



OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN MÁ NUAD

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

MAYNOOTH

**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**M.Ed. (Research in Practice)**

**(2020 – 2021)**

**Irish language reading homework: Developing my practice through collaboration with  
parents/guardians and pupils**

**Clíona Ní Dhúshláine**

*A Research Dissertation submitted to the Froebel Department of Primary and Early  
Childhood Education, Maynooth University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Education (Research in Practice)*

*Date: 24/09/2021*

*Supervised by: Laoise Ní Chléirigh*

## **Declaration of Authenticity**

*“Plagiarism involves an attempt to use an element of another person’s work, without appropriate acknowledgement in order to gain academic credit. It may include the unacknowledged verbatim reproduction of material, unsanctioned collusion, but is not limited to these matters; it may also include the unacknowledged adoption of an argumentative structure, or the unacknowledged use of a source or of research materials, including computer code or elements of mathematical formulae in an inappropriate manner.”*

### **Maynooth University Plagiarism Policy**

I hereby declare that this project, which I now submit in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice) is entirely my own work; that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

***Signed: Clíona Ní Dhúshláine***

***Date: 24/09/2021***

## Abstract

This thesis examines the difficulties and challenges that pupils and parents/guardians face in relation to Irish reading homework and the lack of resources available to teachers to assist them in this area. It aims to explore the experiences of pupils and parents/guardians of Irish reading at home as well as my own approach to assigning Irish reading homework. As this is a self-study action research project, I, as a researcher, was prompted to examine my core values and my role in the challenges in this area. This was with a view to possibly creating change in school practice and policy and improving the experience of Irish reading homework for all.

The research stems from my interest in the difficulties parents/guardians experienced with Irish reading homework during the first lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, and the study aims to explore this area solely from their perspectives. Recordings of Irish readers were provided in *naíonáin mhóra* (senior infants) and *rang a haon* (first class), to assist with Irish reading during school closures. I then decided to focus primarily on the recordings as a valuable learning tool for the development of pupils' Irish reading skills. A mixed methods approach of qualitative and quantitative data collection was chosen for this study using a variety of data collection tools. Participants included pupils and parents/guardians from *rang a haon* (first class) in an Irish medium primary school. Key findings from the study are (i) difficulties with pronunciation in Irish reading, (ii) the value of the recordings as an additional learning tool, and (iii) positive engagement with the recordings. It is important to note that the home setting itself impacts significantly on pupils' development of Irish reading skills and analysis of the findings in this study provides an insight into the demands placed on parents/guardians and how resources such as recordings has a direct impact on their experience of Irish reading.

## **Buíochas**

Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le mo stiúrthóir Laoise Ní Chléirigh as an gcabhair, tacaíocht agus comhairle a thug sí dom agus an treoir a chuir sí orm ón tús. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil léi chomh maith as an misneach a spreag sí ionam i rith na bliana.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil freisin le léachtóirí Froebel as na léachtaí agus as an gcabhair le linn an chúrsa seo mar aon le páistí agus tuismitheoirí/caomhnóirí rang a haon, a ghlac páirt sa taighde seo.

Ba mhaith liom buíochas ó chroí a ghabháil le mo chlann, leo siúd a chabhraigh liom le linn na máistreachta, agus le mo chairde as a gcuid tacaíochta agus tuisceana i mbliana. Do Lára as an gcomhairle agus as an gcairdeas, agus do Neil a chuir an síol.

Ar deireadh, tiomnaím an tráchtas seo do mo thuismitheoirí, as a gcuid tacaíochta agus foighne agus an staidéar idir lámha agam, a thug grá na Gaeilge dom agus a thacaíonn liom i gcónaí.

## Table of Contents

1.1 Focus and Aims of the Study .....	9
1.2 Research Background, Context and Intervention .....	12
1.3 Potential Contribution to the Study .....	14
1.4 Chapters Outline .....	16
<i>Chapter 2: Literature Review</i> .....	<b>18</b>
2.1 Overview .....	18
2.2 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Homework .....	18
2.3 The Importance of Strong Teacher/Parent Relationships .....	20
2.4 Teachers' and Parents'/Guardians' Attitudes Towards Irish Reading Homework .....	21
2.5 Irish Literacy Support for Teachers .....	24
2.6 Parental Involvement: Strategies & Supports to Assist Parents/guardians with Irish Literacy .....	26
2.7 The Effects of Immersion Schools and Bilingualism on Irish Reading Homework .....	29
<i>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</i> .....	<b>33</b>
3.1 Overview .....	33
3.2 The Principles of Self-Study Action Research .....	33
3.3 The 5 Cs: An Evolving Process .....	34
3.4 Examining the Values of the Practitioner and the Pupil .....	35
3.5 A Mixed Methods Approach: An Overview .....	36
3.5.1 Qualitative and Quantitative Research .....	36
3.5.2 Research Paradigms .....	37
3.5.3 The Ontological & Epistemological View .....	38
3.6 Methodological Tools .....	39
3.7 Triangulation and Validity .....	39
3.8 Ethical Considerations .....	41
3.8.1 Informed Consent and Assent .....	42
3.8.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity .....	43
3.8.3 Vulnerability and Sensitivity .....	43
4.1 Overview .....	45
4.2 Research Rationale .....	45
4.3 Explanation and Description of the Project .....	46
4.3.1 Research Design .....	47
4.3.2 Research Site .....	48

4.3.3 Research Participants .....	49
<b>4.4 Construction of Letters of Consent: Board of Management and Participants.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>4.5 Action Plan: Cycles 1 &amp; 2 .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>4.6 Construction of the Recordings .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>4.7 Primary Data Collection Tools: Discussions, Surveys &amp; Questionnaires.....</b>	<b>53</b>
4.7.1 Construction of Open-ended Discussions with Pupils.....	53
4.7.2 Construction of Pupil Involvement Surveys .....	54
4.7.3 Survey 1: Pupils.....	55
4.7.4 Survey 2: Pupils.....	55
4.7.5 Construction of Parent/guardian Involvement Questionnaires .....	56
4.7.6 Questionnaire 1: Parents/guardians .....	56
4.7.7 Questionnaire 2: Parents/guardians .....	57
4.7.8 Questionnaire 3: Parents/guardians .....	58
<b>4.8 Learning and Insights.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b><i>Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis .....</i></b>	<b><i>60</i></b>
<b>5.1 Overview .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>5.2 Data Collection .....</b>	<b>60</b>
5.2.1 Data Collection Tools.....	61
5.2.2 Data Storage .....	61
<b>5.3 Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>61</b>
5.3.1 Emerging themes and sub-themes: Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis.....	62
5.3.2 Summary of discussions with pupils.....	63
5.3.3 Summary of findings: Cycle 1 .....	65
5.3.4 Summary of findings: Cycle 2.....	69
5.3.5 Parents/guardians views on immersion & the effects of school closure: Survey 3 .....	77
<b>6.1 Overview .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>6.2 Summary of findings .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>6.3 Contextualising Results .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>6.4 The Theory Behind the Research.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>6.5 Limitations of the study .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>6.6 Future directions .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>6.7 Communicating the Research.....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>6.8 Complexity theory and change in schools .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>6.9 Summary.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b><i>References .....</i></b>	<b><i>93</i></b>
<b><i>Appendices .....</i></b>	<b><i>98</i></b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>98</b>

## **List of Figures**

- Figure 5.1: Findings from question 3 on survey 1 distributed to pupils
- Figure 5.2: Summary of findings from survey 1 distributed to pupils
- Figure 5.3: Findings from question 6 on questionnaire 1 distributed to parents/guardians
- Figure 5.4: Findings from question 7 on questionnaire 1 distributed to parents/guardians
- Figure 5.5: Summary of findings from questionnaire 1 distributed to parents/guardians
- Figure 5.6: Findings from question 1 on the second survey distributed to pupils
- Figure 5.7: Findings from question 2 on the second survey distributed to pupils
- Figure 5.8: Findings from question 4 on the second survey distributed to pupils
- Figure 5.9: Summary of findings from survey 2 distributed to pupils
- Figure 5.10: Findings from statement 1 on the second questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians
- Figure 5.11: Findings from statement 3 on the second questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians
- Figure 5.12: Findings from statement 9 on the second questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians
- Figure 5.13: Findings from statement 4 on the third questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians
- Figure 5.14 Findings from statement 5 on the third questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians

## **List of Tables**

- Table 5.1: Emerging themes and sub-themes using Braun & Clarke's Thematic Analysis
- Table 5.2: Number of pupils who preferred reading at home/ in school
- Table 5.3: Parents'/guardians' level of Irish

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Focus and Aims of the Study

This research aims to address the difficulties and challenges pupils and parents/guardians face at home in relation to Irish reading homework. One of the most significant challenges they face is whether there are sufficient resources to assist them with Irish reading. This is an exploratory study using a mixed methods approach which investigated the area of Irish reading homework from the perspectives of pupils and parents/guardians. It was invaluable for me, as a practitioner and as a native Irish speaker, to reflectively consider other viewpoints in relation to this area. This was in order to fully understand the challenges and barriers posed by Irish reading. The aims and objectives of this study were:

- To conduct research around Irish reading homework.
- To reflect on my practice in order to improve my own approach to assigning reading homework in a Gaelscoil setting.
- To assess the level of resources available to pupils and parents/guardians to assist them with Irish reading homework.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of recordings of Irish readers as an additional reading resource.
- To assess the level of engagement by pupils and parents/guardians with Irish reading homework.

Issues in the area of Irish reading homework and a lack of resources to assist parents/guardians came to light during the Covid-19 pandemic. They were faced with the challenge of home-schooling and online learning as well as teaching their children Irish reading. Teachers also experienced new challenges in that they were faced with remote teaching for the first time. While some resources are provided, they are not sufficient to address vocabulary and pronunciation correctly which are integral for fluency in reading. Covering these areas in Irish reading was



challenging for teachers and in turn was a cause of frustration for parents/guardians as they completed Irish reading with their children at home.

While data collection involved a wide variety of focus questions, the most significant questions to inform this research were:

- What challenges/difficulties for Irish reading homework pose for pupils and parents/guardians?
- Were there sufficient resources to assist with Irish reading homework?
- Did a lack of resources affect pupils' Irish reading abilities?
- How beneficial were recordings for vocabulary and pronunciation?
- What effect, if any, did the pandemic have on pupils' Irish reading abilities?

The focus of the study was not only to examine the area of Irish reading homework in relation to the questions listed above, but also to critically reflect on my own practice and professional development. Examining my core values was a key aspect of the process and despite exposing my most vulnerable self, critical reflection opened the door for positive change, both personally and professionally.

As educators, we constantly strive and search to be our best selves, but the journey of professional learning is an ever-evolving process and examining this journey through critical reflection is key.

Tremmel (1993) in his discussion on reflective practice states that:

... the way of teaching demands a long journey that does not have any easily identifiable destination ... It is a journey that I believe must include a backward step into the self and it is a journey that is its own destination (Tremmel, 1993: 456)

Exploring myself and my own journey of professional learning was both challenging and enlightening and this project afforded me the opportunity to examine whether I was truly living by my core values in my practice. Values such as respect, care, integrity, trust and understanding.

Values such as these are important in that they have a profound impact on how we live our lives and how we present ourselves as educators.

Living by such values essentially guides us in everything we do. On the practical side, as educators, our values are at the core of our decision making, they guide the actions that we take, and we reinforce these values in our teaching. Whitehead (1989) states ‘the reason that values are fundamental to educational theory is that education is a value-laden practical activity’ (Whitehead, 1989: 41-52), This highlights the importance of our values and how they give meaning to our lives and to our practice. Values are constantly challenged in one’s practice and getting the balance right is what is required. We may not always achieve our ideals but as the Irish proverb goes ‘*is leor ó dhuine a dhícheall*’ / all anyone can do is one’s best (Seanfhocail Na Mumhan, 2003). What we can aim to achieve, however, are ways to enhance our practice, to assist teaching and learning, rather than strive for perfection. As educators, we have good intentions and values, but these do not always match our practice. There is a gap between what is theory and what is real and trying to bridge this gap is challenging, both personally and professionally.

The journey of critical reflection can spark the fear of the unknown, asking difficult questions such as: How do I teach? What do I teach? How can I improve my teaching? McNiff (2010) address the questions ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ and outlines how action research allows us to explore and improve our practice to bring about change and help others. The same author outlines the principles of action research and how they lay the foundation for an investigation of our own work. This investigation helped me to navigate my way through the discourses in my practice and gain a true sense of self-understanding. The reflective activities I engaged in and the use of a reflective journal over the course of this project prompted me not only to explore my values but to identify assumptions in my practice. The assumptions that arose from my personal background as

a native Irish speaker, and the expectations I held as an educator changed my views on Irish reading homework. Self-study and critical reflection are eye-opening and though not an easy process, they provide the opportunity for growth and change. In the case of this research, changing our approach to Irish reading homework and examining the lack of resources available to assist parents/guardians with Irish reading, would be significant to address the difficulties and challenges in the area of Irish reading homework.

## **1.2 Research Background, Context and Intervention**

The background of the research stemmed from the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenge of homeschooling. The recordings of Irish readers provided for parents/guardians during the first lockdown in March 2020 inspired the topic for this research. The project involved Irish reading homework with and without the use of recordings. By implementing an action plan and analysing data collection, which will be discussed in detail in chapters four and five, the goal was to gain a better understanding of how pupils and parents/guardians felt about Irish reading homework and whether they felt there were sufficient resources to assist with Irish reading homework. The background to the research was also inspired by my passion for the Irish language, my interest in the area of Irish reading homework and how to improve the quality of Irish reading for pupils.

Through this research, parents/guardians had the opportunity to express how they felt about Irish reading and the school's role in assisting them with reading at home. Strong teacher and parent/guardian relationships are important and involving them in their children's education is paramount. The importance of these relationships and its effect on the development of literacy skills is highlighted in the results of a 5-year study conducted by S en echal & LeFevre (2002).

Their results show how parental involvement with reading at home contributed greatly to vocabulary, reading skills and comprehension skills. They also outline how children's phonological awareness of letters and sounds, and good language skills contributed to their acquisition of reading. Sénéchal & LeFevre (2002) identify the importance of parental involvement in the development of their children's early literacy skills and show how open and informative communication between teacher and parent/guardian is an integral part of the development of literacy skills in the home. We, as educators, need to enhance parental involvement to achieve better results in literacy acquisition for children. These studies point to the need to bring parents/guardians into the homework process in a positive and beneficial way. They highlight the importance of putting support in place to make reading at home more engaging and strengthening the relationship between school and home.

By gaining a true insight into pupils' and parents'/guardians' experiences and perspectives of Irish reading homework, I could address my assumptions in relation to Irish reading homework and develop a new theory of practice. The design and methodology of the research involved critical reflection on practice and provided an alternative view for me on Irish reading homework. Brookfield (1995) discusses how, if we as researchers are truly critically reflective, we will be able to stand back and analyse our practice from a different perspective.

The recordings provided during lockdown were a short-term solution and this study aimed to examine the area of Irish reading homework in a broader context. Recordings such as those provided were of significant benefit for fluency in reading and once the recordings could no longer be provided, the difficulties associated with Irish reading homework were highlighted further. The recordings were extremely beneficial for vocabulary and pronunciation, which are especially challenging for parents/guardians with a low proficiency in the language.

As part of the intervention in this study, I decided that the research project would focus on the use of recordings and the benefits associated with this type of resource. Research has consistently shown that putting strategies in place to help parents/guardians with reading has a significant impact on children's reading acquisition. Baker (2006) discusses how grammatical accuracy and unfamiliarity with a language creates a barrier for parents/guardians and their contribution to their children's acquisition of literacy skills. We can draw on these studies in our discussions on reading homework in Irish medium schools. While Irish reading may be covered in class, language barriers at home present various challenges. Unfamiliarity with the language could lead to grammatical errors and difficulty with pronunciation, which could lead to frustration. Kavanagh (2013), in her research on immersion schools found parents/guardians expressed concern that they were not equipped with the resources needed to support their children with reading at home.

The intervention involved completing Irish reading at home with and without recordings, as mentioned above, for certain periods of time. There was an additional challenge in the intervention in that the level of reading was increased to challenge pupils and parents/guardians and place a greater emphasis on the use of the recordings. The aim of the intervention was to investigate if there was a need for further resources for Irish reading, to ensure continuity in Irish reading skills between school and home. The action research was investigating if a lack of resources played a significant role in the acquisition of new vocabulary and accurate pronunciation.

### **1.3 Potential Contribution to the Study**

Homework itself is a hotly debated topic, which will be discussed in chapter two, however Irish reading homework is an under-researched area. The study could potentially contribute to further

research to provide an insight into the benefits and challenges of Irish reading for parents/guardians and pupils who may experience difficulty when Irish is not the first language of the household. The development of early literacy skills in Irish is necessary, for pupils to achieve a level of proficiency and fluency in Irish reading. O'Toole and Hickey (2016) discuss how exposure to Irish in the home and parents'/guardians' use of the language with their children plays a significant role in this development. They discuss how parental involvement directly impacts children's acquisition of the language.

The evidence provided in this study could potentially enable further planning in the area of Irish reading homework and the possible implementation of change. If action was taken to develop a solution to the issue first addressed based on the findings of the research, perhaps an adaptation process could begin where procedures or practices around Irish reading homework could be altered to support those findings. Schools could reassess their reading homework policies and look at other avenues to assist parents/guardians with Irish reading. Perhaps building on additional resources that are already available would create an opportunity for a change in classroom and school procedure in relation to Irish reading homework, and an amendment of school policies to create positive change for pupils, for parents/guardians and for the wider school community.

Bennet & Kalish (2006) argue that the disadvantages of homework are as a result of poor training for teachers with regards to assigning homework and the same could be said for Irish reading homework. Perhaps this research points to the need to provide teachers with appropriate strategies to support parents/guardians with Irish literacy at home. Protheroe (2009) provides a solution to this by outlining how a school wide approach should be considered which would include an effective homework policy, clear expectations for teachers and parents/guardians, consistent schedules, recognising limitations for certain pupils and clear communication between school and

home. This kind of approach might improve the experience of Irish reading homework and enhance pupils' fluency in Irish reading.

Another area in need of further examination is how student teachers are taught to teach Irish reading. Not only are there a lack of resources to assist with Irish reading homework, but many teachers are unfamiliar with basic reading skills and how to teach them, which will be discussed further in chapter six.

## **1.4 Chapters Outline**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter one, Introduction, outlines the focus and aims of the research as well as the context, rationale and intervention of the research. Key focus questions in relation to the research are identified and the need for further research is also addressed.

Chapter two, Literature Review, contains a detailed critique of current literature on homework and Irish reading homework. This chapter examines the advantages and disadvantages of homework, the importance of strong teacher-parent/guardian relationships and teachers' and their attitudes towards Irish reading homework. Literature in relation to Irish literacy and strategies and supports to assist parents/guardians at home is also critiqued and the effects of immersion schools and bilingualism on Irish reading is explored.

Chapter three, Methodologies, outlines clearly the research rationale and explores parents'/guardians' and pupils' experiences of Irish reading homework. The principles of self-study action research are examined and there is an overview of the mixed- methods approach describing both qualitative and quantitative data collection. There is an examination of the ontological and epistemological views as well as my own assumptions, and the methodological

design of the research is clearly described, including data collection tools, triangulation and validity. All ethical considerations prior to and during the research are discussed.

Chapter four, Preparation and Research Cycles outlines the rationale behind the research as well as the research site, design and participants. It describes in detail the steps taken prior to the commencement of the research including ethical approval, approval by the Board of Management of the school, information regarding the research distributed to participants and consent from the research participants in writing. This is followed by a description of the action plan implemented in the research and the cycles involved as well as a timeline of the research.

Chapter five, Results, Analysis and Recommendations, discusses the use of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns within the data collected. The emerging themes and sub-themes are described followed by analysis of the findings from both cycles of the research. Parents'/guardians' views on immersion and the effects of the pandemic and school closure on their child's Irish reading ability is also presented.

The thesis will conclude with a short overview and a summary of the main findings. The theory behind the research as well as limitations of the study will be presented. Future directions and how to communicate the research will also be explored. There will be a discussion on complexity theory and change in schools and recommendations will be made for further research in the area of Irish reading homework.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the various factors that influence pupils' and parents'/guardians' experiences and perspectives in relation to Irish reading homework. There will be an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of homework and the importance of a strong link between school and home will be discussed. Parent/guardians and teacher attitudes towards homework will be examined as well as the significance of parental involvement in the development of early literacy skills. The importance of providing parents/guardians with the appropriate resources to support their children with Irish reading at home will also be outlined. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on Irish literacy supports for teachers followed by an analysis of the effects of immersion schools and bilingualism on Irish reading homework and second language acquisition.

### **2.2 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Homework**

There has been significant research on the advantages and disadvantages of homework. Bennett and Kalish (2006) present a strong argument that homework can be attributed to student burnout and can impact negatively on learning and development. Marzano and Pickering (2007) contradict this however, providing evidence that homework enhances student achievement if used appropriately.

Ratnesar (1999), in his article, *The Homework Ate My Family* discusses the negative impact that homework can have on pupils and parents/guardians. His article explores the impact of homework drawing on the perspectives of children and parents. The same author outlines how some parents expressed that homework is often a 'struggle' and left less opportunity for family time. He discusses the unnecessary stress created for both children and parents and how children had less time for more enjoyable activities and far more time was dedicated to homework. He addresses difficult questions in his article; 'What should we expect from our children? What do we want them to learn and how much is enough?' (Ratnesar, 1999: 54-63). McPherson (2020) however is far more detailed in his research on the benefits and drawbacks of homework and rather draws on previous literature as opposed to Ratnesar's more personal approach. McPherson (2020) provides a detailed analysis of the impact homework has on pupils and on learning in general. He discusses how homework could perhaps be designed effectively to achieve positive learning outcomes and examines the negative consequences of homework.

Both Ratnesar (1999) and McPherson (2020), while highlighting the drawbacks of homework, explore the idea of finding a balance. Rather than eradicating homework altogether perhaps a dedicated amount of time could be assigned, an approach many schools have already taken. Ratnesar (1999) points out that teachers are not always aware of how much time is spent on homework, and this is echoed in the arguments made by McPherson (2020). He focuses on the design of homework and how revising that design could lead to positive change.

Teachers and school leaders should take care to design homework to be as effective as possible towards achieving a learning object and consider if other alternatives would be better suited (McPherson, 2020: 55).

Bempechat (2010), however argues that homework contributes to better academic achievement, good study skills and work ethic, ‘When you have homework on a regular basis, you learn persistence, diligence and delayed gratification’ (Bempechat, 2010: 189-196). The same author also refers to the impact homework has on pupils when it comes to coping strategies and motivation. She examines the strategies and coping skills that children can develop to deal with challenges and disappointments. Protheroe (2009) outlines the broad benefits of homework. Benefits such as better study habits and skills, self-direction, self-discipline, independent problem solving, improved time management and parental involvement. She does, however, contribute these benefits to good homework practices, careful planning and an effective whole-school approach.

For homework to be effective, it should be carefully planned to support specific educational goals, take into account the specific abilities and needs of students, and strengthen the link between home and school (Protheroe, 2009: 42-45)

Similarly, Schrat Carr (2013) highlights the benefits of homework and outlines them as:

long term academic benefits, better study habits and skills, non-academic benefits such as greater self-admiration and greater self-discipline, better time management, independent problem-solving, greater parental involvement and participation in schooling (Schrat Carr, 2013: 171).

### **2.3 The Importance of Strong Teacher/Parent Relationships**

The role of the parent/guardian in the home impacts significantly on their child’s achievement and depends largely on the communication and relationship between school and home. Research has shown the effect that both the school community and family involvement have on pupils’ achievement:

Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement.....Although there is less research on the effects of community involvement, it also suggests benefits for schools, families, and students, including improved achievement and behaviour (Henderson & Mapp, 2002: 24).

The views of Henderson and Mapp (2002) highlight the benefits of parental involvement, however they also show how other factors are necessary for high student achievement. These factors include effective leadership, effective teaching and learning and a strong relationship between parents and the community. These factors combined contribute not only to higher student achievement but also to better social and management skills.

Research by Bishop et al. (2001) highlights the benefits of positively engaging pupils in their own academic achievements and the importance of creating a close and engaging relationship with parents. Developing a level of respect between teacher and parent is imperative to build a foundation for positive parental involvement both at home and in school (Kavanagh, 2013). Baeza (2012) discusses how a lack of communication between teachers and parents contributes to parents' reluctance to engage with the school or seek additional support. They are often not provided with sufficient information regarding reading homework and are not aware of the effect their involvement has on the development of their child's early reading skills. (Harris & Ó Laoire, 2006). A key strategy is to strengthen the relationship between school and home and ensure a 'level of trust and confidence in the school's strategy' (Harris & Ó Laoire, 2006: 42).

#### **2.4 Teachers' and Parents'/Guardians' Attitudes Towards Irish Reading Homework**

Hickey and Stenson (2016) focus much of their discussion on the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) and the New Irish Primary Language Curriculum (2015). They analyse the findings of

interviews conducted with primary teachers in 2014 which explored the attitudes of teachers with regards to teaching Irish. While the results were comprehensive and informative, they were concerning for several reasons. Primarily, it emerged that teachers' attitudes towards teaching Irish reading were overwhelmingly negative. Although these interviews were conducted with teachers in English medium schools, comparisons can be drawn with how Irish reading is taught in Gaelscoileanna.

Hickey (2001) points out that teachers can differ in their approaches when teaching Irish reading. Some teachers view it as an additional skill to oral Irish in the classroom while others see Irish reading as another component of developing reading skills in general. Reading in a second language should not be viewed as a secondary skill but rather as a valuable and enjoyable aspect of reading acquisition:

It is vital that the recommendations regarding Irish reading be implemented, so that the role of reading in supporting and extending second-language learning and providing attractive and enjoyable input can be fully realised, and so that Irish reading can be seen as a linguistically- enriching and enjoyable experience, rather than merely secondary support for oral skills (Hickey, 2001: 87)

Hickey (2001) noted that although teachers recognised the importance of Irish reading, they did not spend enough time on it during the school day. Teachers claimed this was due to a lack of interesting and suitable reading material, and that children lost interest in Irish reading as a result. According to Harris & Murtagh (1999) for children reading in Irish and learning the language itself, a positive attitude would ultimately make them more successful learners.

Another factor that Hickey and Stenson (2016) discuss, is teachers' confidence when it comes to teaching Irish. They point out that teachers often have low confidence in their ability to teach Irish despite having a level of fluency in the language. When it comes to Irish reading, not only are

teachers less confident but they simply are not appropriately trained to teach Irish spelling and reading skills. We should be mindful of the Latin maxim '*Nemo dat quod non habet*'/ nobody can give what they do not have (Latin Proverbs: Wisdom from Ancient to Modern Times, 2002) which states, that if one does not have a particular skill, it is difficult to impart it to others. Very often teachers have little confidence in their own oral competence and reading skills in Irish. This leads to difficulties with basic literacy skills and ultimately a low level of reading acquisition amongst their pupils. Teachers tended to prepare better and focus more on other subjects due to low confidence and a lack of resources.

Not only have teachers identified gaps in teaching literacy skills in Irish but parents/guardians are also aware of the significant difference in how their children read in English and how they read in Irish. This can lead to stress and frustration and ultimately less emphasis on Irish reading at home. They are often deterred from helping their children with Irish reading due to a low proficiency in Irish and a poor level of competence (Hickey, 2001). Irish homework is in fact an opportunity for parents/guardians to experience joint learning with their children, creating a situation that would be both fun and beneficial for the children and an opportunity for a learning and bonding experience.

Parents'/guardians' attitudes towards Irish can also be associated with how they were taught Irish themselves at school. Baeza (2012) studies how parents/guardians could be encouraged and 'empowered' to become more involved in their children's education and as a result, contribute to their overall academic achievement. His research is based on studies conducted with Latino immigrant families. Comparisons, however, can be drawn in relation to Irish medium schools. Baeza places emphasis on questions such as 'How do parents participate in their child's schooling? What support do they have outside of school? What supports do the school provide?' (Baeza, 2012:

83) Research regarding these questions found that most parents/guardians were interested and involved in their children's education but that further support could be put in place to build on this involvement, which is reflective of the literature shared above. The risk to children's educational development by parents/guardians who fail to become involved was examined:

Failure to actively participate and perform in an education system is a risky scenario whose effects and consequences are felt in the later development stages of children (Baeza, 2012: 12)

Hickey (2001) found that providing appropriate strategies to support children with Irish reading at home also had the ability to alter the attitudes of the parents/guardians towards Irish reading and towards the language itself. Additional support for Irish reading homework could reignite a respect and a '*grá*' for the language.

## **2.5 Irish Literacy Support for Teachers**

Ó Duibhir and Ní Thuairisg (2009) outline how there are limited opportunities for pupils to use their second language outside of the school setting. Therefore, it is even more important to make Irish reading in the home as engaging as possible. It is necessary to put various strategies in place to make Irish reading positive and engaging and to encourage pupils and parents/guardians to read for pleasure (Ní Nuadháin, 2006). Many of these strategies and approaches are recommended in the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) to improve children's Irish reading skills. Ní Nuadháin (2006) discusses Irish reading programmes as far back as 1922 and how these programmes have developed over the years. She also highlights how children's reluctance to read in Irish can be attributed to the fact that adults, even in Gaeltacht areas, displayed a disappointing level of ability when it came to Irish reading as it was essentially an oral traditional.

Hickey (2001) also refers to the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) which outlined recommendations supporting the view that Irish reading was an integral part of the language learning process. The new materials that were added to textbooks added another dimension to the development of children's Irish reading skills. By using these new materials and creating engaging tasks, the four language skills, listening, reading, speaking and writing were approached in an alternative manner to help children to read with a purpose. Ní Nuadháin (2006) outlines these tasks as, colouring, drawing or making and are based on a text the children have read. Other tasks involved listening to stories, role-play, drama and games. These tasks could then be extended to writing activities which they completed based on the stories they had read. The Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) aimed to combine the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing so that enjoyment and pleasure could be brought to the process of Irish reading: 'Éisteacht, labhairt, léitheoireacht agus scríbhneoireacht a fhorbairt ar bhealach comhtháite' (1999:14). Engaging the children in tasks such as those mentioned above, would add to the development of pupil's acquisition of the Irish language and to their Irish reading skills.

Ní Nuadháin (2006) focuses on the 'pre-reading phase', which should be completed before the children can read independently in Irish. Similarly, Hickey (2007) found that promoting word recognition led to a high level of vocabulary and contributed to a fluency in Irish reading. She concluded that efficiency in vocabulary enhanced reading skills and made independent Irish reading more effective. Teaching and revising vocabulary, the process of questioning and answering and retelling the story through role-play or drama, builds a foundation for solid Irish literacy and reading skills. 'The 'reading phase' itself would also involve discussion of pictures in the texts, questions and answers and should be followed then by silent reading or reading aloud.' (Ní Nuadháin, 2006: 1-22). The Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) provided these materials



and resources, such as picture books, audio books, Irish reading schemes and more (Ní Nuadháin, 2006). Harris and Ó Laoire (2006) also refer to the lack of appropriate materials available to teachers. They deemed this to be an ‘obstacle’ and that it was the responsibility of the teachers themselves to create resources for their own classes. There is also often a lack of awareness amongst teachers that Irish reading skills must be taught in the same way that English reading skills must be taught.

## **2.6 Parental Involvement: Strategies & Supports to Assist Parents/guardians with Irish Literacy**

Studies by Bishop et al. (2001) focused on the importance of a positive relationship between school and home for effective learning for all. By identifying appropriate teaching and learning strategies and materials, teachers could better their practice and create an effective learning environment for pupils. This would provide them with the skills to put effective strategies in place for pupils and parents/guardians at home. The same authors place emphasis on encouraging children to interact with new teaching strategies and materials to provide an opportunity for continuous effective learning.

Hickey (2001) outlines some of the strategies and supports that could be provided for teachers but also for parents/guardians as they read in Irish with their children. Supports such as, decoding skills in Irish, models of Irish reading, access to Irish books, new materials along with extended use of existing materials, taped books and general parental support for Irish reading. (Hickey, 2001: 77). Darling & Westberg (2004) discuss the various areas of literacy that parents/guardians need to be familiar with to best help their children with Irish reading. These areas of literacy include letter names, letter sounds, phoneme awareness, letter recognition and reading

comprehension. This research by Darling and Westberg (2004) highlights how parents/guardians simply listening to their children read at home is not enough, but that training needs to be provided to better equip them with the skills to teach their children *how* to read. They discussed the results from a meta-analysis conducted by the National Center for Family Literacy which provided evidence that parental involvement had a positive effect on children's literacy development. The meta-analysis focused on three specific types of parental involvement: Parents/guardians listening to their children read, training them to listen to their children read and training them to teach their children how to read. Providing support for parents/guardians to differentiate between these strategies is paramount to successfully train them to help their children learn how to read in conjunction with school activities. All three studies provided parents/guardians with effective activities to support their children's reading acquisition. Strategies such as appropriate reading locations, good reading practices, paired reading, phonic cues, flashcards and clear direction on letter sounds and letter blending. Darling and Westberg (2004) show in their analysis, that efforts are made by family literacy experts and various other educators to place an emphasis on literacy development. They do so by providing activities and strategies to engage parents/guardians in the development of their child's reading skills. They also showed that support should be put in place to help parents/guardians as they read with their children at home and that such support would be extremely beneficial:

the results of this research synthesis on parent involvement in children's acquisition of reading provide another layer of evidence for implementing effective reading instruction that increases children's reading achievement and builds stronger families of readers (Darling & Westberg, 2004: 776)

Henderson & Mapp (2002) raise the question, would homework be more beneficial if teachers were equipped to provide better information for parents about the purpose of homework? Perhaps

the issue lies with the fact that teachers do not know enough about the benefits of homework. Teachers in Irish medium schools must deal with this issue not in one but in two languages. If teachers had more information on the purpose of homework, perhaps they would be better able to design appropriate homework assignments for pupils and parents/guardians to complete together at home (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Kavanagh (2013) examines the relationship between parental involvement and pupil's achievement in detail and considers various factors which could influence parental involvement. Factors such as marital status, the number of children in the home, parent education level, books in the home, proficiency in linguistics, attitudes towards the Irish language and their motivation for choosing immersion (Kavanagh, 2013). Her research also highlights how parents/guardians in immersion schools encounter barriers which prevent them from effectively supporting their children with homework activities and that this was a great source of concern for them. Similarly, Evans et al. (2000) conducted studies on the effect that literacy activities and parental involvement had on children's early literacy skills and examined the link between the home environment and literacy development. Their research provided evidence that home based activities on letter names, sounds and phonological awareness led to greater achievement in reading skills later.

Another factor which impedes parental involvement in children's education is the language barrier which causes a strain on relationships between school and home and discourages parents/guardians from becoming involved. Baeza (2012) presents findings from interviews conducted with parents/guardians that outline two significant barriers. They were 'language difficulty and low proficiency' (Baeza, 2012: 88). In these cases, it was low proficiency in English, and we can draw a comparison here to parents/guardians in Irish medium schools who face the same language barriers due to a low proficiency in Irish. This is significant as Baeza's studies highlight how such

language difficulties and low confidence can impact the level of parental involvement and in turn affect children's academic achievements.

O'Toole and Hickey (2016) claim that parents/guardians are often left unsupported in relation to Irish reading homework which in turn can lead to language delay. The results of their studies show that the level of exposure to Irish in the home had a direct impact on pupils' acquisition of Irish vocabulary. Their discussions focused on support that teachers could put in place, to encourage parents/guardians to use more Irish with their children at home which in turn would enhance their Irish reading abilities.

## **2.7 The Effects of Immersion Schools and Bilingualism on Irish Reading Homework**

There was a significant growth in Irish immersion schools in the 1970s and the popularity of these schools continued to grow from there. There was a recognition of the Irish language and a realisation of the benefits of sending children to Irish medium schools. Ó Duibhir and Ní Thuairisg (2009) outline that, from the 1960s, there was a general dissatisfaction amongst parents/guardians who wished for higher standard of Irish for their children which motivated them then, to send their children to immersion schools. They wanted their children to have a high proficiency in the language and supported the development of additional Irish medium schools to achieve this.

The Gaelscoil movement grew as a result and the Government responded to parental demand. Ó Riagáin (1997) discusses how parents/guardians felt that Gaelscoileanna would increase their children's level of Irish and improve their academic development:

The new generation of all Irish schools were founded in response to parent groups rather than state pressure and they are, by and large, additions to the school system rather than reconversions of the existing schools to bilingual teaching. Thus, any suggestion that they

represent a reversal of trends needs considerable qualification. They are more accurately seen as the start of a substantially new trend (Ó Riagáin, 1997: 24)

Harris & Ó Laoire (2006) refer to the benefits of Gaelscoileanna and immersion in the second language and how the more exposure pupils have to the language, the better their acquisition of that language. Similarly, O'Toole and Hickey (2016) discuss how exposure to the language in immersion schools optimised pupils' chances of acquiring a high proficiency in that language which contributed not only to their vocabulary skills but also to their Irish reading skills.

Harris & Ó Laoire (2006) refer to the encouragement of bilingualism which came about in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They outline how previous research favoured bilingualism and contributed both to the cognitive and social development of pupils. (Harris & Ó Laoire, 2006) The same authors claim that bilingualism is key to the revival of the Irish language and that Irish-medium schools not only present pupils with a high proficiency in the language, but that they also contribute to the language on a national level.

However, conflicting evidence has been presented over the years with regards to the positive and negative outcomes of bilingual and immersion education. Macnamara (1966) presents the negative influence of the second language. His research showed how the second language created deficits in reading achievement. Studies by Swain & Lapkin (1982) contradict Macnamara's research however, suggesting evidence of the more positive outcomes of immersion for pupils. They claim that a second language provides the learner with additional opportunities and 'carries with it potential political, economic and social rewards' (Swain & Lapkin, 1982: 203)

Another concern that has emerged from previous research is the effect that total immersion in a second language has on a pupil's first language. Hickey (1997) discusses the advantages of immersion in a second language, focusing her studies on immersion as early as the *Naíonraí*, or

pre-school years. She states that early immersion provides high levels of proficiency in the second language for pupils, and similar, if not better, academic achievement than that of pupils not attending immersion schools. Daily exposure to the second language has no bearing on the first language and does in fact add to the acquisition of the second language (Hickey, 1997).

Watkins-Mace (2003) claims that less emphasis should be placed on the concerns around immersion and more on how the first language influences the second language. She focuses much of her study on how a high level of competency in the first language makes acquisition of the second language much easier. She discusses how regular exposure to language and literacy in their immediate environments helps pupils to grow and develop, while also gaining a high competency in the language. The same author refers to the ‘silent period’ where the learner simply listens and gains confidence in their literacy skills over time. This period allows them the opportunity to develop literacy skills before they start speaking the language. We see evidence of this in the process of total immersion schools in Ireland where pupils are exposed to the second language throughout the school day. Bilingualism yields ‘significant cognitive and academic advantages that will serve the learner the whole course of their lives.’ (Watkins-Mace, 2003: 23) The research provided by the same author is pivotal in highlighting the advantages of bilingualism.

Ó Duibhir and Ní Thuairisg (2009) also note how Irish medium education creates a positive attitude from pupils and parents/guardians towards the language, that there is significant parental support for the teaching and learning of Irish and an increase in pupil's ability to use the language. Hickey and Stenson (2018) address the question of ‘why should we teach Irish reading?’ They provide a strong argument for an increased emphasis on Irish reading in the second language curriculum as they viewed reading as an essential component of language development. They

claim that ‘the more exposure to a language the learner gets, and the more time spent engaging with it, the greater the success.’ (Hickey & Stenson, 2018: 5)

It is hoped that addressing the issues outlined in this review can help create a balance between contributing to pupils’ academic achievement and avoiding stress for pupils and parents/guardians at home. By gaining a better understanding of the homework experience in the homes and lives of second language learners attending immersion schools, strengthening the relationships between school and home and providing appropriate support for teachers and parents/guardians, the efficacy of homework will be improved, the involvement will be more willing, the experience more enjoyable and cooperation will be fostered between the school and home. Attention must be drawn to the importance of putting support in place in relation to Irish reading homework and improving the acquisition of Irish literacy and the language itself. Some of the studies outlined in this review were conducted in schools abroad and are not ideally representative of the situation here in Ireland, however their findings prove the need for further research on reading homework in Irish medium schools.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter will begin with a discussion on the basic principles of action research and an overview of the mixed methods approach will be given. My values as a practitioner and pupils' values will be explored as well as a brief discussion on research paradigms and the interpretative approach taken in this study. Ontological and epistemological views will be examined and their contribution to my examination of Irish reading homework. A brief outline of data collection tools will be given, with a more detailed discussion on these in chapter four. All ethical issues which may arise in the process of this project will be addressed. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of the points mentioned above and the rationale for this study, with reference to the research design, the research site and research participants which will be outlined in detail in chapter four.

### **3.2 The Principles of Self-Study Action Research**

Action research can be defined as 'a systematic approach that combines action and reflection with the intention of improving practice' (Ebbutt, 1985: 32). It is at the very core of change, for researchers, for participants, for the school community and for society. The idea behind action research is that it informs us, as researchers, of our values as well as our assumptions (McDonagh et al., 2016) and that ultimately it is a process of critically reflecting on our own practice with a means to enhancing and improving it 'The action research approach provides practitioner researchers with a way of studying their own work so as to understand it better as they begin to try to make some systematic improvement to it' (McDonagh et al., 2016: 25). The action research



process is so valuable in that it allows for space to critically examine your own practice, to reflect on your role as a practitioner and how you fit into the 'wider educational context' (McDonagh et al., 2016).

Cohen et al. (2007) describe the purpose of action research:

- To plan, implement, review and evaluate an intervention designed to improve practice/ solve local problems.
- To empower participants through research involvement and ideology critique.
- To develop reflective practice.
- To promote equality and democracy.
- To link practice and research.
- To promote collaborative research. (Cohen et al. 2007: 85)

In her discussion on action research, McNiff (2010) describes how it is important to justify new information and to present evidence to support the claim made prior to the commencement of the research. She describes the reflective practitioner as being empowered by self-knowledge, critical thinking, inquisitiveness and emotional intelligence. McNiff (2010) goes on to talk about reflection in practice and reflection on practice, describing reflection in practice as allowing the researcher to observe themselves in action, while reflection on practice allows for deep reflection after the action has been completed. While the actions are different, both are equally important and complement each other. The basic principles of action research include the need for justice and democracy, the rights of people to speak and be heard, the opportunity to improve their work and to find truth and beauty in their lives, both professionally and personally (McNiff, 2010).

### **3.3 The 5 Cs: An Evolving Process**

Action research is a continuous and evolving process and centers on the 5 Cs: **C**ommitment, **C**oncern, **C**onsideration, **C**ollaboration and **C**hange as outlined in Action Research in the

Classroom Part 1 (Frank, 2009). Lewin (1946), who is considered to be the founder of action research itself, described it as an evolving process which emphasised professional values and collaboration to address complicated and adaptive problems. He viewed action research as an opportunity for teachers to become ‘architects’ of their own professional development. Action research allowed me to deeply reflect on myself as a practitioner and reinvent myself, in a sense, as an educator. I identified the area of Irish reading homework and the possible challenges that parents/guardians and pupils face in Irish medium schools. I set a plan in motion for what type of design or methodology was best suited for this project. Drawing on previous research in the chosen area, although limited, was important in the planning process and collaboration was also taken into consideration. The action plan was carried out by adopting a clear and concise approach and once this plan was in place, I focused on data collection and interpreting the results of that data.

### **3.4 Examining the Values of the Practitioner and the Pupil**

Brookfield (1995) discusses how educators often make assumptions about themselves and that those assumptions can affect our values and shape our practice in a negative way. Assumptions can also have a profound impact on how we live our lives and how we present ourselves as educators. It is important for me to ensure, not only that I am living by my values in my practice, but to encourage my pupils to live by them too. Staying true to one’s values creates a positive teaching and learning experience where pupils feel safe, happy and content in their school environment. Great importance should be placed on values and encouraging pupils to display a level of respect and care for each other. The value of democracy is important to me as an educator and this research will explore this value and the voice of the pupils in relation to Irish reading homework. Brookfield (1995) examines the possibility that educators are too empowered, that

values are not lived by and that the structures, rules and procedures that are in place are prohibiting children from becoming life-long learners. The same author recognises that this sense of empowerment is not intentional and is often due to lack of understanding, He concludes that teachers often find it difficult to recognise that their intentions do not always reflect the method of their practice, something which came to light for me during this process of critical reflection.

### **3.5 A Mixed Methods Approach: An Overview**

A mixed methods approach was chosen for this research as a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data was deemed to be the most appropriate design. This mixed methods approach allowed me to be innovative and creative and enhanced the validity of the research. Research paradigms will be discussed here to help me, as a practitioner, to understand my interpretation of reality and beliefs from an ontological and epistemological viewpoint. Onwuegbuzie & Turner (2007) state that the mixed methods approach considers various viewpoints and perspectives when it comes to research and this approach also involves ‘inference, interpretation, explanation and prediction’ (Cohen et al., 2007: 47) The primary aim of this mixed methods approach was to generate evidence in relation to my research and to gain a better understanding of my practice with a view to enhancing it.

#### **3.5.1 Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

Cresswell (2002) outlines the difference between qualitative and quantitative research:

in quantitative research the research problem section is used to direct the types of questions or hypotheses asked in the study, whereas in qualitative research the research problem

discussion is typically used to establish the importance of the central idea (Cresswell, 2002: 19).

The aim here was to combine both, with a view to providing an analysis of the possible benefits and challenges of Irish reading homework for pupils and parents/guardians in households where Irish is not the first language. Beginning with the qualitative phase allowed me to explore the views of pupils and parents/guardians. The information gathered in this phase was generated to create the second phase of quantitative data collection. Qualitative data collection is more relatable to self-study action research as multiple perspectives are presented, and I, as the researcher, was an active participant. Both the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach allowed me to collect data from several sources, creating an opportunity for triangulation of the data which enhanced its accuracy, validity and credibility.

### **3.5.2 Research Paradigms**

This research involving pupils and parents/guardians experience with Irish reading homework was explored through the interpretative paradigm. I investigated their actions in relation to Irish reading homework, while also exploring my personal values and involvement in the research. The interpretative approach allowed me to explore a question or theory and gain new information on the area under examination. For example, I investigated whether a lack of additional resources to assist with Irish reading homework presented significant challenges for both parents/guardians and pupils. This involved ‘examining and interrogating’ (Cohen et al., 2007), whereby I was operating from the perspective of an insider and through new knowledge or theory of practice, I could describe and explain the findings of my research.

### **3.5.3 The Ontological & Epistemological View**

Ontology is ‘the study of being’. It is concerned with ‘what kind of world we are investigating, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such’. (Crotty, 2003:10). Our ontological values inform our teaching and involve our way of being in the world and our relationship with others. I focused on the effects and challenges associated with Irish reading homework, its impact on pupils and parents/guardians and in turn, the relationship between family and school. Epistemology on the other hand is ‘a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know’ (Crotty, 2003:3). Epistemological values are based on knowledge, how that knowledge is acquired and how we view it. Taking both the ontological and epistemological view into account in this research, the aim was to view Irish reading homework from an alternative standpoint. I considered the beliefs and assumptions around Irish reading homework and its effects on pupils and parents/guardians. Al-Saadi (2014) highlights the importance of one's ontological and epistemological assumptions and how they are at the core of the researcher's methodological approach to the research.

the ontological and epistemological assumptions which you make or hold as a researcher are important in the sense that they (should) justify your choice of methodology and methods of your research. In other words, your choice of data collection, data analysis and data interpretation should be informed by, and understood through, the ontological and assumptions and arguments you are making (Al-Saadi, 2014: 10).

Both my ontological and epistemological assumptions informed my understanding of action research and contributed to the methodology and methods used to examine the area of Irish reading homework.

### **3.6 Methodological Tools**

Data collection tools chosen for this study involved the use of a reflective journal, discussions with participants, discussions with a critical friend, surveys and questionnaires. Surveys and questionnaires were used, to examine in detail, the beliefs, views and experiences of pupils and parents/guardians in relation to Irish reading homework. Pupils' views on reading in Irish at home were also explored through classroom discussions. Cohen et al. (2007) state the importance of choosing the most appropriate data collection tools to ensure a well-designed action project. The same authors outline the key elements involved in the designing of surveys and questionnaires. The key elements considered for this study were ethical issues, structure and layout of the surveys and questionnaires, open and closed questions, multiple choice questions, sensitive questions and practical considerations in the designing of the questionnaires. Mertens (2012) outlines the practicality of using a mixed methods approach with numerous data collection tools. She outlines how collecting data in this way leads to further research and decisions using the information gathered on the research topic under investigation. The same author comments on how the mixed methods approach gives a fuller picture of the study as opposed to using one method of data collection. Examples of the data collection tools used in this research can be viewed in Appendices B and will be described in detail in chapter four.

### **3.7 Triangulation and Validity**

As mentioned above, the mixed methods approach in this research was deemed most appropriate to ensure triangulation. The use of surveys, questionnaires and discussions for the purpose of inquiry added to the validity of the research. Cohen et al. (2007) also note how triangulation adds

to the researcher's confidence that the research being conducted is worthwhile. Triangulation in this research was effective in highlighting how a lack of Irish reading resources presented challenges for parents/guardians and affected pupils' Irish reading abilities. Responses and information provided in the surveys and questionnaires allowed me to view Irish reading homework through the eyes of pupils and parents/guardians and analyse their experiences and perspectives. Discussions with a critical friend also helped me to explore the challenges they experienced due to a lack of resources to assist with Irish reading homework. A culmination of these methods of data collection allowed for validity in the research. Guion (2002) defines validity as:

Validity, in qualitative research, relates to whether the findings of your study are true and certain. "True" in the sense of your findings accurately reflecting the real situation. "Certain" in the sense of your findings being backed by evidence. "Certain" means that there are no good grounds for doubting the results, i.e., the weight of evidence supports your conclusions (Guion, 2002: 1)

McNiff (2010) outlines how validation from several sources provides the researcher with the confidence to claim that they have influenced a certain situation and can improve their practice as a result. She notes how validation can be ensured by preparing a strong rationale for the research and linking values to that research. Linking my own values to this research helped me to prepare a strong rationale for the study and the use of a reflective journal to reflect on personal teaching and learning was also a key aspect of the validation process (McNiff, 2010).

Cohen et al. (2007) outline the many types of validity but, due to certain conditions that can affect the research, validity does not always ensure reliability. They outline how research can never be 100 percent valid. They also discuss the issue of bias and both uncertainty and bias emerged over the course of this research, which will be discussed in chapter four. Cohen et al. (2007) define

validity as, ‘an important key to effective research. If a piece of research is invalid, it is worthless’ (Cohen et al. 2007: 133).

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations involve, ‘the search for rules of conduct that enable us to operate defensibly in the political contexts in which we have to conduct educational research’ (Simons, 1995, 435-449). In any research conducted with children, a careful approach to the research must be taken to eliminate the possibility of risk or harm. In the case of this study, various tangible ethical considerations were addressed. I needed to be cognitive of the fact that parents/guardians might become conscious of their own level of Irish, or that they would feel inadequate in their ability to complete Irish reading homework correctly. They could also have been reluctant to express dissatisfaction at the resources provided by the school to assist with Irish reading. As this study was conducted during a pandemic, school closures and additional pressures to complete Irish reading with little assistance, had to be considered.

Throughout the project, I needed to evaluate the possible risk or harm that could be caused to pupils and to ensure measures were in place to mitigate these risks. There was the possibility that they could have become overwhelmed during the research process, particularly at such a young age. Assuring them that they could express their thoughts and feelings in a safe space and with an adult they can trust was paramount. Pupils were also assured that they could withdraw from the research at any point without judgement. Considering all ethical issues and adhering to the code of practice ensured that procedures, methods and data collection tools were in keeping with all



ethical guidelines. I was also aware that there could be adverse effects on participants and that the research should be suspended if necessary.

The Maynooth University Ethics Policy (2020) outlines how researchers should conduct their research in line with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The ‘Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children’, DCYA (2011), focuses on ‘protecting and promoting child welfare’ and outlines procedures or practices that should be followed by all researchers. These documents provided me with the necessary tools to minimise risk or harm to pupils taking part in this project. It is outlined in ‘Ethical Procedures’, section 8.0 of the Froebel Student Handbook, that there could be serious implications and referral to the Central Faculty Ethics Committee as a result of the following: causing harm or the potential of harm to participants/ researchers, illegal activity, deceiving participants or jeopardising participants or researchers. This study underwent full ethical review and was granted approval. As the study involved research with children, ethical issues that may have arisen were considered prior to the commencement of the research and are outlined in detail below.

### **3.8.1 Informed Consent and Assent**

Prior to the research, I used bilingual information sheets to describe in detail, the purpose of the research and what the research would entail (See Appendix A: A.1- A.4). Parents/guardians were advised to carefully read the information sheets with their children to ensure that they were fully informed of the nature of the research. Informed written consent was necessary for inclusion in the study. Pupils and parents/guardians were also informed of the fact that they could withdraw from the research at any point without having to give a reason. They were also advised that their privacy

and anonymity would be protected to avoid exposure and vulnerability. Research such as this can place restrictions or limitations on participants and informed consent and assent ensured that rights were protected but that a certain amount of responsibility lay with the pupils and parents/guardians themselves (Cohen et al., 2007: 52).

### **3.8.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Mitigating possible breach of identities and ensuring that pupils and parents/guardians were not exposed in any way, ensured their privacy and anonymity throughout the course of the research. Both the Maynooth University Ethics Policy (2020) and the Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy (2016), outline the importance of data collection, data storage, and the retention and disposal of data to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. It is outlined how researchers must conduct their research with honesty, reliability, a duty of care and responsibility. In conjunction with university policies, I had a personal responsibility to ensure that all ethical procedures were followed. I ensured prior to the research, that all participants were aware that any data collected would be destroyed within a stated timeframe in accordance with university guidelines and should any breach in confidentiality occur during the research that all relevant parties and the university would be notified.

### **3.8.3 Vulnerability and Sensitivity**

I was aware that situations could arise during the research involving risk, discomfort or harm. Younger participants could have been particularly vulnerable and protecting them was a priority. Intervention during the research was considered and I was equipped with the necessary tools to

cope with any unforeseen outcomes and to deal with them appropriately should the situation arise. In the event of sensitive, intrusive or stressful situations, I was aware that they should be dealt with in a professional and ethical manner. It was understood that both the supervisor and the University would be consulted with regards to the appropriate steps to take, to deal with the aftermath of a disclosure. I was aware of the importance of waiting for instruction from the college before approaching pupils and parents/guardians in relation to the events in question. As this research involved Irish reading at home, parents/guardians could have potentially found the research intrusive and stressful. Though they gladly agreed to participate at the beginning, they may have felt the need to withdraw from the research process over time which would have been fully accepted and respected.

The aim of this chapter was to provide an insight into action research by outlining the basic principles of research and discussing its continuous and evolving process. Discussing the methodological design of the research in detail was with a view to laying the foundation for the rationale, design and preparation of the research, which will be outlined in detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Preparation and Research Cycles**

### **4.1 Overview**

This chapter aims to describe and explain the project in detail and to provide learning and insights into the process of the research itself. The rationale for the research will be defined and justified, and there will be a clear layout of the design of the research, where the research was undertaken and its participants. The action plan implemented in the research project will be presented with an in-depth description of the research cycles that were conducted. The graded readers used in the project will be mentioned and an explanation as to why these readers were chosen. The preparation of surveys, questionnaires and discussions will be outlined as well as a description of how the recordings were constructed. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of the key points and the preparation for the analysis of data findings which will be presented in detail in chapter five.

### **4.2 Research Rationale**

The purpose of this research was to provide an accurate representation of the challenges that pupils, parents/guardians and teachers faced with reading homework in Irish medium schools. The research question itself focused on their lived experiences and perspectives of Irish reading homework. This research was motivated by the challenges parents/guardians faced during the pandemic, engaging in home-schooling for the first time and teaching their children Irish reading. Although there were a number of parents/guardians with a high level of Irish, they were in the minority, and most found it difficult to complete Irish reading activities and struggled with

vocabulary and pronunciation. Recordings were provided to assist them in these areas. These recordings were part of the weekly Irish lesson plans, and participants could listen to the stories and read along while also focusing on Irish grammar points. Parents/guardians found this resource very useful, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Pupils were given the opportunity to continue with their Irish reading at home and there was a demand for this resource to continue once pupils returned to the classroom. The school, however, was not in a position to continue providing this resource as a support for Irish reading.

### **4.3 Explanation and Description of the Project**

As this was a self-study action project, the process of critical self-reflection throughout was imperative to help change and improve my practice. At times the business of the classroom can affect how we think and reflect on our practice, but the process of self-study action research tells the story of our practice and of our teaching and this project gave me a true insight into the struggles for parents/guardians with Irish reading at home and the limited Irish reading resources available to them. It was important to address these issues, to identify the challenges associated with Irish reading homework and to draw attention to the gap in research on the topic and the need for further examination.

An action project such as this creates uncertainty and can be a challenging process. Cook (2009) discusses the ‘messy area’ and how “entering the ‘messy area’ can be professionally and personally uncomfortable but vital to research. That it seeks to engage in contesting knowledge leading to changes in practice (Cook, 2009: 11). Opening the door to criticism on Irish reading homework and the availability of resources in schools was risky in that any findings or changes in practice

could be met with opposition in the workplace. In conjunction with this, the additional resource of recordings was provided for parents/guardians during this action project but ceased once pupils returned to school, causing frustration. While this showed the value of the recordings, it left the school and teachers open to criticism of the availability of this resource. So, while action research and critical reflection can be a taxing process, the value of a project like this, is significant, in that it highlights how Irish reading homework is an under-researched area and more must be done to assist parents/guardians with Irish reading homework.

The approach I chose to take for this action project allowed me to investigate how pupils and parents/guardians felt about Irish reading homework and the resources provided to them, allowing me to gain a true insight into their perspectives of Irish reading homework and the challenges they face while reading with their children.

#### **4.3.1 Research Design**

In relation to research design, methodologies and methods for the project were carefully considered. Cohen et al. (2007) highlight how there must be a clear distinction between the two; the approach and style of the research as opposed to the instruments used and the method of data collection (Cohen et al. 2007: 83). The methodology consisted of two cycles with two phases in each cycle. Both cycles followed a similar format and will be described in detail below. The research focused predominantly on the use of recordings as an additional learning tool to assist pupils and parents/guardians with Irish reading at home.

A clear time frame from January to March was initially planned however this needed to be amended as a result of school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Alternatively, the research

took place over the course of five weeks, for the month of April into June. A number of data collection tools were used, and the data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The overall approach to the design of the project was carefully considered with a view to gaining a better understanding of how to amend and enhance my practice.

#### **4.3.2 Research Site**

The research site for the purpose of this self-study action project was a co-educational Irish medium primary school consisting of 463 students and 27 staff. The school is under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin and strives to maintain a Catholic and inclusive ethos. The research and data collection were conducted in a mainstream classroom, *rang a haon* (first class). The school involved in this research places a strong emphasis on both English and Irish reading choosing specific reading schemes to suit all age groups. Reading is considered to be a significant aspect of homework and is included in the homework policy for all class groups. Teachers in the junior classes are required to read with the children daily and to incorporate paired and shared reading into their lesson plans. The school does not adopt a definitive reading policy and reading practices differ from class to class. This research focused on the reading process implemented by the teachers of *rang a haon*, where pupils are divided into reading groups and read individually with the class teacher within these groups daily. Children with a lower reading ability read individually with the class teacher and are also granted additional reading time with in-class learning support. The reading groups are constantly revised, and the children move from group to group based on their progression. There are several families in the school where at least one parent is fluent in Irish and a small number where both parents/guardians would have a level of fluency

in the language. Many would have respect for the language and a desire to speak it however they are reluctant to use any Irish they do have due to a lack of confidence.

### **4.3.3 Research Participants**

This research project involved thirty-three pupils, aged six and seven, and their parents/guardians. Discussions took place with a critical friend who was a colleague and was also in charge of *rang a haon*. The pupils were invited to partake in SPHE lessons (see Appendix B.1) to generate discussions on their thoughts and feelings on Irish reading and were asked to complete Irish reading exercises with their parents/guardians at home, with and without the use of recordings. Pupils and parents/guardians were then invited to complete questionnaires and surveys on their experiences and perspectives of Irish reading homework and the use of the recordings.

### **4.4 Construction of Letters of Consent: Board of Management and Participants**

Prior to the research, permission was sought from the Board of Management of the school for the research to take place. A letter was constructed for the Board informing them of the nature and topic of the research (see Appendix A.1). The Board were also informed that the privacy and anonymity of the school and the participants of the research would be assured and that any data collected would be destroyed within a certain timeframe adhering to college guidelines. Considerations of the possibility of school closures as a result of the pandemic and the alternative approach to the research were also outlined to the Board. Copies of the information sheets and letters of consent for pupils and parents/guardians were also included.



Pupils and parents/guardians were presented with information letters and consent forms prior to the research. Parents/guardians were encouraged to read the information sheets with their children, to ensure that they understood what the research was about, that they could opt out of the research process at any time and to ensure the consent forms were signed by the children themselves. Parents/guardians were also asked to sign consent forms and return them to the school. The information provided to pupils and parents/guardians was similar to that presented to the Board and all ethical considerations were considered. All letters and forms presented to the Board and to participants were presented in both Irish and English and can be viewed in full in Appendix A: A.1-A.4.

#### 4.5 Action Plan: Cycles 1 & 2

This research consisted of two main cycles with two phases in each cycle. A model of the action plan implemented is presented in figure 4.1. A description of the surveys and questionnaires used will be described in detail in section 4.7.

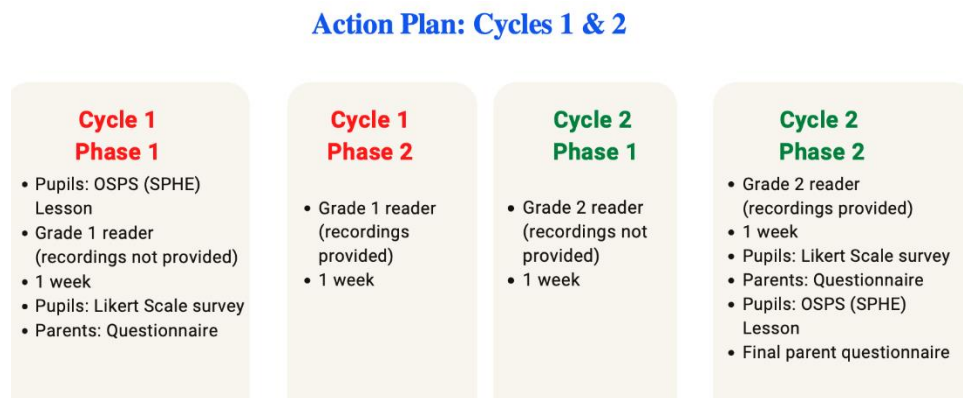


Figure 4.1: Model of action plan for data analysis

Cycle 1 involved two phases and investigated pupils' and parents'/guardians' thoughts and feelings on Irish reading homework. Phase 1 began with a discussion with the pupils on Irish reading homework and they were given a grade 1 reader without recordings to complete with their parent/guardian at home. A Likert scale survey was presented to the pupils to gather their perspective on Irish reading. A more detailed questionnaire was presented to parents/guardians on their perspectives of the grade 1 reader with their child with room for additional comments. Phase 2 continued with the same reader and recordings were provided at this point to assist with the Irish reading. These recordings focused on pronunciation and new vocabulary.

Research questions presented to pupils and parents/guardians in Cycle 1 aimed to examine their thoughts and feelings in relation to homework in general and Irish reading homework. Cycle 1 was effective in that it invited pupils and parents/guardians to express their feelings on a range of topics relating to Irish reading homework (see Appendix B.1, B.2 and B.3).

Cycle 2 followed a similar pattern to Cycle 1 using a grade 2 reader. The purpose of increasing the grade of the reader was to challenge pupils' reading abilities and place more emphasis on the use of the recordings. Surveys and questionnaires were then presented to pupils and parents/guardians on their experiences of Irish reading homework and focused primarily on the additional support of the recordings (See Appendix B.4 and B.5).

At the end of Cycle 2, another discussion took place with pupils about their experiences of the recordings. Pupils were also invited to share their feelings on Irish reading homework in school and during school closures as a result of the pandemic. The research concluded with a final questionnaire for parents/guardians involving open-ended questions on a range of topics relating to their own experiences of the Irish language and the effect that the pandemic and school closures had on their child's Irish reading ability (See Appendix B.6).

## 4.6 Construction of the Recordings

The recordings provided are ultimately what capture the essence of the project itself. As the recordings provided prior to the commencement of the project were essentially trial and error, it was easy to build on these and present recordings that were clear, concise and easy to follow. This was important to keep pupils and parents/guardians engaged with the recordings and with the research itself. These ‘pilot’ recordings allowed me also to identify and correct any issues such as pace, clarity, content and engagement.

As outlined above, two Irish readers were chosen for the purpose of this research. The Irish readers in use by the pupils at the time of the research were not recorded to ensure the authenticity of the research. Alternatively, two readers used in previous years by the school but no longer in circulation were used- *Seán agus an Fathach* and *Diarmaid an Dragún*. *Seán agus an Fathach* was chosen as the grade 1 reader for Cycle 1 and *Diarmaid an Dragún* as the Grade 2 reader for Cycle 2. Again, increasing the level of the Irish reader encouraged pupils and parents/guardians to use the recordings as an additional resource to assist them with Irish reading.

Recording the Irish readers was a complex process and required a significant amount of time, which highlighted how such a resource could not realistically be provided by class teachers on a regular basis. Screencast-O-Matic was chosen for the purpose of recording for this project, a screen casting and video editing software tool that is widely used in the education sector. In the recordings, I read each page twice drawing attention to specific pronunciation and difficult vocabulary. Each page included new vocabulary, and I addressed these at the beginning of the recordings to draw the pupils’ attention to words they were not accustomed to. Pupils and

parents/guardians were invited first to listen to the recording while following the text in front of them and to read along a second time. They were then encouraged to repeat this process once or twice before moving on to the next page.

#### **4.7 Primary Data Collection Tools: Discussions, Surveys & Questionnaires**

Open-ended discussions with pupils, surveys and questionnaires, as well as a reflective journal and discussions with a critical friend were deemed to be the most appropriate methods of data collection for this project. Additional methods such as, interviews with pupils and parents/guardians and writing activities for the pupils based on the recordings were initially considered, however it was considered that there may be an overload of findings for analysis. The preparation and layout of the discussions, surveys and questionnaires are outlined in detail below.

##### **4.7.1 Construction of Open-ended Discussions with Pupils**

Open-ended discussions with the pupils in this research were particularly significant as they provided additional data in relation to pupils' views on Irish reading homework. The discussions were part of an SPHE lesson (see Appendix B.1) and were subjective where the pupils could respond in their own words. They led to further discussions on the effect the Covid-19 pandemic had on them and how they felt about Irish reading at home. The lesson took approximately twenty minutes and was conducted in a group setting. The teacher was at the top of the room and gathered data through notetaking. Pupils responded to the questions with a show of hands and although all pupils were invited to share their thoughts and opinions, not all chose to take part in the discussion. Cohen et al. (2007) outline how discussions like these, affords the researcher the opportunity to

‘probe so that she may go into more depth if she chooses’ (Cohen et al.,2007: 357). While the questions designed for these discussions focused on Irish reading homework and resources to assist with it, the pupils provided answers that were not expected or anticipated in relation to the pandemic and its effects on pupils’ experiences of Irish reading at home.

The group discussion with the pupils allowed them to speak freely about homework as opposed to a tick the box option on the surveys that would be distributed later in the research process. The research ended with another SPHE lesson (see Appendix B.1) where the discussion focused more on the recordings of the Irish readers and how the pupils felt about reading at home during the school closures. This discussion lasted longer, and the pupils were forthcoming and honest with their answers. Samples of their comments in relation to their feelings during the pandemic are included in the findings presented in chapter five.

#### **4.7.2 Construction of Pupil Involvement Surveys**

Choosing surveys as a means of data collection was important as it allowed for gathering information and for exploring the attitudes and preferences of the participants, along with their beliefs and perspectives (Weisberg et al., 1996). Likert scale surveys, with the use of emojis, were chosen for this research as a data collection tool to ensure the research questions were clear, concise and age appropriate for the pupils. Prerequisites to the designing of the surveys, as outlined by Cohen et al. (2007) involved specifying the purpose of the inquiry, the population on which the research focused and the resources available for designing the surveys. The surveys used in this research had a specific aim to gain a true insight into how pupils felt about Irish reading homework.

### 4.7.3 Survey 1: Pupils

Survey one which was distributed to pupils in cycle one, consisted of four questions (see Appendix B.2) focusing on the pupils' thoughts and feelings on homework in general and Irish reading homework. The pupils were given three possible answers '*Is aoibhinn liom é, Tá sé ceart go leor* or *Níl mé cinnte* and *Ní maith liom é*' (I love it, it's okay or I'm not sure and I don't like it.) The surveys were constructed in both Irish and English and parents/guardians were asked to read the surveys with their children but not to prompt them in any way. Space for additional comments was also provided for pupils to express any feelings or opinions they had in relation to the questions in the survey. Survey one can be viewed in full in Appendix B.2.

### 4.7.4 Survey 2: Pupils

The questions on the second survey distributed to pupils, which was distributed at the end of cycle two, focused solely on their experiences of the recordings to assist them with their Irish reading homework (see Appendix B.4). Again, this was a Likert scale survey and consisted of four questions related to the recordings of the Irish readers. Pupils were asked if they enjoyed the recordings, whether they influenced their Irish reading and if they were difficult to follow. They were given a number of possible answers '*Thaitin sé go mór liom, Bhí sé ceart go leor, Níor thaitin,* or '*Bhí, Níl mé cinnte, Ní raibh*' (I enjoyed it a lot, it was okay, I didn't enjoy it or it was, I'm not sure, it wasn't). Question four on this survey was a simple *Tá* (Yes) or *Níl* (No) answer where the pupils were asked whether they preferred Irish reading with or without the recordings. The findings from this question were significant in that they captured the purpose of the recordings and their contribution to the project overall. Survey two can be viewed in full in Appendix B.4.

#### **4.7.5 Construction of Parent/guardian Involvement Questionnaires**

The questionnaires designed for parents/guardians partaking in this research involved a more detailed approach in relation to their perspectives on Irish reading homework. As outlined by Cohen et al. (2007), the questionnaires designed were clear on the purpose of the inquiry, on what was included and covered in the questionnaires, covered all elements of the research on Irish reading homework and asked appropriate questions to elicit appropriate data for analysis. While the questionnaires were structured and specific, room for additional comments was provided to gather more information on parents'/guardians' views on Irish reading homework and the resources available to them. It provided them with the opportunity to elaborate on their answers and give further information. These additional comments were rich in content and contributed significantly to the findings of the research.

The questionnaires aimed to cover a range of topics in relation to Irish reading homework and parents'/guardians' views on various issues relating to Irish reading and the availability of resources. Both questionnaires allowed me to identify areas that were not addressed or that created bias within the research. A third questionnaire was created for parents/guardians to focus on the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures had on their child's Irish reading ability.

#### **4.7.6 Questionnaire 1: Parents/guardians**

The first questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians in cycle one, consisted of eleven questions with four possible answers '*Aontaím go hiomlán, Aontaím, Ní aontaím and Ní aontaím in aon chor*'

(Strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). (See Appendix B.3). Questionnaire one was constructed with a view to answering specific research questions which are outlined below:

- Did parents/guardians feel that their child enjoyed homework/ Irish reading homework?
- Was Irish reading easy/ difficult for their child?
- Did their child struggle with Irish vocabulary/ grammar/ pronunciation?
- Did parents/guardians find Irish reading homework stressful?
- Did parents/guardians feel that their own level of Irish affected their child's Irish reading ability?
- Were parents/guardians satisfied with the resources provided to assist with Irish reading homework?

These statements were carefully considered to ensure that the primary concerns in relation to Irish reading homework were addressed and that the objectives of the research were fully covered.

#### **4.7.7 Questionnaire 2: Parents/guardians**

The second questionnaire given to parents/guardians and presented in Cycle two was based solely on their experiences of the recordings. This questionnaire consisted of ten questions (see appendix B.5), again with four possible answers '*Aontaím go hiomlán, Aontaím, Ní aontaím* and *Ní aontaím in aon chor*' (Strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). Similar to the first questionnaire, the second was constructed with a view to addressing the questions below:

- Were the recordings helpful with Irish reading homework?
- Did the recordings help with vocabulary and pronunciation?
- Were the recordings easy to follow/ too long?
- Did the recordings help with the level of Irish reading?
- Were the recordings stressful for the child or parents/guardian?
- Were the recordings a useful resource?

This questionnaire was designed with a view to addressing the lack of resources available to parents and emphasising the value of recordings as an additional learning tool. The findings in



relation to the recordings were significant and will be analysed in detail in chapter five. The statements on questionnaire two can be viewed in full in Appendix B.5.

#### **4.7.8 Questionnaire 3: Parents/guardians**

The third questionnaire was very detailed and was created to expand on the valuable data that emerged from the first two questionnaires. This final one also provided clarity on parents'/guardians' opinions on resources provided to assist with Irish reading homework prior to school closures and prior to the research. It addressed:

- Parents'/guardians' concerns regarding their own level of Irish before their child started school and how they feel now.
- The effects of the pandemic and school closures on their child's Irish reading ability.
- Their opinions on Irish reading resources provided prior to the first lockdown in March 2020.

The statements on the final questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians can be viewed in full in Appendix B.6. The information that emerged from the surveys, questionnaires and open-ended discussions in this project will be discussed in detail in the analysis of findings in chapter five.

### **4.8 Learning and Insights**

Much was learned from providing recordings prior to and during the research and there was evidence that additional resources such as those recordings were necessary to improve the experience of Irish reading homework. While there are certain resources available to schools and parents/guardians, the recordings provided here were simple to use and easily accessible. This made them very appealing and the demand for a continuation of this resource was not surprising.

Building on what was provided during the lockdown as part of this research project improved the content and quality of the recordings.

Formulating an action plan and constructing the various aspects of this project recognised in general, the contribution that school practice and policy have on parental involvement but specifically parents'/guardians' involvement in Irish reading. Recognising the impact that the partnership between school and home has on Irish reading homework was important. It is also important to note that while schools and teachers are pivotal in relying to parents/guardians the importance of their involvement in their child's acquisition of Irish reading skills, there is not always an awareness of the challenges in this area. Further learning and insights from this project will be discussed following a thorough analysis of data findings in chapter five.

## **Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis**

### **5.1 Overview**

This chapter aims not only to investigate the experiences of pupils and parents/guardians regarding Irish reading homework, but to provide evidence to allow me, as a practitioner, to address my approach in relation to this. Through data collection, I gained insight into parents/guardians and pupils' thoughts and feelings in relation to Irish reading homework. In this chapter, themes from the data findings will be examined using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The concepts and themes that emerged from analysis were essential to understanding pupils' and parents'/guardians' views on Irish reading homework and will be discussed in detail. Evidence will be provided of alternative methods, such as recordings of Irish readers, to assist with Irish reading to make the experience more engaging.

### **5.2 Data Collection**

A systematic approach to data collection was essential to maintain an ordered process to the research, as discussed earlier. The collection of data encouraged me to reflect on practice and implement change in relation to Irish reading homework. It was important to be aware that an overload of content could be overwhelming, and that careful consideration be given to planning. All areas which could provide valuable findings for analysis had to be considered. It was important therefore to be clear and focused on the implementation of data collection.

### **5.2.1 Data Collection Tools**

Cohen et al. (2007) discuss the importance of choosing appropriate data collection tools to successfully implement a well-structured action plan. They claim that ‘the strengths and weaknesses of these instruments are set out, so that decisions on their suitability and the criterion of *fitness for purpose* can be addressed’ (Cohen et al, 2007: 315). In this project, data collection tools consisted of a reflective journal, open-ended discussions, discussions with a critical friend, surveys and questionnaires.

### **5.2.2 Data Storage**

A specific data storage strategy was put in place prior to the commencement of the research. Hard copies of the surveys and questionnaires, along with observations relating to the discussions were stored in locked cabinets with limited access. Digital files were stored and protected using passwords and encryption, as outlined in the Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy, to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of pupils and parents/guardians. The data was accessible to participants and would be held for a recommended timeframe of ten years. They were assured in information leaflets and consent forms of the points above in relation to data storage. It was made clear that data collected would be published in the final thesis, but that the identity of pupils and parents/guardians and the location of the research would remain anonymous.

## **5.3 Data Analysis**

The data analysis process involved examining whether the evidence from data collection supported my concerns that pupils and parents/guardians were struggling with Irish reading due to a lack of resources to assist them at home and whether evidence from the data collected could lead to a positive change in the area of Irish reading homework. To articulate the findings of the research, I reflected on the research process while examining the data thoroughly. Part of the process of analysis involved examining the relevance of the findings and the influence those findings could have on my own educational practice and the practice of others.

### **5.3.1 Emerging themes and sub-themes: Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis**

'Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is the most commonly used approach used by researchers to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012). The 6-step process is outlined by Braun and Clarke as follows: familiarising with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 35).

This process of analysis allowed me to organise and describe the data in detail and identify emerging themes and sub-themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline in detail 'what counts as a theme' (2006: 10). They state how there is no 'hard or fast answer' to what would suffice as a theme and that the decision to define a theme lay with the researcher. I chose two primary emerging themes and several sub-themes in this project, which will be discussed below. Determining the themes and sub-themes was at my own discretion and judgement and using thematic analysis allowed me to 'identify, code and analyse' (Braun and Clarke, 2006), to accurately present the content of the data collected. Identifying data can be done in an inductive way (Braun and Clarke,

2006) which I chose for this study as the themes were strongly linked to the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this approach of thematic analysis as ‘data-driven’.

To code the data, I transcribed from discussions, surveys and questionnaires and used a highlighting method which identified the themes and matched them to the data extracts. I collated codes together in a computer file and tagged and named selections of texts within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I coded as many interesting or potential themes as possible and narrowed them down by reviewing and refining them. I had a clear insight then into what the different themes were and how they fit together. It was important at this point to consider how they connected to the overall ‘story’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in relation to the original research question. The primary themes and sub-themes are outlined in table 5.1 below.

Themes	Sub-themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The value of the recordings to aid pronunciation</li> <li>• Engagement of participants with the recordings as an additional resource</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recordings assisting with new vocabulary</li> <li>• Recordings increasing parents’ own level of Irish</li> <li>• Recordings used for structured lessons during school closures</li> </ul>

*Table 5.1: Emerging themes and sub-themes using Braun & Clarke’s Thematic Analysis*

### 5.3.2 Summary of discussions with pupils

The short open-ended discussions as part of the SPHE lessons (see Appendix B.1) with the pupils revealed several interesting findings. Pupils expressed, by a show of hands, whether they enjoyed reading with their mother/father/guardian at home and the results were surprising as a very small percentage enjoyed reading at home as shown in table 5.2 below.

<b>Pupils who prefer reading in school</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Pupils who prefer reading at home</b>	<b>8</b>

*Table 5.2: Number of pupils who preferred reading at home/ in school*

Pupils were then invited to comment further on why they preferred Irish reading in school:

*It is easier in a group, you can hear everyone reading. I prefer reading in class. (Child C)*

*I am happier when the class is doing it together. I feel proud of the class too. (Child D)*

*When my teacher is not with me, I feel I am in the wrong place. (Child A)*

The more significant findings from the discussions related to how the pupils felt about the recordings and how they helped them with their Irish reading at home. Several of their responses were linked to how they felt about school closures, the use of a mask by the teacher as a result of the pandemic and reading at home without their teacher.

*I would like the recordings again because some of the words are too hard and my Daddy doesn't know them. (Child B)*

*Some of the reading was hard and the recordings helped me a lot. Now I am confident and can read my own stories. (Child H)*

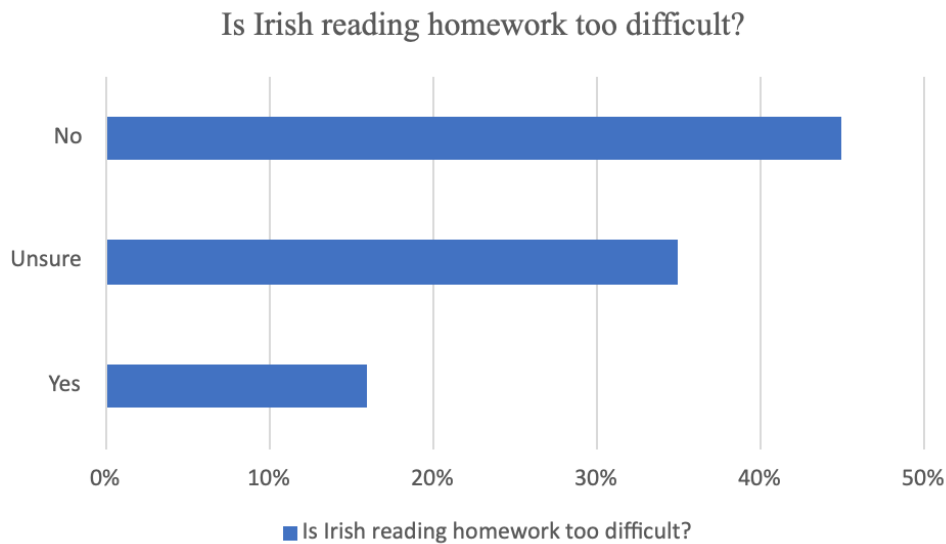
*Reading is too hard without the recordings. It was easier when you read the page twice.*

*I felt sad and missed Irish reading with you. (Child A)*

*I like the recordings because I can pause and go back but I can't pause you in school.*  
(Child C)

### 5.3.3 Summary of findings: Cycle 1

Pupils were asked in Survey 1 how they felt about homework and more specifically how they felt about Irish reading homework. 29% expressed that they liked homework in general and 54% stated that they enjoyed Irish reading homework. A small percentage were unsure, however uncertainty was to be expected, perhaps due to the age of the participants. When pupils were asked if they found Irish reading homework too difficult, 45% said no, 35% were unsure and 16% found it too difficult as shown in figure 5.1

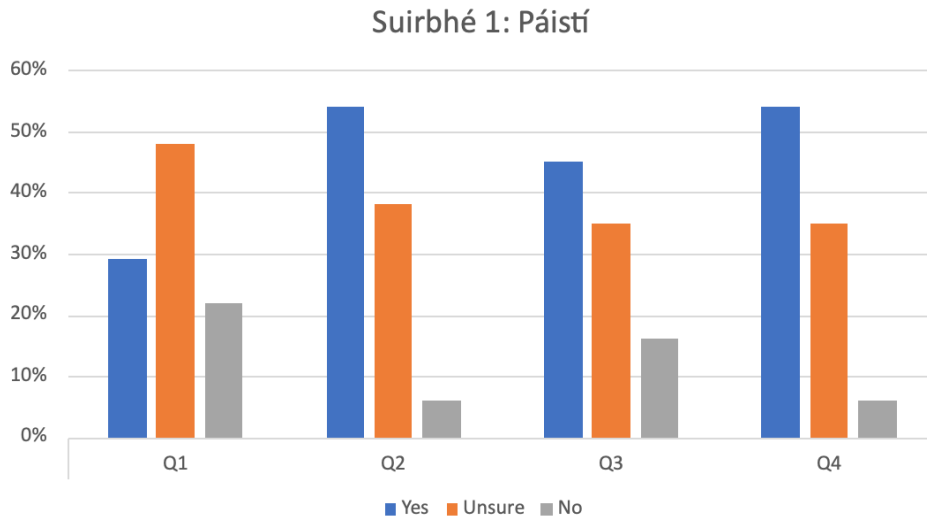


*Figure 5.1: Findings from question 3 on Survey 1 distributed to pupils*

Overall, there was a very positive attitude towards Irish reading homework from the pupils in Survey 1. They were asked four clear questions in relation to homework, Irish reading homework

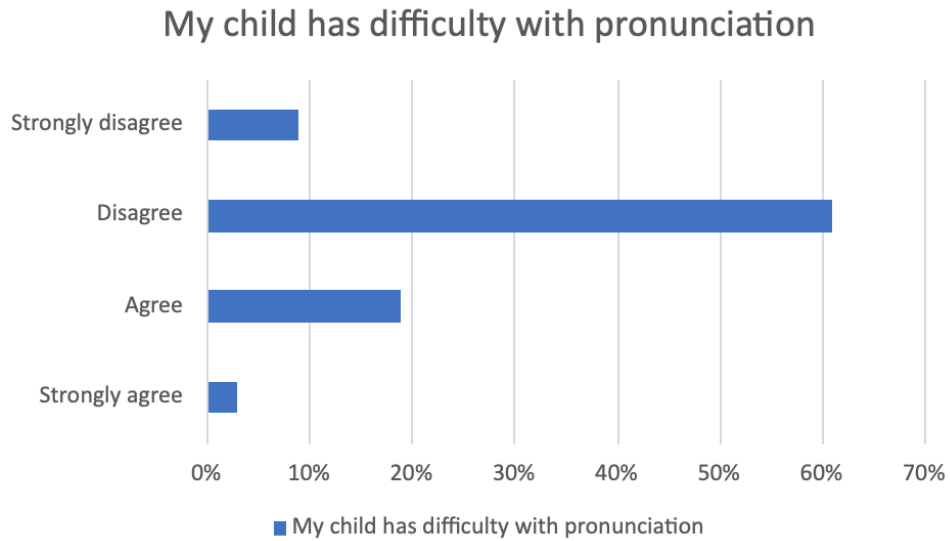


and how they felt about reading at home with an adult. The questions can be viewed in full in Appendix B.2 and the findings are depicted in figure 5.2 below.



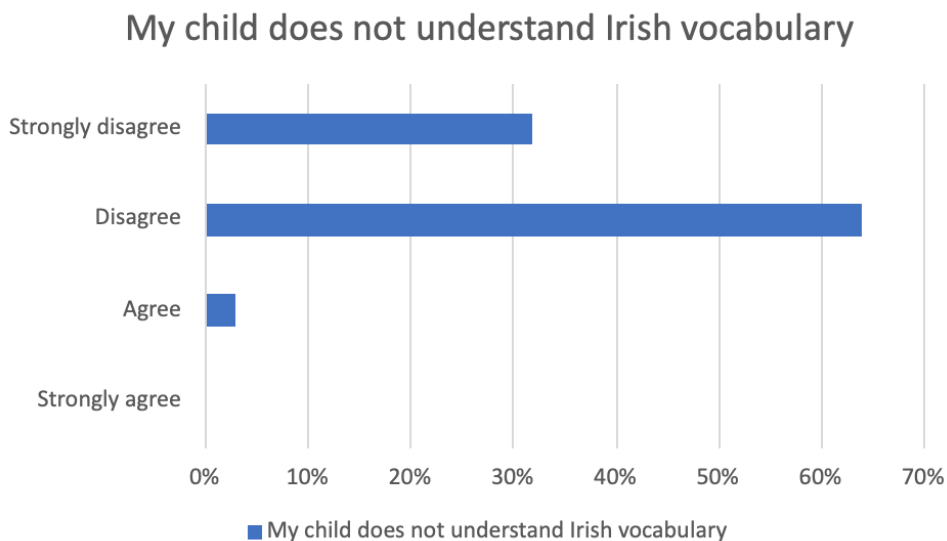
*Figure 5.2: Summary of findings from Survey 1 distributed to pupils*

The questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians in Cycle 1 involved a range of statements in relation to the recordings and they were given four options to respond; strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. This questionnaire presented significant data in relation to Irish reading homework in comparison to the pupils' survey due to the detailed nature of the questions (See Appendix B.3). Factors such as difficulty with new vocabulary and pronunciation were addressed and ultimately whether parents/guardians felt that a lack of resources to assist with Irish reading homework played a role here. The findings from the first questionnaire suggested that most felt their children did not struggle with pronunciation and a small percentage agreed that their children had some difficulty. See figure 5.3 below.



*Figure 5.3: Findings from question 6 on Questionnaire 1 distributed to parents*

Figure 5.4 below shows how a large majority of parents/guardians felt their children had little or no difficulty with vocabulary. However, this was contradicted in the questionnaire given to parents in Cycle 2 and will be discussed further below.



*Figure 5.4: Findings from question 7 on Questionnaire 1 distributed to parents/guardians*

Parents/guardians were provided with room for additional comments on the questionnaire in Cycle 1 and it emerged that there was a sense of accomplishment amongst them in that they felt much of their Irish came back while doing Irish reading with their child. Many commented that they felt their own level of Irish was sufficient to help their child with Irish reading.

*When I first sent my child to a Gaelscoil I dreaded Irish homework and thought I would struggle. I was quite surprised at how much my own Irish came back to me. (Parent C)*

*I might not understand all the rules (grammar) but can read and write it well enough to support her reading. (Parent E)*

Only 34% of parents/guardians felt that their own level of Irish affected their child's reading ability while 63% felt their proficiency in the language was strong enough to effectively help their child with Irish reading homework. It emerged however, that some felt it would become more of an issue as their child progressed through the school where Irish reading became more challenging, pointing to the need for further research across all age groups at primary level which is included in the recommendations in the final chapter.

Figure 5.5 below represents the overall findings from the questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians in Cycle 1. They were asked eleven questions (see Appendix B.3) which covered a range of topics, including how their child felt about Irish reading homework, difficulties with the level of reading/pronunciation/vocabulary, whether Irish reading caused stress at home and how they felt their own level of Irish effected their child's Irish reading ability. The questions can be viewed in full in Appendix B.3 and findings are presented in figure 5.5 below.

### Suirbhé 1: Tuismitheoirí

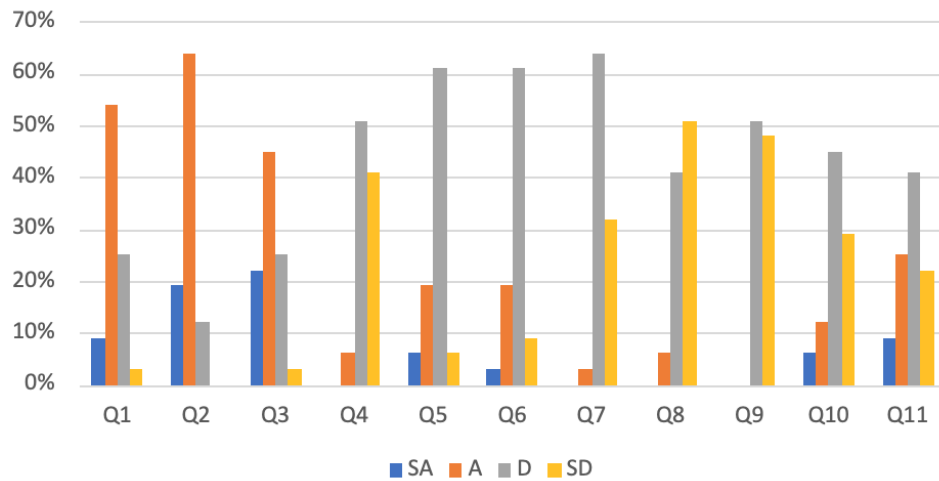


Figure 5.5: Summary of findings from Questionnaire 1 distributed to parents

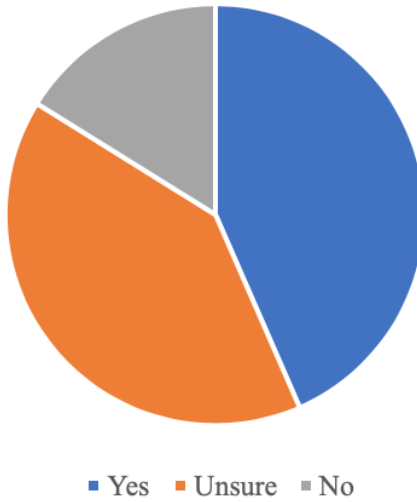
#### 5.3.4 Summary of findings: Cycle 2

The surveys and questionnaires presented to pupils and parents/guardians in Cycle 2 aimed to examine their experiences of the recordings of the Irish readers and how they contributed to Irish reading at home. Again, pupils were asked four simple questions while the questionnaires for parents/guardians were longer and more detailed (See Appendices B). The two primary themes that emerged from the findings were strongly represented in the findings in Cycle 2.

The figure below shows findings from the survey distributed to pupils at the end of Cycle 2. To ensure the surveys were again age-appropriate, Likert scale surveys using emojis were given to the pupils (See Appendix B.4). 16% of pupils felt the recordings did not help them as they were completing their Irish reading while 43% felt they did. A similar percentage of 40% were unsure.

The results from question 1 are shown in figure 5.6 below.

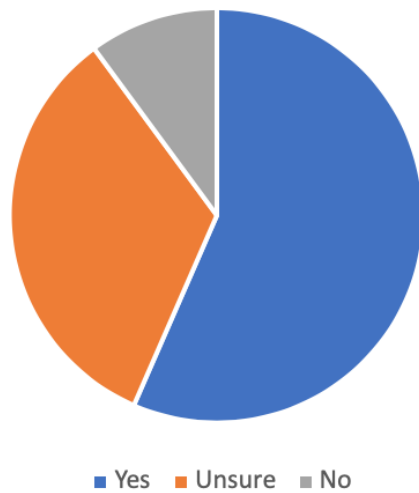
Did you enjoy the recordings of the Irish reader?



*Figure 5.6: Findings from question 1 on the second survey distributed to pupils*

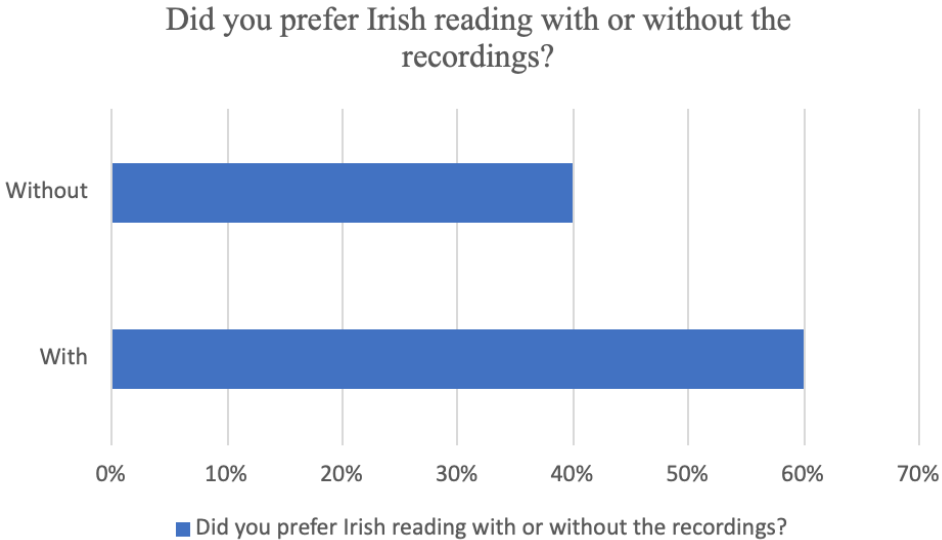
In relation to question 2, there was an overall positive response from the pupils which is depicted in the figure below. Again, there was a significant level of uncertainty here.

Did the recordings make a difference to your Irish reading?



*Figure 5.7: Findings from question 2 on the second survey distributed to pupils*

Pupils were also asked in this survey whether they preferred Irish reading with or without the recordings and the results are shown on the chart below. While the results were positive, it was not an overwhelming majority. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the pupils preferred reading in school, as discussed above.



*Figure 5.8: Findings from question 4 on the second survey distributed to pupils*

Similar to Cycle 1, pupils were asked four questions in relation to the recordings, how the recordings helped them with their Irish reading and whether they enjoyed Irish reading with or without the recordings. The questions can be viewed in full in Appendix B.4 and findings are represented in figure 5.9 below.

## Suirbhé 2: Páistí

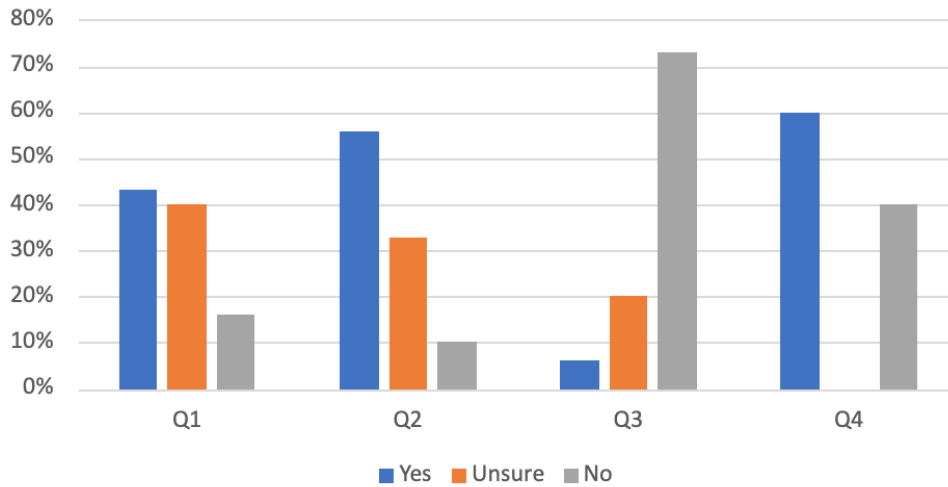
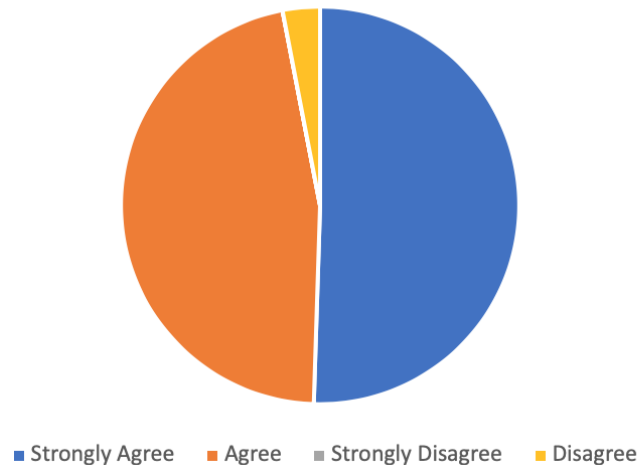


Figure 5.9: Summary of findings from Survey 2 distributed to pupils

The questionnaires distributed to parents/guardians in Cycle 2 were similar in format to Cycle 1. Findings from statement 1 on the questionnaire are represented in figure 5.10 below. Parents/guardians expressed here whether the recordings helped them as they were reading with their children. 50% strongly agreed, 46% agreed and a small percentage of them disagreed. This was an overwhelmingly positive response.

The recording helped me as I was reading with my child



*Figure 5.10: Findings from statement 1 on the second questionnaire distributed to parents/guardians*

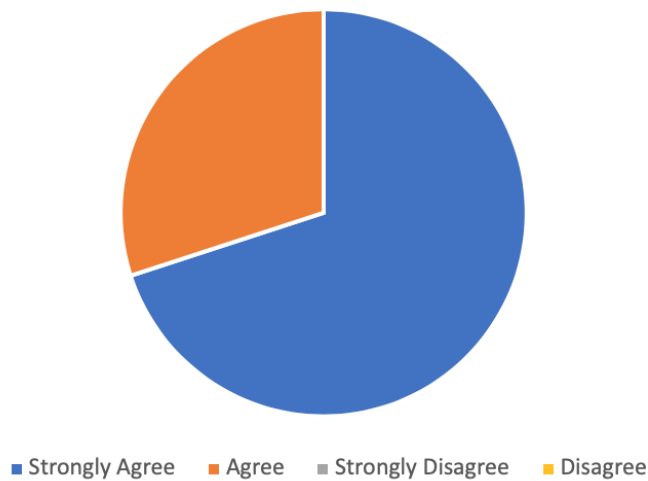
It must be acknowledged that these findings are representative of the fact that many parents/guardians are unfamiliar with the language and are often uncertain if they are pronouncing words correctly. Table 5.3 represents their level of Irish including Irish speakers, non-Irish speakers and those with a basic level of Irish.

<b>Irish speakers</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Non-Irish speakers</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Basic level of Irish</b>	<b>9</b>

*Table 5.3: Parents'/guardians' level of Irish*

Statement 3 on the questionnaire addressed the issue of how beneficial the recordings were to aid pronunciation, which was a primary emerging theme throughout the analysis. 70% strongly agreed that the recordings were very useful for pronunciation, 30% agreed and none disagreed, as figure 5.11 represents. This again, was a strong and positive response.

The recording was useful for pronunciation





*Figure 5.11: Findings from statement 3 on the second questionnaire distributed to parents*

As mentioned above, the findings from Cycle 2 contradicted parents'/guardians views in Cycle 1 in relation to pronunciation. Not only was this evident in statement 3 but reference to the value of the recordings and pronunciation was extensive in the additional comments.

*The recordings are a great help. Pronunciation can be so different across dialects, and I hate correcting it incorrectly. Especially if there are many ways to say it. (Parent E)*

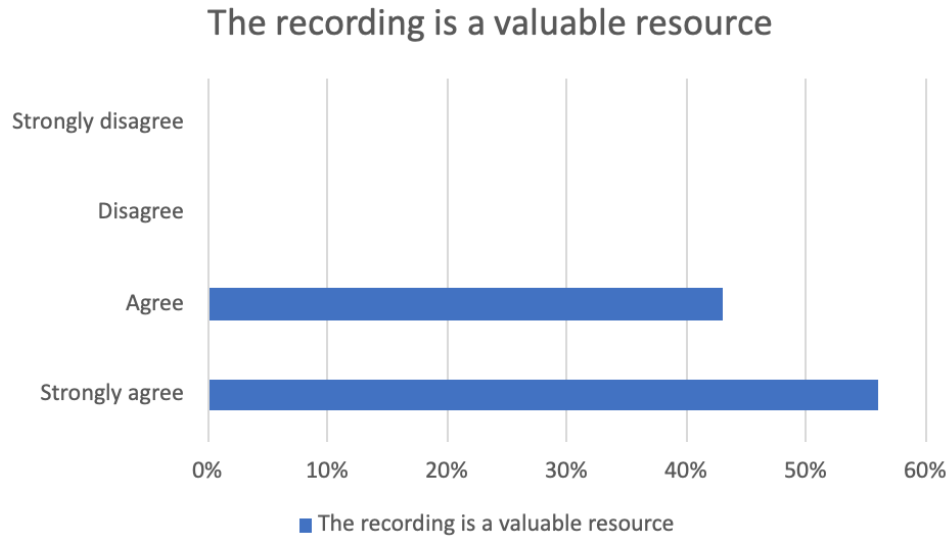
*I think the way you highlight the difference in the pronunciation when there is a 'h' added or if an 'úrú' is added, that the word changes, is an additional learning piece that is good to re-enforce and highlighting the sounds e.g., 'bh' makes a 'v' sound. I did reference your pronunciation of 'shuigh' as I would have learnt to say 'hig' but you say it as 'he', I didn't want to confuse her. (Parent A)*

*I especially found them (the recordings) helpful with pronunciation, I was confident I was teaching him the right words with the backup of the recordings. (Parent F)*

*I found that the videos provided for Irish reading during school closure helped with Irish pronunciation. I found that the various accents of teachers in the school can cause confusion and the videos helped to confirm that I was pronouncing words correctly. (Parent H)*

A number of significant factors emerged from these additional comments. Parents/guardians were extremely positive about the recordings, expressing that they were a brilliant resource for enjoyment, engagement, pronunciation and confidence. This, as well as reference to dialects and grammatical errors, captures the essence of the recordings.

Parents/guardians were also asked if they felt that the recordings were a valuable resource, and the response was overwhelming. 99% in total agreed that the recordings were invaluable to assist with Irish reading homework. See figure 5.12 below.



*Figure 5.12: Findings from statement 9 on the second questionnaire*

Parents/guardians were also invited to comment further on their opinions in the recordings as a valuable resource, again providing some very positive responses.

*I think my child kept a good level of reading. We found the videos an excellent resource for him to learn alongside his teacher. It was almost one-on-one. Almost! (Parent M)*

*I do believe the recordings are a great help and encouragement for kids for their reading. (Parent J)*

*Her spoken Irish I feel has probably suffered but her Irish reading ability has been maintained through homeschooling and recordings. (Parent B)*

The two primary themes that emerged in the research, as outlined above, the engagement of pupils and parents/guardians with the recordings and the educational value of the recordings to aid pronunciation emerged in both cycles. However, Cycle 2 presented stronger data in relation to these themes. The most challenging aspect of Irish reading that emerged was correct pronunciation and resulted in frustration during reading for both pupils and parents/guardians, as the comments below suggest.

*I find that pronunciation can cause issues during Irish reading homework. (Parent A)*

*My child has good and bad days with Irish reading homework but continues to work hard on his phonics. (Parent C)*

*My child has a real interest and wants to read but can struggle with pronunciation and sounding out Irish words. I feel that I am not always able to help her. (Parent E)*

*Her increased confidence made reading for homework far more appealing for her and the recordings helped me to ensure her pronunciation was correct. (Parent G)*

*The recordings were very useful in that they gave my child a form of interaction with her teacher. It was useful for me also as I have Donegal Irish, and she often complains that I don't say things 'right'! It was useful for me to hear her teacher's pronunciation to be able to relay to my child in a way she understands. (Parent B)*

Sub-themes that emerged were also significant in that they represented further challenges such as new vocabulary and how they were invaluable for increasing parents'/guardians' ability and confidence in the language. By listening to the recordings, they improved their own level of Irish and felt that they could now complete Irish reading homework correctly with their child.

*My own Irish has improved with the videos (recordings) provided over lockdown and they have improved the level of resources to assist with Irish reading homework. (Parent B)*

*I am much more confident now. I'm capable of correcting their (siblings in the school) pronunciation and spelling and I converse with them if possible. (Parent C)*

*Very confident. It is amazing how your Irish comes back to you. I know if I can't understand something, I can get great support through teachers. (Parent G)*

The effects of school closures during the pandemic on Irish reading must also be acknowledged. Parents/guardians found that the recordings helped to produce a structured lesson during homeschooling and provided direction for Irish reading.

*I found the recordings a brilliant resource when home schooling my child. My child also enjoyed hearing his teacher read it and felt more like a lesson and school. (Parent F)*

*My child enjoys Irish reading but due to my own level of pronunciation, I am unsure if my child is pronouncing words correctly. I found the videos provided during school closure to be particularly useful. (Parent L)*

The recordings assisted not only with vocabulary and pronunciation but created a link between pupils, parents/guardians and the teacher during a difficult and challenging time. The effects of the pandemic are explored further below.

### 5.3.5 Parents/guardians views on immersion & the effects of school closure: Survey 3

At the end of Cycle 2, there were some considerations in relation to the recordings. There was some inaccuracy and bias as a result of recordings being provided prior to the commencement of the research. To address this, I created a third questionnaire and parents/guardians were specifically asked whether they were satisfied with Irish reading resources prior to school closures in March 2020 and prior to the research. This final questionnaire was distributed at the end of Cycle 2 and the findings are shown in figure 5.13 below:

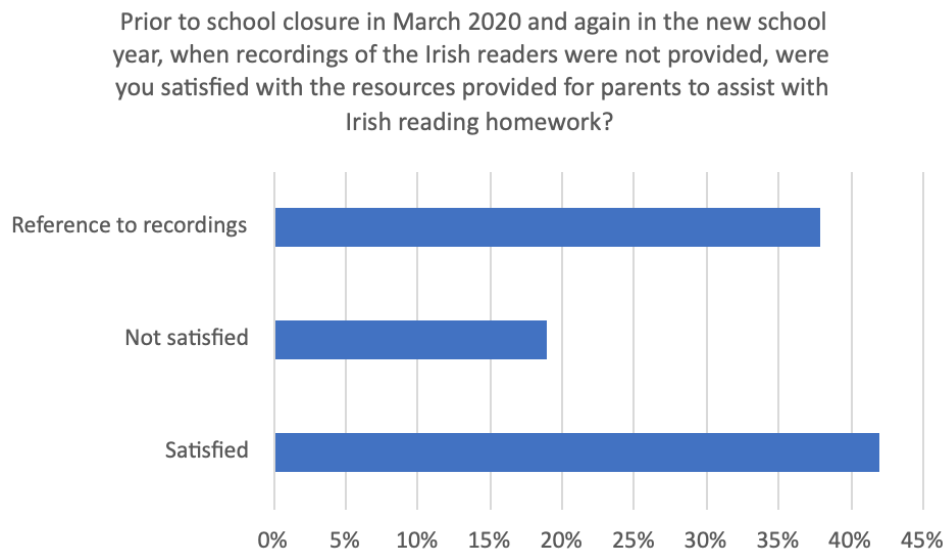


Figure 5.13 Findings from statement 4 on the third questionnaire

42% were satisfied with the resources previously provided, 19% were dissatisfied and 38% referred to the recordings provided during the first lockdown and again as part of the research. This may suggest that had the recordings not been provided, there may have been a higher level of dissatisfaction.

The third questionnaire also provided parents/guardians with the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions on the topics below. Questions in relation to these topics can be viewed in Appendix B.6.

- Confidence in the Irish language prior to sending their child to a Gaelscoil.
- How they currently feel in relation to their confidence in the Irish language.
- Opinions on resources provided for Irish reading in previous years.
- The effect of the pandemic and school closure on their child's Irish reading ability

A primary concern for parents/guardians when choosing to send their child to an immersion school was how they would be able to help their child with homework through the medium of Irish. This questionnaire showed that 59% of parents/guardians were concerned about their level of Irish prior to their child starting school and 40% were not. Comments below are samples of parents/guardians who were concerned or confident in relation to their own level of Irish.

*Although throughout my primary school and on into my secondary school, Irish was the choice language to be spoken at school, I did have concerns that I wouldn't be able to help my child with homework. It is also the first question parents of non-gaelscoil going children ask. (Parent N)*

*Yes, as I hadn't used any Irish since my leaving cert in 1989. (Parent A)*

*I had some concerns but hoped the Irish I had learned would be sufficient. (Parent B)*

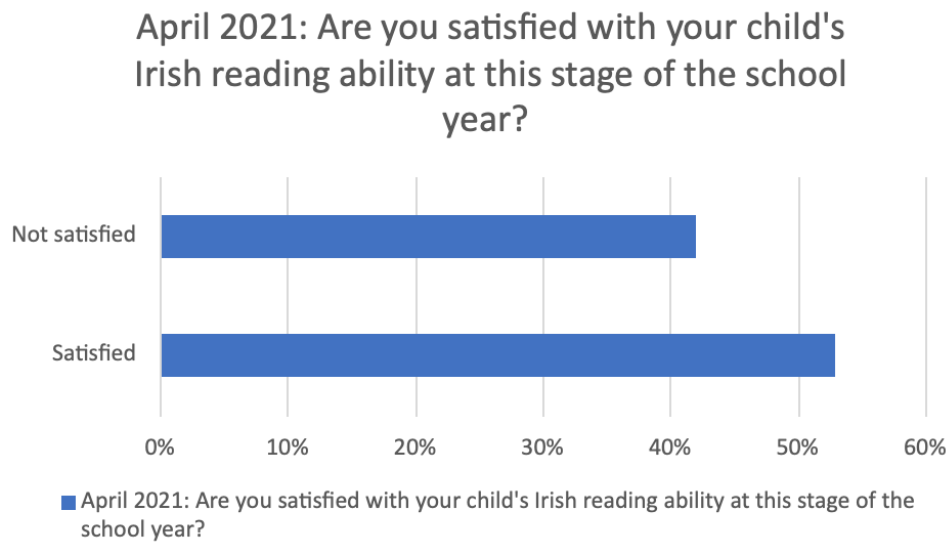
*No, I'm okay with understanding written Irish mostly- it's the oral Irish I find challenging as it takes me longer to process what's said to me even when the Irish said is simple! Similarly, I need time to think how to say something in Irish. (Parent P)*

*Ní raibh toisc go bhfuil Gaeilge agam fhéin. (I wasn't worried as I had Irish myself, Parent C)*

*Níor cheap ós rud é gur tógadh le Gaeilge mé. (I didn't as I was raised with Irish, Parent E)*

*No, I didn't really have concerns. I did honours Irish for the leaving cert so felt it would be okay. (Parent L)*

While the effects of the pandemic on Irish reading homework was not initially included in the action plan, significant data emerged from the surveys and questionnaires that led to additional findings. This was also addressed in the final questionnaire where parents/guardians were asked if they were happy with their child's reading at the time the research was conducted. Results are shown in the figure below. A significant percentage were not satisfied which was reflective of the effects of the pandemic on their child's Irish reading ability.



*Figure 5.14 Findings from statement 5 on the third questionnaire distributed to parents*

Many took the opportunity in the third questionnaire to express how they were feeling on several issues relating to their child's progression and the effects of the pandemic.

*She seems to be doing okay. However, I have no idea where she should be at this stage if Covid wasn't an issue.*

*I'm sure if they hadn't missed lots of school last year and this year, her reading ability would be better.*

*We are fine with his level of reading. I imagine he would have made more of an improvement over the year had he been in school.*

*I feel that the pandemic had a huge impact on my child's reading.*

The findings from the research outlined in this chapter reflected the aims and objectives outlined at the beginning of chapter one. The results of the research showed that a greater level of resources is needed to assist parents/guardians with Irish reading homework, that the recordings are an effective additional resource and that there was a high level of engagement by pupils and parents/guardians with the recordings. The results also allowed me to reassess my approach to how I assign Irish reading homework and what more I can do to assist with Irish reading at home. The implications and emerging questions from the findings of this study form the basis for the discussion in the final chapter.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Overview**

The overall aim of this study was to examine the challenges associated with Irish reading homework in an all-Irish medium school through the experiences and perspectives of both pupils and parents/guardians. It gave me, as an educator, the opportunity to better understand how parents/guardians felt about Irish reading homework and how to amend my own practice to improve the experience of Irish reading in the home. Data collection and analysis gave a deeper insight into how these targeted groups felt about Irish reading and their opinions on the availability of resources to assist them with Irish reading at home. Recordings were provided as part of the project to elicit their views on vocabulary and pronunciation. Open-ended discussions were conducted with pupils to informally discuss how they felt about the recordings and how they felt about Irish reading at home and in school. Themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected were outlined in chapter five and the emerging questions and implications are discussed here. This final chapter will focus on the importance of examining the area of Irish reading homework and providing pupils and parents/guardians with the appropriate resources to better the experience of Irish reading in the home. The importance of theory and change as well as limitations of the study will also be discussed, and the chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research.

### **6.2 Summary of findings**



The main findings of this study indicated that additional resources prove an advantage for parents/guardians to assist with Irish reading homework, primarily to address vocabulary and pronunciation. This is with a view to improving pupils' Irish literacy skills and to make the Irish reading homework experience at home a more enjoyable one. The findings from the research were overwhelmingly positive and showed that parents/guardians found the recordings invaluable when it came to helping their children with Irish reading homework.

The primary emerging themes from the research were how pupils and parents/guardians engaged with the recordings and the value of the recordings to assist with pronunciation. They also found that listening to the recordings helped to create an enjoyable structure for Irish reading at home. Parents/guardians also expressed the view that various dialects made Irish reading challenging, that their children became frustrated if they were pronouncing words differently to how their teacher pronounced them, and that this frustration added to the strain of Irish reading homework. The recordings by the class teacher helped parents to pronounce words similar to how the teacher pronounced them while preparing pupils for Irish reading in class.

Pupils also expressed that they enjoyed listening to their teacher on the recordings as it felt more like school, this was particularly important for them during the pandemic as they missed structure and routine. This research acknowledged how pronunciation in Irish often differs from what the spelling would suggest and that additional resources such as recordings would improve Irish literacy skills and the quality of Irish reading overall by acting as a kind of parallel voice-over. The research also highlighted how important it is to teach student teachers to teach Irish reading appropriately. This in turn could create a more positive attitude amongst teachers towards Irish reading and how they teach Irish reading skills in class as it is often more challenging than teaching English literacy skills. Homework policies and school practice in relation to Irish reading

homework, should also be reviewed to improve the experience of Irish reading for pupils/parents/guardians, particularly following school closures as a result of the pandemic. These factors are important to improve the quality and fluency of Irish reading.

Implications of the findings of this study are outlined below.

- Reviewing homework policies.
- Examining the availability or lack of additional resources to assist with Irish reading at home and how to amend this.
- Reviewing how student teachers are taught to teach Irish reading.
- Promoting a more positive attitude towards Irish reading and the language itself.
- Exposing the need for further research in the area of Irish reading homework.
- Reviewing homework policies and school practice.
- Drawing attention to the importance of pronunciation to improve the quality of and fluency in Irish reading and pupils' acquisition of Irish reading skills.

It was important to draw on the conclusions from the results of this study to provide the opportunity to explore and contextualise the challenges of assigning reading homework in a Gaelscoil setting where not all families are fluent or confident with their own level of Irish.

### **6.3 Contextualising Results**

The area of Irish reading homework was examined in the context of an all-Irish medium school and focused solely on pupils and parents/guardians in *rang a haon* (first class). They were accustomed to the Irish language as the curriculum was taught through the medium of Irish and the school adopted a full-immersion policy. By choosing to send their child to a Gaelscoil, parents/guardians were embracing the language. They still struggled however with Irish reading homework and acknowledged that additional resources such as recordings would be beneficial to assist them at home. The results of the study were significant in relation to Irish reading in Irish

medium schools, however expanding the research to English medium schools could broaden our insight into the challenges of Irish reading homework and further research in this area could then be presented in the context of all schools.

#### **6.4 The Theory Behind the Research**

The question that prompted the research was that if additional Irish reading resources were provided for parents to assist with Irish reading homework, would the quality of Irish reading and pupils' acquisition of Irish literacy skills improve, and would pupils and parents have a more positive attitude towards Irish reading homework?

Identifying the challenges of Irish reading homework was key to creating the research question for this study and the research itself can be linked to other relevant theories in the area of homework. For example, as discussed in chapter two, Kavanagh (2013) examines parental involvement in Irish immersion primary education and explores this from multiple perspectives. She discusses second language learning, parental involvement in homework, parents' experiences of immersion amongst other topics, which this study can relate to. Hickey and Stenson (2017) discusses tackling Irish reading in the classroom and the importance of correct pronunciation, which was also a key theme in this research and the findings from this study fit in with theories created by others in their research. Many researchers discuss the challenges of homework in general terms and broadening these investigations to the area of Irish reading homework led to the theory behind this study. Data collection and analysis of findings ensured that the theory created by this research was well-substantiated and worthy of further investigation.

## **6.5 Limitations of the study**

While this study was unique in that it focused primarily on the voice of pupils and parents/guardians, it was conducted only in an all-Irish medium school which limited the research itself. The research is not representative of the challenges of Irish reading homework overall but solely of Irish reading in the context of all-Irish medium schools and specifically this school.

While the research was challenged in that it was conducted during a global pandemic, it inadvertently led to a wider discussion on the pandemic and its' effects on Irish reading. The research examined how pupils felt about Irish reading during the pandemic and to what extent parents/guardians felt school closures affected their child's Irish reading abilities.

The research was confined to a certain group of participants and the quality of the research may have been more effective and valuable had it been extended to pupils in the higher classes and to English medium schools. Interviews with parents/guardians would have been valuable as part of the research but this method of data collection had to be reassessed as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. Examining how student teachers are taught to teach Irish reading would also have contributed greatly to this study but again was outside the scope of this research. Despite limitations in the study, the central finding that recordings are an invaluable aid will help us to acknowledge the increasing importance of oral proficiency as a prerequisite for the development of reading skills.

## **6.6 Future directions**

Ó Cathalláin (2011) states that 'Educational research should not just be *about* education. It should be *for* education' (2011: 86). This small-scale study affirms how, not only is educational research

invaluable to improve school policies and practice, but that research such as this is a steppingstone toward improving the overall experience and quality of Irish reading for pupils and parents/guardians.

This project was about taking action and in doing so, gaining knowledge of the area under examination. ‘We only know the world as a result of our actions’ (Biesta & Burbulos, 2003: 55). Examining Irish reading homework through the eyes of pupils and parents/guardians was a means of acknowledging how difficult it was for some and how a lack of resources to help them played a significant role in their attitudes towards Irish reading and the language itself. Teachers and pupils engage in reading activities in the classroom that differ from how the pupils engage in reading with their parents/guardians at home (Ó Cathalláin, 2011). The direction behind the research was to explore the idea of providing additional resources for Irish reading. This is with a view to improving the link between school and home and in turn pupils’ acquisition of Irish literacy skills and parents’/guardians’ attitudes towards the language. The research also aimed to provide me with the opportunity to review how I assigned Irish reading homework, to recognise what areas of Irish reading homework were most challenging for pupils and parents/guardians and to change my practice as a result.

## **6.7 Communicating the Research**

Educational research is key to bringing about change in schools and policy and sharing research such as this on various educational platforms would be beneficial to create more awareness around the area of Irish reading homework and its effects on pupils and parents/guardians. Sharing research such as this allows for the work to contribute to research beyond the original findings. It

is important to collaborate with relevant bodies, identify the audience to which the research is best suited and to effectively communicate the research to increase its impact. Sharing research is beneficial not only to the wider school community but to the education sector and to institutions. Writing articles such as those published in the *InTouch* magazines for schools, posting on various social media platforms or including the area of Irish reading homework as part of the Continuous Professional Development courses available to teachers would be effective and would help to solidify the findings and the value of the research. It also allows for further investigation of the theory or concept behind the research itself. It may also encourage researchers to revisit other related oral questions such as memory skills or mental exercises, focusing on rote learning, tables, songs, poems, etc. While my own approach to Irish reading homework has changed, communicating the results of the research in my own school could prompt management and staff to review homework policies and how Irish reading homework is assigned to all age groups. For example, sourcing additional resources for Irish reading and reviewing how Irish literacy skills are taught in class in preparation for Irish reading. Identifying areas such as these and creating change could improve the experience of Irish reading at home for pupils and parents/guardians, as explained below.

## **6.8 Complexity theory and change in schools**

The significance of the research is not only that it raises awareness in the area of Irish reading homework and how to improve the experience for pupils and parents/guardians but that it has an impact on the educational development of the pupils, on the wider school community and on school policy.

Fullan (1993) describes how researchers become change agents to initiate change and increase effectiveness of our teaching and practice. Fullan's article refers to examining and re-examining why we decide to come into teaching. He prompts us to examine what difference we are trying to make. He describes how we as change agents are life-long learners and that change is important to redesign our practice and our schools. McDonagh et al. (2016) highlight how opening ourselves up to change can add to the value of our classroom practice and the benefits that emerge from implementing those changes. The same authors highlight how we, as teachers, are agents of change 'change begins with you, as teacher, embracing your capacity for critical reflection and self-evaluation that could contribute to improvement in your practice or in the understanding of your practice' (McDonagh et al., 2016: 112).

This process of change, however, is not an individual one but should be done in collaboration with colleagues, parents/guardians, institutions and the wider school community. This leads us to the discussion on complexity theory and how it strengthens and enhances teaching and practice. Complexity theory is a theory of adaptation and development (Morrison, 2002) and certain components of complexity theory help schools to adapt and develop and encourage staff development (Fong, 2006). Morrison (2006) describes schools as open, complex and adaptive systems and he presents a strong argument for the value of complexity theory due to its unpredictability. He notes that there is no guarantee that the outcomes of complexity theory or change will improve education so why should schools take the risk? Research allows for change or improvement in education and change in policy to benefit the school community. Theories must also be justified however, to avoid educational discourse, get buy in from the school community and create a want and a desire for change despite its unpredictability.

Fong (2006), like Morrison, raises the question of whether complexity theory and change adds to staff development or contributes to education. In the case of this research, creating change in the area of Irish reading homework, and acknowledging that there is not sufficient support for parents/guardians while reading at home, could improve not only basic Irish literacy skills but overall fluency in the language. By bringing about this change perhaps pupils, parents/guardians and teachers would have a more positive attitude towards Irish reading homework.

Doyle (2021) in her lecture on complexity theory discusses connectivity and the difficulties of social change. She notes how any kind of change can bring chaos, for example, how reverting to online teaching during the pandemic caused stress and frustration for some families. This research highlighted the challenges of Irish reading in light of homeschooling during the pandemic and the lack of resources to assist parents/guardians. They were forced to adapt and respond effectively by working in conjunction with teachers during this disruption and chaos. This showed the importance of connectivity and the school community working together, to look at how to get around the challenges of Irish reading homework. The disruption caused by the pandemic upset many and mindsets were hard to change, however, bringing research such as this into schools, however challenging, could ultimately create effective change in the area of Irish reading homework.

In relation to change in my own practice as a result of this research, this action project has given me, as a researcher, the confidence that I am making a difference. It has given me a sense of empowerment and a deeper understanding of practice and has guided me to create change and ultimately improve my own practice and the practice of others in the area of Irish reading homework. This project also invited me to examine my core values, to explore the idea of change in practice and create a want and a desire for that change.



## 6.9 Summary

Although various findings in this research were encouraging and positive, it is important to note that there is a need for further research on this topic. The data reflects that providing additional resources such as recordings, positively impacts the homework experience for pupils and parents/guardians in relation to Irish reading language homework. The results of the analysis revealed how effective the recordings of Irish readers were. Further research, however, could facilitate comparing the quality of Irish reading homework over a range of age groups, with and without the support of additional resources. It is important to note that time for preparing and providing recordings could not realistically be allocated for teachers and it was not a typical resource available to parents/guardians. More research would address how additional resources could contribute to improving the quality of Irish reading for pupils while also leading to a higher proficiency for parents/guardians and create a more positive approach towards the language.

There is evidence that Irish reading homework is an under-researched area, as outlined in chapter two. Although this research found that pupils and parents/guardians were quite positive in relation to Irish reading homework, this is not to say that further stresses could not emerge for them as their children progressed up through school. Pupils in older classes would be better able to express their thoughts and feelings in relation to Irish reading homework and the level of Irish reading for older groups would be more challenging for adults at home. Conducting this research in English medium schools would also build on these findings as Irish reading homework can be more challenging for pupils and parents/guardians in these schools due to less engagement with the Irish language.

The research could also be extended to how we teach student teachers to teach Irish reading. In doing so, perhaps teachers would be better equipped to provide families with more appropriate support. Hickey and Stenson (2018) address the question of ‘why should we teach Irish reading?’

They provide a strong argument for an increased emphasis on Irish reading in the second language curriculum as they viewed reading as an essential component of language development. They claim that ‘the more exposure to a language the learner gets, and the more time spent engaging with it, the greater the success.’ (Hickey & Stenson, 2018: 5)

Stenson and Hickey (2014) conducted interviews with teachers, and it emerged that teaching literacy skills in Irish was not an area on which they often focused. They attributed this not only to their approach to teaching Irish reading but also to the lack of materials and lack of appropriate training. There are certain characteristics that have a profound impact on Irish reading and second language acquisition, not only due to the lack of support for teachers but also as a result of the following:

the limited access to Irish that most learners encounter inside and outside their classrooms, greater limitations on the availability of resources for teaching and learning compared with more commonly taught languages like English, French and Spanish, and the fact that most teachers of Irish are themselves speakers of Irish as a second language (L2) (Stenson & Hickey, 2018: 2).

Stenson and Hickey (2018) discuss how teachers are often left feeling ‘frustrated’ when planning to teach Irish spellings and vocabulary. They found that teachers do not feel adequately trained or prepared for teaching Irish literacy. They felt that Irish reading was in fact ‘neglected’ in schools due to the lack of practical training for teachers and that it should be facilitated and encouraged as a supplement to oral Irish in the classroom. Exposure to the language in this way, and with the appropriate resources, pupils' level of vocabulary and grammar could be enhanced. (Stenson and Hickey, 2018). Not only would providing teachers with additional materials for Irish reading be beneficial but it would in fact add to teacher’s confidence in teaching Irish literacy. Building on studies such as this research project and work by researchers such as Hickey and Stenson could

potentially open the door to further studies on the development of basic Irish literacy skills. It could also improve the transition between school and home with the provision of additional resources, and ultimately improve fluency in Irish reading for pupils.

For the most part, English reading is taught through programs with very specific literacy skills and appropriate teaching resources. Hickey & Stenson (2016) shed light on the fact that there is an assumption that Irish literacy skills are the same as English literacy skills which is not the case. This raises further concerns, specifically in Irish reading, as they found that there was in fact, a lack of importance placed on basic literacy skills, word recognition and reading comprehension. Ó Cathalláin (2011) discusses how providing support for Irish medium schools was necessary due to a decline in the standards of Irish. Placing greater emphasis on the importance of Irish in the Colleges of Education was important in order to better equip student teachers with the necessary strategies and skills to teach effectively through the medium of Irish and to teach pupils Irish literacy skills appropriately (Ó Cathalláin, 2011: 10).

The conclusion drawn from this study is that while schools and teachers may feel that they are supporting parents/guardians as best they can with Irish reading homework, perhaps re-assessing and building on the resources that they have would help them with pronunciation and vocabulary as they read with their children at home. Critically examining school practice is challenging, but recognising the challenges associated with Irish reading homework and acknowledging the lack of resources for parents/guardians, would improve the experience of Irish reading homework. This would also help to improve fluency in Irish reading and the quality of the language itself.

## References

- Al-Saadi, H. (2014) Demystifying Ontology and Epistemology in Research Methods. *Research Gate*, 1(1), 1-10. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260244813> (Accessed 3 November 2020)
- An Roinn Oideachais. (1999) *Curaclam na Bunscoile/ Primary School Curriculum*. Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair. Le fáil ar: <https://www.curriculumonline.ie> (Accessed 11 November 2020)
- Baeza, R. (2012) The Educational Impact of Involvement of Immigrant Latino Parents on Their High-Achieving 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Children. University of California, L.A. Available at: <https://escholarship.org/content/qt969821zx/qt969821zx.pdf> (Accessed 10 November 2020)
- Baker, C. (2006) *Foundations of bilingualism and bilingual education*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Clevedon, UK: Channel View Publications Ltd.
- Bempechat, J. (2010) The Motivational Benefits of Homework: A Social-Cognitive Perspective. *Theory into Practice*, 43(3), 189-196.
- Bennett, S. and Kalish, N. (2006) The Case for and against Homework. *Educational Leadership*, 64 (6), 74-79.
- Biesta, G. J. J. and Burbules, N. C. (2003) *Pragmatism and Educational Research*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Lanham, MD, United States: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Biesta, G., Filippakou, O., Wainwright, E. and Aldridge, D. (2019) Why Educational Research should not just solve problems but should cause them as well. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(1), 1-4.
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M and Richardson, C. (2001) *Te Toi Huarewa: Effective teaching and learning strategies, and effective teaching materials for improving the reading and writing in te reo Maori of students aged five to nine in Maori-medium education*. The University of Waikato: Ministry of Education.
- Brookfield, S. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, USA: Jossey-Bass.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, C. (2006) Qualitative Research in Psychology. *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*, 3 (2): 77-101.
- Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2011). Dublin: An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, L. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Cook, T. (2009) The purpose of mess in action research: Building rigour through a messy turn. *Educational Action Research*, 17 (2), 227- 291.

Creswell, J. (2002) *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Crotty, M. (2003) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspectives in the Research Process*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Sage Publications.

Darling, S. and Westberg, L. (2004) Parental involvement in children's acquisition of reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(8), 774-776.

Department of Children and Youth Affairs. (2012) *Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children*. Galway: NUI Galway. Available at: [https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Publications/Ethics\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Publications/Ethics_Guidance.pdf) (Accessed 15 October 2020)

Doyle, A. (2021) Educational Change- a complex landscape, *EDF688[A]: Implications for Educational Improvement*. 25 May 2021, Ollscoil na hÉireann, Má Nuad.

Ebbutt, D. (1985) Educational action research: some general concerns and specific quibbles. In: Burgess, R. (ed.) *Issues in Educational Research: Qualitative Methods*. Lewes: Falmer, 74-152.

Evans, M.A., Shaw, D. and Bell, M. (2000) Home literacy activities and their influence on early literacy skills. *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 54, 65-75.

Fong, K.I.S. (2006) Complexity theory and staff development. Unpublished paper presented at: The Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association International Conference. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education, 28-30 November 2006.

Fullan, M.G. (1993) The Professional Teacher. *Education Leadership*, 50 (6), 12-17.

General Data Protection Regulations (on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC, 2016). European Parliament and Council of the European Union.

Guion, L. A. (2002). *Triangulation: establishing the validity of qualitative studies* [online]. Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, EDIS. Available at: <http://purl.fcla.edu/UF/lib/FY394pdf> (Accessed 10 January 2021)

Harris, J and Murtagh, L. (1999) *Teaching and Learning Irish in Primary School: A Review of Research and Development*. Dublin, Ireland: Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann. Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED432150> (Accessed 5 January 2021)

Harris, J. and Ó Laoire, M. (2006) *Language and literacy in Irish-medium primary schools: A review of the literature*. Laois, Éire: An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta.

Henderson, A.T. and Mapp, K.L. (2002) *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hickey, T.M (1997) *Early Immersion Education in Ireland: Na Naíonraí*. Éire: Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann.

- Hickey, T.M. (2001) Reading in a Second Language: Teaching Irish Reading In: Shiel, G. and Ní Dhálaigh, U., ed (2001) *Reading Matters: A Fresh Start*. Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann. 69-87.
- Hickey, T.M. (2007) Fluency in reading Irish L1 or L2. Promoting high frequency word recognition in emergent readers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 10, 471-493.
- Hickey, T.M and Stenson, N. (2016) One Step Forward and Two Steps Back in Teaching an Endangered Language? Revisiting L2 Reading in Irish. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 29 (3), 302-318.
- Hickey, T.M. and Stenson, N. (2017) Teaching Irish reading: Tackling an elephant in the classroom. In B. Culligan and G. Mehigan (eds). *Exploring the Literacy Landscape*. Dublin: Literacy Association of Ireland, pp.178-186.
- Kavanagh, L. (2013) *A Mixed Methods Investigation of Parental Involvement in Irish Immersion Primary Education: Integrating Multiple Perspectives*. College of Human Sciences: University College Dublin.
- Kenner, C. (2006) Using Home Texts to Promote L1 and L2 Literacy Learning in the Classroom In: Hickey, T.M., ed. (2006) *Literacy and Language Learning: Reading in a First or Second Language*. Dublin: Reading Association of Ireland. 74-85.
- Leitch, R and Day, C. (2000) Action research and reflective practice: towards a holistic view, *Educational Action Research*, 8 (1), 179-193.
- Lewin, K (1946) Action Research and Minority Problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 2(4), 34-46.
- Macnamara, J. (1966). *Bilingualism and primary education: A study of Irish experience*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Marzano, R.J and Pickering, D.J (2007) Special Topic/ The Case for and Against Homework. *Educational Leadership*, 64(6), 74-79.
- Maynooth University Ethics Policy. (2020) Available at: <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/university-policies/research-policies>
- Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy. (2016) Available at: <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/university-policies/research-policies>
- McNiff, J. (2010) *Action Research for Professional Development: Concise Advice for New (and Experienced) Action Researchers*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Bodmin and King's Lynn: MPG Books Group.
- McPherson, J (2020) *Impact of Homework on Learning*. Minnesota: Hamline University.
- Melissa Frank. (2009) *Action Research in the Classroom Part 1* [video online]. Available at: <https://youtu.be/ZZHvpgU7pc8> (Accessed 19 June 2020)
- Mertens, D. (2012) Transformative Mixed Methods: Addressing Inequities. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 56 (6), 802-813.
- Morrison, K. (2002) *School Leadership and Complexity Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Morrison, K. (2006) Complexity Theory and Education. Unpublished paper presented at: The Asia-Pacific Educational Research Association International Conference. Hong Kong: Macau Inter-University Institute, 28-30 November 2006.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999) *Revised Primary Curriculum*. Dublin: An Roinn Oideachas.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999) *New Primary Language Curriculum*. Dublin: An Roinn Oideachas.

New Data Protection Bill (*The protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, 2018*). Tithe an Oireachtais. Number 7 of 2018.

Ní Nuadháin, N (2006) Putting a Bit of Spice into Reading in Irish in the Primary School In: Hickey, T.M., ed. (2006) *Literacy and Language Learning: Reading in a First or Second Language*. Dublin: Reading Association of Ireland. 1-22.

Ó Cathalláin, S. (2011) *Early Literacy in all-Irish Immersion Primary Schools: A micro-ethnographic case study of storybook reading events in Irish and English*. University of Sterling.

Ó Duibhir, P and Ní Thuairisg, L (2009) Young Immersion Learners' Language Use Outside the Classroom in a Minority Context. *AILA Review*, 32 (1), 112-137.

Ó Riagáin, P. (1997) *Language Policy and Social Reproduction: Ireland 1893-1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Onwuegbuzie, A.J and Turner, L.A. (2007) Toward a Definition of Mixed Methods Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1 (2), 112-133.

O'Toole, C and Hickey, T.M (2016) Bilingual language acquisition in a minority context: using the Irish-English Communicative Development Inventory to track acquisition of an endangered language. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 20 (2), 146-192. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.

Protheroe, N. (2009) Good homework policy = Good teaching. *Principal*, 89 (1), 42-45.

Ratnesar, R. (1999) The Homework ate my Family. *Time Magazine*, 153 (3), 54-63.

Schrat Carr, N. (2013) Increasing the Effectiveness of Homework for All Learners in the Inclusive Classroom. *School Community Journal*, 23 (1), 169-182.

Sénéchal, M and LeFevre, J. (2002) Parental Involvement in the Development of Children's Reading Skill: A Five-Year Longitudinal Study. *Child Development*, 73 (2), 445-460.

Simons, H. (1995) The Politics and Ethics of Educational Research in England: Contemporary issues. *British Educational Research Journal*, 21(4), 435-449.

Stenson, N. and Hickey, T.M. (2014) In defense of decoding. *Journal of Celtic Language Learning*, 18, 11-40.

Stenson, N. and Hickey, T. (2018) *Understanding Irish Spelling: A handbook for Teachers and Learners-Tuisceint ar Litríú na Gaeilge: Lámhleabhar do Mhúinteoirí agus d'Fhoghlaimeoirí*. Dublin: An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta.

Student Handbook. (2020) *Master of Education (MEd): Research in Practice*. Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education: Maynooth University. Section 8.0 and 9.0).

Swain, M. and Lapkin, S. (1982) Evaluation bilingual education: A Canadian case study. *RELC Journal*, 14 (2), 120-121.

Sweet, W.E. (2002) *Latin Proverbs: Wisdom from Ancient to Modern Times*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Wauconda, USA: Bolchazy-Carducci.

Tremmel, R. (1993) Zen and the Art of Reflective Practice in Teacher Education In: Leitch, R and Day, C. (2000) Action research and reflective practice: towards a holistic view, *Educational Action Research*, 8 (1), 179-193.

Ua Maoileoin, P and An Seabhad. (2003) *Seanfhocail Na Mumhan*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Baile Átha Cliath: An Gúm.

Vanassche, E and Kelchtermans, G. (2015) The state of the art in Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 47(4), 508-528.

Watkins-Mace, S.P. (2003) *The Effect of First Language Literacy Skills on Second Language Literacy Skills for Native Spanish and Native English Speakers*. Curriculum and Instruction Programs: Kansas State University.

Weisberg, H.F., Krosnick, J.A. and Bowen, B.D. (1996) *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling and Data Analysis*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Whitehead, J. (1989) Creating a Living Educational Theory from Questions of the Kind, 'How do I improve my Practice?'. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 19 (10), 41-52.

Young, C. (2001) *English Heritage position statement on the Valletta Convention* [Online] Available at: <http://www.archaeol.freeuk.com/EHPositionStatement.htm> (accessed 24 Aug 2001)



# Appendices

## Appendix A

**A.1:** Litir don bord bainistíochta/ Letter to school management

**A.2:** Litir eolais do thuismitheoirí/ Information sheet for parents

**A.3:** Foirm thoilithe do thuismitheoirí/ Consent form for parents

**A.4:** Foirm thoilithe do pháistí/ Consent form for pupils

*A.1: Litir don bord bainistíochta/ Letter to school management*



**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil  
Mhá Nuad  
Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and  
Early Childhood Education**

A Chathaoirligh, a chara,

Ba mhaith liom an Bord Bainistíochta a chur ar an eolas faoin staidéar atá ar siúl agam i mbliana.

Tá Máistreacht san Oideachais á dhéanamh agam faoi láthair le Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Tá taighde faoi leith á dhéanamh agam agus beidh sé bunaithe ar na buntáistí agus na míbhuntáistí a bhaineann le hobair bhaile i nGaelscoileanna. Beidh taighde á dhéanamh agam chomh maith ar na himpleachtaí a bhíonn ag obair bhaile trí mheán na Gaeilge ar pháistí agus ar thuismitheoirí.

Maidir leis an taighde é fhéin, beidh sonraí á bhailiú agam ar bhealaí éagsúla. Beidh breathnóireacht rialta ar siúl agus dialann á choimeád agam ar na páistí agus ar an obair bhaile. Beidh plé neamhfhoirmiúil á dhéanamh agam leis na páistí faoina gcuid tuairimí/ mothúchán maidir le hobair bhaile. Beidh samplaí de chleachtaí obair bhaile, torthaí scrúdaithe agus obair ranga na bpáistí á bhailiú agam. Chomh maith leis sin, beidh ceistneoirí á ndáileadh agam ar pháistí agus ar thuismitheoirí.

Ní bheidh ainm aon pháiste ná ainm na scoile cuimsithe sa téis a scríofar agus beidh cead ag páistí agus ag thuismitheoirí tarraingt siar ón taighde ag am ar bith.

Beidh an t-eolas ar fad a bhaileofar faoi rún agus déanfar scríosadh ar gach eolas a bhailítear lastigh de theorann ama áirithe de réir treoirínte an Choláiste. Beidh gach píosa taighde in oiriúint leis na treoirínte sin. Ní chuirfear tús leis an taighde go dtí go bhfaightear cead oifigiúil ó Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas.

Sa chás go ndúntar na scoileanna, leanfaidh an taighde trí theagmháil a dhéanamh le thuismitheoirí ar líne. Cuirfear obair léitheoireachta agus físeanna abhaile chuig na páistí agus iarrfar ar thuismitheoirí aiseolas a thabhairt trí ríomhphost.

Iniata, tá na foirmeacha a bheidh á ndáileadh agam ar thuismitheoirí agus ar pháistí, mar eolas.

Má tá ceisteanna ar bith agat tá lánfháilte romhat dul i dteagmháil liom trí ríomhphost.

Is mise le meas,

Clíona Ní Dhúshláine

## *A.2: Litir eolais do thuismitheoirí/ Information sheet for parents*



**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil  
Mhá Nuad  
Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and  
Early Childhood Education**

### **Litir Eolais**

### **Tuismitheoirí agus Caomhnóirí**

#### **Cé dó an litir eolais seo?**

Tá an litir eolais seo do thuismitheoirí agus do chaomhnóirí.

#### **Cad atá i gceist leis an Tionscnamh Taighde Gníomhaíochta?**

Mar chuid den chúrsa máistreachta le Roinn Froebel Don Bhun agus Luath Oideachas, tá ar an múinteoirí tionscnamh taighde gníomhaíochta a chomhlíonadh bunaithe ar ghné éigin den mhúinteoireacht. Beidh scagadh á dhéanamh aige/ aici ar a gcuid modhanna múinteoireachta féin. Baileofar sonraí mar chuid den taighde ag úsáid breathnóireacht, nótaí féinmheastóireachta agus ceistneoirí. Tá sé de dhualgas ar an múinteoir ansin, téis a chur le chéile bunaithe ar an tionscnamh taighde gníomhaíochta.

#### **Cad é an ceist taighde?**

“How has my own lived experience influenced my perception and expectations of pupils and parents/ guardians in a Gaelscoil community, regarding Irish reading homework?”

#### **Cad iad na modhanna a úsáidfear le sonraí a bhailiú?**

Breathnóireacht rialta, samplaí obair bhaile, samplaí obair ranga, ceistneoirí, dialann féinmheastóireachta agus comhrá neamhfhoirmiúil.

#### **Cé eile a bheidh mar chuid den tionscnamh?**

Beidh an staidéar idir láimhe agamsa, Clíona Ní Dhúshláine, mar chuid den chúrsa Máistreachta san Oideachas le Roinn Froebel don Bhun agus Luath Oideachas. Beidh an téis á chur faoi bhráid ag stiurthóir an mhodúil, an Dr. Bernadette Wrynn agus beidh scrúdú á dhéanamh ag foireann na Roinne ar an téis. Beidh teacht ag scrúdaitheoirí seachtracha ar an téis chomh maith.

### **Cad é ról an tuismitheora/ caomhnóra?**

Tá cead an tuismitheora/ caomhnóra á lorg agam leis an taighde seo a dhéanamh le mo rang. Beidh na sonraí a bhailítear rúnda agus déanfar tuairisciú ar an anailís gan ainm. Úsáidfean na sonraí a bhailítear do thaighde amháin mar chuid den chúrsa máistreachta le Roinn Froebel don Bhun agus Luath Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Déanfar scroisadh ar na sonraí sin de réir threoirlínte an Choláiste.

## **Information Sheet**

### **Parents and Guardians**

#### **Who is this information sheet for?**

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

#### **What is this Action Research Project about?**

Teachers of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University, are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's own practice. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes and questionnaires. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

#### **What is the research question?**

"How has my own lived experience influenced my perception and expectations of pupils and parents/ guardians in a Gaelscoil community, regarding Irish reading homework?"

#### **What sorts of methods will be used?**

Regular observation, homework samples, classwork samples, questionnaires, reflective journal and informal conversations.

#### **Who else will be involved?**

The study will be carried out by me, Clíona Ní Dhúshláine, as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

#### **What are you being asked to do?**

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with my class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines.

*A.3: Foirm thoilithe do thuismitheoirí/ Consent form for parents*



**Maynooth University**  
National University  
of Ireland Maynooth

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas, Ollscoil  
Mhá Nuad  
Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and  
Early Childhood Education**

**Foirm Thoilithe do Thuistí**

Tá an t-eolas sa litir iniata léite agam go mion agus tá mé sásta gur freagraíodh na ceisteanna a bhí agam. Tá mé sásta cead a thabhairt do mo pháiste páirt a ghlacadh sa taighde seo. Tá sé soiléir dom go dtabharfar cóip den fhoirm thoilithe seo dom do mo chuid eolais féin.

Síniú Tuismitheora/ Caomhnóra (1): \_\_\_\_\_

Síniú Tuismitheora/ Caomhnóra (2): \_\_\_\_\_

Dáta: \_\_\_\_\_

Ainm an Pháiste: \_\_\_\_\_

Síniú an Pháiste: \_\_\_\_\_

Dáta: \_\_\_\_\_

**PARENTAL**

**CONSENT**

**FORM**

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this research. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent / Guardian Signature (1): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Guardian Signature (2): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*A.4: Foirm thoilithe do pháistí/ Consent form for pupils*



Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas,  
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad  
Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary  
and Early Childhood Education

**Ainm an Pháiste:** \_\_\_\_\_

Tá mé ag iarraidh a fháil amach conas mar a mhothaíonn tú faoin léitheoireacht Gaeilge a bhíonn agat don obair bhaile. An dtaitníonn sé leat nó nach dtaitníonn sé leat? An gceapann tú go bhfuil sé éasca nó deacair? Ba bhreá liom labhairt leat faoi agus nótaí a choimeáid ar an obair bhaile a dhéanann tú.

An bhfuil tú ceart go leor leis sin? Cur tic sa bhosca ceart:

Tá	<input type="checkbox"/>
Níl	<input type="checkbox"/>

Chur mé ceist ar do mhamaí/ do dhaidí/ do chaomhnóir an raibh sé ceart go leor labhairt leat faoi seo. Má tá ceisteanna ar bith agat tá mé sásta iad a fhreagairt. Má tá tú sásta le sin, is féidir leat an fhoirm a chur mé abhaile a shíniú.

Más rud é go n-athraíonn tú d'intinn níl fadhb ar bith leis sin.

**Child's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

I am trying to find out how you feel about your Irish reading homework. Do you like it/ not like it? Do you find it easy or difficult? I would like to find out more about



this. I would like to talk to you about it and to write down some notes about you and your homework.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box:

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

I have asked your Mum or Dad or Guardian to talk to you about this. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that, could you please sign the form that I have sent home.

If you change your mind, that's ok too.

## **Appendix B**

**B.1:** Ceachtanna OSPS: Liosta ceisteanna (SPHE Lessons: List of questions)

**B.2:** Suirbhé 1: Páistí (Survey 1: Pupils)

**B.3:** Ceistneoir 1: Tuismitheoirí (Questionnaire 1: Parents)

**B.4:** Suirbhé 2: Páistí (Survey 2: Pupils)

**B.5:** Ceistneoir 2: Tuismitheoirí (Questionnaire 2: Parents)

**B.6:** Ceistneoir 3: Tuismitheoirí (Questionnaire 3: Parents)

*B.1: Ceachtanna OSPS: Liosta ceisteanna (SPHE Lessons: List of questions)*

**Ceacht OSPS/SPHE (1): Liosta ceisteanna**

- An dtaitníonn obair bhaile léitheoireachta Gaeilge leat? Cén fáth?
- An fearr leat léitheoireacht a dhéanamh sa bhaile nó ar scoil? Cén fáth?
- An dtaitníonn cabhair leat agus tú ag déanamh do chuid léitheoireachta Gaeilge?

**Ceacht OSPS/SPHE (2): Liosta ceisteanna**

- Ar thaitin na taifead de na léitheoirí Gaeilge leat?
- Ar chabhraigh na taifead de na léitheoirí Gaeilge leat?
- An raibh na taifead deacair/ éasca a leanúint?
- Ar chabhraigh aon duine leat leis na taifead?
- Ar mhaith libh níos mó taifead de na léitheoirí Gaeilge?
- Conas mar a mhothaigh tú faoi léitheoireacht sa bhaile nuair a bhí na scoileanna dúnta?

**B.2: Suirbhé 1: Páistí (Survey 1: Pupils)**

Léigh na ceisteanna thíos agus cur tic sna boscaí a oireann!

Read the questions below and tick the box that best suits you!

An dtaitníonn obair bhaile leat?

Do you enjoy doing homework?



Is aoibhinn liom é.



Tá sé ceart go leor.



Ní maith liom é

--	--	--

An dtaitníonn obair bhaile léitheoireachta Gaeilge leat?

Do you enjoy Irish reading homework?



Is aoibheann liom é.



Tá sé ceart go leor.



Ní maith liom é

--	--	--

An bhfuil an obair bhaile léitheoireachta Gaeilge deacair?

Is Irish reading homework difficult?



Níl sé deacair



Níl mé cinnte (not sure)



Tá sé deacair

--	--	--

An dtaitníonn sé leat léitheoireacht Gaeilge a dhéanamh le do mhamaí/ dhaidí/ chaomhnóir sa bhaile?

Do you enjoy doing Irish reading homework with your mammy/ daddy/ guardian at home?



Is aoibhinn liom é.



Tá sé ceart go leor.



Ní maith liom é

--	--	--

**B.3: Ceistneoir 1: Tuismitheoirí (Questionnaire 1: Parents)**

**Léigh na ráitis thíos agus cur tic sa bhosca a oireann.**

*Please read the statements below and tick the box that best suits you.*

	Aontaím go hiomlán/ <i>Strongly Agree</i>	Aontaím/ <i>Agree</i>	Ní aontaím/ <i>Disagree</i>	Ní aontaím in aon chor/ <i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Taitníonn obair bhaile go ginéaráлта le mo pháiste/ <i>My child enjoys doing homework in general.</i>				
Taitníonn obair bhaile léitheoireachta Gaeilge le mo pháiste/ <i>My child enjoys doing Irish reading homework.</i>				
Tá an obair bhaile léitheoireachta Gaeilge éasca do mo pháiste/ <i>My child finds Irish reading homework easy.</i>				
Tá an obair bhaile léitheoireachta Gaeilge ró-dheacair do mo pháiste/ <i>My child finds Irish reading homework too difficult.</i>				

Tá deacrachtaí ag mo pháiste leis an bhfoclóir Gaeilge/ <i>My child has difficulty with Irish vocabulary.</i>				
Tá deacrachtaí ag mo pháiste leis an bhfoghraíocht Gaeilge/				

<p><i>My child has difficulty with Irish pronunciation.</i></p>				
<p>Ní thuigeann mo pháiste an foclóir Gaeilge/ <i>My child does not understand the Irish vocabulary.</i></p>				
<p>Cuireann obair bhaile léitheoireachta Gaeilge strus ar mo pháiste/ <i>My child feels stressed while doing Irish reading homework.</i></p>				

<p>Mothaím strus mar thuismitheoir agus mé ag déanamh léitheoireacht Gaeilge le mo pháiste sa bhaile/ <i>I feel stressed while doing Irish reading with my child at home.</i></p>				
<p>Ní mhothaím go bhfuil go leor áiseanna ann le cabhrú le tuismitheoirí leis an léitheoireacht Gaeilge/ <i>I do not feel there are sufficient resources to assist parents with Irish reading homework.</i></p>				

<p>Mothaím go bhfuil éifeacht ag mo Ghaeilge fhéin ar dhul chun cinn léitheoireachta mo pháiste/ <i>I find my own level of Irish affects my child's progression with Irish reading</i></p>				
--	--	--	--	--



*B.4: Suirbhé 2: Páistí (Survey 2: Pupils)*

Léigh na ceisteanna thíos agus cur tic sna boscaí a oireann!

Read the questions below and tick the box that best suits you!

Ar thaitin an taifead Gaeilge den leabhar leat?

Did you enjoy the Irish recording of the book?



Thaitin go mór!



Bhí sé ceart go leor.



Níor thaitin

--	--	--

An raibh éifeacht ag an taifead Gaeilge ar do chuid léitheoireachta Gaeilge?

Did the recording make a difference to your Irish reading?



Bhí!



Níl mé cinnte (not sure)



Ní raibh

--	--	--

An raibh sé deacair an taifead a leanúint?

Did you find the recording difficult to follow?



Bhí!



Níl mé cinnte (not sure)



Ní raibh

--	--	--

Cur tic sa bhosca a oireann duit/ Tick the box that best suits you.

B'fhearr liom léitheoireacht Gaeilge leis an taifead/ I prefer Irish reading <b>with</b> the recording.	B'fhearr liom léitheoireacht Gaeilge gan an taifead/ I prefer Irish reading <b>without</b> the recording.

--	--

**B.5: Ceistneoir 2: Tuismitheoirí (Questionnaire 2: Parents)**

**Léigh na ráitis thíos agus cur tic sa bhosca a oireann.**

*Please read the statements below and tick the box that best suits you.*

	Aontaím go hiomlán/ <i>Strongly Agree</i>	Aontaím/ <i>Agree</i>	Ní aontaím/ <i>Disagree</i>	Ní aontaím in aon chor/ <i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Chabhraigh an taifead den léitheoir Gaeilge liom agus mé ag léamh le mo pháiste/  <i>The recording of the Irish reader helped me as I was reading with my child.</i>				
Chabhraigh an taifead go mór leis an bhfoclóir nua/  <i>The recording was very useful for new vocabulary.</i>				
Chabhraigh an taifead go mór leis an bhfoghraíocht/  <i>The recording was very useful for pronunciation.</i>				
Bhí an taifead soiléir, cruinn agus éasca a leanúint/  <i>The recording was clear, concise and easy to follow.</i>				
Níor chabhraigh an taifead le leibhéal léitheoireachta mo pháiste/  <i>The recording did not help with my child's Irish reading ability.</i>				
Chuir an taifead den léitheoir brú ar mo pháiste				

<p><i>My child found the recording of the reader overwhelming.</i></p>				
<p>Chuir an taifead den léitheoir brú ormsa/ <i>I found the recording of the reader overwhelming.</i></p>				
<p>Thaitin an léitheoireacht Gaeilge liom agus an taifead in úsáid <i>I enjoyed Irish reading homework with the aid of the recording.</i></p>				
<p>Sílim gur áis úsáideach é an taifead <i>I find the recording of the Irish reader to be a valuable resource.</i></p>				

Nótaí/ *Further Comments:*

**B.6: Ceistneoir 3: Tuismitheoirí (Questionnaire 3: Parents)**

**Suirbhé 3: Tuismitheoirí / Survey 3: Parents**

Sula thosaigh do pháiste sa Ghaelscoil, ar cheap tú go mbeadh obair bhaile Gaeilge dúshlánach de bharr leibhéal do Ghaeilge féin?

Prior to sending your child to a Gaelscoil, were you concerned that Irish homework would be challenging as a result of your own level of Irish?

Conas mar a mhothaíonn tú anois?

How do you feel now?

Ar thug tú faoi deara aon difríochtaí idir léitheoireacht Ghaeilge do pháiste i rith dúnadh na scoile agus nuair a d'fhill do pháiste ar scoil?

In relation to your child's Irish reading, did you notice any difference in his/ her level of reading during school closure and when he/ she returned to school?

Roimh dúnadh na scoile i Mí Márta 2020 agus arís sa bhliain scoile nua, ar cheap tú go raibh a dhóthain áiseanna ar fáil do thuistí le cabhrú le léitheoireacht Gaeilge?

Prior to school closure in March 2020 and again in the new school year, when recordings of the Irish readers were **not** provided, were you satisfied with the resources provided for parents to assist with Irish reading homework?

An gceapann tú go raibh éifeacht ag dúnadh na scoile ar leibhéal léitheoireachta do pháiste nó an bhfuil tú sásta le leibhéal léitheoireachta do pháiste ag an dtráth seo den bhliain scoile? Do you feel that your child's level of Irish reading suffered as a result of school closure during the pandemic or are you satisfied with your child's Irish reading ability at this stage of the school year?

Nótaí sa bhreis/ Additional comments: