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Contents

Foreword

We are very pleased to publish Volume Four of the Hibernia College Education Papers. As part of our Professional Master of Education programmes, students complete a 10,000-word dissertation during their research module. They choose a research topic from four different theme areas: (1) Teaching, Learning and Assessment, (2) ICT, (3) Psychological, Sociological, Philosophical and Historical and (4) Inclusion and Differentiation. In this publication, graduate teachers cover a diverse range of research areas, for example, the LGBTI+ supports available to teachers, effective literacy interventions, media literacy education and the impact of one-to-one iPad use on teaching and learning.

This collection of education papers showcases research from graduate teachers from both our Professional Master of Education in Post-Primary and Primary Education programmes. Each of the authors demonstrated a passionate dedication to research whilst completing a demanding course. The projects they undertook are timely, thought-provoking and important in the continued advancement of educational practice in Irish schools.

The dissemination of open-access research plays an important role in the development of educational practice. The purpose of this publication is to not only showcase the high-quality research of our graduate teachers, but to provide and disseminate models of good research practice to our future students in the School of Education and to the wider education community.

We pay tribute to the dedication and support of our research supervisors in encouraging our student teachers to not only engage with research in a professional way but to instil a culture of teachers as researchers. We continue to prioritise the value of research and are proud to disseminate this body of student work as a collection of key research issues that permeate Irish education today.

Dr Mary Kelly
Academic Dean

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Acting Programme Director
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Effective Literacy Interventions in a DEIS Primary School – Teachers' Perspectives

Keira Allen

Biography

Keira Allen graduated with a Bachelor of Science (Hons) Degree from John Moores University, Liverpool and worked in health protection agencies in the UK before returning to Ireland where she worked developing and managing postgraduate distance learning programmes in medical colleges. Graduating with First Class Honours in the Professional Master of Education (PME) from Hibernia College in 2020, Keira recently completed her first year of teaching in a DEIS primary school in Dublin with Junior Infants and derived tremendous satisfaction from helping her pupils realise the potential of their individual strengths and abilities throughout the year. With a passion for horticulture and landscape design, Keira always seeks to share her appreciation of nature and art with her pupils. She was drawn to teaching because it presents continuous challenges requiring innovation and versatility.

Effective Literacy Interventions in a DEIS Primary School – Teachers' Perspectives

Research supervisor: Dr Jean Henefer

Abstract

This single case study explored which evidence-informed literacy interventions used in DEIS schools are most effective from teachers' perspectives. Data was collected by an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Teachers addressed the benefits and challenges of implementing literacy interventions in their school and how adequately resourced and equipped they felt in delivering the literacy interventions. Teachers reported that evidence-informed practices (EIPs) for literacy were working in the school and positively impacting pupil well-being. However, the research indicated that teachers needed more time to collaborate and plan with colleagues so that EIPs could be more tailored to meet the needs of all pupils.

Keywords: Literacy, Intervention, Teachers, Challenge, Effective, DEIS

Introduction

It serves the national and individual interest to ensure that everyone acquires the literacy and numeracy skills required to participate in society as these skills are central to achieving social justice, participation and equity in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2011). Irish primary school teaching policy emphasises literacy teaching, with more than half (52%) of teaching time devoted to Language and Mathematics (NCCA, 2010). However, school inspectorate and international studies state that many pupils (particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds) are not achieving their anticipated literacy skills (DES, 2011). An interim review in 2015 of the National Strategy highlighted a continuing gap in literacy achievement between DEIS urban Band 1 primary schools and non-DEIS schools (DES, 2017). Raising literacy standards in this cohort was identified as a continuous challenge by the

Department of Education (DES, 2017a). This single case study identifies the literacy interventions teachers find to be most effective in DEIS primary classrooms and explores the following research questions:

- What evidence-informed literacy interventions used in DEIS schools are most effective from teachers' perspectives?
- What are the benefits and challenges of implementing the specific literacy interventions identified in this single case study?
- Do teachers feel adequately resourced and equipped to deliver the literacy interventions to their pupils?

Literature Review

In the *Progress in international reading literacy study* (PIRLS) in 2011, Ireland ranked fourth internationally, with a significant difference in literacy achievement between pupils attending DEIS and non-DEIS schools (Kennedy, 2013). Weir and Denner, 2013 (cited in NEPS, 2016, p.6), state that 11% of pupils attending DEIS schools read at or below the 10th percentile in 2nd Class and 20% in 6th Class.

The frequency of recreational reading at nine years of age is significantly related to early language skills development and experiences of reading (DCYA, 2018). As school represents only a small proportion of a child's time, family involvement at home is essential for providing opportunities to engage in quality conversations as good oral language skills influence both reading and writing skills (NEPS, 2019). Poorly developed vocabulary levels are one of the major obstacles to overall literacy achievement, including reading; in circumstances of socio-economic disadvantage, reading at home can be a challenge as children may lack the support for reading or oral language development to help them improve (NEPS, 2016).

The impact of poverty on literacy success has been researched by Kellet (2009) who looked at links between reading and the effects on the child's confidence and self-esteem. The research reported that children prefer a nurturing, quiet environment, such as the home, to practise their reading. Dearing et al. (2006) argue that family involvement has a positive impact on literacy performance levels, which can reduce the achievement gap between children from low-income families and their wealthier peers.

The presence of a skilled adult plus a suitable study environment help children to achieve literacy success (Kellet, 2009). However, these crucial factors are less available to children living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, meaning that disadvantage may be prolonged by missed literacy opportunities.

In school, active learning assists pupils' retention and comprehension of information through discussing, applying and explaining information to others (Felder and Soloman, 2008). In the classroom, the teacher's role is vital in implementing active learning methodologies to teach literacy, for example: group work, discovery learning and collaborative learning, which can promote and increase literacy attainment. Block, Hurt and Oaker, 2002 (cited in Fergusson et al., 2011, p.239) state that teacher abilities in the classroom may have a greater impact on attainment than any curricular programmes.

Kennedy and Shiel's two-year study in a DEIS primary school focused on improving literacy attainment. The study used a comprehensive, active and collaborative approach. Participating teachers received professional development training to acquire skills to assist in making appropriate decisions for the context and developmental stages of their pupils (Kennedy and Shiel, 2010). Their research identified benefits for teacher and pupil participants including increased knowledge and expertise for teachers, and overall improvement in standardised reading test results for pupils (Daly, 2015). This emphasises the value of effective teacher-pupil interactions and shows that a range of strategies and methodologies are required to support children in developing their language and literacy levels (Rivalland, 2004).

Brooks (2016) reviewed the effectiveness of a range of evidence-informed literacy interventions for students with literacy difficulties. He recommends that schools ensure that staff are trained, continuously updated and supported in teaching these programmes, and, crucially, that the latter are tailored to the requirements at the pupil, class, and school. Brooks argues that EIPs are most effective when they retain sufficient flexibility to respond to the demands of different circumstances. Brooks (2013) emphasises that schools must provide further professional development so that staff can provide effective support to those falling behind in literacy attainment. However, support and supplementary training for two of the literacy programmes used in Irish primary schools (Reading Recovery and First Steps) has been found to be inadequate (Kennedy and Shiel, 2010).

It is imperative that teachers are driven by evidence-informed research currently available on effective reading to improve their instruction of reading in the classroom (Taylor et al., 2005). The National Reading Panel (NRP) (2005) states that pedagogical practices in schools must be driven by EIPs but recognises the practicalities involved. It argues that teachers often have limited access to relevant and up-to-date research, which may not be fully understood or interpreted correctly to deliver instructional approaches that will provide the most gains in reading achievement.

Teachers can face multiple and complex challenges when implementing evidence-informed literacy practices. In their study of using literacy EIPs in disadvantaged schools, Davidson and Hobbs (2013) highlight these challenges but also experienced some success in doing so. Although recently there are noticeable improvements in literacy attainment with the implementation of national educational initiatives, a gap remains in reading achievement between pupils attending DEIS and non-DEIS schools requiring increased research, development and investment to improve literacy achievement in DEIS schools (NEPS, 2019).

Methodology

This was a single case study situated in a DEIS Band 1 primary school. Participants were qualified primary school teachers. The researcher determined that the nature of the questions and the small scale of the project indicated that a single case study employing a mixed methods approach would be the most appropriate method, as it allows for a flexible approach to data collection to examine the possible benefits and challenges of implementing literacy EIPs. Interviews were the main source of qualitative data, permitting the researcher to observe and gather more descriptive data (Creswell, 2013). Online surveys gathered quantitative data. Creswell (2013) states that by gathering qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher is obtaining statistical and personal data, which can lead to a more in-depth understanding of the research question(s).

Mixed Methods Approach

Two semi-structured interviews were carried out. Interview questions were open-ended to encourage a natural flow of information, thus enabling deeper responses (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011). Interview questions focused on: 1) Literacy and phonics intervention programmes,

2) Effectiveness of the literacy intervention programme(s), 3) Challenges and supports encountered over time and the nature of the support received and 4) Resources.

The interviews allowed the respondent and interviewer to interact in a relatively informal and unstructured atmosphere, encouraging respondents to develop ideas, answers and precise opinions dynamically beyond the questionnaire. However, Hepburn and Potter (2004) caution that the participant's unique and specialised perspective can mean that analysis of qualitative data may be open to researcher bias. It is thought that researcher bias can occur because qualitative research is open-ended and less structured than quantitative research (Burke Johnson, 1997). By employing a qualitative method, the researcher was able to develop an in-depth understanding of how literacy interventions were being implemented in the school. It permitted the researcher to consider the challenges faced by primary school teachers in implementing certain literacy interventions, and identify factors that might determine the selection of interventions being used as well as outcomes.

In addition to the two semi-structured teacher interviews, an online survey was drafted, piloted and revised based on feedback. Open-ended questions were included in the survey, allowing participants to elaborate and qualify their responses, thereby avoiding the limitations of pre-set response categories (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is used for identifying and analysing qualitative datasets to help identify themes or patterns of meaning in the data. Analysis of the data involved the researcher listening to and transcribing both interviews to become familiar with the transcripts. Any emergent or recurring themes that addressed the three research questions were identified, and these were then coded and further analysed. Online survey data was gathered from Google Forms for analysis and interpretation by the researcher, and basic descriptive analysis was undertaken using Microsoft Excel. Charts and graphs were produced to visually represent the data throughout the analysis.

Ethical approval was granted by Hibernia College's Ethics Committee and the principles of the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018) were applied to ensure that the study adhered to all relevant ethical

standards. Participants were informed of the purpose and methods of the research, including reassurance around confidentiality. All data was used in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. Given the small sample size, this study also ensured there was no possibility of deductive disclosure.

Findings

Two semi-structured interviews were carried out and a total of 16 survey returns were submitted by primary school teachers (N=16). Almost 70% of participants had 1–10 years' teaching experience with the remainder having more than 10 years' experience. Of the 16 survey respondents, 75% (N=12) were teaching in a mainstream class while 25% (N=4) worked in a learning support setting.

The findings indicated that several evidence-informed practices and interventions/programmes (EIPs) for literacy operated in the school including: Reading Recovery, Literacy Power Hour (Power Read), Book Start Reading initiative, Oral language Programme, Aistear/Structured Free-Play, Reading Buddies, guided reading stations, and Building Bridges comprehension strategies. Teachers considered the literacy intervention(s) in the school to be effective in supporting and building pupils' literacy skills. Survey respondents (87.5%, N=14) stated that children's literacy attainment improved as they progressed through the school. Data from the interviews confirmed this. Interview and survey results indicated that, although teachers saw improvements in the school, a significant problem with literacy remained despite the interventions.

Collaborative planning, co-teaching approaches, open communication and differentiated learning experiences were reported by survey respondents as the most important factors in successful literacy interventions, with a consensus that creating differentiated learning experiences to meet the needs of individual children was paramount. Responses are shown in Figure 1.

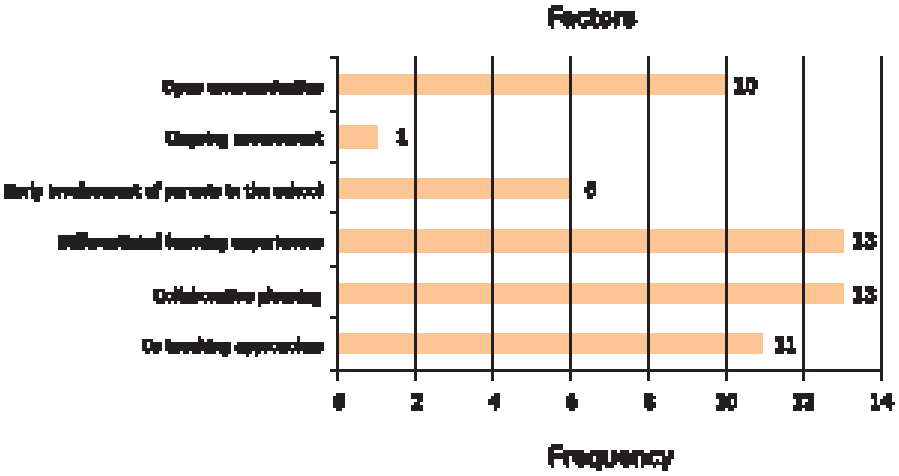

Figure 1: Factors that enabled the effectiveness of the literacy programmes in the school

Early involvement of parents in the school was reported by 37.5% (N=6) of respondents as influencing the effectiveness of literacy interventions, with respondents adding that attendance and punctuality also impacted on the effectiveness of the interventions. Interviewees considered that a lack of support at home and a lack of exposure to books in the home had a negative effect on children's literacy attainment.

Teachers' views of the benefits and challenges of implementing EIPs for literacy were considered important to the study and are shown in Figure 2. Teachers considered that EIPs for literacy had many beneficial outcomes for pupils with the most noticeable impact being on pupils' self-esteem and confidence.

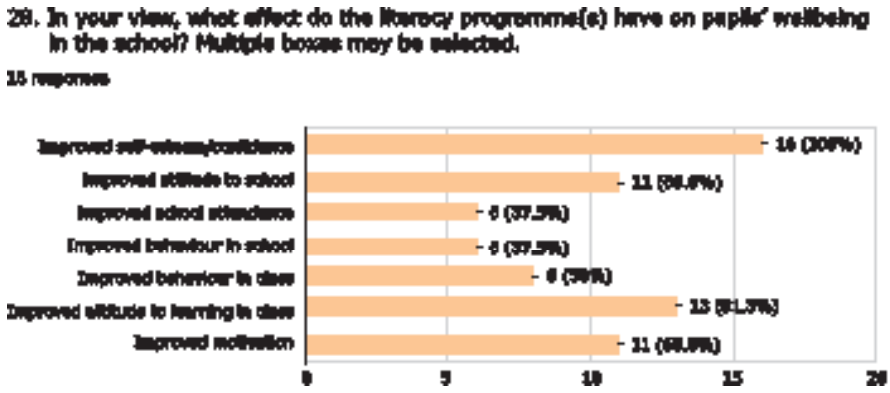

Figure 2: Effect of literacy programmes on pupils' wellbeing in the school

Half of the respondents (50%, N=8) indicated improvement in class behaviour, with 37.5% (N=6) of respondents reporting improved attendance as a benefit of literacy interventions. Although the research indicated teacher satisfaction as a benefit of implementing literacy interventions, most respondents indicated multiple challenges to the delivery of literacy intervention programmes in the school (Table 1).

Challenges	Number	Percentage
Time constraints	13	81.3%
Insufficient resources	7	43.8%
Insufficient training / CPD for teachers	6	37.5%
There are no challenges	1	6.3%
Don't know	0	0%

Table 1: List of challenges to teaching literacy intervention(s) in the school

Time constraints were identified as a significant challenge, with teachers indicating that they had a lack of time to plan and review literacy interventions. Some teachers wanted more training in this area. Findings from the interviews identified a lack of training as a key challenge, with interviewees saying that there was little opportunity to observe each other's teaching practices, and that input from expert teachers or schools

where interventions were working well would be beneficial. Interviewees identified additional challenges such as a high staff turnover and delivering literacy interventions in an already overcrowded curriculum.

In summary, the data indicated that teachers considered that evidence-informed literacy interventions were working effectively to support and build pupils' literacy skills. Teachers considered that EIPs for literacy had beneficial outcomes, with the most noticeable impact being on pupils' self-esteem and confidence. The results highlighted the challenges identified by teachers in furthering the success of literacy EIPs, with time constraints indicated as the greatest challenge and a lack of resources in the school. These findings were reflected in the interviews and surveys.

Discussion

The findings highlight themes relating to the original research questions. The survey data revealed that, from teachers' perspectives, EIPs for literacy were working effectively in developing their pupils' literacy skills. Factors contributing to the effectiveness of EIPs included collaborative planning, differentiated learning experiences and co-teaching approaches. Results correlated with the interview findings in which teachers stated that, in their experience, differentiated learning activities tailored to pupils' needs, and had a beneficial impact on pupils' literacy attainment levels and wellbeing in terms of improved self-esteem and confidence. This corresponds to research by Kennedy (2010) and Nugent (2010) — that pupils who previously struggled with literacy success can attain literacy through effective literacy practices (NEPS, 2019).

Interviewees reported on the impact of home life on literacy attainment, stating that a lack of support and limited access to reading material in the home had a negative effect on literacy achievement. Dearing et al. (2006) state that family support and involvement can increase achievement in literacy levels, thereby reducing the gap between pupils from DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Parental involvement is considered essential in creating a positive school climate. However, in this study, data from the survey showed that only 37.5% (N=6) of 16 respondents identified early involvement of parents in the school as a factor enabling the effectiveness of the literacy programmes.

Several key challenges were identified in the delivery of literacy interventions. Time constraints were reported as the most significant challenge to implementing successful literacy interventions while delivering, what participants considered, an overloaded curriculum. Teachers indicated limited capacity to share and discuss teaching strategies with colleagues or to reflect on the quality of teaching, and requested more time to plan and collaborate around the implementation of EIPs. NEPS (2019) emphasises the importance of teacher reflection in informing the next steps in teaching the intervention to pupils.

The research indicated that in DEIS schools, attendance presents a major challenge to implementing literacy interventions in addition to managing difficult social behaviours and dynamics among pupils. This confirms the point raised by Brooks (2016) that interventions are most effective when they are flexible and relevant to the needs of individual pupils in a variety of situations and are implemented by teachers who are supported and sufficiently trained to deliver the intervention. Peurach and Glazer (2016) point out that additional challenges can exist within DEIS schools in implementing literacy programmes, such as the particular needs of pupils and the transfer of knowledge regarding EIPs between teaching staff, which affirms findings from this study about the challenge of time.

Insufficient resources were mentioned as a key challenge, with teachers indicating they would like further training in the implementation and delivery of literacy EIPs. Research supports the need for continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers to meet the specific literacy needs of children not making progress, and stresses the importance of teachers being adequately trained and equipped with appropriate teaching methodologies to assist children struggling in literacy attainment (Brooks, 2013).

Interview responses identified a lack of time as an obstacle to planning, training and collaborating with colleagues in regard to implementing literacy interventions for the needs of specific pupils. Some teachers indicated that it would be beneficial to observe the practice of other teaching professionals delivering EIPs in similar settings. The benefits of more teacher collaboration in schools, according to Daly (2015), include more cooperation and sharing experience between teachers, which may result in improved staff motivation and morale.

Conclusion

The researcher used a single case study to acquire the views and experiences of a small number of teachers working in a DEIS primary school implementing evidence-informed literacy interventions. The sample size for the study was limited to one primary school (two interviewees and 16 survey respondents). The researcher was met with difficulties in achieving the recommended number of survey returns (N=20) despite continuous efforts. Bell (2005) explains that a significant concern in using a case study approach is that generalisations are not always possible.

A mixed methods approach allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives in relation to the effectiveness of literacy interventions used in the school. Findings revealed literacy interventions to be effective in the school with a number of benefits identified in relation to pupil wellbeing and academic achievement in literacy. However, a number of key challenges were identified in relation to delivering literacy interventions in the school, including a lack of time to plan and collaborate with colleagues around the implementation of EIPs to enable them to be more effective in meeting the specific needs of pupils (Brooks, 2016). The data also identified a lack of resources as a challenge to the delivery of EIPs, with some teachers specifying a need for more training and suggesting that observation of EIPs in similar school settings would be beneficial to their own practice. Overall, the data suggests that EIPs for literacy that are used in DEIS schools must be tailored to the specific challenges and obstacles experienced in a particular school, and that teachers will require time to do this (Brooks, 2016).

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Oral Language Development: Teachers' Perspectives on Oral Language Development in Junior Infants to Second Class

Niamh Allen

Biography

Niamh Allen completed her Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education with Hibernia College in 2020. Prior to this, she graduated with an International Arts degree from Maynooth University, majoring in English Literature and French Studies. She spent two years in France studying English Literature at the University of Brittany and, following this, she worked as an EFL teacher in Paris. Niamh is an avid reader and has a keen interest in literacy. She is currently working as a special education teacher in a rural school and has always thoroughly enjoyed teaching literacy — in particular, discrete oral language lessons. This interest influenced the research topic, which focuses on Oral Language Development: Teachers' Perspectives on Oral Language Development in Junior Infants to Second Class.

Oral Language Development: Teachers' Perspectives on Oral Language Development in Junior Infants to Second Class

Research supervisor: Dr Julie O' Sullivan

Abstract

Oral language is our principal means of communication; our ability to speak and listen. This study aimed to research oral language development in Junior Infants to Second Class. A mixed-method approach was used to investigate 22 teachers' perspectives on oral language development; the importance of oral language, challenges with teaching it and confidence in assessing oral language. The findings of the study concluded that, although teachers acknowledge its importance, the difficulties alluded to within the study impact teachers' competence in teaching and assessing oral language. Irish primary teachers need improvements to be made to support oral language development in Junior Infants to Second Class.

Keywords: Oral language, Literacy, English as an additional language (EAL), Challenges, Assessment

Introduction

The curriculum acknowledges the importance of oral language development, aligning with the view that 'oral language permeates every facet of the primary language curriculum' (Professional Development Service for Teachers [PDST], 2015, p.2). Lev Vygotsky (1962) believes that children learn through social interaction and this theory of social constructivism supports and relies on oral language development in the classroom. This is reflected in the principles of the 1999 curriculum, which states that 'language is central to the learning process' (DES, 1999, p.8). The *Primary language curriculum* (2015, p.7) also acknowledges the importance of oral language development in all areas of the curriculum: [it] 'has significance for children's learning across the curriculum.'
The Department of Education and Skills (DES) released the *National strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young*

people — 2011–2020. The aims in this strategy focus mainly on oral language development, 'raise public awareness of the importance of oral language' and acknowledges the 'critical importance of supporting the development of children's ability to become effective communicators' (DES, 2011, p.17). While the DES aims to improve oral language, there is little research on Irish primary teachers' confidence in teaching and assessing oral language. The objective of this research was to investigate Irish primary teachers' perspectives on the importance of oral language development and explore the difficulties that impact teachers' abilities to teach and develop oral language skills in Junior Infants to Second Class, examining social constructivist theory into practice in the mainstream classroom.

Literature Review

Reading and writing float on a sea of talk

(Britton, 1970, p.164)

Supporting Britton's view of talk, oral language provides the foundation for literacy development. Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) (2015, p.2) defines oral language as speaking and listening in order to effectively communicate: 'oral language is about communicating with other people…a process of utilizing thinking, knowledge and skills in order to speak and listen effectively'. Oral language is a strand of the *Primary language curriculum* that can be integrated into all strands of literacy lessons and can also be taught as a discrete lesson. Oral language is one of the three strands in the *Primary language curriculum* and oral language as a methodology can be integrated across the curriculum through the means of talk and discussion: 'oral language permeates every facet of the primary language curriculum' (PDST, 2015, p.2).

Developing Oral Language Skills in the Classroom

Leloup and Pontero (2017) believe listening skills need to be modelled and taught in the classroom as it is of utmost importance in oral language development: 'listening is arguably the most important skill…we listen considerably more than we read, write or speak.' Oral language skills may be taught and extended by the teacher through playful language activities: 'they also play with language, sharing rhymes, jokes, nonsense

syllables…appropriately playful, stimulating and engaging learning environment facilitates language learning and development' (DES, 2015, p.9).

Differentiation for English as an Additional Language (EAL) Pupils

A major issue in teaching EAL pupils in the mainstream class is a lack of knowledge and training as to how English should be taught as a foreign language. Cajkler and Hall (2008) believe that teacher training should include preparation on how to teach EAL pupils effectively as the lack of learning about EAL pupils in pedagogy leaves teachers at a disadvantage when attempting to sufficiently teach children with these specific language needs.

Difficulties Surrounding Oral Language Assessment

Chris Harrison (2013) believes teachers need to focus on formative assessment in oral language lessons because '[it] supports learning rather than judging achievement.' Despite this, Cregan (1998, p.5) argues that it is difficult to assess oral language, and that 'growth and development in terms of oral language is very difficult to see'.

- The primary issue with teaching oral language lies not with acknowledging its importance in the mainstream classroom, but rather with a lack of understanding about how to adequately teach it. Indeed, Cregan (2010) believes teachers acknowledge the importance of oral language; however, they struggle with how best to respond to this need. This is supported by Locke (2007) who believes teachers struggle to effectively teach oral language skills: 'we need to train teachers in both what to teach and how to teach it' (p.220) Following this research, these questions have arisen:
    1. Do teachers believe it is important to teach oral language lessons?
    2. What are the challenges with teaching discrete oral language lessons?
    3. Do teachers feel confident assessing oral language?

Methodology

Research Instruments

An advantage of quantitative research according to Dillman, Smyth and Christian (2014) is that it allows researchers to effectively collect data results and analyse results based on the answers received. Ary et al. (2013) believe the main downfall of quantitative research is that it lacks the opportunity to expand on narrowly defined assumptions about a researched group.

According to Denzin (1997), qualitative research gives a detailed account of a person's opinions, experiences and emotions and interprets them. Qualitative research gives a detailed insight into behaviours and experiences. A major disadvantage of qualitative research is with the smaller sample size; there may be a tendency to generalise to the whole population of the research (Harry and Lipsky, 2014).

A mixed methods approach was adopted by the researcher. According to Malina, Norreklit and Selto (2011), a mixed method approach is stronger than each method individually: 'a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods can be fruitful for obtaining profoundly new empirical insights' (p.61).

Quantitative Online Survey and Qualitative Interviews

Quantitative research was applied through the means of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was answered by 20 participants with at least five years' teaching experience in Junior Infants to Second Class in a mainstream setting. Two semi-structured interviews were undertaken in order to allow teachers to elaborate upon their answers and further express their opinions. The two participants were interviewed for 20 minutes and the interviews were recorded.

Pilot Interview and Questionnaire

A pilot interview was undertaken before interviewing took place. Harding (2013) elaborates on the reasoning and benefits behind using a pilot interview, suggesting that it allows the researcher to adjust the interview to address any shortcomings arising in relation to the style or structure of the proposed interview before properly initiating it. A pilot questionnaire was conducted and adjustments were made to the questions to be more concise.

Participants

The online questionnaire was completed by 20 mainstream teachers from Junior Infants to Second Class who had at least five years' teaching experience in the academic year 2019–2020. The two participants in the interviews were mainstream teachers with at least five years' experience respectively, working within a mainstream setting teaching class levels ranging from Junior Infants to Second Class.

Data Analysis

A coding approach was applied to the analysis of the data. The researcher listened to and transcribed the semi-structured interviews. The researcher read and recorded common characteristics within the 20 questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Ethic approval was sought and granted by Hibernia College's Ethics Committee. The researcher aligned with BERA's (2018) *Ethical guidelines for educational research* throughout the research process by ensuring anonymity, allowing an opt-out option, safeguarding data by ensuring the researcher's laptop is password protected and ensuring that the data is encrypted and will be destroyed after three years.

Findings

The findings in this chapter are based on a mixed method approach to researching teachers' perspectives on oral language development in Junior Infants to Second Class. Quantitative research was conducted through online questionnaires with 20 participants. Qualitative research was conducted through two semi-structured interviews. For anonymity in the research, the teachers have been named as Participant A and Participant B.

Teachers' Perspectives on Oral Language as Part of the Primary Language Curriculum

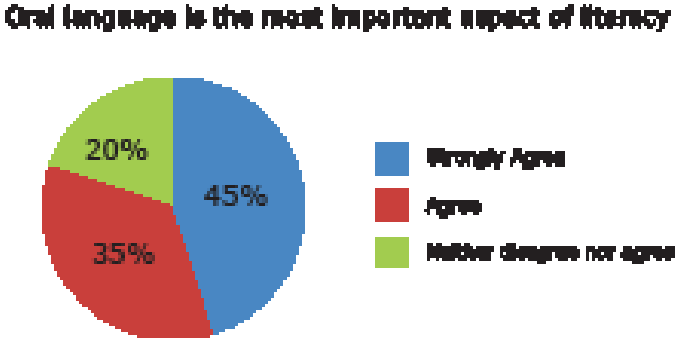

Figure 1: Oral Language as the Most Important Aspect of Literacy

Of the 20 respondents of the survey, nine participants (45%) strongly agreed with the statement that oral language is the most important aspect of literacy, seven participants (35%) agreed with the statement and four participants (20%) neither disagreed nor agreed.
In the qualitative interviews, Participant B (Second Class) expressed that she thought oral language was the most important aspect of literacy: 'oral language is at the heart of everything, I think it is central to all literacy activities.' Participant A (Senior Infants) also agreed that a pupil's reading and writing ability depends on their oral language skills: 'for me oral language is a key foundation for reading and writing skills in young children.'

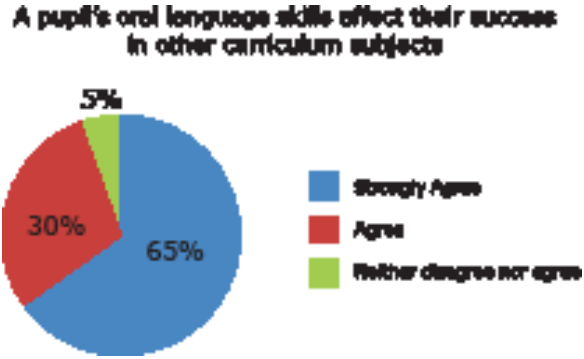

Figure 2: Oral Language Skills Impact Success in all Subjects

Thirteen out of twenty participants (65%) strongly agreed that a pupil's oral language skills affect their success in other curriculum subjects. Six participants (30%) agreed with the statement and one participant (5%) neither disagreed nor agreed.

When questioned on the importance of developing oral language skills, both interviewees expressed the opinion that oral language affects every subject in the primary curriculum. Participant B stated, 'oral language is a key component.' Participant A shared the same opinion as Participant B, who stated that oral language affects a pupil's success in all subjects: 'for me oral language is a key foundation in all aspects of their education.'

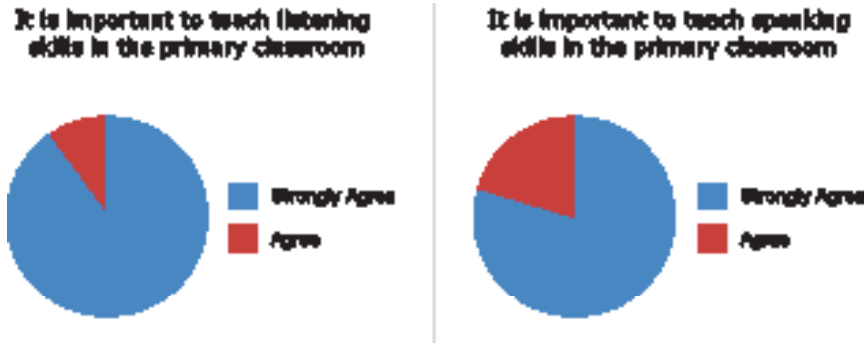

Figure 3: Is it more Important to Teach Speaking or Listening Skills?

Eighteen participants (90%) strongly agreed that listening skills should be taught in the primary classroom, two agreed (10%) while sixteen participants (80%) strongly agreed that speaking skills should be taught in the primary classroom and four participants (20%) agreed with the statement.

Participant A stated that listening skills are more important: 'just about everything a child does at school depends on their ability to listen.' Participant B communicated that she felt both listening and speaking skills have equal importance: 'their speaking skills are important for social skills and communication with adults and peers so I would say they are of equal importance.'

Factors That Impact Teaching Oral Language Lessons

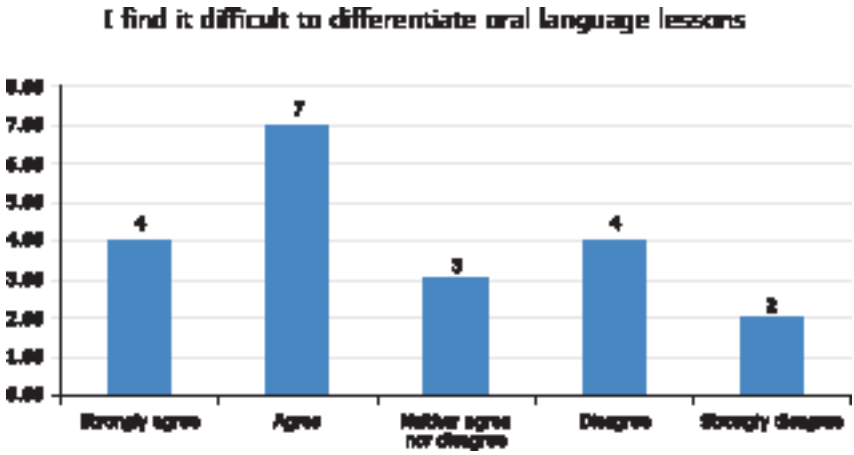

Figure 4: Differentiating Oral Language

Four participants (20%) strongly agreed that they find it difficult to differentiate oral language lessons. Seven participants (35%) agreed with the statement. Four participants (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Three participants (15%) disagreed with the statement and two participants (10%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

When questioned on whether they found oral language lessons easy or difficult to differentiate, Participant A stated she found it easy: 'I don't find it difficult to differentiate for oral language.' Participant B stated that, although it depended on the class, in general, she also found it easy to differentiate oral language lessons: 'it depends on the class and the ability groupings within the class.'

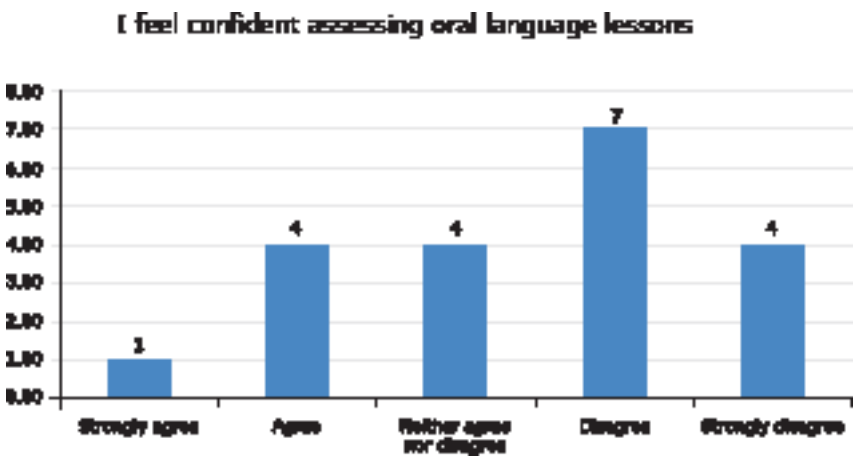

Figure 5: Oral Language Assessment

One participant (5%) strongly agreed that they feel confident assessing oral language lessons while four participants (20%) agreed with the statement. Four participants (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Seven participants (35%) disagreed with the statement and four participants (20%) strongly disagreed with the statement.

Participant B also expressed that she found oral language difficult to assess compared to reading and writing activities: 'if it's a reading or writing activity you can ask them a comprehension question about the text read when it's writing it's easy because there's literally a piece of work produced at the end of it.' Participant A showed a different opinion to Participant B, as she said she found it easy to assess oral language: 'I don't find oral language hard to assess, I would use self-assessment or peer-assessment.'

The findings show that 80% of the teachers agreed that oral language is the most important aspect of literacy lessons and 95% of the teachers believed a pupil's oral language skills affect their success in other curricular subjects. The participants believed teaching listening skills is more important than teaching speaking skills as 90% of teachers strongly agreed that listening skills should be taught compared to just 80% who strongly agreed that speaking skills should be taught. Teachers found differentiation difficult; more participants agreed (55%) than disagreed

(30%) that they found it difficult to differentiate oral language lessons. Finally, a noteworthy 25% of participants felt confident assessing oral language lessons.

Discussions

The Importance of Developing Oral Language Skills

The research findings found that 80% of teachers viewed oral language as the most important aspect of literacy in Junior Infants to Second Class: 'it lays the foundation for reading and writing skills.' Findings revealed that 100% of participants agreed it is important for listening and speaking skills to be taught in the primary classroom. Leloup and Pontero (2017) believe listening skills are more important than speaking skills: 'listening is arguably the most important skill…we listen considerably more than we read, write or speak.' The findings show a direct correlation between Leloup and Pontero's belief and teachers' perspectives on the importance of listening as more teachers expressed that it is important to teach listening skills than speaking skills.

The integrated nature of oral language is recognised in the curriculum: 'oral language permeates every facet of the primary language curriculum' (PDST, 2014, p.2). Teachers believed that a pupil's success in all other curriculum subjects is dependent on their level of oral language skills, as findings revealed that 95% of teachers believed a pupil's oral language skills affect their success in all curricular subjects. The results indicate that teachers recognise the significance of oral language: 'if a child cannot say something then we can't expect them to write it. It really is the foundation to all learning.'

Challenges in Teaching Oral Language

Teachers acknowledged the importance of developing oral language skills in Junior Infants to Second Class, but the findings show that there are major difficulties that impact the teaching of oral language: according to (Cregan, 2010) teachers acknowledge the importance of oral language but find it difficult with how respond to this need. The main difficulties expressed were the following: finding the time in an overcrowded curriculum, differentiating lessons and lacking confidence in assessing oral language lessons.

Lack of Time

The Primary language curriculum was introduced in 2019 and, despite an improvement to a less-crowded curriculum, participants still felt the pressure of time and a sense of it remaining overcrowded: 'it's such a jam-packed curriculum and it can be hard sometimes to find enough time to allocate discrete oral language lessons.' In 2020, the NCCA submitted a draft primary school curriculum framework, which calls for a more flexible curriculum: 'challenges too have been well documented such as curriculum overload — too much to do and too little time to do it all' (NCCA, 2020, p.2). The passing of this framework would benefit oral language as there would be more flexible time within the curriculum and more time would be allocated to developing oral language skills.

Differentiating Oral Language Lessons

A total of 55% of teachers found it difficult to differentiate oral language lessons, in particular for EAL pupils: 'diverse nationalities in classroom…. lots of EAL students.' Cajkler and Hall (2008) believe that teacher training should include preparation on how to teach EAL pupils as it does not support teachers in knowing how to effectively teach EAL pupils.

Confidence Assessing Oral Language

Cregan (1998, p.5) argues that it may be difficult to assess oral language development: 'growth and development in terms of oral language is very difficult to see'. The results of the qualitative and quantitative research are directly in line with Cregan's view. Significantly, only one quarter of teachers surveyed felt confident assessing oral language. Teachers found oral language assessment difficult: 'assessment of a child's oral language skills can be tricky…finding an assessment that gives a good overview or a baseline on which to improve.' The results of the findings verify that significant improvements need to be made to support teachers in assessing oral language.

Oral language development affects a pupil's success in all curriculum subjects, which in turn will affect a pupils' full development into future education and adulthood. Despite the significant recognition oral language as a foundational aspect of the primary school curriculum, teachers expressed major difficulties that impact their teaching of oral language. There needs to be further reductions in other curriculum subjects to fully

reduce workload and give teachers the opportunities to have the time to teach oral language lessons. Teachers indicated they found it difficult to differentiate oral language lessons for EAL pupils. In line with suggestions made in literature, the inclusion of EAL teacher training should be considered for teachers as it would be beneficial as Ireland moves towards a more multicultural society. The most significant result was the lack of confidence in assessing oral language; these findings were echoed in literature by Cregan. Teachers may require further training in assessing oral language. Oral language development in Junior Infants to Second Class is important; however, further improvements are required to support teachers in how to overcome the difficulties mentioned.

Conclusion

The findings identified that teachers acknowledged the importance of developing oral language skills in Junior Infants to Second Class; however, the findings showed that there a number of difficulties that impact teaching oral language skills. This aligns with Cregan's (2010) view that although teachers acknowledge the importance of teaching oral language, they find it difficult to teach it.

Limitations

A limitation in this research is that the majority of participants gathered to undertake the quantitative research taught Senior Infants and Junior Infants; it would be preferable to have an equal measure of infant classes and First and Second Class to gain an insight into whether there were differences in challenges depending on the class level.

Recommendations

Time

According to the NCCA (2008), teachers reported they did not have enough time to sufficiently teach all curricular subjects, including discrete oral language lessons. A whole-school policy regarding conducting a weekly discrete oral language lesson in all class levels should be implemented and put into practice to promote oral language development.

Differentiation

Cajkler and Hall (2008) believe teacher training should include how to effectively teach and support EAL pupils. There is further research needed to examine how effective it is to provide EAL training within teacher training colleges. At a whole-school level, there is a need to have support policies regarding collaboration with the special education teacher (SET), the class teacher and parents to support oral language development for EAL pupils.

Assessment

This study revealed that a significant amount of teachers did not feel confident assessing oral language lessons. This supports Cregan's (1998, p.5) view that it is difficult to assess oral language: 'growth and development in terms of oral language is very difficult to see'. Further collaborative practice should be considered in this case with the special education teacher; the class teacher should consider planning in-class support for discrete oral language lessons or include an oral language table in station teaching.

This research study revealed that teachers viewed oral language as important, but there needs to be improvements made to increase teachers' overall competence in teaching and assessing oral language.

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Investigating the LGBTI+ Supports Available to Irish Primary School Teachers

Bernie Balfe

Biography

Bernie Balfe completed the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education at Hibernia College in 2020. Prior to this, she worked as a musician — teaching and performing for over 20 years. Bernie currently lives with her husband and two young boys, Max and Alfie, in Ardee, Co. Louth. She holds a Bachelor of Music in Classical Music Performance from Dublin Institute of Technology and a Master of Arts in Research Through Music from Dundalk Institute of Technology. Throughout her life, she was fortunate to meet and work with diverse people who shared their personal struggles growing up. This dissertation is a small token of empathy written with great love.

Investigating the LGBTI+ Supports Available to Irish Primary School Teachers

Research supervisor: Avril Carey

Abstract

The background of this research focuses on exploring the LGBTI+ supports available for teachers within a primary school setting. Objectives include examination of the procedures, supports and difficulties in fostering an LGBTI+ inclusive classroom across the patronages. Both qualitative and quantitative methods — online surveys and semi-structured online interviews — are used in the design. The findings investigate several common themes; policies, training, curriculums and programmes and inclusion. The findings are examined alongside the relevant literature and discuss the variables found across the patronages. The limitations and recommendations of the research are outlined in the conclusion.

Keywords: Inclusion, Heteronormativity, LGBTI+, Patronage/ Ethos, Diversity, Bullying and Policies

Introduction

The researcher set about this research with the purpose of investigating the support for LGBTI+ issues available for Irish primary school teachers. Policies, curriculums and programmes, training and skills, and inclusion were all examined to help teachers nurture an LGBTI+ inclusive classroom. This research explored the reasons for invisibility of these minority groups while studying the societal changes that have occurred within an Irish context (Bailie, 2017). Relevant literature was examined to look at the coexistence of religion and sexuality and minority groups, both internationally and nationally (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017; Carroll and Robotham, 2017).

As I reflected on my own beliefs and how these aligned with the ethos of the school, the following questions arose: How can I create an LGBTI+

inclusive classroom within the ethos of the school? Do I have sufficient training and skills to address any LGBTI+ issues that may arise? Do I know where to find accurate and appropriate information for LGBTI+ groups? What programmes and curriculums might I use to teach LGBTI+ topics? These questions provided me with a definitive pathway towards my research goal of understanding the support available to primary teachers in dealing with LGBTQ+ issues. Throughout this research, my personal awareness and empathy for sexuality and gender minority groups developed as well as my understanding for promoting an LGBTI+ classroom. The literature I have engaged with and the research I have conducted have the potential to aid teachers and the school community while also acknowledging the limitations of such research.

Literature Review

Today, Ireland is more diverse than it was in the nineties when the 1999 Primary Curriculum was implemented (Fitzpatrick, Twohig and Morgan, 2014). An absence of research influences the development of appropriate policies and practices. The lack of research in attitudes amidst the Irish population or adequate discussion of the support for changes in policies led to the GLEN and BeLonG To report (Higgins et al., 2016).

LGBTI+ in the Irish context

Within the Irish context, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2018) created a world first Strategy as an action plan for enhancing the lives of LGBTI+. Prior movements and acts paved the way for change; the Irish Gay Movement (1970s), the establishment of the Gay Lesbian Equality Network (1980s), the decriminalisation of homosexuals (1990s), the *Equal Status Act*, the *Human Rights Commission Act* (2000) and the *Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations Act* (2010). This transformation of opinion was affirmed in 2015 when Ireland became the first country to pass Marriage Equality by vote, which was quickly followed by the Gender Recognition Act (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2018, pp.4–5). Gender identity has moved beyond lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) or heterosexual (Lovaas, Baroudi and Collins, 2002, p.181; Bragg et al., 2018, p.421). Heteronormativity refers to relationship and behavioural stereotypes identified as male or female. Today, gender identity includes transgender, intersex and other minority groups (TI+) (Transgender Equality Network Ireland [TENI], 2020; BeLonG To, 2020).

Patronage/ ethos and diversity and policies

The Catholic religion is a deeply rooted part of Irish culture that infiltrates society. This contributes to heteronormativity and concern for teachers (Neary, Gray and O'Sullivan, 2018). Irish society is considered more open-minded than affected by the Catholic church principles (Higgins et al., 2016, p.67). However, the influence by the church regarding which content was taught or omitted was a recurrent item in the discussions and surveys for the *LGBTI+ national youth strategy* report (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). Consequently, the Irish Government created a strategy to increase the quantity of non-denominational schools to four hundred by 2030. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2013) recommended that all schools create an identity-inclusive anti-bullying policy. Additionally, all schools are required to develop a *Relationships and Sexuality Policy* (RSE).

Training, skills and information for inclusion

Primary teachers globally are unsure how to deal with non-heteronormative circumstances (van Leent, 2017). It is recommended that teachers build a rapport with transgender students and families to cater for their needs on a case-to-case basis (Meyer and Leonardi, 2018, p.460). In the Irish context, supports include 'RESPECT'; Different Families, Same Love posters for every class level; picture books for different kinds of families; activities for each class level; anti-bullying websites; and guidelines for an inclusive school (Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), 2019). The PDST says that 'SPHE and RSE are key components in supporting our school and children to develop into healthy young adults' (PDST, 2017). The Educate Together (ET) non-denominational schools explore diversity through their own Ethical Education curriculum at both primary and secondary level (Educate Together, 2018). Internationally, better support for inclusion of LGBTQ+ should be available in schools (Carroll and Robotham, 2017, p.6). It is recommended that a framework of awareness within the school be implemented (Meyer and Leonardi, 2018, p.457). BeLonG To's Stand Up Awareness week against sexuality and gender minority bullying delivers information and stages for Irish schools to foster an inclusive school setting (Higgins et al., 2016, p.144).

The literature examined raised the following questions:

- What procedures do schools have in place to support primary teachers for LGBTI+ issues across the patronages?
- What support for LGBTI+ issues are available?
- What difficulties do primary school teachers experience in fostering an LGBTI+ inclusive classroom/school?

Methodology

Research design

A mixed-methods approach was used to conduct this research. Mixed-method research uses both qualitative and quantitative designs. Qualitative interviews allowed for in-depth responses from participants compared to the closed responses of the quantitative online survey. However, the quantitative survey allowed for 'increased opportunity for population' (McInroy, 2016, p.83).

Instruments

Online surveys were conducted using online platforms. These questions were organised into four sections. The researcher chose a clear 'dichotomous response' where all points of the scale were included (Presser and Krosnick, 2010, p.270). The interview questions reflected the survey questions but were open-ended to allow for detailed and in-depth responses.

Sampling strategies

Non-probability sampling, which included purposive and snowball strategies, was used.
Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest purposive sampling as a means for selecting participants for the research. The researcher applied purposive sampling to distribute a sample size of surveys to schools inclusive of all patronages, as listed by the DES.

Participants

Surveys were distributed electronically. All nine patronages as outlined by the DES were invited to participate in the survey; however, only schools of Catholic, Church of Ireland and Educate Together patronages responded. The information was then electronically gathered, examined and evaluated using a compare rule supported through online software. Four primary school principals participated in interviews. This allowed for comparison of primary school teacher experiences in Catholic, Church of Ireland and Educate Together schools. The responses of the surveys could then be compared against the responses from the interviews.

Pilot study and procedure

The researcher conducted a pilot study of the survey questions. Feedback indicated that the language of a select number of questions needed to be adapted in order to make the survey more accessible to participants. The semi-structured interviews were constructed around the survey questions, which provided guidance to the researcher in collecting appropriate information.

Data Analysis

Strauss and Corbin (2015) refer to selective coding as a way of looking at developing theory around the material. The researcher tabularised quotations from each of the participating school principals for comparative analysis. This allowed examination of the relationships, likenesses and distinctions between the responses.

Survey responses were collected, collated and analysed electronically to provide numerical data. The researcher applied a compare rule to examine the responses within each school patronage and across the patronages and 'view them side-by-side' (SurveyMonkey, 1999-2020). Data was tabularised into charts to form visual representations of the results for examination.

Improving trustworthiness of mixed-method research

Steps were taken to avoid bias. This included pilot testing survey and interview questions. Triangulation ensured that the information came from a variety of sources (Lawlor, Tilling and Davey Smith, 2016). A critical friend analysed the transcripts, supporting analysis carried out by

the researcher. Transcriptions were reviewed by the participants, which allowed them to check their interview material.

Ethical considerations and GDPR

All research was conducted within the ethical guidelines for ethical research in close consultation with the British Educational Research Association (2018).

Limitations

The interviews do not embody the opinions of all Irish primary teachers. Although schools from all patronages were invited to participate, only ten schools from three patronages agreed to participate.

Findings

Within the initial stages of 'Investigating the LGBTI+ supports available to Irish primary school teachers', four themes appeared from the literature. The researcher organised the findings under four themes (policies, training, curriculums and programmes, and inclusion) together with the data collected from the participating primary school teachers via online surveys and interviews.

Policies

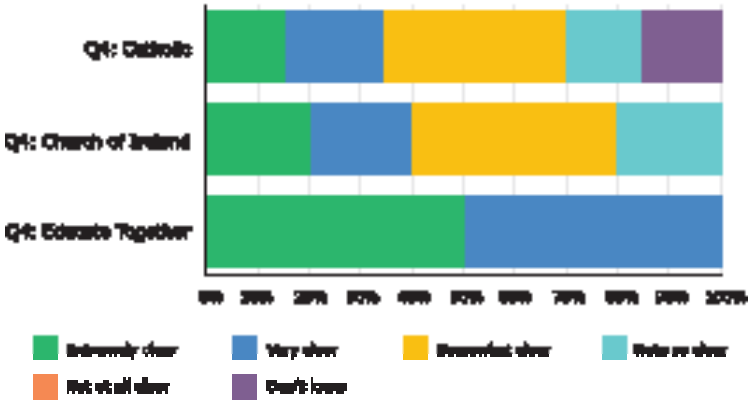

Figure 1: Comparison of clarity of homophobia in the school's anti-bullying policy across the patronages

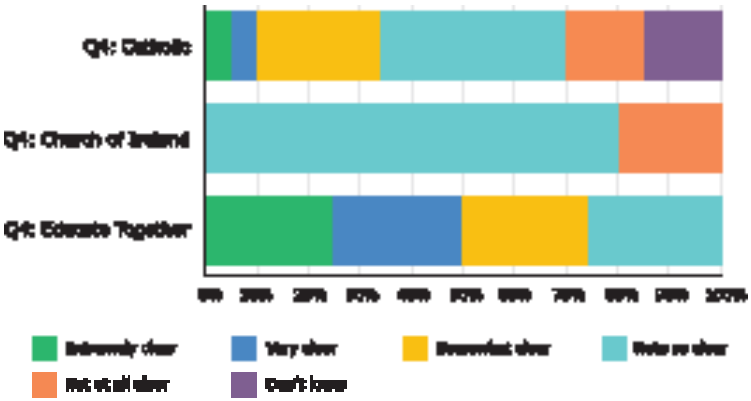

Figure 2: Comparison of clarity of transphobia in the school's anti-bullying policy across the patronages

The 29 respondents who rated the clarity of homophobia and transphobia in school policy indicated less clarity in transphobia than homophobia. All responses were then further compared within each patronage. See Figures 1 and 2.

The four principals interviewed discussed the clarity of language in their schools' anti-bullying policies in two statements for Q12 and Q13 (Table 1).

School	Principal	Q12: Does your school's anti-bullying policy include homophobia?	Q13: Does your school's anti-bullying policy include transphobia?
1	A	'Yes, that would be very clear'	'No, I don't think so'.
2	B	'We have it included as a definition of bullying'	'Yeah…harassment of pupils and teachers…'.
3	C	'Absolutely. Yeah'	'It doesn't because it hasn't come up'.
4	D	'Every school as part of their anti-bullying policy…'	'I think it is yeah…I would have to go and check…'.

Table 1: Comparison of interview responses to my school's anti-bullying policy includes homophobia/ transphobia

With the exception of School 1/Principal A, interviewees referred to the role of policies intermittently during the interview (Table 2).

School	Principal	Policies
2	B	'It's so much easier now to deal with any topics when you have that policy in place'.
3	C	'We have our policy around inclusion…in the SPHE or RSE policy we have a list of the words children use'
4	D	'I think there's a lot less kind of because homophobia is in the anti-bullying policy…if something comes up then afterwards that happens in the life of the school you can add it into the policy'.

Table 2: Comparison of interview responses about school policies

Training (skills, information and professional development training)

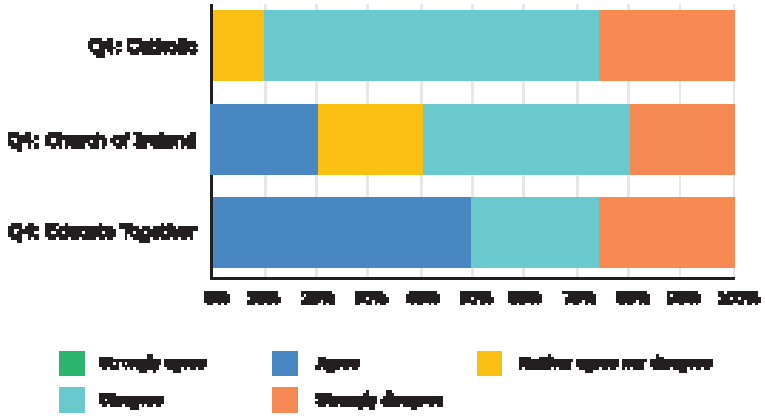

Figure 3: Comparison of agreement of enough training to discuss or address gender and sexuality issues in the classroom across the patronages

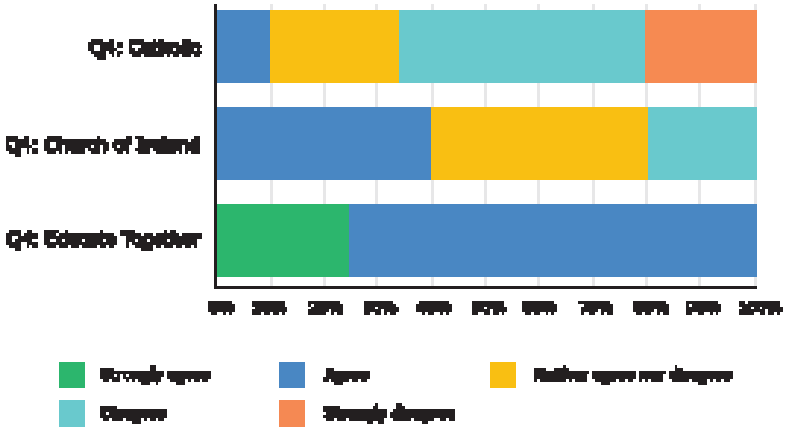

Figure 4: Comparison of agreement of skills to discuss or address gender and sexuality issues in the classroom across the patronages

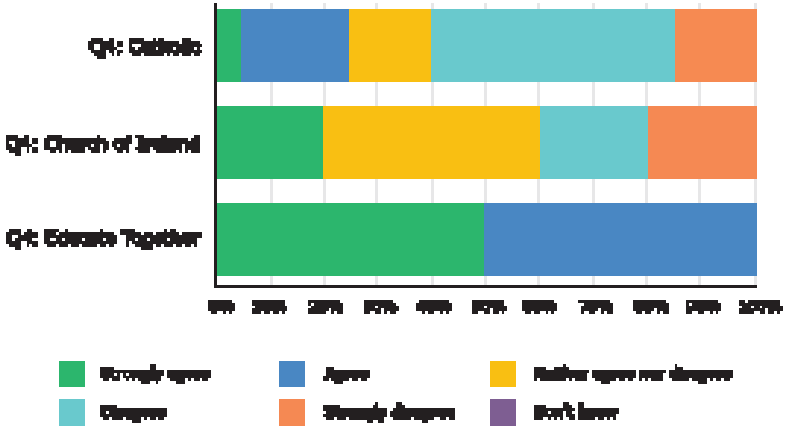

Figure 5: Comparison of agreement to knowing where to access accurate and appropriate information for gender and sexuality groups for current class level across the patronages

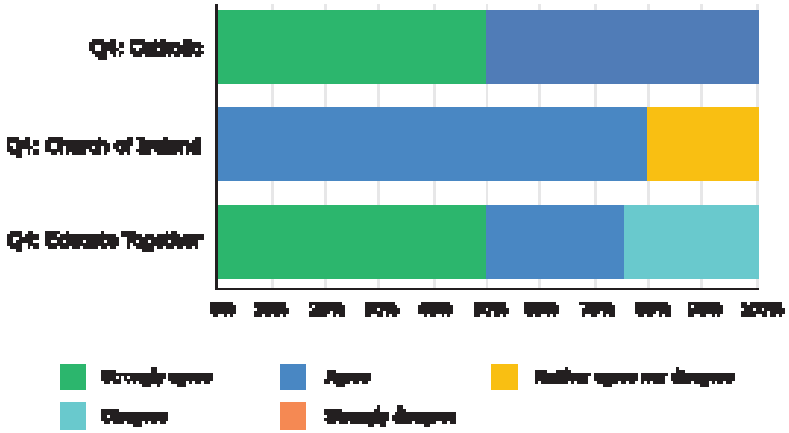

Figure 6: Comparison of agreement to benefit from professional development training for understanding diversity, gender, LGBTI+ families and bullying across the patronages

Questions 22 (Figure 3), 23 (Figure 4), 24 (Figure 5) and 29 (Figure 6) from the surveys sought to explore agreement of training, skills, access to accurate and appropriate information, and professional development training amongst Irish primary school teachers. All four principals concurred that further professional development in the area of LGBTI+ would be beneficial to primary teachers (Figure 6). Principals who were interviewed added to these findings by describing their own personal experiences (see Tables 3 and 4) (Appendix V).

School	Principal	Q22: Do you feel that you have had sufficient training to discuss and address the above gender and identity issues in your current classroom?	Q29: Do you feel that you would benefit from professional development training for understanding diversity, gender, LGBTI+ families and bullying?
1	A	'No, we haven't had any training… You'd like to be more empowered and have actual knowledge of what you're talking about.' 'Yes, definitely'. 'No, we haven't had any training…You'd like to be more empowered and have actual knowledge of what you're talking about.'	'Yes, definitely'.
2	B	'No'.	'Yes'.
3	C	'I sought the training myself. So yes, but it wasn't offered to me'.	'You learn something new and help someone with it'.
4	D	'…training adults to be on a helpline…I think there were INTO courses…'	'if one person could go and feed-back to everybody isn't that as good?'.

Table 3: Comparison of interview responses about training and benefit of professional development training across the patronages

School	Principal	Q23: Do you feel that you have the necessary skills to discuss or address the previously said gender and sexuality issues in your current classroom?	Q24: Do you know where to access accurate and appropriate information for the said gender and sexuality groups for your current class level?
1	A	'Yes'.	'Yes. I would have signed up to those information groups…Belong To'.
2	B	'No, I wouldn't'.	'No. I know…All Together Now and Belong To'.
3	C	'Yes'.	'Yes'.
4	D	'Yeah I suppose but it's that like your pastoral role as a teacher without overstepping the mark'.	'Yeah…BELONG To or TENI you have the LGBT groups where the INTO have done good posters that…don't bombard you with loads of information…'.

Table 4: Comparison of interview responses about skills and accessing information for gender and sexuality groups across the patronages

School 4/Principal D has much experience, having received training and delivered training. It was highlighted that lack of training should not be an excuse for improperly addressing any type of issue. Transferable skills should be considered when training is not feasible. Principal D also recommended restorative practice as an approach. The good work of LGBTI+ groups and the need for advocates in primary schools was also acknowledged.

Curriculums and programmes

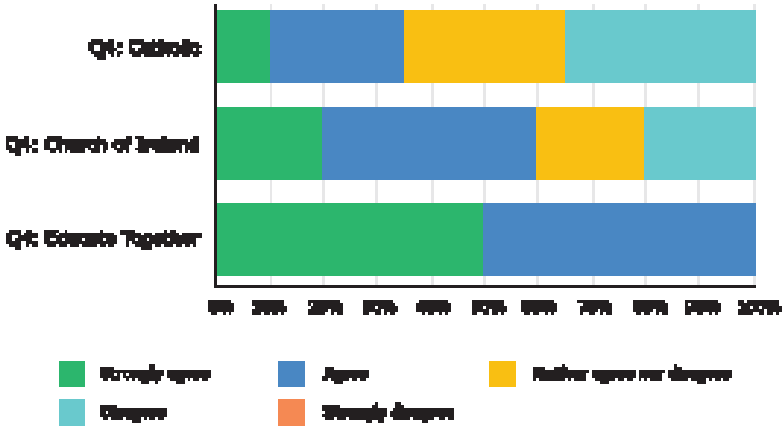

Figure 7: Comparison of agreement to whole-school approach to SPHE inclusive of LGBTI+ issues across the patronages

Question 31 of the online surveys sought to clarify whether schools have a whole-school approach to SPHE that is inclusive of LGBTI+ issues (Figure 7) (appendix II). Of the primary teachers in Catholic schools, 30% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. In comparison, 20% of primary teachers in Church of Ireland schools neither agreed nor disagreed, with 20% disagreeing with the statement above, while 0% of Educate Together neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (see Table 8). Principals who were interviewed added to these findings by also mentioning RSE and Ethical curriculums as well as the Stay Safe and Same Love, Different Families programmes (Table 9).

School	Principal	Q31: Is there a whole-school approach to SPHE that is inclusive of LGBTI+ issues?
1	A	'Right there is a whole school approach SPHE. There is a whole school approach to RSE……LGBTI+ issues only come in at the upper end of the school, 5th and 6th and very fairly'.
2	B	'No…in terms of LGBT through the whole school, not a whole school. But it is touched on in the Stay Safe programme at the senior end'.
3	C	'We only have 3rd to 6th class so that makes it a little bit easier. Yes. And I will add that the questions asked by the children we just have a policy of answering them and I find that LGBTI issues don't really come up for 3rd and 4th class as much as 5th and 6th'.
4	D	'Every school has to have robust procedures for teaching SPHE and then it's about having people interested in it like you know the way you are when you are really interested like I loved Gaeilge when I was teaching…'.

Table 9: Comparison of interview responses to whole school approach to SPHE inclusive of LGBTI+ issues

The four principals described the curriculums and programmes at their schools (Table 10).

School	Principal	Curriculums and Programmes
1	A	'…it's just what the children come out with themselves'.
2	B	'it discusses gay, lesbian, the vocabulary is used'.
3	C	'…RSE might be tied up a bit in sensitive issues when actually it shouldn't even be a separate lesson. Personally, I believe the RSE should be taught the same way incidentally when it came up'.
4	D	'…SPHE and RSE and all those kind of things that you are doing it in the context of everything else and that the teacher is doing it as well not that we need to bring somebody else in from outside to do it because what kind of message does that send? It sends that we are not able to talk about this ourselves… Different Families, Same Love. We'd all work on that every year…'.

Table 10: Comparison of interview responses about curriculums and programmes across the patronages

School 4/Principal D mentioned an ethical sub-committee in School 4, which would discuss ethical issues including LGBT issues. Principal C shared experience of LGBTI+ issues in School 3:

> '…they're not coming up as much for the children unless the child themselves is LGBTI+…And if the child is feeling that way the parents would be aware of it and there would have been a discussion…' (

Inclusion

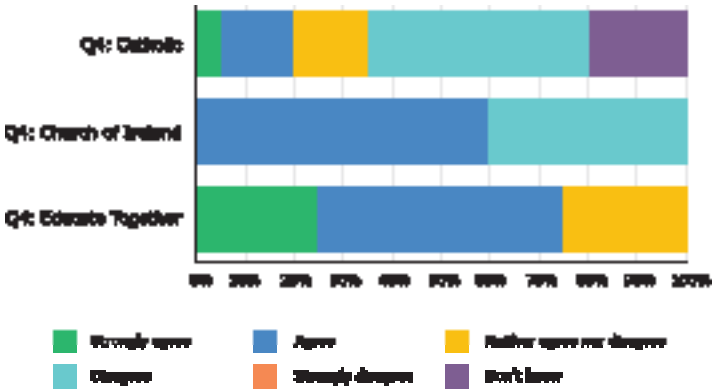

Figure 8: Comparison of framework of awareness around gender identity across the patronages

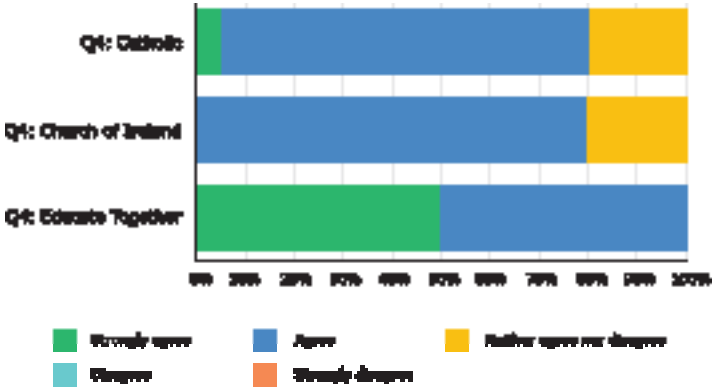

Figure 9: Comparison of belief that LGBTI+ literature should be available in school across the patronages

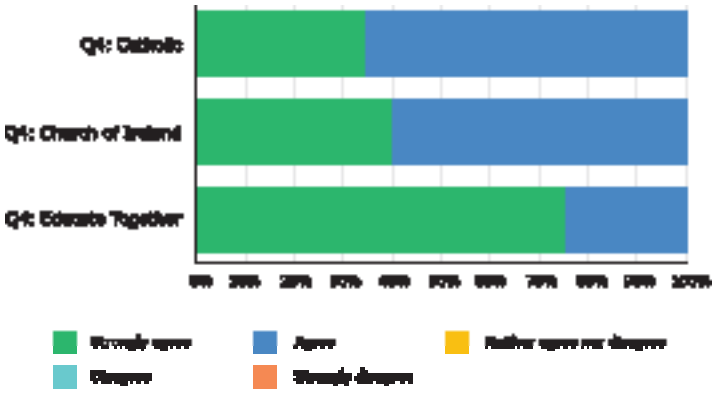

Figure 10: Comparison of agreement to make small changes in the classroom to provide for the needs of everyone across the patronages

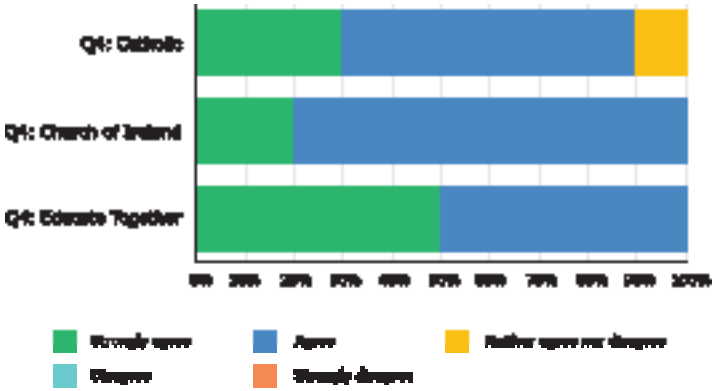

Figure 11: Comparison of consideration to support Stand Up Awareness Week against sexuality and gender minority bullying

Questions 7 (Figure 7), 28 (Figure 8), 32 (Figure 9), 33 (Figure 10 and 34) in the surveys sought to establish agreement in schools around the inclusion of LGBTI+ issues. The data was studied using a compare rule across the patronages.

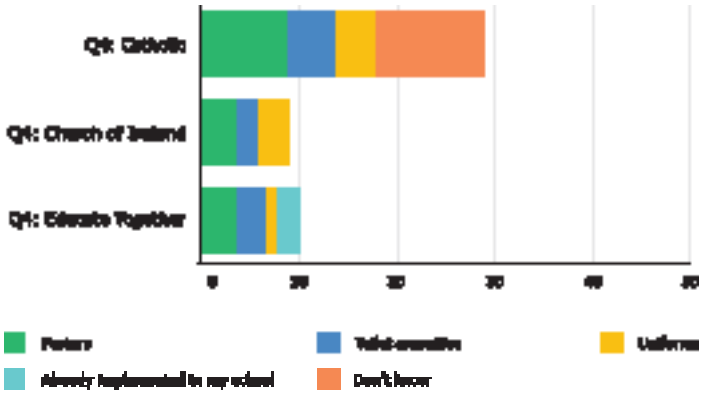

Figure 12: Comparison of considerations to include posters, toilet amenities and uniforms to include the needs of all pupils across the patronages.

Principals who were interviewed enhanced this numeric data by providing agreement that their school has a framework of awareness around gender identity (see Table 13) (Appendix V). Principal A and Principal B disagreed with the statement. However, Principal C agreed that there was an unofficial framework. Principal D agreed to the statement by describing the framework of awareness around gender identity in School 4 (Appendix V).

School	Principal	Q8: Does your school have a framework of awareness around gender identity?
1	A	'No'.
2	B	'We don't have a framework as such in terms of gender identity, no'.
3	C	'Informally, yes…We have no official documentation…As of yet'.
4	D	'…we have an Ethical curriculum that we do in the school so that is… embedded in that.'

Table 13: Comparison of interview responses to framework of awareness around gender identity across the patronages

In comparison with the online survey data from Church of Ireland primary school teachers, Principal C agreed to everything (Table 14). The data from the online survey showed that 25% of Educate Together primary teachers would consider uniforms. Principal D (School 4) said that Educate Together schools do not have a uniform. When asked about posters, Principal D agreed 'yes' and explained that he would not have a personal issue with unisex toilets (Table 14), but elaborated that older school plans may not be able to facilitate them, which isn't their fault.

School	Principal	Q34: Would your school consider the following to include the needs of all pupils; posters, toilet amenities and uniform?
1	A	'Yes, I would consider everything'.
2	B	'the majority of the children wear…the tracksuit…definitely ok with posters but in terms of I suppose toilet facilities…I'd be erring on the side of caution…'.
3	C	'There would be no issue for whatever toilet the child wanted to use… If they want to come in in a sparkly unicorn jumper that's fine'.
4	D	'I don't really have a problem with that'.

Table 14: Comparison of interview responses to implementing posters, toilet amenities and uniform to include the need of all pupils across the patronages

Discussion

Policies

Results of the surveys and interviews showed a greater clarity in homophobia than transphobia in school policies across the patronages. The results of these interviews conveyed a greater reliance on policies by School 2, of Catholic patronage, in addressing issues that might arise. In comparison, School 3, of Church of Ireland (COI) patronage, expressed that listing the language in the policies agreed by all parties ensured a democratic approach, while School 4 expressed that the policy must be more than a document to reflect inclusion as a living part of the Educate Together schools. Higgins et al. (2016), and INTO (2019) discussed the dissatisfaction of LGBTI+ issues being properly addressed by schools.

Training (skills, information and professional development training). van Leent (2017) describes a global lack of awareness in skills and training of primary school teachers in approaching LGBTI+ issues. The data from the online surveys demonstrated a stronger agreement in having required skills over adequate training for addressing LGBTI+ issues. The data also showed that primary school teachers across the patronages thought that professional development training would be advantageous. Interviews with School 1/Principal A and School 2/Principal B found an absence of training and recognised that PDT would give their staff greater understanding of diversity, gender, LGBTI+ families and bullying. School 3/Principal C and Principal D of School 4 were both very confident in their level of skills and training. Meyer and Leonardi (2018) recommended a culture of discussion amongst pupils and staff to build a relationship based on understanding. LGBTI+ issues were clearly discussed amongst the staff and somewhat clear between the staff and children in School 1 and School 2. Further recommendations from School 4/Principal D included transferable skills, restorative practice and school advocates where training is not feasible.

Curriculums and programmes

The results from the surveys show a stronger agreement with a whole-school approach to LGBTI+ issues in the SPHE curriculum amongst ET schools compared with COI and Catholic schools. Interview responses from School 1 and School 2 indicate that there is not a whole-school approach to LGBTI+ issues in Catholic schools. LGBTI+ issues are addressed at the senior end of the school only as part of the Stay Safe or RSE programmes. Responses from the interviewee with School 3 demonstrates that this COI school addresses all questions as they come up; however, they tend to not come up until 5th or 6th Class. Interview responses from School 4 indicate that this ET school describes a whole-school approach to LGBTI+ issues in the SPHE curriculum at an age-appropriate level. This is supported by programmes such as Different Families, Same Love, which is taught all year as well as a discussion of LGBTI+ issues by the school's ethical sub-committee once a month.

Higgins et al. (2016) described a lack of LGBTI+ content in the SPHE curriculum, which creates invisibility. Organisations such as the HSE (2015), INTO (2019) and PDST (2017) recommended that schools include LGBTI+ content. With the exception of the ET schools, the results from the interviews illustrate LGBTI+ content is less visible throughout all school years than it is in the senior end.

Inclusion

Results from the online survey indicate that a framework around gender identity inclusion is less transparent in COI schools in comparison to ET schools. However, there was an agreement across these patronages that adjustments should be made to include LGBTI+ issues. Interview responses indicated that there is currently no framework of awareness around gender identity in the Catholic schools. The ET school achieved a clear framework of awareness through assemblies, speakers and general ease in discussing gender identity.
Meyer and Leonardi (2018) described the necessity for a framework of awareness around gender identity. Greater heteronormativity was evidenced at the Catholic and COI schools surveyed and interviewed. Philips (2015) and Depalma and Jennett (2010) describe heteronormativity as a lack of awareness in how materials, language and groupings might make a child feel who does not fit in the stereotype of male or female identity. Carroll and Robotham (2017) suggest that there is greater support and inclusion where there is experience of knowing someone of a gender minority group. Higgins et al. (2016) proposed a Stand Up Awareness week as well as considerations for posters, toilet amenities and uniforms to support inclusion. Burke and Greenfield (2016) advised an examination of literature to develop compassion for others.

Conclusion

Only Educate Together schools have an ethics sub-committee where issues around inclusion, including LGBTI+ issues, are discussed once a month. With the exception of Educate Together schools, LGBTI+ issues were identified and addressed through RSE in the senior end of the schools only. Aside from 30% of Educate Together participants, the findings showed that primary school teachers considered the benefit from further professional development training for supporting LBTI+ issues.

Despite contacting schools of all patronages, only Catholic, Church of Ireland and Educate Together schools responded. Limitations also include sample participants where primary school teachers were the focus of the research.

Recommendations for schools to consider include:

- Ensuring that a framework is in place, either officially or unofficially, encouraging the visibility of sexuality and gender minority groups (Meyer and Leonardi, 2018, p.457).
- Awareness that a person identifying as transgender can be twelve or younger (Irwin-Gowran, 2016, p.13).
- The language in anti-bullying policies should include transphobia.
- Inclusion of ethical sub-committees, assemblies and guest speakers (School 4/Principal D).
- Promotion of open conversation about the inclusion of LGBTI+ families, pupils and issues (INTO, 2019).
- Inclusion of LGBTI+ literature at an age-appropriate level from the junior end of the school and gradual inclusion into the school library (School 4/Principal D). Development of the SPHE curriculum to include discussion of different families (INTO, 2019).
- Other programmes such as Different Families, Same Love or All Together Now should be considered.
- School advocates who are interested in creating an LGBTI+ inclusive school and report back to staff can be a meaningful and practical support to the school community.
- Where training is not feasible, other transferable skills such as restorative practice could be considered (School 4/Principal D).

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A Case Study Investigating the Impact of One-to-One iPad Use on Teaching and Learning in an Irish Post-Primary School

Genevieve Taylor

Biography

Genevieve Taylor is a qualified post-primary school teacher and a graduate of Hibernia College, where she completed the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Post-Primary Education. She also holds a Bachelor of Business Studies Honours degree from Trinity College, a Diploma in Software Engineering and a Diploma in Digital Marketing from Irish Times Training. She has worked in various fields including software engineering and digital marketing. She decided to complete her teacher training when she found great enjoyment in thinking up creative ways to help her children with their homework.

A Case Study Investigating the Impact of One-to-One iPad Use on Teaching and Learning in an Irish Post-Primary School

Research supervisor: Mr Harry Freeman

Abstract

The impact of iPads in an educational setting is a new phenomenon and, as such, educators have yet to understand their long-term implications. This case study investigates the impact of one-to-one iPads in a secondary school in Ireland, which was an early adopter of them in 2012. The research used a mixed methods approach in the form of an online survey (n=100) and qualitative interviews (n=2). The research found that while the majority of teachers surveyed believe that the use of iPads has had a positive influence on student engagement and understanding, they also pose a major distraction to students in class. Almost all of the teachers surveyed believed that they would benefit from further iPad training.

Introduction

The recent media hype in Ireland over the question of whether iPads are harming or improving students' learning outcomes in schools has left many parents confused and worried about their children's education (RTE, 2019; The Irish Times, 2019). One school in Ireland that recently advised parents they were replacing textbooks with iPad-only eBooks led to protests from parents claiming their children's education had been impaired by over-reliance on digital technology since the iPad policy in the school was introduced in recent years (The Irish Times, 2019). However, is the recent debate in the media justified or is it based on anecdotal evidence? What does the actual empirical research tell us about the impact of iPads on the learning environment?

This thesis explores the topic of digital technology in a school that was an early adopter of Apple iPads in 2012. The school where the research took place is a suburban, co-educational community school with over 1,200 students and 100 teachers.

Literature Review

To date, there are no official figures of how many Irish schools are using one-to-one tablets in the classroom. Wriggle, which is one of the largest firms supplying iPads to schools in Ireland, manages up to 40,000 devices for students in more than 100 secondary schools (The Irish Times, 2019). The represents approximately 10–15% of Irish post-primary schools (RTE, 2019).

Some studies have shown that students have a higher interest in class when iPads are used (Domingo and Gargante, 2016). Supporting studies also indicate that when students use iPads, the learning experience is more enjoyable and students' lessons can be more customised and scaffolded according to their individual needs (Price, Jewitt and Crescenzi, 2015). However, other research has shown that overuse of screens, such as those on an iPad, have a negative impact on our attention span and can cause mental fatigue (Cytowic, 2015). The use of iPads can also tempt students to multitask, and recent research shows that multitasking has a negative impact on academic performance (Cardoso, Green and Bavelier, 2015).

With increasing demands on teachers to use technology in their lessons and pressure from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to provide digital literacy in Irish schools (DES, 2019), it is becoming crucial that teachers become proficient in teaching effectively through ICT.

Some research has indicated that banning tablets from class caused students' scores in exams to improve by 18% (Carter, Greenberg and Walker, 2017), and is supported by another study which found that students taking notes on devices consistently performed worse in exams than students who took handwritten notes (Mueller and Oppenheimer, 2014). In 2019, the results of a European-wide, four-year study involving 200 researchers on the impact of digitised reading was published as The Stavanger Declaration (2019). This study found that reading physical paper best supported deeper comprehension and retention.
Conversely, Churchill, Fox and King (2012) found that the use of iPads in the classroom supported learning and improved performance, as well as encouraging student motivation (Kinash, Brand and Mathew, 2012), and enhancing students' creativity (Sullivan, 2013). The recent Stavanger Declaration (2019) also found that a digital reading environment gave

educators great opportunities to tailor learning technologies to individual student's learning preferences.

Based on the literature review, the main questions arising from this research are:

1. What are teachers' attitudes to the impact of one-to-one iPad use?
2. What impact does the use of iPads have on student participation in class?
3. What impact does the use of iPads have on students' understanding of the topics covered in a lesson?
4. Is further training needed for teachers to use iPads more effectively in class?

Methodology

A case study was selected for the purpose of this research as the author's final SEPP took place in a school that has been using iPads as an educational resource for over seven years. Yin (2014, p.23) defines a case study as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context'. iPads are a new phenomenon in Irish schools and, as the author wished to establish their impact in a particular school, the choice of a case study was deemed most relevant. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2018, p.129) state that the purpose of a case study is 'To portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts' and that the focus of the case study should be on 'Individuals and local situations.'

A mixed methods approach was used, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research. When conducting research, there are several different approaches that may be considered; however, no one style is perceived to be superior to the other (Bell and Waters, 2014). Although the author's research is on a small scale, Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2018, p.725) state that 'quantitative data can be used for serving smaller-scale research', which describes the study the author intends to perform. However, as the aim of this study is to understand the impact iPads have on the teaching environment rather than whether they should be used or not, this author felt that a qualitative perspective to capture individuals' perceptions of their impact would augment the findings from

the quantitative research.

The quantitative data was gathered using an anonymous Google Forms questionnaire. This questionnaire was sent to 100 teachers through the school email system. The qualitative data was gathered using a semi-structured interview of two teachers, one male and one female, one of whom frequently used the iPad during class and one who did not. Both qualitative and quantitative data was examined for themes in tandem with existing research so that conclusions could be ascertained.

The author submitted an ethical application to perform this research, which was approved by Hibernia College. Both of the research methods used were carried out in compliance with BERA's (2018) guidelines (Appendix 1.2). In compliance with GDPR (2018), all research participants were required to consent to their data being used for the purposes of this study only. No personal information was used in the collection of data. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the subjects anonymity.

Findings

Teacher Attitudes to the Use of iPads in Class

59% of the respondents used iPads always or most of the time. Participants were then asked about their views on the use of iPads in school. Figure 4.2.2 below shows their responses.

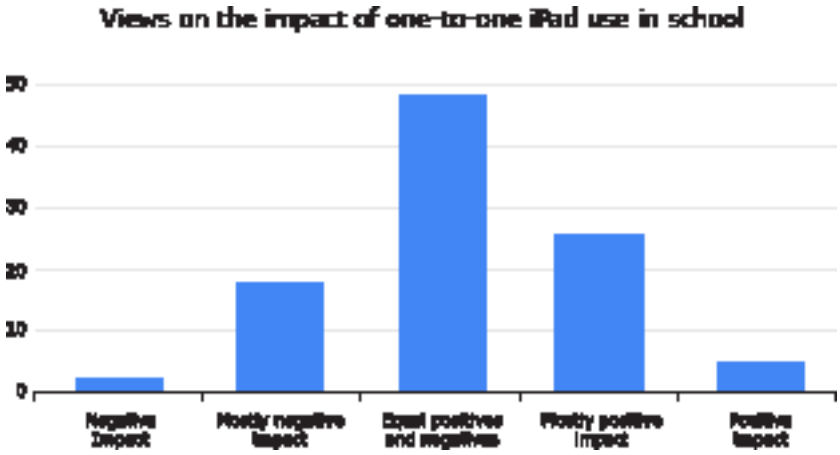

Figure 4.2.2 Participants' views on the impact of one-to-one iPad use

Despite a 59% majority of teachers who used iPads always or most of the time, Figure 4.2.2 shows that only 31% believed that the use of iPads was a positive or mostly positive influence, with 21% of the teachers believing that they were a mostly negative or negative influence. Almost 50% of participants thought there were equal positives and negatives to using the iPads in school.

Impact of iPads on Student Engagement

36% of teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed that iPads better engaged students, while 33% of those surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that the iPads did better engage students during class.

62% of participants believed that the iPads did not keep students focussed for longer during class. One teacher commented that 'using technology is fine but students cannot focus very long using iPads.' The perception that iPads were a distraction was a common theme. Participants were asked if they found iPads a distraction during class:

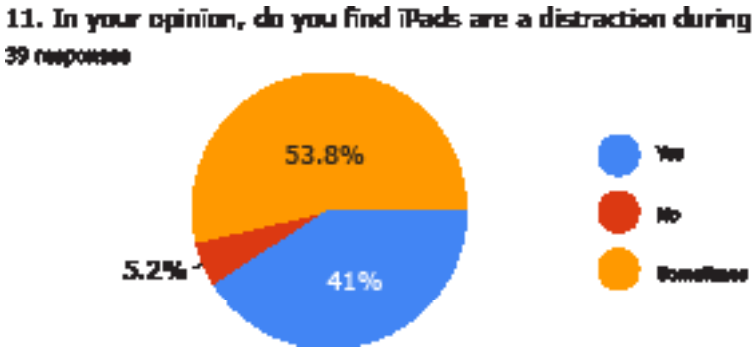

Figure 4.3.3 Do teachers find iPads are a distraction during class

Only 5% of participants thought that iPads were not a distraction in class. This view was supported by both teachers in the interviews. Teacher 1 was of the view that iPads could offer no real benefit to her subject. Teacher 2 commented that when using the iPad for study, students became easily distracted.

Impact of iPads on Student Learning Outcomes

Participants were asked if using iPads during class could improve students' understanding of a topic. While 46% of respondents disagreed or remained neutral, a majority of 54% agreed or strongly agreed that iPads could help improve students' understanding during class.

This same question was then applied to learning at home. An even higher percentage of those surveyed (59%) agreed or strongly agreed that iPads could help students when learning at home. When asked to expand on this answer, participants commented that, 'Students can expand on their knowledge by doing extra research.' and, 'The internet is a massive resource that the students can access to enhance their learning at home.'

eBooks versus Textbooks

Participants were asked if they preferred students to use eBooks or textbooks when learning. While 46.2% preferred their students to use textbooks, a slight majority of 51.3%, felt that the choice of medium didn't matter when learning. One teacher stated that, 'students are more focused with the hard copy of their book and less distracted by notifications, etc. and other apps'. Another teacher commented that, 'I follow school policy, which is to allow students to decide and to make schoolbags less heavy. I would encourage iPad use, but I believe that the textbook is easier on their eyes, they can navigate a book more easily and the majority of my senior students after 4 years of iPad choose the textbook.'

Training in iPad Use

Participants were asked if the DES provided adequate training in how to use iPads during class. 66.7% of participants believed that the DES did not provide enough training on how to use iPads in class. Participants were then asked if they felt they would benefit from subject-specific training on how to use iPads in class. The results are presented below in Figure 4.6.2.

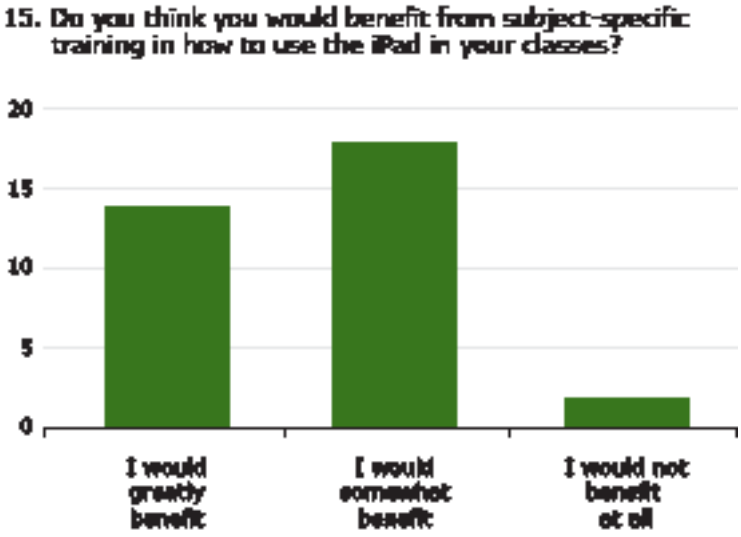

Figure 4.6.2. Participants' thoughts on subject-specific training on the use of iPads

The chart above shows that 95% of the respondents felt they would benefit from subject-specific training on how to use the iPads in their classes. One teacher reflected the majority view of the respondents by summing up, 'I think the use of iPads can be beneficial, however there needs to be more training for teachers and more limits to what an iPad can do in a classroom.'

Discussion

Teachers' attitudes to the impact of one-to-one iPad use

The results of this case study indicated that the majority of teachers used iPads in their classes almost always or most of the time. Given that this is an iPad school, this result was to be expected. The analysis confirmed that a majority of 77% of teachers were very confident or confident in using the iPad.

One of the main negatives for teachers in using the iPad was the distraction they offered students from the learning intentions, with 95% of teachers stating that the iPads caused a distraction. The topic of iPads as a distraction in school recently made the headlines in an Irish context.

A school in Meath commissioned the first Irish, in-depth review into its use of iPads following a protest by parents when they issued an iPad-only policy in 2019. While the results have yet to be published, RTE News (2020) summarised the main findings, many of which support the findings in this case study, stating that 'Distraction among students and difficulties around monitoring online activities were highlighted as key issues.'

Impact of the iPad on student participation class

Contrary to the hypothesis that ICT can increase student motivation and engagement (McGlynn and Kelly, 2019), the teachers in this case study were almost equally divided in their opinions. 25.6% of teachers agreed that iPads better engaged students, while 30.8% of them disagreed. One teacher commented that the iPad caused 'Poor concentration, less oral participation' while another stated that 'Good classroom tasks engage students, not the iPad which is a tool.'

In regard to student focus, the analysis confirms research by O'Neill and Dinh (2015) that Irish children view tablets as a source of entertainment, with 62% of teachers in this case study agreeing that the use of iPads did not keep students focussed for longer in class.

Impact of iPads on Student Learning Outcomes

Despite the distractions offered by iPads and the doubt about their ability to engage students as discussed above, the author was surprised that the data demonstrated a strong correlation between iPad use and the improvement of student learning outcomes with 54% of teachers stating that the use of iPads in class positively improved their understanding of the topics. When asked if the iPad could assist students learning at home, this figure rose to 59%. Teachers commented, 'iPads are beneficial in the sense that they really assist with the students' independent learning and ability to develop their technical and creative skills'. This data was further supported by the hypothesis of Churchill, Fox and King (2012) who found that the use of iPads supported students' learning.

eBooks versus Digital Books

Contrary to the recent results of the E-READ Stavanger Declaration (2019), which found that reading digitally leads 'to more skimming and less concentration on reading matter', 51.3% of the teachers surveyed

stated that they didn't think it mattered if students used eBooks or textbooks to study.

However, a large percentage of participants, at 46.2%, stated that they preferred their students to use textbooks when learning. Comments such as, 'neuroscience has evidence text is best' and, 'It's much better for the students to physically write the answers rather than the notes feature on their iPads.' showed that many teachers instinctively supported the Stavanger Declaration (2019) findings, which found that reading on paper improves comprehension.

Training in iPad Use

95% of the teachers surveyed felt they would benefit from subject-specific training in how to use the iPad in their particular subject, with 66% of respondents stating that the DES does not provide adequate training in how to use the iPads in class.

At present, the DES does not offer any formal training in iPad use, and it is up to the individual school to allocate its annual technology grant as it sees fit. The PDST offers ad hoc courses in tablet use within class, but there is no national strategy to assist teachers in designing course content for use with an iPad or tablet (Marcus-Quinn, Hourigan and McCoy, 2016). The Stavanger Declaration (2019) has warned that better guidelines are needed for the implementation of digital learning devices, stating that switching indiscriminately between paper and eBooks may cause a setback in students' comprehension and problem-solving skills.

This lack of training in developing digital resources was also highlighted by the report commissioned by Ratoath College (headed by Marcus-Quinn, 2019) where it found that, 'when teachers were asked to create their own resources instead of using textbooks, this was often done in "a piecemeal manner" and meant students were receiving information "without the context afforded by a textbook".' (cited by RTE, 2020). Research supports the fact that a lack of CPD training for teachers is a major weakness in any education system (Cumming and Wyatt-Smith, 2009). The dearth of explicit teacher training in how the DES envision using technology to implement its new strategy on improving and elevating the Irish education system is a major concern for this author.

Conclusions and Recommendations

iPads as a distraction

Based on teachers' beliefs that iPads are a distraction, it may be worthwhile to consider specific tools or apps that will allow teachers to manage what students are able to use.

iPads in supporting teaching and learning

As the majority of teachers believed that iPads could assist in a student's understanding of a topic, teachers could explicitly model how to research and collaborate digitally. Students should be directed to distinguish between reliable data sources and fake news.

eBooks Versus Textbooks

A slight majority of teachers saw no advantage of textbooks over eBooks. However, recent studies (The Stavanger Declaration, 2019; Marcus-Quinn, Hourigan and McCoy, 2019) indicate that reading physical books improves comprehension when compared to reading eBooks. Schools could implement a system where the iPad may be used in class for research purposes and during certain assessments (Kahoot Live, Quizlet, etc.) while physical books can be used for note-taking and study.

Further training on the use of iPads

95% of participants believed they would benefit from subject-specific training on how to use iPads in their classes. The DES could incorporate explicit iPad training, subject by subject, into their CPD strategy for teachers going forward.

Limitations of study

While the sample of this case study included all teachers in the case study school (n=100), only 39% of teachers completed this survey. This impedes the generalisation of this case study to the school as a whole. The teachers participating in the semi-structured interviews were chosen as they have polarising views on the use of iPads. While they offered a deeper insight into the spectrum of views on iPads, their views themselves are not balanced and so restricted the reliability of this study. However, Blaxter (2001) states that while case studies are not without their limitations, they can shed light on areas where there is a dearth of previous research, as is the case in this research study.

Final Conclusion

Since 2015, the DES has put in place a Digital Learning Strategy for Schools. Its main aim in implementing this approach is to safeguard the future of our children by developing competent and coherent thinkers who can contribute to our society moving forward. But is the random implementation of one-to-one iPad use in schools really assisting in achieving these goals? With a lack of adequate longitudinal studies on the impact of introducing such digital learning techniques, we have no concrete, empirical evidence of the impact this is having on a whole generation of students. However, the final comment in this dissertation goes to one of the participants who stated:

> Communicating using digital platforms is here to stay, it is used in every type of industry. Students are getting used to it in school and will have a great advantage when they move onto 3rd level and/or the workplace. (Anonymous teacher, 2020)

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Irish Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences of Differentiation for the Exceptionally Able Child in Inclusive Mainstream Classrooms

Mary Collins

Biography

Having worked in HR and Health and Safety Management for nearly 20 years, Mary realised that she wanted a more rewarding career and, so, she chose to embark on the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Primary Education with Hibernia College. Mary believes that this was the best decision she ever made. She is currently working in a multigrade classroom with Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First and Second class and she absolutely loves it. When her children were growing up, she was amazed at their capacity to learn. While on placement during her PME, she became particularly interested in children who were exceptionally able. She wanted to explore the methodologies for differentiation for exceptionally able children and investigate the challenges faced by teachers and children.

Irish Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences of Differentiation for the Exceptionally Able Child in Inclusive Mainstream Classrooms

Research supervisor: Aideen Ní Chéilleachair

Abstract

This study analyses Irish teachers' perspectives and experiences of differentiation for the exceptionally able child in inclusive mainstream classrooms. The study focuses on the identification of exceptionally able children and the strategies considered effective in differentiating for them. The challenges faced by both teachers and exceptionally able children are also explored. The study used a qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews from a small sample of experienced teachers (N=5). Findings indicate a strong commitment at school level to provide effective differentiated education for the exceptionally able in the mainstream classroom; however, a lack of legislation, resources and training in this area is making the task very challenging.

Keywords: Exceptionally able children; differentiation; special education; giftedness; inclusive education; full potential.

Introduction

The provision of special education has progressed significantly in the Irish education system over the past twenty years since the Education Act 1998 came into being. The aim of the Act was to provide for the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs, in an inclusive education system. This Act was influenced by the report issued by the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) in 1993, which recommended the development of an inclusive education system where the needs of all learners were catered for, including the exceptionally able. The SERC based its definition of exceptional ability on the *Marland report* (1972), which is credited with being one of the main influences on gifted education. In the *Education Act 1998*, the term special educational

needs (SENs) included the needs of exceptionally able children. However, a subsequent piece of legislation, namely the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004*, omitted the term exceptionally able from its definition of SEN. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2007) published draft guidelines for teachers on exceptionally able students to support teachers in their efforts to provide for the needs of the exceptionally able child. The guidelines provided practical advice on the identification of the exceptionally able child as well as guidelines for differentiation. This study sets out to investigate Irish teachers' perspectives and experiences of differentiation for the exceptionally able child in inclusive mainstream classrooms with particular focus on the identification of the exceptionally able child and the challenges faced by both the teacher and the child.

Literature Review

The idea that giftedness was largely genetically based and synonymous with innate high intelligence was the dominant view throughout much of the last century (Endepolhs-Ulpe and Ruf, 2006; Uí Chonaill, 2018). In more recent times, there has been a change in how giftedness is conceptualised and this is thought to be influenced in no small part by the publication of the *Marland report* (1972). According to Marland (1972, p.8):

> Children capable of high-performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singularly or in combination:
>
> - General Intellectual Ability
> - Specific Academic Aptitude
> - Creative or Productive Thinking
> - Leadership Ability
> - Visual and Performing Arts
> - Psychomotor Ability

The SERC report (1993, p.160) added 'mechanical aptitude' to the Marland definition. The NCCA (2007, p.7), in their publication *Exceptionally able students: draft guidelines for teachers*, acknowledge that there is no

universally agreed definition for 'exceptionally able' but they use the term in their guidelines to 'describe students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students'.

Theories of Giftedness and Intelligence

Theories of giftedness date back to the late 1800s when Sir Francis Galton concluded that giftedness was an innate characteristic and Lewis Terman created the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test, which is still widely used as a measure of intelligence today (O'Reilly, 2010; Chitty, 2013).

Howard Gardner (1993) proposed a more modern theory of multiple intelligences including logical/mathematical, spatial, linguistic, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Gardner promoted the belief that giftedness results from innate abilities when a person interacts with a supportive environment.

Sternberg (1985) contended that giftedness comprises of three core qualities or intelligences: componential intelligence, experiential intelligence and contextual intelligence. Sternberg questioned the reliability of IQ as an indicator of intelligence, arguing that creative or practical thinkers may not be identified as gifted (Council of Curriculum Examinations and Assessment [CCEA], 2006).

Renzulli (2005) explored the premise that gifted behaviour reflects an interaction between three basic human traits: above average ability, high levels of creativity and high levels of task commitment.

There continues to be a debate in the literature regarding the concepts of giftedness; however, some consensus can be derived from the work of these theorists in that giftedness can be viewed as a multidimensional concept (Uí Chonaill, 2018), embracing relatively autonomous human intellectual competencies (Gardner, 1993), different types of intelligences (Sternberg, 1985) or clusters of traits, which combine and interact with each other to form creative accomplishment (Renzulli, 2005).

Experience of gifted education in Ireland

Ní Chéilleachair, 2013 (cited in Uí Chonaill, 2018), outlined that very few primary teachers reported having implemented or even seen the

NCCA (2007) draft guidelines. A study conducted on behalf of Centre for Talented Youth in Ireland (CTYI) reported that 70% of exceptionally able children were not being challenged in their primary schools and that differentiated instruction 'appeared to be rarely or never happening for these high ability students' (Cross et al., 2019, p.2).

With the omission of exceptionally able from the definition of SEN in the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004* and the guidelines for exceptionally able children (NCCA, 2007) still in draft form, this raises questions over the level of priority afforded to them.

Identifying exceptionally able children

Renzulli (2011) espouses the three-ring model as a means to identify the gifted child. He points out that 'no single cluster makes giftedness' and warns against relying on academic results to identify giftedness. Wallace et al. (2010 p.29) propose that schools 'need to create opportunities that will enable all pupils to discover their potentials'. The NCCA (2007) suggest that in any school setting there will likely be 5–10% of students deemed exceptionally able. This perhaps overlooks the underachievers that may be present in the classroom. Wallace et al. (2010) describe the underachievers as those who do not experience success due to a lack of effort, perseverance, self-belief and/or encouragement.

The twice-exceptional student, defined by Baldwin et al. (2015, p.212) as individuals who evidence 'exceptional ability and disability, which results in a unique set of circumstances', poses another challenge for teachers as the exceptional ability may mask the disability or vice versa, leaving neither recognised or addressed.

Differentiating for the exceptionally able

In order to meet the needs of all children in the mainstream classroom, there is a need to differentiate (Heacox, 2002; Terwel, 2005; Tomlinson, 2014). Tomlinson (2014, p.13) describes a differentiated classroom as one that 'supports students who learn in different ways and at different rates and who bring to school, different talents and interests'. Differentiation is promoted by the NCCA (2007) as a means of meeting the needs of exceptionally able children; however, in practice, this is proving problematic. Cross et al. (2019, p.103) acknowledge that a differentiation model 'is difficult or impossible to achieve in large classrooms with under-

trained teachers'. The literature also proposes many other means of meeting the needs of exceptionally able children such as extension and enrichment (Wallace et al., 2010), asking better questions (Smith, 2005), the menu approach of offering choice and promoting independent learning (Smith, 2005), and acceleration (Gross, 2015).

Challenges associated with exceptional ability

Being of exceptional ability is not without its difficulties and it is important to understand and support the emotional and mental health of the child (Freeman, 2006; Van Tassel-Baska and Hubbard, 2016). Sutherland (2008) pointed out that gifted children can experience jealousy from peers, expectations of perfection and finding it difficult to form relationships. In a mainstream classroom situation, children who are not adequately challenged can learn to become underachievers or disengage and become disruptive (Sutherland, 2008). Supporting the learning needs and mental health of the exceptionally able child places quite a burden of responsibility on the teacher and the general consensus is that they feel underprepared to deal with it (O'Reilly, 2018).
The research aims to explore the following research questions:

1. How would a teacher identify an exceptionally able child in the classroom?
2. What measures would a teacher take to differentiate for the exceptionally able child?
3. What challenges does a teacher experience in identifying and providing for an exceptionally able child?
4. What challenges does the exceptionally able child experience in the classroom?

Methodology

Methodological Design

Several possible research methods were considered in assessing the suitability to answer the research question, and the researcher gave consideration to the effectiveness, feasibility, meaningfulness and appropriateness of the method to be chosen (Hannes et al., 2015). Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to gain meaningful insights into the views and experiences of the participants (Scott and

Morrison, 2006; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). According to Scott and Morrison (2006, p.182), in qualitative research, 'the focus is on seeing the world through the eyes of those being studied'. As this research aimed to gather data on teachers' perspectives and experiences of differentiating for exceptionally able children, it was decided that qualitative research methods were most closely aligned with the nature of the study.

The small-scale nature of this research influenced the sampling method chosen. Non-probability sampling in the form of purposive sampling was selected and data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with a small sample of primary teachers (n=5). In purposive sampling, 'researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample' in order to access 'knowledgeable people who have an in-depth knowledge' of the topic being studied (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011, p.115).

Freebody (2003, p.153) describes the semi-structured interview as beginning with a 'predetermined set of questions, but allow some latitude in the breadth of relevance'. The questions were carefully composed following a thorough review of relevant literature with the intention of collecting relevant data. They were piloted and tested on one teacher to assess their suitability and to ensure they aligned with the research questions.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was the strategy used to analyse the data generated through the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis can be described as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within the data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). According to Howitt and Cramer (2008, p.328), the task of the researcher in thematic analysis is to 'identify a limited number of themes which adequately reflect their textual data'. To ensure the required level of analysis was conducted on the data, the researcher followed the Braun and Clarke (2006) phases of thematic analysis, as outlined in the table.

Step	Phase	Description of the Process
1	Familiarise yourself with your data:	Transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generate initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing the themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming the themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 3.1. Phases of Thematic Analysis. Source: Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87)

Enhancing credibility of qualitative research

For research to be considered reliable, it needs to demonstrate that if it were carried out 'on a similar group of respondents in a similar context, then similar results would be found' (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011, p.351). To this end, the researcher carried out a number of processes to ensure the validity and reliability of this research. The careful piloting of the interview schedule was the first step taken to enhance the reliability of the research, as suggested by Walford (2012). The next step was triangulation, which is a procedure where researchers look for 'convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes and categories in a study' (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.126). Data source triangulation was achieved by interviewing a number of suitably qualified and experienced teaching professionals (Bryman, 2004). The researcher also engaged a trusted, critical friend to analyse and interpret the data, and the outcomes were compared and reviewed to ensure consensus and validity. The last step in ensuring credibility of the research was a process called respondent validation, which involved sending the interview transcriptions back to the participants to allow them to validate their responses or reinterpret if necessary (Polit, Beck and Hungler, 2001).

Limitations

A significant limitation of qualitative research methods is that the quality of the research is heavily dependent on the 'individual skills of the researcher' and can be easily 'influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies' (Anderson, 2010, p.3). To address this limitation, the researcher engaged the support of a critical friend and regarded the advice of the research supervisor. The limited sample size (n=5) and the short time frame within which this small-scale study was completed were also discernible limitations of this research.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing the research, an ethical review form was submitted to the Hibernia College Ethics Committee and was subsequently approved. The research followed the guidelines from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) on ethical standards in research. In compliance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2018, the data gathered was stored on a password-protected computer and hard drive.

Findings

Five major themes emerged from the findings:

Theme one: Range of definitions of exceptionally able

When asked to share their understanding of the term 'exceptionally able', the respondents gave a range of answers and definitions. Teacher A explained his understanding was of a 'child who needs to be challenged far beyond the level of their class curriculum'. Teachers B and C made reference to the child's ability in comparison to his/her peers. Other expressions used to describe exceptional ability were 'talented', 'extremely bright', 'has an excellent knowledge of a particular subject' and 'very gifted'.

Theme two: Identification of exceptional ability in the classroom

The method of identification reported by all of the respondents was 'teacher observation'. The use of 'class work or test scores', 'assessment in academic areas', 'class assessments', and 'standardised tests' were credited by all respondents as being key to identifying the exceptionally

able child. There was also consensus on the value of referrals from previous teachers and from parents.

All respondents overwhelmingly concurred that exceptional ability is found in areas other than literacy and numeracy such as PE, visual art, music, etc. Three of the respondents reported that exceptional ability was not something they see every year, but perhaps every few years. The other two respondents reported there being a small percentage, 2–3% every year, that they would identify as exceptionally able.

Theme three: Differentiation for the exceptionally able

The strategies reported by the respondents are presented in Table 4.2 and are based on the CARPET PATCH framework for differentiation (Westwood, 2007).

		Participants Responses (Teacher A, B, C, D or E)
C	Curriculum Content	Vary the content for visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners (A, B, D, E). Increase complexity, depth and breadth of a lesson (D). Vary the amount, content, level and method of curriculum presentation (E).
A	Activities	Extension work (A, B, E) Research and projects (A) Task Setting (B) Extra worksheets (E) Challenge — word problems in maths, brain teasers (C) Opportunities to showcase strengths (C) Giving time for personal interests (B, D, E) More advanced learning activities (D) Restructuring activities to be more intellectually demanding (D)
R	Resources	Choice (B, C) Resources used (B) Vary resources (E)
P	Products	Expectations of outcome (B)
E	Environment	An environment that encourages inquiry and independence (D)
T	Teaching Strategies	Higher order questioning (C, E) Teaching independent learning skills (B) Help the child to know his/her learning style (B, C) Vary the methodologies (E)
P	Pace	Pace (B, D, E)
A	Amount of Assistance	Support Given (B) Attend SEN for extra work (E)
T	Testing and Grading	
C	Classroom grouping	Peer-Tutoring (C, E) Groups — Mixed ability and High ability (A, B, C) Ability groups to allow acceleration in a subject (E)
H	Homework	Homework (C)

Table 4.2 Differentiation strategies reported by respondents

Table 4.2 shows the wide range of strategies used by the participating teachers in differentiating for the exceptionally able. Differentiating through activities, for example, extension work, was the most popular strategy reported among the participants. Varying the content, teaching strategies and classroom groupings were all mentioned frequently in the responses. Another approach quite prevalent amongst the responses (teachers A, B and D) was independent learning and helping the child to develop skills to become independent learners and take ownership of their

own learning. The participants noted that children are not accelerated to higher classes, but subject acceleration is widely used where some children may work from a textbook at a higher class level than their peers.

Ambiguity was noted in the responses relating to SEN policy and provision. Only teachers B, D and E reported that exceptionally able children are included in the SEN policy of their respective schools. All of the participants indicated that exceptionally able children are not prioritised in the allocation of SEN resources.

Theme four: Challenges

- Challenges faced by teachers

The challenges reported in identifying and differentiating for the exceptionally able in mainstream classrooms were generally consistent across all of the participants, with 'time' being cited by all as one of the most significant challenges. The time constraints respondents referred to include preparing extra work, identifying and catering for the different learning styles, gathering information, and teaching a packed curriculum. The other significant challenge described by all the participating teachers was 'class size', making it very difficult to cater for the needs of all children in a class.
Another notable challenge conveyed was 'to get children out of their comfort zone and to challenge themselves' (Teacher A). Twice exceptional pupils with learning difficulties or behavioural issues can make identifying and differentiating more difficult (teachers E and B). When asked if the participating teachers had received any specific training to support them in providing for the exceptionally able child, there was a resounding 'No'.

- Challenges faced by exceptionally able children

According to the participating teachers, the most common challenge reported was 'boredom' due to the child finding the class work mundane and unchallenging. Teachers B, C and E reported that this boredom can lead to the child 'acting out' and behaving disruptively. High achieving pupils who are always succeeding in class can be on the receiving end of jealous remarks from their peers (Teacher C) and make it difficult to 'maintain genuine friendships', which can lead to low self-esteem and self-consciousness issues (teachers D and E).

4.6 Improving provision of differentiated education for the exceptionally able

Four of the five participants responded with a need for more resources in the form of 'sufficient resource hours' (Teacher A); 'more SET support' and 'more teaching resources' (Teacher B); and 'more SEN time and extra resources' (Teacher E). Teacher C reported that 'Training and resources would be the most beneficial' to improve the provision for exceptionally able children. Teacher E concluded the interview by sharing an opinion that appears to be common to all of the participants, 'I don't think [exceptional ability] is seen as a priority in the Department of Education and until then it is unlikely to get the support it needs'.

Discussion

This study explored teachers' perspectives and experiences in differentiating for the exceptionally able child in inclusive mainstream classrooms. The themes emerging from the data are further discussed here.

Range of definitions of exceptionally able

The literature review acknowledged the lack of a universally agreed definition for exceptionally able or gifted children (Borland, 2005; Freeman, 2006; NCCA, 2007; Gross, 2015). The NCCA (2007, p.7) choose to describe exceptionally able children as those 'who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students'. Teacher A, B and C made reference to the child's ability in comparison to his/her peers. Teacher D echoed Renzulli's conceptions of exceptional ability by referring to the child's levels of commitment, creativity and ability to grasp complex problems for their age (Renzulli, 2005). Only two of the participants stated they identified 2–3% of their class as exceptionally able whereas the NCCA (2007) suggests that 5–10% of the population should identify as exceptionally able. This discrepancy is perhaps worthy of further research.

Identification of exceptional ability in the classroom

Sutherland (2008), Renzulli (2011) and Wallace et al. (2010) promote a holistic and inclusive approach to identifying the exceptionally able and advise against relying on academic results alone. The findings from

the data align encouragingly well with the literature on this point. While all of the respondents reported that they look to assessment results for indications of exceptional ability, they included several other methods of identification to ensure a more rounded approach. These methods included teacher observation, previous teacher referrals and parent referrals. There was an energy and enthusiasm in the responses from all of the participating teachers on the topic of exceptional ability in areas other than numeracy and literacy, with each one advocating for the importance of supporting the child to reach their full potential and giving them 'an opportunity to shine' (Teacher B) in whatever area their exceptional strengths lie. This point is fully supported in the aims of the Primary school curriculum (NCCA, 1999, p.7) as it recognises 'the importance of developing the full potential of the child'.

Wallace et al. (2010) cautioned on the risk of overlooking the underachievers. Only one of the respondents alluded to this.

The findings suggest that Gardner's multiple intelligences are used more as a strategy to differentiate for the exceptionally able child rather than to identify his/her exceptional ability (Gardner, 1993).

Differentiation for the exceptionally able

The wide range of strategies for differentiation reported by the participants (Table 4.2) align with the concept of the differentiated classroom as suggested in the literature (Heacox, 2002; Terwel, 2005; Tomlinson, 2014). A key strategy emerging from the data was helping the exceptionally able child to develop independent learning skills and to take ownership of their own learning. Smith (2005) and Tomlinson (2014) advocate the importance of independent learning. This was further supported in the findings when teachers B, D and E proclaimed that giving the child time for 'personal interests' was one of the most effective differentiation strategies for the exceptionally able. Supporting the child to research a topic or develop a skill in an area of personal interest gives the child the motivation to pursue the learning (Smith, 2005) and tap into the particular style of learning that works best for them (Gardner, 1993).

Ability groupings were reported by two of the teachers as being the most effective strategy for differentiation as it allows the very able to work at an accelerated level. Tomlinson (2014) has some reservations about ability grouping as it can lead to labels being applied to children such

as 'high achievers', 'average' and 'strugglers'. Further research on the advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping is needed to determine the effectiveness of it as a strategy for differentiation for the exceptionally able.

Wallace et al. (2010) promote enrichment and extension strategies to meet the needs of exceptionally able and the findings from the data overwhelmingly support this. All of the participating teachers reported the effectiveness of extension activities such as extended tasks and worksheets, additional challenges, more advanced learning activities, as well as enrichment through choice and project work in groups or individually.

Acceleration of an exceptionally able child to higher class levels was not experienced by any of the participating teachers; however, the small-scale nature of this study may not be representative of the national landscape and a more quantitative study of acceleration may be required to determine if acceleration is considered a viable option.

Challenges

- Challenges faced by teachers

While the literature overwhelmingly supports and promotes the effectiveness of differentiation for addressing the needs of the exceptionally able child in the mainstream classroom (Heacox, 2002; Smith, 2005; NCCA, 2007; Wallace et al., 2010; Tomlinson, 2014), Cross et al. (2019) acknowledge that this is not without its challenges. The participating teachers were animated in their responses about the challenges and difficulties they face when trying to identify and differentiate for the exceptionally able child. The most significant challenges reported were the lack of time and the class sizes. These challenges had a knock-on effect on where the teachers' time and resources (both mainstream and SEN) were drawn and, inevitably, in all cases, the priority was given to the children with learning difficulties rather than the exceptionally able child. Teacher E commented that until exceptional ability becomes a priority in the DES, it is unlikely to get the support and resources it needs at class and school level. This challenge aligns with O'Reilly (2018) who claims the lack of government legislation in the area of gifted education is a significant barrier. The guidelines for

exceptionally able children (NCCA, 2007) remaining in draft form some thirteen years after first being published is perhaps indicative of where the provision for exceptionally able children lie in the priorities of the government.

The participants also echoed O'Reilly (2018) in his criticism of the lack of teacher training in the area of gifted education. None of the participating teachers had received any training for identifying the exceptionally able child or for providing for their learning needs. While all of the participating teachers confidently reported on how they identify exceptionally able children in this study, O'Reilly (2018) and Uí Chonaill (2018) raise concern that schools are often unable to identify exceptionally able or gifted students. Their concerns are perhaps upheld to some degree in this study as three of the respondents reported they identify exceptionally able children every few years while the other two respondents reported identifying 2 to 3% of their class each year. The NCCA (2007) suggest the population of exceptionally able children should be between 5 and 10%. This may be a challenge that the teachers themselves have not yet perceived. Specific training in this area may help to improve the identification of exceptional ability in the classroom.

- Challenges faced by the exceptionally able child

The exceptionally able child, whose wellbeing and development are the main inspiration for this study, faces significant challenges in the mainstream classroom (Cross, 2014). There was consensus from the participating teachers that the main challenge facing the exceptionally able child was boredom. Cross (2014); Preckel, Gotz and Frenzel, (2010); and Sutherland (2008, p.39) support this finding and outline that the exceptionally able child can 'become bored with regular, repetitive activities' and may 'become frustrated' and 'lash out'. Unfortunately for the child, his/her exceptional ability and talent can lead to peer jealousy and make it difficult to form and maintain relationships with their peers (Freeman, 2006; Sutherland, 2008). Teachers D and E expressed concern that this could lead to low self-esteem and self-consciousness, thus affecting the child's mental health. These challenges facing the child further compound those facing the class teacher as it is he/she who will inevitably have to create and foster an environment conducive to the support and development (both educationally and emotionally) of the exceptionally able child in their classroom. This is a strong argument for providing appropriate training for teachers in this area.

Improving provision of differentiated education for the exceptionally able

The teachers who participated in this study have first-hand experience of implementing the many theories and strategies promoted in the literature, and are in a good position to comment on their effectiveness or otherwise and offer suggestions for improvements to the educational provision for exceptionally able. The findings show that more SEN resources proved the most prevalent response from the participating teachers to ensure improvements. The participating teachers also reported the need for training in the specific area of educational provision for the exceptionally able. This is endorsed by O'Reilly (2018) and Cross et al. (2019) in order to ensure effective differentiation for the exceptionally able. Class size was also identified as a significant challenge and one that should be addressed in order to support the provision of differentiated education to all types of learners. Kelleher and Weir (2016) endorse this concern and highlight that Ireland's average class size of 25.5 continues to exceed the OECD average class size of 21. Unfortunately, as was articulated by Teacher E, until exceptional ability is seen as a priority by the DES, 'it is unlikely to get the support it needs'.

Conclusion

Identification of exceptional ability

The participating teachers were confident in their ability to identify the exceptionally able through observation, teacher and parent referral as well as peer referral; however, the rate of identification among this sample group, from occasionally to 2–3% per annum, is lower than that expected in the draft guidelines for exceptionally able, 5–10% (NCCA, 2007). Other studies highlight identification of exceptionally able as a difficulty for teachers (O'Reilly, 2018; Uí Chonaill, 2018); therefore, in order to widen the net and ensure all exceptionally able children are adequately identified, there needs to be specific training and guidance for teachers in this area. The starting point for this would be clarifying a definition of exceptional ability, which has eluded the literature to date (NCCA, 2007). Well-defined training may also support the teachers in identifying the underachievers (Wallace et al., 2010) and the twice exceptional (Baldwin et al., 2015).

Differentiating for the exceptionally able

As a GST, the researcher was particularly interested in the practicalities of differentiation strategies and their effectiveness in the classroom. To this end, the data did not disappoint, providing the reader with numerous practical options. A key learning from this study was the importance placed on developing independent learning skill as an effective strategy for meeting the needs of the exceptionally able child (Smith, 2005; Tomlinson, 2014). Encouraging the child to take ownership of their learning by giving them choice and encouraging them to pursue personal interests in a child-centred learning environment is an approach that the researcher will venture to implement in her future teaching career.

The challenges for both teachers and exceptionally able children

The challenges of time, a packed curriculum, class sizes and inadequate SEN resources make catering for the exceptionally able a difficult task for teachers, according to the respondents. The findings of this study provide justification for the exceptionally able child to be given greater attention at government level so that they can perhaps be afforded the resources and opportunities they deserve to achieve their full potential and make a full contribution to society. If the exceptionally able are legislated for and adequate provision is made for their additional educational needs, this will go a long way in addressing the challenges of boredom, frustration and social difficulties experienced by these children.

The lack of training for teachers in the area of identifying and providing differentiated education for the exceptionally able is another significant challenge emerging from the findings that requires attention at government level. This recommendation echoes many previous studies on the topic (O'Reilly, 2018; Uí Chonaill, 2018; Cross et al., 2019).

Limitations and areas for further research

The small-scale nature of this study suggests that the findings may not be representative of the wider teaching community and further research on a larger scale would be recommended. The participants were limited to experienced teachers and there is scope for widening the net to include parents and pupils. The issue of twice exceptionality warrants further research as this study did not adequately represent this cohort. This study raised inconsistencies between the literature and the findings in relation to effectiveness of ability groupings and acceleration in meeting the needs

of the exceptionally able, suggesting that more research in these areas would be beneficial.

Conclusion

The perspectives and experiences of Irish teachers on the identification of and differentiation for exceptionally able children in mainstream classrooms were examined in this study. The findings confirmed a commitment amongst the teaching profession to support exceptionally able children to meet their full potential, but challenges of time, SEN resources and lack of training were obstacles to this. This study highlighted the need for the government to address these challenges by legislating for the provision of education resources to meet the needs of the exceptionally able, and developing and implementing training courses to support teachers in identifying and differentiating for this cohort. This research has instilled in the researcher a commitment and enthusiasm to proactively seek out the exceptionally able pupils within the school population and be instrumental in supporting them to reach their full potential.

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The Current Status of Media Literacy Education in Irish Primary Schools and Discussion of the Use of Logic as a Tool to Improve Media Literacy

Kate O'Connell

Biography

Kate O'Connell is a graduate of Hibernia College after completing the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Education. Prior to beginning her teaching journey, Kate graduated from Maynooth University with a BA in English and Philosophy. She is passionate about helping children develop critical thinking skills, which led her to investigate the area of media literacy education. Kate emphasises the importance of helping children develop the skills to identify disinformation and to mitigate media influence. She recognises that children are the future, and we must prepare them for their future lives in a modern society. Most of all, Kate is passionate about providing every child with a safe and supportive learning environment. A little act of kindness goes a long way.

The Current Status of Media Literacy Education in Irish Primary Schools and Discussion of the Use of Logic as a Tool to Improve Media Literacy

Research supervisor: Mary Garry

Abstract

This small-scale research of five participants aimed to investigate the presence of media literacy in Irish primary school classrooms and explored teachers' opinions on teaching logic as a tool to help children become media literate. A qualitative approach facilitated the exploration into the perspectives of primary teachers regarding the status of media literacy within Irish primary education. Findings from the semi-structured interviews indicated that media influence on children is increasing and also highlighted a lack of engagement with media literacy in classrooms. Findings also indicated that teachers' opinions on using logic as a tool to develop media literacy were strongly positive.

Keywords: media literacy, logic, primary education, media influence.

Introduction

Media use amongst young children is rapidly increasing (Rantala, 2011); consequently, the media has become a greater influence in their lives (Livingstone and Bovill, 2002). It is essential, therefore, that children develop media literacy skills to mitigate media influence and to critically engage with the abundance of misinformation present within the media (Mallon, 2018). In the Irish context, media literacy in children's education has been overlooked, with media education being primarily concerned with online safety (Barnes et al., 2007; O'Neill and Barnes, 2008). According to Mallon (2018), developing the ability to think critically is an essential part of becoming media literate. Engagement with philosophy should enable children to develop critical thinking skills (Rahdar, Pourghaz and Marziyeh, 2018). Logic is an area of philosophy primarily concerned with developing reasoning and critical thinking skills (Copi and Cohen, 1994).

The research aims to investigate whether children of primary school age are influenced by the media. Having engaged with the wider literature in this area, an identified absence of media literacy in Irish primary schools also directed the investigation. This research also examines the current approach to media education in Irish primary schools. Teachers' opinions on introducing logic into children's education are explored. These opinions facilitated discussion as to whether logic could be used to support children in becoming media literate.

Literature Review

Media literacy education overview

Attention to media literacy in childhood education has developed momentum in response to the rapid growth of the media environment and the major rise in children's internet usage (Rantala, 2011). It has become fundamental that children develop the ability to analyse the various forms of information that can be encountered due to the abundance of misinformation present within the media (Mallon, 2018). The media's influence within children's lives is rapidly growing and, therefore, media use can no longer be seen as separate from education and social development (Livingstone and Bovill, 2002). It is essential that children develop the skills to access, analyse, evaluate and create content, with each skill complementing the other in an integrated learning process (Livingstone, 2004).

Implementation of media literacy education and the Irish Primary Curriculum

Media literacy education aims to develop the ability to think critically in response to the news and other multimedia sources (Hobbs, 2007). However, there is a lack of knowledge and research regarding the implementation of media literacy education for children (Rantala, 2011). In response to the rise in young children using social media, concerns have been raised regarding children's safety and privacy (Snyder et al., 2011). Consequently, media education has focused on personal safety and online behaviour (Snyder et al., 2011), hence, media literacy has not received the same recognition (Rantala, 2011).

Media literacy education has been incorporated into the Irish primary school curriculum in a cross-curricular approach (O'Neill, 2000). The

limited attention given to media education through the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum focuses on children's online safety, whilst analysing media content and information critically is overlooked (Barnes et al., 2007). This fragmented implementation of media literacy has hindered its development (Barnes, et al., 2007). Individual primary schools and teachers are given autonomy when implementing media education, which results in discrepancies (Barnes et al., 2007). Where Irish primary children have engaged with media literacy, it is as a result of the individual teacher's willingness to utilise the limited opportunities within the formal curriculum (Barnes et al., 2007).

In the Irish context, media education has not attained the significance it has achieved internationally due to it being regarded as a soft subject and as a consequence of the overcrowded primary curriculum (O'Neill and Barnes, 2008).

Introducing philosophy into primary education

Primary education should prepare children to think independently; consequently, interest has grown regarding the teaching of philosophy, which should help children develop critical thinking skills and the ability to think independently (Rahdar, Pourghaz and Marziyeh, 2018). As most studies remain at a theoretical level, research regarding the use of philosophy in the classroom is scarce (White, 2012). Nevertheless, there is agreement that the development of critical thinking and reasoning skills are essential to children's learning (White, 2012). Engagement with philosophy will foster the ability to deliberate, make judgements and reason (Lipman, 2003) — skills that are developed particularly in the area of logic. Logic focuses on developing the ability to identify correct from incorrect reasoning, and to think critically and independently (Copi and Cohen, 1994).

From reviewing the literature, the following research questions have emerged:

- What is the current status of media literacy within Irish primary schools?
- Are primary teachers observing children being influenced by the media?
- What is the current approach to media education in Irish primary schools?

- What are Irish primary teachers' responses to teaching children logic?
- Would teaching children logic help them to become media literate?

Methodology

The research paradigm

This research was conducted using the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach was taken. The theoretical perspective taken to conduct this research was that of a phenomenological approach. The methodology and methods chosen to collect information reflected the interpretivist paradigm.

The research design

Qualitative interviews were chosen as the data collection method for this research. Qualitative research is primarily the systematic collection, organisation and interpretation of information derived from talk or conversation (Malterud, 2001). The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. The semi-structured approach provided flexibility to pursue relevant topics that arose during the interviews in more depth (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Brinkmann, 2013).

Research instruments

Interview planning involved conducting pilot interviews with participants similar to the researcher's selected sample (Bell and Waters, 2014). The information retrieved was used to review the interview schedule and to edit the interview questions, where necessary.
The interview schedule consisted of eighteen open-ended questions. This allowed participants to attach meaning to their experiences, which the researcher interpreted to investigate the area of study (Creswell, 2007).

Population and sampling method

The participants in this research were chosen through qualitative sampling. Qualitative sampling is a purposeful data collection method. The selection criterion was that the participants be primary school teachers working in Irish primary schools. By this criterion, five participants (see Table 1) were selected:

	Gender	Years Teaching	Class Level	School Context
Teacher A	Female	20	3rd & 4th	Rural
Teacher B	Male	12	6th	Urban
Teacher C	Female	11	6th	Rural
Teacher D	Female	3	2nd	Urban
Teacher E	Female	15	Senior Infants	Urban

Table 1: Teacher Participant Characteristics

Data analysis

Analysing the data began with the process of comprehending; comprehension was achieved when the collected data facilitated an in-depth inquiry (Mayan, 2009). Synthesis allowed the researcher to merge experiences and viewpoints in order to identify and describe patterns. The researcher then selected, revised and discarded data to develop informed assumptions and explanations (Mayan, 2009). The results were then placed in the context of the literature to support existing knowledge as well as contribute new arguments (Mayan, 2009).

Robustness and testing of analysis

Collaboration was used to establish the validity of this research. Informal collaboration with participants ensured the credibility of the data (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Peer review also established the credibility of this research. Formal collaboration with the research supervisor allowed the research to be examined and tested by an individual external to the study. Addressing the limitations of this small-scale research also contributed to its credibility.

Limitations

This was a small-scale research undertaken by an individual researcher. Due to the small scale of this research, the researcher could not engage with a variety of complex sampling techniques (Bell and Waters, 2014). Furthermore, the sample size was predicated by the scale of this research. Although qualitative interviews provided invaluable data, they primarily unearthed individuals' perceptions and personal experiences (Bell and Waters, 2014).

The necessity for reflexivity was vital (Creswell, 2007). Naturally, the researcher's views and values initiated the research; this was the same as any other qualitative or quantitative inquiry (Grossoehme, 2014). Therefore, the researcher remained self-aware and critical of personal biases and viewpoints during the course of the research. Collaboration also minimised bias within the research.

Ethical issues

Before beginning the research, ethical approval was obtained from Hibernia College's Ethical Committee. During this research, the researcher adhered to BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018). The Data Protection Act (2018) and Hibernia College's Privacy Policy (2020) regarding data storage and eventual destruction were adhered to.

Findings

Irish primary school teachers' knowledge of media literacy

Most of the participants did not display any prior knowledge of media literacy. This indicated that the participants were unaware of the concept. Teacher A did identify media literacy as 'an aspect of SPHE' but was unable to clearly define it.

Teachers B, C and D professed to having no prior knowledge of media literacy. Teacher D explained that, 'I actually have very little knowledge of media literacy…I genuinely don't know what it is'.

Notably, Teacher E equated media literacy with internet safety and spoke about the prevalence of 'cyber bullying', which indicated a lack of awareness of media literacy.

The influence media has on Irish primary school children

All participants firmly asserted that children of primary school age are influenced heavily by the media. Teacher A asserted that, 'they believe everything they see, and they think it's real' while Teacher E similarly stated that they are, 'heavily influenced by it'. Overall, the consensus among the participating teachers was that the media significantly influences children of primary school age.

Current approach to media education in Irish primary schools

When the researcher asked the participants to describe the current approach taken to media education, responses from the participants were mixed. Teacher A asserted that, 'it's up to the teacher to integrate it within the other subjects'. This assertion suggests that engagement with media education is arbitrary and dependent on the individual teacher. Teacher B shared a similar perspective, stressing that, 'the child's experience will be different in every classroom'.

Most of the participating teachers identified media education as being primarily concerned with online safety. Teacher E explained, regarding media education, that, 'we can very much teach best practice, and how to stay safe'. Teachers B and C also commented on media education's focus on online safety, but also implied an overall lack of presence regarding media education. Notably, Teacher B acknowledged that media education is regarded as a soft subject: 'like it doesn't, to me seem to be a real… you know, it's not a real subject really'. Regarding the current approach to media education, Teacher B reported that, 'it's about them being safe within that media.' This assertion implies that online safety takes precedence over media literacy.

Overall, the general consensus highlighted the emphasis placed on online safety, further confirming the lack of media literacy presence in Irish classrooms.

Challenges to engaging with media education in Irish primary schools

Teacher A highlighted that time was a barrier to teaching media education, stating that, due to 'how heavily loaded the curriculum is, it isn't possible to actually spend any more time on it'.

Time and an overcrowded curriculum were also identified as challenges to teaching media education by the other interviewees. For example, Teacher C emphasised that an overloaded curriculum presents a challenge: 'there's an awful lot of things to do in the classroom now. Every subject is overloaded'.

Furthermore, Teacher D asserted that, due to an overloaded curriculum, 'it's up to kind of teacher preference' to incorporate it into the classroom timetable, while Teacher A also reported that 'the onus is on the teacher to integrate it'.

The major challenges to teaching media education highlighted were the lack of time and an overloaded curriculum. The general consensus suggests that media education is treated as a soft subject that struggles to find time due to an overloaded curriculum.

Introducing logic as a tool to help children become media literate
Initially, the researcher provided the participants with a definition of logic relevant to this research. In response, Teacher A asserted that, 'we need to teach children to be critical thinkers; and this logic, it would, it would really help them'.

Teacher B also affirmed that 'this critical…critical analysing or critical reasoning would be an excellent thing to teach them'.

Notably, Teacher C stressed that engagement with logic could mitigate the influence that media has on children, and further noted the necessity for children to have the ability to 'read advertisements, and to read social media accounts, and to read all of these things, and not always take things for granted'.

Teacher D affirmed that 'it would really help' and 'even like that more emphasis could be put on critical thinking'. This perspective was also shared by Teacher E who explained:

> Children do need to be taught hardcore, critical thinking skills like that. They need to be taught appropriateness around arguments and around thinking for themselves and being able to think in isolation and been able to think independently.

Overall, the consensus among the participants was that engagement with logic would help children to develop critical thinking skills; consequently, helping children to become media literate.

Discussion

Current status of media literacy in Irish primary schools

Most of the responses from the participants indicated a lack of awareness regarding media literacy. This finding corresponds to Kupiainen's (2010) assertion that teachers are lacking both awareness and training in media

literacy education. This lack of awareness and engagement with media literacy stems from an overcrowded curriculum (O'Neill and Barnes, 2008). All participants described the overburdened curriculum as a barrier to engaging with media education. This corresponds with O'Neill's (2000) assertion that media literacy education in Irish schools is not being assigned the significance that it has been given internationally.

Children's engagement with media literacy is dependent on the individual teacher's willingness to utilise the limited opportunities within the formal curriculum (Barnes et al., 2007). Participants reported that it is the responsibility of teachers to integrate media education into other subject areas. Overall, the importance of media literacy is not recognised by the Irish primary school curriculum (O'Neill and Barnes, 2008).

The influence of the media on children in Irish primary schools

The influence that the media has on children is rapidly increasing (Livingstone and Bovill, 2002; Rantala, 2011). Participants' responses firmly corresponded to this assertion. Participants emphasised the extent to which children are influenced by the media; from the clothes that they wear, the language that they use and the information that they believe. The data indicated that children's lives are centred around media and internet use. This finding underlines the relevance of Mallon's (2018) assertion that the development of media literacy skills should be integrated into children's formal education.

Easily accessible information increases the influence of the media and presents challenges in filtering reliable information from the false (Mallon, 2018). This assertion corresponds to reports from participants that children struggle to distinguish between factual and false information in the media. This suggests the importance of addressing the impact of media influence on children's lives.

The current approach to media education in Irish primary schools

Participants reported that engagement with media education is dependent on teacher preference, resulting in a lack of commonality in children's experiences. This may be due to the fragmented implementation through cross-curricular non-media subject areas as described by Barnes et al. (2007).

Some participants affirmed that they were not aware of the current approach to media education, or whether there was one currently present. However, all participants reported that the primary focus of media education is online safety. This finding corresponds with the assertion that due to the growth in media use amongst children, media education has focused on children's personal safety and privacy (Barnes et al., 2007; Snyder et al., 2011). This emphasis on online safety indicates that media literacy has been overlooked in Irish primary education.

Challenges to engaging with media education in Irish primary schools

Media education is regarded as a soft subject as a result of an overcrowded curriculum (O'Neill and Barnes, 2008), which corresponds with participants' affirmations that an overcrowded curriculum and lack of time are barriers to engaging with media education. All participants asserted that, ideally, more time should be spent engaging with media education. This lack of time as a consequence of an overcrowded curriculum has resulted in engagement with media education being dependent on individual teacher's classroom priorities.

Opinions on introducing logic to the classroom from Irish primary teachers

Although the Irish primary curriculum includes the development of critical thinking skills, most participants asserted that more emphasis should be put on the development of these skills. This research considers whether the philosophical area of logic may potentially help children develop these skills.

Developing critical thinking and reasoning skills is fundamental to children's development (White, 2012) — an assertion that corresponds to the participants' affirmations that children need to be taught hardcore critical thinking skills. All participants asserted that logic, as defined by the researcher, would help children develop the ability to think critically. Responses from the participants indicated that teachers would be willing to introduce logic into the classroom. Some participants did note that, although logic would benefit children's ability to think critically, the overcrowded curriculum and lack of time would be a barrier to its introduction into the classroom. Furthermore, most participants commented that training or guidelines in this area would be needed.

Logic as a support to help children become media literate

Findings from the collected data and literature both suggest the necessity for children to learn how to be critical in relation to the media. Media literacy develops the skills necessary to engage with media critically in order to become informed and to mitigate influence (Tanriverdi and Apak, 2010). Participants reported that teaching children logic would enable them to think independently, decipher and curtail influence. Therefore, from the findings of both the collected data and literature, it may be that the integration of logic into the teaching of media literacy could help children develop the skills to become media literate.

The use of philosophy in primary education is primarily theoretical and, therefore, research on this area is scarce (White, 2012); this affirmation also applies to logic — it being an area of philosophy. Furthermore, findings from the participants are based on personal perspectives; notably, none of the participants have experience engaging with teaching logic in the classroom. This, along with the lack of literature, indicates a lack of research in the area of whether logic can be used to support media literacy development. More research will need to be conducted in order to facilitate further discussion.

Conclusion

Media influence on children is rapidly increasing (Rantala, 2011) — an assertion confirmed by participants. This suggests the need for children to become media literate; however, findings from the literature and participants outline the absence of media literacy in Irish primary schools. The findings also outline the necessity for children to develop critical thinking skills to mitigate media influence. Opinions from participants on teaching logic to develop critical thinking and media literacy skills were strongly positive.

Recommendations for future research and practical suggestions include:

- Conducting further research to investigate the scope and extent of media influence on children from the perspectives of children.
- The introduction of a flag initiative for media literacy, similar to the Green Flag initiative. This may stimulate interest in and raise awareness of media literacy.

- The provision of media literacy in-service days. These would raise awareness in the area of media literacy education and provide a forum where teachers could exchange and share resources and ideas.
- Conducting action research for future studies by providing participants with sample lessons. This would provide the opportunity to determine whether logic can be used in the classroom to enable children to become media literate.

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The Attitudes Towards the Teaching and Learning of Irish at Post-Primary Level in the Republic of Ireland

Sinéad de Buitléir

Biography

Sinéad de Buitléir is from Kilkenny and recently graduated from Hibernia College with a First Class Honours in the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Post-Primary Education. Prior to this, she completed a Bachelor of Arts in Irish and History at Trinity College, Dublin in 2012. Before undertaking the PME, Sinéad spent five years working as a primary teacher in a large international school in the Middle East, teaching children the curriculum of England. This experience of teaching children through their second language of English, along with her background in language, led to her research interest in language acquisition and attitudes. Sinéad is currently teaching Irish and History at Presentation Secondary School, Kilkenny.

The Attitudes Towards the Teaching and Learning of Irish at Post-Primary Level in the Republic of Ireland

Research supervisor: Mairéad Nic Suibhne

Abstract

This study explored the main attitudes that exist towards the teaching and learning of Irish at post-primary level in the Republic of Ireland. Data was collected within a single-sex, Catholic post-primary school. Drawing on a quantitative approach, the research employed the use of online questionnaires (n=40). A convenience sample of teaching staff was used as participants. The findings highlighted that identity, culture and prior experience with the Irish language influenced positive attitudes whereas the language's perceived usefulness, its compulsory nature and personal experience impacted negative views. The study recommendations focus on the reluctance to use the Irish language when competency and favourable attitudes are present.

Keywords: Irish language, attitudes, post-primary, teachers, students, quantitative research

Introduction

Irish is recognised as the first official language of Ireland according to Article 8.1 of the Irish Constitution and legislation concerning the Irish language has been primarily related to education (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2016). Consequently, the vast majority of the population who progressed through the Irish education system would have experienced studying the language and may possess opinions on it. With thousands of young people leaving school every year having completed the Irish examination to some level, students should have some degree of competency in the language. Furthermore, the attitudes of these students towards the teaching and learning of the subject would be beneficial for the future development of the language in the education system. Researching the prevailing attitudes towards the teaching and learning

of Irish is significant in the promotion and development of the language, particularly since the first exposure to the language of those outside the Gaeltacht is at school. Education is a key player in the revival of the Irish language (Watson and Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 2011). Investigating the attitudes towards the teaching and learning of the language will provide an insight into its future development. While much research has been carried out on the attitudes of the general public and primary school teachers towards the Irish language, there is little comprehensive research on the attitudes of post-primary teachers specifically. It is the intention of this study to investigate the attitudes of post-primary teachers towards the teaching and learning of Irish. In addition, the study seeks to determine what attitudes exist among post-primary level students towards the subject.

Literature Review

National surveys and census data provide a valuable insight into the public's position on the language. Earlier surveys carried out on the Irish language among the adult population of Ireland in 1973 (Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (CILAR), 1975), 1983 and 1994 (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin) reveal that a considerable majority of the respondents from the general public had a favourable attitude towards the language. The CILAR was set up in 1970 to examine the general public's support for Irish language policy (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Its 1973 survey found that the average person valued the language as a symbol of national identity but was pessimistic about the future of the language. A replicated survey, with fewer questions, was carried by Institúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann a decade later with similar findings regarding the national identity of the language and the Gaeltacht (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1984). The 1993 national survey yielded similar findings to its predecessors in attitudes to the Irish language. Surveys in the 21st century, such as the study of over 1,000 adults carried out in 2007–2008 by McGréil and Rhatigan (2009), found a continued positive support for the aspiration of the Irish language; 52% wished for the language to be preserved and over 40% wished for it to be revived. Interestingly, respondents were more appreciative of the language since leaving school.

The *Growing up* in Ireland study, conducted by the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) (2017), yielded significant results regarding 13 year olds' attitudes to the Irish language. It found that children who

liked the subject as a 9-year-old would strongly influence their attitude to the language at a later age. The study indicated that a young person's attitude to school impacted their attitude to Irish. Ó Cuinneagáin (2010) investigated 400 Leaving Certificate students on their attitudes to and motivation in the learning of Irish as a second language and German as a foreign language.

Interestingly, when the attitudes to the learning of Irish are compared to that of a foreign language, Ó Cuinneagáin found more positive results compared to the findings of the ESRI surveys. Students considered Irish as part of their cultural and national identity. However, Ó Cuinneagáin states that the positive attitudes that students possessed towards Irish did not necessarily mean they were positive about actually learning the language. Similar to the Post-primary longitudinal study (2014), girls were more positive towards language learning than boys.

The findings of a study carried out on the experiences of those becoming primary teachers and their views on the teaching of Irish reveal that, even with limited experience in the classroom, the student teachers recognise the challenges of teaching Irish at primary level (Dunne, 2019). One such challenge is the degree of blame that is placed on teachers for the low standards of Irish. The findings reveal the teachers' position in relation to the responsibility of promoting the language; that there should be more support from parents in passing Irish on to their children to nurture positive attitudes towards the language.

Through reviewing relevant literature, sub-questions emerged:

- What are the main attitudes towards the Irish language for those studying it at post-primary level?
- What are the main attitudes of post-primary teachers, including teachers of Irish, towards the language as a subject?
- Are there negative attitudes to the teaching and learning of the Irish language in Irish post-primary schools?

Methodology

The aim of this research was to investigate the attitudes to the teaching and learning of Irish at post-primary level. The collection of data for this research was mainly concerned with the attitudes of teachers due to the insufficient literature in this specific area, as previously noted. Therefore, the positivist approach was adopted through quantitative methods to uncover participants' attitudes and present it in numerical form. As proposed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.501), 'quantitative data analysis is a powerful research form emanating in part from the positivist tradition'. Considering the timeframe and the sample size for this study, quantitative methods were deemed to be the most suitable.

The objectives of this research fit into the quantitative approach; investigating the attitudes of teachers. The attitudes can be measured using numerical data from the online surveys. By incorporating quantitative research only and not utilising qualitative or mixed methods, the data gathered provides an insight into the attitudes of teachers using mainly closed questions, as is characteristic with quantitative surveys. This numerical data measures the attitudes of teachers. While closed questions are easier and quicker, there is a lack of expressiveness in responses (Oppenheim, 1992). Hence, qualitative features were included in the survey in the form of open-ended questions. This allowed participants to convey their perspectives more freely. This data further informed the research.

The use of questionnaires in quantitative studies are not exempt from drawbacks. The quality of the questions and the type of questions used can affect the responses of participants. If only closed questions are included, then the questionnaire may lack coverage of what is being investigated. If only open questions are used, then respondents might be unwilling to record their answer (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.158). If the questions are not easy to understand or they are too long, respondents may not complete it accordingly or at all. The wording of the questions in the survey for this study was carefully considered to avoid issues with reliability. Questions that are worded poorly or difficult to understand may undermine the reliability of the study (Connolly, 2007). The researcher employed both open and closed questions in the survey to ensure that there was sufficient scope.

The quantitative method chosen for this study comprised of gathering data by the use of online questionnaires. The questionnaires were piloted before they were administered to the sample being targeted. Three teachers who were not participating in the study piloted the questionnaire. This allowed the researcher to assess if the wording of the questions were clear for participants to interpret. All participants required for this study, were qualified teachers within the post-primary system in Ireland. The study was carried out in the researcher's Advanced SEPP school: a Catholic, single-sex school. The size of the teaching staff provided the researcher with valuable access to participants for the survey. This was particularly true for obtaining teachers of Irish to participate in the study as there were three additional questions exclusively for them to complete. A convenience sampling approach was used to gather participants. This approach was selected over other methods due to the timeframe of the study and the accessibility of teachers. As Bryman (2012, p.201) states, 'a convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility'. The researcher acknowledges the limitations of this method and so the findings will not generalise the population of teachers as a whole, but describe the sample used in this study.

Findings

The researcher has prioritised presenting findings that are relevant to the research objectives: the attitudes to Irish as a school subject, participants' personal enjoyment of learning Irish and the attitudes of Irish language teachers to the subject.

Irish as a School Subject

A majority of participants expressed clear support for the language to be compulsory for all primary level students. Of the respondents, 57.5% strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed with the statement, 'All primary school students should learn Irish as a subject.' Only 5% disagreed with it. However, the responses to the following statement, 'All post-primary school students should learn Irish as a subject', was more varied.

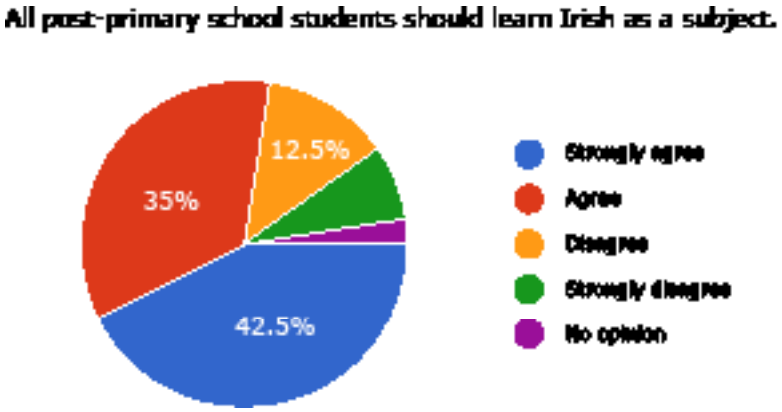

Figure 1: Participant responses to Irish as a compulsory subject for all students at post-primary level.

The dominant reason that was expressed by those who were in favour of Irish remaining as a compulsory subject was that of Irish identity. Seventeen respondents referred to 'national', "culture", "identity" or "heritage" in their answers. They felt the mandatory nature of the subject is important in order to retain Irish heritage and culture for future generations. One respondent expressed the importance of keeping the language alive through the education system. However, respondents overwhelmingly disagreed that the education system alone could keep the language alive.

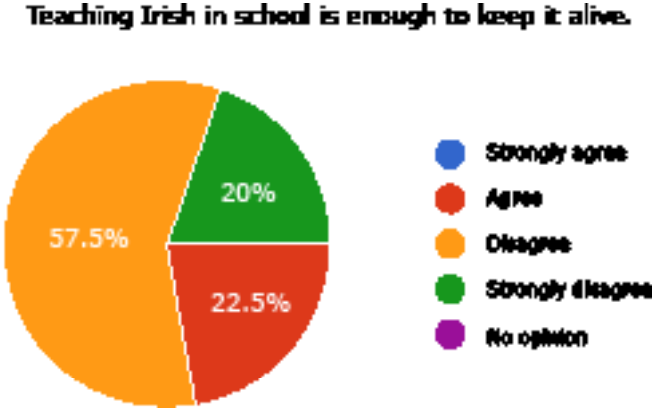

Figure 2: Participant responses to keeping Irish alive through teaching it in schools.

Some respondents who agreed with all post-primary students studying Irish highlighted the need for the curriculum and the teaching of the subject to be reformed. Creating two different courses at senior-cycle level was suggested; a compulsory, conversational language module and an optional, literature-based module. It was noted by one respondent that the teaching of Irish could be transformed and modelled on the approach that is currently taken in the teaching of modern foreign languages.
A total of 20% of respondents were not in favour of all post-primary students studying Irish. Those in this category expressed reasons such as its value and its use as a subject for students once they leave school. One respondent noted, 'It should be a choice. Not everyone will use Irish in their life.' The forced learning of the subject was considered by another respondent as generating resistance towards it.

Enjoyment of Learning Irish

The vast majority of respondents (97.5%) studied Irish to Leaving Certificate level. One theme that was common across respondents' answers was the enjoyment of the oral and conversation aspect of the subject. Some respondents noted that they did not possess much interest in the poetry and literature aspects of the course, but mainly the spoken language. However, considering the majority of respondents possess favourable attitudes towards the language and enjoyment in learning it, this does not translate into use of the language outside the education system. Many of the respondents' experience of learning the language at primary school influenced their attitudes towards the language at post primary and beyond. Teachers played an important role in fostering favourable attitudes towards learning the language. The passion and dedication of Irish teachers was highlighted as a reason for enjoying the subject as a student, with one respondent stating, 'My teacher had a big role in this and always tried to make it interesting when she could.' Respondents who did not view Irish as an enjoyable subject expressed reasons such as the difficulty of the subject, the content of the curriculum and the standards of teaching. Some respondents noted that they found the subject challenging due to the emphasis on rote learning and not on the language itself.

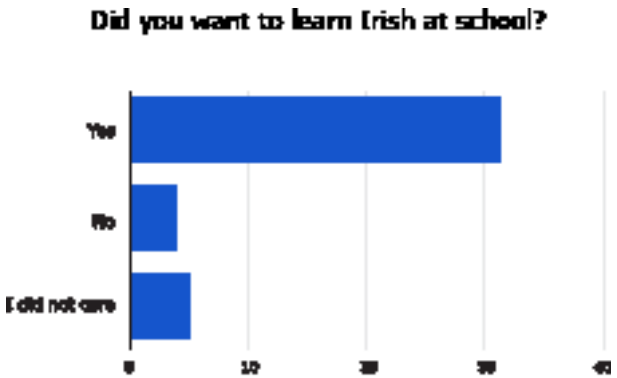

Figure 3: Participant desire to learn Irish at school

Attitudes of Teachers of Irish

Teachers of Irish expressed a range of challenges in the teaching of the subject. One of the main themes that arose from these answers was that of student competency in Irish as they enter secondary school. The level of Irish that students possess and their attitudes towards the subject is expressed by teachers as quite challenging. One respondent believes that students 'haven't been given a proper representation of the language in primary school and therefore instantly do not have an interest entering [secondary] school.' Another common challenge is the literature aspect of the Irish curriculum. Some respondents noted the difficulty in teaching poetry and prose to students with varying levels of competency in the language. Participants revealed similar responses towards student attitudes to Irish. Many respondents noted that the attitudes of students depended on the aspect of the curriculum being studied. Some indicated that students enjoy the spoken language but 'find the material that has to be covered boring/irrelevant to them.'

Discussion

The Irish Language as a Symbol of Identity and Culture

This study found that identity and culture played a significant role in favourable attitudes towards the Irish language. Over 80% of participants agreed that if Ireland did not have its native language that it would lose its identity as a separate culture. Additionally, it was expressed by participants in this study that in order to retain the Irish language for future generations, it was necessary to teach it at school. This

corroborates with national surveys carried out by CILAR (1975), Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1983; 1994) and Hickey (2008), that the majority of participants considered the language a symbol of their national identity and that identity and culture are closely related to how the Irish language is perceived.

Irish in the Education System

The findings from this study found that an overwhelming majority (77.5%) of respondents supported the inclusion of Irish in post-primary schools. The education system was highlighted as important for keeping the language alive. Similarly, the results from the national surveys, as referenced above, found that there was a majority support for maintaining Irish in the education system among the public. However, the 1993 survey (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin, 1993) found that although there was continued support for the Irish language in the school system, there was less support for the effectiveness of the policy. MacGréil and Rhatigan (2009) found, in a survey of over 1,000 adults, that 52% wished for the Irish language to be preserved and over 40% wished for it to be revived. Additionally, the study discovered that attitudes towards the Irish language can change over time. It found a change in attitudes towards the language since the respondents left school; over 42% were in favour of Irish at school compared to over 56% now. They found that respondents were more appreciative of the language since leaving school. The findings of this study did not yield such results as there was exclusively a focus on the present attitudes to the language. Therefore, it is an area that could be developed in future studies.

Use of the Irish Language

Positive attitudes towards the language does not translate to use of the language, as found by Ó Laoire (2006). Those who consider the language favourably may not necessarily use the language in their daily lives. These figures are reflected in the findings of the researcher's study. Of those surveyed, 37.5% stated that they use Irish less often outside the education system and 27.5% stated that they never use it. From the findings of this study and previous research, it is evident that while viewing the Irish language in a positive light and recognising its importance in the education system, there is a reluctance to use the language outside of the school setting.

Attitudes of Teachers and Students towards the Teaching and Learning of Irish

The research on the views of post-primary teachers of Irish is very limited. The body of research in this area is chiefly limited to the attitudes of primary teachers towards the teaching of Irish. Teachers of

Irish who were surveyed for this study presented a range of challenges in the teaching and learning of Irish. Competency in the language was highlighted as an obstacle in the learning process. The standard of Irish that students possessed as they entered secondary school was expressed as challenging to the teaching of the subject. Dunne (2015) also found that proficiency in the language was presented as a challenge for primary teachers. Primary teachers conveyed their lack of confidence in teaching Irish, especially when they compared themselves to native speakers of the language. However, this was not expressed by the post-primary teachers of Irish in the findings of the researcher's study.

The ESRI's (2017) Growing up in Ireland study found that a considerable percentage of children did not find Irish interesting and that the relationship a child had with their teacher influenced their views on the subject. These findings are comparable to the data obtained from the researcher's study. However, it must be noted that the researcher's study did not survey students; nevertheless, the teachers of Irish provided an insight into student attitudes. The researcher's study found (through the responses of teachers) that student attitudes can be varied depending on factors such as gender, school setting and prior experience of the subject. In contrast, some teachers of Irish revealed in the researcher's study that they have found student attitudes to be overall positive towards learning Irish. Ó Cuinneagáin (2010) found that the students surveyed held more positive attitudes towards learning Irish than they did for the modern foreign language, German. Likewise, students asserted that learning Irish was important for cultural and identity reasons being young Irish people.

Conclusion

The overall findings of the research revealed that the majority of post-primary teachers that were surveyed possessed a positive attitude towards the language, giving reasons such as the cultural importance of the language, its significance to Irish identity and their prior experience of learning the language. Data from previous published research echoed the findings of this research such as Hickey's (2008) national survey on language use and attitudes, which also found that there was a connection between the language and identity. In addition to positive attitudes, the findings revealed that some respondents held negative views towards the subject. Negativity towards the forced learning of the language at school and the usefulness of the subject was expressed.

The study investigated the attitudes of post-primary teachers and quantitative methods were used. Even though this survey had features of qualitative methods, the inclusion of interviews of teachers of Irish

may have proved valuable to the overall findings. As the importance of the Irish language in culture and identity of Ireland has been expressed throughout this research, there is scope to explore the reasons behind the reluctance to use the language when competency and positive attitudes are present. In addition, there is a gap in published literature in the area of post-primary attitudes to the teaching and learning of the language and a more structured study on both teacher and student perspectives would prove insightful. By gaining a comprehensive insight into the attitudes of both post-primary teachers and students, it could lead to development in the area of language attitudes and its use outside the classroom. Investigating student attitudes towards the language would allow development of teacher practice in the classroom.

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An Early Examination of the Application and Effectiveness of the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 in Post-Primary Schools

Niamh Mc Carry

Biography

Niamh Mc Carry recently graduated with First Class Honours in the Professional Master of Education (PME) in Post-Primary Education with Hibernia College and is currently teaching Science and Biology in a large community school in Dublin. Prior to teaching, Niamh undertook a BSc in Physiology in UCD and an MSc in Molecular Medicine in TCD. She subsequently worked in medical device and pharmaceutical companies for four years, which gave her the opportunity to gain invaluable insight and experience in innovative science. Niamh's passion for teaching, inspired by her mother who worked in education, combined with her love of science and working with young adolescents, compelled her to return to the classroom in a teaching capacity. Niamh has always had a strong interest in student wellbeing, having experienced little support in this regard in school. Her research study examined the early application and effectiveness of the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 in post-primary schools.

An Early Examination of the Application and Effectiveness of the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 in Post-Primary Schools

Research supervisor: Sarah Walshe

Abstract

This research examined early perspectives of teachers on the application and effectiveness of the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 in post-primary schools from September 2018 to date. Data was collected within two co-educational and two single-sex post-primary schools in the east of Ireland. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the research employed the use of interviews (n=2) and online questionnaires (n=27). Findings highlighted that student wellbeing was highly valued, but concerns existed regarding whole-school approaches, teacher training/support and use of evidence-informed initiatives. Project recommendations focus on professional development for teachers and further research on the processes involved in implementing school-wide interventions.

Keywords: Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 (WPSFP), student wellbeing, whole-school approach, training, support, collaboration

Introduction

In recent years, emphasis has been placed worldwide on mental health and wellbeing, particularly in relation to adolescents (Rochford et al., 2018; World Health Organisation (WHO), 2020). Significantly, Ireland has one of the highest rates of mental health illnesses in Europe (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission, 2018). School communities are recognised as highly influential contexts in which young adolescents can develop positive mental health and wellbeing. International research has shown

that a whole-school collaborative approach, using a wide range of evidence-informed interventions, can optimise student wellbeing (Ireland. Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2019). Consequently, school-wide approaches to embed positive changes for student wellbeing in school cultures and practices have been gaining increasing significance (Jones and Bouffard, 2012). Informed by international research and practice and relevant policies and guidelines, the DES introduced the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018–2023 (WPSFP). The aim of the WPSFP is to ensure that the experience of young people in post-primary schools 'will be one that enhances, promotes, values and nurtures their wellbeing' (Ireland. DES, 2019, p.5). It is expected that wellbeing promotion should be supported by evidence-informed approaches, appropriate to need, in a review and development cycle as part of a school self-evaluation (SSE) process by 2023. Within this context, this study set out to establish the early practices, views and experiences of teachers on the application and effectiveness of the WPSFP in four different post-primary school settings from September 2018 to date.

Literature Review

Historically, the term wellbeing is acknowledged to be a complex construct, making it difficult to accurately define and examine (Diener, 2009). In recent years, the topic of wellbeing has grown in significance with many researchers exploring its meaning and how it can be enhanced (Dodge et al., 2012). To try to encapsulate its meaning, the DES (2019, p.10) define wellbeing as follows:

> Wellbeing is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life.

Why examine wellbeing?

A recognition and real understanding of mental health and its direct association with wellbeing have been developed in recent years (Dodge et al., 2012). The promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing in young adolescents is a shared responsibility (Ireland. DES, Health

Service Executive (HSE) and Department of Health (DH), 2013). This knowledge has helped trigger a major reform in the Irish curriculum and in educational policies. A central policy arising from this is the WPSFP, a fundamental DES policy and framework, which seeks to promote student wellbeing at the core of every school's ethos and daily practices.

The importance of school environments

Piaget (1936) and Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the need for schools to recognise and understand the types of environments and situations that children and young adults need to develop positively in. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework of Human Development further places the school environment in the most influential category, the microenvironment, in terms of its impact on a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This implies that a school, and teachers, can significantly enhance a child's growth by adopting more supportive and nurturing relationships and interactions. In 2014, the OECD highlighted how school environments are key in facilitating development in young people by cultivating their cognitive, social and emotional skills (OECD, 2014).

Key roles of teachers and whole school interventions

Research has shown that student wellbeing is strongly linked to student outcomes and that student outcomes are directly associated with the quality of teacher-student relationships (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2017; Ireland. DES, 2019). International research highlights the importance of undertaking a whole-school, collaborative approach to initiatives undertaken to enhance student wellbeing (Glazzard, 2018). Significantly, Goldberg et al. (2019) highlight clearly how teachers and schools require ongoing professional development to advance their capacity for wellbeing learning and to support the integration and effectiveness of whole-school interventions. In addition to this training/support, it is also essential to consider teacher wellbeing as it is believed that 'there is little or no student well-being without educator well-being' (Hargreaves et al., 2018, p.12).

Key elements of the WPSFP

The five key principles of the WPSFP underpin a whole-school, multifaceted and preventative approach to wellbeing to address four key areas known to contribute to wellbeing. A significant addition/ change currently taking place in schools in Ireland is the extension of the SSE process to include a framework for wellbeing promotion (Ireland.

DES, 2016). In this, schools have a responsibility to identify their own targets and wellbeing promotion. This should be accomplished through consultation with the whole and wider school community.

Methodology

Elements of quantitative and qualitative approaches were integrated in this mixed-methods study to help corroborate and deepen the understanding of this research topic (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). This process focussed on the purposeful selection of four different post-primary schools, two mixed-sex schools and two single-sex schools of boys and girls.

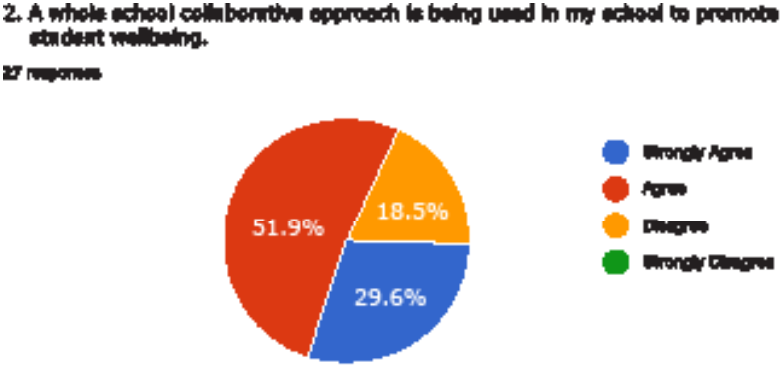
Quantitative data, in the form of questionnaires, was collected from 27 teacher participants using 14 closed-ended questions. The variety of roles undertaken by participants in schools, and the consequent broader range of perspectives, was deemed fundamental in considering sample selection. Consequently, participant teachers included school management, a guidance counsellor, a school chaplain and wellbeing coordinators. Qualitative structured and semi-structured interviews were further employed with two participants as a second method of data collection to try to triangulate the data and to gain a range of varying answers to the phenomenon discussed (Bell, 2010). To help ensure accuracy, 'member checking' was undertaken (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.314). This process, also known as 'respondent validation', is key to helping ensure data credibility (Torrance, 2012, p.5). The researcher was aware of the limitations of the size of this study's design, the need for care in the analysis and interpretation of data (Bazeley, 2010) and the impact of researcher bias and reflexivity on the study (Malterud, 2001).

Findings

Overwhelmingly, the findings of this study found that participating teachers are aware of the active implementation of the WPSFP in schools and agree that student wellbeing is key to student success in terms of academic outcomes and healthy development. However, four key findings of concern emerged when coding was conducted on responses from 27 participants from a questionnaire and two additional participants from interviews. Significantly, the range of roles occupied by participating

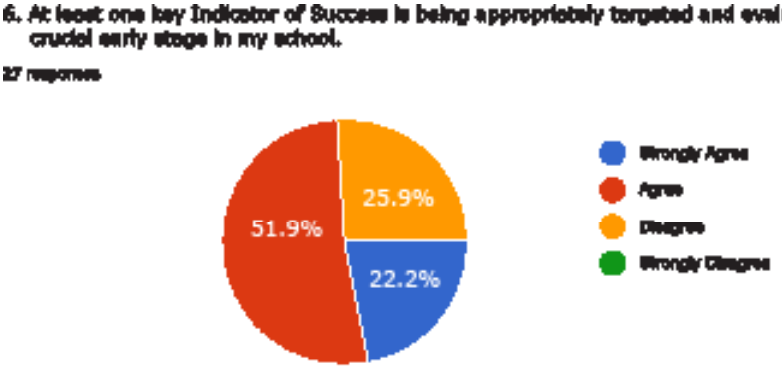
teachers in schools, including school management, a guidance counsellor, school chaplain and wellbeing coordinators, was as representative of the school population as possible to be able to draw generalisations from the data gathered (Bell, 2010).

A whole school approach to wellbeing

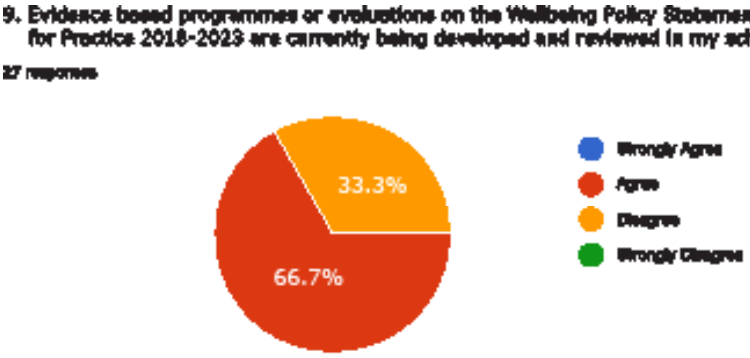


All participants (n=5) who disagreed with this statement came from one school, indicating contrasting approaches in schools to the promotion and support of student wellbeing. One interviewee spoke of the range and rate of significant educational change that is occurring at the moment in schools and how 'the synchronicity between all of those different agendas hasn't necessarily happened'. Clearly, though student wellbeing is highly prioritised, sustained work remains to embed this in a whole-school approach.

Indicators of Success and evaluations

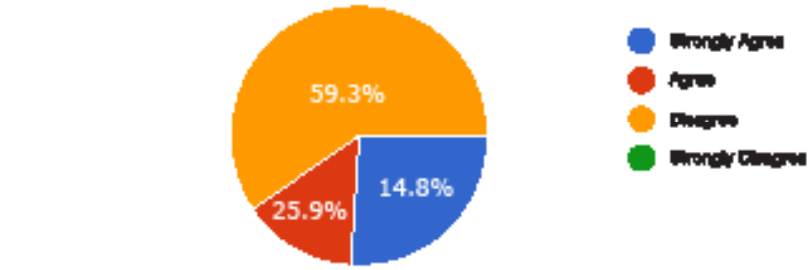


This contradictory data would question if teachers are being involved in whole-school collaboration and evaluation at this point. Let us further consider an additional question that was asked in this area.



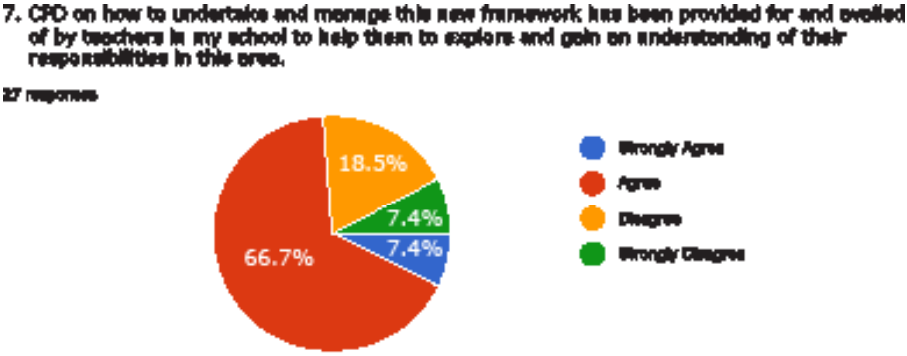
This data suggests that evidence-based programmes or evaluations focused on the WPSFP are not widely known to be in development or review by participating teachers. In interview, one participating teacher stated that, in terms of formal evaluation of wellbeing provisions and practices, 'we are not at that stage yet', while the second interview participant stated, 'it hasn't been something that has been a core focus for us at the moment'.

Competing demands and teacher capacity



This data reveals how a significant proportion of teachers have serious concerns that the WPSFP framework will be fully and effectively implemented in their schools. Both participating teachers, in interview, expressed clear concerns about teacher capacity in terms of current workload at this time and, consequently, about the practicalities of fully implementing the WPSFP in their school setting. One interviewee spoke of so much change currently occurring in education that wellbeing 'only occupies one small space' in crowded, competing agendas, which detract from whole-school focus in developing the WPSFP. These agendas include the daily running of the school, academic programme reforms, 'and now COVID-19'. Significantly, both participants, in interview, absolutely agreed that teacher wellbeing is essential to student wellbeing while one participant stated that there is not enough support for teacher wellbeing at this time.

Training and support for teachers



Of all the questions asked, this was the most diverse in terms of participants' responses. Disagreement occurred between teachers in three out of four schools, highlighting differences in their experiences/opinions. In interviews, both participants confirmed that, to date, teacher training and support on student wellbeing, not specifically attributed to the WPSFP, has been provided internally by their schools. One of these two participants, who has been extensively involved on a national level in providing continuing professional development (CPD) on wellbeing, has availed of external training and has continued to assist with internal CPD in her own school. This evidence suggests the range of training and support available to teachers on this framework is variable and, essentially, localised at school level.

Discussion

At the time of this study, the implementation of the WPSFP had been underway in schools for approximately eighteen months. This study sought to establish the early application and effectiveness of the WPSFP to date. The findings presented from this research will now be considered and clearly linked to relevant literature outlined earlier in this study.

A whole-school approach to wellbeing

Participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that student wellbeing is key to success in terms of academic outcomes and healthy development, and almost totally agreed that student voices are heard in the culture and ethos of their individual schools. This research also found that all participants were aware of the active implementation of the WPSFP. However, a significant divergence occurred when participants were asked to respond if their schools were using a whole-school, collaborative approach to promote and support student wellbeing, which is most influential in terms of impact on a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Weare and Gray, 2003). Significant concerns were raised by all teachers from one school who disagreed that such an approach was taking place while the competition of crowded agendas and the volume of changing policies/practices was raised in one other school. Despite the significance of a whole-school approach to enhancing student wellbeing (Jones and Bouffard, 2012; Barry, Clarke and Dowling, 2017), this research notes that there is already a gap between this vision and the day-to-day reality of practices in Irish post-primary schools at this early stage of implementing the WPSFP.

Indicators of Success and evaluations

The vision and ambition of the WPSFP is to build on existing good practice to optimise student outcomes in a whole-school setting (Ireland. DES, 2019). It outlines four broad outcomes to which the DES aspires schools to achieve, identified as Indicators of Success, which act as a set of standards for whole-school wellbeing provisions. Schools are required to evaluate these in their SSE process by 2023 (Ireland. DES, 2016). This process of continual review and evaluation is essential to realise optimum long-term outcomes for students (Barry, Clarke and Dowling, 2017). However, this research found that while most participants agreed that one key Indicator of Success was now being appropriately targeted and

evaluated, contradictory responses emerged from each school. When asked if evidence-based programmes or evaluations on the WPSFP were underway, one third of respondents disagreed. If a whole-school approach to promote change is to be developed and sustained in the long term, more effort is needed in collaborating, supporting and applying evidence-based interventions (Wandersman and Florin, 2003).

Competing demands and teacher capacity

While sourcing participants for this study, it was clear that the availability of teacher time was an issue. The prevalence of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic also created significant challenges. One interviewee spoke of the WPSFP as a 'new framework being brought in, yes, another one' while another spoke of school management having 'a responsibility to their staff to ensure that they are not overwhelmed' when asking teachers to do more. Barry, Clarke and Dowling (2017) highlight if school-based actions are to be optimised then attention needs to be focused on the circumstances in which they are delivered and embedded in school settings. Significantly, research supports how greatly teachers' wellbeing impact not only on themselves, their students and the school environment, but in strengthening links between student wellbeing and academic achievement (Hargreaves et al., 2018; Ireland. DES, 2019).

Training and support for teachers

The powerful influence of a young person's school environment has long been highlighted by behavioural and social learning theorists such as Watson (1928), Skinner (1965) and Bandura (1971). However, at a practice level, if the changes aspired to by the WPSFP are to be realised, clear guidance and support for teachers must be ensured and provided for. Studies have shown that developing professional skills in teachers not only improves a teacher's wellbeing and capacity but works positively on school practices promoting wellbeing and achievement (Hargreaves et al., 2018). The question of CPD provision in this study elicited the most diverse answers and concern in terms of participants' feedback. When participants were asked if there are serious concerns at this early stage in implementing the WPSFP, a disquieting two fifths agreed with this statement. Clearly, if the vision of this policy and framework is to be optimised, change is required. This includes examining competing demands and, as noted by Goldberg et al. (2019, p.774), ensuring the ongoing professional development of teachers' expertise and skills 'to support the integration and sustainability of whole school interventions'.

Conclusion

This research provided some very positive findings noting all participants were aware of the implementation of the WPSFP, highly valued and supported student wellbeing and agreed many different practices are underway in schools to support this. Key concerns were raised, however, in this research. These included serious concerns about the development of a whole-school, collaborative approach in individual schools (Jones and Bouffard, 2012) and how failure to have appropriate CPD may undermine the ultimate effectiveness of the WPSFP (Goldberg et al., 2019). Finally, further concerns were expressed about managing multiple changes in educational practices and having insufficient teacher time and focus to engage fully with new interventions (Barry, Clarke and Dowling, 2017). Limitations of this study included (1) a relatively small sample size of 27 questionnaire participants and 2 interviewees; (2) all participants came from the one geographical area; (3) participants were selected based on their willingness to participate; (4) this researcher would not necessarily have the expertise of multiple researchers in a wider study (Johnson and Christensen, 2014); and (5) lack of representation of student voice due to Hibernia College ethical guidelines.

This research highlighted recommendations for future practice and research. The need for wider and more focused CPD to support whole-school, collaborative approaches might include mobile in-service meetings, an online teacher forum allowing teachers to support each other, creating geographical hubs of schools to create centres of learning and sharing of good practice. Additionally, teachers need to be assigned time and provided with a range of tools to effectively engage with the WPSFP. Finally, further studies should take place of processes which optimise implementation of school-wide interventions.

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Teachers' Perspectives of the Challenges Faced When Facilitating English as an Additional Language Student at Post-Primary Level

Louise Flood

Biography

Louise Flood is currently a post-primary school teacher in Dublin working with students with special educational needs and learners with English as an additional language. She received a bachelor's degree in business from Dublin Institute of Technology and a master's degree in post-primary education from Hibernia College. She taught English as a foreign language in the private sector in Dublin for five years. She also spent time teaching English abroad before undertaking her master's. This sparked her interest in English as an additional language (EAL) learners in mainstream education, integration and inclusive education in a post-primary setting.

Teachers' Perspectives of the Challenges Faced When Facilitating English as an Additional Language Student at Post-Primary Level

Research supervisor: Maria Mulrooney

Abstract

Large-scale migration into Ireland has increased the number of students with English as an additional language (EAL) in post-primary schools. This study aimed to examine teacher perceptions about the challenges and supports in place for teaching EAL students. Using a questionnaire (N = 28) and semi-structured interviews (N = 2), two key themes emerged: 1) teacher training and support for teachers; and 2) learning and teaching strategies. These themes are discussed, with emphasis being placed on the need to create a truly inclusive environment where all students are afforded the same opportunity for educational success.

Keywords: Inclusion, diversity, integration, English as an additional language (EAL), English as a second language (ESL), migration, immigrants.

Literature Review

According to the Department of Education and Skills (DES), over 48,000 'newcomer' students of 160 nationalities were enrolled in schools in Ireland in 2008. Approximately 60% (or 28,800) do not have English as a first language (Oireachtas, 2008, p.7), and there is an achievement gap between EAL students and native-speaking students (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2009). It is crucial that EAL students can access the curriculum and integrate fully. Developing their language skills is an important part of this process (Culleton, 2004). Teachers are an important contributory factor to student achievement, and it is essential they have the knowledge, skills and competence to address the diverse needs of EAL students. This will ensure that equality and inclusion are actively implemented and not just promoted as ideals.

Students from minority language backgrounds have less successful educational experiences than their peers (OECD, 2006; European Commission, 2008; McGinnity, 2011). Of the 56,526 post-primary school students (aged eleven to eighteen years) who speak a foreign language at home, 5.5% cannot speak English 'well' or 'at all' (CSO, 2017a, p.56). In Ireland, there is an achievement gap between students who speak English at home and those who do not (OECD, 2009, p.9). Findings from research in Ireland show that migrant students are much 'less likely to take higher level subjects in their Junior Certificate examinations than their peers' (Ledwith, 2015, p.24).

Inclusive education must examine the ways our schools, classrooms, programmes and lessons are designed so that all students can participate. Ensuring that migrants have the opportunity to learn the host country's language can safeguard a more socially cohesive society.

Limited guidance on supporting EAL learners is given to schools in Ireland. Circular 0013/2017 states that schools should use their special educational needs teaching supports to support students with EAL (DES, 2017, p.21). According to the DES (2012, p.5), 'Initial teacher education is probably the most important factor in having a well-performing public education system'. However, the teacher training system in Ireland has been criticised as providing unsatisfactory preparation for post-primary school teachers (Eurydice, 2009). Although the teaching methodologies used in EAL classrooms are 'effective' in the majority of lessons, a DES report found no school showed consistently high-quality EAL support (DES, 2012, p.32). Lyons (2010) found the lack of in-service training was a key concern amongst teachers, who highlighted a shortfall of collaboration among specialist language support and mainstream teachers. It is therefore crucial that teachers are using consistent, effective teaching methods to support ESL/EAL students.

Lack of diversity amongst Irish teachers may impact the educational outcomes of EAL learners. Research on Initial teacher training in Ireland (2013–14) showed that 96% of trainee teachers were white, Irish and predominantly middle class (Kean and Heinz, 2015, p.295). A demographic match between teacher and students can have a positive effect on grades, attendance and behaviour (Gershenson et al., 2018). There is a discrepancy between the diverse student population and the homogenous teacher profile of Irish schools (O'Sullivan, 2019).

In order to provide equal opportunity to EAL students, we must apply pedagogical strategies that lend themselves to an inclusive classroom and which are appropriate in terms of the students' language learning needs (Davies, 2012). Teachers often have lower expectations for EAL learners. This, along with the lack of modification of teaching strategies and instruction to accommodate students' needs, can result in students being low achievers (Zetlin et al., 2011). It is important to recognise the importance of a student's primary language. For example, learning keywords and phrases in students' language helps to value and affirm these languages. This type of intercultural approach not only fosters a more inclusive and welcoming environment for EAL students, but also builds on their self-esteem (IILT, 2006; Dong, Randall and Collaco, 2008), which improves educational attainment.

There is a scarcity of research into subject teachers' perspectives on EAL provision within the Irish education system. Without knowing how subject teachers feel about teaching EAL students in mainstream education, we cannot devise strategies to improve the teaching of EAL students. The aim of this study is to examine the views of post-primary education teachers on their ability to teach EAL students. The results of this study can be used to devise strategies to integrate EAL students and improve the curriculum for teacher training within Ireland so that it focuses more on effective EAL teaching practice.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used. Firstly, a questionnaire was designed to investigate how teachers felt about different elements of facilitating EAL learners and how supported they felt by the school in meeting the needs of EAL students in their classroom. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with two respondents to gain further insights into the nuances of accommodating EAL learners in the classroom.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was generated using Google Forms and was distributed to all seventy teachers in the Advanced SEPP school via staff email. The questions began with demographic information followed by closed questions and Likert scales to gauge respondents' opinions and feelings. The final question was open-ended. All responses were anonymised.

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone. Open-ended questions were asked to allow respondents to speak freely about their own experiences of teaching EAL students.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire results were analysed and visually conveyed using graphs, charts and descriptive statistics. Bivariate analysis was used to show the relationship between the length of teaching experience and teachers' attitudes and opinions toward different outcome variables, such as their attitude toward the support provided by the school regarding EAL students.

Interviews were recorded on the researcher's password-encrypted laptop. Each interview was then transcribed into Microsoft Word. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes.

The data from both the questionnaires and interviews were triangulated for discussion and evaluation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained in September 2019 by Hibernia College's Ethics Committee prior to the beginning of this research. The study was conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011).

Findings

The questionnaire was sent to 70 teachers, of which 28 responded (40%); the majority were female (61%). The mean number of years teaching was 9.8 years (SD = 8.9, median = 7). Most respondents were born in Ireland (93%) and all of them were native English speakers.

The most common subject taught was English (6 teachers reported English as their main subject). This was followed by Science (4 teachers). Figure 4 shows the main teaching subject for each respondent.

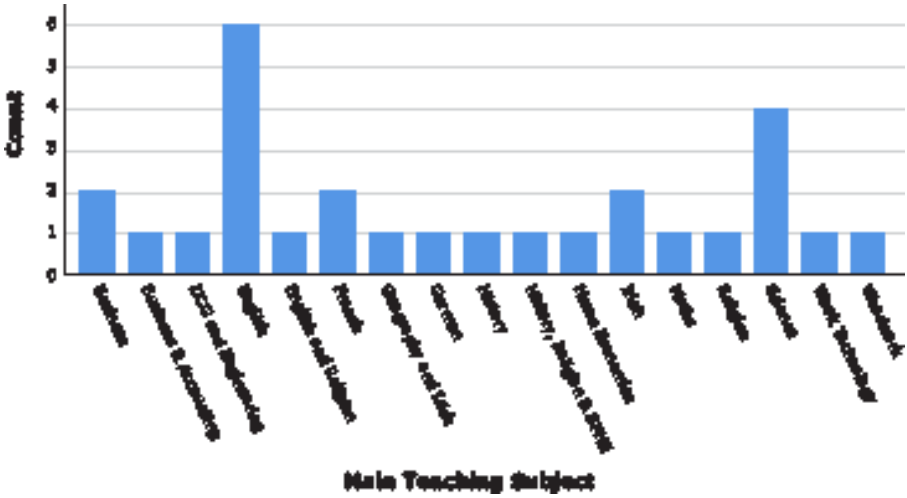

Figure 1: Teaching subjects of respondents

The two semi-structured interviews were conducted separately with one male teacher and one female teacher. Both taught different subjects and had varying levels of teaching experience. In line with general data protection regulations, these two interviewees have been given pseudonyms — Frank and Lisa.

Two themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews:

1. Teacher training, CPD and support for teachers
2. Learning and teaching strategies for EAL learners

Theme One: Teacher Training, CPD and Support for Teachers

When asked if they had received training on how to facilitate EAL students in their classroom, 75% of the teachers responded that they had never received any form of training. (see Figure 2 for the correlation between the respondents' opinions and their years of teaching experience)

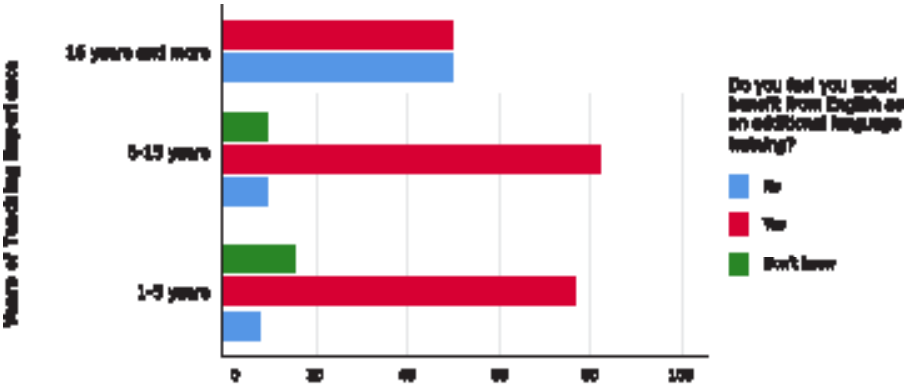

Figure 2: Relationship between respondents' experience and whether they feel they would benefit from EAL training

Both interviewees stated they had not received any training within their current school. Lisa commented, 'I think the only CPD session I have had on EAL learners was a two-hour session we had in college'. Frank had received no training from the school and only a small amount of training on differentiation more generally. Frank commented that he would like to see more EAL training as part of the Professional Master of Education or the Droichead programmes.

Both suggested that schools use Croke Park hours to deliver teacher training. Frank suggested training on basic tools and strategies that would help EAL learners, including the use of keyword notebooks and technology for translation (incorporating students' first language), and teachers adapting the speed and intonation of their speech.

Both the quantitative and qualitative research found that teachers felt that more support was required with regards to teaching EAL students in post-primary education in Ireland (see Figure 3).

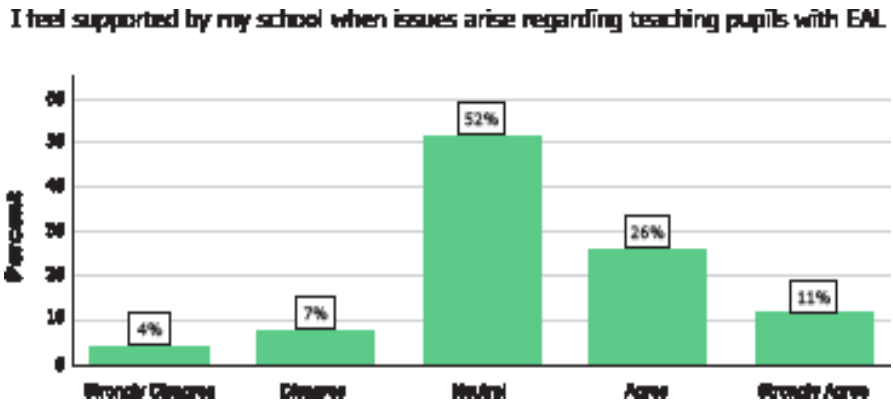

Figure 3: How supported by the school respondents feel when issues regarding EAL arise

Figure 4 shows the relationship between respondents' years of experience and how supported they felt by the school when issues regarding EAL arose.

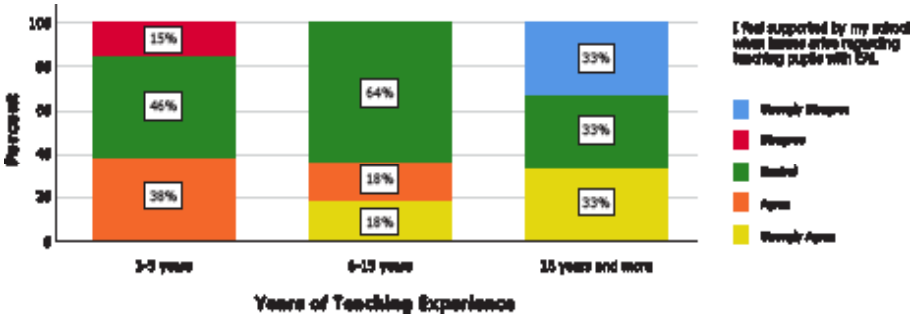

Figure 4: Relationship between respondents' years of experience and how supported they feel by the school when issues regarding EAL arise

Most of the respondents were neutral with regards to how satisfied they were with the level of support they received from their school (see Figure 5).

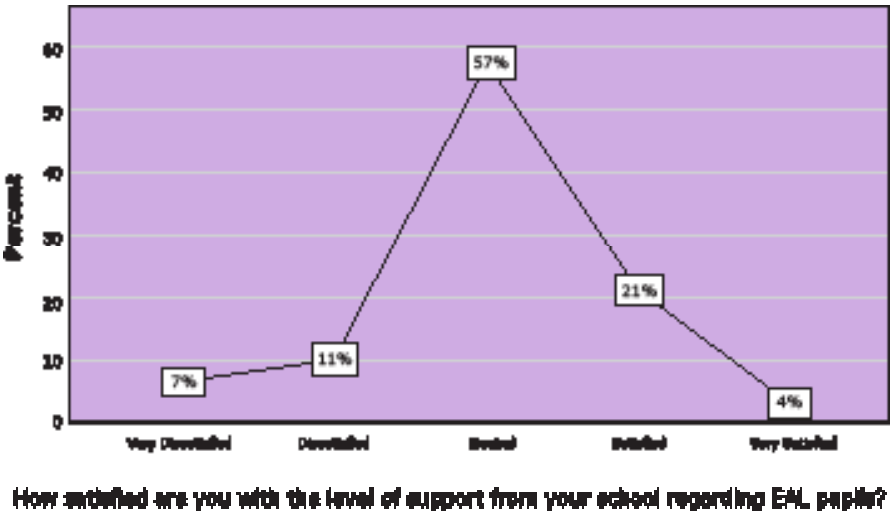

Figure 5: How satisfied respondents are with the overall level of support from the school regarding EAL

Figure 6 shows the relationship between respondents' years of experience and how satisfied they are with the overall support by the school regarding EAL students. Respondents with 16 years or more teaching experience were the most dissatisfied.

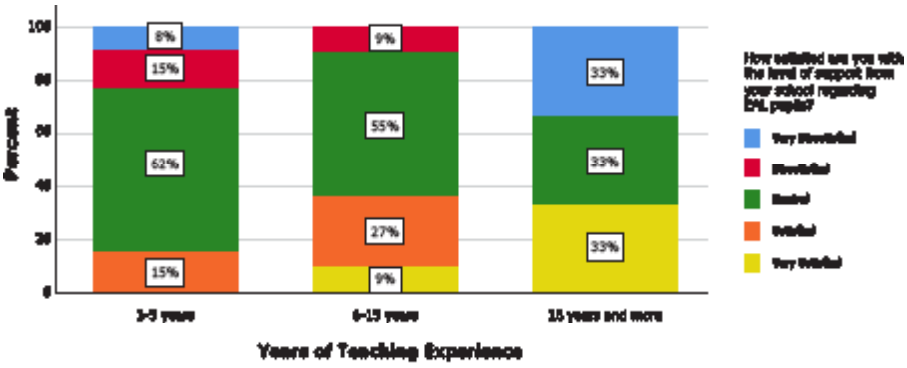

Figure 6: The relationship between respondents' years of experience and how satisfied they are with the overall support by the school regarding EAL students

In the questionnaires, teachers were invited to make any other comments that they felt were relevant. A Science teacher commented that, in her experience, EAL students found Science 'extremely difficult' and stated: I feel I have not been approached by anyone about how best to help them. I think teachers of these students should be given advice regularly on how best to help these students.

Another teacher mentioned that teachers are not 'formally made aware of EAL students that might be in their class'. This point was reiterated by both respondents during interviews.

Theme Two: Learning and Teaching Strategies for EAL Learners

Approximately two-thirds of respondents agreed that EAL students find the syllabus difficult to understand (Figure 7), and over half of the teachers found it difficult to explain the curriculum to EAL students (see Figure 8).

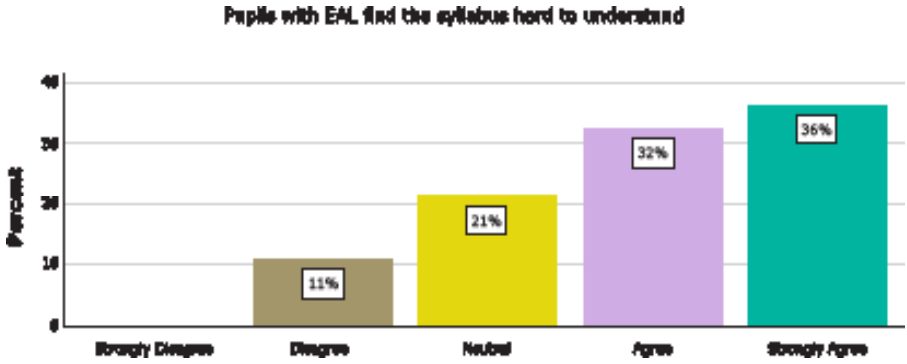

Figure 7: Respondents' perspectives on how difficult it is for EAL students to understand the syllabus

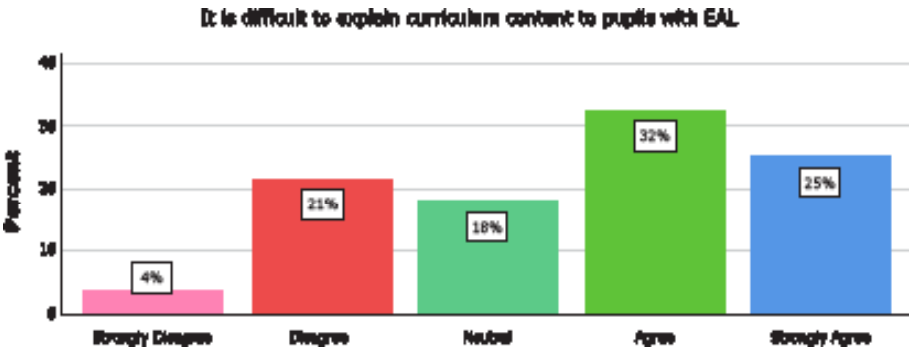

Figure 8: Respondents' perspectives on how difficult it is to explain the curriculum to EAL students

Half of the respondents reported that they found it difficult to assess the knowledge of students with EAL (see Figure 9).

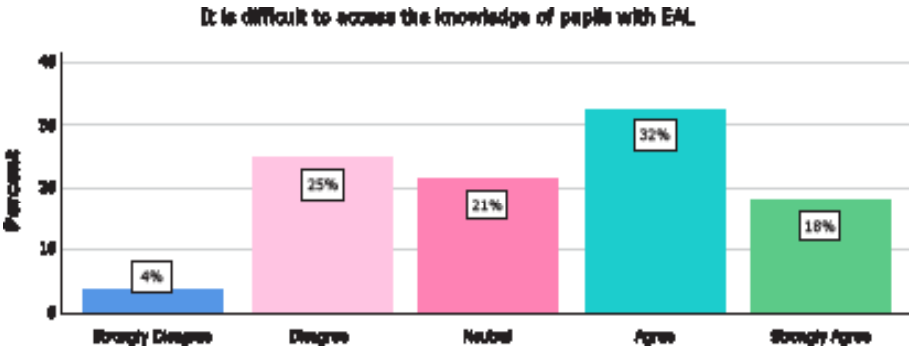

Figure 9: Respondents' responses as to whether assessing EAL students is difficult

Frank and Lisa were asked about the learning and teaching strategies they use to help EAL learners in their classroom. They both mentioned the use of technology.

Technology

Both used technology to support EAL learners in their classrooms and found it to be a great tool. Frank felt that 'technology has a big role' and 'can be a great leveller'. He noted that it can be of 'really great assistance

for these students where you know they might have the knowledge' and are just 'struggling to articulate it'. Frank found translation applications as well as Immersive Reader to be great resources for these learners. Lisa mentioned that she relied heavily on Google Translate to communicate with EAL students.

Other Differentiation Strategies

Frank and Lisa used similar and different strategies to accommodate their EAL learners. Lisa usually has a separate handout in 'very basic English' to help support her EAL students. In England, Lisa was allocated extra hours so she could provide extra tuition to her EAL students outside of class time, but this is not the case in her current school. Frank used a variety of differentiation strategies, such as pairing an EAL student with another student with a good command of the English language and who also speaks their native language to help them settle in. Frank also asked students to write in their native language and then to translate it. He suggested getting students to keep a keyword copybook differentiating work for EAL learners by having some words on the worksheet explained in their own language.

Assessment

Both teachers felt that EAL students really struggled, particularly at Leaving Certificate level. Lisa commented on one student who was doing Ordinary Level 'because she wouldn't be able for the English side of things'. Similarly, Frank shared concerns about the rigid nature of the senior-cycle curriculum and how some EAL students 'really struggle'. Both interviewees believe the new curriculum to be more inclusive.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how teachers are facilitating the growing numbers of EAL students in their classrooms and to investigate their perspectives on the challenges involved in doing so. The research findings identified two key themes: 1) the need for training and support for teachers regarding EAL; and 2) teaching and learning for EAL students.

Pre-service teacher training does not incorporate the 'new multilingual paradigm', leaving teachers with 'misconceptions' about best practice learning and teaching methodologies for EAL students (Martí and Portolés,

2020, p.248). Both interviewees highlighted that initial teacher training programmes directed little attention to EAL. This reiterates that a lack of in-service training is a key concern amongst teachers (Lyons, 2010). Teachers ought to engage in CPD to adapt, upskill and make changes to their classroom practice for the benefit of students (Van der Heijden et al., 2015, p.68), but the majority of teachers want more CPD than they receive (Shiel, Perkins and Gilleece, 2009).

Most respondents in this study (74%) felt that they would benefit from EAL training. Teachers with less experience believed they would benefit more from training than teachers with more experience. Teachers with more teaching experience may feel more confident in their ability to teach EAL students. However, it could be that these teachers attended EAL training in the past and did not find it beneficial. Therefore, it may not be that these teachers do not feel they would benefit from the additional training, but that the training is not effective. This is something the Irish Government has made a commitment to change (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, p.26). As Irish schools become more diverse, it is important that more CPD is provided to enable teaching staff to build their capability and resources when teaching EAL students.

Over half of respondents (52%) were 'neutral' with regards to how satisfied they were with the level of support regarding EAL students. This denotes either a state of ambivalence or a lack of knowledge. More experienced teachers were less satisfied. Teachers with more experience were more likely to have taught at a number of schools with varying levels of EAL teacher support and were in a position to compare schools. Overall, the dissatisfaction with teacher support in this study is consistent with previous research. This highlights poorly coordinated EAL provision with ineffective communication between the language support team and main subject teachers (Lyons and Little, 2009).

One of the factors that fuel educational disadvantage for students is the connection between proficiency in the English language and academic achievement (DES, 2019). In this study, 66% of teachers agreed that students with EAL found it difficult to understand the curriculum and 57% found it difficult to explain the curriculum to EAL students. One interviewee noted that EAL students struggled specifically in the senior cycle and would be doing Higher Level if they had a better command of English. EAL students are potentially disadvantaged academically due

to language limitations rather than intelligence or ability. Interviewees mentioned the new junior cycle was more inclusive and that the continuous assessment element has made it easier for EAL students to perform well.

The principal objective of inclusion is to accommodate diverse needs in the classroom (NSCE, 2011 cited in DES, 2017, p.21). Interviewees used a good range of support strategies for EAL learners, including peer support, tiered assignments and flexible grouping, and both employed strategies that encouraged students to use their first language. Irish teachers have taken a monolingual approach to date, placing little value on EAL students' home languages (Nowlan, 2008; Lyons, 2010) despite this having a positive impact (Lyons, 2010). Although the sample of the current study consisted of only two interviewees from one school, it is encouraging that both place an emphasis on inclusion and integration.

The findings of the study highlighted the important role of ICT in supporting students who have EAL needs. Both interviewees relied heavily upon ICT to support EAL learners. The use of Google Translate enables the teacher to assess the students' ability regardless of the language barrier, which makes students more engaged and productive (Sullo, 2009, p.108). These results should inform new teaching strategies not only for EAL learners but for teaching more generally.

Lower expectations of ethnic minority students (Howard, 2010) along with culturally and linguistically unresponsive teaching, can lead to lower achievement (Darmody, 2007). This study, in line with previous research, found 96% of respondents were born in Ireland. A more diverse teaching workforce would provide important role models for students from ethnic minorities. Whilst the Migrant integration strategy states that 'proactive efforts will be made to attract migrants into teaching positions' (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, p.26), Ireland could be doing a lot more for their EAL learners.

The results of this study indicate that initial teacher training programmes give little attention to EAL, and that more EAL-focused training and CPD specifically on teaching methods and differentiation strategies would be beneficial. Teachers feel more support is required to help them cater to the needs of their linguistically diverse classrooms and the use of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies strategies is not

consistent across schools in Ireland. A more standardised whole-school approach and clear guidance for teachers would ensure more consistency and benefit EAL students.

This was a small-scale research project, and the scope of this study was limited. As such, results cannot be generalised to other schools nationally or internationally (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Further research with a larger sample should explore the views of the parents and EAL students themselves. It would also be interesting to assess the effectiveness of EAL teacher training courses in Ireland to see whether these have a positive impact on teachers' ability to teach EAL students and whether academic grades improve for EAL students as a result. Overall, this study has identified a deficit in how the Irish education system is adapting to meet the growing linguistic diversity of contemporary Irish society. While efforts have been made to make schools more inclusive, more needs to be done to ensure EAL learners are given equal opportunity within the educational system.

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Teachers' Perspective of Student Empathy: Developing Active Citizenship and 'Working with Others' Through the Study of History with the Context of Junior Cycle Curricula

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Biography

Dr Jeffrey Leddin is from Co Limerick. In 2011, he was awarded a First Class Honours for his BA in English and History by the University of Limerick. In 2016, he completed his PhD in History with the same university. His book, *The labour Hercules: the Irish Citizen Army and Irish republicanism, 1913–23*, was based upon his dissertation and was published by Irish Academic Press in 2019. In 2020, he completed his Professional Master of Education (PME) in Post-Primary Education in Hibernia College and was awarded a First Class Honours. He is currently teaching in Borrisokane Community College. He was drawn to teaching because it presents continuous challenges requiring innovation and versatility.

Teachers' Perspective of Student Empathy: Developing Active Citizenship and 'Working with Others' Through the Study of History with the Context of Junior Cycle Curricula

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Abstract

This article inspected the perceptions of Irish post-primary teachers regarding empathy, its relationship to their Junior Cycle subject, and this relationship's impact on a hidden curriculum of active citizenship. Given the prevalence of theory relating to historical empathy, focus was placed primarily on this subject. Context was provided through an analysis of subjects such as English. Data was garnered through a qualitative approach using semi-structured, short interviews (n=5) with participants selected via purposive sampling. Findings showed interviewees to be less optimistic than theorists regarding potential empathetic performance among young adolescents. Nevertheless, interviewees deployed empathetic methodologies within their subjects and believed this could foster active citizenship.

Keywords: empathy, active citizenship, history, Junior Cycle

Introduction

According to Cooper (2011, p.30), 'the hidden curriculum' presents a fertile base for 'moral learning', such as empathy. The intersection between this hidden 'moral learning' and subject context is particularly noticeable in History as empathy can be seen as 'both the process of historical craftsmanship and its end result' (Riley, 2001, p.145). Situated within the south-west Irish post-primary school context, this article ascertains teachers' perceptions of the above statements and if this intersection can play a role in creating a culture of active citizenship amongst students. To achieve the above, an interpretivist qualitative approach, which assessed teacher meta-cognition, was deployed. This was

done through the implementation of purposive sampling, which ensured that interviewees with relevant information regarding the phenomenon were used as sources for data (Robinson, 2014, p.32).

Of those sampled, semi-structured interviews were implemented to allow interviewees enough scope to discuss what they saw as pertinent while remaining relevant to the article's themes. The subject History was chosen as the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) specification for the Junior Cycle (JC) requires students to understand 'the big picture' of historical context and to 'develop a sense of historical empathy' (2017, p.16). Therefore, empathy should be a central feature of the JC History classroom. By encouraging students to see the world through other perspectives, historical empathy allows for the development of 'children's social responsibility' (Field, 2001, p.130). Foster suggested that this 'ensures that active participation, critical inquiry and considered self-reflection' are embedded into the classroom (2001, p.178).

Literature Review

Edith Stein's seminal work On the problem of empathy (1917) is the starting point in understanding other theories relating to the nature of empathy. For Stein, empathy can be considered as all acts upon which 'foreign [as separate from the 'I'] experience is grasped', i.e. the 'psycho-physical state' of another person (Stein, 1964, p.6). Cognisance of literature which stresses Stein's emphasis of 'foreign' must also be taken. As noted by Ratcliffe, it is not a matter of sharing the same feelings as the foreign 'Other' but viewing the experience of the 'Other', which remains theirs, through our own experience (2011, p.475). For Stein, there is a dichotomy between the primordial experience of that with which we empathise and the non-primordial experience of the process of empathy itself: the two acts do not have 'a consciousness of sameness or a continuity of experience' (1964, p.11). This epistemological concept of a central dissonance between the two actors in empathetic performance has important pedological implications. As the empathetic 'I' never shares the 'psycho-physical state' of the 'Other', (s)he with whom is emphasised, his/her perspective is never assumed, merely understood. Thus, empathy is distinctive from sympathy. Contemporary literature contends similar (Davis, 2001; Foster, 2001; Volk, 2011; Halpern, 2018).

Historiographers such as Tosh recognise the role empathy has in maintaining historicism: accepting the 'foreignness' of the past while also penetrating that 'foreignness' (2010, pp.8–9). Tosh also notes that historical empathy is an identification of the 'common humanity' that is shared between the inhabitants of today's world and our forebearers (p.9). Such identification suggests that historical empathy can play an important part in the hidden curriculum of preparing students to take co-operative and active roles in a pluralistic modern society. Rantala, Manninen and Ven den Berg (2016, p.234) argue that historical empathy takes its place in a 'dual-domain construct' within the classroom where the goal is to both understand the period of the time studied as well as the thoughts of the historical figure. Portal (1987) contended that historical study is fundamentally an empathetic act where we attempt to understand what people thought they were doing as opposed to just what they were doing.

The DES's specification for JC History is suggestive of a connection between the creation of historical consciousness and the value of the development of empathy. The learning outcomes related to strand one: The Nature of History create a clear connection between the development of historical consciousness and empathy. Learning outcome 1.1 states that students will be able to 'develop a sense of historical empathy by viewing people, issues and events encountered in their study of the past in their context' (DES, 2017, p.16). Resultingly, a number of questions are raised.

These are:

1. How do the teachers interviewed perceive the development of empathy?
2. How do the teachers interviewed perceive the intersection of empathy with their Junior Cycle subjects?
3. How do the teachers interviewed perceive the extent to which this intersection enables key skills and active citizenship?

Methodology

The focus on teachers' perceptions necessitated an interpretivist epistemological approach, i.e. an examination of social phenomena

through a 'logic of discovery' whereby hypotheses develop throughout the study, rather than beforehand. This is done using open instruments with the acceptance that social reality is constructed within a historico-social context through the interactions of humans (Rosenthal, 2018, pp.14–15). Given Bell's position that the qualitative approach is applicable when considering how people perceive the world (2014, p.9) and Denscombe's assertion that qualitative research allows for more grounded data and analysis situated within the complexity of society and is more tolerant of both contradictions and ambiguity (2014, p.302), this approach was taken.

As the article is underpinned by teacher meta-cognition, interviews were determined to be the best method of data collection as they are inherently 'self-reports' where interviewees comment upon their own belief systems and their actions within those systems (Denscombe, 2014, p.184). This conception that interviews offer an avenue into the participant's meta-cognition was supported by Castillo-Montoya who suggested that this method provides 'rich and detailed qualitative data' of the interviewee's experiences, their depiction of these experiences, and what they believe these experiences signify (2016, p.811). Semi-structured interviews were utilised as they foster a space where the interviewee can develop ideas and issues to the point that they see fit (Denscombe, 2014).

Theorists have suggested that for interviews, the researcher should adopt 'purposive or judgement sampling' methods of data collection (Vogt, Gardner and Haeffele, 2012, p.33). Purposive sampling seeks out 'key informants…[who] act as guides to a culture' (Tongco, 2007, p.147). The focus on perceptions relates to the category of the culture of how teachers see their classroom and empathy within it. Thus, purposive sampling was deployed. Thematic analysis was used to decipher the resulting data. This is described as 'a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting' upon the themes that arise from the undertaken research (Nowell et al., 2017, p.2). Widely used in the social sciences, it attempts to extrapolate explicit and implicit ideas that emerge throughout the data set (Fugard and Potts, 2015). It is theorised that this analytical framework is particularly useful 'for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences and generating unanticipated insights' (Nowell et al., 2017, p.2).

To ensure research was conducted in the most ethical manner, the British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines were consulted

throughout the entire process. Teachers were made aware of the purpose of the research through the provision of an information sheet and were informed of the right to withdraw at any point during the project (BERA, 2018). Consent was sought through a consent form. Ensuring anonymity was another ethical consideration. No identifiable information was collected with the data and pseudonyms were used in the dissertation. All data is stored within password-protected hardware and no participant was given access to other participants' information.

Findings

The findings resulted from five interviews with History, English and Religion post-primary teachers. The interviewees' broad understanding of what empathy means was largely homogenous; typically defined as trying to take on the vantage point of the other person. Two interviewees used the metaphor of wearing another person's shoes ('Alex'; 'Drew'). For 'Morgan', empathy seemed to involve a conscious decision not just to understand the other person but to give that person a 'break'. It was noted that, when asked to define empathy, only one interviewee explicitly expressed it as 'emotional intelligence' ('Jordan'). For 'Jordan', that intelligence could be developed through the emphasiser's own personal history: 'maybe how they've experienced their own feelings and how they deal with the feeling[s] around them.' Teachers viewed the development of empathy in Piagetian terms: that the cognitive process of empathetic performance is somewhat dependent on maturation. One interviewee stated, 'it develops with age' ('Alex'). 'Drew' argued the same while 'Jordan' articulated, 'yeah, I think age has a lot to do with it…age and experience'. The implication here is that there is limited scope for the development of empathy at JC level.

All of the interviewees that were asked noted that they felt History was particularly valuable as a subject which could develop empathy. 'Jamie' stated 'empathy is a big part of History'. For 'Jordan', History required an understanding of the 'wider context', an understanding of 'motives', and an ability to see where people were 'coming from'. The implication here is that as understanding multiple perspectives is a requirement of the subject, a particular space is opened up for empathetic performance. Interviewees understood empathy as distinctive from sympathy. This has important implications. Agreement with the 'Other' was not a prerequisite for empathetic performance. For instance, without prompt,

all interviewees discussed understanding the development of life in Nazi Germany, Hitler and the Holocaust. This has significant consequences. Students can be tasked with understanding another person's viewpoint without having to agree with it. While the Holocaust is an extreme example of intolerance, this can be extended to simple cultural divergence.

'Morgan' contended that Religion also creates cultural empathy. (S)he also expressed the view that in English, there was 'a massive scope' to develop empathy. Such statements indicate an interconnectedness where the practice of empathy helps students to learn humanities subjects while all these subjects work harmoniously to develop empathy. As 'Morgan' continued:

> 'most English teachers have a humanities second subject be it History, or Geography, or Religion … so, you know, there's more scope to apply what you know.'

Subtle differences between the perception of the intersection between History and empathy, and English and empathy were noted. The perception appeared to be that History requires and develops empathy as students encounter alien experiences of other peoples and other times. They are encouraged to see things from other vantages. English, however, was seen to develop it by stressing the timelessness of themes: the shared features of humanity. References to Shakespeare were common.

Interviewees argued that that through an understanding of other people's cultures and perspectives, students are encouraged to give something back. Three themes under which active citizenship could be actioned arose: human rights and morality; environmentalism, and tolerance.

Regarding the first, it was argued that if students can empathise with past victims of injustice then they will be more likely to ensure that it does not happen again ('Drew'). In relation to environmentalism, the fight against pollution was noted as one manner in which students have become active citizens ('Jordan'). Lastly, the ability to adopt multiple perspectives was seen as a way of creating a society more tolerant of socio-economic and cultural differences. 'Morgan' noted having English students work with Syrian refugees while 'Jordan' maintained that the act of role play within history would lead to understanding people across all sectors of society, from 'doctors' to the unemployed. The importance of empathy and active

citizenship was made clear by 'Morgan', who stated:

> we've got a multicultural kind of world now in the country…so, I think that there is massive scope to have, you know, more empathy and more respect…it's important and it will make them be more active citizens.

Discussion

The interviewees' largely homogeneous understanding of empathy as a vicarious act paralleled Stein's conception of the primordial leading the 'non-primordial' (1964, p.11). However, in truth, few went beyond a generalised understanding. In contrast, theoretical discussion on empathy as explicit simulation presented it as both a psychological state and an intellectual endeavour. It involves both the 'affective' element, 'an emotional response' to another person's situation as well as the cognitive self-regulated capacity to 'modulate' these subjective states (Lonigro et al., 2016, p.1; Decety and Morgiguchi, 2007, p.4). 'Jordan' was the only person whose definition encapsulated both domains, viewing it as encompassing both emotional intelligence and a shared experience.

Interviewees displayed a harmonised understanding of the development of empathy as dependent upon the pupil's maturational stage ('Alex'; 'Drew'). Of pedagogical concern is that this indicates that practices which teach for empathy should be modified based upon the developmental stage of the class group. However, a degree of divergence exists between the perceptions of those interviewed with the theoretical findings assessed. Academic research displayed greater faith than the interviewees' statements regarding the potential of the development of empathic performance during early adolescence. One study found that the age was 'malleable' and a prosocial-driven curriculum could allow early adolescents to be 'active agents' and push empathetic skills further (Caprara et al., 2015, p.2227). Another longitudinal study found that all participants, when in 'early adolescence', demonstrated 'empathic awareness' and described their activities in 'empathetic terms' (Malin et al., 2014, p.191).

'Drew' appeared the most pessimistic about JC students' perspective-taking abilities, arguing that these students can only process their own experiences but recollected having students compare their lives with

historical figures. Superficially, there does appear to be an inherent contradiction in the above. However, Ashby and Lee's five level ('the divi past', 'general stereotypes', 'everyday empathy', 'restricted historical empathy', and 'contextual historical empathy') stratification of historical empathy clarifies this apparent contradiction (1987, pp.68–82). 'Drew's' comparison method aligns somewhat with level three: 'everyday empathy'. Under this stratum, pupils examine the past through their own gaze. There is no moving perspective and empathetic performance is done through 'personal projection: what would it have been like for me if I had been there' (Ashby and Lee, 1987, p.74).

However, scholars have suggested cognitive perspective taking also has empathetic potential for early adolescent pupils. For Endacott, the affective and cognitive processes were not mutually exclusive (2012). Rather, in a subsequent article he noted that they were both part of historical empathy (Endacoot and Sturtz, 2015). This interlocking of empathy and role play was also expressed by Luff (2000) who felt that they allow students to move away from 'contemporary values' into a more accurate historicist understanding of the past. Returning to the strata presented by Ashby and Lee, this corresponds with level five: 'contextual historical empathy', which occurs when pupils attempt to understand figures and actions within the wider 'big picture' of the contextual time and space that they are studying. Through this, pupils clearly delineate between themselves and their consciousness, and the subjects of their inquiry (Ashby and Lee, 1987, p.82). There is, then, greater potential in perspective taking than convinced by those interviewed.

In relation to English, interviewees did not leave behind a lacuna of data relating to literacy scholarship and affective empathy. Both 'Alex' and 'Morgan' discussed the importance of the universality of themes in Shakespeare and how students could learn and display empathy through relating these to their lives. Indeed, for 'Morgan', empathetic responses could be drawn out of students by relating emotive topics such as racism to the situational context of the school community: 'how do you think that would work in this school'. This is congruent with the scholastic field. For Keane, the narrative acts as empathetic 'affective transaction' (2007, p.XV). Furthermore, she argues that this transferral 'across boundaries of time, culture, and location may indeed be one of the intrinsic powers of fiction' (p.XXV). Bal and Veltkamp studied the role of reading on empathy and noted similar, that the affective domain 'is elicited by the narrative' (2013, p.2). This indicates that both the affective and cognitive domains

of empathy can be elicited through the study of English and History. The interviewees' repeated utterances of how this development revolved around issues such as injustice, i.e. Nazi Germany, human rights, and cultural diversification was congruent with the finding of Haas (2020) and Foster (2001).

Conclusion

There are a number of limitations related to the article's findings. Given the regional focus and the narrow sample seize, generalisability is one issue. The article could only present an analysis of the perspectives of the five interviewees within the specific context in which they teach, and cannot draw conclusions about teachers' perspectives on empathy across the whole of Ireland. Within this data population, as an interpretivist approach was taken, the potential for bias is persistent. Researchers and participants often unconsciously bring their a priori values and beliefs into an interview, which can limit validity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

However, a number of conclusions arose. Interviewee perceptions of empathy lacked the bifurcation of affective and cognitive domains as established by theorists (Decety and Morgiguchi, 2007; Lonigro et al., 2016). Interviewees saw empathy as a vicarious act where, consistent with Stein's (1964) primordial/non-primordial espousal, there was a duality of perceptions present. All interviewees highlighted the maturational aspect to empathy's development but were more pessimistic than academic case studies regarding the potential of young adolescent empathic skills (Caprara et al., 2015). The data suggested that this may have pedagogical implications where empathetic practices at JC are limited to an unnecessarily low stratum. Yet, interviewees shared the belief in the potential for empathy within their subjects. Vis-à-vis future professional practice, explicit awareness of both the affective and cognitive domains in empathy, and a strong knowledge of the general scope of empathetic performance at its different maturational stages would allow for the most effective use of empathetic practices in the classroom. For History teachers, an understanding of Ashby and Lee's stratification would be particularly valuable. This is important because a pedagogy of empathy can act as an important antidote to civic lethargy and empower students with the skills and dispositions necessary to create inclusive pluralistic societies.

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