A comparative study of regional-language immersion education in Brittany and Wales

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ABSTRACT

This article compares the immersion-education systems in Brittany and Wales. The number of Welsh speakers is growing thanks to its well-developed immersion-education system. Brittany has a much less well-developed system and the number of Breton speakers is falling dramatically. Urgent action is needed if Breton is to survive. Using an approach based loosely on ‘comparative history as a comparison of contrasts’, the paper examines differences in political support for immersion education between the two regions. It considers the impact of this support on planning strategies and mechanisms and considers how a range of pedagogical factors including age of exposure, language-use in the classroom and teacher training are tackled in the two contexts. It finds that the Welsh system enjoys far greater political support than that of Brittany because control of the education system is in the hands of a devolved regional authority which fully supports the regional language. The situation may be about to improve for Breton owing to the publication of a recent circular authorising full-immersion education within the state education system for the first time. The paper recommends close collaboration between the two regions moving forward in an attempt to save Breton from extinction.
Introduction

Over the past 200 years, the rise of nation states and their concordant 'national' languages have pushed regional languages across Europe to the point of extinction. In both Britain and France, national education systems have contributed significantly to this decline, with the exclusion of regional languages from the education sphere leading to a loss of prestige and a consequent decline in intergenerational transmission (Judge, 2007). Today, conversely, the education system is an increasingly important means of regeneration for regional languages and it is the contention of this study that much can be learnt from the comparative study of how national and regional authorities approach this issue.

The study will consider how immersion education in pre-school, primary and secondary education is being used to protect and revitalise two regional languages: Breton and Welsh. Its scope does not allow for a detailed analysis of higher and further education but these remain important areas of interest for future study. An immersion school, for the purposes of this study, is one in which the regional language is used as a means of instruction and communication. These can be classified as partial-immersion, when both a regional and a national language are used, or full-immersion, when only the regional language is spoken.

The study will adhere loosely to a comparative method known as 'comparative history as the contrast of contexts' (Skocpol & Somers, 1980). Welsh and Breton have been chosen because, although they experienced a similar process of decline over the centuries, they are in very different situations today, with Wales boasting a much larger and more developed immersion-education system than Brittany and its language showing far greater signs of vitality (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014; Vallerie & Bouroulleg, 2019).

The article will highlight contrasts in the approaches of these two regions towards immersion education 'with the aid of references to broad themes' (Skocpol & Somers, 1980, p. 178). First, it will provide some context, outlining the history of the two languages and the current state of immersion education in each region. It will then compare the regions’ education-planning strategies, before examining certain pedagogical considerations, including the age of immersion students, language use in the classroom and the provision of teachers. In this way, it will 'offer through systematic contrasts a commentary on the particularity of each region (idem, p.179), which, it may be hoped, will be of use to the language planners wishing
to revitalise the regional languages of Brittany and Wales but also to those working more widely across Europe in the future.

**Context**

Breton is a Celtic language spoken for over 1,000 years in the historic region of Brittany that now equates to the modern Bretagne administrative region and a small part of the Pays de la Loire region (Vallerie & Bouroulleg, 2019). Breton was the main language of Brittany until the twentieth century but nowadays is only spoken by around 304,000 people (DGLFLF, 2016). Furthermore, the average Breton speaker is over sixty and so the speaker base is expected to shrink by 79% in the next thirty years unless urgent action is taken (Office public de la langue bretonne (OPLB), 2020). Its decline was inexorably linked to the rise of the French State. Numerous nineteenth-century laws gradually excluded Breton from the public sphere in order to ‘assert national unity, homogeneity and identity in the multilingual regions under developing political control’ (Spolsky cited in: Mooney, 2015, p. 154). Education became the cornerstone of the strategy, with the Falloux Law (1851) declaring that all teaching must be in French and the Ferry Laws (1882) making education compulsory for all children (Vallerie & Bouroulleg, 2019). Teachers were charged with spreading the French language, with one official reminding them of their mission ‘to kill the Breton language’ (Jacob & Gordon, 1985, p. 115). One common technique was to make any pupil caught speaking patois carry an object, like a brick or a ribbon, until they denounced another child. The child with le symbole at the end of the day would be beaten (Cartrite, 2009). Such measures resulted not only in a loss of prestige for Breton, which came to be viewed as ‘an impediment to personal improvement and socio-economic progress’ (Hifearnáin, 2011, p. 118), but also ‘acted on the community’s social psychology’ (Lafonte in: Joubert, 2015, p. 173). The logical outcome was that parents stopped transmitting Breton to their children, and Judge (2007) cites studies showing that 90% of adult Breton males whose parents spoke to them in Breton are not speaking it to their children. Grenoble and Whaley highlight that ‘disrupted transmission to children can move a vital language to near extinction in the course of a single generation’ (2005, p. 13) and indeed Breton has seen its speaker base shrink dramatically. It is notable therefore that, in December 2021, the French Ministry of Education, after a period of intense political debate, officially approved the use of full-immersion education within the State education system for the first time (Circulaire du 14 décembre, 2021). This decision represents a significant break with the State’s traditional reticence to support regional languages.
The decline of Welsh followed a similar pattern to that of Breton. When Wales came under English control in 1536, the language was officially excluded from public life, although it continued to be the main community language for several centuries (Judge, 2007). This resilience was facilitated by the translation of the Bible into Welsh in 1588, which maintained the prestige of the language, and by the strong mining economy, which meant Wales did not experience mass emigration (idem.). Once again, it was education, however, which would become the agent of Welsh’s demise, with the Education Act of 1870 imposing schooling solely through English. Even though this rule was tempered in 1890, education had become a hostile environment for the language, instilling shame in its speakers and stripping it of its prestige (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014). The consequence was the familiar decline in speaker numbers and the inevitable loss of domains of use: in 1911, there were 977,000 Welsh speakers but this number fell to a low-point of 504,000 in 1981 (idem.). Nonetheless, there has since been a dramatic upturn in the number of speakers, which currently stands at 562,016 and, most significantly, the number of three and four-year olds speaking the language has increased from an estimated 11.3% in 1971 to 23.6% in 2011 (idem.). In this respect, the vitality of Welsh stands in sharp contrast to that of Breton, which risks seeing its speaker numbers crumble in the coming decades. The study of how Wales has achieved this turn-around may therefore be instructive for language planners in Brittany and beyond.

**Revitalisation through education**

The main strategy for language revitalisation in Brittany and Wales is education, which is generally considered to be ‘the surest, most measurable way to create new speakers’ when intergenerational transmission has become insufficient (Grin, 2003, p. 102). Regionallanguage education has various forms. At one end of the spectrum is second-language instruction, with the language being taught as a subject for non-native speakers. Both Brittany and Wales offer such teaching but, in Wales, it is obligatory for all learners between the ages of three and sixteen not in immersion education, whereas in Brittany it is merely an option each education authority must now offer. Such instruction certainly provides an initiation to the language but the limited number of hours a week means it is unlikely that learners will achieve the oral competence needed to reintroduce the language into the community and it is often therefore little more than a symbolic gesture (Clague, 2009).

At the other end of the scale is immersion education, which is generally considered to be ‘the only realistic way of increasing or maintaining the number of speakers of a language when intergenerational transfer […] ceases to happen’ (idem., p.178). The logic behind immersion
education is that the regional language is used as the means of instruction and communication within the school. In this way, ‘a handful of dedicated and well-trained teachers […] can produce scores of new minority-language speakers over a period of several years’ (Dorian cited in: Goalabré, 2015, p. 53). The proportion of the timetable delivered through the language varies, with partial-immersion schools, often known as bilingual schools, using two different languages of instruction and full-immersion schools using the regional language for almost the entire curriculum.

**Current immersion-education provision**

In 2020, there were 19,165 students studying in Breton-immersion primary and secondary schools in the historic region of Brittany (OPLB, 2020) out of a total of 860,390 (Académie de Nantes, 2021; Académie de Rennes, 2021). The largest provider was the State, which offered partial-immersion education to 9,583 students in 593 schools (OPLB, 2020). Until now, these have operated on the basis of parité horaire, wherein ‘teaching is delivered half in the regional language and half in French’ but with the particularity that ‘no single discipline, other than the regional language itself, may be taught exclusively in the regional language’ (Arrêté du 12 mai, 2003). A further 5,523 students were following the same system in the private Catholic sector (OPLB, 2020). The recent change in the law means that, for the first time, full-immersion education will now be officially permitted within the State sector, with schools freed from the constraints of parité horaire and able to determine freely which language they use when, in accordance with the school’s educational plan and the needs of its learners (Circulaire du 14 décembre, 2021). At present, 4,059 learners receive full-immersion education at primary and secondary levels but only in the private sector (Diwan, 2021). The main provider is the Diwan association, whose students study all subjects in Breton except foreign languages and French. Both Diwan and Catholic Schools usually have funding agreements with the Department of Education, which provides and pays for teachers, and Diwan schools also depend on local councils or communes for premises and materials. The immersion offer has been growing each year but is insufficient to keep up with parental demand (Conseil Culturel de Bretagne, 2020).

In Wales, the immersion-education sector has developed gradually since the 1940s and is now much larger than in Brittany (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014). Data for the 2019–20 academic year show that there were 88,821 school pupils in full-Welshmedium education and 31,224 students in partial-immersion education at primary and secondary levels in 2019 out of a total of 469,176 students (Statistics for Wales, 2020). The proportion of the timetable
taught through Welsh in immersion schools varies considerably from one school to another and has never been policed as strictly as in Brittany, meaning that the term ‘bilingual school’ has often referred to institutions making very different uses of the language in their curricula (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014). This has made it complicated to trace the extent to which schools truly dispense Welsh-medium education. However, the Government is now reclassifying schools more clearly to allow for greater transparency (Lloyd et al., 2020). The new system will conceptualise the range of schools as a continuum, with full-Welsh-immersion ones at one end and full-English-immersion ones at the other. In this way, the Government hopes to increase the proportion of schools offering Welsh-immersion education over the coming decades by encouraging institutions to gradually move along the scale (Welsh Government, 2017).

**Comparative analysis**

**Political investment**

The principal explanation for the difference in the scale of immersion education between Brittany and Wales up until now lies in the differing degrees of political investment by the relevant state and regional authorities. For Welsh, the UK Government has, for many decades, shown itself to be committed to the protection and promotion of the language, making the study of Welsh an obligatory part of the National Curriculum at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 in 1990 and Key Stage 4 in 1999 (Donaldson, 2013) and signing Parts II and III of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in 1992 which include a commitment to the provision of education through Welsh (Council of Europe, 1992). Most importantly, however, control over the education system is devolved to the Welsh Government. This administration has invested a great deal of political capital in its flagship Cymraeg 2050 strategy, the goal of which is to see ‘the number of people able to enjoy speaking and using Welsh reach a million by 2050’ (Welsh Government, 2017). Furthermore, the Government publicly recognises that ‘Welsh-medium immersion education is our principal method’ for achieving this ambitious target (idem.) and has therefore legislated to ensure local authorities prioritise it. The Government has thus encouraged local-authority and school leaders to commit to the strategy. It has also attributed it a significant budget, with £400 million being spent on the refurbishment of Welsh-medium schools between 2014 and 2019 for example (Welsh Government, 2017a). This commitment to language revitalisation has been made possible by the fact that legislative and budgetary control of the education system is held by a devolved administration whose boundaries align closely with those of the linguistic community. The immersion-education programme is thus a product of the wider shift in
international normative values towards ‘recognising the rights of minorities, both as individuals and as groups, within modern nation-states’ which has occurred over the last fifty years (Grenoble & Whaley, 2005, p. 2). Fishman argues such changes are highly advantageous to regional languages, denoting a ‘new spirit of the times’ which makes it harder for countries to disregard the ‘linguistic rights’ of their minority populations (2001, p. 12).

In Brittany, however, the political situation is very different and there is less political support for immersion education. The law confers responsibility for promoting Breton on regional authorities, and the Bretagne regional authority, which administers the vast majority of the historic region of Brittany, has pledged to ‘support the demand of the bilingual-education community to provide immersion teaching in both public and private bilingual schools and in particular in primary schools’ (Bretagne Région, 2018). However, unlike in Wales, regional authorities have no power to legislate over education policy and limited influence over the teaching that occurs within schools. Control of the education system is shared between different agencies, with preschool and primary institutions managed by local communes, secondary schools by the départements and only lycées by the régions. Curriculum content, teacher allocation and qualifications are controlled centrally by the powerful Department for National Education, Higher Education and Research (Eurydice, 2021). Every five years, a regional authority wishing to promote its language therefore has to negotiate an agreement called a convention spécifique with the Education Department to agree the linguistic objectives to be met by the education system. There is no such agreement in place for the Pays de la Loire Region and the newest agreement between the Bretagne Region and the State should have been signed in 2020 but negotiations broke down amid accusations that the State was refusing to allocate enough teachers to immersion schools (Ouest France, 2021).

Such brinkmanship highlights the Education Department’s ambivalence towards the teaching of regional languages and towards full-immersion schools in particular. This is illustrated by the recent controversy around immersion education. The recent change in the law to allow state schools to offer full-immersion teaching came about only after a tempestuous political battle. In 2019, a bill was drafted to allow state schools to provide full-immersion education for the first time (Molac et al., 2019) and this was approved by the Parliament in early 2021. However, the education minister argued that it went against Article 2 of the French Constitution, which states that ‘The language of the Republic is French’ (Constitution du 4
octobre, 1958) and the Constitutional Court agreed, concluding that it would be unacceptable for state employees in such schools to conduct state business in a language other than French (Conseil Constitutionnel, 2021). The Court therefore concluded that immersion education in the state sector was unconstitutional and, by extension, called into question the legality of all existing full-immersion provision. This led to panic in the Breton community and it was only after the intervention of the French President (Macron, 2021) that the situation was ultimately clarified with the issuing of new guidance (Circulaire du 14 décembre, 2021). France’s highly-centralised education system therefore continues to resist international normative pressure to give speakers of regional languages the powers to adequately protect them and the authorisation to use immersion education in the State sector has been accorded very much against its will. It remains to be seen whether this theoretical green light will actually translate into the opening of full-immersion state schools.

Planning strategies

The consequences of these opposing political philosophies can be seen in the different immersion-education planning strategies adopted in Brittany and Wales. In Wales, the Government, driven by its ambitious targets, is proactively seeking to increase immersion provision in order to stimulate parental demand, arguing that ‘Evidence gathered […] shows that planning on the basis of responding to demand […] does not necessarily ensure growth in provision’ (Duggan et al., 2016). Given that the ‘population is not expected to increase substantially over time’ and that few new schools will therefore be needed, the Government’s plan is to gradually turn existing English-language schools into Welsh-medium ones (Welsh Government, 2017, p. 38). In addition, it hopes its recent decision to enact the recommendation of the One Language for All report (Davis, 2013) to establish a single Welsh-language curriculum to be followed by both first and second-language learners will make it easier for students to move into Welsh-immersion classes during their schooling (idem.). The Government also plans to attract more parents to immersion education with publicity campaigns designed to ‘increase understanding of bilingualism’ (Welsh Government, 2017). These campaigns stress ‘the cognitive, economic, social, educational, health and community benefits of bilingualism’ (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017, p. 5) and thus draw on ‘the most recent and relevant scientific research’ (idem, p.10). Such arguments are powerful tools for the Welsh Government, since, as Goalabré notes, ‘The educational field is one area where such strategic and socially orientated choices can be found, with many parents calculating and evaluating the best options for their children’ (2015,
p. 53). The Government has therefore placed a proactive strategy for generating demand at the heart of its Cymraeg 2050 strategy.

In Brittany, however, the expansion of immersion-education provision continues to occur in reaction to parental demand rather than as part of a proactive top-down planning process, with the French Government explicitly stating that ‘The opening of new bilingual sites must be based on the existence of documented parental demand’ (Circulaire n°2017-072, 2017). In reality, however, there is no centralised mechanism for measuring public demand and so new schools only tend to open after sustained campaigns by interested parties, such as the FSU teacher union, the Kelennomp! Breton teacher association and the Unanet evit ar brezhoneg pressure group. Furthermore, there is often considerable resistance from the Department of Education when it comes to opening new Diwan full-immersion establishments, with the Department having being accused of opening state partial-immersion schools in certain areas merely to compete with the Diwan network rather than to genuinely expand provision (FSU, 2021; Hifearnáin, 2013). Nonetheless, research shows that there is significant parental demand for Breton-immersion education (Bretagne Région, 2018) based, like in Wales, on cognitive and linguistic arguments but also on the perceived role of the language in protecting Breton identity (Timm, 2009). Furthermore, the regional authorities have undertaken communication campaigns focusing on the benefits of bilingualism in an attempt to stoke this demand (OPLB, 2019; 2021). Such parental and community support for revitalisation may ultimately prove crucial to the future success of Breton-immersion education by providing the bottom-up pressure needed to drive its expansion.

**Planning mechanisms**

There are also key differences in the planning mechanisms around immersion-education in Wales and Brittany. The Welsh Government has used its devolved powers to implement a statutory planning process. Each local authority is obliged by law to submit a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) to the Government every ten years for validation (Welsh Government, 2021). The WESP must show how the authority will work in a coherent, long-term manner with schools and private providers to increase the number of learners studying through Welsh at each stage of the education system in line with the Cymraeg 2050 goals (Welsh Government, 2017). This system therefore requires local authorities to consider ‘all elements of the education system’ (Duggan et al., 2016, p. 36), to ensure that ‘the central vision (of continuous growth and proactive planning) permeates all aspects of the Welsh-
medium education system and all strands of the system at an operational level' (idem, p.36). It also makes them focus on practical considerations, like school-transport provision and catchment areas. These can be significant barriers to immersion education, with leaders in one immersion school tracing a direct causal connection between an increase in school-transportation costs and a drop in student numbers (idem). Another advantage of the WESPs is that they build in measures for monitoring and evaluating progress and thus ensure a high degree of accountability (Welsh Government, 2021), while allowing for the rapid identification of weaknesses in local-authority and government plans.

These robust planning mechanisms are complimented by the Government’s commitment to ‘ensure a sound research base’ around Welsh-immersion education (Welsh Government, 2017b, p. 21). This is evidenced by the wealth of reports commissioned by the Welsh Government in the past ten years and the fact that their findings have been reflected in later policy documents. For instance, the 2017 Rapid Review of the WESPs by Roberts showed that a three-year planning cycle was too short and this was quickly extended to ten. The robustness of Wales’s statutory planning mechanisms and their basis in research has been praised by stakeholders as a positive step towards strengthening immersion-education planning in Wales (Duggan et al., 2016), although reviews of the system argue more could be done to enhance cooperation with private providers, such as the nursery group Mudiad Meithrin (Roberts, 2017). Admittedly, the mechanisms have yet to generate the large-scale growth in Welsh-medium provision they were designed to provide (Welsh Government, 2017a) but the Government has always stressed that policy implementation would be ‘a slow, consistent process, perhaps without obvious success at the beginning’ (Welsh Government, 2020, p. 5). Such longterm political planning beyond the electoral cycle is noteworthy and highlights the Government’s understanding of the intricacies of language revitalisation.

In Brittany, on the other hand, planning mechanisms are less coherent and robust. Given the separation of responsibilities between the different administrative levels, it is difficult to create a single coherent plan and the closest thing is the Convention spécifique Etat-Région sur la transmission des langues de Bretagne signed by the Department of Education and the Bretagne Region in 2015 (Bretagne Région and Préfet de la Région Bretagne, 2015). This document sets out various commitments regarding the administration and expansion of immersion education over the following five years, with the Bretagne Region promising, for example, to lead publicity campaigns and the State agreeing to provide a certain number of
teachers to make expansion possible (idem.). Negotiations can, however, be tense and the follow-up agreement due in 2020 has yet to be signed. The measures set out in the 2015 Convention also lack detailed indications of how they are to be achieved or a rigorous system for monitoring implementation. The document does establish a monitoring committee to oversee implementation but this is made up of representatives of the various partners rather than external observers and its reports are not made public (idem., 2015).

Furthermore, as noted by the Conseil Culturel de Bretagne (2020), there are few clear success measures in the document, which makes it hard to hold stakeholders accountable for their pledges. In addition, there is clearly not the same investment in external research reports as in Wales, which means that immersion-education planning tends to reflect political considerations rather than research findings. Wales therefore clearly has a much more coherent and informed approach to immersion-education planning than Brittany, and this is helping to strengthen its immersion education offer.

**Age of exposure**

Having considered educational planning, this article’s focus now shifts to the study of selected pedagogical considerations around immersion education. One key factor is the age at which immersion education begins. The Welsh immersion-education strategy places particular emphasis on developing pre-school provision, stating that ‘Welsh-medium education from the early years, with robust linguistic progression through every phase of education, offers the best conditions for developing young people who are truly bilingual’ (Welsh Government, 2010, p. 7). Local authorities therefore offer an extensive network of Welsh-medium pre-schools and, where these are oversubscribed, buy into private provision offered by the nursery association, Mudiad Meithrin. In the 2019–20 academic year, 11,544 children attended Mudiad Meithrin Welsh-medium nurseries and 29% of the 15,925 children in government-funded childcare were in Welsh-immersion playgroups (Welsh Government, 2020). This decision to focus heavily on early exposure is based on research showing that immersion in the first three or four years of life can lead to a ‘simultaneous acquisition of bilingualism’, with the child acquiring two first languages (Meisel, 2006). The Welsh strategy certainly seems to be working, with the number of three- and four-year olds able to speak Welsh rising significantly from 11.3% in 1971 to 23.6% in 2011 (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014).

In Brittany, however, very few children come into contact with Breton before the age of three. In 2017, 3,250 children under this age had had some contact with Breton but only 60 had been truly immersed (OPLB, 2020a). While this was a small increase on the previous year, it
still represented only 0.04% of children of that age and the children concerned attended just three establishments (idem.). The Bretagne Region nonetheless recognises the importance of implementing immersion care from the earliest possible age and pledges to continue its ‘active support for associations which promote, coordinate and help local initiatives caring for young children through Breton, whether they be full- or partial-immersion creches or networks of childminders’ (Bretagne Région, 2018). Furthermore, the Bretagne and Pays de la Loire Regions seek to develop the Breton abilities of existing early-years staff by offering funding for short- and longterm training (OPLB, 2020a). In reality, however, their capabilities are once again limited because the ‘best way of reinforcing the use of the language in the early-years sector is to have permanent staff members who speak Breton’ (idem., p.3) but the recruitment of early-years staff is controlled by communes. Research shows that few of these local councils ‘have assumed a policy of developing a Breton-language job market in the early-years sector’ (idem, p.3). Much more work is therefore needed in Brittany to provide immersion care for young children at an age where the simultaneous acquisition of bilingualism is still possible, and this will require increased investment by and coordination between the various local authorities.

**Linguistic continuity**

Another important pedagogical factor in immersion education is the importance of learners remaining within it for the duration of their schooling. The Welsh Government claims that ‘Improving linguistic progression is a national priority’ (Welsh Government, 2012), since ‘The data suggests that the increase in the numbers of fluent Welsh speakers created within the school curriculum may be undone when moving between stages within the educational system’ (Hodges & Prys, 2019, p. 218). Indeed, data for the 2014–15 academic year showed a 12.9% drop in students in Welsh-immersion education between primary and secondary levels (Duggan et al., 2016) and the Estyn inspection body (2014) highlights a direct correlation between linguistic continuity in education and the development of ability in Welsh. The Government therefore insists that local authorities outline ‘progression protocols’ in their WESPs to tackle this problem (Welsh Government, 2021). One suggested focus is clear communication with parents about their options within the immersion system, particularly at pressure points such as the transfer from primary to secondary school (Welsh Government, 2012). To facilitate such conversations, the Government has produced a list of talking points for teachers and a series of YouTube videos explaining the benefits of bilingual education (idem.). Similarly, the Cymraeg for Kids website, which aims to support parents, portrays Welsh-language education as an ongoing ‘journey’ (Welsh Government, 2022). The Welsh
Government also recommends the appointment of a teacher as a Welsh-Language Champion to run taster sessions for students, answer staff questions and support Year-7 students struggling with the linguistic demands of the curriculum (idem.). The Carmarthenshire local authority is developing a role-model programme, where older Welsh-immersion students mentor younger ones during the transition from primary to secondary school (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017). It is interesting to note that the lowest continuity rates in full-Welsh-immersion education are seen in the areas with the highest number of partial-immersion schools (Duggan et al., 2016), which underscores the dangers previously noted in the Breton context of competition between partial- and full-immersion schools.

Linguistic progression is an even more pressing problem in Brittany, where there is a significant drop from 15,831 immersion students in primary schools to 2,705 in collèges and only 629 in lycées (OPLB, 2020b). To tackle this issue, the Bretagne and Pays de la Loire regional authorities have launched a communication campaign to raise awareness of the immersion-education options open to parents and of the value of continuing within the system. This campaign remains relatively factual, however, without the persuasive slant to be found in its Welsh equivalent. The new government guidance, meanwhile, promotes continuity in partial-immersion and second-language education by obliging local authorities to fund schooling in other jurisdictions or in private institutions for learners who wish to continue studying Breton but live in an area without sufficient provision (Circulaire du 14 décembre, 2021). It does not, however, guarantee students a right to full-immersion provision, and the limited number of immersion schools makes continuation complicated for such students. The Diwan network has found an innovative solution to this problem by making its 6 collèges and 2 lycées boarding schools. This allows students from its 48 primary schools to continue with full-immersion education even though its provision at this level is much more limited. It would be helpful for the regional authorities to undertake further research into progression rates and into the choices made by individual learners to allow for more proactive planning measures and a more cohesive strategy that could consolidate the gains achieved by immersion schools at the primary level.

Language use in immersion education

Another central consideration in immersion education is how and when the dominant and regional languages should be used in the classroom. In Wales, the new Curriculum for Wales (Education for Wales, 2019) embraces an innovative pedagogical approach, known as
translanguaging, which recognises that bilingual speakers naturally codeswitch between their languages. Accordingly, translanguaging encourages teachers to ‘alternate the use of Welsh and English for input and output in the same lesson’ (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017, p. 311) so that ‘Knowledge and skills in one language should support the development of knowledge and skills in other languages’ (Education Wales, 2019, p. 9). In practice, this means that teachers might introduce a subject in English but ask students to discuss it in Welsh, or vice versa. According to Baker (2001), this approach has many advantages including the development of a deeper understanding of the subject matter, since, ‘If the pupils have understood it in two languages, they have really understood it’ (Baker, 2010, p. 74). He also contends that it helps learners ‘develop skills in weaker languages’ (p.75) and makes it easier to integrate learners with different levels of Welsh within the same immersion class. Lasagabaster believes that translanguaging recasts bilingualism ‘as a resource instead of approaching it as a problem’ (2015, p. 130) and this is emphasised in the Curriculum’s new achievement outcomes, which explicitly highlight translanguaging as a skill for learners to recognise and acquire (Education Wales, 2019). There is, however, a risk associated with translanguaging in an immersion context: the lack of boundaries may encourage both learners and teachers to drift towards the dominant language (Baker, 2010). The Welsh Government therefore advises that translanguaging not be used with children under the age of seven, who ‘need to focus on Welsh immersion’ (idem, p.17). It will be important to monitor the implementation of this innovative new curriculum to see whether teachers are able to achieve that positive language balance needed to reap the benefits of translanguaging within the Welsh-immersion system.

In Brittany, the separation of languages is also a significant concern in policy documents but the focus has traditionally been more organisational than pedagogical. The strict parité horaire imposed on partial-immersion schools until now has meant that teachers have been obliged to attribute a specific language to each lesson in advance and to record this in a teaching log so as to ensure that no more than half the week’s classes were delivered in the regional language (Inspecteur de l’Education nationale en language régionale, 2017). Interestingly, some pedagogical guidance issued by the Education Department also claimed that this emphasis on separating the languages was a way of supporting language acquisition, given that ‘It thus avoids the micro-alternations between languages that can be harmful for the acquisition of regional languages’ (idem., p.3). Such statements draw on the traditional view of the importance of keeping languages separate, a view which is only considered relevant for younger children in the Welsh curriculum. This stance is, however, nuanced in other areas of the same guidance which appear to suggest the value of
translanguaging without ever referring to it as such. The message in the guidance around partial-immersion teaching has therefore been unclear until now and has lacked the explicit theoretical framework needed to give teachers an informed understanding of and agency over their language choices. The new guidance states, however, that ‘The time of exposure to one or the other of the languages being learnt is adapted to the needs of the students and the pedagogical programme of the school or of the class’ (Circulaire du 14 décembre, 2021). This loosening of the constraints of parité horaire may help to ease the tension which has existed between the need to police language use and the surreptitious awareness that modern translanguaging principles may be a more effective pedagogical approach.

Brittany’s private full-immersion education offer, on the other hand, has traditionally managed to sidestep the strict rules around language use and now finally has a clear legal framework to support it in its approach. The Diwan network proudly declares that ‘The main language of teaching and the language of school-life is Breton’ (Diwan, 2021a). This statement would, at first glance, suggest a high degree of language separation, with Breton being the sole language of instruction in the classroom. In reality, however, the network seems to adopt a more pragmatic approach, recognising the overlap between the students’ linguistic systems: ‘Once a child has discovered a concept or a new technology through Breton, they do not need to do the same work in French’ (Diwan, 2021a). Similarly, their website implies that translanguaging principles are a part of their pedagogical approach, with one coordinator explaining that the reformulation of French utterances in Breton ‘helps the child to consider coherence, lexical choice, accuracy, syntax […]. He doesn’t repeat the words he has just said but relies on his knowledge of the two languages to find another way of explaining what he really means’ (Diwan, 2021b). While there does not appear to be an alternation between the languages in terms of input and output, as recommended in Wales, both languages are clearly present and being exploited for linguistic development within the classroom in line with translanguaging principles. This is ultimately unsurprising, since classroom research shows that translanguaging is an inevitable linguistic practice in bilingual classrooms, whether officially sanctioned or not (García, 2009).

**Teacher provision and training**

The provision and training of teachers is another key consideration in the success of immersion education. The planned expansion of the Welsh-medium-education sector over the next thirty years means that workforce planning is a particular challenge for Wales, with projections requiring 1,400 extra teachers able to teach in Welsh by 2031 and a further 1,600
by 2050 (Welsh Government, 2017). To facilitate recruitment and upskilling, the Welsh Government introduced a new School Workforce Annual Census in 2019 to take stock of teachers’ ability to teach in Welsh (Welsh Government, 2020). This data was fed into the WESP process to allow local authorities to develop effective workforce-growth strategies. Furthermore, the Government offers various financial incentives, such as the Iaith Athrawon Yfory ITE scheme to attract graduates into Welsh-medium teaching (Welsh Government, 2021a) and these have been judged effective (Duggan et al., 2016). There are also training opportunities for existing teachers who wish to move into Welsh-medium teaching, the most notable of which is the Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme which offers existing teachers the opportunity to spend a year out of the classroom developing their language skills and learning about bilingual pedagogy (Welsh Government, 2021b). These programmes, taught by higher-education institutions, are available at various language levels and have proven popular, with 120 teachers participating in the 2019–2020 academic year (Welsh Government, 2020). The Government’s review of the scheme nonetheless recommended that it should be better integrated into the participants’ ongoing development by way of an after-care package ‘mapping the follow-up support and training available across each region and developing a clearer understanding of the follow-up support needs’ (Welsh Government, 2021b). Such a package would stress how the scheme fits into a larger process of skills development and would enhance its impact by supporting ‘practitioners to share teaching practices and examples of implementing their new skills with colleagues and other schools’ (idem.). The Government also funds the Welsh language and methodology training for early-years practitioners offered by the Mudiad Meithrin organisation, which can lead to a Welsh-medium Level 3 qualification in Childcare, Learning and Development (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014). The provision and training of Welsh-medium teachers has therefore been dynamised by the Government’s expansion agenda and its subsequent need to increase the size of the Welsh-immersion workforce significantly in the coming decades.

In Brittany, however, teacher provision is a significant barrier to the development of Breton-medium education. Teachers in France must first prepare a master’s degree in Education and then sit a concours exam to become civil servants (Vallerie & Bouroulleg, 2019). The Government determines the number of teaching posts available each year and allocates successful candidates to state schools or to schools under contract with the State, like the Catholic and Diwan networks (idem.). Master’s courses and concours for teachers specialising in regional-language immersion education now exist for every level of the education system and the Bretagne Region funds students wishing to prepare for these exams through the Skoazell and Desk / Kellen programmes (Bretagne Région, 2018). For
existing teachers wishing to move into immersion teaching, there is also the possibility of
taking a sabbatical, known as a congé formation, to enhance their language skills, although
there is no specific training scheme associated with this programme and teachers must find
an appropriate adult-learning programme on their own. Finally, the Bretagne Region also
funds language training for early-years practitioners wishing to move into immersion
provision through the Desk / Petite enfaed programme (Bretagne Region and Préfet de la
Région Bretagne, 2015). Despite these training options, teacher provision is an acute
problem in Breton-immersion education due to the Department of Education’s reluctance to
allocate sufficient teachers to the programmes. The State did meet its target of making 20%
of new posts in 2020 into bilingual posts (Kelennomp!, 2020) but this is not enough to meet
the demand for expansion in the state sector (Bretagne Région, 2018; Vallerie & Bouroulleg,
2019). Meanwhile, the Diwan and Catholic networks are often the last to receive teachers
(OPLB, 2020b) and this lack of ambitious planning has slowed the development of Breton-
immersion education. Estimates suggest that, if these networks had had similar rates of
growth to the public sector over the past few years, there would have been twice as many
learners in Bretonmedium education in 2019 (idem.). The provision and training of immersion
teachers in Brittany is therefore a significant hurdle in Breton-language revitalisation but
overcoming it requires the support of the Department of Education, and its recent reaction to
the Molac bill suggests this is unlikely to be forthcoming at present.

Materials provision

Another central consideration for language revitalisation through immersion education is the
design and provision of appropriate materials. In Brittany, the State and the Bretagne Region
co-fund the TES publishing house, which provides Breton-language materials for immersion
education (TES, 2021). Nonetheless, the Conseil Culturel de Bretagne (2020) argues that
there is still a paucity of immersion materials, and the Breton-teacher association
Kelennomp! (2020a) claims that teachers spend long hours designing resources and
translating French-language materials. Such practices are particularly problematic because
many parents choose immersion education so that their children obtain a ‘sense of place’,
with materials and teaching that reflect the unique character of Brittany (Timm, 2009).
Interestingly, both the Catholic and Diwan networks encourage this motivation with repeated
references on their websites to ‘enracinement’ or learners being rooted in their native soil
(Diwan, 2021b; Enseignement Catholique Bretagne, 2021). Similarly, the State refers to the
importance of ‘linking the study of the Breton language to Breton culture’ within the partial-
immersion system (Inspecteur de l’Education nationale en language régionale, 2017). It is
therefore important that more specific Breton-immersion materials be developed to fulfil these promises and to reduce pressure on immersion teachers. Although the Convention spécifique acknowledged this need (Bretagne Region and Préfet de la Région Bretagne, 2015), there have since been persistent rumours that funding for the TES is to be reduced (Kelennomp!, 2020b). This would represent a significant regression in the provision of pedagogically- and culturally-appropriate immersion materials in Brittany.

In Wales, the situation is more encouraging, with a wide range of Welsh-immersion materials available for all ages and an average of 160 new works published each year (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014). According to a recent review, the provision of materials has been facilitated by the Government’s Resource Commissioning Programme, which ‘has increased and improved the choice of available Welsh-medium and bilingual resources’ and ensured that the materials are of high quality (Thomas and Duggan, 2014). Procedures also exist to ensure that the commissioning of materials reflects the needs of the teaching community (Duggan et al., 2016). Studies nonetheless show that Welsh medium teachers still spend more time preparing resources than English-medium teachers (idem.), although it may be hoped that the new Curriculum for Wales’s focus on translanguaging will help to alleviate this problem, as teachers will be encouraged to use English-language materials in Welsh-immersion classes provided these are then discussed in Welsh (Thomas et al., 2018). Another issue is that Welsh-medium materials are often published later than equivalent English-medium ones (Duggan et al., 2016) but the Government has recently outlined an infrastructure plan to ensure that resources for the new curriculum are published simultaneously in English and Welsh (Welsh Government, 2021c). Once again, it is evident that the difference in the scale of immersion-education infrastructure between the two regions has a significant impact on the experience of students and teachers alike.

**Linking immersion education to community use**

Perhaps the most important element in effective immersion education, however, is ultimately its capacity to encourage language use outside of school. This ‘forward shift’ from proficiency to use (Gorter, 2013, p. 95) is vital if a language is to survive and flourish, for ‘a healthy, vital language is used in a range of settings with a wide variety of functions’ (Grenoble & Whaley, 2005, p. 7). In Brittany, research shows that immersion students make limited use of Breton outside of school (Broudic, 2010; Goalabré, 2015). Both the state and regional authorities are aware of the dangers inherent in these findings, with Article L216-1 (2016) seeking to promote the social use of Breton by authorising its use in educational, sporting and cultural
activities within the school day. The Bretagne Region also finances a wide range of extracurricular activities in Breton, including workshops and sailing lessons in schools (Bretagne Region and Préfet de la Région Bretagne, 2015), and supports associations like the Union bretonne pour l'animation des pays ruraux which offer summer camps in Breton (idem.). Moreover, it funds events bringing together native Breton speakers and immersion students, and thus provides a social use of the language (idem.). Perhaps the most effective strategy for promoting community use has, however, been the Diwan network’s decision to offer secondary education through boarding schools, which means that ‘Breton is not just a language within the lessons but is also the language used for interaction between students in their everyday lives’ (Diwan, 2021c). Such initiatives will be vital to the revitalisation of Breton, since the key to its survival lies in immersion students not just using it in their studies but ultimately choosing to transmit it to their own children.

Similarly, research in Wales suggests that urgent action is needed to ensure Welsh is actively used in the wider community and not just in schools. The Welsh Language Survey 2013–15 showed that young people were more likely to speak Welsh at school than with friends or at home (Duggan et al., 2016) and Price and Tamburelli conclude that ‘Welsh-medium education appears able to produce individuals educated through Welsh but not necessarily willing to use Welsh’ (2016, p. 203). They offer an interesting explanation for this paradox, arguing that the widespread use of Welsh in the education system has led to it ‘increasingly being associated with formal domains’ (p.190) and that this has resulted in the ‘cultural disengagement’ (p.189) of young people (particularly male adolescents) who now see English as the language of rebellion and progress. They also contend that ‘the formal register learned by informants is wholly inappropriate for casual application’ and that immersion students are therefore unable to use it in their everyday lives (p.201). In light of such findings, the Welsh Government has recognised the need ‘to plan provision for children and young people which not only gives them the opportunity to use or practise Welsh, but instils in them positive attitudes towards the language which translates into active use’ (Welsh Government, 2017). The provision of extracurricular activities in Welsh is now a central element of the WESP documents, with local authorities being encouraged to publicise available activities (Welsh Government, 2021). While this may seem sensible, the difficulty of holding a local authority accountable for activities outside of its remit has nonetheless been highlighted (Welsh Government, 2019). The Government also encourages immersion schools to work closely with other organisations, such as the Welsh Young Farmers Association, which organise informal events in Welsh (Welsh Government, 2019). Ultimately, however, the Cymraeg 2050 strategy recognises that there is only so much that the
Government can do to promote the informal use of Welsh by immersion students and that, once opportunities have been provided, it will be up to them to determine the future of their language (Welsh Government, 2017).

One important strategy for encouraging the use of the languages outside the classroom is to convince parents to be actively involved in their children’s immersion education. To this end, both Wales and Brittany encourage parents to learn the language and to take special courses on how to support their child’s language development. In Brittany, there is only limited scope for adult Breton-language learning (Vallerie & Bouroulleg, 2019) but the regional authorities direct parents towards a specialist course on supporting young children run by Stumdi and towards books such as Help! My Child Speaks Breton (Leon and Auvrignon, 2018). The Diwan network also provides vocabulary lists to parents and recommends various Breton courses (Diwan, 2021d). In Wales, however, the adult-education offer is much larger and there is a specialised programme called Welsh for the Family available in which parents develop their language abilities at the same time as their children (Prys Jones & Jones, 2014). The Government has also created the website Cymraeg for Kids to provide support and learning activities for parents of children in immersion education. It is important that the regions support such initiatives, since parents need to be aware that regional-language acquisition cannot be left to the education system alone (Hodges, 2012).

**Conclusions**

This article has therefore sought to draw a detailed comparative picture of the immersion-education systems for learners up to the age of 18 in Wales and Brittany. Several key themes have emerged from this exercise.

Most notably, it is evident that political investment is hugely important to the successful development of immersion education and the consequent revitalisation of a regional language through education. The Jacobin ideology at the heart of the French State too often leads the Education Ministry and wider political establishment to see regional identities as incompatible with a single, uniform French identity. Therefore, there is little desire in Paris to support regional languages and concessions to immersion education are often the result of fierce legal and political battles. Meanwhile, the UK government is arguably more accepting of regional identities and has devolved language policy and control of the education system to regional governments. The consequence is that political power over the education system
in Wales is held by a Welsh government that has every interest in promoting the Welsh language and this leads to significant investment in immersion education as the principal tool of revitalisation. The findings of this article suggest that solid political support must ultimately be the foundation upon which successful regional-language immersion education can be based.

Such political support allows for the establishment of wide-ranging, coherent and rigorous language planning and monitoring mechanisms. For instance, the Welsh Government’s Cymraeg 2050 strategy is an example of language planning that integrates immersion education into a society-wide approach to language revitalisation. This strategy is supported by statutory planning mechanisms that oblige local authorities to enact the wider strategy and hold them accountable for its delivery. The existence of strategy documents and planning mechanisms in Wales also feeds the need for research into immersion education in the form of government reports and evaluations, and these, in turn, provide an evidence base that allows for informed decision making. Such strategy and planning mechanisms are largely absent in Brittany, where language planning is the result of often heated political negotiations between different regional authorities and the State which lead to precarious, short-term settlements. Instead, the development of immersion education is driven by bottom-up pressure from parents and campaign groups with individual decisions all too often taken without regard for a larger strategic picture. This is far less conducive to effective language planning and leads to illogical and counter-productive planning decisions, as well as a lack of certainty around long-term funding and resource allocation that is hindering the revitalisation of Breton through immersion education.

The degree of political support enjoyed by immersion education also dictates the pedagogical conditions in schools. This is perhaps best illustrated by the question of language use within immersion schools. The French government has traditionally concentrated its efforts on the rigid policing of barriers between regional and national languages in the classroom, with little regard for advances in language pedagogy or the realities of bilingual language use. In Wales, however, efforts have been made to reflect on and develop modern teaching approaches that reflect contemporary multilingual pedagogy, and wider curriculum decisions have been made to align first-language and second-language curricula sensitively as one coherent spectrum. Similarly, while both regions have traditionally suffered from a paucity of teaching materials for immersion classes, proactive steps are
being taken to solve the issues in Wales, whereas Breton teachers continue to fear potential reductions in the availability of materials. There are, on the other hand, a wide number of training options open to teachers wishing to specialise in immersion education in both regions, although such efforts in Brittany are limited by the underdevelopment of the adult education sector. To some extent, the realities in the classroom are therefore not only determined by political support but also by an economy of scale, the larger the number of immersion classes, the greater the impetus to provide the materials, training and guidance needed for successful immersion education and the easier it is to commission and provide them.

Perhaps the most important theme of this report, however, relates to community use of the languages. The goal of language planners wishing to revitalise regional languages must ultimately be the re-establishment of intergenerational transmission within families and the wider community but the immersion-education schemes in the two regions are not necessarily leading to the widespread family or community use necessary to ensure the future of the languages. Tackling this issue must be the number-one priority for language planners in both regions or else the arguments in favour of immersion education will lose their power. It is interesting to note the number of innovative schemes in both regions, with Brittany in particular showing great creativity in this area. Such initiatives underline the importance of the sharing of best practice between regions with similar needs. Currently, links between Brittany and Wales are not particularly strong in the education or language sectors and it must be hoped that these will be developed further in the future.

This article has been written at a crucial point in time for the Breton language. The decisions made today will determine whether the language dies, survives or flourishes in the coming decades. The recent decision by the French Government to authorise full-immersion education could be determinant, but its success will ultimately depend on a wide-ranging shift in traditional political attitudes in France. Wales provides an interesting model of how governmental support can transform the fortunes of a regional language, and greater communication between language planners in the two regions could help significantly in the development of effective education policies in the future. Ultimately, however, the growth of immersion education in the two regions and elsewhere will be pointless if the links between school and community use are not strengthened to ensure that intergenerational transmission is re-established and that the language is appropriated in all domains of use by the graduates of such immersion schemes.
Note

1. All translations from French are the author’s.

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