

Unveiling Post-Colonial Perspectives: Primary Educators' Insights on Teaching English in Multilingual Malta.

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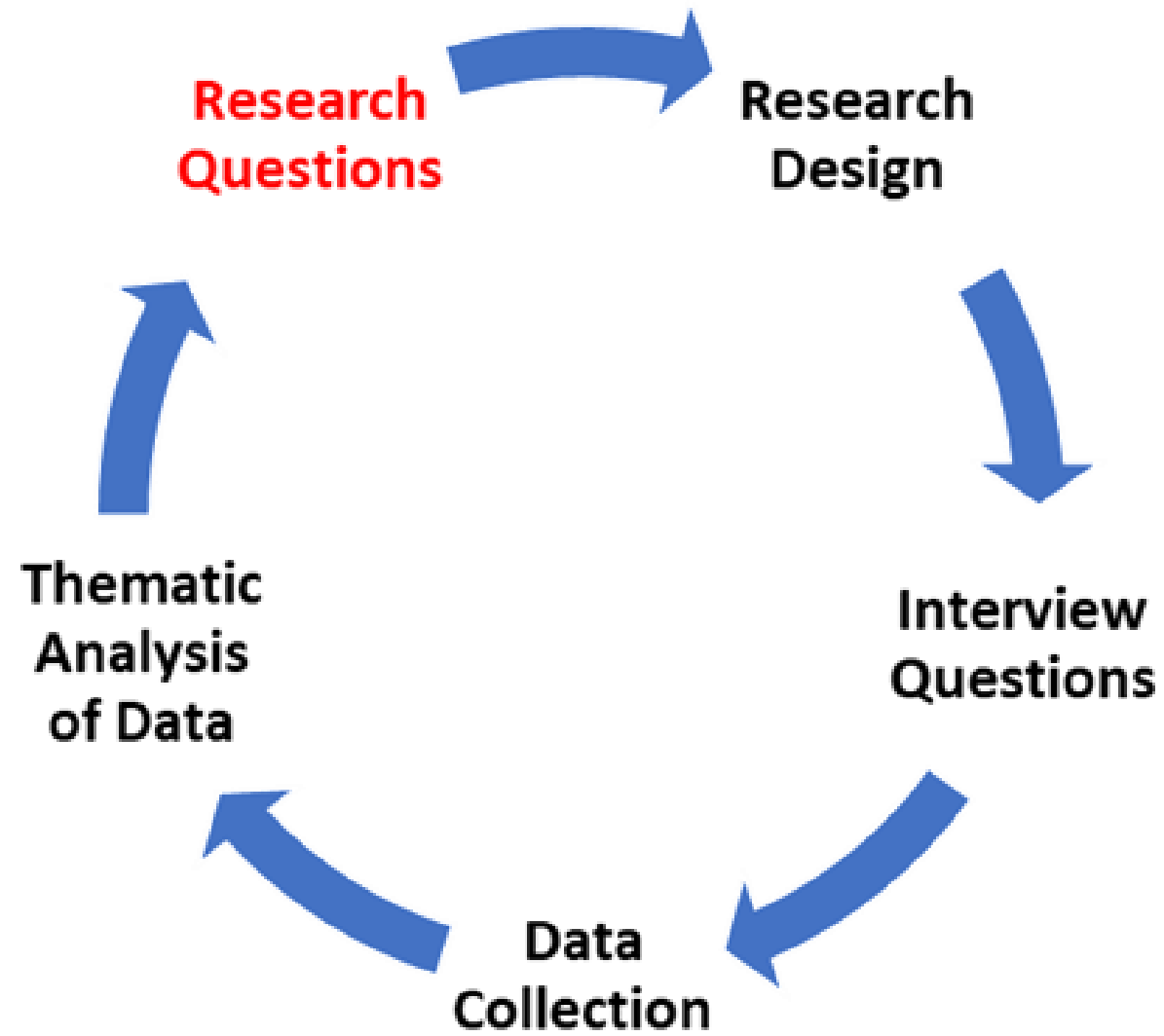
THE RESEARCH STUDY



- Part of a larger doctoral study (see Panzavecchia, 2020).
- Malta's bilingual situation - part of its historical legacy of foreign occupation.
- Malta's socio-cultural context - its influence on teachers' linguistic identities (impacting their language practices and pedagogical approaches).
- Teachers' views on students' current English proficiency levels and proposed strategies to enhance language competence.
- Malta's experience of the global trend of linguistic diversity. Demographic shifts - transformation from a bilingual to multilingual society.
- Impact on educational system – classrooms becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse. Maltese educators are naturally incorporating cross-linguistic practices in their English lessons to meet the diverse needs of their students.
- Impact on professional practice, professional development, and initial teacher education programmes.

In-depth semi-structured interviews with 9 primary school teachers to explore their bilingual identities, beliefs, and pedagogical practices.

Thematic analysis to identify common themes within participants' rich accounts of experiences related to teacher identity and English language teaching.



Cyclical Research Process of the Study

THE PARTICIPANTS



Purposive Sampling

- 9 Maltese primary school teachers, each with over 10 years teaching experience.
- Working in state, church-run, and private independent schools.
- Teaching at different ends of the primary spectrum.
- 8 females and 1 male teacher (representative of the gender imbalance within the teaching profession, where female teachers are largely over-represented in primary education in the EU (Eurostat, 2017)).
- Ages varying between 30s to 50s.

MALTA AND ITS LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND





Location - Middle of the Mediterranean Sea.



History - A history of continuous co-existence of at least two languages on the island (including Arabic, Latin, Italian/Sicilian, French, English, and Maltese). The presence of English in Malta is a result of the island's colonial heritage.



Language - Almost all citizens are bilingual. English and Maltese are both official languages. Maltese is our national language. Italian is considered to be a third language.



Education - Maltese and English are both languages of instruction, and subjects in their own right.

- Maltese is the dominant spoken language (L1), although a large number of Maltese nationals choose English as their mother tongue.
- There is a constant interplay between the two languages through the prevalence of codeswitching and the use of “Manglish” (Rix, 2010), or “Mixed English Maltese” (Borg, 1980), or “Maltese English (MalTE)” (Bonnici, 2010; Grech, 2015), where both languages are used in parallel, interchangeably, or in a blended manner.



MALTA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM




Malta's educational system is largely a product of its colonial heritage, hence its foundations are built on the British educational system.



The choice of language for instruction, the design of educational curricula, and the selection of textbooks have been significantly influenced by colonial practices and their enduring effects in the post-colonial era.


Both Maltese and English are mediums of instruction, whilst also being subjects in their own right. Both languages are taught in tandem.



Educators frequently engage in codeswitching during lessons.



Written English remains the predominant language in Maltese educational institutions, with comparatively fewer resources available in Maltese.



Bilingual and multilingual development in schools is supported by language policies aimed at encouraging positive attitudes towards Maltese, English, and other languages.

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN MALTA



- The **teaching of English** in Maltese primary schools is founded in the concept of a **bilingual education system**, which places importance on the country's two official languages.
- **English** is formally introduced in the **first year of primary education**.
- The **national curriculum** encourages primary school teachers to use the English language for subjects such as **English, Mathematics, Science, and Technology**, while acknowledging the benefits of **codeswitching** when necessary to ensure comprehension.
- A minimum of **90 minutes** per day are dedicated to **language and reading instruction**.
- The teaching of **English as a second (ESL) or foreign/additional language (EFL/EAL)** is becoming increasingly essential in Maltese primary schools due to the influx of non-Maltese students.
- Current shift to an **all-English medium of teaching** in Maltese schools, where the predominant use of the English language makes education more accessible to non-Maltese students.

CURRENT DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS ON THE ISLAND



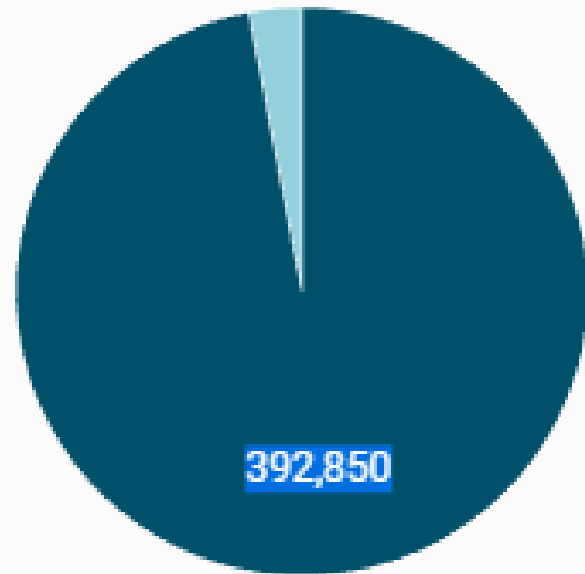
- In the past 2 decades, due to its geographical location, Malta has been considered to be a **symbolic gateway into Europe**.
- **Asylum seekers** and **refugees** have been inflowing Malta at unprecedented rates.
- Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004 - **transnational migration** is on the increase as more EU citizens are exercising their right of free movement within the European member states (International Organisation for Migration, 2016).
- **Importation of foreign labour** by the government over the past few years to sustain economic growth.
- **One fifth** of Malta's population and over a quarter of Malta's workforce are currently made up of foreign nationals.
- The past decade has seen an increase of **over 95,000** non-Maltese nationals on the island (Borg, 2023).
- The population of Malta stood at just over half a million in 2021, making it the most densely populated country in the EU with **1,649 residents per square kilometre**. (**Malta is 27 km long and 14.5 km wide**).

- Italians make up the large majority of non-Maltese living on the islands, followed by British residents.
- Other common nationalities residing in Malta include Indian, Filipino, Serbian, Bulgarian and Libyan populations (National Statistics Office, 2023).
- As a result of such unparalleled and rapid changing demographics on the island, Malta finds itself shifting from bilingualism to multilingualism, effectively becoming **a cultural and linguistic melting pot** of sorts.

Maltese & non-Maltese population 2005-2021

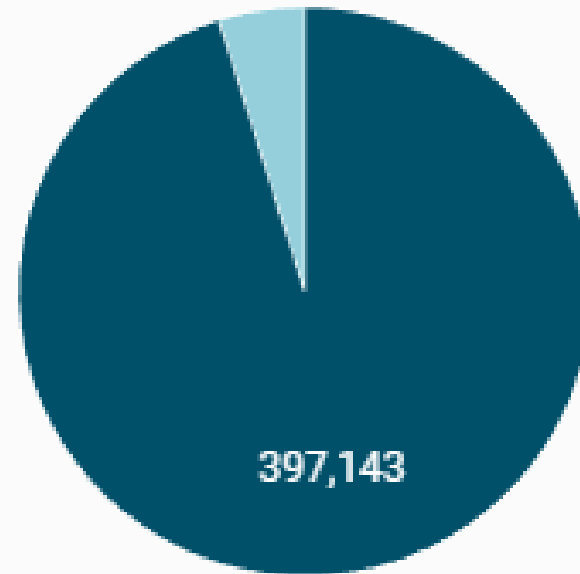
Malta's non-Maltese population increased from under 2% in 2005 to 22% in 2021.

■ Maltese ■ Non-Maltese



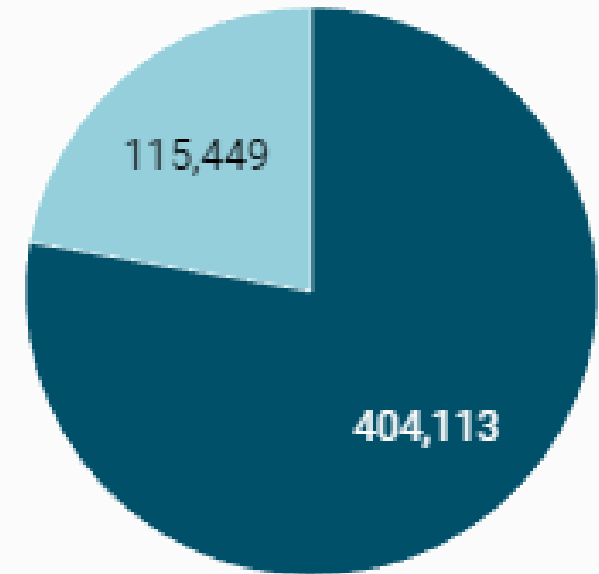
2005

Total population:
404,962



2011

Total population:
417,432

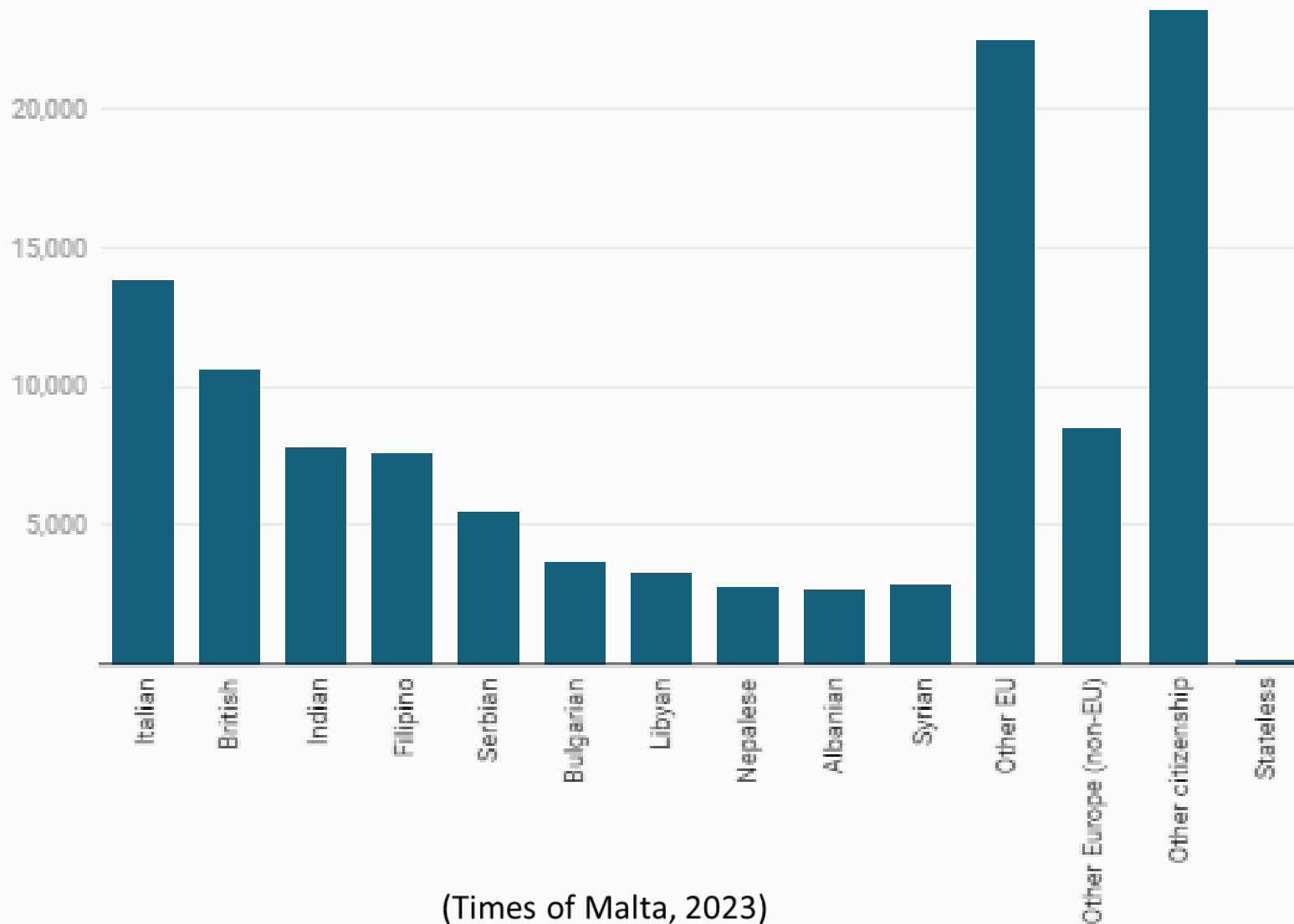


2021

Total population:
519,562

Nationalities of foreign nationals in Malta in 2021

A third of all foreign nationals in Malta are EU citizens.



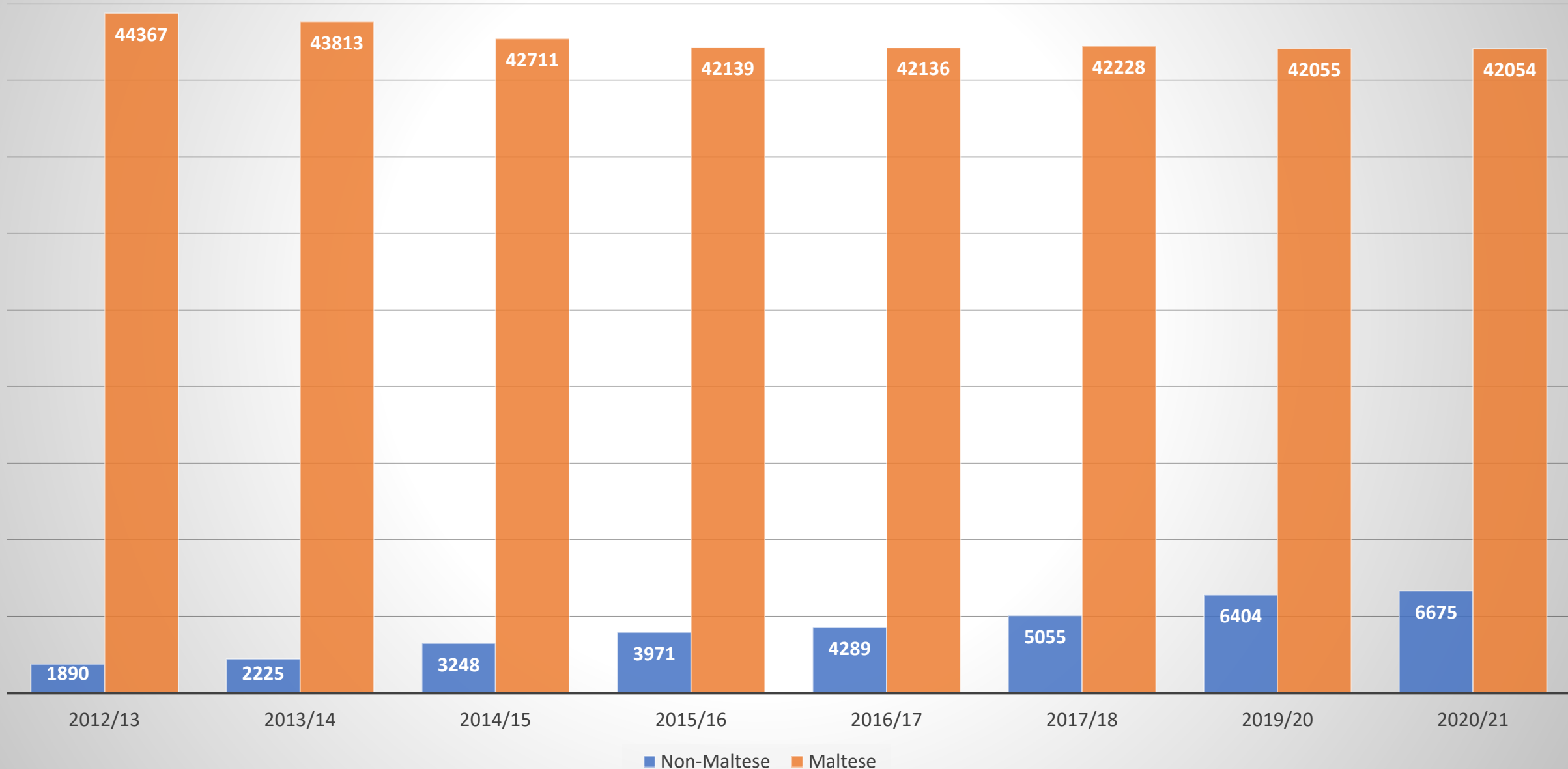
(Times of Malta, 2023)

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND SCHOOLS



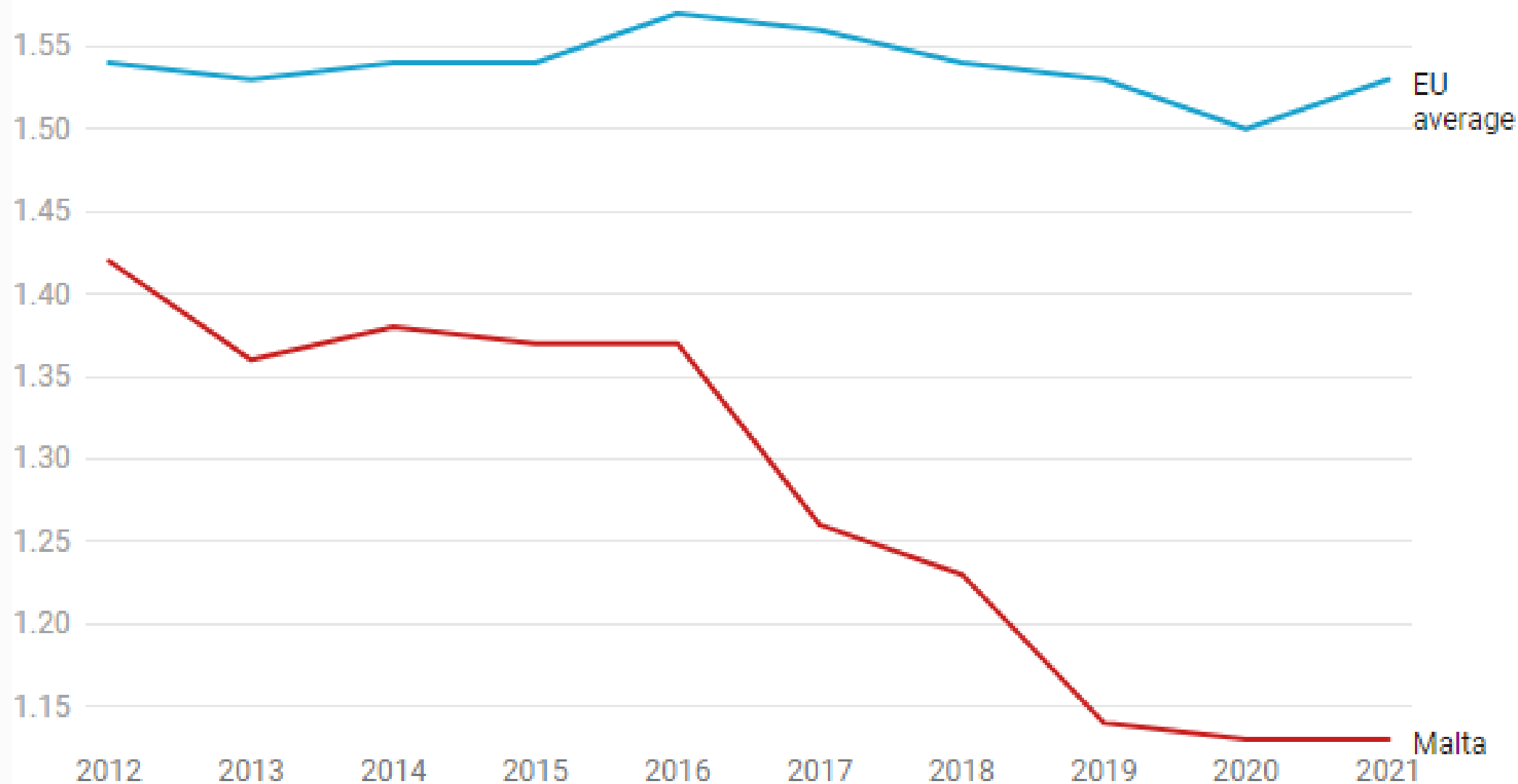
- Non- Maltese pupils in 2012/13 - 1,890, in 2020/21 – 6,675. **In 8 years the number has more than tripled** (NSO, 2023).
- Number of Maltese children decreasing (**lowest fertility rate in Europe**) (Eurostat, 2021).
- Maltese primary schools host the largest percentage of non-Maltese children - **15% of the schools' population** in 2020/21 (NSO, 2023).
- The source of both **enrichment and challenge**.
- **Cultural and linguistic impact** on schools.
- Maltese educators **teaching students who do not speak either English or Maltese**.

Maltese and non-Maltese students 2012 – 2021



Fertility rate 2012-2021

The difference between Malta's fertility rate and that of the rest of Europe is increasing.



FINDINGS



- The participants speak the **language dominant in their families**; but **both languages are utilised equally and interchangeably** in their daily interactions.
- Participants favour **full immersion** practices during language teaching - the way in which they had been taught languages themselves was greatly influential on their pedagogical beliefs.
- Often resorting to **language mixing** in the form of **codeswitching, translanguaging, translation** or **repetition** to mitigate **language barrier** challenges.
- **Different languages and codeswitching and/or translation practices**, mainly when **reinforcing a point, providing instructions, clarifying concepts or directions, emphasising key points**, and for **effective classroom management**.
- The majority of participants voiced their concerns on **the declining level of English**. Common concerns - a **lack of reading**, an **increase in the use of technology** (social media, gaming, YouTube).
- Influence of **popular culture**- Maltese children adopting an **Americanised style** of speaking and writing English. Growing **American influence** on the **English language**, specifically highlighting the media's role in shaping language varieties
- Both American and British English are legitimate language models, but there appears to be a **European academic bias** favouring the **British model**.

- Standard **British English** remains prominent in Malta, particularly as a **written medium** in education.
- Lack of **training programmes** for pre-service and experienced educators. Lack of **teacher agency**.
- **Initial training** and **professional development programmes** should focus on the current **linguistic diversity** in Malta's classrooms, offering **hands-on, practical solutions** for teaching and learning.
- A need for a **shift** in the way the **English language** is taught in primary schools: more **listening comprehensions**, more **oral component**, more **exposure to children's literature**, more **fun and play based learning**, less emphasis on **summative assessment**.
- **Physical resources, multimodal teaching, smaller class populations**, prioritising **human resources** to facilitate smaller group instruction and differentiated learning strategies.
- More focus on the **communicative aspect**, and **less so on grammar** taught out of context.
- **Educators** should work with **parents** to highlight how important it is for a child to grow up having a good command of the English language (language of tertiary education)

**RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR ENGLISH
LANGUAGE TEACHING**



English as a second language (ESL) requires a shift to incorporate EFL/EAL (English as a foreign/additional language).

Place students predominantly in mainstream settings, dividing them into smaller groups for specific tasks, with occasional pull-out classes.

Reconsider the roles of Maltese and English as languages of instruction, utilising flexible language practices to bridge language gaps.

Increase training and support in multilingual instructional strategies essential for teaching English.

Build bilingual and multilingual strategies on students' prior knowledge to facilitate language transfer.

Legitimise the use of students' L1 in the English language classroom to support students' identities.

Curricular and assessment changes, along with ITE and CPD training programmes, should reflect linguistic diversity.

Focus language teaching on communication, interest-based materials, and contextual grammar instruction.

Encourage self-expression in creative writing, thus fostering a love for the language.

Create literacy-rich environments through resources and engaging learning opportunities.

Further explore the use of multimodal texts to enhance learning through various means. Incorporate multicultural and multilingual resources in English lessons to foster inclusivity.

Provide authentic language learning materials to aid the contextual application of language skills.



Strengthen English proficiency and nurture a love for reading through diverse, high-quality texts.

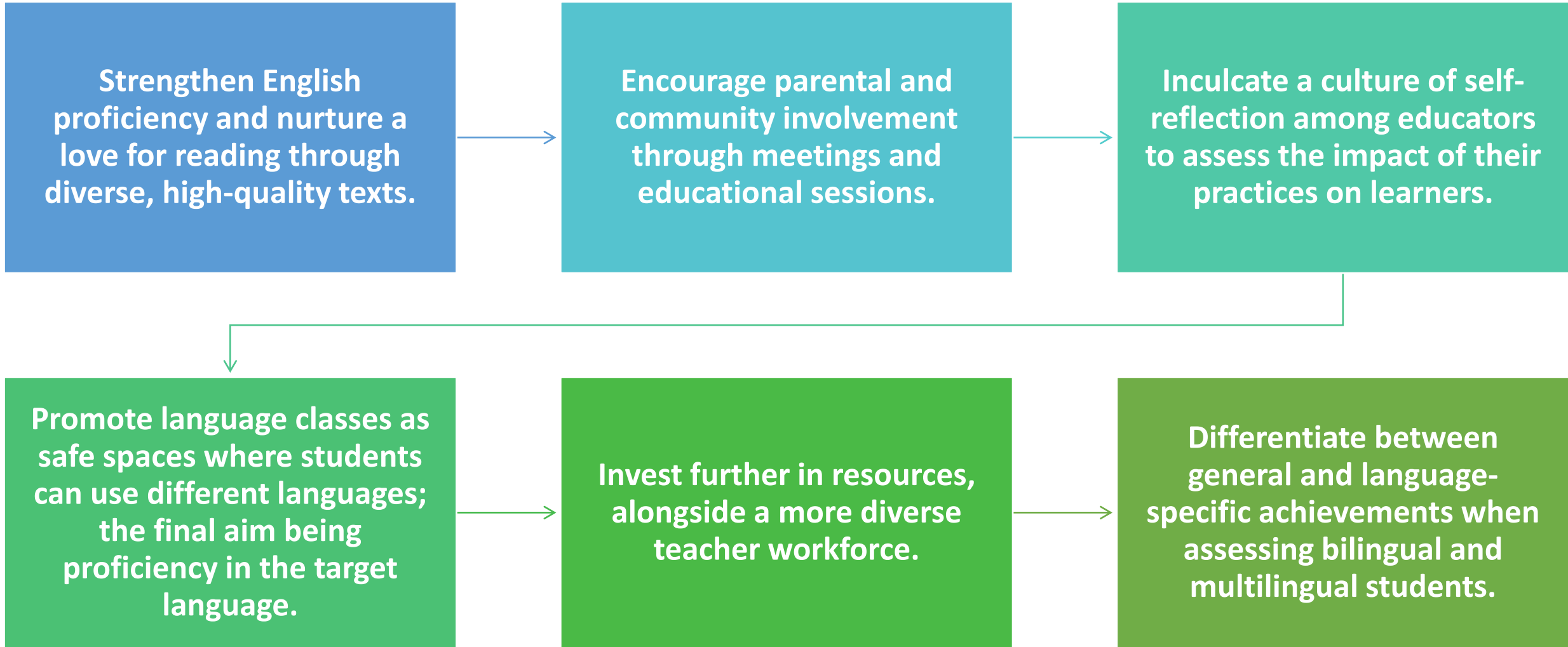
Encourage parental and community involvement through meetings and educational sessions.

Inculcate a culture of self-reflection among educators to assess the impact of their practices on learners.

Promote language classes as safe spaces where students can use different languages; the final aim being proficiency in the target language.

Invest further in resources, alongside a more diverse teacher workforce.

Differentiate between general and language-specific achievements when assessing bilingual and multilingual students.



The results of the study present **implications** related to the **Maltese educational system, English language pedagogy** in multilingual classrooms, and **teacher training**.

There is a need for a **pedagogical shift** focusing on **inclusive teaching strategies, a revision of English language teaching programmes and methods of assessment, additional human and physical resources, the promotion of equity in education, and the provision of support systems** for disadvantaged students and minority groups.

This necessitates the **development of a teacher workforce which is more culturally and linguistically responsive** to meet the demands of Malta's increasingly diverse classrooms.



About the presenter

Michelle Panzavecchia is a full-time Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Education. She is also a Visiting Senior Lecturer at The University of Malta. She has previously worked as an Assistant Head of School and as an Educator in the early and junior years. Michelle holds a PhD in the field of Bilingualism, Multilingualism, and English Language Teaching from the University of Sheffield, UK. She also holds an M.Sc. in Language and Communication Impairment in Children from the University of Sheffield, UK, and a B.Ed. (Hons.) from the University of Malta.

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ANY
QUESTIONS?



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