

Portuguese students who attend mother tongue classes attain higher GCSE results

Goldsmiths College, University of London

A research study at Goldsmiths College, University of London, indicates that Portuguese students who attend mother tongue classes have a much higher probability of obtaining grades A*-C.

The study analysed the results attained in GCSE exams by Portuguese students in five London secondary schools with a high population of students from this community. The grades achieved by the students attending mother tongue classes were compared to those of students from the same community not attending classes. The information gathered indicated that the Portuguese students who had been attending were five times more likely to obtain 5 or more GCSEs of grades A*-C than those who had not attended.

End of Key Stage 4 results collected for 48 students showed that 41% of the students attending mother tongue classes obtained 5 or more A*-C GCSE results against 8% of those students not attending Portuguese mother tongue classes. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant difference between these two groups ($p=0.048$). The data collected regarding children in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 also yielded results that appear to indicate an advantage for Portuguese children attending mother tongue classes.

According to Olga Barradas: 'This is an important result that shows the effect of academic work conducted in the children's mother tongue. Although this is an exploratory study, it is of relevance to bilingual children from other communities who, like the Portuguese, attend supplementary mother tongue classes. It also carries implications for the way mainstream schools support children's development in their mother tongue'.

This study is part of the research being done for a PhD degree at Goldsmiths College University of London and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).