

## **Irish education must embrace language diversity, seminar told**

*Sat., March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016*

The Irish education system must embrace diversity of languages and provision should be made to enable immigrants become both proficient in English and to write education papers in their international languages, **Mr Egide Dhala, Outreach Coordinator, International Organisation for Migration and co-founder and Director Wezesha African Diaspora**, said in Dublin today (Saturday March 5th)

He was speaking at a seminar on '*Linguistic Diversity in Education – Benefits and Challenges*,' organised by the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT).

Mr Dhala said that "Immigrants now represent 12% of the Irish population. The Education system here must embrace this diversity and take into account immigrants' backgrounds to truly open doors to more engagement and commitment by migrants and to allow them enter, progress and achieve best results in Education.

"Lack of English proficiency, including accent, affects negatively on immigrants' standards of results in Education and, in the case of third-level, lack of recognition of international qualifications and prior learning is a major barrier that must be addressed," he said.

In the keynote address, **Dr David Little, Trinity College, Dublin**, said that migrants face very substantial and often unacknowledged challenges in acquiring proficiency in the language of their new country.

"Education planning must take this into account as a priority, in order to enable students from migrant backgrounds to achieve their full potential.

"Identity is rooted in a person's first or home language. Education supports must take this actively into account and the challenge is to ensure positive action is taken so that such students can draw effectively on their 'first language' background.

"To deny migrants use of their own language in education is an infringement of human rights and is one of the grounds for discrimination under the European Convention on Human Rights," Dr Little added.

**Dr Bríd Ní Chonaill, Institute Of Technology Blanchardstown,** said that lecturing experience showed clearly that migrant students' English language competency clearly influences their academic performance.

"Research has recognized language proficiency as one of the primary reasons why non-EU students 'drop out' of academic programmes.

"Even when migrant students present themselves with the necessary standard of English based on the International English Language Testing System, the demands of academic English remain 'very challenging' for any student who is a non-native speaker of English.

"Many migrant students underachieve simply because the students' knowledge may be far greater than their results suggest.

"The language deficit is regularly in written rather than oral performance, such students may underachieve because they cannot express themselves in the right way

"This deficit may follow students after graduation, resulting in fewer postgraduate and labour market opportunities," she said.

**Ms Joan Donegan, Deputy General Secretary of IFUT,** said that the challenge is to develop a sensitive assessment of language and learning needs and promote the well being of migrant students.

"Policy generally must aim to provide a welcoming environment, offer relevant supports and facilitate integration into college and school communities, to enable migrant students achieve their full potential," she said.

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