A distinctive feature of education in Scotland is the provision of Gaelic-medium education (GME), which spans preschool, primary and secondary education. During 2010–2011, over 2000 children were enrolled within 60 primary schools in 14 education authorities. Considering that GME was only formally introduced in 1985 these figures can be taken as an indicator of the demand for GME (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2005, 2011). However, concurrent developments have not transpired in the assessment tools available to Gaelic-medium teachers or indeed educational psychologists linked to GME schools. Difficulties with reading may be just as prevalent for Gaelic speaking pupils as for English speaking pupils. The aim of this study is to explore how language skills are assessed in GME. To this end, a teacher from each of the 60 GME schools and units spread across Scotland was invited to complete a questionnaire and comment on their experience regarding additional support needs in GME. In general, there was a reliance on teacher judgement to act as a means of assessment. Tools and tests available for use for assessment purposes were informal measures, and regularly found to be a translated version of existing tests. Tests that have been translated may suffer from inadvertent weaknesses, especially when the phonology of one language differs greatly from another. In order to support learners at an early stage in their education, not only do such tests need to be developed, but crucially they ought to be based on the Gaelic language.

Keywords: Gaelic-medium education; assessment; reading.

GAEIC-MEDIUM EDUCATION (GME) first appeared in Scotland through playgroups in the early 1980s in an attempt to support Gaelic language usage and arrest the apparent decline. Gaelic-speaking parents ran the playgroups as there was no local authority provision and their success, together with parental pressure, led to demands for GME primary education. The rapid growth of GME that followed was such that by 2010 there were 60 primary schools engaged in GME, involving 2256 pupils as well as 58 nursery units and some 115 preschool groups throughout 14 education authorities (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2010). The commitment to the continued provision of Gaelic within Scotland is noted by the publication of the first Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act in 2005, followed in 2007 and 2013 by National Plans for Gaelic (Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2007, 2012). The impact of such publications can be seen in the subsequent Gaelic plans of a wide range of local and national organisations. Clear trends are apparent with increasing opportunities for GME provision taking place throughout Scotland. However, concurrent developments have not transpired in the assessment tools available to Gaelic-medium teachers or indeed educational psychologists linked to GME schools, a fact that was recognised by HM Inspectorate of Education in 2005:

‘There was a lack of suitable resources to assess and diagnose the difficulties of pupils whose general and Gaelic learning needs were more challenging. Most typically, teachers felt unable to ascertain whether any difficulties that arose were related to the fact that the child was learning a second language or whether the difficulties were more fundamental and would have emerged in the context of their first language.’ HM Inspectorate of Education (2005, p.26)

GME has existed since 1985 in Scotland, but the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence in Scottish schools in 2010...
prompted an analysis of the different language models in GME (O’Hanlon, Paterson & McLeod, 2012). Their report highlighted four different categories of GME, ranging from Gaelic as the medium of instruction throughout primary to Gaelic as the medium of instruction for only the first two years of primary education. Learning and Teaching Scotland (2010, p.3) state that the minimum curricular requirement for a school to be considered as GME is when ‘learning and teaching is wholly through Gàidhlig during the immersion phase from P1–P3’ followed by the gradual introduction of the English language through the medium of Gaelic ‘with Gàidhlig remaining the predominant language of the classroom in all areas of the curriculum [throughout the primary school stages].’ If this definition is closely adhered to, one would assume that assessment materials, especially those used in the identification of specific learning difficulties, were written and conducted in Gaelic. This is not the case, and the lack of such tools either for classroom-based teachers or educational psychologists involved in the assessment of additional support needs is inconsistent with the generally held understanding that early identification of language difficulties is supported through assessment (Lyon, 2003). The aim of this study is to explore how language skills are currently assessed in GME and to investigate areas for development.

Although it has been acknowledged that pupils receiving immersion or bilingual education are likely to achieve higher attainment than pupils receiving a monolingual education (Baker, 2011; Johnstone et al., 1999), it should be recognised that difficulties with reading can be just as prevalent for Gaelic speaking pupils as for English speaking pupils. In a recent survey, McLullich (2013) found that 15 per cent of pupils receiving GME had some additional support needs whereas 17 per cent of English-medium pupils in Scotland had additional support needs. In Ireland, the Pobal Report (2010) found that 20 per cent of the bilingual (Irish–English) school population had additional support needs at some stage in their school career.

Fluency, competence in and comprehension of spoken language are the keys to being able to learn effectively and support children’s progress in every area of the curriculum (Riley, Burrell & McCallum, 2004). The majority of preschool children acquire spoken language simply by being exposed to speech at home. However, pupils in GME require considerably more exposure to Gaelic language as ‘Gaelic is not just for the Gaels!’ (Gaelic Excellence Group, 2011, p.4). Pupils in GME usually have had exposure to two languages at levels which vary considerably between home and school and pupils will reach stages at different times according to the Highland Council (1995). Spoken language needs to be developed both as a language for thought and as a basis for developing literacy skills and achieving access to other curricular areas. The emphasis on the functional aspects of language is important as it highlights the significance of communication. The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 has raised the profile of the language for the general public, but it has also prompted educationalists to seek parity of provision. HM Inspectorate of Education (2005, p.39) recommended that national bodies should ‘explore means by which schools and authorities in collaboration with other education and health professionals can work towards meeting the needs of pupils with additional support needs.’ The Education Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Acts in 2004 and 2009 provide a framework of support which includes the identification of additional support needs.

While acknowledging the relatively short life of GME provision, teachers, some of whom have benefited from GME themselves, feel disparaged by the lack of equivalent educational resources in Gaelic. The immersion curriculum, utilised in GME schools, is identical to the curriculum used elsewhere in Scottish schools. Therefore, pupils in
GME should have access to the same level of support when needed, however, the lack of materials for pupils with additional support needs was noted as an important area of weakness within GME provision by HM Inspectorate of Education (2005).

In order to identify pupils in GME as having weaknesses with literacy one must first know what skills to look for. Considerable research has been carried out to try to identify the indicators of what are good predictors of later reading in English speaking schools and it has become clear that phonological awareness is a pre-eminent factor. Phonological awareness, including processing skills, has been identified as a suitable predictor of reading abilities in English (Hatcher, 2000; Muter & Snowling, 1998; Muter, 2003; Vellutino et al., 2004). In the classroom, this means that pupils who appear to be doing well but have a weak ability to spot the onset sound or rhyming patterns of words, frequently struggle at a later date. It is well established that phonological awareness skills in a native alphabetic language can transfer to the learning of a second language (Gillon, 2004; Kaushanskaya, Yoo & Marian, 2011). However, such transfer is influenced by the congruence or incongruence of characteristics within the native language to which a child is exposed and the second language a child is learning. Specific characteristics such as whether languages utilise an alphabetic or non-alphabetic script, and whether alphabetic scripts are more or less transparent¹, are worth bearing in mind when children complete phonological awareness tasks. Pupils in GME come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, with varying experiences of length of exposure to the Gaelic language. Thus, the timing of tests used with children having varied levels of language proficiency in Gaelic is an area suited to investigation.

A study undertaken in GME classrooms considered if phonological skills could be assessed in Gaelic and asked teachers to administer a phonological screening tool, which was created in Gaelic, to pupils (Lyon, 2011). The resulting phonological screening tool offers a good starting point for this study, indicating that the teaching population are themselves eager to be involved in such research and to share their views. This study describes how language skills are assessed in Gaelic, investigating what tools are in use, offering teachers and other such professionals in education the opportunity to share their views on the assessment of literacy in Gaelic.

**Method**

**Design and sampling**

Teachers from each of the GME schools/units in Scotland were invited to complete a questionnaire and comment on their experience regarding additional support needs in GME. A questionnaire and a telephone interview facilitated data collection given the geographical spread of participants. Respondents from 45 out of the 60 schools returned a completed questionnaire. Two schools submitted two questionnaires each as teachers from both Primary 2 and Primary 3 classes decided to participate. Eighteen of the 45 respondents volunteered to be interviewed at a later date.

**Procedure and analysis**

Each GME school in Scotland was invited to participate and a minimum of one response per school was encouraged. Questionnaires were posted to schools, enclosed with stamped-addressed envelopes to facilitate return of data. Questionnaire items included open-ended questions and a small number of scaled responses. Participants could respond to scaled items by selecting one of three responses (yes, quite or no), where

¹ Transparency refers to the relationship between printed text and its associated sound when read aloud.
participants omitted to select any option, a code of ‘nil response’ was used. The questionnaires sought to record demographical information and obtain information regarding whether participants were interested in volunteering their time to be involved in a semi-structured interview, as well as collecting information regarding the types of assessments used by teachers. Audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews facilitated transcription and were recorded using a dictaphone. Teachers’ responses to the questionnaire were combined with the interview data and analysed to create sub-themes.

Results
Teachers were asked to identify how language skills were assessed in GME and what tools were used. Participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire, following which they were given the option to be included in a semi-structured interview. Demographics of those involved in the questionnaire are presented, after which details of the interviews are given.

Given the relatively small number of Gaelic-medium schools/units in Scotland, all teachers of Primary 2 and Primary 3 pupils, pertaining to the immersion stage of GME, were invited to participate. Information regarding the respondent’s current role, and details of the local authority in which they worked were collected to look at whether teachers holding different positions within the schools held different levels of knowledge regarding assessment and its role in literacy acquisition. A total of 45 questionnaires were returned; of these, 20 participants worked in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (the Western Isles), 13 in the Highland Council region, three in Argyll and one response was received from participants who each worked in nine separate local authorities. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Highland Council together made up more than 50 per cent of the teachers involved, which is not surprising given that these geographical regions show a high density of GME provision. The questionnaire respondents held various roles in the schools as shown in Table 1.

Given the focus of this study on the assessment tools used by teachers, it was encouraging to find that 62 per cent of respondents were indeed Classroom Teachers. Some schools offering GME in fact have only one teacher with responsibility for Gaelic, whereas the fact that only three Support for Learning teachers responded adds to wider research that suggests such teachers are scarce in GME (Lyon, 2003) meaning that there may be limited access to support in such settings (MacLeod and MacLeod, 2001).

Having completed the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate their willingness to be interviewed, it was hoped that 10 per cent of questionnaire respondents would volunteer. In fact 40 per cent (18 of 45 respondents) elected to take part in the telephone interviews and their respective positions are shown in Table 2. Interviews were considered an opportunity to find out information from teachers holding various posts in schools, in particular from Classroom Teachers.

A total of seven of the 11 local councils were represented among the interviewees. Some nine interviewees (50 per cent) were working in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, a further four interviewees (20 per cent) from the Highland Council and the remaining five interviews came from five separate local authorities (30 per cent). The fact that respondents who volunteered to be interviewed were drawn from a variety of locations, and held different roles and posts of responsibility within the school system, allowed for a wider perspective of the difficulties involved in assessing phonological awareness to be recorded. In all cases, a semi-structured format was used, which allowed the interviewees to be led through a series of pre-planned questions.
This section discusses how teachers would normally identify children at risk of reading failure or wider literary difficulties. It looks at the assessments currently used and the role of Support for Learning in GME. A specific question regarding a phonological screening measure that had recently been circulated to GME schools was included in the questionnaire given to teachers (for more details please see Lyon, 2011). Teachers who were familiar with the phonological screening test were asked to consider whether they used any similar tests. Table 3 presents a summary of teachers’ responses on that specific question.

Sixty per cent of questionnaire respondents stated that similar tests were used when identifying phonological awareness skills this reduced to one of the 18 teachers interviewed. Of the questionnaire respondents, five said the tests that they used were in English. One Principal Teacher stated that they:

hadn’t really done any sort of determining what… no formal sort of assessment like that. We had done sort of variations of what you had put together but nothing as formal as that from what we had done ourselves.

(Principal Teacher 44)²

A variety of tests and assessment measures were noted by teachers as being available for use and are listed in Table 4. Each of these assessments has been created for different purposes, and aimed at children of different ages. None of the tests recalled by teachers were standardised tests of reading.

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² To ensure anonymity, each participant was given an identification number so that the data could be cross-referenced.
Table 3: Do you use any other similar tests?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Nil response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depute Head</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Tests named by Gaelic teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>No. of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in Literacy</td>
<td>The Edinburgh Primary 1 Baseline Test.</td>
<td>Edinburgh City Council, 1999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Linkage</td>
<td>Comprises of a criterion-referenced test of phonological awareness.</td>
<td>Hatcher, 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aston Index</td>
<td>Involves 16 tests covering visual and auditory discrimination, motor coordination, written language, reading and spelling as well as general underlying ability and attainment.</td>
<td>Thomson &amp; Newton, 1982</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia Screener</td>
<td>Computer-based six tests covering ability, attainment and diagnostic areas.</td>
<td>Turner &amp; Smith, 2004</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia Screening Test (DST)</td>
<td>Subtests include one minute reading, two minute spelling, digit span, rapid naming, postural ability and bead threading.</td>
<td>Nicholson &amp; Fawcett, 1996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs Assessment Profile (SNAP)</td>
<td>Computer based profiling package that supports the identification of a wide range of additional support needs through pupil, parent and teacher questionnaires. Available with an accompanying Gaelic section.</td>
<td>Weedon &amp; Reid, 2008</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measadh Leughaidh</td>
<td>A translation of an English Baseline Assessment that focuses on a child’s familiarity with Gaelic.</td>
<td>The Highland Council, 2001</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measadh Bogadh</td>
<td>Used to assess understanding of spoken Gaelic.</td>
<td>The Highland Council, 2001</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GME related tests
The following three assessments are the only recognised ones for identification of literacy difficulties. Three references were made by teachers to the Special Needs Assessment Profile (SNAP); with fewer direct mentions of Measadh Bogadh and Measadh Leughaidh.

SNAP
With some probes available in Gaelic, this assessment consists of a number of tests used to identify clusters of problems associated with specific learning difficulties.

…it is a good overall assessment of needs but doesn’t go into so much detail phonologically.
(Class Teacher 7)

I’ve been given a CD. Up till now I’ve used something produced by Highland, it’s… now I can’t think of it. I’d have to go and get it. I got it in a folder.
(Support for Learning Teacher 32)

Measadh Bogadh
As this test was only mentioned twice in the 64 transcripts of interviews and questionnaires it can be acknowledged that it is not in widespread use. This measure is designed to assess the understanding of spoken Gaelic.

It’s not specifically for rhyming. It deals with initial consonants, final consonants.
(Support for Learning Teacher 32)

In the past I’ve used a test that was produced I think in Highland Region and it was ‘Measadh Bogadh’ or something, I can’t remember the name of it.
(Principal Teacher 37)

…used that but I found that that was possibly more to do with children who were just not using Gaelic, more sort of a general language based thing.
(Principal Teacher 37)

Measadh Leughaidh
One participant mentioned this test, however, although labelled a reading test it is not standardised and is more appropriately described as an assessment of a child’s linguistic ability rather than being overly focused on literacy acquisition.

Highland Council have a similar test in Gaelic – ‘Measadh leughaidh – deuchainn sgrùdaidh 2001, deuchainn sgrionaidh.
(Class Teacher 25)

Innovative and resourceful teachers
In the absence of any formal testing, some teachers created assessments although little substantive detail was given about what was being assessed:

…informal testing in class produced similar results.
(Depute Head Teacher 35)

own generated tests to see where the children are in their learning. All work is in Gaelic.
(Class Teachers 26, 28 and 35)

I do kind of informal - not tests but things that would indicate where they are or where they should be.
(Class Teacher 10)

Two teachers made reference to specific resources that they had prepared:

…assessment of sounds – own materials,
(Head Teacher 40)

while another referred to

…only pictures I have made up myself to reinforce letters and blends.
(Class Teacher 10)

Effort involved in creating measures or assessment cannot be underestimated and goes a long way in pointing out that teachers can identify where tests can be applied and that a need for such tests is great in this area. A few teachers have shown their ability in creating suitable differentiated resources (e.g. Gaelic version of Phonic Code Cracker, Russell, 1993); however, it cannot be expected that such skills transfer to the creation of formal assessment materials, which involve expert input.

Professional insight as assessment
Many teachers did not identify weaknesses in phonological awareness through assessment but rather relied on their own judgement and experience as seen in the following comments:

you would just get to realise pretty quickly who is not recognising sounds, who can’t hear them.
(Principal Teacher 44)
just through their lack of progress when it came
to reading, that they weren’t progressing and
sort of using the skills with regard to phonics
and not using that skill to progress with
reading.
(Principal Teacher 1)
…just by their lack of progress in reading,
them not coming on as well as the rest.
(Class Teacher 11)
…basically by checking spelling and certain
words in their reading and writing. It’s quite
obvious you know if there’s phonics mistakes.
(Class Teacher 33)
…basically through observation and listening.
You know routine observation. You become
aware of when a child is having problems.
(Depute Head Teacher 46)

However, teachers who draw on their own
observations and experience to identify
‘at-risk’ poor readers, often miss the mark
(Flynn, 2000). Several teachers appeared to
be using no form of assessment:
…just through class work. In small classes
you’re doing it [phonics] with them on a daily
basis. Just a general impression.
(Class Teacher 4)
…it was just the day-to-day activities and
obviously just homing in on that particular
difficulty.
(Class Teacher 33)
…just through the normal course of reading
and just through classroom use of phonics
really.
(Head Teacher 40)
…years of doing it. I’m very long in the tooth
– a year to go to retirement!
(Class Teacher 19)
I think probably day-by-day teaching in class.
The teaching itself and through recognition of
sounds within words and reading.
(Principal Teacher 41)

Four interviewees did not carry out any
assessment themselves explaining that the
Support for Learning Teacher would under-
take such activity, and such input would be
sought by teachers when available:

Learning Support normally do that sort of
thing in conjunction with the Class Teacher.
A Learning Support Teacher would probably
do it with a pupil anyway, but in English, and
I would get feedback from them.
(Class Teacher 17)
…if you had a child who was struggling with
reading and writing you would refer them to
them [Support for Learning] and they did
whatever tests they had but then with the infant
Gaelic class those tests weren’t in Gaelic.
(Principal Teacher 6)

Alternative approaches to assessment

In cases where literacy acquisition gives grave
cause for concern, teachers will usually liaise
with the Educational Psychologist associated
with the school. However, it was noted that
assessments of GME pupils were rarely
carried out. Some critical comments were
made regarding the provision of expert
support and that this is always carried out in
English. Indeed, HM Inspectorate of Educa-
tion (2005, p.26) noted that ‘in many
instances, teachers reported that external
support professionals had little or no
expertise in Gaelic-medium education or the
issues pertaining to it’. This is particularly
important in Gaelic-medium education as
schools are widely spread across the country.
On occasions, teachers are advised to alter
their teaching approaches, employing
general strategies that may support a child
about whom they have concerns.

I’ve had a child that I’ve been specifically
concerned about, then I’ve maybe had a word
with the Educational Psychologist and they’ve
sort of worked out a little bit with the child
before me or a Learning Support Teacher.
(Principal Teacher 37)
Generally it’s very much you’ve just got to find a
way that suits the child and suits the provision.
(Principal Teacher 37)
…a Psychologist is very reluctant to see a child
until Primary 3 anyway.
(Principal Teacher 1)
And another thing that we’re up against is a
psychologist is reluctant as well to say whether
it is because of doing an additional language
that these difficulties occur or whether they
would just occur anyway.
(Principal Teacher 1)
Support for development of appropriate tests

The two Support for Learning Teachers interviewed were critical regarding the availability of Gaelic tests. They also commented that GME pupils experiencing language difficulties were not identified until late Primary 3 or Primary 4 suggesting that the current practice within GME does not mirror that available within English-medium education.

I’ve been working with children who have been in Gaelic-medium but the tests are only in English, you know the dyslexia tests.

(Support for Learning Teacher 22)

…the trouble was that I didn’t have an equivalent one in Gaelic.

(Support for Learning Teacher 32)

…they had to wait until the end of Primary 3 and into Primary 4 before they were really tested to see if there was a dyslexic problem or whatever.

(Principal Teacher 6)

The consequences stemming from a lack of suitable assessments was evident from comments made by teachers.

I feel there is very little to aid those who struggle in this area.

(Classroom Teacher 8)

…there’s no tests. We just go by our experience if a child isn’t performing well.

(Classroom Teacher 30)

…there’s been nothing used in the past in Gaelic. I don’t use any tests at all.

(Classroom Teacher 11)

…there’s no specific thing – just what we’ve made up in school.

(Classroom Teacher 40)

This frustration undoubtedly makes teachers feel that they are not teaching as effectively as they could be.

I’ve been struggling with working with children in Gaelic medium where there’s nothing.

(Support for Learning Teacher 14)

I had one child there who we knew had problems but there don’t seem to be any tests available for teachers to use to identify what areas they are finding difficulties with.

(Class Teacher 30)

I have children in other schools in Gaelic medium who actually have specific difficulties and there’s just nothing.

(Support for Learning Teacher 14)

The current arrangements for identification are gradually improving but there was not a great deal of difference between the findings of the present study and that reported in an earlier study, 10 years previously (Lyon, 2003).

Discussion

In general, there was a reliance on teacher judgement to act as a means of assessment. Assessments described as in, or available for, use were scarce, not widely utilised when available and regularly found to be translated version of tests. Tests that have been translated may suffer from inadvertent weaknesses, especially when the phonology of one language differs greatly from another. It would be effective practice to assess pupils using the language of the classroom. On the basis of the findings available within this study, if suitable Support for Learning is not available, teachers are not likely to attempt to implement formal assessments themselves, rather they prefer to utilise indirect means of assessing, such as using their professional judgment.

Difficulties in identifying and labelling children being educated in a bilingual setting have been noted in relation to dyslexia (Deponio et al., 2000). The suggestion to counter a weakness in practice, reported within a wider audit, was that Learning Support Teachers, rather than Educational Psychologists, could have a key function given that their position includes identifying and establishing the needs and long-term aims of some pupils. The value of early identification through screening is without question, and research has shown that such action can take place within Primary 1 and Primary 2 (Blatchford & Cline, 1992, 1994; Lindsay, 2004; Wilkinson et al., 1998). In the context of GME, however, any expectation or hope that Support for Learning Teachers can be called
upon to fill the gap is questionable, based on the findings of this study as well as wider research and literature. This study noted the limited number of Support for Learning Teachers in place within GME. MacLeod and MacLeod (2001, p.13) interviewed Learning Support Teachers who, although aware of assessments developed for English, felt that ‘the absence of a resource of equivalent substance and rigour in Gaelic was a source of frustration to them and raised concerns about equity in terms of entitlement’. This long-standing concern signals that urgent action is needed, particularly in light of a recent report that has commented that the number of Support for Learning Teachers remains unbalanced in relation to their need within GME (McLullich, 2013). This report suggested that existing staff could be trained ensuring that a fluent Gaelic speaker would be available to provide Support for Learning in each school. These staff members could have specific duties including liaison with external professionals offering Gaelic language assessment.

Adopting a broader perspective, similar difficulties regarding the development of language specific and language sensitive materials have been located in other countries. In Ireland, there is a dearth of dyslexia assessment resources for bilingual pupils and the only Irish tool available is the letter-sound relations test in Áis Mheasainithe sa Luathlithearthacht: Treoir ar Mhúinteoirí (Clay & Nig Uidhir, 2007).

There is a great deal of information available for teachers in English-medium education, including diverse and detailed assessments but none exist in Gaelic. The identification of language difficulties in GME is constrained by the immersion model in which it operates, and that there are no tools in Gaelic suited to this purpose. Language difficulties, like dyslexia, are currently identified when such difficulties can be recognised in English. Consequently recommendations set out in early intervention guidelines cannot be fully implemented (Fraser, 1998). This need for material sensitive to the Gaelic language is a key finding of the study. Despite the range and variety of practice evident within this study, and existing within Gaelic-medium schools generally, such breadth cannot overcome the scarcity of such materials.

All children have a right to receive an education appropriate to their needs. As GME is so new, children should not be disadvantaged just because there are no methods of assessment of phonological awareness in Gaelic yet. A number of difficulties exist when developing a literacy assessment for a population that is quite unusual in education. GME attracts people from a wide variety of backgrounds, including those where Gaelic is the first language, but significant numbers come from homes where no Gaelic is spoken. The fact that pupils are learning to operate in two different phonological and written language systems could be a further complicating factor. This adds additional difficulties for the teachers when trying to identify specific learning difficulties with literacy where complete (or ‘balanced’) bilingualism has not been achieved. This study has highlighted an area where teachers, educational psychologists and stakeholders in education have the opportunity to increase their knowledge of issues arising in GME, contribute to the development and implementation of support available to schools, while also further developing an understanding of this minority group of learners and their needs. Of course, this presupposes that educational psychologists are able to make time to accommodate such opportunities (given the stretched nature of provision this may be less than realistic in some regions) and that educational psychologists or similarly trained experts who speak Gaelic are available. Yet, despite such tensions GME and the provision offered need to keep a pace with initiatives like the Dyslexia Friendly Schools Scheme (MacKay, 2006). Such initiatives have successfully led to alterations in practice so as to accommodate dyslexic pupils by using appropriate teaching methods and ensuring that all
school environments are dyslexia friendly. It is important in terms of inclusion that this practice is available in all classrooms in Scotland irrespective of the medium of teaching.

These findings do not necessarily suggest that provision for additional support needs in GME is overlooked, rather that research driven measures would be a valuable and timely development within GME so as to provide forms of support that are relevant to good practice. Unless action is taken to remedy the paucity of tools available to assess children’s literacy skills in GME, this situation will perpetuate. In order to support learners at an early stage in their education, not only do such tests need to be developed, but crucially they ought to be based on the Gaelic language. The Getting It Right for Every Child approach (Scottish Government, 2011) aims to improve outcomes for children and meet the needs of all children to ensure they reach their full potential. A sustainable approach is called for, where assessment measures are developed for a specific purpose, presenting an easy-to-follow format allowing a range of educational professionals to administer such measures.

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