Primary Perspectives: The Acquisition of Literacy in Children in Ireland
- A Study exploring the Views of Primary School Principals, Teachers and Children

Angela Coyne

This research explores the views of teaching professionals: primary school principals, primary teachers, academics and children in relation to the acquisition of literacy in children in an Irish context. This study includes an online survey (162 responses) and research interviews (33) with teachers in different primary school settings in Ireland – rural, urban, schools designated as DEIS (Delivering Equal Opportunities in Schools) Band 1, Band 2, and Gaelscoileanna. This research also includes the views of children (115: third to sixth class, 9–12 years) obtained in research questionnaires. This study identifies the most influential factors in children’s literacy acquisition from the perspectives of teaching professionals in this research. These factors relate to parental and family context and involvement, the influence of language, culture and socio-economic factors. Research findings convey that factors occur simultaneously and are interrelated; an important consideration in establishing an appreciation of the potential opportunities and challenges presented in the current context and in addressing implications for best practice. This study identifies a number of relevant challenges relating to pupil attitudes and abilities and the support available to children at home and at school. In addition, this research outlines some important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in an Irish context. These relate to school and curricular considerations and pupil specific considerations. Research findings emphasise the importance of teacher education, a whole school approach to literacy acquisition and the availability of appropriate educational resources. In addition, findings reiterate the need for effective curricular implementation in oral language, reading and writing and the benefits of cross-curricular integration. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the importance of parental involvement in influencing children’s literacy acquisition, the need to encourage positive pupil attitudes towards learning in literacy and the importance of appropriate differentiation in the teaching of children of both genders and different abilities.

Overall, similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children in this research, in relation to many issues, and in most instances, findings were in keeping with those reported in recent research literature. Similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children regarding the need for opportunities to improve oral language, pronunciation and comprehension. In addition, research findings suggest that teaching professionals and children recognised that literacy can influence personal development and acknowledged the associations between literacy and life-long learning.

While findings from this research provide the potential for further exploration and discussion, a knowledge and awareness of the influential factors, challenges and considerations for the future in addressing literacy is of benefit to educators in their endeavours to promote and facilitate children’s literacy acquisition in different educational contexts.
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Angela Coyne

Doctor in Philosophy, Education

Trinity College, Dublin

Supervisor: Prof. Ann Devitt

Submitted to the University of Dublin, Trinity College, May 2016
Declaration

I hereby declare that this is my own work and that it has not been submitted for the award of any degree at any other university. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation on request.

______________________
Angela Coyne
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I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Ann Devitt for her advice and guidance throughout this research.

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Summary

This research explores the views of teaching professionals: primary school principals, primary teachers, academics and children in relation to the acquisition of literacy in children in an Irish context. This study includes an online survey (162 responses) and research interviews (33) with teachers in different primary school settings in Ireland – rural, urban, schools designated as DEIS (Delivering Equal Opportunities in Schools) Band 1, Band 2, and Gaelscoileanna. This research also includes the views of children (115: third to sixth class, 9–12 years) obtained in research questionnaires.

This study identifies the most influential factors in children’s literacy acquisition from the perspectives of teaching professionals in this research. These factors relate to parental and family context and involvement, the influence of language, culture and socio-economic factors. Research findings convey that factors occur simultaneously and are interrelated, an important consideration in establishing an appreciation of the potential opportunities and challenges presented in the current context and in addressing implications for best practice. This study identifies a number of relevant challenges relating to pupil attitudes and abilities and the support available to children at home and at school. In addition, this research outlines some important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in an Irish context. These relate to school and curricular considerations and pupil-specific considerations. Research
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Overall, similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children in this research, in relation to many issues, and in most instances, findings were in keeping with those reported in recent research literature. Similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children regarding the need for opportunities to improve oral language, pronunciation and comprehension. In addition, research findings suggest that teaching professionals and children recognised that literacy can influence personal development and acknowledged the associations between literacy and lifelong learning. While findings from this research provide the potential for further exploration and discussion, a knowledge and awareness of the influential factors, challenges and considerations for the future in addressing literacy is of benefit to educators in their endeavours to promote and facilitate children’s literacy acquisition in different educational contexts.
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<td>Children and Parents Enjoying Reading</td>
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<td>CLIL</td>
<td>Content and Language Integrated Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEIS</td>
<td>Delivering Equal Opportunities in Schools</td>
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<td>EBSCO</td>
<td>Elton Bryson Stephens Company</td>
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<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
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<td>ERIC</td>
<td>Education Resources Information Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>International Business Machines Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
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<td>L1</td>
<td>First Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
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<td>OED</td>
<td>Oxford English Dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIRLS</td>
<td>Progress in International Reading Literacy Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>Social and Emotional Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>SESE</td>
<td>Social, Environmental and Scientific Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPHE</td>
<td>Social, Personal and Health Education</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The importance of literacy has been recognised by many influential scholars throughout the centuries. Benjamin Franklin (2012) challenged us to “either write something worth reading or do something worth writing” (Franklin, 2012, p. 1). Calkins (2001) compared teaching reading to teaching living. Henry Thoreau (1906) commented, “What I began by reading, I must finish by acting” (p. 5). Much has been said in relation to the value of reading in accessing and assimilating knowledge from an array of sources. Schopenhauer (1974) stated “Reading is equivalent to thinking with someone else’s head instead of with one’s own” (p.1). Descartes elaborated on the value of reading when he suggested that “the reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries” (Descartes, 1637/1955, p. 38). Locke (1824) commented on the concept of ownership of such knowledge: “Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours” (p. 371).

The creative interaction that takes place when the reader encounters a text was also noted by Ralph Waldo Emerson who suggested that one must be an inventor to read well. He postulated that there is creative reading as well as creative writing (Emerson, 2009, p. 34). The value of literacy as a source of knowledge and education for the individual was noted
by Francis Bacon when he wrote: that “Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man” (Bacon, 2002, p. 81).

Literacy can be the catalyst for personal transformation, reflection and renewal (Merton, 1983). The importance of literacy has been acknowledged by many individuals and organisations as a means to promote personal and social change (Freire, 1970; UNESCO 2011). If, as Wordsworth (1999) wrote “books are yours…these hoards of truth you can unlock at will” (p. 54), then, as educators, we should seek to facilitate access to this gift for all students.

1.2 Thesis Aims

As suggested in Section 1.1, literacy provides access to knowledge, facilitates creativity and enables engagement with the contributions of individuals and societies throughout the centuries and in contemporary times. Literature forms an important part of Ireland’s heritage and culture. Ireland, ‘the land of saints and scholars’, has a particularly strong literary tradition and a longstanding reputation for excellence in education. Educators should seek to continue this literary tradition so that its benefits can be enjoyed by future generations. The acquisition of literacy is a principal concern of the primary curriculum and this is reflected in stated national policy for Ireland (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). It is significant that English was the first area of the 1999 curriculum to be implemented and (along with Visual Arts and Maths) reviewed in 2003-2004. The primary motivation for this research relates to
recent innovations in the research literature, which recognise the potential of literacy in the education of children: in the acquisition of cognitive and language skills and in the promotion of life-long learning.

Recent social, economic and demographic changes in Ireland have impacted on the contexts in which children acquire literacy and provide potential opportunities and challenges for children and their educators. Following the publication of Ireland’s results in recent international assessments (Section 2.4), there have been a number of attempts to address literacy in an Irish context. First and foremost is that presented by the Department of Education and Skills (2011) in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020* (‘National Strategy’), which addressed the following areas to assist in improving literacy outcomes:

- Enabling parents and communities to support children’s literacy and development
- Improving teachers’ professional practice through changes to both pre-service and in-service education
- Building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy in schools
- Getting the content of the curriculum for literacy right at primary level by making sure that the curriculum is clear about what students are expected to learn at each stage
- Targeting available additional resources to learners with additional needs, including students from disadvantaged communities, students learning English as an additional language and students with special educational needs
- Improving how teachers, schools and the educational system use good assessment approaches to plan the next steps for each learner and monitor progress

The *National Strategy* further outlined a number of aims to improve literacy outcomes. These related to the improvement of teacher and pupil attitudes to literacy, the fostering of an enjoyment of reading among children and young people and the raising of public awareness of the importance of oral and written language in all its forms (including print, writing and digital media). The *National Strategy* acknowledged the key role played by parents, families and communities in supporting children’s ability to become effective communicators from their earliest years. It also sought to improve the communication and oral-language competence of young children in education settings and outcomes at primary school level and to ensure that each primary school sets goals and monitors progress in achieving demanding but realistic targets for the improvement of the literacy skills of its students in a school improvement plan. Furthermore, the *National Strategy* sought to increase the percentages of primary children performing at Level 3 or higher (at the highest levels) in the National Assessment of English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both
second class and sixth class by 2020, and to reduce the percentage of children performing at or below Level 1 (at the minimum level) in the National Assessment of English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020. The National Strategy also recognised the need to increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy and to include assessments of primary students’ ability to read digital material as part of the national assessments of English reading.

In view of the relevant research literature, recent attempts to address literacy, including the National Strategy and the provision of many initiatives to support the education of teachers in different school settings, it is timely to explore the acquisition of literacy in children from the perspectives of primary education professionals (primary school principals, primary teachers and academics in this field) and children in an Irish context. In considering how educators can best facilitate children’s acquisition of literacy it is necessary to explore the factors affecting children’s acquisition of literacy, the related challenges in the current social context and to address considerations for the future. This study addresses the literacy needs of children as identified in the research literature and as experienced by those currently involved in the acquisition of literacy in children; namely teachers and children across different primary school settings in Ireland. The researcher sought to include participants from a variety of educational settings to obtain multiple perspectives and to compare the views expressed by teachers and children.
1.3 Research Questions

A comprehensive review of the research literature suggests that there is a variety of factors that affect the acquisition of literacy in children. An exploration of these factors resulted in the recognition of various challenges and a need to identify the most important considerations relating to the acquisition of literacy in children, across different primary educational settings in order to establish relevant implications for practice. This research seeks to address the following research questions from the perspectives of primary teaching professionals and children in an Irish context:

– What are the most influential factors in a child’s literacy acquisition?
– What are the main challenges in the acquisition of literacy in children?
– What are the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children?

The researcher sought to address these research questions and issues arising from their discussion to explore the acquisition of literacy in children in Ireland comprehensively in the current social context. These questions were addressed by means of an online survey and research interviews with primary school principals, teachers and academics with professional experience, many of whom had a particular interest and expertise in literacy acquisition in children.
1.4 Research Overview

This study incorporates an online survey (162 responses) and research interviews (33 individual participants) conducted with teaching professionals (primary school principals, primary teachers and academics) to provide a comprehensive exploration of views relating to children’s literacy acquisition. In order to address these issues competently, this research includes the views of primary teachers in different school settings in Ireland: urban and rural schools, schools designated as DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Band 1 and Band 2, non-DEIS schools and Gaelscoileanna. This research also includes the views of children (115 participants: children from third to sixth class, aged 9–12 years from urban, rural and non-DEIS schools).

This chapter includes an introduction to the research (Section 1.1). It outlines the thesis aims (Section 1.2), research questions and primary motivation for adopting this approach (Section 1.3). It also includes an overview of the research and methodology and an outline of the following chapters (Section 1.4).

The second chapter sets out a review of the literature in relation to the topic of literacy. Section 2.2 examines multiple sources in an endeavour to move towards an acceptable definition of literacy for the purposes of this thesis. This section also elaborates on the categories of literacies that emerge from a review of the literature, in order to establish an understanding of the concept of literacy. Section 2.3 extracts and explores
the main factors affecting the acquisition of literacy which can be identified from a review of the literature. These include considerations of family and parental context and involvement (Section 2.3.1), the influence of language (Section 2.3.2), culture (Section 2.3.3), and socio-economic factors (Section 2.3.4). Section 2.4 outlines Ireland’s performance in recent international literacy assessments. Section 2.5 addresses the research and official literature in relation to curricular implementation in oral language (Section 2.5.1.1), reading (Section 2.5.1.2) and writing (Section 2.5.1.3). This section also addresses the importance of cross-curricular integration and assessment (Section 2.5.1.4). In the consideration of the broader definitions of literacy, as outlined in Section 2.2, it is necessary to address several relevant issues. Section 2.6 outlines sources from the literature which have considered the importance of social and emotional learning, the issue of gender and its influence on literacy acquisition, and the associations between literacy, personal transformation and social change. A summary of the chapter is provided in Section 2.7.

The third chapter outlines the methodology used in this research. It includes a statement of the research questions (Section 3.2) and a description of and rationale for the research approach selected (Section 3.4). It also includes a description of the data collection instruments (Section 3.5), a timeline for progression of the research (Section 3.6), details pertaining to sampling (Section 3.7), trustworthiness; validity, triangulation, reliability, transferability and reflexivity (Section 3.8), data analysis (Section 3.9),
ethics and data presentation (Section 3.10). The limitations of the methodology are addressed in Section 3.11 and a conclusion to the chapter is provided in Section 3.12.

The fourth chapter, presented in three parts, elaborates on the research findings in tabular and written form. Section 4.2, Part I provides an analysis of responses to the online survey completed with teaching professionals. Section 4.3, Part II presents an analysis of responses from teaching professionals in research interviews, and Section 4.4, Part III includes an analysis of responses from children in research questionnaires. Section 4.5 provides a conclusion to the chapter.

The fifth chapter presents a discussion of research findings which emerge from data obtained from the online survey, research interviews with teaching professionals and questionnaires with children. The main findings are addressed in light of the relevant research literature (Chapter Two) and the perspectives of research participants. Section 5.2 addresses the factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children. Section 5.3 outlines the main challenges in children’s literacy acquisition identified in this research and addresses some important considerations for the future in meeting the literacy needs of children. Section 5.4 outlines conclusions from the chapter.
The final chapter addresses the principal contributions of this thesis (Section 6.2) and implications for practice (Section 6.3), outlines limitations of this thesis (Section 6.4) and closes with suggestions for further research (Section 6.5).
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature in relation to literacy, in particular, the acquisition of literacy in children. In completing the literature review, the researcher selected studies from a variety of national and international sources that were relevant to the research topic and to related issues influencing the context in which children acquire literacy. The researcher considered various sources that could make an informative, meaningful and enlightening contribution to the discussion of the questions and matters addressed in this thesis. Articles, research studies and publications were sourced via Trinity College Library (www.tcd.ie/library) and online databases including Google Scholar (scholar.google.com), EBSCO (www.ebsco.com) and ERIC (eric.ed.gov).

Section 2.2 examines multiple sources in an endeavour to move towards an acceptable definition of literacy for the purposes of this thesis. This section also elaborates on the categories of literacies that emerge from a review of the literature in order to establish an understanding of the concept of literacy. Section 2.3 extracts and explores the main factors influencing the acquisition of literacy in children, as identified in a review of the literature. These include considerations of family and parental context and involvement (Section 2.3.1), the influence of language (Section 2.3.2), culture (Section 2.3.3), and socio-economic factors (Section 2.3.4).
Section 2.4 outlines details relating to Ireland’s performance in recent literacy assessments. Section 2.5 addresses the research and official literature relating to curricular implementation in oral language (Section 2.5.1.1), reading (Section 2.5.1.2), and writing (Section 2.5.1.3). This section also addresses the importance of cross-curricular integration and assessment (Section 2.5.1.4). Section 2.6 outlines sources from the literature which have explored the associations between literacy, social and emotional learning, gender, personal transformation and social change. The chapter closes with a summary of a review of the literature in Section 2.7.

2.2 Literacy: Towards a Definition

The word ‘literate’ emerged from the Latin term *literatus*, which for Cicero (Grant, 1974), meant a learned person. Literacy is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* as the ability to read and write. The authors of the government-sponsored initiative ‘Delivering Equal Opportunities in Schools’ (2005) defined literacy as the integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The concept of literacy goes beyond simply being able to read; it has always meant the ability to read with meaning, and to understand. It is the fundamental act of cognition (Gilster, 1997). In their response to *Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People: A Draft Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools*, the Reading Association of Ireland (2011) recommended proceeding towards a broad conceptualisation of literacy. Since literacy is so broadly defined in this plan it is argued that it should be
complemented with a definition of reading literacy, such as that used in the National Assessment of English Reading or in PISA (the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment). The definition of reading literacy provided in the 2009 *National Assessment Report* is as follows:

Reading literacy is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader’s existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation. Young readers read to learn, to participate in communities of readers and for enjoyment (Eivers et al., 2010, p. 15).

This definition refers to “communities of readers” (p. 15) which suggests the importance of communicating about what has been read, both orally and in writing, with peers and others, and reading for enjoyment. Significantly, the National Assessment Report definition also referred to “the reader’s existing knowledge” (p. 15) (that is, background or prior knowledge) which is fundamental to the comprehension of text. The Reading Association of Ireland (2011) postulated that clear reference to the role of background knowledge has implications for the teaching and assessment of reading in a school context. According to PISA, reading is:
understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts [both print and electronic], in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential and to participate in society (OECD, 2009, p. 25).

The Reading Association of Ireland (2011) also advised that it is beneficial to address the changing nature of literacy as related to a child’s development. Considering this definition would assist in understanding the distinction between ‘literacy’ in a broader sense and the more specific aspects of reading literacy. Similarly, Moll (1994) noted that literacy is “not in isolated bits of knowledge but in students’ growing ability to use language and literacy in more and broader activities” (p.202). The UNESCO definition of literacy acknowledges a continuum of learning:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve (their) goals, develop (their) knowledge and potential and participate fully in the community and wider society (UNESCO, 2008, p. 18).
This notion of recognising literacy as a continuum is one with which more recent contributors to the discussion concur (Ahmed, 2011). Many sources in the literature have referred to levels of literacy (Edwards & Potts, 2008; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Wagner, 2005) and noted that literacy is not a solitary skill or quality that one possesses or acquires; rather, it encompasses various forms of skills that individuals already possess to varying degrees. They postulated that there are different levels and categories of literacy, which reflect the ability to perform a multitude of tasks using written materials that differ in nature and complexity. Literacy in this interpretation can be understood as a continuous variable, ranging from the most rudimentary and mechanical ability to read and write a few words with limited understanding, to more sophisticated reading and writing skills that can be employed for more progressive forms of communication.

Dail and Payne (2010) postulated an ideological perspective in which literacy is defined as social practice involving written language; characterised as dynamic, culturally situated, and multifaceted. In this way, children and their families engage in a range of literacy practices, and literacy is viewed as more than a neutral cognitive skill. While young children must acquire specific literacy skills to access the school curriculum, it is important to note that becoming literate involves more than simply mastering these discrete skills. Learning to read therefore extends far beyond isolated skills and encompasses one’s views and attitudes towards the wider world.
A review of the literature suggests that there have been many attempts to categorise the concept of literacy. Brooks and Normore (2009) postulated that there are nine literacies that can be acquired. They are (a) political literacy, (b) economic literacy, (c) cultural literacy, (d) moral literacy, (e) pedagogical literacy, (f) information literacy, (g) organisational literacy, (h) spiritual and religious literacy and (i) temporal literacy. Steiner (1984) defined emotional literacy, and outlined its importance in well-being. Shanaghan and Shanaghan (2012) described disciplinary literacy as specialised skills and codes that one must master to be capable of reading and writing in various disciplines. Fang and Coatoam (2013), Hillman (2014) and Moje (2007) reviewed the literature of disciplinary teaching and elaborated on questions concerning its definitions.

Like Brooks and Normore (2009), Mulcahy (2009) discussed different categories of literacy, and defined them accordingly: functional, cultural, progressive and critical. Functional literacy has been deemed a fundamental human right (UNESCO, 2009). Functional literacy is presented as the traditional view of literacy, where those who are functionally literate have achieved the abilities necessary for daily living (Reading Association of Ireland, 2011). Functional definitions of literacy are therefore contextual.

Cultural literacy assumes the existence of a body of common knowledge, which Mulcahy (2009) believes may impede students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Progressive literacy is defined as a
literacy which is student-centred, all-inclusive and holistic and is frequently instigated via readers’ and writers’ workshops. Critical literacy, according to Mulcahy (2009):

delves deeply into socio-political and sociocultural issues to identify the root cause of social inequalities and injustices...educators concern themselves with encouraging people to think more reflectively about the world and to identify ways to act upon the world and enact change against relations of oppression. In this way it is a literacy of transformation (Mulcahy, 2009, p. 163).

Coiro et al. (2008) postulated that we must appreciate that which emerges from the core of what we consider to be literate in the twenty-first century. According to the National Economic and Social Forum (2009), the skills necessary for literacy emphasise a more holistic focus on comprehension, analysis and critical evaluation. This source advised that the definition of literacy should be extended from simply reading and writing to incorporating skills such as oral language, comprehension analytical skills and the use of information and communications technology (ICT).

Recent academic discussion has referred to the introduction of new literacies, incorporating the use of ICT, digital and media literacy although some sources in academic discussion have expressed caution in assimilating
these facets into their definition (Coiro, Knobel, Lanksheer, & Leu, 2008, p. 26). The Reading Association of Ireland (2011) model of literacy encompasses a multitude of terms: digital literacy, ICT literacy, computer literacy, internet literacy, information literacy and so forth, all frequently summed up as new literacies, and subsequently proposes that this enhanced definition of literacy should form the foundation for all subsequent recommendations in future editions of a national plan for literacy. In addressing literacy, Flewitt (2008) referred to various forms of technologies, such as mobile phones, computers and games consoles with which children have learned to become proficient in ICT. Children must learn to interpret traditional words and pictures in addition to screen-based and digital texts (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, 2011). In reference to the PISA 2009 results for digital literacy (OECD, 2010), Coiro et al. (2008) suggested that it is imperative to understand and adequately assess the new forms of reading literacy that come with the practice of reading from digital displays.

The Irish Department of Education and Skills (2011), in its recent publication, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020*, recognised that:
Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media...when we refer to “literacy” we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media (p. 8).

In this context, literacy relates to the acquisition of these competencies in the first language of the school. This is the operative definition for the purposes of this study, as it acknowledges more traditional interpretations of the term; the importance of reading and writing *(OED)* yet allows for broader interpretations as addressed by sources in the literature *(Brooks & Normore, 2009; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; UNESCO, 2008)*. Although the definition posited by the *National Strategy* does not mention culture or context, it refers to the communicative aspect of literacy and suggests that literacy relates to the assimilation and synthesis of various forms of communication in its many forms including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media *(Coiro et al., 2008; Flewitt, 2008)*. The definition proposed by the *National Strategy* also referred to the
importance of “understanding and critically appreciating various forms of communication” (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p 8); encompassing aspects of literacy described in other definitions posited by sources in the literature emphasising the importance of comprehension in considering what it means to be literate (Eivers et al., 2010; Gilester 1997; National Economic and Social Forum, 2009; OECD, 2009; Reading Association of Ireland, 2011).

2.3 Factors Affecting the Acquisition of Literacy

A review of the recent research literature suggests that there are a variety of factors affecting the acquisition of literacy (Alivernini, Manganelli, Vinci, & Leo, 2010; Brice Heath, 1986; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Geske & Ozola, 2008; Hart & Risely, 1995; McCoy & Cole, 2011). The following sections explore the main factors among these, including the influence of parental and family context and involvement (Section 2.3.1), language (Section 2.3.2), culture (Section 2.3.3), and socio-economic factors (Section 2.3.4).

2.3.1 Parental and Family Context

There is an extensive literature pertaining to the significance of family in the acquisition of literacy. This includes a comprehensive recent research review exploring the importance of family and home environments as addressed by many international sources (McCoy & Cole, 2011). In the last 30 years, compelling evidence has been presented that the family is of key importance in the acquisition of literacy in the early years (Fan & Chen,
2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). As parents are the first teachers, the key research findings contributed by this review are that families and parents are crucial to children’s achievement. The influential role of the home and parents are emphasised. Early intervention is highly recommended for enduring outcomes, as children learn a great deal before entering the formal educational system (McCoy & Cole, 2011).

Kennedy et al. (2012) acknowledged that the amount and quality of language interactions with parents and caregivers are both important for the acquisition of literacy skills, strategies and dispositions in early years settings. The nature of such activities, including the warmth of such interactions in contexts such as storybook reading, are key variables contributing to the acquisition of literacy in children. Furthermore, parent(s)’ efforts to promote language and literacy can assist children’s learning and preparation for the demands of school (Kennedy et al., 2012). In a relevant publication, addressing pathways to early literacy, McClelland, Kessenich and Morrison (2003) explored the interactions between parenting, child temperament and learning-related social skills. The earlier parents become involved in their children’s literacy practices, the more profound and long-lasting the effects (Hegarty & Feeley, 2010). Parental involvement in their child’s literacy activities positively affects children’s academic performance, and is a more prevailing force for academic success than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Department of Education and
Fan and Chen (2001) postulated that parental attitudes and support for their children’s learning influences performance in literacy tests, irrespective of socio-economic status.

Hart and Risely (1995) completed a study in relation to the early experiences of children with language, the interaction between parents and children, and later vocabulary growth rate. This study examined the verbal interactions in 42 families from the time the child was 10 months old to three years of age. Research findings suggested that children in professional families heard more words per hour, resulting in larger cumulative vocabularies, and heard a higher ratio of encouragements to discouragements than children whose parents were not employed in professional occupations. In effect, Hart and Risley’s (1995) thesis suggested that the amount of language that young children hear affects their range of vocabulary. The three major conclusions from this study were (1) families differ greatly in the quantity of speaking that occurs with children, (2) quantity of speaking is connected to growth in range of vocabulary, and (3) quantity of speaking is associated with the amount of quality features in the language used (Nation, 2015). Hart and Risely’s (1995) findings provided important insights into our understanding of how such differing experiences can affect children across very different home and social backgrounds and are influential; this study is endorsed by leading educational figures, and its findings are widely cited (Nation, 2015).
The importance of establishing daily routines and practices where reading is encouraged and facilitated has been recognised as a key component in promoting positive attitudes and experiences for children (Bedard, Horn, & Garcia, 2011; Heckman, 2004; Webner & Caccavale, 1991). A recently conducted large-scale commercial survey, with a sample of 1,000 people over the age of 16, claimed that one in five parents in Ireland do not read to their children and that women were more likely to read to their children than men (Easons, 2012). It is also remarkable that one third of parents claimed that time pressures were the main reason they could not read to their children.

The recent Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children (Williams et al., 2009b), which included a nationally representative random sample of 8,570 nine year olds, their families, school principals and teachers, suggested that most parents were found to be very supportive of their nine-year-old’s education. This expressed itself, for example, in attendance at parent-teacher meetings and in providing assistance with the child’s homework (Williams et al., 2009a, p. 96). Williams et al., (2009b) also reported that the majority of parents felt that their child was above average or excellent at reading. It was noteworthy that parents had a higher estimate of their children’s abilities than their teachers. Interestingly, some sources in the research literature have suggested that the mother’s educational attainment level and social class are important determinants in affecting achievement in literacy (Finlay &
Gibbons, 2009; Williams et al., 2009b); for example, the higher the educational level of the child’s mother, the better the child performed in vocabulary tests (Williams et al., 2009b, p. 3).

The way in which the key concepts of parental involvement, family, literacy, and family literacy are defined can have an impact on the way family literacy provision is established and implemented. Wasik and Herrmann (2004) posited that family literacy can be considered “a phenomenon of family life, which has long been acknowledged and appreciated” (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004, p. 7). This definition of family literacy emerges from a belief in the importance of children’s home life in their literacy acquisition and is promoted by Wasik and Herrmann (2004) when they reserve the term ‘family literacy’ for literacy beliefs and practices among family members and the intergenerational transfer of literacy to children. The expression is also used to refer to studies of how young children become literate, including the connections between family literacy practices and children’s literacy and language acquisition (Wasik & Herrmann, 2004).

Recent innovations in the theoretical construct of family literacy would recommend the use of the plural form (family literacies), in recognition of the fact that families have different ways with words and very diverse linguistic practices (Pahl, 2008) which may vary across cultural, linguistic and social contexts. A sociocultural perspective is incorporated in this interpretation in acknowledging that practices in the home can differ
linguistically or culturally from those in mainstream education (Sections 2.2, 2.3.2, 2.3.3). This perspective respects parents as their children’s first educators (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999), recognises that parents have the potential to influence the literacy learning of their children, and values the role of parents, siblings and the extended family. McCoy and Cole (2011) advised against adopting an inflexible definition of family literacy. When addressing family literacy initiatives, this type of definition risks attempting to apply a ‘one-size-fits-all’ response to a host of complex social and learning situations, a generalisation which devalues the diverse social systems in the very families and communities that family literacy programmes are devised to assist.

In their consideration of the role of family involvement in early literacy acquisition, Dail and Payne (2010) referred to an ideological perspective of literacy. The contribution of families to their children’s literacy acquisition extends beyond their immediate influences upon specific, discrete early literacy skills. Parent involvement programmes that reflect this ideological perspective recognise the multifaceted nature of literacy and thus such interventions must consider the multiple contexts of home and community as well as of school and build on the family constructs of knowledge. Such initiatives are familial and culturally conscious, in their recognition of existing family routines and values and integrating ‘schooled’ literacy practices within those structures (Dail & Payne, 2010).
Many sources in the research literature (Dail & Payne, 2010; Pahl, 2008; Wasik & Hermman, 2004) and a constructivist pedagogical approach to learning (Bruner, 1977; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978a) suggest a need to connect the acquisition of literacy in children at home and at school. Many after-school literacy programmes seek to bridge the gap between home and school contexts (Biggart, Kerr, O’Hare, & Connolly, 2012). The National Strategy recommended a number of actions to enable parents to support their children’s literacy acquisition (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, pp. 19-25). These include an information campaign to build up awareness of the important role that parents can play in supporting literacy, the provision of advice and information to parents and the promotion of models of good practice that enable the co-operation and support of parents, families, communities and schools.

In their comprehensive analysis, Edwards, Franklin, and Holland (2003) explored the issues of families and social capital, and their influence on education, and posited that the associations between broad social changes, particularly in relation to education, and social changes arising from increasing cultural diversity in family life, have implications for concerns about the general existence and generation of social capital (the values that people hold, accessible resources and socially negotiated relationships). These findings suggest the need for a wide-ranging investigation of and critical approach to the relationship between the dynamics of family change and social capital in different circumstances and
localities. This is necessary to provide theoretical understanding and empirical knowledge of the processes through which social capital is formed and sustained for and within families. The influence of family and community social capital on educational achievement has also been explored by Israel, Beaulieu, and Hartless (2001). Research findings suggest that policies designed to promote educational achievement must extend beyond the school and seek to strengthen social capital in the family and community (Israel et al., 2001).

Ryan, Adams, Gullotta, Weissberg, and Hampton (1995) competently addressed the connections between family and school and how school achievement is influenced by parent-child interactions and the family environment. In a study involving group interviews with parents of pupils in primary schools in areas of economic disadvantage, Hanafin and Lynch (2002) suggested that further exploration was needed into the heterogeneity of the working-class voice, and posited that although working class parents were interested, informed and concerned in relation to their children’s education, they felt excluded from participating in decision making relating to their children’s progress.

In a noteworthy contribution, Smyth, Whelan, McCoy, Quail, and Doyle (2010) addressed the relationship between parental background and children’s educational outcomes and referred to the ongoing debate for the merits of explanations which concentrate on the role of sociocultural reproduction and those which focus on rational choice. Smyth et al. (2010)
observed that many empirical studies within the social stratification tradition do not consider children’s own agency in influencing the relationship between social background and educational outcomes.

In drawing on the first wave of a large scale longitudinal study of over 8,000 nine-year-old children in Ireland and combining information from parents, school principals, teachers and children, Smyth et al. (2010) established that social class and parental education had significant effects on the reading of nine year olds. These effects are partly mediated by home-based educational outcomes and activities, parental educational expectations for their child and parents’ formal involvement in school. Interestingly, Smyth et al. (2010) posited that children’s own engagement and attitudes to school had a strong influence on their academic performance and suggested that the influence of children’s own attitudes and actions can reinforce or mitigate the effect of social background factors (Smyth et al., 2010). As outlined above, numerous sources in the research literature emphasise the importance of parental and family context and suggest that such influences are integral to the acquisition of literacy in children. It is also important to note that, as well as considering parental and family context, there is also a need to recognise the community and school contexts which must be negotiated by the child and the ways in these contexts can affect children’s literacy acquisition.
2.3.2 Literacy and Language

The complex relationship between literacy and language and the ways in which progress can be achieved in these areas have been addressed extensively by sources in the literature (Kern, 2000; Stubbs, 1980). This section outlines some of the relevant issues pertaining to the language context in Ireland, and considers current demographics and the acquisition of literacy in a bilingual environment as well as the benefits of an integrated approach to the teaching of language. It also refers to recent research literature relating to the acquisition of literacy in language minority pupils.

Recent decades have seen an increase in pupils from a wide array of language backgrounds as the result of growth in immigration to the Republic of Ireland. Ireland has been transformed into an increasingly heterogeneous country in terms of nationality, language, culture, ethnicity and religious affiliation (Byrne, McGinnity, Smyth, & Darmody, 2010). This presents both opportunities and challenges to children’s linguistic acquisition as well as many other aspects of the child’s educational experience. Researchers such as Wallen and Kelly-Holmes (2006) have explored how Ireland has responded to these changes. The context of Ireland is an interesting one, considering its demographical history as a country of net emigration with minimal cultural diversity and the teaching of the Irish language in primary schools, which continues to facilitate bilingualism and promote linguistic diversity. In Ireland’s case, the Irish language is a relevant consideration. Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012, pp. 24
-25) provided a contextual background to language learning in Ireland. Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland, 1942) recognises the Irish language as the first official language of Ireland with English as a second official language, a position which has been maintained by subsequent government statements on the Irish language (Government of Ireland, 2006). Irish is taught as a compulsory subject throughout primary school. The position of Irish in the education system was further strengthened by a 20-year strategy for the Irish language (Government of Ireland, 2010, p. 4).

Children in Ireland learn two languages from the early years of primary school – Irish and English. They are, therefore, engaged in literacy acquisition in two languages, although to a differing extent, depending on the linguistic context of the school. The different contexts in which children learn languages in Ireland is acknowledged by the primary school curriculum (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999a). Currently, language in the curriculum is taught in *Gaeilge* and English in three different school contexts: English medium schools, *Gaeltacht* schools and all-Irish schools (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999a, p. 43). The Irish curriculum has been criticised, however, for not being sufficiently rich as a mother-tongue curriculum for native Irish speakers, particularly in comparison with the English curriculum (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, 2011). Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012) posited that all children begin school with competency in one or more
languages regardless of context but that pupils differ in their contact and exposure to Irish in and outside of school (Ó Laoire & Harris, 2006). The National Strategy acknowledged the need to support children who do not speak English or Irish at home and to rebalance the supports made available to address the literacy needs of students for whom English is an additional language (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 69).

The associations between literacy and language teaching have been addressed by many authors. Kern (2000) elaborated on a theoretical foundation for the application of literacy concepts to language teaching. Stubbs (1980) provided the foundation for a sociolinguistic theory of reading by situating reading within a discussion of the formal and functional characteristics of language use in social settings.

In a recent report commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012) examined the principles of children’s language learning and addressed practical examples of language curriculum integration. They suggested that there is extensive research evidence to support the view that literacy-related skills and knowledge can be transferred across languages.

When considering the acquisition of literacy, it is necessary to identify the language in which one seeks to be literate and the purpose and means by which one can assess attainment (Hermes & Uran, 2006). There is some support in the research literature for the idea that the acquisition of literacy in one language can support literacy in another, and that learning a
second language does not mean losing the first (Winsler, Díaz, Espinosa, & Rodríguez, 2003). These issues are of relevance when considering children who may be learning English as an additional language.

Ó Laoire and Harris (2006) completed a comprehensive review of the literature relating to language and literacy in Irish medium schools and addressed the issues of language and education, language revitalisation and language education for language maintenance. These researchers posited that there are many other questions – in addition to those involving early literacy acquisition – about the place of a home language within the immersion which a major programme of research might address, for example, the use of teacher-centred teaching methods in immersion classrooms (Cummins, 2000).

Numerous sources in the research literature have noted the benefits of bilingualism (Sparks, Patton, Granschow, & Humback, 2009). Bialystok (2001) explored the impact of bilingualism in children’s learning and addressed the way that children who learned two languages in childhood acquire cognitive skills. Bialystok (1997) also investigated the effects of bilingualism and biliteracy on children’s emerging concepts of print. Research findings from this study suggested that bilingual children understood the general symbolic representation of print better than monolingual children.
Sparks, Patton, Ganschow, Humbach, and Javorsky (2008) examined how early first-language reading and spelling skills predicted later second-language skills. Some studies have emphasised the importance of appropriate resources and networks and the influence of school environment in enabling children to enjoy the benefits of bilingualism. Golash-Boza (2005) suggested that there are advantages to bilingualism beyond the functional ability to communicate with one's parents and also postulated that bilingualism is only advantageous in communities with low levels of English proficiency and high levels of resources and networks. Han (2012) examined the role that bilingualism plays in children’s progressing academic trajectories during their early school years, with particular attention to the school environment. Research findings suggested that school-level factors explained approximately one third of reductions in the differences in children's academic performance. Findings from these studies recognise that while the process of facilitating children’s literacy acquisition in a bilingual context is not without its challenges, many of which can be overcome, it also offers many potential benefits for children’s learning.

Cummins (1979) posited that a cognitively and academically beneficial form of bilingualism can be achieved only on the basis of adequately developed first language (L1) skills, formulating and combining two hypotheses to arrive at this conclusion. The ‘developmental interdependence’ hypothesis proposes that the development of competence in a second language (L2) is, in part, a function of the type of competence
already developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins. The ‘threshold’ hypothesis suggests that there may be threshold levels of linguistic competence which a bilingual child must achieve in order to avoid cognitive disadvantages and enable the potentially beneficial aspects of bilingualism to impact on their cognitive and academic functioning necessary for the acquisition of literacy skills. These hypotheses are integrated into a model of bilingual education in which educational outcomes are explicated as a function of the interaction between background, child input and educational factors.

An integrated approach to the teaching of languages is supported by the Council of Europe (2008, p. 9). The principal rationale for integration across languages is that learning competences can be achieved when teachers explicitly draw children’s attention to the similarities and differences between their languages and reinforce effective learning strategies in a cohesive way across languages. An explicit instructional focus on integration across languages will assist children in making cross-lingual connections (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012).

Lesaux and Geva (2006) completed a synthesis of the acquisition of literacy in language minority students. This review explored the similarities and differences between language-minority and native speakers in the acquisition of various literacy skills in the societal language. It examined the profiles of those language-minority students identified as having literacy difficulties and elaborated on factors which have an impact on the literacy
acquisition of language-minority students. Findings from this review suggested that it is only when reading comprehension is the focus that language-minority students encounter problems. As outlined above, there are many studies in the research literature which elaborated on the issues that emerge in considering the associations between literacy and language. An awareness of such issues can inform educators in facilitating the acquisition of literacy in children of different language backgrounds.

2.3.3 Literacy and Culture

As literacy is acquired within a sociocultural context (Flewitt, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978a) it is useful to consider the associations between literacy and culture as addressed by many researchers (Bedard, Horn, & Garcia, 2011; Corsaro & Nelson, 2003; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011). This section explores the influence of the sociocultural environment and the importance of incorporating culture in literacy instruction in a way that promotes self-esteem and respect for cultural diversity. It addresses the need to consider the everyday cultural context and the effect of peer culture and cultural capital in the acquisition of literacy in children. It also refers to cultural diversity in Irish schools, indigenous and ethnic cultures, and elaborates on the interaction between literacy and culture. In addition, it addresses the concept of literacy as a cultural phenomenon, the impact of culture on literacy and the concept of transcultural literacy. An awareness of such issues can inform educators of the associations between literacy and culture.
and the need to consider and address these in their attempts to assist children in their literacy acquisition.

The significance of the sociocultural environment and the effects this may have on children’s literacy acquisition have been addressed in the research literature (UNESCO, 2011). Flewitt (2008) posited that the different modes of children’s learning are influenced by the social and cultural environments in which they find themselves. Children utilise amalgamations of different modes such as gesture, gaze, movement, image, layout, and sound effects to become literate (Flewitt, 2008). As literacy is historically and culturally relative, it is very difficult to define it in isolation from a specific time, place and culture, and therefore, illiteracy can only be understood in relation to a culture’s definitions of literacy, since it is the deficiency of a certain set of characteristics (UNESCO, 2011).

Many sources in the research literature have elaborated on the role of culture in the acquisition of literacy, in a home, school and community context. McClelland, Kessenich, and Morrison (2003) described a complex model of literacy acquisition and addressed the dynamic relations and complex interplay between child, family and sociocultural factors, schooling influences and early literacy skills. Serpell, Sonnenschein, Baker, and Ganapathy (2002) documented the culture of families in the early socialisation of literacy for children at public elementary schools in a large city in the United States and concluded that psychosocial features of a
family’s culture are more informative than economic indices of the family’s material resources.

Li (2003) examined the complex interrelationship between home literacy, culture and the politics of schooling. Research findings from this study, which drew on three distinct perspectives: (1) cultural mismatch theory, (2) theories of minority assimilation and acculturation, and (3) cultural capital theory in the design of its theoretical framework, suggested that cultural mismatch theory alone cannot explain minority school failure. Li (2003) also posited that multilevel interactions including cultural differences, modes of incorporation and differential power relationships between school and home result in difficulties among minority school students.

Rupley, Nichols, and Blair (2008) examined considerations that are imperative to the role of language and culture in literacy instruction and suggested that teachers must be well prepared in culturally responsive instruction to accommodate the learning needs of a pupil population with great diversity in cultures, backgrounds, interests in social reading, linguistic and reading abilities and reading styles. Coyle (2008) referred to the importance of culture in the 4Cs framework for the Content and Language Integrated Learning model. In considering children’s literacy acquisition, it is important to consider the cultural contexts of classrooms in the teaching and implementation of subjects and teaching approaches (Hogan & Corey, 2001).
Some sources in the research literature (Cavazos-Rehg & DeLucia-Waack, 2009) have suggested that there are strong links between positive reinforcement, the representation of one’s language and culture and the promotion of self-esteem. It is important for educators to be aware of the representations conveyed and attitudes implied towards differing cultures in material presented to children and learners of all ages in their efforts to facilitate literacy experiences. Furthermore, it is necessary to be conscious of one’s own biases and cultural mores and their resulting influence. Caution should also be exercised when using the individualistic lens to examine self-worth contingencies as there can be a tendency to pathologise and marginalise those who do not embody the broader cultural values. Cavazos-Rehg and DeLucia-Waack (2009) refer to the damage done to children’s self-esteem when their culture is degraded. Such observations allude to the associations between literacy and social and emotional learning (Section 2.6). The National Strategy acknowledged the need to improve the literacy skills of all young people (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 8). An awareness and respect for diversity and the use of inclusive teaching methodologies in the classroom is important to ensure positive learning experiences for children of different backgrounds.

Harris (2009) explored the ideas of everyday multiculturalism as an analytical approach to acquiring an understanding of the ways in which young people engage with differences in culture in conditions of diversity. Corsaro and Nelson (2003) recognised that recent work on early literacy
relating to the child’s active nature in the learning process has considered the effects of including children’s peer interests in the literacy curricula. Drawing on data gathered from intensive longitudinal ethnographies of the peer cultures of preschool and early elementary school children in the United States and Italy in seven early education settings over a 30-year period, Corsaro and Nelson’s (2003) research found that children who engage in consistently appropriate literacy activities and knowledge in formal lessons subsequently use, refine and extend these activities in their peer culture. Corsaro and Nelson (2003) considered the implications of these outcomes for theoretical work on children’s peer cultures and for preschool and elementary school literacy curricula. These findings emphasised the importance of social interaction in the acquisition of literacy and suggested that what is required are programmes which build on children’s desire to read and write and incorporate children’s perspectives and peer cultures. Ammermueller and Pischke (2009) explored peer effects for fourth graders in European primary schools. Their research findings suggested that the peer effect is a modestly large measurement error, important in survey data, and selection plays little role in biasing peer effect estimates.

The research literature indicates that educational achievement reflects differences in social class background, parental education and/or income across different contexts (Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). The nature and impact of children’s extra-curricular experiences and informal learning
have not been extensively explored. Few studies have directly assessed the contribution of out-of-school experiences to children’s learning and education (Williams et al., 2009a). Bourdieu’s sociocultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) provides some relevant insights and focuses on the inequity in distribution of economic, social and cultural resources (or capital) across classes and their subsequent transmission from parents to children. Familiarity with the dominant culture is a form of cultural capital and can influence an individual’s predisposition to learning, among other factors (Reay, 2004). Middle-class parents possess the kinds of cultural and social capital which assist them in promoting their children’s educational success.

Bryan (2010) provided an empirical critique of recent social and educational policy responses to cultural diversity in an Irish context, focussing specifically on the anti-racism, integration and intercultural education policies developed during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era. Bryan (2009) also examined the interrelationship between the creation of national identity and multiculturalism in Irish schools and society. These contributions suggest the need for educators and policy makers to be aware of the complexities associated with the cultural context in which children acquire literacy. Devine (2009) drew on the notions of social and cultural capital, as well as inter-generational analyses of children’s roles in the structuring of daily life, to emphasise the strategic orientation of migrant children to their primary schooling. In addition, Devine (2005) observed that a large
proportion of research in the area of ethnicity and schooling is carried out in countries with an existing tradition of immigration. The swiftness of social change in Ireland, at a time of unprecedented economic growth, means that many schools are contending with the challenges that are created by the emerging patterns of immigration. Devine (2005) explained that how schools, and indeed the state, adapts to this changed social context has important consequences for the transition of Irish society to a more multicultural state, which values and respects the cultural and ethnic diversity manifested in its many forms.

It is also important to consider the issue of indigenous and ethnic cultures (Hornberger, 1997). Rose (2013) addressed the need to build on existing formal learning in Traveller communities through family literacy programmes. Similarly, Prior (2013) referred to the challenges that face educators and pupils in closing the gap in literacy in indigenous communities. Valdes (1986) elaborated on the need to bridge the cultural gap in language teaching. It is interesting to note that Tunmer, Chapman, Greaney, Prochnow, and Arrow (2013) cited the failure to respond adequately to differences in cultural capital at school entry as one of the factors contributing to the failure of the national literacy strategy in New Zealand. Rupley, Nichols, and Blair (2008) explored the interaction between literacy and culture. These researchers postulated that a significant, yet either frequently absent or under emphasised realisation in both United States federal and state standards for literacy is that literacy is
predominantly a language process and culture is a reflection of language. Rupley, Nichols, and Blair (2008) also proposed that the nation and the state sincerely want individuals who can use literacy to learn and to improve and enhance their quality of life, as well as the quality of life of others.

In considering the role of literacy in contributing to a cognitive divide, Frake (1983) addressed literacy as a cultural phenomenon while acknowledging that anthropologists have neglected its study as a cultural topic. Frake (1983) suggested that the fact that literacy is perceived as a cultural, rather than a psychological, phenomenon should not, in any way detract from its importance. While it may be suggested that literacy is not a political or economic resource and is not denied to anyone, Frake (1983) did acknowledge, however, that the practice of literacy is a political and economic resource in society; one which is systematically denied to certain social categories of persons. The difficulties encountered by individuals in those categories attempting to acquire a command of this resource and to function in society without it, are recognised. If children do not acquire literacy by a certain age, due to a variety of reasons including social and cultural differences they will be unable to practice literacy. Frake (1983) also postulated that the difficulty is not in the illiterates themselves, but in the social system that categorises them.

Gafoor and Jayasudha (2011) postulated that when considered as a cultural rather than a cognitive phenomenon, literacy is less well defined, as its meanings, functions, and methods of transmission may differ from one
cultural group to the next. As proposed by Gee (1996), Klaas and Trudell (2011) and Rassool (1999) literacy should not be considered as a single entity but rather a plural set of social practices.

Bedard, Horn, and Garcia (2011) have written on the impact of culture on literacy. Three themes emerged from their exploration: family influence, self-exploration through literacy and the cultural politics of literacy. Further examination has led to three premises about literacy: the insider view, the assimilation view and the outsider view. These research findings emphasised the importance of student literacy history and provided a means for teachers to reframe their instruction, based on student voice (Section 2.6). Kostogriz and Tsolidis (2008) explored transcultural literacy, between the global and the local and posited that transcultural literacy is inseparable from social and cultural practices of meaning- and identity-making. The associations between culture and literacy are complex and varied, as outlined in the research literature. An awareness of how such elements interrelate is important in literacy acquisition, life-long and life-wide (Rogers, 2011).

### 2.3.4 Literacy and Socio-economic Factors

The influence and effects of socio-economic factors on literacy acquisition have been explored extensively in the research literature (Duncan & Seymour, 2000; Hart & Risely, 1995; Sancore & Palumbo, 2010). This section addresses the impact of socio-economic factors on children’s progress in cognition and behaviour in the early years, and
examines how such patterns and socio-economic influences impact on the acquisition of literacy in later years.

The relationship between socio-economic status, emergent cognition and academic achievement has provided subject matter for much academic discussion (Bloom, 1964; Feinstein, 2003), in addition to other features of a child’s learning (Davie, Butler, & Goldstein, 1972). The strength of such relationships may differ broadly between cultures, however (OECD, 2004; Section 2.3.3). The question as to which aspects of socio-economic status relate most strongly to academic achievement is an interesting one. There is strong support in the literature to suggest that parental education is the greatest predictor, with maternal education being most prominent in the early years (Mercy & Steelman, 1982; Sammons et al., 2004). Socio-economic status explains only a limited amount of variance in academic achievement, however, and so other factors are prevalent in the explanation of such variation (White, 1982). While this may be true, socio-economic status is probably the most consistent correlate of achievement, especially at school level. Other factors are important, but it is often more difficult to identify what these are.

Several studies indicate that lower school achievement among disadvantaged children is predicted by preschool cognitive differences (Denton, West, & Walston, 2003; Melhuish et al., 2008). Indeed, the relationship between socio-economic status and emergent cognition is present from infancy onwards (McCall, 1981). Such evidence suggests that
the causes of poor academic achievement may be attributed in part to children’s experiences during preschool years. Heckman and Wax (2004) suggested that most important mental and behavioural patterns are difficult to change once children enter school. Heckman (2006) observed that early intervention is the most cost-effective course to encourage both social justice and economic productivity concurrently. Barnett (2001) described how the differences in emergent literacy for lower socio-economic status children could be bridged by preschool education. In Ireland, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme, which provides a free year of early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age, seeks to address such differences (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). However, the contention that differences in emergent literacy among low socio-economic status pupils can be bridged by preschool education has been recently contested. McKeown, Haase and Pratschke’s (2015) findings suggest that a free pre-school year simply reinforces the status quo.

Melhuish et al. (2008) posited that parenting varies with socio-economic status. Research findings from Parcel and Menaghan (1994) explained that there were differences in the ways in which mothers with differing occupations provided support and stimulating materials for their children which had direct associations with the acquisition of children’s verbal skills. Parental practices such as reading to children, the use of complex language as well as responsiveness and warmth in interactions, are all associated with improved learning outcomes (Bradley, 2002). This goes
some way in explaining the connections between socio-economic status and learning outcomes, in that higher socio-economic status parents engage in more cognitively improving activities (Hess, Holloway, Price, & Dickson, 1982). Melhuish et al. (2008) noted that stimulating activities may enhance learning by assisting children with particular skills (linking letters to sounds), but also and perhaps more significantly by improving the child’s ability and motivation in relation to learning. Furthermore, it is possible that a feedback circle is in operation, whereby parents are influenced by the child’s level of progress, which may lead to children with higher ability receiving more parental stimulation.

Shiel et al. (2012) explored differences in the language of children living in socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances, and the effect of such differences on their attainment in a range of curricular areas. Considering the concept of decontextualised or academic language in an attempt to understand differences and provide for them in school contexts, it was observed that recent conceptualisations of decontextualised language refer to the context of language use – social out-of-school contexts, and academic contexts in school, including curriculum-content language and school navigational language (Shiel et al., 2012). Differences in language attainment between socio-economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children include vocabulary size, grammatical development, and communicative style. Shiel et al. (2012) suggested that some of these variances may be related to the language input children receive at home or
in early care settings, where mothers of higher socio-economic status speak more to their children, provide more opportunities to use language, and use a wider range of vocabulary when talking to their children. The characteristics of language used in storybook reading can also vary across social groups. Consequently disadvantaged children may be less well prepared for the language-related challenges of school (Shiel et al., 2012). Furthermore, Shiel et al. (2012) noted that a key factor in understanding language differences between more and less disadvantaged children relates to the frequency with which complex language is used, as opposed to the children’s underlying ability.

The *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Williams et al., 2009b) reported that the level of parental support and encouragement for their children’s education was high overall and was not strongly related to social variations (p. 151). It was significant that the availability of educational resources in the home was strongly linked to socio-economic characteristics and, specifically, to the mother’s level of completion of education. This was found consistently across a number of assessments ranging from the extent to which a child reads for fun to the number of children’s books in the home. The research findings relating to education are indicative of differing processes and variants in school and home educational environments in addition to the relationship between these two settings and the influence their interaction has on educational attainment.
Research findings from the same study (Williams et al., 2009b) also indicated that while levels of absenteeism and uncompleted homework reported by teachers were relatively low, it was noteworthy that the levels were differentiated by social class and related characteristics, being higher among children from more disadvantaged groups. Children’s academic performance, as assessed in standardised reading and maths tests, was strongly associated with socio-economic characteristics, including social class, maternal education, family income and family structure.

The issue of book ownership and its relation to reading enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour and attainment was also addressed by recently published findings from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Williams et al., 2009b, p. 5) and the *National Literacy Trust* (Clark & Poulton, 2011). The *National Strategy* recognises the importance of supporting the needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and noted that schools in which there are high concentrations of pupils from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are affected by a ‘multiplier effect’; the concentrated nature of disadvantage means that these pupils achieve significantly less well than if they were attending schools where socio-economic disadvantage is less common (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 62). A number of actions were outlined by the *National Strategy* including the provision of continuing professional development opportunities to principals and teachers to improve the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy in schools in areas of disadvantage (p. 68).
An extensive range of sources in the research literature have explored the relationship between literacy and socio-economic factors internationally. Manz, Hughes, Barnabas, Bracaliello, and Ginsburg-Block (2010) completed a descriptive review and meta-analysis of family-based emergent literacy interventions and explored the extent to which research is applicable to low-income, ethnic-minority or linguistically-diverse young children. A paper published by the OECD exploring social inclusion and reading provided evidence from PISA which showed that although social background is a powerful feature influencing performance, poor performance does not automatically follow from low socio-economic status: fifteen year old students whose parents have the lowest occupational status, but who read regularly and felt positive about it were better readers than students with home advantages and weaker reading engagement (OECD, 2002). The research evidence suggested that encouraging reading for pleasure could be a means of contributing towards educational standards and contending with social exclusion (Clark & Akerman, 2006).

Sancore and Palumbo (2009) described the achievement gap that exists between students of low-income and middle-income families. Duncan and Seymour (2000) investigated the foundation literacy skills of children aged between four and eight years old from varying socio-economic backgrounds in a cross-sectional study involving data obtained from approximately 20 children at each stage of schooling: Nursery, Primary 1, 2, and 3. Research findings suggested that once adjustment was
made for socio-economic groups, reading age and high and low socio-economic performance was indistinguishable.

Roberts, Jurgens, Burchinal, and Graham (2005) conducted a relevant study with 72 African American children and their mothers or primary guardians, predominantly from low-income families, whose home literacy environment and learning were followed from early infancy. The global evaluation of receptiveness and support in the home environment was the greatest predictor of children’s language and early literacy skills, and contributed over and above the particular literacy practice methods in predicting the acquisition of language and literacy in children. Such findings are in keeping with observations made in the National Strategy that parental support for young children in some circumstances mitigates the negative effects of low socio-economic status (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 19). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) posited that while it appears socio-economic status has an effect on educational achievement there is evidence to suggest that engagement in reading can compensate for low family income and educational background. An awareness of these differences and the recognition of such variations in individual literacy experiences suggest the need for educators to understand and address the opportunities and challenges presented in the acquisition of literacy in children across differing socio-economic backgrounds.
2.4 Performance in Literacy Assessments

Numerous sources have elaborated on the context in which children acquire literacy in Ireland (Culligan, 2009; Kennedy et al., 2013; National Economic and Social Forum, 2009; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012). This section reviews the performance of pupils in Ireland in recent national and international assessments. NA’ 14 (The 2014 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics in Primary Schools) represents the first national assessment since 1980 in which there has been a statistically significant increase in performance in English reading (Shiel et al., 2014). Results from these assessments convey significant increases in average performance on overall English reading in second and sixth classes between NA’ 09 (The 2009 National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics in primary schools) and NA ’14. There are also indications of improved performance among higher-achieving pupils in reading and reductions in the proportions of lower-achieving students, in reading literacy in NA’ 14 (5–6% of pupils performing below Proficiency Level 1, compared with 10% in NA’ 09 (Shiel et al., 2014)).

Ireland participated in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2011, approximately four months before the launch of the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). In considering the performance of Irish pupils in international assessments, it is also necessary to consider PISA 2009, as a decline in performance in these assessments may suggest issues in curriculum, teaching or learning at either
primary or post-primary levels. Shiel et al. (2014) noted that some evidence has emerged in the last few years that standards in reading may not have declined to the extent suggested by PISA 2009. The results of the PIRLS 2011 indicated that pupils in fourth class in Ireland performed at a high level. Ireland was placed 10th among 48 participating countries, with only five countries (Hong Kong, the Russian Federation, Finland, Singapore and Northern Ireland) performing at a significantly higher level. In Ireland, 15% of students performed at or below the low PIRLS reading benchmark (a broad indicator of low performance in reading) compared with 20% at the international median (PIRLS reports the international median which was set at 500 in PIRLS 2011). Furthermore, 16% of pupils in Ireland performed at the advanced PIRLS benchmark, which compared favourably with high-scoring countries such as Northern Ireland (19%) and Finland (18%), as well as with the corresponding PIRLS median percentage (8%). It is noteworthy that in Ireland, girls outperformed boys by 15 points on the overall reading scale, two points below the international average difference of 17 points. Interestingly, girls in Ireland outperformed boys by 22 points on literary texts, although the difference for informational texts was just 12 points (Shiel et al., 2014).

In addition, Ireland ranked 5th of 34 OECD countries and 7th of all 65 participating countries on print reading in PISA 2012, with an overall mean score that was significantly above the OECD average. Ireland also performed strongly in digital reading. While the outcomes of PISA 2012 for
print reading literacy represented an improvement over PISA 2009, Ireland’s performance in 2012 was similar to previous performances in pre-2009 cycles of PISA (Shiel et al., 2014).

There are many relevant issues to be explored in considering Ireland’s performance in these assessments. Firstly, it is debatable whether a national strategy was necessary or if a greater focus was required in its implementation to provide for the needs of pupils with particular learning needs (for example, those who performed below Level 2 on proficiency scales in both national and international assessments (Shiel et al., 2014)). Secondly, the use of international literacy assessments to evaluate reading literacy standards in children is not without its limitations. It is noteworthy that while international assessments make it possible to compare the performances of different countries, the content of tests administered may not entirely adhere with national curricula. In addition, the issue of cultural differences appears to be equally important.

Eivers and Clerkin (2013) observed that the national assessments of reading literacy in Ireland tend to be more difficult for Irish pupils than PIRLS, which is directed at a broader range of reading ability among pupils in 45 countries, including countries in which pupil achievement is considerably lower than in Ireland. Eivers and Clerkin (2013) also noted that pupils in Ireland tended to do less well on PIRLS items requiring them to identify and provide support in respect of traits of a leading character, and to articulate in writing the lesson they had learned from a story.
Furthermore, higher-level questions were generally more challenging for Irish pupils than questions requiring more basic thinking. In addition, it is also questionable, for example, if the gender differences reported in recent results in PISA (Shiel et al., 2014) would remain consistent if children were asked to complete a different configuration of tasks.

Findings from a recent report published by the Educational Research Centre in Dublin, subtitled *Changes in Pupil Achievement in Urban Primary Schools between 2007 and 2013*, established that test scores in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) primary schools at all grade levels have increased significantly (Weir & Denner, 2013). While there has been a striking reduction in low-scorers (those at or below the 10th percentile) in reading, the percentage of high achievers in this subject area has been maintained or increased. Considering that one in three pupils in disadvantaged areas experience literacy difficulties (Department of Education and Science, 2006), these results from the Educational Research Centre relating to DEIS schools are very encouraging. While consideration should be given to the size of the observed improvements (which are in fact quite small), they confirm that the significant investment made in these schools is making a difference (Weir & Denner, 2013). There are many outcomes of the DEIS programme. Evaluations by the Educational Research Centre and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills indicate a reduction in absenteeism rates in Urban Band 1 primary schools, an improvement over time in planning for teaching and learning.
and setting of targets for achievement in DEIS schools (Smyth, McCoy, Kingston, 2015). It is important to note that recent improvements in the reading test scores of primary students in DEIS schools must be seen in the context of the information from the NA’ 14 which shows an improvement in reading scores across all primary schools, most likely reflecting the impact of the National Strategy (Department of Education and Science, 2011). This suggests that while DEIS schools have maintained pace with improvements in other schools, the gap in pupil attainment has not narrowed.

The National Strategy (Department of Education and Science, 2011) sought to improve literacy outcomes for students across all levels, from early childhood to secondary schooling and included a number of targets to increase the proportions of students performing at the highest proficiency levels in English reading, and to reduce the proportions performing at the lowest levels. In considering a review of these targets, it is important to note that while Ireland has performed respectably in recent international assessments (10th position in PIRLS 2011), parents, teachers, policy makers and children need to continue to make further efforts so that all pupils in Ireland can achieve their potential and Irish pupils can improve their performance in national and international assessments. While recent reports are encouraging (for example, Weir & Denner, 2013), all relevant agencies need to continue to share expertise and to work co-operatively to improve literacy outcomes for pupils in areas of urban and rural disadvantage,
children for whom English is an additional language and children with specific learning needs.

### 2.5 Curricular Implementation

In considering the acquisition of literacy in children, it is appropriate to examine the official and research literature in relation to recommendations pertaining to the effective implementation of differing aspects of the curriculum. A number of recommendations were provided by the *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, pp. 43-47) to improve the curriculum and learning experience. The *National Strategy* acknowledged that the starting point for young people’s learning should reflect their needs and interests and that positive attitudes and motivation are vital for progression in literacy. The curriculum needs to support literacy teaching across all areas of learning and must provide clear advice to teachers on how to teach and assess literacy. In addition, the curriculum should define clear learning outcomes for literacy and state clearly the skills and competences expected of learners. A number of actions were proposed in the *National Strategy* to improve the curriculum and learning experience in primary schools (pp. 53-57). These included the revision of the English curriculum for primary schools to clarify the learning outcomes to be expected of learners, the provision of guidance to teachers on how literacy may best be acquired across all curricular areas, and an increase in the amount of time spent on the teaching of literacy in primary schools.
The implementation of cross-curricular integration is one means by which time spent on literacy instruction can be increased. Numerous studies have explored the ways in which cross-curricular integration can assist in content and integrated learning (CLIL) (Coyle, 2008); in inquiry based learning (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Guthrie et al., 2004); in science (Cervetti et al., 2012; Goldschmidt & Jung, 2011) and in music (Heyning, 2010; Pane & Salmon, 2011). Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012) and Cooper (2000) noted a need to move towards an integrated language curriculum in primary education. The following sections outline sources from the official and research literature which have addressed curricular implementation in relation to oral language (Section 2.5.1.1), reading (Section 2.5.1.2), writing (Section 2.5.1.3) and assessment (Section 2.5.1.4).

### 2.5.1.1 Oral Language

Table 1 outlines sources in the research and official literature which have addressed curricular implementation in relation to oral language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral Language</th>
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<tr>
<td>The <em>Primary School Curriculum Teacher Guidelines</em> (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- envisaged oral language as essential in its own right, in addition to being important in reading and writing and outlined recommended approaches and methodologies to assist teachers in facilitating oral language acquisition in children</td>
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<td>- outlined a framework for classroom discussion elaborating on how a teacher could manage talk in the classroom through, for example, providing appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure, and modelling different types of response</td>
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<tr>
<td>- suggested several instructional activities to improve children’s oral language including story-based activities (listening to, recalling and retelling stories) and recognised that care-giver and teacher knowledge of how spoken language is acquired, the ability to evaluate the linguistic competencies of children, and the ability to encourage spoken language as required are important factors for effective early language teaching</td>
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<td>Authors</td>
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| Shiel et al. (2012) | - Explored the connections between oral language, reading and writing and subsequently examined the need to assess oral language and planning for instruction.  
- Referred to a continuum of oral language development across the curriculum, addressed the context of language learning in addition to effective practices and recommended strategies such as the use of language enrichment groups, talking time, and shared reading with the level of intensity being an important consideration. |
| Dickinson and Tabors (2001) | - Identified features of pre-school and infant classrooms that are connected with effective language acquisition, including a teacher’s use of rare words, lower rates of teacher talk to child talk during free play, and a concentration of teacher talk on extending children’s responses.  
- Recognized that interactive strategies which extended children’s oral responses through prompts, open-ended questions, expansions and recasts were found to be effective and indicated that gains in language ability can be achieved with relatively small changes in the details of conversational interactions and social-emotional engagement in the earlier grades. |
| Lyster and Saito (2010) | - Emphasised the importance of corrective feedback on children’s language acquisition. |
| The Department of Education and Skills (2005) and Kennedy et al. (2012) | - Emphasised the importance of activating cognitive abilities through language, including engagement in activities to increase vocabulary discussion and problem-solving. |
| A report on the teaching of English based on incidental visits to primary schools by members of the inspectorate (Department of Education and Skills, 2010) | - Noted that overall implementation of the oral language component of the English curriculum was satisfactory, although in some schools further attention was needed in the areas of planning, teaching and assessment.  
- Suggested the importance of providing a more intensive approach to children’s oral language acquisition in certain schools that provide for pupils from challenging or disadvantaged backgrounds. |

Table 1  Oral Language: Summary of Literature
2.5.1.2 Reading

There are numerous studies relating to effective reading practices and instruction for children in different learning contexts (Cunningham & Carroll, 2011; Judge, 2013; Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000; Spira, Bracken, & Fischel, 2005; Torgerson, Brooks, & Hall, 2006; Zucker, Cabell, Justice, Pentimonti, & Kaderavek, 2013). Kennedy et al. (2012) completed a review of research relating to the teaching of reading literacy. The review focussed on the report of the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), the UK Report of the Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading (Rose, 2006) and the US What Works Clearinghouse Guide, Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through Third Grade (Shanahan et al., 2010). Although arguably broader in range and focus, a number of other reports have also provided some relevant recommendations for the teaching of reading. Table 2 provides a summary of these reports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The US National Early Literacy Panel Report, Developing Early Literacy</td>
<td>identified effective literacy strategies for children in the 0–5</td>
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<tr>
<td>development and implications for intervention (National Early Literacy</td>
<td>years age range</td>
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<td>Panel, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The UK Report, Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading</td>
<td>examined the role of systematic phonics in teaching reading to</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Rose, 2006)</td>
<td>children in the early years of formal schooling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>The US What Works Clearinghouse Guide, Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten through Third Grade</td>
<td>outlined effective approaches to teaching reading comprehension in the early grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The European Eurydice Report, Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices (Eurydice, 2011)</td>
<td>summarised research into the effective teaching of reading to children in the 5–15 years age range</td>
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<tr>
<td>The UK EPPI-Centre (University of London, Institute of Education) report (Hall &amp; Harding, 2003)</td>
<td>provided a systematic review of effective literacy teaching in the 4–14 age range in mainstream</td>
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<td></td>
<td>schooling</td>
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<tr>
<td>The US National Reading Panel Report, Teaching Children to Read (National Institute of Child Health and Human</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development, 2000)</td>
<td>described the effective teaching of reading in elementary (primary) schools, from kindergarten to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>sixth-grade</td>
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Table 2  Reading: Summary of Reports

These reports addressed shared reading, phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, reading fluency, reading vocabulary, reading comprehension strategies, balanced literacy, engagement, motivation and self-regulation. To ensure balance, reading instruction that is code based should be combined with reading in instruction which concentrates on reading for meaning (Eurydice, 2011; Hall & Harding, 2003).

An important aspect of reading which requires particular attention is reading comprehension. Table 3 outlines sources in the official and research literature which have recommended effective strategies and practices to assist children with reading comprehension across many differing learning contexts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Comprehension</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Primary School Curriculum Teacher Guidelines</strong> (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b, p. 64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes, Raghubar, Faulkner, &amp; Denton (2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branden (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corte, Verschaffel, &amp; Ven (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hart, Soden, Johnson, Schatschneider, &amp; Taylor (2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kinnunen &amp; Vauras (1995)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morales Silva et al. (2010)</td>
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</table>
| Hall & Harding (2003) and Shanahan et al. (2010) | ➢ claimed that the discussion of texts with children can be an effective approach to reading comprehension and suggested that ideally, such discussion should include a range of cognitive processes, such as locate and recall, integrate and interpret, and critique and evaluate.  
➢ recommended that teachers should create engaging and motivating contexts in which to facilitate comprehension instruction such as identifying texts on topics in which children have an interest, providing limited and specific choice of texts, and allowing children to decide how to respond to texts. |
| Clark (2014) and Kennedy et al. (2012) | ➢ acknowledged the importance of meaningful and authentic contexts and the need to match children’s differing interests and prior experience to facilitate comprehension. |
| Duke & Pearson (2002); National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000); Pearson & Gallagher (1983) and Shanahan et al. (2010) | ➢ acknowledged that direct instruction in reading comprehension skills using a gradual release of responsibility instructional model can have positive effects on young children’s reading comprehension - this model involves extensive teacher modelling of a strategy early in the instructional cycle, and increased child responsibility for implementing the strategy later in the cycle. |

**Table 3  Reading Comprehension: Summary of Literature**

Reading comprehension instruction can be effective where strategies are taught individually or collectively. Such individual strategies include: activating prior knowledge, predicting, questioning, visualising, monitoring, clarifying and using fix-up strategies, drawing inferences, summarising and retelling. Multiple strategies include: reciprocal teaching, transactional
strategy instruction, informed strategies for learning, and a concept-orientated reading instruction model (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Duke et al., 2011; Dymock & Nicholson, 2010; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). In their consideration of comprehension, Braun and Froese (1977) commented that:

For one thing, direct experience is the key source of information required for the acquisition of concepts that are brought to bear in listening, speaking, reading and writing. No one can argue against the impact of experience on comprehension (Braun & Froese, 1977, p. 13).

Braun and Froese (1977) suggested that experience is at the heart of comprehension. They argued that the background or personal history of experience alone does not provide the ‘content’ one applies as one comprehends, but suggest that, equally importantly, it provides the reader (or listener) with the concept of how to apply this experience (and to extend and elaborate experiences) at more advanced levels.
2.5.1.3 Writing

Table 4 outlines sources in the official and research literature which have provided recommendations in relation to writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Primary School Curriculum Teacher Guidelines</em> (Department of Education and Science /National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999b) and Graves (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillingham &amp; Stillman (1997); Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (1999b) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope &amp; Kalantizs (2008); Culham (2003); Lewis &amp; Wray (1998) and Fernald (1943)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avery (2002); Clay (1975) and the Department of Education and Skills (2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Writing: Summary of Literature

2.5.1.4 Assessment

Many sources in the research literature have acknowledged the importance of assessment in literacy acquisition (Afflerbach, 2009; Kennedy et al., 2012) and recommended that assessment in writing should focus on both the process of writing and the product (Culham, 2003; Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and
Table 5 outlines sources from the official and research literature which have provided recommendations in relation to assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Primary School Curriculum Teacher Guidelines</strong></td>
<td>recommended a range of assessment tools and a common understanding of assessment which will ensure a common reference against which children’s progress, ability and needs are measured and promote consistency in recording and reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black &amp; Williams (1998); Brookhart (2003); Clarke (2005); Hattie &amp; Timperley (2007); Sadler &amp; Good (2006); Shepard (2009; 2006) and Tierney (2006)</td>
<td>emphasised the benefits of assessment for learning or formative assessment and provided recommendations for classroom assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The inspectorate (Department of Education and Skills, 2005, p. 54)</td>
<td>completed an evaluation of curriculum implementation in primary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recommended that there is a need for school management and principals to concentrate on and provide leadership in achievement and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emphasised the need for high expectations and purposeful teaching to promote children’s learning and progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recommended the coordination of individual teacher planning and whole school planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5  Assessment: Summary of Literature

A comprehensive review of the contributions made by sources in the official and research literature in relation to effective curricular implementation and assessment in oral language, reading and writing can enable educators to consider the implications for best practice and implement the relevant recommendations proficiently for children with a variety of learning needs across different learning contexts.

2.6 Important Issues in the Acquisition of Literacy in Children

A review of the literature suggests that there are many relevant issues to be considered in addressing the acquisition of literacy in children. The importance of social and emotional learning has been recognised by several sources in the research and official literature (Bernardo, 2000; Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2005;
Department of Education and Science, 2005; Elias et al., 1997; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; McGough, 2008; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b; Williams et al., 2009a; Zins et al., 2004). Table 6 outlines sources from the research and official literature which have addressed the associations between literacy and social and emotional learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Durlak et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- conveyed research findings from a meta-analysis of 213 school-based universal SEL programmes and reported that SEL participants presented significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour and academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- recapitulated outcomes from three research reviews, in relation to the effects of SEL programmes on elementary and middle-school students and discovered that SEL programmes greatly improved students’ social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, affiliation and connection to school, positive social behaviour and academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- completed a school-randomised clinical trial of an integrated SEL intervention and provided supportive evidence that this intervention may initiate positive effects both in the general population of students and among those at highest behavioural risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- research findings support the growing empirical evidence regarding the positive impact of SEL interventions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The associations between literacy and gender have been addressed by many sources in the research literature. It is relevant to consider gender differences, including those which are mainly socially constructed. Research findings from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Williams et al. 2009a) suggested that distinct social (and in some instances gender) differentiations appear at the early age of nine years. Gender differences, in relation to performance in different subjects (girls achieving higher scores in reading than boys) were a cause for concern, but could be addressed by a concentration of efforts by parents, teachers and policy makers (p. 148). In addition, the findings suggested that girls were more likely to read for pleasure than boys (p. 5).

Chafouleas, and Skinner (2005) advised that educators may seek to use procedures such as altering material, providing variety in what is read, and providing additional reinforcement for reading to enhance boys’ motivation to read. Rose and Atkin (2011) addressed the issue of gender roles and involvement in family literacy.

Many sources in the research literature have elaborated on the connections between literacy and its role in the promotion of life skills and personal transformation (Benson, 2010; Calkins, 2001; Comber, 2005, Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Kalman, 2008; Pattison; 1982; Riemer 2008; Rogers, 2011; Scribner, 1988; UNESCO, 2009; 2008; 2000). The ways in which literacy can influence social change have been addressed by various sources in the research literature (Basu et al., 2008; Bernardo, 2000; Damber, 2011; Holland & Skinner, 2008; Ramdas, 2008, Rassool, 1999; Robinson-Pant, 2008; Roggero, 2009). Researchers have also explored the influences of critical literacy (Comber, 2005; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1998; 1994; Lankshear & Knobel, 2009; Pinhasi-Vittorio, 2011; Vasquez, 2004) and the complexities involved in defining literacy and social change (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000; Klaas & Trudell, 2011; Neuman, 1999; Rosenblatt, 1985; Street, 2011; 1984; Stromquist; 1990).

2.7 Conclusion

A review of the literature suggests that there are various definitions, conceptualisations and understandings of the term ‘literacy’. In recognition of the Latin term *literatus*, meaning ‘learned person’ (Grant, 1974) from
which the word originates it is preferable to consider a definition which encompasses the multifaceted nature of the word and includes the many qualities and dimensions associated with being literate in the present day.

The definition proposed by the Department of Education and Skills (2011) in the National Strategy acknowledges more traditional interpretations of the term; the importance of reading and writing (OED) and also facilitates broader interpretations as addressed by sources in the literature (Brooks & Normore, 2009; Gafoor & Jayasuda, 2011; UNESCO, 2008).

Many interrelating factors affect children’s literacy acquisition (Alivernini et al., 2010; Brice Heath, 1986; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Geske & Ozola, 2008; Hart & Risely, 1995; McCoy & Cole, 2011) including the influence of parental and family context and involvement (Section 2.3.1), language (Section 2.3.2), culture (Section 2.3.3), and socio-economic factors (Section 2.3.4).

A review of the research literature suggests the importance of family context and parental involvement in facilitating children’s early literacy experiences and in the formation of positive attitudes towards literacy and engagement in future learning opportunities (Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). There is an extensive array of sources which elaborate on the interrelations between language and culture (Flewitt, 2008; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Rupley, Nichols, & Blair, 2008) and from which one can gain an appreciation of the opportunities and challenges which arise given
the diversity in lingual and cultural contexts in which children acquire literacy in Ireland. Although socio-economic factors are an important consideration, there is also a need to consider differences in parenting styles, parental-child interaction, parental attitudes, values, reading and social practices (Melhuish et al., 2008; Shiel et al., 2012). While it appears socio-economic status has an effect on educational achievement there is evidence to suggest that engagement in reading can compensate for low family income and educational background (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Furthermore, some sources have also posited that children’s own engagement and attitudes to school have a strong influence on academic performance and suggested that the influence of children’s own attitudes and actions can reinforce or mitigate the effect of social background factors (for example, Smyth et al., 2010).

The importance of effective curricular implementation in the areas of oral language, reading, and writing, and appropriate cross-curricular integration and assessment is established in the official and research literature (Section 2.5). Many researchers have explored several important issues in the acquisition of literacy in children (Section 2.6). There is a need to address social and emotional learning so that children can fully engage with literacy (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2010; Payton et al., 2008) and to acknowledge the ways in which literacy can influence other domains of children’s lives, promote motivation and resilience and assist children in finding and expressing their voice (Kennedy, 2008; Morgan, 2009; Sperling
et al., 2011). Sources in the research literature have also elaborated on the issue of gender (Below et al., 2010; Geske & Ozola, 2009; Williams et al., 2009a); the need for appropriate expectations and approaches to literacy acquisition in children, and the associations between literacy and the promotion of life skills, personal transformation, social change and life-long learning (Bernardo, 2000; Freire, 1970; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Kalman, 2008; Riemer, 2008; UNESCO, 2011).

The *National Strategy* provided a number of recommendations to improve literacy outcomes in addressing the acquisition of literacy in children in an Irish context. These emphasised the importance of enabling parents and communities to support children’s literacy, improving teachers’ professional practice through changes in teacher education and building the capacity of school leadership to lead improvements in the teaching and assessment of literacy in schools. The *National Strategy* also recognised the need for appropriate curricular content, clear learning expectations, the need to provide available additional resources to learners with specific educational needs, and to improve how teachers, schools and the educational system use assessment approaches to plan and monitor progress for each learner.

The literature provides many insights into the acquisition of literacy in children which can inform educators in implementing recommendations for best practice to continue to improve literacy outcomes for children across different learning contexts.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this research. It provides a statement of the research questions (Section 3.2) and a rationale for the research approach selected (Sections 3.3, 3.4). It also includes a description of data collection instruments used, details pertaining to implementation (Section 3.5), sampling (Section 3.7), trustworthiness; validity, triangulation, reliability, transferability and reflexivity (Sections 3.8.1–3.8.4, data analysis (Section 3.9), ethics and presentation (Section 3.10). It closes by addressing limitations of the methodology (Section 3.11) which may be taken into account in the consideration of derived conclusions (Section 3.12).

3.2 Statement of Research Questions

A comprehensive review of the research literature suggests that a variety of factors affect the acquisition of literacy in children. In considering these factors, it is also necessary to consider the related challenges and considerations for the future which have implications for practice for parents, teachers and children. This study explores the views of teaching professionals (primary school principals, primary school teachers, academics) and children in an Irish context and seeks to address the following research questions from these perspectives.
– What are the most influential factors in a child’s literacy acquisition?
– What are the main challenges in the acquisition of literacy in children?
– What are the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children?

This research seeks to examine the most influential factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children, the main challenges in the current context and the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children as identified in the literature review and as recognised by teaching professionals in responses to the online survey and in research interviews (Sections 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.3). This thesis also considers these questions from the perspectives of the children in this research (Section 4.4).

3.3 Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Research Methods

Johnson and Christensen (2008) summarised three major research traditions in educational research: qualitative research, quantitative research and mixed research. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods have strengths and weaknesses (Johnson & Christenson, 2008). Qualitative research tends to use exploratory scientific methods to generate hypotheses and establish understandings about particular people, places and groups (for example, in case studies, ethnography, phenomenology and historical research). Qualitative research is discovery-orientated and is frequently conducted in natural settings. Qualitative research uses behaviour, words
and images as the evidence from which conclusions emerge. Its objective is to understand how people experience their lives as a means of providing deep insights into why things happen as they do (Newby, 2010). Quantitative research is typically completed under more tightly controlled conditions and tends to use the confirmatory scientific method, with a focus on hypothesis testing and theory testing. Quantitative researchers hope to discover common patterns in thought and behaviour. Newby (2010) explained that quantitative research looks for numerical evidence on which to reach conclusions. It bases these assumptions on data collection and analysis, which occasionally may constrain some investigations. Newman and Benz (1998) explored the notion of the qualitative-quantitative interactive continuum as opposed to a dichotomy and suggested that most research is made up of a combination of qualitative and quantitative constructs. Thomas (2003) outlined the characteristics of a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the conditions under which a particular research method is most appropriate and ways in which qualitative and quantitative methods can be blended in research. Neuman (2005) emphasised the benefits of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in social science research.

Mixed research comprises of mixing and combining qualitative and quantitative research in single research studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The research literature explicates that mixed methods research represents a coherent amalgam of two different research traditions and
benefits from the strengths of both designs. Springer (2010) observed that quantitative and qualitative designs are based on different epistemologies, methods and approaches to analysis and interpretation, each with its own unique strengths and limitations and that one type of research is not superior to the other. Quantitative and qualitative designs are each suitable for addressing different types of research questions. Springer (2010) observed that while, in theory, any given study can be categorised as either quantitative or qualitative, in practice, classifications are not exclusive. Quantitative research frequently includes informal, qualitative observations just as many qualitative studies refer to numerical data. It is acknowledged that adding quantitative information to a qualitative study or vice versa can greatly enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the research (Springer, 2010).

Tashakkori and Cresswell (2007) explained that while there are disagreements about what specifically constitutes a mixed methods design, studies that refer to themselves in this way represent a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to establishing research questions, obtaining samples, gathering and coding data, and analysing and drawing conclusions from the data. Such research processes are labour-intensive as each approach is integral to the study and expertise is required in both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to complete the study successfully. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) noted that the inclusion of quantitative and qualitative methods in a mixed methods study serves at
least one of three general purposes. The results of one method corroborate or extend the results obtained by the other method, or rule out other explanations for the results obtained by the other method. Alternatively, the combination of both methods enables the exploration of various aspects of a phenomenon. Mixed methods designs are suitable for most research questions that can be examined by means of either quantitative or qualitative approaches. Cresswell (2005) summarised some of the different approaches reflected in mixed methods processes and analysis. Newby (2010) provided an analysis of the arguments for mixed methods research including the argument that mixed methods are fundamentally positivist, and those against, in addition to frameworks for combining methods including a mixed method design, a mixed model design and a multilevel design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Lin (1998) suggested that the usual juxtaposition of qualitative research against quantitative research may obscure the fact that qualitative research itself encompasses at least two traditions: positivist and interpretivist (Mack, 2010) and made recommendations for a combination of these approaches.

3.4 Research Approach Selected

In the design of this research, a number of research approaches and types of research were considered. These included the observation of instruction in multiple case studies (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Hammersley, 1992; Newby, 2010; Yin, 1994) and action research (MacGilchrist & Buttress, 2005). However, whilst the merits of these
approaches were acknowledged by the researcher, they were not considered appropriate in this instance, as they may not adequately facilitate an exploration of the factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children as identified by participants in this research. In the case study model, for example, it would be difficult to identify and isolate specific factors and to monitor their effects on children’s literacy acquisition over a certain period of time. Children may be affected by factors which may be difficult to quantify or which occur outside the domain within which the case study is implemented. Furthermore, such approaches have their limitations in terms of the kind of issues which they could address. For instance, it would be difficult for a case study to examine the factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children as children may be influenced by factors other than those identified and assessed in a particular case study. Similar difficulties would emerge in considering the factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children by an investigation examining a hypothesis or cause and effect scenario in action research.

In recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative data, researchers are increasingly advocating that studies combine these research traditions within the same exploration (Johnson & Christenson, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). After much consideration of the research questions, a mixed methods approach was selected. This research combines both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study to obtain the benefits of a combination of the two research traditions.
This approach enabled the researcher to acquire a substantial amount of relevant quantitative and qualitative data from which the research questions could be addressed in a comprehensive manner and facilitated the exploration of some important related issues which emerged from a review of the literature and responses from research participants. Whilst an array of research approaches and methods was considered, the provision of opportunity, access to appropriate samples, practical considerations relating to implementation such as the effective distribution of the online survey, the organisation of research interviews and the availability of the researcher and research participants, provided a strong stimulus for the research approach selected.

A review of the literature (Chapter Two) suggests that studies relating to the acquisition of literacy in children have been conducted within many different theoretical frameworks, however, the nature of this research design was best suited to adopting a more emergent approach. This research incorporates both positivist and interpretivist approaches (Lin, 1998) and encompasses observations made by Mack (2010) in relation to the ontological assumptions envisaged by interpretivist approaches to research that people interpret and make their own meaning of events and the subsequent implication of the importance of considering an occurrence or subject from multiple perspectives. It also seeks to understand rather than explain the issues in relation to the acquisition of literacy in children from
the perspectives of different research participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Mack, 2010).

This research involved the use of an online survey (162 responses) which featured a selection of questions to be addressed by teaching professionals in a variety of different educational contexts (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil). The survey was derived from a carefully designed schedule, covering a variety of issues and themes identified in a review of the research literature. The use of an online survey provided both quantitative and qualitative data as well as suitable contacts from which further qualitative data could be sourced. This research included subsequent follow-up individual research interviews with teaching professionals (33 participants) to elaborate on responses received from the online survey and to gain a greater insight into the views of participants.

A review of the literature suggests that there are various relevant issues pertaining to the acquisition of literacy in children. Questions in the data collection instruments used in this research were selected as they addressed issues related to the research questions in this thesis. The online survey included questions relating to the main factors affecting children’s literacy acquisition, the associated challenges and most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in an Irish context. Research interviews with teaching professionals provided a further opportunity to address these questions in greater depth and elaborate on several issues which emerged in teachers’ responses (in the
online survey and research interviews) and were relevant to the discussion of the research questions (Sections 4.3, 5.2, 5.3). These issues related to implementation of the primary curriculum, professional practice, social and emotional learning and assessment (Section 4.3). The use of the online survey and research interviews with teaching professionals provided an integrated approach to addressing the research questions and establishing an overall appreciation of the pertinent issues to be considered.

In addition, this research involved the use of a semi-structured questionnaire (completed individually within a group setting with the researcher present) with children (115 participants) from differing backgrounds, attending rural, urban and non-DEIS schools. The questions addressed in the children’s questionnaire provided an opportunity for children to express their views in relation to parental involvement in literacy activities at home, support received by children in literacy at school, attitudes towards literacy, preferences in reading habits, the importance of literacy and the associations between literacy and social and emotional learning. These items were included in the children’s questionnaires following careful consideration of the research literature, the research questions in this thesis and their suitability for inclusion in the data collection instrument used with children. The children’s questionnaire provided both quantitative and qualitative data which could be subsequently analysed and compared with data collected from the online survey and the research interviews with teaching professionals.
3.5 Description of Data Collection Instruments

An online survey, research interviews with teaching professionals and semi-structured questionnaires completed with children, were implemented as data collection instruments in this research.

3.5.1 Surveys

This section addresses some of the important issues relating to surveys and online surveys made by sources in the literature and details pertaining to the implementation of the online survey in this research.

Surveys are a form of quantitative research where the investigator identifies either the sample or the population, collects data through questionnaires or interviews and proposes conclusions or makes inferences about the population (Newby, 2010). A survey collects data at a particular point in time with the objective of describing the nature of existing conditions (Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). It is an effective design when researchers wish to collect data quickly and economically, explore attitudes and opinions and survey geographically disperse individuals (Cresswell, 2002). Surveys have several advantages including the fact that they are economical and efficient, they represent a wide target population, they generate numerical data, provide descriptive, inferential and explanatory information and gather data which can be processed statistically. However, the explanatory potential or detail of a survey has some limitations, as an
individual’s response can be exceeded by the combined response (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

Some key characteristics of survey design are described by Cresswell (2002) including the process of sampling from a population, collecting data through questionnaires or interviews, designing instruments for data collection, obtaining a high response rate, and designing and conducting interview surveys. The process of conducting a survey consists of considering whether a survey design is best, formulating questions, identifying a population and an appropriate sample to study. The researcher then creates or selects the survey to reach this sample or population, collects data to ensure a high or sufficient response rate and analyses the data to answer descriptive questions or to address key issues.

Anderson and Kanuka (2002) outlined the advantages and disadvantages of internet-based surveys. The advantages identified related to time and cost savings, greater accuracy, direct entry of data by participants and convenience in survey creation and distribution. Disadvantages included the lack of computer expertise of respondents, issues relating to security and confidentiality and difficulties in obtaining responses. Check and Schutt (2012) outlined why survey research is popular, and provided recommendations relating to the construction of question schedules, including the need to maintain consistent focus, and the need to refine, test and order questions, in addition to recommendations pertaining to appropriate language.
Dillman (2000) outlined elements of the tailored design method. He addressed the writing of questions, the construction of question schedules and elaborated on details relating to survey implementation. He emphasised the need to tailor the design to the survey situation, the need to time the distribution of the survey effectively to ensure maximum response rates and the importance of selecting an appropriate means of measuring responses.

A number of scales are available for this purpose: attitude scales, rank-order scales, rating scales and so on (Kerlinger, 1970). A Likert scale is one such attitude scale (Likert, 1932). Newby (2010) defined a Likert scale as “a scale developed to represent the attitude or views of people” (p. 657). A Likert scale provides a range of responses to a given question or statement (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree). An important feature of an attitude scaling instrument is that it should implement the notion of uni-dimensionality. It should measure one concept at a time; a cornerstone of Likert’s own thinking (Likert, 1932). This provides an alternative to dichotomous questions and an appropriate means of gathering and measuring degrees and intensity of responses. One of the advantages of the Likert scale is that it takes very little time to construct. Best and Kahn (2006) outlined a procedure for creating a Likert scale and provided recommendations pertaining to its use. This opinion measure is not without its limitations, however. It is inexact, to a certain extent and cannot measure opinion with as much precision as one may wish. Respondents may answer according to how they should feel
rather than how they actually feel (Best & Kahn, 2006; Corry & Tu, 2001). Indeed, this is an issue which must be taken into account when considering the interpretation of findings from qualitative research, particularly online surveys (Section 3.8.1).

The use of online surveys is growing in popularity for a number of reasons. They are frequently less expensive and can be administered considerably more rapidly than other forms of mail surveys (Dolnicar, Laesser, & Matus, 2009). The use of online surveys also enables access to wider larger and more difficult populations, respondents can complete the survey at a time suitable for them, and human error is reduced in entering and processing data online (Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

The issue of obtaining adequate response rates remains an important consideration in the design of surveys (Nulty, 2008). Pan (2010) reviewed a number of issues with online surveys including response rates, speed of response, representativeness of the samples and the variances in results due to different survey media. Dommeyer, Baum, Hanna, and Chapman (2004) compared in-class and on-line surveys, and their effects on response rates and data obtained. The findings from this study suggested that differences in response rates and data acquired were not significant, even when incentives were introduced.
Dillman (2000) explored the fundamental distinctions between designing for paper and the internet, such as the differing representations of visual images on paper and on computer screens due to different operating systems, browsers, screen configurations and individual designer decisions. Corry and Tu (2001) noted some important considerations in the self-presentation, social presence and social interaction of online learning communities. Thompson and Surface (2007) addressed some factors which may prevent participants from contributing to online research. Eaton et al. (2011) have written on computer availability and the perceptions school principals have of online surveys which could result in unsatisfactorily low school participation rates. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) completed a comprehensive outline of problems and solutions for internet-based surveys relating to sampling, ethics, technical issues, respondents, layout and presentation and reliability. An awareness of these issues, which emerged from the research literature and recommendations relating to how they may be addressed were important considerations in the design and implementation of the online survey in this research.

Considerations pertaining to a number of issues including practical advantages relating to time, effective distribution, the validity of data obtained and the need and means of obtaining adequate response rates were given due attention in the creation and implementation of this online survey (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Dolnicar, Laesser, & Matus, 2009). Recommendations made in the research literature
(Arksey & Knight 1999; Dillman, 2000; Kerlinger, 1970) were implemented in the construction of the schedule of questions used in this survey (Appendix A). Questions addressed themes and issues which emerged from a comprehensive review of the relevant research literature (Chapter Two). The survey included a variety of question types including open ended questions (Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

A Likert scale (Likert, 1932) was selected as a means of gathering and measuring responses. This provided an alternative to dichotomous questions and an appropriate way of gathering and measuring degrees and intensity of responses. In this research, respondents also had the opportunity to express their views relating to open-ended questions in greater detail. This online survey was piloted initially with a small group of teachers to finalise questions and issues relating to the appearance of the survey (Dillman, 2000; Pan, 2000). A pilot online survey was conducted with a group of seven primary teachers (female (4) male (3), in urban (4), rural (3), DEIS (3) and non-DEIS (4) schools). This led to a number of minor changes to the layout of the response options in some of the questions. In Question Four, teachers in this pilot group identified the need to distinguish between DEIS Band 1 and 2 as a response option. In Question Five, suggestions were made by this group of teachers to make distinctions between the parent’s, child’s and school’s language background and the parent’s and child’s cultural background as influential factors in children’s literacy acquisition. Therefore, the relevant changes were made
to these response options. The Other (Please Specify) option was added as a response option in Questions Five, Six and Seven as the pilot group also recommended that respondents be provided with the opportunity to add their own views in their responses to each of these questions.

While observations made by Dillman (2000) regarding differences in the appearance of web questionnaires on respondents’ computer screens were considered, the survey design presented by the online facility (Survey Monkey; www.surveymonkey.com) was not inhibited to any great extent across differing computer configurations. The format was such that it was largely unaffected by such differences. Concerns expressed by Pan (2010) and Nulty (2008), relating to the attainment of adequate response rates were addressed by attempting to obtain responses from a variety of sources. The online survey was completed over a five month timeframe (May – September), at a time when respondents would be most available to participate (Dillman, 2000). While sources in the research literature have described the use of incentives to increase response rates (for example, Dommeyer et al., 2004), there were no incentives used in this research other than the opportunity to contribute to a knowledge base which may serve to improve the ways in which children are facilitated and supported in their literacy acquisition. It was evident from the responses received that this proved to be more than adequate as the principals and teachers who participated were enthusiastic and forthcoming in their contributions.
This online survey received 162 responses; however, it is important to consider the issue of non-response bias and the factors which may have prevented some participants from contributing to this research (Corry & Tu, 2001; Eaton et al., 2011; Thompson & Surface, 2007). A variety of issues including a lack of experience with internet surveys, difficulties with access to computers and a reluctance to participate in an online forum were relevant considerations. In light of these observations, research participants who did not wish to complete the online survey were invited to participate in research interviews. The online survey provided some substantial quantitative and qualitative data which was subsequently analysed (Sections 3.9, 4.2) and addressed in light of a review of the literature (Chapter Two) and responses received in research interviews with teaching professionals (Section 4.3) and research questionnaires with children (Section 4.4; Chapter Five).

3.5.2 Research Interviews

This section outlines some of the main observations made by sources in the literature relating to interviews and details regarding the implementation of interviews in this research. Interviews provide an effective and informative means for participants to give their views and to be candid in voicing their opinions. Interviews are a valuable source of information in the quest for individuals’ personal and subjective experiences. They are useful as some people find it easier to express themselves orally than in writing (Loxley, 2009) and they also allow space for interviewees to
add anything which may be relevant, or which may have arisen (directly or indirectly) from their experience. A useful conceptualisation of this process is Schwandt’s (1997) contribution that the interview is:

a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent (Schwandt, 1997, p. 79).

Loxley et al. (2009) also suggested that in addition to this oral dimension, the dialogical nature and the process involved in this method allows interviewers and interviewees:

- to explore exactly what someone means, either through their questions or in their responses;
- to reduce ambiguity for both interviewer and interviewee, leading to more appropriate, if not necessarily more accurate data;
- to ask probing questions or seek clarification or compare experiences and thoughts, which can result in the interviewee gaining new insights and making more sophisticated interpretations (Loxley et al., 2009, p. 6).
Loxley et al. (2009) made some relevant observations regarding the challenges of interviews. They claimed that while generalisations can be inaccurate, interviews make serious demands on time, organisation and analysis. Loxley et al. (2009) cited Fontana and Frey’s (2000) assertion that “the spoken or written word has always a degree of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we report or code the answers” (p. 645) – an important consideration in this research. Interviews may be conducted in groups or individually and can take many forms including standardised, in depth, ethnographic, elite, life history, focus groups, structured, semi-structured, exploratory, among many others (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Loxley et al., 2009; Newby, 2010; Springer, 2010). Patton (1980, p. 206) completed a summary of the strengths and weakness of different types of interviews. Tuckman (1972) provided a summary of the relative merits of interviews and a comparison of a selection of response modes.

Interviews may be unstructured, structured or semi-structured (Drever, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1991). The unstructured interview is a free form of interview where themes have been identified but there is an opportunity to follow up on new themes, to return to themes as new information emerges and to enquire about additional information. In a structured interview, themes to be covered are identified and addressed sequentially. Semi-structured interviews where themes are identified and lead questions specified, and where the interviewer is able to ask supplementary questions that will provide the data required for the research
provide a means of benefitting from a combination of these formats (Newby, 2010). Drever (1995) provided a guide to using semi-structured interviews in small-scale research as did Seidman (1991) who described a structure and process for conducting research interviews in education. Kerlinger (1970) outlined different kinds of items used in the construction of schedules in research interviews including ‘fixed-alternative’ items that allow the respondent to select from two or more alternatives, the dichotomous item (the most frequently used item) which offers only two alternatives: “yes/no” or “agree/disagree” and a third alternative: “undecided” or “don’t know”.

Opdenakker (2006) observed that interviewing face to face or by telephone is an appropriate choice if the interviewee is seen as a subject, and as an irreplaceable person, from whom the interviewer wants to acquire his or her opinion. Face to face interviews may be more suitable than telephone interviews in some circumstances (Weisberg, Krosnick & Bowen, 1996). This mode affords greater equality of power between interviewer and interviewee, a more natural context may yield greater accuracy, and is appropriate when older or second language speakers are being interviewed (Shuy, 2003)

Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) have written on the comparisons between telephone and qualitative face to face interviewing. While they acknowledged that some concerns have been raised that results can vary depending on method applied, their study found no significant differences in
the data obtained and concluded, with some qualifications, that telephone interviews can be used effectively in qualitative research. A comparison of web and telephone interviews has been completed by Fircker, Galesic, Tourangeau, and Yan (2005). Cook (2009) examined the transition of talk to text in the procedure of performing and recording semi-structured interviews by telephone and considered the ways participants involved in the process of interviewing complete their role in the research process. Cook (2009) acknowledged the uncertainties involved in interviews and the degree to which research participants are affected by previous experiences and exchanges and the direction of the ongoing research focus.

Skype is a free software facility which enables one to voice call, video call or text to one or more persons simultaneously in real time. It provides good sound and video quality via the internet. Hanna (2012) provided an insight into the ways in which using Skype as a research medium can enable the researcher to experience the many advantages of traditional face-to-face interviews in qualitative research, while simultaneously benefiting from the features that telephone interviews provide to such research. Bertrand and Bourdeau (2010) also addressed research interviews conducted by Skype and claimed that this medium necessitates a higher degree of collaboration from the interviewee. Skype interviews can reduce the cost of conducting research interviews considerably and make data collection more accessible, faster and easier. Wildeman (2012) explored the benefits of Skype for conducting research
and noted the advantages, ease of use and geographic flexibility that Skype offers scholars and practitioners.

Following a preliminary analysis of responses received from the online survey, interviews were completed with individuals to explore themes and issues in greater depth. The online survey provided an important source of contacts from which 33 individual interviews were arranged and completed. After careful consideration of recommendations from the research literature, including an exploration of the advantages and disadvantages of different interview modes, a combination of face-to-face, telephone and Skype interviews was selected as the most suitable option. Research interviews were conducted face-to-face (3), by telephone (20) and via Skype (10), and were in excess of 30 minutes in duration in most cases. Interviews via telephone and Skype provided the most convenient way to access teachers, was somewhat less invasive and enabled the research participants to answer from a location of their choice. This was a practical consideration as many of the teachers participating in this research had multiple commitments, personal and professional. Where possible and appropriate, face to face interviews were conducted with research participants.

Comments made by Bertrand and Bourdeau (2010) regarding the importance of collaboration between interviewer and interviewee were taken into consideration in the conducting of these interviews. Research interviews proved to be a relatively cost effective and time efficient means
of collecting data from interested and experienced teachers across many geographical locations (Wildeman, 2012). Individual research interviews were selected, as this mode of data collection enabled individual teachers to express opinions without feeling social pressure to conform or to agree with the views of others, as addressed by Corry and Tu (2001). Requests were also made of teachers who may not have wished to complete an online survey, following recommendations from some sources in the research literature (Thompson & Surface, 2007). These contributions were subsequently obtained, analysed and taken into consideration in the overall interpretation of research findings.

Recommendations made by sources in the literature (Check & Schutt, 2012; Kerlinger, 1970; Kvale, 1996) including those made by Dillman (2000), who described the tailored design method, were implemented in the design and construction of a schedule of questions for research interviews with teaching professionals. These included the questions in the online survey, in addition to themes and issues which emerged from an analysis of the research literature and participants’ responses.

Furthermore, recommendations made by Arksey and Knight (1999), including considerations pertaining to the vocabulary used, the avoidance of prejudicial language, the avoidance of ambiguity and imprecision, hypothetical or speculative questions and questions that make assumptions (p. 95), were also taken into account in the writing of questions for research
interviews with teaching professionals (Appendix C). There were advantages and disadvantages of including some fixed-alternative items: they achieved greater consistency of measurement and provided a structure in which the respondents could answer in a manner that suited the response category, and they could be conveniently coded. Disadvantages included their superficiality, the possibility of irritating respondents who found none of the alternatives suitable, and the possibility of forcing responses that were inappropriate (Kerlinger, 1970). Attempts were made to overcome these shortcomings in the writing and selection of items, and by using fixed-alternate items in conjunction with open-ended questions and interjections by the interviewer. Open-ended items used in the schedule of questions with teaching professionals provided a frame of reference for participant responses and had a number of advantages. They were flexible, they facilitated the interviewer in probing further, so a greater depth of knowledge and understanding could be acquired, issues could be clarified and misunderstandings alleviated, and they assisted in establishing rapport and co-operation (Check & Schutt, 2012; Kerlinger, 1970).

Recommendations made by Dilley (2000) and Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) regarding the conducting of successful interviews were followed in the completion of these interviews. Dilley (2000) has written about the need to gather and analyse background information in conducting successful interviews. In this research, this process assisted in devising the schedule of questions and informing analysis as it assisted the researcher in acquiring an
understanding of the different contexts in which the respondents taught, (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil). The researcher conducted three pilot research interviews with teaching professionals (Female, Principal, Urban, Non-DEIS (1), Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS (1), Female, Teacher, Urban, Non-DEIS (1)). A number of changes were subsequently made to the schedule of questions used in the research interviews. These included the addition of questions relating to the benefits of a whole school approach to literacy acquisition, the associations between literacy and personal development and assessment.

Beer (1997) acknowledged the fact that some interview questions can have multiple answers (p. 122). Dilley (2000) has written about the need to be aware of multiple voices expressed in contributions by participants with multiple perspectives; noteworthy considerations in this research. Recommendations made by Dilley (2000) emphasising the importance of the interviewer seeing the interview as a communication act and attempting to see the issues discussed and the intermediate interaction from the respondent’s perspective, and observations made by Cook (2009) relating to the degree to which research participants are affected by previous experiences and exchanges were taken into account in conducting these research interviews and were important considerations in the interpretation of these research findings. It was also important to consider the issues of self-reporting and subjectivity in responses from research participants.
Semi-structured interviews were an appropriate choice for this research as they were a form of interview where themes could be identified and addressed sequentially. They also provided an opportunity to follow up on new themes, to return to themes as new information emerged and to enquire about additional information. Lead questions were specified, but the interviewer was also able to ask supplementary questions that provided the data required for this research (Newby, 2010). The interviewer sought to talk 20% of the time and listen 80% of the time during interviews in this research (Dilley, 2000). Research interviews with teaching professionals provided some extensive qualitative data which was subsequently analysed (Sections 3.9, 4.3) and addressed in light of a review of the literature (Chapter Two), responses received in the online survey (Sections 4.2.2, 4.2.3) and questionnaires with children (Section 4.4; Chapter Five).

3.5.3 Questionnaires with Children

This section outlines some of the main observations made by sources in the literature relating to questionnaires and details pertaining to the implementation of questionnaires with children in this research.

This study involved the use of an appropriately designed research questionnaire with children. The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting information providing structured, often numerical data and is straightforward to analyse (Wilson & McLean, 1994). Questionnaires may be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Drever, 1995; Newby, 2010) and feature closed
and open, dichotomous and multiple choice questions (Arksey & Knight 1999; Dillman, 2000; Kerlinger, 1970). A semi-structured questionnaire (Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Newby, 2010) to be completed while the researcher was present was selected as an instrument for the collection of data from children as it provided a useful framework to address relevant questions and also provided the opportunity for children to elaborate and extend their responses and address relevant issues as appropriate (Appendix D). This data collection instrument was both quantitative and qualitative in nature (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

In the implementation of this research questionnaire, the researcher was available to assist children with reading difficulties and to address any difficulties children may have had with understanding the questions or in expressing their responses. There were numerous advantages in completing the questionnaire in this way including the benefits of a common experience, good quality control and completion rates (Newby, 2010). The challenges recognised by Newby (2010) in bringing everyone together and managing finishing times were addressed by means of effective coordination and co-operation between the researcher and research participants. While children were enthusiastic and forthcoming in their responses, the researcher had to ensure that children remained on task and engaged in the data collection process as some children’s attention spans can be limited and a lot of information needed to be gathered in a short time (Lewis, 1992; Simons, 1982).
The data collection instrument used with children in this research was as Newby (2010) advised, a conciliation between a questionnaire (where there is no freedom to deviate) and an evolving interview (which has known objectives but no intended or expected end points). It was structured in as much as there was a guide with topics to be addressed. It also had key questions and themes to introduce if the participants did not introduce them and there was guidance on researcher behaviour including direction on the clarification that could be offered (Newby, 2010).

In the design of this data collection instrument, there was also a need to capture interest, to build commitment, and to present the questionnaire in an accessible way for the children and the researcher (Newby, 2010). It was important to consider the topics and issues addressed, the writing of questions, the types of items and item format, the kinds of responses required, the structure, layout and administration of the questionnaire (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Newby, 2010). The semi-structured questionnaires included fixed alternative and open-ended questions (Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). There were similar advantages and disadvantages to using fixed-alternative items in these research questionnaires with children to those outlined in the writing and selection of questions for use in research interviews with teaching professionals (Section 3.5.2); greater uniformity of measurement was achieved, respondents were enabled to answer in a mode that fitted the response category, and responses
could be more easily coded. Open-ended questions were included in addition to fixed alternative items and interjections were made by the researcher where appropriate to overcome any related disadvantages (Kerlinger, 1970). Open-ended questions provided research participants with increased flexibility and opportunities to elaborate on their responses.

The questionnaire was piloted with a group of ten children (female (5), male (5), urban (5), rural (5)) as recommended by many sources in the literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Desimone & Le Floch, 2004). A number of changes were made to the questionnaire including the provision of additional answer space for children to make comments and to give reasons and examples in their responses.

The questionnaires used in this research involved the completion of a written section where participants were asked to tick the most appropriate option and elaborate as necessary. This method was employed to avoid bias and peer pressure due to participants hearing other children’s responses and subsequently changing their answers accordingly (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Due to parental and anonymity concerns, recordings were not a preferred option. The completion of a written response and discussion were also considered to be less invasive and a more accurate means of obtaining data for the purposes of this research (Bailey, 1994; Breakwell, 2000; Lewis, 1992; Simons, 1982).
The observation that some participants may find it easier to express themselves orally than in writing is a relevant consideration in completing research with young children (Loxley et al., 2009). For this reason, provisions were made for differentiation. Children could respond in writing if they wished or participate in a share session with other participants and the researcher, and then complete their answers (Lewis, 1992).

Group share sessions were implemented in this research as they are a viable and effective technique with younger participants and facilitated children in elaborating on their responses. The aim of such share sessions was to assist the child in formulating their own opinion and to give assistance in articulating and communicating their views where necessary and appropriate. Observations relating to the influence of group dynamics and group relations made in the research literature (Halbwachs, 1992; Lewis, 1992; Rosen, 1998) were considered in planning the data collection process with children in this research. The researcher was aware of possible difficulties such as the dominance of one member of a group, exaggeration and a participant’s reluctance to express views which may differ from peers (Arksey & Knight, 1999). In conducting the share sessions, the researcher was cognisant of the importance of dividing attention as a facilitator, the sequence in which participants responded, the relationships among the group and the need to appropriately handle a variety of very different responses to the same question (Breakwell, 2000; Lewis, 1992).
The “think aloud” approach, described by Bell (2007), Desimone and Le Floch (2004) and Newby (2010) was implemented in this study. This differs from other forms of data collection in that its purpose is not to establish factual accuracy but to gain insight into thought and analytical processes. In essence, it is a relatively simple concept. As participants undertake a task, they were asked to describe what they are thinking. The think aloud approach (Newby, 2010, pp. 347-349) was implemented and the researcher’s field notes were compiled as the questionnaires were completed. The think aloud approach has many advantages. It enabled children to express their views as they completed the questionnaire and to address any issues they had with individual questions. It also enabled individuals to elaborate and extend their responses as they engaged in the thinking aloud process. It facilitated the researcher in acquiring the data in an authentic context, to address issues which were of interest to research participants and also informed the researcher of possible directions for further research. While the think aloud procedure appears straightforward, it was not without its difficulties. A small number of participants found the verbalisation of their thought processes difficult initially but succeeded in expressing and articulating their views as they continued to engage in the process.

In the design and implementation of this research, it was important to understand the world of children through their own eyes rather than those of an adult. Arksey and Knight (1999) observed that children differ from
adults in terms of cognitive and linguistic capabilities, attention and concentration span, ability to recall, life experiences, what they consider to be important, status and power. Haubl and Liebsch (2009) addressed the notion of inter-subjectivity and its importance when conducting research with children. Inter-subjectivity is achieved when the researcher succeeds in understanding the children's expressions and their efforts to communicate their ideas. Children who find it challenging to express themselves are dependent on adults’ empathy, understanding and support. Haubl and Liebsch (2009) advocated that even though inter-subjectivity is frequently undermined, neglected or ignored in educational activity, as well as in research with children, it needs to be recognised and preserved so that children may talk and adults listen. The children were provided with ample opportunities to express and communicate their responses.

The pitching of language at an appropriate level, the use of open-ended questions to avoid a single answer type of response (Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) and the adaptation of data collection for use with children were important considerations in the implementation of this research (Bailey, 1994; Breakwell, 2000; Lewis, 1992). The different items in the research questionnaires; fixed alternative and open ended questions, the think aloud approach and share sessions provided qualitative and quantitative data which was subsequently analysed (Sections 3.9.3, 4.4) and addressed in light of a review of the literature (Chapter Two) and responses from teaching professionals in the online
survey (Sections 4.2.2, 4.2.3) and research interviews (Section 4.3; Chapter Five).

3.6 Timeline for Progression of Research

The following is a timeline of events in the progression of this research.

September 2011 – December 2011: Background reading and review of relevant reports in an Irish and international context.


May 2012 – September 2012: Online survey (data collection and analysis).


September 2012 – December 2012: Analysis of survey and interviews.

October 2012 – April 2013: Questionnaires with children (data collection).

May 2013 – June 2013: Completion and analysis of questionnaires with children.

June 2013 – August 2013: Analysis of all data collected (online survey, interviews, questionnaires).

September 2013 – December 2013: Analysis of data and writing a discussion of research findings in light of literature.

January 2014 – May 2014: Writing a discussion of research findings in light of literature.

June 2014 – August 2014: Writing, editing and presenting.
3.7 Sampling

This research includes the views of primary school principals, primary teachers, academics and primary school children in different settings in Ireland (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS and Gaelscoil). Rather than attempting to access all teachers and primary pupils, this research sought to include the views of a purposeful sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993) of primary teachers and primary pupils, although this research was largely dependent on the availability of teaching professionals and children to participate. This is an important consideration in the generalisation of these research findings.

3.7.1 Online Survey

It was necessary to compile a list of e-mail addresses in order to invite participants to respond to the online survey. Initially, a list of the e-mail addresses of teachers and schools was sought from a variety of agencies including teachers’ unions, education centres and special interest groups involved in education across the country. It was difficult to obtain e-mail mailing lists, however, due to issues related to data protection. These e-mail addresses were then sourced, as available, from school websites and online directories such as SchoolDays.ie (www.schooldays.ie) and the Citizen’s Information Board (www.citizensinformationboard.ie). An e-mail inviting teachers to participate in this online survey was sent to 140 primary schools in counties in each of the four provinces of Ireland. A subsequent e-mail was sent to the same schools a week after the initial e-mail as a
reminder and to encourage maximum participation. As principals, school secretaries and primary teachers were encouraged to forward the invitation to other primary schools and primary teachers with which they were in contact, it is likely that the number of initial e-mails was extended by participants in this research.

Support in sourcing appropriate participants was received from the Literacy Association of Ireland; a note to members and a link to the online survey was placed on their website (www.reading.ie). In addition, the Literacy Association of Ireland sent an e-mail with an attached invitation to their members with relevant information. This led to the sourcing of research participants with a particular interest in the area of literacy. The Galway-Mayo Education Centre (www.mayoeducationcentre.ie) also placed a note and a link to the online survey on its website.

Furthermore, teachers were sourced via ten personal contacts (former peers, friends and teaching colleagues who had attended St. Patrick’s College). Participants were also sourced by attending summer course meetings at Marino College of Education where good support was received from tutors facilitating continuing professional development courses in literacy. This led to many opportunities to contact teachers who had specific interests in this area and were very involved in the acquisition of literacy in children in their respective schools. The online survey was distributed and responses were subsequently collected via an interactive facility (Survey Monkey). As this research involved an online survey, a
variety of methods to obtain e-mail addresses (including 140 e-mail invitations sent to primary schools initially) and the assistance of different agencies in distributing the web-link to the online survey (Literacy Association of Ireland, Galway-Mayo Education Centre), it is difficult to identify how many potential participants were aware of and had access to contribute to this research. The online survey received 162 responses in total and provided a means of contact with interested primary teaching professionals in a variety of school settings. The online survey led to the compilation of research data within its own parameters and also to multiple opportunities to interview participants to address issues arising from responses.

The chi-squared goodness-of-fit test (Section 3.9.1) was used to determine whether there were differences in the proportions of populations in this sample and equivalent national populations. According to recent figures released by the Department of Education and Skills (2012/2013), there are 32,030 primary teachers in Ireland. The sample represents 0.5% of this population (Department of Education and Skills, 2012/2013). This is an important consideration in the interpretation and generalisation of these research findings as findings may be specific to participants in this research (Section 3.8.3). Of the 162 responses received, 78.4% (127) were from females, 21.6% (35) from males. There is a statistically significant difference (Chi^2 value = 7.782, p value = 0.005, significant at p ≤ 0.05) in the ratio of male to female respondents in this sample and the ratio of male
to female teachers in primary education in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2012/2013). There is a significantly higher percentage of males in this research sample than that which occurs in the equivalent percentage in the national population; a relevant consideration in the interpretation of these research findings.

The online survey received responses from a broad and varied group of participants teaching in many different types of schools. Respondents to this survey were asked to indicate the school setting in which they taught using five descriptors: Rural, Urban, DEIS Band 1, DEIS Band 2, and *Gaelscoil*. Respondents could select one or as many of the descriptors as applied to them. Of the 162 participants, 43 indicated that they were teaching in a rural setting and 76 were teaching in an urban setting; 28 were teaching in a school categorised as DEIS Band 1, and 17 were teaching in a school categorised as DEIS Band 2. There were no statistical differences (\(\chi^2\) value = 0.329, \(p\) value= 0.566, not significant at \(p = \leq 0.05\)), in the percentages of responses received from teaching professionals in DEIS Band 1 and Band 2 settings in this research sample and the equivalent percentages of DEIS Band 1 and Band 2 schools nationally (Department of Education and Skills, 2014). Twelve of the respondents indicated they were teaching in a *Gaelscoil* setting. This research thus includes the views of a significantly higher proportion of teachers in a *Gaelscoil* setting (\(\chi^2\) value = 92.501, \(p\) value = 0.001, significant at \(p = \leq 0.05\)) than the equivalent percentage of teachers in *Gaelscoileanna* nationally (Department
of Education and Skills, 2012/2013); a relevant consideration in the interpretation of findings from this research.

Participants were also asked to indicate the gender composition of their schools: 79.1% (128) respondents were teaching in a mixed school, 11.1% (18) in an all-boys school and 9.8% (16) in an all-girls school. There were no significant differences in the percentages of mixed (Chi^2 value = 1.826, p value = 0.177, not significant at p = ≤ 0.05) and all boys and all girls (Chi^2 value = 0.229, p value = 0.633, not significant at p = ≤ 0.05) schools in this sample when compared with the equivalent percentages of children attending mixed, all boys and all girls schools nationally (Department of Education and Skills, 2012/2013).

3.7.2 Research Interviews

The online survey provided an important source of contacts from which individual interviews were arranged and completed. This research includes data obtained from 33 individual research interviews, 13 of which were with primary school principals. They included participants teaching across the country, in Dublin, Galway, Cork, Limerick, Bray, Louth and Waterford, among many other locations. Of those who gave interviews, 21% (7) were male, 79% (26) were female. Of the 39% (13) primary principals who participated, 12% (4) were male, 27% (9) were female. The school settings of the 33 interviewees were: 15% (5) rural, 85% (28) urban; 42% (14) taught in a DEIS school setting, 58% (19) taught in a non-DEIS school setting; and 9% (3) taught in a Gaelscoil setting. These interviews
included research participants who were mainstream, resource and learning support teachers.

Candidates for participation in the research interviews were sourced directly by e-mail invitation and following introductions at conferences and teacher education courses, as they had relevant research interests and professional experience at primary level. Following recommendations from some sources in the research literature (Thompson & Surface, 2007), requests were also made of teachers who may not have wished to complete an online survey. The researcher used these different approaches to source a variety of research participants and to avoid any limitations which may be associated with any one particular approach.

3.7.3 Research Questionnaires

Responses from research questionnaires with children (115 participants) from third to sixth class (9–12 year olds) provided an important source of data. The researcher made initial requests to include the views of children to principals in ten different schools (rural (5), and urban (5); DEIS (5) and Non-DEIS (5)). This research includes the views of children who were attending Rural (32), Urban (83) and Non-DEIS (115) schools, although it should be noted that children within such school categories had differing backgrounds. While this research did not include the views of children attending DEIS schools, the children in this research sample did have differing socio-economic backgrounds. The researcher was dependent on the participants’ availability and willingness to participate in this study.
This research included children in the age range 9–12 years as children of this age would be sufficiently able to engage with the questions in the research questionnaire, participate fully in the data collection process and express their views in an articulate and comprehensive manner. While the researcher considered including the views of children of a younger age, such an approach presented many related challenges including the access and availability of research participants and difficulties related to younger children’s participation in the data collection process; younger children may have difficulties in understanding the issues addressed in this study, and in their ability to communicate their responses adequately and effectively. This sample represents 0.05% of the total population of 9–12 year olds in mainstream primary education and 0.025% of the total primary pupil population in mainstream primary education (total population of 9–12 year olds in mainstream primary education: 228,098; total population in mainstream education: 460,529 (Department of Education and Skills, 2012/2013)). This is a relevant consideration in the interpretation of this study as research findings may be specific to participants in this research (Section 3.8.3).

Of these participants, 100 (87%) were boys and 15 (13%) were girls. The ratio of male and female pupils in this sample is significantly different (Chi^2 value = 59.596, p value = 0.001, significant at p ≤ 0.05) from the ratio of male and female pupils in mainstream primary education nationally (Department of Education and Skills, 2012/2013). Of the 115 participants,
68 (59%) spoke English only at home, 24 (21%) spoke English and Irish at home and 23 (20%) spoke other languages at home; findings indicative of the multilingual context in which children acquire literacy in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2012, p. 29; Devine 2005; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012). For reasons relating to access and availability of research participants, this research includes the views of significantly more boys than girls. While this may be a consideration in the interpretation of research findings, it should also be noted that as this is not specifically a gender related study, the gender of a participant may be considered no more relevant than any other related characteristic such as language, cultural or socio-economic background.

3.8 Trustworthiness

This section addresses the trustworthiness of this research in reference to the issues of validity, triangulation (Section 3.8.1), reliability (Section 3.8.2), transferability (Section 3.8.3) and reflexivity (Section 3.8.4).

3.8.1 Validity

It is important to address the issue of validity, to ensure that a study assesses what is actually intended (Shenton, 2004) and to addresses how congruent the findings are with reality (Merriam, 1998). The following provisions were made to ensure the validity of this research. This research included an exploration of the definitions of literacy and a comprehensive literature review (Chapter Two). It established the context for this research and examined Ireland’s performance in recent national and international
assessments (Section 2.4). Such inclusions promoted validity and credibility as they assisted in establishing an understanding of the research topic and related issues, and the context in which the research was conducted as recommended by Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) and Shenton (2004).

This research included the implementation of research methods well recognised in qualitative investigation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993; Shenton, 2004; Yin, 1994). The methods of data collection and analysis used in this study are well established in mixed methods research. They are: online survey (Arksey & Knight 1999; Check & Schutt, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Dillman, 2000; Dolnicar, Laesser, & Matus, 2009; Kerlinger, 1970), research interviews with teaching professionals (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010; Dilley, 2000; Dillman, 2000; Sturges & Hanrahan; 2004), research questionnaires with children (Check & Schutt, 2012; Newby, 2010) and statistical analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Mann & Whitney 1947; Wilcoxon, 1945; Sprinthall, 2013); factor analysis (Kim & Mueller, 1978; Kline, 1994); hierarchical cluster analysis (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984) and template analysis (Newby, 2010; Waring & Wainwright, 2008). The researcher also chose an appropriate time scale, ensured that there were adequate resources for the required research to be undertaken, and used appropriate samples and methodology to answer the research questions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The researcher was careful in devising and using appropriate instruments to
gather accurate, relevant and comprehensive data (King et al., 1987), ensuring that questions and readability levels were appropriate, tailored the instruments to the concentration span of the respondents, avoided any ambiguity of instructions, terms and questions, avoided making questionnaires too short or too long, and avoided too many or too few items for each issue (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). This was particularly important to ensure the validity of responses to the online survey (Check & Schutt, 2012).

Shenton (2004) and Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) recommended that the researcher establish early familiarity with the culture of participants (Morgan, 2005) before the first data collection dialogues take place. In this research, this was achieved via a comprehensive review of the research and official literature and preliminary visits to primary schools to talk to primary principals, teachers and children. Another relevant consideration addressed by Shenton (2004) relates to the nature of sampling of individuals to serve as research participants. Although this research involved the use of purposive sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993) there was also a degree of random sampling involved in the sourcing of research participants for the online survey and research interviews, considering the possible populations of primary school principals, teachers, academics and children which could have been included in the study. This approach to sampling assisted in reducing researcher bias in the selection of participants and, as Preece (1994) notes, may have also assisted in ensuring that any ‘unknown
influences’ were disseminated evenly within the sample. In this way, multiple voices, exhibiting characteristics of similarity, dissimilarity and variety, were sought in order to gain greater knowledge of a wider group (Stake, 1994), such as a more general population, rather than simply the individual informants who were contributing data. This was a relevant consideration in this study considering the variety of individuals who participated in this research (primary school principals, primary teachers, academics and children in different settings: urban, rural, DEIS Band 1 and 2, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil).

Shenton (2004) also recommended measures to assist in ensuring honesty in informants when contributing data. Each participant approached was given the opportunity to refuse to participate in the study to ensure that the data collection sessions involved only those who were genuinely willing to participate and prepared to offer data freely (Shenton, 2004). Interviews were conducted individually to enable research participants to express their views irrespective of the influences of other participants, group dynamics or group relations (Halbwachs, 1992; Rosen, 1998). Participants were encouraged to be candid in their responses and were made aware of the independence of the researcher. The right to withdraw from the study at any point was also made clear to research participants.

Triangulation is an important aspect in addressing the validity of qualitative research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Gorard & Taylor, 2004; Silverman, 2008/2001). Following recommendations made by
sources in the research literature (Newby, 2010; Springer, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Section 3.3), a mixed methods research design was selected so as to gain as accurate and as comprehensive a perspective as possible (Shenton, 2004). In this study, triangulation involved the use of different methods such as the online survey, research interviews and questionnaires (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). These research questions were addressed in relation to the research literature (Chapter Two) and the data obtained in responses to the online survey (Sections 4.2.2, 4.2.3), in research interviews with teaching professionals (Section 4.3) and questionnaires with children (Section 4.4).

The researcher sought to achieve content validity (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Springer, 2010) in the design and selection of questions in the online survey, research interviews with teaching professionals and research questionnaires with children. The online survey included questions relating to the main factors affecting children’s literacy acquisition, the related challenges and most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in an Irish context and was effective in acquiring both quantitative and qualitative data (Section 4.2). In addition, research interviews with teaching professionals provided a further opportunity to address these questions in greater depth and to elaborate on several related issues which emerged in teachers’ responses (in the online survey and research interviews) and were relevant to the discussion of the research questions (Sections 4.3, 5.2, 5.3). These included issues pertaining
to the implementation of the primary curriculum, professional practice, social and emotional learning and assessment (Section 4.3). The use of the online survey and research interviews with teaching professionals provided a comprehensive approach to addressing the research questions and establishing an overall appreciation of the related issues to be considered. In this way, the use of different methods compensated for their individual limitations and attained their respective benefits (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Springer, 2010).

In considering findings from the online survey and research interviews, it is apt to cite comments made by Gorard and Taylor (2004) when they observed that the introduction of two perspectives amalgamated in a mixed methods design gives us a broader perspective not just on measurement of an issue but also on our appreciation of it. Gorard and Taylor (2004) also posited that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches together allow researchers to compare results in a complementary way; they cannot validate each other but they can reinforce each other: “triangulation takes on a different mantle when qualitative and quantitative approaches are implemented” (Gorard & Taylor, 2004, pp. 44-46). Newby (2010) suggested that triangulation is less concerned with the accuracy of measurement than it is with the accuracy and legitimacy of insight and interpretation.
In this study, the researcher had previous relevant professional experience as an educational researcher and primary teacher. Shenton (2004) suggested that the background, qualifications and experience of the researcher is an important consideration in ensuring triangulation in research. Patton (1990) posited that the credibility of the researcher is especially important in qualitative research as it is the person who is the most important instrument of data collection and analysis. Alkin, Daillak, and White (1979) postulated that a reader’s trust in the researcher is of equal importance to the adequacy of the procedures themselves.

Another form of triangulation involves the use of a wide range of informants (Shenton, 2004). The online survey provided a considerable number of responses (162 responses in total) from which general trends, patterns and differences (Krippendorf, 2004) could be observed, recorded and analysed. It was also important to include an analysis and consideration of responses received from teaching professionals (33 participants) in research interviews and from children (115 participants) in research questionnaires. This provided a way of triangulating via data sources (Shenton, 2004). Individual viewpoints and experiences were compared with others and, ultimately, a comprehensive compilation of the views of research participants was constructed based on their contributions. Such an approach enabled the corroboration of data and the comparison of information across participants (Van Maanen, 1983).
This research facilitated space triangulation (the examination of data received from domains of spatial or locational difference (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007)) or site triangulation (Shenton, 2004) as it included the views of principals, teachers and children in a variety of contexts (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) and across differing geographical areas. The inclusion of participants in different settings provided the diversity that underpins Dervin’s (1983) concept of “circling reality”, which she described as the necessity of acquiring multiple perspectives (Dilley, 2000) to achieve a more accurate view of ‘reality’ based on a broad range of observations from a wide base of points in time and space. This also assisted in reducing the effect on the study of individual local factors particular to one particular school setting as research findings may have more credibility where similar results emerge from different settings (Shenton, 2004).

An analysis of the data received from responses to the online survey was viewed by another academic with relevant expertise in statistics so findings could be corroborated (investigator triangulation, Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The use of template analysis assisted triangulation as it provided a means by which the experiences of teaching professionals teaching in a variety of settings could be compared and contrasted. The implementation of statistical and template analysis and the comparisons made between data received from the online survey and research interviews with teaching professionals and questionnaires with children (trends,
patterns and differences (Krippendorf, 2004)) also provided the opportunity for combined level analysis triangulation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

As Shenton (2004) suggested, just as triangulation via data sources can involve the use of a diversity of informants, a range of documents may also be employed as source material. In this research, a range of official and research literature was reviewed and consulted to ensure triangulation. As recommended by Dilley (2000), Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) and Shenton (2004), supporting data were obtained from documents to provide a background to and help explain the views expressed by individual research participants in different settings where possible and appropriate. Opportunities were also taken to examine relevant documents referred to by teaching professionals during research interviews to inform research findings and to obtain relevant insights into the issues addressed.

Silverman (2000) posited that the ability of the researcher to relate his or her findings to an existing body of knowledge is a key criterion for evaluating works of qualitative inquiry. Where relevant and appropriate, findings from this research were addressed in relation to sources and recommendations in the literature review (theoretical triangulation; the examination and comparison of data from differing theories or disciplines (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007)). For instance, the research findings were addressed in reference to those reported in the *Growing Up in Ireland Longitudinal Study of Children* (Williams et al., 2009a) and
recommendations made in the *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

### 3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability can be achieved by the employment of overlapping methods and a detailed methodological description enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Newby, 2010; Shenton, 2004; Springer, 2010). In this study, Sections 3.4 and 3.5 outline details relating to this research design and its implementation, Section 3.7 provides details of sampling and the main research findings are addressed in Chapters Four and Five. The questions used in the online survey, in research interviews with teaching professionals and in the questionnaire with children are included in Appendix A, C and D respectively.

The researcher made provisions to ensure reliability in the planning, layout, presentation and implementation of this research, in the writing of questions and in the selection of items to include in the data collection instruments (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Greater reliability was also achieved through the use of fixed-alternative items in the online survey, research interviews with teaching professionals and questionnaires with children. Kerlinger (1970) observed that one of the advantages of the use of fixed-alternative items is that they achieve greater uniformity of measurement and therefore greater reliability. They can be more easily coded as they make the respondents answer in a mode that fits the response
category. Research interviews are typically quite reliable (an interview can be repeated, for example). However, consideration does have to be given to the nature and delivery of the sample used. Share sessions were included in this research as they are a viable and effective technique with younger participants and can enhance the reliability of children’s responses (Lewis, 1992). The use of template analysis also assisted in ensuring reliability as template analysis can be used to test the applicability and reliability of a method or to see whether results obtained in an earlier study are applicable elsewhere (Newby, 2010).

The qualitative nature of the data collected in the online survey, research interviews and questionnaires with children suggests that findings in this study may be specific to individual participants. Nonetheless, the researcher was satisfied that these instruments enabled the participants in this research to express their views in a comprehensive manner. The research findings (Chapters Four and Five) and implications for practice which emerged from this study (Section 6.3) which were considered in relation to relevant sources in the research literature (including the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) and recent findings from the Growing Up in Ireland Longitudinal Study of Children (Williams et al., 2009a) support the reliability of this research.
3.8.3 Transferability

Transferability or external validity (Merriam, 1998) is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a particular study can be applied to other situations and to a wider population. Since the findings of a qualitative study are specific to a small number of individuals and environments, it can be problematic to suggest that findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. Erlandson et al. (1993) suggested that many researchers believe that, in practice, even conventional generalisations are never possible as all observations are defined by their specific contexts.

Stake (1994) and Denscombe (1994) posited a converse view that while each case may be unique, a study may be an example within a broader group and, therefore, the potential for transferability should not be rejected without careful consideration. The influence of contextual factors on individual cases is an important consideration in adopting such an approach (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). Bassey (1981) suggested that, if practitioners believe their situation to be similar to that described in the study, it is acceptable to relate findings to their own positions. Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Firestone (1993) presented similar arguments and also recognised the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that sufficient contextual information about the research is provided to enable the reader to make such a transfer. Sufficient description of the research topic under investigation should be provided to enable readers to acquire a proper
understanding of it, and make comparisons with other situations (Shenton, 2004). The work of Cole and Gardner (1979), Marchionini and Teague (1987), and Pitts (1994) emphasised the importance of the researcher’s conveying of the boundaries of the study to the reader as this information must be considered before any attempts at transference are made. Details of the research approach selected in this study are outlined in Section 3.4 and a description of data collection instruments and details relating to their implementation are described in Section 3.5. Section 3.7 outlines details pertaining to sampling in the online survey (Section 3.7.1), research interviews with teaching professionals (Section 3.7.2) and questionnaires with children (Section 3.7.3), and limitations of the methodology in this study are addressed in Section 3.11. These research findings were also considered in relation to relevant sources in the literature including the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) and previous research findings such as those reported in the Growing Up in Ireland Longitudinal Study of Children (Williams et al., 2009a).

As Borgman (1986) and Pitts (1986) acknowledged, understanding of this topic is gained gradually, through several studies, rather than this research study conducted in isolation. Even if different investigations offer results that are not entirely consistent with one another, this does not necessarily imply that one or more is untrustworthy. It may be that they simply reflect multiple realities, and, if an appreciation can be gained of the reasons behind the variations, this understanding may prove as useful to the
reader as the results actually reported. Such an attitude is consistent with what Dervin (1997) considered should be key principles within research, namely to posit every contradiction, every inconsistency, every diversity not as an error or extraneous but relevant to contextual analysis (pp. 13-38). Therefore it should be questioned whether the notion of producing truly transferable results from a single study is a realistic aim or whether it disregards the importance of context which forms such an influential factor in qualitative research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993; Shenton, 2004).

This research includes the views of a purposeful sample of teaching professionals including primary school principals, primary teachers, academics, and children in different educational settings in Ireland (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil). This is an important consideration in the generalisation of these research findings. Ultimately, the results of this study must be understood within the context in which this research was conducted and the particular characteristics of research participants. In order to assess the extent to which findings may be true of teaching professionals and children in other settings, similar studies employing the same methods but conducted in different environments could well be of great value. Further studies could also be completed in other countries and comparisons made with the views expressed by participants in this research. The accumulation of such findings from studies in different settings might enable a more inclusive, overall perspective to be achieved (Shenton, 2004). Similar to Gross (1998) when she described the multiple environments in
which the phenomenon of her interest takes place, this research provides a baseline understanding with which research findings from subsequent research could be compared.

3.8.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity relates to an awareness that the researcher and the object of study affect each other mutually and continually in the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Reflexivity is an awareness of the researcher’s own role and the ways in which this is influenced by the object of the research, allowing the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he or she affects the research process or the research outcomes (Haynes, 2012). It is often identified as the process by which the research process turns back upon and takes account of itself (Alvesson, Hardy & Harley, 2008; Weick, 2002); as ways of seeing which act back on and reflect existing ways of seeing (Clegg & Hardy, 1996). In other words, research reflexivity involves thinking about how our thinking came to be, how a pre-existing understanding is constantly revised in the light of new understandings and how this in turn affects our research. Reflexivity involves thinking about our experiences and questioning our ways of doing (Symon & Cassells, 2012) and involves interpretation and reflection (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). It enables the research process and outcomes to be open to change and adaptive in response to multiple layers of reflection (Haynes, 2012).
Haynes (2012) suggested that an important element of reflexivity is the need to be aware of motivations for completing the research and the ways in which the researcher is connected with the research theoretically, experientially and emotionally. The primary motivation for this research relates to the recognition of literacy as a means of access to knowledge and social engagement and its potential to promote life skills and life-long learning (Section 1.2). The researcher had relevant theoretical knowledge and professional experience, as a primary teacher and educational researcher, as well as a personal and professional interest in the research topic. These influences assisted in providing the motivation, knowledge and interest to complete this research and to address research findings in light of previous findings from sources in the research literature.

Hibbert, Coupland and MacIntosh (2010) described four stages that collectively encompass a meta-process of reflexivity. The first stage is repetition where the researcher reflects in a self-focused manner. In this study, this occurred during the initial considerations of the research topic and the completion of the literature review (Chapter Two). This was followed by extension (the second stage), where there was some building of new understandings that connect with established principles, and disruption (the third stage) – the element of reflexive research which facilitates the questioning and exploration of previous findings. The fourth stage, participation, describes how the researcher actively participates and engages in the research process to see if new contributions to knowledge can be
made or if new interpretations can be made from existing knowledge. In this study, the researcher engaged with these three steps of extension, disruption and participation simultaneously at various stages of the research process, most notably in the creation of a research design and data collection instruments (Sections 3.4, 3.5), in the analysis and comparison of data (Section 3.9; Chapter Four), and during the subsequent writing of the discussion in light of the literature review and these research findings (Chapter Five).

A consideration of reflexivity in this study involves the recognition of this research as a symmetrical and reflexive narrative, a number of participant stories which interconnect in some way (Cunliffe, 2003). The researcher also acknowledged the constitute nature of research conversations with teaching professionals (Cunliffe, 2003) as a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee within the context of a semi-structured interview conducted face to face, by telephone or Skype. While these modes of interview had their benefits and limitations (Section 3.5.2), the researcher was satisfied that they were an effective and appropriate choice as a means of obtaining the data required to complete this research. In the researcher–participant relationship, the researcher sought to establish a good rapport between researcher and participant while maintaining impartiality. The situated nature of narrative accounts was reduced (Cunliffe, 2003) as this research included 33 individual interviews with research participants in different contexts (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil). The
researcher listened to recordings of the research interviews with teaching professionals to see how the presence of the researcher or interaction as researcher affected the data collection process. The researcher was aware of the importance of inter-subjectivity and the importance of validity and credibility in acquiring the data in research interviews with teaching professionals. In addition, the researcher was conscious of the importance of impartiality in the completion of research questionnaires and in share sessions with children (Section 3.5.3; Symon & Cassels, 2012) and reviewed fieldwork notes of observations, interactions and conversations during these activities to assist in ensuring the validity and credibility of data obtained in this study. The researcher was also cognisant to consider reflexivity in the ways in which these research findings were interpreted and addressed in light of relevant sources and previous research findings in the literature (Chapters Four and Five; Cunliffe, 2003).

3.9 Data Analysis

This section addresses analysis of the data acquired in the online survey (Section 3.9.1), research interviews (3.9.2) and questionnaires with children (Section 3.9.3).

3.9.1 Online Survey

Data compiled from the online survey were analysed via the use of data and statistical analysis instruments from an online facility (Survey Monkey) and IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Degrees of responses (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly
disagree) to each question were analysed accordingly (Likert, 1932). An analysis of overall responses relating to the most influential factors in children’s literacy acquisition, the related challenges and most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children is outlined in Charts 3–5, Sections 4.2.2.1–4.2.2.3.

Factor analysis was completed with responses to this online survey (Tables 8–16, Section 4.2.3.1). Factor analysis is a mathematical approach for attempting to explain the correlation between a large set of variables in terms of a small number of underlying factors. The main assumption of factor analysis is that it is not possible to observe the underlying factors directly, that is, they are ‘latent’. Factor analysis is predominantly used for data reduction or structure detection. The purpose of data reduction is to remove redundant (highly correlated) variables from the data file, possibly replacing the entire data file with a smaller number of uncorrelated variables. The purpose of structure detection is to examine the underlying (or latent) relationships between the variables. The rotated component matrix helps one to determine what the extracted components represent (Kim & Mueller, 1978; Kline, 1994). The Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization (Kaiser, 1958) was used in completing this analysis. Varimax rotations are inclined to produce multiple group factors maintaining orthogonality and frequently result in increased multivocality; loadings of variables on ‘primary factors’ is decreased and loadings on ‘secondary factors’ is increased (McCarthy, 2008).
In statistical analysis, explained variation assesses the proportion to which a mathematical model explicates the variation (dispersion) of a particular data set. Variation is regularly quantified as variance. The more precise term explained variance can also be used. The remaining portion of the total variation is termed unexplained or residual (Sprinthall, 2013). Eigenvalues are a particular set of scalars related to a linear system of equations (i.e. a matrix equation) that are also referred to as characteristic roots, characteristic values (Hoffman & Kunze, 1971), proper values, or latent roots (Marcus & Minc, 1988, p. 145). The eigenvalue for a particular factor assesses the variance in all the variables accounted for by that factor. In addition, the ratio of eigenvalues is the ratio of explanatory importance of the factors in relation to the respective variables. When a factor has a low eigenvalue, it is contributing little to the explanation of variances in the variables and can be considered redundant with more important factors. Eigenvalues quantify the extent of variation in the total sample accounted for by each factor.

Hierarchical cluster analysis (Chart 6, Section 4.2.3.2) was completed with responses to the online survey. Hierarchical cluster analysis is an exploratory tool designed to reveal natural groupings (or clusters) within a data set that would otherwise not be apparent. It is most useful when a researcher wishes to cluster a small number (less than a few hundred) of objects. The objects in a hierarchical cluster analysis can be cases or variables, depending on whether one wants to classify cases or
examine relationships between the variables (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). Clustering produces hierarchical clusters of items based on distance measures of dissimilarity or similarity. The cluster method defines the rules for cluster formation. When calculating the distance between two clusters, one can use the pair of nearest objects between clusters or the pair of furthest objects, or a compromise between these methods. Dendrograms can be used to assess the cohesiveness of the clusters formed and can provide information about the appropriate number of clusters to keep (Anderberg, 1973).

The Spearman’s rho measure was used to explore correlations between responses (Section 4.2.3.2, Table 32, Appendix B). The Spearman’s rho statistical measure quantifies the rank-order association between two scale or ordinal variables and works regardless of the distribution of the variables (Kendall, 1955; Siegel, 1956; Sprinthall, 2013). Comparative analysis was completed with responses received from male and female respondents and from teachers working in all girls, all boys and mixed school settings (Section 4.2.3.3). A similar analysis was instigated to compare responses from participants teaching in different categories of school setting: rural, urban, DEIS Band 1, DEIS Band 2, and Gaelscoil. This research involved the implementation of a Mann–Whitney U test (Mann & Whitney 1947; Wilcoxon, 1945) as a means of statistical analysis. The Mann–Whitney U test is a nonparametric test that allows two groups or conditions or treatments to be compared without making the assumption that
values are normally distributed (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; McKnight and Najab, 2010). A Mann–Whitney U Test determines whether two independent rankings are different (Springer, 2010). This was an effective way of examining whether differences in responses received from respondents across these categories were statistically significant (at a significance level of 0.05).

The chi-squared goodness-of-fit test (Sprinthall, 2013) was implemented to examine differences in the proportions of populations in this sample and the equivalent national populations. The chi-squared goodness-of-fit test investigates whether the observed frequency distribution of a nominal variable matches an expected frequency distribution (Sprinthall, 2013).

### 3.9.2 Research Interviews

Cassell et al. (2005) identified a key issue of concern for the qualitative researcher; how to manage effectively the volume of text that is generated by qualitative research. A form of data analysis referred to as ‘template analysis’ was implemented in this research. Template analysis is a structured technique for analysing qualitative data that enables researchers to place some order on their data from the beginning of the analytic process. Template analysis was implemented in this research as this approach has many advantages. The main benefit of the technique and the rationale for selecting it as a form of data analysis in this research therefore is that, through its application, researchers have a relatively clear path to follow in
creating a structure for the analysis of their data. It allows for themes to emerge from the data. Its flexibility means that it is appropriate for a range of qualitative study approaches and for use with large data sets. It is suitable for research questions which relate to an individual’s experience whilst it also facilitates the researcher in extending the scope of a study past individual experiences. There are also some disadvantages associated with this approach. Its flexibility may make it difficult to identify the most important aspects of data on which to concentrate and the use of thematic analysis may mean that nuances in the data can be missed.

Waring and Wainwright (2008) provided an overview of the origins of template analysis and addressed how it has been used to structure qualitative data. These researchers observed that template analysis is a relatively recent innovation and appears to have emerged from more structured approaches such as Grounded Theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. This approach can be useful to a large number of researchers as it can be implemented within a range of epistemological positions. Waring and Wainwright (2004) observed that when template analysis is used within a broadly phenomenological approach it is very similar to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and suggested that the main difference between the two approaches are the use of ‘a priori’ themes in template analysis and the balance between within- and across-case analysis.
Waring and Wainwright (2008) elaborated that the template approach involves coding a large volume of text so that segments about an identified topic (the themes) can be assembled in one place to complete the interpretative process. The complete analysis process involves the organising, connecting, and corroboration of data. Template analysis differs from other qualitative analysis approaches in that, unlike the others, where the strategy is to let the themes emerge from the data, template analysis is centred on working from the top down, at least in the preliminary stages (Newby, 2010, pp. 481-484).

A template is a predetermined framework of concepts that are represented as themes. Existing templates can be used to test the applicability of a method or to see whether results obtained in an earlier study are applicable elsewhere. Alternatively, templates can arise from the nature of the research questions. They can also emerge from a combination of existing knowledge about an issue and the philosophical perspective within which the researcher chooses to work within. Newby (2010) observed that most template analysis research seems to originate in this way and elaborates on using templates to analyse literature and to study interview data. The process of creating the template structure and data collection, are concurrent. In some instances, the template evolves as the data are assessed. An inductive approach can then be used to create additional themes as they continue to be identified as data analysis progresses.
Many sources in the research literature have provided frameworks, for the identification, categorisation and summarising of themes in the analysis of qualitative research data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Cresswell, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Recommendations relating to the establishment and selection of themes have been provided by King (2004) and Miles and Huberman (1994). King (2004) advocated that researchers may adopt one of three positions when beginning their research. The researcher may have pre-defined (a priori) themes based on the theoretical position of the research or establish themes after some preliminary exploration of the data using an immersion crystallisation or editing organising style (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). An intermediate approach which is frequently implemented involves the refinement and modification of initial themes during the analysis process (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; King 2004). Krippendorf (2004) elaborated on the extrapolations of trends, patterns and differences in data analysis; a useful approach when analysing and comparing data obtained from research participants (teaching professionals and children) in different settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil).

The research interviews conducted in this study were analysed by listening to the interview responses, the completion of a comprehensive summary of each interview (Drever, 1995) and a review of the notes from interviews. Quotations from individual interviews were organised according to theme (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Emerging themes which
were addressed in individual interviews relating to particular school settings were noted and referenced for subsequent exploration in the discussion of research findings (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; King, 2004). Categories and sub-categories were employed for this purpose (Cresswell, 2008). Due to the large number of interviews considered, the duration of the interviews and the need to focus on specific themes, partial transcription was selected as an effective means of analysing data obtained in these research interviews (Drever, 1995; King & Horrocks, 2010; Powers, 2005).

The template used was of emergent design (Newby, 2010) and was applied to analyse the content of responses received in research interviews. It outlined the main themes addressed in questions in the online survey and research interviews with teaching professionals and also facilitated the introduction of new or emerging themes (Cresswell, 2008; Newby 2010). These themes related to the main factors influencing literacy acquisition including parental and family influences, language, culture and socio-economic factors. The template also included themes relating to implementation of the primary curriculum; oral language, reading and comprehension, writing, differentiation, gender, cross-curricular integration, professional practice; teacher education, a whole school approach to literacy acquisition, resources and multimedia. In addition, responses were outlined in relation to themes such as social and emotional learning, personal development leading to personal transformation and assessment. A selection of responses obtained in research interviews with teaching
professionals, relating to specific themes is included in Section 4.3. A subsequent analysis was conducted with data obtained from all the interviews relating to the final template which included all considered themes. Trends, patterns and differences (Krippendorf, 2004) in responses from principals and teachers in different school settings were compared and contrasted. The research findings were addressed in light of the literature (Chapters Four and Five).

3.9.3 Research Questionnaires

Template analysis was also completed with responses received in questionnaires with children from differing backgrounds. Quotations from individual research questionnaires were organised according to theme. A template outlining the main themes derived from a review of the research literature and addressed in the individual questions in the research questionnaire was used to analyse responses received. These included oral language, reading, writing and personal transformation. A selection of responses, obtained in the research questionnaires with children, is included in Section 4.4. A chi-squared test (Bagdonavicius & Nikulin, 2011) was selected as a means of statistical analysis to compare responses received from boys and girls in this research (Section 4.4.1.2). A chi-squared test, also known as a chi-square test is any statistical hypothesis test in which the sampling distribution of the test statistic is a squared distribution when the null hypothesis is true (Sprinthall, 2013). This was an effective way of examining whether differences in responses received from respondents
across genders were statistically significant (at a significance level of 0.05). Field notes, compiled by the researcher during the think aloud approach and share sessions, were also analysed in reference to the template analysis completed with responses in the research questionnaires, where appropriate, to inform the context and content of the data acquired (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Responses from children in questionnaires were analysed with reference to the template analysis completed with responses received from teaching professionals to identify trends, patterns and differences (Krippendorf, 2004). Where applicable these research findings were addressed in relation to relevant sources in the literature review (Chapters Four and Five).

3.10 Ethics and Data Presentation

The researcher was careful to protect the identity of individual respondents to the online survey and participants in research interviews with teaching professionals. Informed consent was sought and given by each respondent and subsequent research interview participant. Responses to the online survey are represented numerically and anonymously. Bar charts were selected as a means of presentation as they display the data appropriately and legibly in terms of percentages for each question (Sections 4.2.2.1–4.2.2.3; Newby, 2010; Springer, 2010). Further analyses of responses are presented in Section 4.2.3 and Appendix B in tabular form. An analysis of responses received in research interviews with teaching professionals is included in Section 4.3.
Contributions from children provided an informative additional source of data. It is important to note that within a primary school context, the researcher had to work within primary curricular guidelines and school procedures, and according to parental concerns in relation to confidentiality and anonymity, as well as ensuring that the children’s best interests were served. Informed consent was sought and received from the parents or guardians of each participant. The researcher applied the recommended and acceptable School of Education ethical procedures in this research to ensure anonymity and the well-being of any persons offering to take part (Appendix E). Appendix F includes copies of the relevant forms and information for participants. The researcher was careful to respect the anonymity of participants in the presentation of these responses. Analysis of the data obtained in questionnaires with children is presented in the form of tables and as quotations in Section 4.4.

The issue of the researcher’s position and subjectivity was an important consideration. An awareness of this was important in the administration and implementation of data collection instruments and the subsequent interpretation of research findings. Where interventions were made they were restricted and were mainly attempts to assist the research participants in understanding the questions and in communicating and expressing their ideas rather than formulating their responses.
3.11 Limitations of the Methodology

One of the limitations of this methodology relates to population sampling. The researcher sought to include schools of various categories (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) in so far as it was possible to obtain school and teacher e-mail addresses. It was hoped that the online survey could be distributed via teacher unions and teacher associations but this was not possible due to restrictions related to data protection. It was therefore necessary to source individual school and teacher e-mail addresses via primary school websites, personal contact with teaching professionals and the Literacy Association of Ireland.

E-mail invitations to participate in the survey were sent to schools (using the principal’s or secretary’s school e-mail addresses). However, in many cases, the e-mails sent to these addresses could not be delivered due to filtering restrictions, inactive e-mail addresses or other technical difficulties. When responses (162) were received and acknowledged, they were comprehensive in nature. Research interviews were subsequently conducted with respondents (33) available to participate. Research findings may be limited to the sample and the individual participants included in this research and this must be taken into account in terms of overall conclusions. Although this study does not include the views of parents as a specific group, due to practical considerations relating to the nature and focus of this research design, and the access to and availability of research participants, many of the teaching professionals who participated in this research were
parents; a relevant consideration in the interpretation of these research findings.

Another limitation relates to generalisation. The nature of this research design, the research questions addressed in this study, and the data obtained from participants suggest that a degree of generalisation features in the findings that emerge from this research. Although the survey sample is broadly in line with national patterns in terms of school category (mixed, all boys, all girls, DEIS, and non-DEIS), the sample may not be representative of primary teachers in Ireland in general. Several of the respondents to the online survey and participants in research interviews were educators with a particular interest in literacy; many attended teacher education courses in literacy and were members of the Literacy Association of Ireland. While this may have enhanced discussion in research interviews and the research participants’ ability to address issues in this study, further investigations would be required to ascertain whether the implementation of this study with teachers with less of an interest in literacy would have resulted in similar response patterns to questions addressed in this research.

While this study provided the opportunity to include and consider the voices and views of children in Ireland, such contributions were somewhat structured due to the nature of this research and the design of data collection instruments.
This methodology incorporates self-reporting. Views expressed by respondents in the survey and by participants in research interviews and questionnaires therefore include some degree of subjectivity. This must be taken into consideration in the interpretation of research findings. The researcher was aware of the importance of impartiality in the implementation and administration of this research.

This is a qualitative study of educators’ perspectives relating to the factors influencing the acquisition of literacy in children, current challenges and important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children. This is not a quantitative study of factors influencing children’s literacy acquisition which thus precludes a hypothesis of the causes and effects of literacy achievement. For this reason, there are no literacy tests. Such assessments would necessitate a very narrow focus and the research questions and subsequent data obtained from the methodology implemented in this research could not be best presented or interpreted in such a research design. Additionally, changes recorded in such assessments may not be accurately accounted for or attributed to any one particular factor. Furthermore, there would be difficulties in gaining access to such data.

This research was also dependent on the individuals’ willingness and availability to participate. Whilst, in some instances, findings may be specific to individual participants, they could also serve to inform and assist educators in facilitating children’s learning in similar circumstances.
3.12 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this thesis including a statement of the research questions and details relating to the implementation of the research approach and data collection instruments selected. It also includes details pertaining to sampling, representation, trustworthiness; validity, triangulation reliability, transferability and reflexivity, analysis of the data and issues relating to ethics, presentation of the data and limitations of the methodology. A consideration of these issues informed research design in order to achieve optimum benefit for children and their educators from the data collected, analysed and synthesised.
4 Chapter Four: Presentation of Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter, presented in three parts, outlines the research findings from data collected in the online survey, research interviews with teaching professionals and questionnaires with children. Section 4.2, Part I presents an analysis of the responses to the online survey. Section 4.3, Part II provides an analysis of data acquired in research interviews with teaching professionals. The chapter closes with Section 4.4, Part III, which includes an analysis of responses received in research questionnaires with children.

4.2 Part I – Analysis of Online Survey

This section includes an analysis of responses received in the online survey. Section 4.2.1 elaborates on the details of respondents. Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 provide an analysis of responses relating to the factors impacting most on a child’s literacy acquisition, the main challenges and important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children.

4.2.1 Details of Respondents to Online Survey

The following charts present details relating to respondents to the online survey. Chart 1 illustrates that 21.6% (35) respondents were male and 78.4% (127) respondents were female.
Chart 1  Gender of Respondents to Online Survey

Chart 2 presents the gender composition of the schools in which participants in the online survey were teaching. It illustrates that 79.1% (128) were teaching in a mixed school, 11.1% (18) in an all-boys school, and 9.8% (16) were teaching in an all-girls school.
Table 7 outlines the categories of school settings in which respondents to the online survey indicated they taught. Respondents could select one or as many of the descriptors as applied to them.
4.2.2 Analysis of Overall Responses

The following sections provide an analysis of overall responses relating to the factors impacting most on children’s literacy acquisition (Section 4.2.2.1), the main challenges in children’s literacy acquisition (Section 4.2.2.2) and the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children (Section 4.2.2.3). The data are presented in the form of bar charts followed by a table including the percentages and absolute values of responses to each question. The data were collected on a Likert scale (Section 3.5.1). Each bar chart therefore represents responses on each point of the Likert scale from “strongly disagree” on the left (green) to “strongly agree” on the right (blue). Questions and responses in this online survey addressed themes and issues which emerged from a review of the relevant research literature (Section 3.5.1).

4.2.2.1 Most Influential Factors in Children’s Literacy Acquisition

An analysis of overall responses provides some interesting research findings. Chart 3 represents responses relating to the factors impacting most on a child’s literacy acquisition. As illustrated by this chart, parental and family support was viewed by teachers as the most influential factor. Responses also indicate the prevalence of language, culture and socio-economic factors in children’s literacy acquisition.
Q5 Factors Impacting Most on a Child's Developing Literacy Skills

Answered: 162  Skipped: 0

- Parental and Family
- Parent(s)' Language
- Child's Language
- School's Language
- Parent(s)' Culture
- Child's Culture
- Religion
- Gender
- Socioeconomic

Legend:
- Green: Strongly Disagree
- Red: Disagree
- Purple: Undecided
- Yellow: Agree
- Blue: Strongly Agree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental and Family</strong></td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>20.3 (33)</td>
<td>79.6 (129)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent(s)’ Language</strong></td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>6.1 (10)</td>
<td>4.9 (8)</td>
<td>37.6 (61)</td>
<td>50.6 (82)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child’s Language</strong></td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>5.5 (9)</td>
<td>7.4 (12)</td>
<td>37.6 (61)</td>
<td>49.3 (80)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School’s Language</strong></td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>8.1 (13)</td>
<td>13.2 (21)</td>
<td>48.4 (77)</td>
<td>29.5 (47)</td>
<td>(159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent(s)’ Culture</strong></td>
<td>4.3 (7)</td>
<td>13.1 (21)</td>
<td>16.2 (26)</td>
<td>45.0 (72)</td>
<td>21.2 (34)</td>
<td>(160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child’s Culture</strong></td>
<td>3.8 (6)</td>
<td>18.9 (30)</td>
<td>20.2 (32)</td>
<td>42.4 (67)</td>
<td>14.5 (23)</td>
<td>(158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td>32.1 (52)</td>
<td>42.5 (69)</td>
<td>18.5 (30)</td>
<td>6.1 (10)</td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>15.9 (25)</td>
<td>39.4 (62)</td>
<td>21.6 (34)</td>
<td>21.0 (33)</td>
<td>1.9 (3)</td>
<td>(157)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-economic</strong></td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>3.1 (5)</td>
<td>11.3 (18)</td>
<td>46.2 (73)</td>
<td>39.2 (62)</td>
<td>(158)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chart 3** Overall – Factors Impacting Most on a Child’s Literacy Acquisition

*Figures are expressed as percentages. Absolute values are provided in brackets.

4.2.2.2 Greatest Challenges in Children’s Literacy Acquisition

Chart 4 illustrates responses relating to the main challenges in children’s literacy acquisition. As represented by this chart, the availability and quality of support received at home and at school were viewed by teaching professionals as the greatest challenges in a child’s literacy acquisition. The importance of pupil enthusiasm, the need to provide for pupils’ specific learning needs, and the availability of appropriate resources were also considered relevant challenges which need to be addressed.
Q6 Greatest Challenges in the Development of a Child’s Literacy Skills

Answered: 162  Skipped: 0
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support at Home</strong></td>
<td>1.2 (2)</td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>1.8 (3)</td>
<td>30.8  (50)</td>
<td>65.4 (106)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support at School</strong></td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>9.3 (15)</td>
<td>3.7 (6)</td>
<td>37.2  (60)</td>
<td>49.0 (79)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pupil Enthusiasm</strong></td>
<td>1.2 (2)</td>
<td>6.7 (11)</td>
<td>3.7 (6)</td>
<td>58.6  (95)</td>
<td>29.6 (48)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pupil Apprehension</strong></td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>10.6 (17)</td>
<td>17.5 (28)</td>
<td>53.7  (86)</td>
<td>18.1 (29)</td>
<td>(160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pupil Abilities</strong></td>
<td>1.2 (2)</td>
<td>12.4 (20)</td>
<td>6.8 (11)</td>
<td>62.1  (100)</td>
<td>17.3 (28)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Needs</strong></td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>5.5 (9)</td>
<td>3.1 (5)</td>
<td>61.4  (99)</td>
<td>20.8 (48)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>8.8 (14)</td>
<td>11.9 (19)</td>
<td>54.7  (87)</td>
<td>23.9 (38)</td>
<td>(159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Sources</strong></td>
<td>1.2 (2)</td>
<td>15.4 (25)</td>
<td>14.2 (23)</td>
<td>45.6  (74)</td>
<td>23.4 (38)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chart 4  Overall – Greatest Challenges in a Child’s Literacy Acquisition**

* Figures are expressed as percentages.
  Absolute values are provided in brackets.
4.2.2.3 Addressing the Literacy Needs of Children – Considerations for the Future

Chart 5 presents responses relating to the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children. As represented by this chart, the need to improve parental awareness was viewed by teaching professionals as the most important consideration in addressing the literacy needs of children. The need to improve curricular approaches with children in the mainstream and children with specific learning needs was also emphasised by teaching professionals in addition to the need to improve pupil attitudes and incorporate multimedia approaches to assist children in their literacy acquisition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>4.3 (7)</td>
<td>7.4 (12)</td>
<td>53.9 (86)</td>
<td>35.1 (57)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Approaches</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>6.1 (10)</td>
<td>8.6 (14)</td>
<td>51.8 (84)</td>
<td>33.3 (54)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Curricular</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>10.5 (17)</td>
<td>15.5 (25)</td>
<td>47.2 (76)</td>
<td>26.7 (43)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed. Needs</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>4.3 (7)</td>
<td>9.8 (16)</td>
<td>46.9 (76)</td>
<td>38.8 (63)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1.8 (3)</td>
<td>5.5 (9)</td>
<td>48.1 (78)</td>
<td>44.4 (72)</td>
<td>(162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional Ability</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3.7 (6)</td>
<td>6.9 (11)</td>
<td>52.2 (83)</td>
<td>37.1 (59)</td>
<td>(159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Resources</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>4.3 (7)</td>
<td>4.3 (7)</td>
<td>57.7 (93)</td>
<td>33.5 (55)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Awareness</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1.2 (2)</td>
<td>35.4 (56)</td>
<td>63.2 (100)</td>
<td>(158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Attitudes</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3.1 (5)</td>
<td>5.5 (9)</td>
<td>52.1 (84)</td>
<td>39.1 (63)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia Approaches</td>
<td>0.6 (1)</td>
<td>2.4 (4)</td>
<td>11.1 (18)</td>
<td>46.5 (75)</td>
<td>31.6 (63)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures are expressed as percentages.
  Absolute values are provided in brackets.

Chart 5  Overall – Addressing the Literacy Needs of Children – Considerations for the Future
4.2.3 Multivariate Analysis of Overall Responses

A multivariate analysis was completed with responses to the online survey. This included a factor analysis (Section 4.2.3.1), hierarchical cluster analysis (Section 4.2.3.2), correlations of responses (Table 32, Appendix B) and a comparative analysis of responses (Section 4.2.3.3) from teachers across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil).

4.2.3.1 Factor Analysis

Table 8 outlines a factor analysis of all responses to the online survey. The first component registers particularly highly the need to improve teacher education, curricular approaches with children in the mainstream and cross-curricular integration. This could be interpreted as the curricular factor. The second component records highly the impact of children’s specific learning needs, pupil apprehension, the availability of resources, and pupil abilities. This could be interpreted as the factor which emphasises the need to support children with specific learning needs. The influence of child, parent, and school language background registers higher than the other response options in the third component which could be interpreted as the language factor. The fourth component records highly the influence of parental and child cultural background and could be interpreted as the culture factor. The fifth component registers highly the responses recognising the impact of pupil attitudes, competition from other sources, the support available to children at school, and the need to improve
multimedia approaches to literacy and could be interpreted as the factor suggesting the need to improve multimedia approaches with children. The sixth component records highly the responses relating to parental and family influences and the support available to children at home which could be interpreted as the parental and family influences factor. The seventh component registers highly the responses relating to child gender and parent(s)’ religious background, which could be interpreted as the gender or religious factor. The eighth component records highly the need to improve parental awareness and pupil attitudes. This could be interpreted as the positive awareness factor and suggests the importance of improving these attributes in parents and children.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s) and Family</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Language</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Language</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.878</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School’s Language</td>
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<td>.135</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s)’ Culture</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.916</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Culture</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>.908</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>-.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s)’ Religion</td>
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<td>-.037</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>.779</td>
<td>.144</td>
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<td>Child Gender</td>
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<td>.086</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.814</td>
<td>-.023</td>
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<td>Socio-economics</td>
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<td>.375</td>
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<td>.050</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>.714</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.216</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support at School</td>
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<td>.172</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.559</td>
<td>.235</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Enthusiasm</td>
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<td>.457</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.240</td>
<td>-.251</td>
<td>.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Apprehension</td>
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<td>.706</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>-.122</td>
<td>.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Abilities</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>.555</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.222</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Specific Needs</td>
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<td>.727</td>
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<td>.181</td>
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<td>-.049</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Resources</td>
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<td>.227</td>
<td>-.110</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>-.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Sources (e.g. TV)</td>
<td>-.052</td>
<td>.309</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.562</td>
<td>-.295</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>-.205</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
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<td>.001</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.046</td>
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<td>.121</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>-.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Approaches</td>
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<td>.010</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>-.123</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Curricular</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>-.154</td>
<td>-.055</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.205</td>
<td>-.028</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>-.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Special Needs</td>
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<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>-.178</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>-.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Mainstream</td>
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<td>.096</td>
<td>-.169</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Exceptional</td>
<td>.489</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>-.214</td>
<td>-.206</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Resources</td>
<td>.455</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>-.363</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>.317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Awareness</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Attitudes</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia</td>
<td>.287</td>
<td>-.144</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.499</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Rotation converged in 8 iterations

**Table 8  Factor Analysis – Overall**

Table 9 displays the variance explained by the initial solution, extracted components and rotated components. The leftmost section of this table presents the variance explained by the initial explanation. The first section of the table shows the Initial Eigenvalues. The Total Column gives the eigenvalue or amount of variance in the original variables accounted for by each component. The % of Variance column gives the ratio, expressed...
as a percentage, of the variance accounted for by each component to the total variance in all of the variables. The Cumulative % column gives the percentage of variance accounted for by the first subsample of components. For example, the cumulative percentage for the second component is the sum of the percentage of variance for the first and second components. Eight factors in the initial solution have eigenvalues greater than 1. Together, they account for almost 64% of the variability in the original variables. There also remains possibility for a lot of unexplained variation. The second section of the table displays the extracted components and the right most section presents the variance explained by extracted factors after rotation. The rotated model makes some small adjustment to factors one, two, three, four, five, six and seven with factor eight left virtually unchanged.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Initial Eigenvalues</th>
<th>Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
<th>Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>% of Variance</td>
<td>Cumulative %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.775</td>
<td>17.684</td>
<td>17.684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.118</td>
<td>7.844</td>
<td>36.783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.752</td>
<td>6.490</td>
<td>43.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.699</td>
<td>6.292</td>
<td>49.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.464</td>
<td>5.422</td>
<td>54.986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.270</td>
<td>4.704</td>
<td>59.689</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.103</td>
<td>4.084</td>
<td>63.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>.968</td>
<td>3.586</td>
<td>67.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>3.425</td>
<td>70.783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>.840</td>
<td>3.113</td>
<td>73.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>.784</td>
<td>2.905</td>
<td>76.801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>2.662</td>
<td>79.464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>2.453</td>
<td>81.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>2.340</td>
<td>84.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>.618</td>
<td>2.290</td>
<td>86.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td>2.002</td>
<td>88.548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>.517</td>
<td>1.913</td>
<td>90.461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>.479</td>
<td>1.776</td>
<td>92.237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>.405</td>
<td>1.499</td>
<td>93.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>1.351</td>
<td>95.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>.312</td>
<td>1.156</td>
<td>96.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td>1.072</td>
<td>97.314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>.936</td>
<td>98.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>99.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>99.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.391</td>
<td>100.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9  Total Variance Explained – Factor Analysis: Overall

Table 10 outlines a factor analysis of responses relating to the factors impacting most on children’s literacy acquisition. The first component registers highly the influence of parental, child and school language background and could be interpreted as the language factor. The second component records highly the influence of parental and child cultural background and parent(s)’ religious background and could be interpreted as the culture factor. The third component registers highly the influence of a
child’s gender, parent(s)’ religious background, socio-economic factors and the importance of parental and family influences. This factor suggests the relevance of the influence of a child’s gender, parent(s)’ religious background, and socio-economic factors.

### Rotated Component Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s) and Family</td>
<td>.404</td>
<td>-.193</td>
<td>.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Language</td>
<td>.858</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>-.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Language</td>
<td>.882</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School’s Language</td>
<td>.755</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s)’ Culture</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>.920</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Culture</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.897</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent(s)’ Religion</td>
<td>-.038</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>.659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Gender</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economics</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>-.170</td>
<td>.630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization  
Rotation converged in 6 iterations  

**Table 10  Factor Analysis: Factors Impacting Most on Children’s Literacy Acquisition**

Table 11 presents the variance explained by the initial solution, extracted components and rotated components. Three factors in the initial solution have eigenvalues greater than 1. Collectively, they account for just over 65% of the variability in the original variables. There also remains scope for a lot of unexplained variation. The rotated model makes some small adjustment to factors one and two with factor three left effectively unchanged.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Total Initial Eigenvalues</th>
<th>% of Variance</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
<th>Total Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
<th>% of Variance</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
<th>Total Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
<th>% of Variance</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.897</td>
<td>32.183</td>
<td>32.183</td>
<td>2.897</td>
<td>32.183</td>
<td>32.183</td>
<td>2.333</td>
<td>25.925</td>
<td>25.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.614</td>
<td>17.931</td>
<td>50.115</td>
<td>1.614</td>
<td>17.931</td>
<td>50.115</td>
<td>1.990</td>
<td>22.106</td>
<td>48.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.395</td>
<td>15.497</td>
<td>65.612</td>
<td>1.395</td>
<td>15.497</td>
<td>65.612</td>
<td>1.582</td>
<td>17.581</td>
<td>65.612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>10.852</td>
<td>76.464</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>.770</td>
<td>8.550</td>
<td>85.014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>.541</td>
<td>6.007</td>
<td>91.022</td>
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</tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>.423</td>
<td>4.703</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>2.654</td>
<td>98.379</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>1.621</td>
<td>100.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11  Total Variance Explained – Factor Analysis: Factors Impacting Most on Children’s Literacy Acquisition

Table 12 outlines a factor analysis of responses relating to the main challenges in children’s literacy acquisition. The first component records highly the impact of pupil specific learning needs, pupil abilities, pupil enthusiasm and apprehension, competition from other sources and the need for appropriate resources. This could be interpreted as the pupil attitudes and abilities factor. The second component registers highly the support available to children at home and at school and the importance of pupil enthusiasm. This could be interpreted as the support available to children at home and at school factor.
### Rotated Component Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support at Home</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support at School</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Enthusiasm</td>
<td>.569</td>
<td>.454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Apprehension</td>
<td>.669</td>
<td>.279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Abilities</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Specific Learning Needs</td>
<td>.733</td>
<td>-.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Appropriate Resources</td>
<td>.616</td>
<td>.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition from Other Sources</td>
<td>.504</td>
<td>-.149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization  
Rotation converged in 3 iterations

Table 12  Factor Analysis: Main Challenges in Children’s Literacy Acquisition

Table 13 presents the variance explained by the initial solution, extracted components and rotated components. Two factors in the initial solution have eigenvalues greater than 1. Together, they account for 49% of the variability in the original variables. There also remains possibility for a lot of unexplained variation. The rotated model makes some small adjustment to factor one with factor two left virtually unchanged.
Table 13  Total Variance Explained – Factor Analysis: Main Challenges in Children’s Literacy Acquisition

Table 14 outlines a factor analysis of responses relating to the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children. The first component registers highly responses relating to the need to improve curricular approaches, cross-curricular integration, teacher education, approaches to literacy with children in the mainstream, with exceptional ability and with special needs, and the importance of availability of appropriate educational resources. This could be interpreted as the school and curricular related considerations factor. Responses recognising the need to improve pupil attitudes, parental awareness, and multimedia approaches record higher in the second component than the other response options. This could be interpreted as the pupil specific considerations factor recognising the importance of pupil attitudes and the need to improve parental awareness of the ways in which they can assist in their children’s literacy acquisition.
Rotated Component Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Teacher Education</td>
<td>.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Curricular Approaches</td>
<td>.822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Cross-Curricular Integration</td>
<td>.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Literacy with Special Needs</td>
<td>.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Literacy with Children in Mainstream</td>
<td>.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Literacy with Children with Exceptional Ability</td>
<td>.462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Resources</td>
<td>.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Awareness</td>
<td>-.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Attitudes</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia</td>
<td>.259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization  
Rotation converged in 3 iterations

Table 14  Factor Analysis: Addressing the Literacy Needs of Children – Considerations for the Future

Table 15 presents the variance explained by the initial solution, extracted components and rotated components. Two factors in the initial solution have eigenvalues greater than 1. Collectively, they account for almost 50% of the variability in the original variables. There also remains scope for a lot of unexplained variation. The rotated model makes some small adjustment to factor one with factor two left virtually unchanged.
4.2.3.2 Hierarchical Cluster Analysis

Chart 6 outlines a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis of all responses to the online survey. It conveys a clustering of responses recognising the influence of parent and child cultural background and parent, child and school language background. In addition, it suggests relations between the impact of pupil specific learning needs, the availability of appropriate resources, and the impact of pupil enthusiasm, apprehension and abilities. It also depicts a clustering of responses recognising the need to improve teacher education, curricular approaches with children of differing abilities, pupil attitudes and the availability of appropriate resources, and responses acknowledging the influences of parental and family context and involvement, the support available to children at home, and the need to increase parental awareness.
In considering the findings from this research it is necessary to acknowledge the inter-relatedness between responses pertaining to the most influential factors affecting children’s literacy acquisition, the relevant challenges in the current context and the most important considerations for the future in addressing children’s literacy needs. Such associations are suggested by a review of the literature and in responses received from teaching professionals (Sections 4.2.3, 4.3). A table of correlations between
responses received in the online survey is presented in Table 32, Appendix B. Table 16 provides a summary of findings from a factor and hierarchical cluster analysis of responses to the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Analysis of Responses to Online Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors – Overall</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Support of Children with Specific Learning Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Multimedia Approaches with Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Parental and Family Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Gender/Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Positive Awareness (Parental Awareness and Pupil Attitudes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors Affecting the Acquisition of Literacy in Children</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Gender, Parent(s)’ Religious Background and Socio-economic Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Challenges in Children’s Literacy Acquisition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Pupil Attitudes and Abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ The Support Available to Children at Home and at School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addressing the Literacy Needs of Children – Considerations for the Future</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ School and Curricular Considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Pupil Specific Considerations (including the need to Improve Parental Awareness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hierarchical Cluster Analysis

- The Influence of Parent and Child Cultural Background
- The Influence of Parent, Child and School Language Background
- The Impact of Pupil Specific Learning Needs, Abilities, Enthusiasm, Apprehension, and the importance of the Availability of Appropriate Educational Resources
- The Importance of Improving Teacher Education, Curricular Approaches with Children with Differing Abilities, Pupil Attitudes and the Availability of Appropriate Educational Resources
- The Importance of Parental and Family Influences, the Support Available to Children at Home and the need to Increase Parental Awareness

Table 16  Summary – Analysis of Responses to Online Survey

4.2.3.3  Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of responses to the online survey was completed to compare responses from participants across different school settings. A Mann–Whitney U test was used to determine whether differences in responses were statistically significant (Section 3.9.1). Findings indicate that differences in response patterns were not statistically significant and suggest a consistency in responses received from teaching professionals across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil). Table 17 provides a summary of the main findings from a comparative analysis of responses to the online survey (Section 4.2).
A comparative analysis indicates that differences in response patterns from respondents across different school settings were not statistically significant.

Table 17  Summary – Comparative Analysis of Responses to Online Survey
4.3 Part II – Analysis of Research Interviews with Teaching Professionals

Table 18 outlines details relating to the individual participants in research interviews. In the process of data analysis (Section 3.9), each research participant was assigned a description, and a number (to distinguish between teachers designated with a similar description, for example, Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 2). In Sections 4.3.1.1–4.3.5, a short description is provided after each quotation to indicate the teacher who made the comment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Interview Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33 Interview Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Principal, Urban, DEIS (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, Teacher, Urban, DEIS (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Principal, Rural, Gaelscoil (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Teacher, Rural, Gaelscoil (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18  Research Interview Participants
The following sections provide an analysis of responses received in research interviews with teaching professionals in a variety of primary school settings (Section 3.7.2). In reading the following sections, it is important to note that where references are made to “teaching professionals” this implies that there was agreement in responses from most of the participants in the research interviews in relation to an issue. In some instances, it is indicated that responses from “teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)” were consistent. In others, it is noted that views expressed were specific to individual research participants or teaching professionals in particular school settings. A review of the data suggests that while teachers in different school settings elaborated on certain issues in greater detail, the findings suggest agreement and a consistency in responses from teachers across different school settings in relation to the questions addressed in the online survey and research interviews (Sections 4.2.3.3, 4.3.1.1–4.3.5).

The subsequent sections outline the responses received regarding the factors influencing the acquisition of literacy in children. Sections 4.3.1.1–4.3.5 present responses relating to specific themes derived from a thematic analysis of the research literature and data obtained in research interviews. These relate to parental and family influences (Section 4.3.1.1), language (Section 4.3.1.2), culture (Section 4.3.1.3) and socio-economic factors (Section 4.3.1.4). Section 4.3.2 outlines responses relating to the primary curriculum including responses regarding oral language (Section 4.3.2.1.1),
reading (Section 4.3.2.1.2), writing (Section 4.3.2.1.3) and differentiation in curricular implementation (Section 4.3.2.2). Section 4.3.3 presents responses relating to professional practice. Section 4.3.4 addresses responses relating to the associations between literacy and social and emotional learning and Section 4.3.5 presents responses from teaching professionals regarding assessment.

4.3.1 Factors Influencing the Acquisition of Literacy in Children

The following sections outline responses received in research interviews relating to the influences of parental and family context and involvement (Section 4.3.1.1), language (Section 4.3.1.2), culture (Section 4.3.1.3) and socio-economic factors (Section 4.3.1.4) in the acquisition of literacy in children.

4.3.1.1 Parental and Family Influences

Table 19 outlines the main research findings in relation to parental and family influences in children’s literacy acquisition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Findings</th>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ positive early literacy experiences and parental involvement encourage</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Hegarty &amp; Feeley, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2012; McCoy &amp; Cole, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children’s learning</td>
<td>Section 4.3.1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ parents are influential in supporting children’s reading habits and</td>
<td>teaching professionals in DEIS and non-DEIS school settings</td>
<td>Bedard, Horn, &amp; Garcia, 2011; Heckman &amp; Wax, 2004; Wasik &amp; Herrman, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homework routines</td>
<td>Section 4.3.1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ parental expectations, hopes and aspirations can affect a child’s</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Fan &amp; Chen, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation and engagement with literacy activities</td>
<td>Section 4.3.1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ parental attitudes towards academic achievement, homework and school</td>
<td>teaching professionals in DEIS and non-DEIS school settings</td>
<td>Flouri &amp; Buchanan, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attendance are influential factors in children’s literacy acquisition</td>
<td>Section 4.3.1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ parental and family influences can positively affect children’s attitudes</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Fan &amp; Chen, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>towards literacy and engagement with practices which facilitate the</td>
<td>Section 4.3.1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acquisition of literacy</td>
<td>Section 4.3.1.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ parental attitudes and support for their children’s learning influences</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Fan &amp; Chen, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievement in literacy irrespective of socio-economic circumstances</td>
<td>Section 4.3.1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ there are differences in the language experiences of children from</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Fan &amp; Chen, 2001; Flouri &amp; Buchanan, 2004; Hart &amp; Risely, 1995; Shiel et al., 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differing backgrounds</td>
<td>Sections 4.3.1.4, 4.3.2.1.1, 4.3.2.1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19  Main Findings: Parental and Family Influences
In research interviews, teaching professionals across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) described parental and family influences in the acquisition of literacy in children (Fan & Chen 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; McCoy & Cole, 2011; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999; Williams et al., 2009a) and noted the importance of parental involvement in facilitating positive literacy experiences for children.

*Children need to have positive early literacy experiences which will encourage them to seek out further learning opportunities and establish positive attitudes towards reading.*

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)

*The child can gain confidence and motivation from successful early literacy experiences.* (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

*Parental involvement is important to reinforce what is learned.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

*Parents have a role in assisting children in the formation of reading habits,* for example, paired reading or joining a library.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)
Parental support is very important in ensuring homework is completed. (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 2)

In their responses, teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools emphasised the importance of promoting conversations between parents and children (Kennedy et al., 2012).

Children should be included in conversations and asked for their opinion. (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Children need opportunities to engage in conversation with their parents, siblings and friends. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 2)

Where parents do not have time to spend with their children, opportunities to use oral language informally are missed, for example, talking around the dinner table, asking children what was going on in their day. (Female, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Differences in the nature of parental involvement and the need for the integration of literacy practices at home and at school (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) were acknowledged by principals and teachers across the different school settings. Interestingly, they recognised the influence of both the mother’s and father’s education in children’s literacy acquisition but suggested that parental interest levels, motivation and
involvement were also important and not always related to parental education levels.

Parents are involved in their children’s literacy in many different ways. The ways in which we understand parental involvement or family literacies can affect the ways in which we facilitate literacy programmes which involve parents.

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

We must acknowledge diversity in family forms and therefore diversity in family literacies. Families engage in differing literacy practices which vary across cultural, linguistic and social contexts.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

It is best when the home and school are working together, when literacy practices in the home and school are integrated.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

The level of education of both the mother and father are influential factors but what is more significant is the level of parental motivation, interest and involvement which may not be related to a parent’s level of education. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)
In addition, the importance of accurate, clear and effective communication between teachers and parents so that parents may be aware of ways in which they can support their child where possible was emphasised by teachers across the different school settings and is recommended by the *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

*There needs to be effective communication between parents and schools, as parents may not be clear on the methodologies and approaches which are now being used.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

*Parents need to be aware of how children acquire literacy so that they can facilitate children’s learning.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

Furthermore, the role of parents in communicating the value of literacy to their children was recognised by teaching professionals across the different school settings and has been recognised by sources in the research literature (Fan & Chen, 2001; McCoy & Cole, 2011). In this research, teaching professionals addressed the need for teachers, parents and policy makers to communicate the importance of literacy in relation to their lived experiences (Section 4.3.4; Bruner 1977; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978a) so that they may be aware of the value of language and
literacy in their lives. Such practices assist in maintaining children’s interest and intrinsic motivation (McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Pressley et al., 2003; Section 2.6) and are important for the promotion of positive attitudes towards literacy, life skills and life-long learning (Section 4.3.4; Calkins, 2001; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Rogers, 2011; UNESCO, 2008; Wells & Claxton, 2002).

There needs to be a similar message transmitted between teacher and pupil and between parent and pupil.

(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Parental and family values in the home can sometimes affect the ways in which families engage with the school and access services like the local library and other cultural amenities.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

If there are problems with parental attitudes at home, these can be difficult to overcome. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 9)

Parental support is important to encourage positive attitudes and to maintain motivation to achieve longer term goals.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)
Parental attitudes can affect children’s attitudes to homework, reading habits, school attendance and academic achievement.  
(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Interestingly, teachers across the different school settings commented on the impact of parent(s)’ own literacy levels. In some instances, parental literacy difficulties provided a barrier to children’s engagement with literacy while in others, parents encouraged their children to access opportunities to address such difficulties.

Parents’ own literacy levels in a language are an important factor in the degree to which they can assist their child at home.  
(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

Parents may have struggled with literacy themselves at school and so have a negative attitude towards literacy.  
(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Parents who have experienced difficulties may be even more motivated to ensure their child accesses opportunities to enable educational achievement.  (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)
It is noteworthy that the value and benefits of participation in literacy programmes for parents and children were recognised by teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings.

*Parents benefit from literacy programmes in schools in DEIS areas. They provide the opportunity to have a positive educational experience that parents may not have had when they were at school.*  
(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

*Literacy programmes can provide an opportunity for parents, children and the school to come together. They can encourage parents to get involved.*  
(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

### 4.3.1.2 Language

In this research, teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and *Gaelscoil*) recognised the need to assist children’s literacy and language acquisition in the early years of children’s lives and the opportunities and challenges presented by the multilingual context in which children currently acquire literacy (Central Statistics Office, 2012; Devine, 2009; 2005). Interestingly, principals and teachers noted the influence of parental attitudes to different languages and the need to provide positive language experiences for children.
There may be a range of languages in the home. Sometimes this can be confusing but sometimes it can make children more open and receptive to learning new languages.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

In homes where more than one language is spoken, parents and children are often more open to learning a new language. Where there is a differing language and culture, the learning of English or Irish is perceived as just another language.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

Where parents have a positive attitude or love for a language, this is communicated to children and can inspire them to learn and enjoy the language. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

We must consider the importance of language and certain languages to individual families and then facilitate learning accordingly.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)
In addressing the use of resources to assist children in their language acquisition (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012) teaching professionals across the different school settings acknowledged the potential provided by opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between schools.

We need resources to get children talking to each other, for example, games. Children need to be given the opportunity to interact and talk to each other and use vocabulary during enjoyable activities in different contexts.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

Methodologies and approaches for language teaching can be transferred across many differing languages and school settings.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

Collaboration between teachers in the school works very effectively for the benefit of teachers and pupils.

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Teachers can adapt approaches and methodologies that we use to teach Irish and other languages.

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)
Interestingly, principals and teachers across the different school settings specified the need to educate children about the uses of language, particularly oral language in a variety of contexts for different purposes (Section 4.3.2.1.1).

*Children need to practise language for a variety of different uses and contexts.* (Male, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

*Children and teachers need to be aware of the functions of language and the ways in which it can be used for different purposes.* (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 2)

*Children need to know that language is used differently in different situations, for example, sometimes we speak differently to different people. They need opportunities to practise this.*

(Female, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

### 4.3.1.3 Culture

In the research interviews, teaching professionals described the influence of culture on children’s literacy acquisition (Flewitt, 2008; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Rupley, Nichols, & Blair, 2008). It is noteworthy that principals and teachers across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) acknowledged that literacy and literature are important facets of Irish culture and form part of Irish heritage.
Children learn to speak, read and engage in literacy activities within their social and cultural environment.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 3)

Irish culture has a respect for literacy. We have a tradition of storytelling. (Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

Irish people are a literate people and value literacy; it is part of our heritage. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Furthermore, teachers from across the different school settings commented on the opportunities and challenges posed by a diversity of cultures.

Diversity is to be welcomed. Literacy material needs to be meaningful and connect with the lives of the children. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 3)

Diversity in cultures in the classroom provides many learning opportunities and the potential for cross-curricular integration. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

In some cases, parents need support in understanding the Irish culture and language. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)
In considering the associations between culture and literacy, and the representations of cultures in literacy materials, teaching professionals across the different school settings recognised the need to be aware of the impact of cultural references included in texts presented to children.

*Our own culture or similar cultures are represented in our reading material while other cultures which are now present in our schools are not represented to the same degree.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

*We need to have an increased awareness of how to include materials which reflect the culture of children from other countries.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

*We need to work towards cultural integration, and be aware of the need to maintain self-esteem and positive self-concept in children of differing cultures.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 2)

The need for children’s cultures to be normalised in texts was addressed by principals and teachers. In their responses, teaching professionals across the different school settings recognised the role of literacy in the expression of voices and narratives from different cultures (Bruner, 2004; Department of Education and Skills, 2000; Ochs & Capps, 1997; Sperling et al., 2011; Van Sluys et al., 2005).
Children’s respective cultures need to be normalised in the texts which children read, for example, Traveller culture. The use of story making is an effective way of facilitating this.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 8)

It is beneficial to use materials which feature specific cultural references to effectively engage with certain groups, for example, with children from differing ethnic cultures.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 9)

Opportunities should be provided to enable the child to find and express his/her voice within a certain culture and to explore the voices of children from other cultures.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

The children enjoy guest speakers from other cultures speaking about their experiences.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

Interestingly, principals and teachers across the different school settings noted differences in practices and expectations in families and pupils of different cultures and the need to reframe instruction to accommodate cultural diversity (Dail & Payne, 2010; Pahl, 2008).
Literary practices in the home differ between cultures, for example, the ways in which parents and children interact in the early years of a child’s life and the experiences children have in literacy before they come to school. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

Parental involvement in their children’s literacy activities and differing parental cultural practices can affect children’s learning and literacy. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 4)

Literacy meanings and practices differ in homes of different cultures. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

We need to present literacy instruction appropriately to children of differing cultures. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

Furthermore, the ways in which literacy can be used to facilitate pupils in self-exploration and to engage with important social and cultural issues (Bedard, Horn, & Garcia, 2011) were identified by the teaching professionals. In their responses, principals and teachers across the different school settings observed the positive and negative influences that different cultures can have on learning.
Literacy provides a means of self-exploration. Children can explore their family’s culture and other cultures through literacy.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 9)

Some children and families of certain cultures are highly motivated and focused on educational achievement. Education and learning are viewed as a means of bettering oneself personally and achieving occupational success. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

Parents and children may have negative attitudes towards certain cultures or aspects of certain cultures or certain types of literacies.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

Children can learn from children of different cultures who may have other interests and motivations.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Parental and child cultural background can influence interest levels in certain subjects, for example, Irish and History.

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)
The ways in which cultural influences can affect personal development, expectations and attitudes towards learning were acknowledged by teaching professionals across the different school settings.

*Cultural influences can affect behaviour. Children can be motivated to change when they are provided with examples of alternative behaviours.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

*In some instances, difficulties children have with literacy and behaviour are connected with cultural factors.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 3)

*There are cultural variations in expectations regarding school and homework.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

*If there are challenges in the culture at home towards school, education or literacy, then these can be difficult to overcome.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 5)

Interestingly, principals and teachers identified the ways in which peer culture (Corsaro & Nelson, 2003) could influence children’s attitudes and engagement with literacy.
If there is a culture of reading in the school; if children see each other reading then children will continue to read for themselves. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

The influence of peer culture is important for children of differing abilities who may need to be encouraged to participate in literacy activities. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

If children see their friends actively engaged in activities, they will want to get involved. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

4.3.1.4 Socio-economic Factors

The impact of socio-economic factors on children’s literacy acquisition was recognised by the majority of teaching professionals across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil). In the research interviews, principals and teachers referred to the importance of access to reading material and observed differences in the types of reading material and literacy experiences available to children in different socio-economic circumstances (Duncan & Seymour, 2000; Hart & Risely, 1995; Williams et al., 2009a).

Socio-economic factors are important for access to books and the provision of reading material in the home.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)
Socio-economic factors can affect the amount of books there may be at home. In some homes there may be very little to read. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 9)

The types of reading material available at home may differ due to socio-economic factors. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Socio-economic factors affect the ways in which parents can provide resources for homework and for school activities. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

In particular, principals and teachers across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) noted that socio-economic factors are influential in a pupil’s ability to change and noted the need for appropriate expectations.

Socio-economic factors can affect parental and child expectations. If change is to happen it will take time and may be over generations. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Socio-economic factors can affect attitudes to social change and a pupil’s ability to change. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)
However, the teaching professionals explained that socio-economic factors were not the most influential factors in the acquisition of literacy in children and described ways in which adverse effects could be overcome (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). It is noteworthy that the principals and teachers recognised the need to engage children from all backgrounds in reading and literacy activities. Interestingly, they acknowledged the benefits that literacy could provide to children in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. In this research, teaching professionals in DEIS schools, in particular, noted that the successful implementation of literacy programmes has shown how progress can be achieved in challenging circumstances (Weir & Denner, 2013). Although principals and teachers emphasised the need to be realistic in expectations, the role of the child’s own agency (Smyth et al., 2010) was acknowledged in pupils’ engagement with literacy activities.

*Socio-economic factors are not the main predictor; the attitudes, values and culture in the home are often more pertinent factors.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

*The influence of parenting style is more significant than socio-economic status; the ways in which parents interact and are involved in their child’s education and literacy.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
Parental involvement can positively influence achievement in literacy irrespective of socio-economic circumstances.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 9)

Poverty does not mean poverty in the parenting line. Parents do the best for their children even with very little resources.

(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Parents can bring their children to activities, access libraries and cultural events even when they do not have a lot of money.

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Parents can be motivated to do the best for their children regardless of socio-economic status and encourage children to enjoy opportunities which they may not have had.

(Female, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

If a child is motivated, interested and engaged in reading then the negative effects of socio-economic factors can be overcome, to some extent. If a child is determined to succeed and enjoys reading then, he/she will seek out learning opportunities, for example, access library books. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)
Engagement with literacy can provide some assistance to children in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. It can provide information to children about how they might solve their problems.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 8)

4.3.2 Primary Curriculum

The following sections outline responses received from teaching professionals in relation to oral language (Section 4.3.2.1.1), reading (Section 4.3.2.1.2) and writing (Section 4.3.2.1.3). Section 4.3.2.2 presents responses relating to differentiation in curricular implementation.

4.3.2.1.1 Oral Language

In the research interviews, 29 out of the 33 teaching professionals identified the need for greater emphasis on the acquisition of children’s oral language skills. Interestingly, principals and teachers across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) suggested that children should take advantage of opportunities to use oral language for a variety of purposes and recognised the importance of such opportunities in enabling children to become articulate and self-confident. In particular, interviewees commented on the importance of assisting children in acquiring oral language skills to express themselves and communicate effectively.
There is a need for the child to be able to articulate details about themselves and about their own lives.

(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

What matters is giving the children the opportunity and misneach (confidence) to speak. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

Children need to be provided with opportunities to speak for themselves and about themselves in different situations and to different people. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

In this research, teachers across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) commented on the need to encourage oral language from an early age and to be aware of problems which may hinder progress, for example, hearing difficulties or delays in children’s language acquisition. In addition, principals and teachers noted the need for a language rich environment and emphasised the importance of talking to children and in allowing children to talk to each other (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b). Furthermore, teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings commented on differences in the language experiences of children of differing backgrounds (Hart & Risely, 1995):
The range of language and number of words children are exposed to differ greatly from child to child. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

There is a difference between the amount of exposure that children from differing homes have to literacy. We are presuming they are all at the same level but they may not be. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Children need to hear positive statements at home and at school. There is a difference in the types of interactions experienced by children and parents in different families and in different areas. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Interestingly, teachers, particularly those in DEIS school settings, noted that educators and parents need to be aware of potential opportunities to enhance children’s language and literacy experiences.

In DEIS schools, oral language remains a priority as the language children hear at home or outside of school is frequently not acceptable in school. Children need opportunities to hear and use oral language appropriately in conversations and in different situations. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)
Many children in DEIS schools have a limited range of vocabulary. *Opportunities need to be provided for the introduction and input of vocabulary.* (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

Most notably, teaching professionals acknowledged and described difficulties that parents and children may have with pronunciation in different languages.

*Parents may have difficulties with their own literacy levels or with a new language. They may not be able to help children and they may not be able to identify mistakes.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 3)

*Math may be difficulties with pronunciation in a new language.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

*Mispronunciations are left uncorrected and so when children hear such expressions repeatedly, they are learned incorrectly.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 8)

It is noteworthy that principals and teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings emphasised the importance of facilitating children in their oral language acquisition to enable progress in reading, writing and other curricular areas (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012; National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). In addition, teaching professionals recommended the implementation of effective methodologies and approaches (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b; Kennedy et al., 2012; Shiel et al., 2012) as well as ongoing teacher education (Section 4.3.3) to assist teachers in addressing children’s difficulties.

Interestingly, teaching professionals noted the potential provided by cross-curricular integration (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999; Section 5.3.1.2.4); integrating oral language activities with reading and writing (Cooper, 2000; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012) and with other areas of the curriculum, for example, inquiry-based learning in science (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Goldschmidt & Jung, 2011; Guthrie et al., 2004). A noteworthy research finding that emerged from the research interviews relates to the recognition of the benefits of cross-curricular integration in music and drama, in promoting children’s expression and fluency in oral language (Heyning, 2010; Pane & Salmon, 2011), and in facilitating children’s social and emotional learning by enabling improvements in children’s self-concept and self-esteem (Section 4.3.4; Kennedy, 2008; Morgan, 2009; Williams et al., 2009a).
Oral language can be integrated across the curriculum. Children enjoy participating in drama and music and learning activities in these curricular areas can provide opportunities for the introduction and use of oral language in different contexts.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4

Children can learn and use oral language across different curricular areas. Children can be introduced to new vocabulary and use oral language in different contexts during science activities; completing experiments and in using an enquiry approach in science, history and geography projects. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)
4.3.2.1.2 Reading

Table 20 outlines the main research findings in relation to reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Main Findings</th>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>a broad range of appropriate reading material can encourage children’s engagement with literacy</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills, 2011; Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b; Kennedy et al., 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>teachers need to incorporate interactive teaching and supplementary material from a variety of sources in addition to school reading schemes in facilitating children’s literacy acquisition</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b; Kalman, 2008; Scribner, 1988; UNESCO, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>children can use reading as a resource for thinking and for reflection</td>
<td>teaching professionals in DEIS and non-DEIS schools</td>
<td>Kennedy et al., 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>teachers and children need to work increasingly towards the acquisition of higher order thinking skills</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b; Kalman, 2008; Scribner, 1988; UNESCO, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20 Main Findings: Reading

While the teaching professionals in this research were aware of a variety of sources in research and official literature which provide recommendations for best practice in reading instruction and observed a pedagogical concentration in this area of literacy acquisition (Section 2.5.1.2), it is important to note that the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 12) reported that one in ten children in Irish schools have serious difficulties in reading or writing (Section 4.3.2.1.3).
research interviews, teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) emphasised the importance of facilitating an environment that encouraged reading and for children to be active readers.

*It is important for children to see people reading around them, where reading is perceived as something one does to increase knowledge and intelligence, for enjoyment and information.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

*Children improve their reading by reading. It is important to provide opportunities for children to engage with different types of texts and enjoy different literacy experiences.*

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)

*Children enjoy ‘Drop Everything and Read’ and reading for specific purposes. They need to be active readers.*

(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
Children need to behave like ‘real readers.’ They need to engage with literacy in the ways in which people do in real life. They may pick up a book or interesting article, read it, think about it and it may impact on the way in which they respond to a situation in their lives. (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

In this research, principals and teachers across the different school settings recognised the need to engage children in reading by facilitating enjoyable literary experiences, for example, participating in workshops at libraries, cultural activities and visits from guest readers. In addition, teachers recommended the provision of opportunities for children to read for different purposes such as silent reading, reading for information or recreation, reading aloud and reading for special occasions. Furthermore, teachers across different school settings recommended a variety of organisational arrangements, for example, independent, pair and group work so that children can engage with texts and with each other (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b) and a diversity in approaches in the ways in which children respond to texts.

Children need to read in a range of genres, for different reasons. (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 2)
A lot of literacy teaching is textbook led in practice. We need to supplement reading schemes with additional resources and make teaching more interactive for children.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

We need to provide alternatives to ‘read the passage and answer the questions’ type responses to texts. Children need a variety of ways to respond to the text. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

In their responses, principals and teachers across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, Non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) commented that there are many opportunities available to teachers to further their education in literacy and reading instruction, that teachers were well informed in relation to an array of approaches and methodologies in the teaching of reading to children of differing abilities, and that teachers are successfully implementing these practices in schools. Interestingly, they recognised that reading comprehension was a challenge for pupils of both genders and for children of different backgrounds.

Children should be encouraged to use their higher order thinking skills, to engage with texts on different levels and to discuss the themes and characters which they come across in the stories they read. (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)
Comprehension is a challenge for children of differing backgrounds and for boys and girls. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 8)

The importance of understanding, accurately assessing and effectively addressing comprehension needs was emphasised by teaching professionals in research interviews.

Children may be able to decode but more needs to be done to ensure they can understand what is being presented...Children need a variety of comprehension strategies and opportunities to practice these in different contexts. We need to help children to understand the many uses of literacy in different situations.
(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

There is a plateau at functionality that stops short of higher order thinking skills. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

In considering the learning needs of children of mixed abilities, teaching professionals across the different school settings recommended a variety of strategies to assist children with comprehension and problem solving (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Duke et al., 2011; Dymock & Nicholson, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2012; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Interestingly, they acknowledged the benefits of regularly reviewing teacher expectations
of children and integrating children’s real life experiences (Braun & Froese, 1977) as appropriate.

*We need to connect children’s real life experiences with their learning so that children can meaningfully engage with texts.*

(Male, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

*Children can identify with cultural references which they see depicted in reading material. This can assist their appreciation of the text and comprehension of the story, characters and ways in which the material may be relevant to their own lives.*

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)

*We need a multi-strategy approach to assist children in improving their comprehension. Children need a variety of comprehension strategies and opportunities to engage with texts of different genres on many different levels.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

*We need to have different expectations for comprehension in children with differing abilities, for example, children with exceptional abilities should be encouraged to engage with challenging material and address issues raised in texts at an appropriate level.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
In addition, teaching professionals across the different school settings recognised the importance of appropriate and effective teacher education to assist teachers in implementing approaches and methodologies to improve children’s comprehension.

4.3.2.1.3 Writing

Table 21 outlines the main research findings in relation to writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Main Findings</th>
<th>Research Participants</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>the physical writing process promotes children’s gross and fine motor skills and manual dexterity</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (Rural, Urban, DEIS, and non-DEIS)</td>
<td>Fernald, 1943; Gillingham &amp; Stillman, 1997; Lerner, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>multisensory approaches have benefits for all pupils particularly children with specific learning needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>a language and print-rich environment provides interesting subject matter which children can incorporate in their writing</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (Rural, Urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢</td>
<td>children need to write in different genres and use a variety of approaches to maintain interest and motivation</td>
<td>teaching professionals across different school settings (Rural, Urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</td>
<td>Cope &amp; Kalantzis, 1993; Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b; Wilson, 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21  Main Findings: Writing

In this research, teaching professionals were provided with an opportunity to address writing; an important component in the acquisition of literacy, and referred to the ways in which the teaching of writing was implemented in schools. In their implementation of the English curriculum teachers need to improve children’s writing skills (NCCA, 2005). The teaching of writing is a significant problem according to reviews of the primary school English curriculum in Ireland and other sources (Shiel et al., 2014). Interestingly, teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings emphasised the importance of encouraging children to write about a variety of ideas and topics (Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b).

A multi-sensory approach to writing is best in the early years to assist children with their fine and gross motor skills.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
We need to provide children with opportunities to write creatively and to explore their own ideas and stories. We need to encourage them to express themselves in their writing and to improve their writing skills. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 2)

Writing can provide opportunities for expression, creativity and personal reflection. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Children need to be given opportunities for creative writing or free writing. We can assist them with presenting their work as they complete the writing process. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 4)

We need to ensure that re-drafting and editing is completed within an efficient timeframe to ensure children remain motivated and interested. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

In particular, teachers across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) emphasised the importance of appropriate selection in the types of writing tasks children were asked to complete and commented on the use of multimedia approaches to assist the writing process (Section 4.3.3).
In some instances, there is an overuse of the writing process.

Children need to complete a variety of different writing tasks, for example, multiple choice activities, letters, e-mails, journals, diaries.

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 2)

A structured approach will assist children in forming good writing habits and will facilitate and encourage the writing process.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Children need to write frequently so that they may be in a constant state of composition and writing becomes second nature.

(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

The use of multimedia can assist children in the presentation of their writing, for example, spelling and grammar checks, Powerpoint.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

4.3.2.2 Differentiation in Curricular Implementation

The diversity provided by the primary curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999) currently being implemented in Irish primary schools was welcomed by teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil). However, they also expressed some criticisms of the current curriculum and recognised the importance of selecting appropriate approaches and
methodologies to address the learning needs of children from different language and cultural backgrounds.

*The diversity provided by the curriculum is to be welcomed.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

*There is a need for appropriate differentiation of the curriculum.*

We cannot have the same curriculum for inner city Dublin as for West Kerry. It cannot work and it just doesn’t.

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

*The curriculum may not be as user friendly as it could be in terms of language relating to strands and objectives.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

*The strands of the curriculum are helpful but they are not specific enough from a teaching point of view. The methodologies and approaches are very good but we need more specific objectives for planning in oral language, reading and writing.*

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)

*Specific targets may be helpful in assisting teachers in assessing what they should cover with children of differing abilities.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
The curriculum provides a broad range of approaches and methodologies but teacher discretion needs to be used to make appropriate selections to suit different educational contexts.

(Male, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

A focussed implementation of the curriculum is required for teachers to address the specific learning needs of the pupils in their class.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Interestingly, principals and teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings noted that teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the pedagogical foundations and learning theories underpinning the primary curriculum (Bruner, 1977; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978a) can assist teachers in selecting effective teaching methodologies and approaches and be advantageous in enabling teachers to motivate children as they implement the current curriculum with children of differing abilities (Section 4.3.2).

*Teachers with a good knowledge of learning theories can select appropriate learning activities and plan for different pupil abilities and learning needs.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)
In this research, teaching professionals across the different school settings reported that they differentiated in their planning, teaching and assessment (Section 4.3.5) in order to meet children’s learning needs (Department of Education and Skills, 2005). While some teachers expressed concerns about the specificity of objectives, they also recognised the disadvantages in the provision of objectives or learning outcomes that were too specific. The need for appropriate expectations, early intervention, and diversity in approaches were noted by principals and teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings.

*It is important for teachers and schools to have realistic but high expectations in planning for literacy.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, Non-DEIS 2)

*Individually designed profiles and programmes should be created and implemented for children with specific learning needs.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 5)

In addition, teaching professionals emphasised the importance of ongoing teacher education, access to resources (Section 4.3.3) and the effective implementation of different curricular approaches (Department of Education and Skills, 2005; Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999a) to address children’s learning needs. Interestingly, principals and teachers acknowledged that appropriate early intervention and differentiation have an important role to
play in maintaining a child’s self-concept and self-esteem (Williams et al., 2009a) and suggested that children should be encouraged to incorporate their own specific interests, talents and abilities. Furthermore, principals and teachers in both rural and urban schools suggested that children with exceptional ability need to be appropriately challenged across a variety of competencies and skills and identified the cognitive and social benefits of providing children with opportunities to engage and connect with each other, for example, in groups or by using multimedia (Colangelo, 2002; Gross, 2004; Kesner, 2008; Laura, 2008; Laura & Smith, 2009). 

In DEIS schools, the levels can be too low for children with exceptional ability. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 3)

Provisions should be made for children with greater ability and maturity. (Female, Teacher, Urban, Non-DEIS 5)

Although not the main focus of this research, findings refer to the issue of gender and its relevance in the acquisition of literacy in children (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1). Interestingly, the majority of teaching professionals across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) expressed the view that there were no differences in vocabulary between girls and boys. This findings concurred with the research findings from the Growing Up in Ireland study (Williams et al., 2009a, p. 3), which reported that girls and boys had a similar percentage of correct scores on vocabulary
tests (67% and 68% respectively). However, teaching professionals across the different school settings recognised the need to approach literacy with boys and girls in different ways and the need for appropriate content and material which would interest and motivate children to engage with literary texts.

4.3.3 Professional Practice

In research interviews, the teaching professionals addressed various aspects of professional practice, including the importance of teacher education, the benefits of a whole school approach to literacy acquisition, the access and availability of appropriate resources, and multimedia approaches to literacy (Sections 5.3.1.1, 5.3.2).

It is noteworthy that teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings emphasised the importance of teacher education to enable them to differentiate adequately for the range of abilities which present in the contemporary classroom and to ensure teachers are kept informed of recommendations for best practice (Section 2.5). In addition, the teaching professionals acknowledged the need for further teacher education to enable teachers to teach children with exceptional abilities and children with specific learning difficulties, to implement resources and initiatives effectively and appropriately, and to assist children in improving their comprehension. Moreover, principals and teachers across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) recognised the benefits of participating in different teacher education courses each year.
and of sharing experiences and expertise. Interestingly, the observation was made by principals in non-DEIS schools that opportunities for further teacher education similar to those available to teachers in DEIS schools should be accessible to teachers in all schools.

Support should be accessible to all teachers, particularly for teachers working with children with specific learning needs or teaching children with challenging behaviour.

(Female, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

The focus should not be on rolling out initiatives. It should be on training the teacher as that is precisely where the transformation is going to take place. (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Encouragingly, principals in this research observed that teachers were actively engaging in further teacher education and were enthusiastic in their implementation of recommended teaching approaches and methodologies.

Teachers are well prepared and open to new ideas and new ways of learning. (Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)
It is noteworthy that principals and teachers across the different school settings emphasised the need to consider the impact of teacher’s different personalities and teaching styles and the effects of teacher-pupil interaction (Rushton et al., 2009), for example, the communication of attitudes and the use of appropriate language in communicating learning intentions and expectations to children. In their responses, teaching professionals described effective ways in which the value of literacy can be communicated to children, for example, the presence of teachers enthusiastic about their subject and their provision of stimulating learning environments (Cambourne, 2001; Elias et al., 1997; Wray, 1999).

A diversity in teaching styles can provide a multitude of ways in which to engage with a diversity in learning styles.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Teachers need to be aware of the importance of teacher-pupil interaction, and educate themselves in ways in which their interaction can have a positive effect on children’s learning, for example, questioning styles, oral feedback.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)
Teachers need to model a positive attitude to learning to encourage pupils to adopt a positive approach to learning.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 2)

Teachers need to be aware of the language which they use in instructions in presenting material, providing feedback to children, and the effect it may have on children’s learning.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

In teaching children of different abilities, teachers need to be aware of the ways in which learning intentions and expectations are communicated to children. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

Another notable finding that emerged from this research relates to the benefits of a whole school approach in supporting children’s literacy acquisition (Section 5.3.1.1). Interestingly, teaching professionals across the different school settings acknowledged that the vision of the principal had an important influence in directing and implementing a school’s approach to literacy and recognised the need for co-operation and collaboration between teachers.

The vision and support of the principal is important in the implementation of a whole school approach to literacy.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
There can be co-operation and collaboration among teachers with different expertise, skills and knowledge. (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

We need to foster a positive attitude towards literacy when children are young and ensure that they continue to engage as they progress through the school. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

It is best when there is consistency, when the whole school is working together. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

Furthermore, the teaching professionals across different school settings recognised the importance of appropriate expectations and communication among teachers.

Low expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies can be perpetuated between classes. (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)

Teachers need to plan together and individually and communicate regularly so that children can achieve their potential.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)
In expressing their views, teaching professionals observed that deficiencies and lack of continuity in whole school planning for children’s learning can make it more difficult for children to achieve their potential.

Table 22 outlines the main research findings in relation to the availability of appropriate educational resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Availability of Appropriate Educational Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Findings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ children require access to appropriate educational resources to achieve their potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ effective literacy programmes should be made available to all schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ children require continued access to ‘real books’ and to library resources which are appealing and relevant to their needs, interests, and curricular objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ a school’s main reading scheme should be supplemented with complementary resources as appropriate; a wide selection and variety of graded reading material in various genres, regular visits to libraries and the appropriate use of ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ effective management of time and human resources and adequate and relevant continuing teacher education can assist teachers and their pupils in obtaining optimum benefits from available resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ resources can be used to provide an authentic context in which literacy instruction can be effectively integrated across many different curricular areas, for example, enquiry based learning in SESE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
multimedia enhances teaching and learning for pupils across different educational settings

multimedia can present materials in different ways enabling children to access new or difficult content in English and as Gaeilge

multimedia approaches must be incorporated in an effective manner with clear educational objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 22</th>
<th>Main Findings: Availability of Appropriate Educational Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In this research, all the teaching professionals recognised the need for a diverse range of appropriate resources including multi-level texts, suitable for children of differing abilities and that learning material should be sufficiently challenging to engage children and sustain their interest. In particular, teaching professionals recognised the necessity to prioritise according to children’s specific learning needs and emphasised the importance of human resources. Interestingly, the observation was frequently made by principals and teachers across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) that the most important resource is the skill set of the teacher. Furthermore, principals in non-DEIS schools noted that, in some instances, current teacher-pupil ratios inhibit the implementation of certain programmes, resources, approaches and methodologies.</td>
<td>Coiro et al., 2008; Flewitt, 2008; Gardner, 1993; Marsh, 2011; McCoy et al., 2012, p. 43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current economic conditions have had an impact on the availability and allocation of resources and affect decisions principals and teachers have to make in relation to the provision of resources for children with specific learning needs.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

Schools can work together to implement literacy programmes, sharing resources and expertise.

(Male, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 1)

Children with exceptional ability need to be appropriately challenged. Where resources are scarce, children with specific learning needs are often a priority.

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

The implementation of multimedia approaches in literacy was addressed by research participants in the interviews. The majority of teaching professionals across the different school settings recognised the benefits of multimedia for teachers and children, for example, to enable access to resources and information, to facilitate efficient and effective communication with other pupils, teachers and schools, and to present learning material in engaging and enjoyable ways.
Multimedia provides an effective way of communicating with other schools and pupils. (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)

Multimedia can make learning more attractive and appealing and can make texts more accessible for children with specific interests and learning needs. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

Multimedia can be used to motivate the child and provide children with a means of expressing their voice in an innovative and creative way. (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 2)

The use of multimedia approaches and digital literacy reflects what the children can do in real life. They can provide real life learning opportunities. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

There is a need for a variety of resources and multimedia resources as Gaeilge to ensure children can avail of the benefits of interactive resources and can be enabled to achieve their full potential. (Female, Principal, Rural, Gaelscoil 2)
In addressing the implementation of multimedia approaches, teachers across the different school settings emphasised the need to use multimedia appropriately and to vary classroom organisational arrangements so that children are actively learning:

*Teachers’ discretion needs to be used to implement multimedia appropriately and effectively.*

(Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 1)

*Teachers need to be clear about learning objectives and how multimedia may assist in achieving learning outcomes.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

*We need to ensure that we use differing organisational strategies when using interactive whiteboards to make sure children are actively learning. Multimedia resources should be used as a teaching aid. While they are of huge benefit, they will not replace quality one-to-one teaching.* (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Interestingly, teachers across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and *Gaelscoil*) elaborated on ways in which multimedia approaches are of benefit to children of differing abilities and referred to the use of Powerpoint to make presentations, the use of spelling and grammar checks, and computer programmes for grammar exercises. In
addition, principals and teachers recognised that interactive whiteboard and kinaesthetic activities can be incorporated to facilitate multiple entry points to learning and that multimedia approaches are beneficial for all pupils, particularly children with specific educational needs and exceptional ability. In their responses, teaching professionals identified the need for teachers to evaluate critically the material accessed on multimedia and the implementation of health and safety guidelines when using multimedia with children.

4.3.4 Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning

The majority of teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) acknowledged the value of social and emotional learning in assisting children’s literacy acquisition. Interestingly, their responses suggest that children’s literacy acquisition can also assist children’s social and emotional learning. In this research, teaching professionals recognised the importance of pupil attitudes, in particular, in influencing children’s literacy acquisition (Charts 4 and 5, Sections 4.2.2.2, 4.2.2.3). Table 23 outlines the main research findings in relation to the associations between the acquisition of literacy and social and emotional learning.
## Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning

### Main Findings

- Emotions impact on motivation, engagement in literacy and learning activities, work ethic, commitment, and school success.
- An enthusiasm for literacy and learning modelled by the teacher and all members of school staff is helpful in encouraging positive attitudes towards learning in children.
- Teachers need to motivate children and facilitate appropriate learning opportunities in literacy.
- Positive teacher-pupil interactions are important in promoting positive attitudes towards literacy, in engaging children in literacy activities and in supporting children’s progress.
- Early intervention and literacy programmes which provide for pupils from a diverse range of language and cultural backgrounds can promote children’s oral language, communication skills, and SEL.
- Reading needs to be encouraged as a thinking skill.
- Reading can inform children of ways of approaching their own problems.
- Engagement with literacy can provide an alternate focus and perspective from which one can view their own situation.
- Literacy can facilitate a connection between children who may be in similar circumstances or need to address similar issues or challenges.
- Peer culture influences pupil attitudes towards literacy, engagement with literacy practices, participation in literary activities, the seeking out of further learning opportunities, motivation and, in some instances, achievement in literacy assessments.

### Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Teaching Professionals Across Different School Settings (Rural, Urban, DEIS, Non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil)</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1.2</td>
<td>Cambourne, 2001; Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2005; Copple &amp; Bredekamp, 2009; Department of Education and Science, 2005; Elias et al., 1997; Guerra &amp; Bradshaw, 2008; Morgan, 2009; Rushton, Juola-Rushton, &amp; Larkin, 2009; Williams et al., 2009a; Wray, 1999; Zins et al., 2004</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3.3</td>
<td>Guthrie &amp; Anderson, 1999; Kennedy, 2008; McTigue, Washburn, &amp; Liew, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Pajares, 1996; Payton et al., 2008; Pressley et al., 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3.4</td>
<td>Corsaro &amp; Nelson, 2003</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### References

- Cambourne, 2001
- Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2005
- Copple & Bredekamp, 2009
- Department of Education and Science, 2005
- Elias et al., 1997
- Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008
- Morgan, 2009
- Rushton, Juola-Rushton, & Larkin, 2009
- Williams et al., 2009a
- Wray, 1999
- Zins et al., 2004
- Guthrie & Anderson, 1999
- Kennedy, 2008
- McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009
- Morgan, 2009
- Pajares, 1996
- Payton et al., 2008
- Pressley et al., 2003
- Corsaro & Nelson, 2003
SEL interventions in literacy are particularly useful with children with specific learning needs and children of exceptional ability, and can assist personal development.

Change is more likely and more sustainable when other supports (such as positive parental, family, peer influences and teacher-pupil interactions) enable it to occur and continue.

All pupils should be encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards literacy.

| SEL interventions in literacy are particularly useful with children with specific learning needs and children of exceptional ability, and can assist personal development |
| principals and teachers across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, and non-DEIS) Section 4.3.4 |
| Boutot, 2011; Colangelo, 2002; Durlak et al., 2011; Gross, 2004; Jones et al., 2010; Kesner, 2008; Laura, 2008; Laura & Smith, 2009; McKeough et al., 2008; Payton et al., 2008; Scattone, 2007 |
| Change is more likely and more sustainable when other supports (such as positive parental, family, peer influences and teacher-pupil interactions) enable it to occur and continue |
| teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) Sections 4.3.4, 5.3.2 |
| McCoy et al., 2012 |

Table 23 Main Findings: Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning

The benefits of using social and emotional learning initiatives that integrate literacy to address issues such as parental separation, loss and bereavement, bullying and low self-esteem were recognised by teaching professionals across the different school settings. In their comments, teachers in DEIS school settings, in particular, noted that literacy provided children with a space for innovation and creative freedom.

*Literacy can have an important role in creating a space for children to reflect and create change in their lives – even if in only part of their lives.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)
Literacy can provide a space for expression, creativity and innovation.  
(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

In their responses, principals and teachers elaborated on the ways in which the acquisition of literacy could connect children with other children, and life experiences could be shared. In addition, teaching professionals suggested that literacy can enable one to access important social opportunities and engage with peers.

*Children can know that they are not on their own. They can know that there are children like them in the world.*  
(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 5)

*Literacy can assist children in finding their own voice and can provide an effective means of communication and expression.*  
(Female, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

*Literacy can provide access to worlds with which the reader is not in contact.*  
(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

*Reading and writing provide a means of social engagement. Without them, one is greatly inhibited as they are excluded from the print world. They provide access to primary, secondary and lifelong learning opportunities.*  
(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)
Literacy can provide a medium through which like-minded peers can connect, communicate and engage with one another.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

It is the medium through which children are able to speak, discuss and think about things. Literacy assists children in being articulate, engaging in dialogue, reflecting and thinking about what they are doing and can be of benefit in assisting children in changing their behaviour. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Literacy can inform pupils of how to change themselves or their situation. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 3)

Literacy can educate pupils about their rights and responsibilities as citizens and can promote social responsibility.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Interestingly, teaching professionals recognised that the acquisition of literacy provides access to other worlds, a means of metaphorical escape (Scribner, 1988), for children or individuals in difficult circumstances. In their responses, the teaching professionals also recognised that engagement with literacy can also lead to the discovery and implementation of problem-solving strategies which readers can apply to their own lives, for example,
self-regulation strategies to encourage emotional stability and resilience (Bear & Watkins, 2006; Elias et al., 1997; Payton et al., 2008; Section 2.6).

Furthermore, teaching professionals from across the different school settings acknowledged the ways in which literacy acquisition could improve self-concept and promote self-esteem which could in turn affect personal development. Such observations and assertions are in keeping with the rationale underpinning many SEL programmes which operate on the premise that increasing self-esteem, self-awareness and self-management can enable children to change their behaviour (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2010; Payton et al., 2008). Their responses convey that literacy was recognised by principals and teachers as an effective medium through which the acquisition of higher-order thinking skills and life-long learning could occur as addressed by Kalman (2008), Scribner (1988), UNESCO (2011), and Rogers (2011).

4.3.5 Assessment

The appropriate and effective use of assessment was addressed by the teaching professionals in research interviews as it is an important issue in the context of the current policy climate at primary level. In their responses, teaching professionals across the different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) recognised the need for teachers to exercise professional judgement in their selection and implementation of differing modes of instruction and assessment (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, pp. 73-84; Department of Education and Skills, 2005;
Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b). In particular, principals and teachers acknowledged the importance of effective assessment at a classroom and whole school level (Black & Williams, 1998; Brookhart, 2003; Shepard, 2006; Tierney, 2006), identified the need for an awareness of the effect of teacher’s own perceptions and practices relating to the administration of assessments, questioning styles and assessment methods (Brown, 2004; Lai & Waltman, 2008) and emphasised the importance of appropriate teacher expectations (Department of Education and Skills, 2005).

We need to implement effective assessment in the classroom and at a whole school level and provide children with constructive feedback so that children can correct their mistakes and make progress. (Male, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

We need to be aware of self-fulfilling prophecies and set appropriate expectations. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

Interestingly, teaching professionals from across the different school settings emphasised the importance of effective communication of expectations to children, in the implementation of assessments and the interpretation of results. In addition, principals and teachers reiterated the
need for efficient communication between teachers, teachers and pupils, and teachers and other relevant support agencies.

We need to have appropriate expectations and communicate these effectively to children. (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 2)

We need to share the learning intentions and the success criteria with children at the beginning of the lesson so that children are clear about what is expected of them.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

Information received from assessments needs to be effectively and efficiently used to plan for future teaching and learning, in the classroom and at a whole school level.

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

In particular, teaching professionals emphasised the importance of communication in effectively addressing pupil apprehension towards certain modes of assessment. In their responses, principals and teachers from the different school settings commented that early intervention, in most instances, is required so that needs are assessed and appropriate interventions implemented before needless damage is done to children’s self-esteem and self-efficacy. Many sources in the research literature have addressed the importance of maintaining children’s self-concept (Williams
et al., 2009a, p. 80), the importance of self-awareness and the need to foster self-esteem (Bear & Watkins, 2006; Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2005; Payton et al. 2008; Section 2.6). Furthermore, principals and teachers recognised the need to take pro-active and preventative measures where necessary in the implementation of assessment for learning. In addition, teachers across the different school settings emphasised the importance of enabling children to experience success and ensuring that children were not negatively stereotyped or “labelled.” In addressing these issues, the teaching professionals recognised the need to change organisational groupings regularly according to children’s progress.

_We need a focus on prevention rather than remediation._

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

_If children do not succeed quickly, they will tune out. Attitudes will be established and they will be increasingly difficult to overcome unless intervention occurs at an early stage._

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 8)

_There is a need to re-arrange groupings very regularly to facilitate progress achieved._ (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
In this research, principals and teachers across the different school settings reiterated the importance of a pro-active approach to assessment for learning as incorporated in the primary curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999, Section 2.5) and as addressed by the inspectorate and many sources in the research literature (Clarke, 2005; Department of Education and Skills, 2005; Shepard 2009). The benefits of formative assessment, the provision of constructive feedback to assist children’s engagement with literacy, and the need to encourage effective study and reading habits when children are young were recognised by teaching professionals and supported by sources in the research literature (Bedard, Horn, & Garcia, 2011; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Heckman & Wax, 2004).

*We need to implement formative assessment to encourage children's engagement with reading and to promote effective study and reading habits when children are young.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

The importance of assessing children accurately and identifying specific learning needs was addressed by teaching professionals across the different school settings.
We need to be mindful of what we need to assess and how best to do this for the benefit of the teacher and pupil.

(Male, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 1)

Sometimes there is a divide between where the children are at and where teachers perceive them to be in terms of their literacy development. There is a need for appropriate and accurate assessment to address this and a willingness on the teacher’s part to acknowledge the pupil’s current learning needs.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Very often children with literacy difficulties are looked at as a collective group. Individual difficulties are not identified or addressed appropriately and effectively.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 5)

We need initial assessment, the identification of strengths and weaknesses, explicit teaching and teacher intervention, with the teacher assisting as appropriate, leading to the mastery of a specific skill. Progress needs to be monitored and reinforced post-testing.

(Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 2)
In this research, teachers across the different school settings addressed the assessment needs of children of differing ability and the importance of assessing children in appropriate ways.

*Objectives need to be appropriately set for children of differing ability.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

*Oral language objectives can be too low for children with exceptional ability. These children need to be challenged and given the opportunities to speak and articulate their views on subjects that interest them.* (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 4)

In addition, principals and teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings suggested that formal assessment should begin at an earlier age and recognised the need for an awareness of the effect of references to culture and gender in assessments presented to children.

*We need to be aware of references to culture and gender in the assessments which children complete; their effect on children’s engagement with the assessment and the interpretation of children’s performance in these assessments.*

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)
It is interesting to note that principals and teachers across the different school settings recommended a holistic approach to children’s assessment and recommended the use of profiles to assess pupils’ strengths and identify specific learning needs.

_We need to look at the whole child and facilitate learning in many different areas._ (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

### 4.4 Part III – Analysis of Research Questionnaires with Children

Table 24 outlines details relating to the participants who completed research questionnaires (Section 3.7.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questionnaires with Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>115 Research Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9 – 12 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, Urban (83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, Rural (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, Rural (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24 Research Participants in Questionnaires with Children

In the process of data analysis (Section 3.9), each research participant was assigned a description, and a number (to distinguish between children designated with a similar description, for example, Child, Male, Urban 23). A short description is provided after each quotation to indicate the child who made the comment. The following sections provide an
analysis of responses received in questionnaires with children (Section 3.7.3), presented in table form. These responses relate to oral language (Section 4.4.1.1), reading (Section 4.4.1.2), writing (Section 4.4.1.3), and the associations between literacy and personal transformation (Section 4.4.1.4).

### 4.4.1.1 Oral Language

Table 25 provides an analysis of responses relating to oral language. It refers to responses received when children were asked if they were given enough opportunities to speak in school and if they needed more help with speaking at school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral Language</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities to Speak in School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(69/115)</td>
<td>(46/115)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help with Speaking at School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(27/115)</td>
<td>(79/115)</td>
<td>(9/115)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25  Oral Language – Children’s Responses

In their responses, children expressed the need for opportunities to improve their spoken English and pronunciation within a whole class and small group setting. In addition, children commented that they enjoyed talking to each other, participating in pair, group and whole class share sessions and making presentations.
Sometimes I need help saying the new words.

(Child, Male, Rural 14)

I like showing things to the class and talking about it.

(Child, Male, Urban 23)

I enjoy presenting to the class and having them ask questions.

(Child, Female, Rural 8)

4.4.1.2 Reading

This section provides an analysis of children’s responses in relation to reading. It outlines responses relating to the availability of books in the home, the practices of reading at home and at school, children’s attitudes and feelings towards reading, the types of reading material children accessed, perceived gender differences in reading, cultural references in reading material and the importance of reading.

When the children were asked about the availability of books at home, 93% (107) responded that there were books to read at home, 7% (8) responded that there were not. Research findings were in line those reported in the recent *Growing Up in Ireland* study, where most parents (56%) said that in excess of 30 children’s books were available to their 9-year-old within the home; 10% of 9-year-olds’ homes had fewer than 10 books (Williams et al., 2009b, p. 5). In their responses, children noted a range of material including children’s story books, school books, books belonging to
their parents and siblings, cookery books, picture books, encyclopaedias and other reference books. Of the children who participated in this research, 38% (43) read with their parents at home, 51% (59) did not and 11% (13) sometimes read with their parents at home. Interestingly, 60% (69) stated that they were a member of a library and 40% (46) responded that they were not. These findings were similar to those conveyed in the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, which reported that approximately two-thirds of parents (65%) used a public library with their child (Williams et al., 2009b, p. 5). In describing their experiences, children commented that they enjoyed visiting the library, spending time there, selecting books, and participating in interesting workshops. In addition, children remarked that the library provided positive experiences and facilitated them in establishing reading habits and pursuing new interests. Table 26 presents a summary of responses relating to the support received by children with reading at home and at school respectively. The children were also asked about their attitudes and feelings in relation to reading. Responses suggest that most of the children in this research (80%) enjoyed reading.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help with Reading at Home</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(92/115)</td>
<td>(23/115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with Reading at School</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(80/115)</td>
<td>(35/115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy Reading</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(92/115)</td>
<td>(23/115)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26  Reading – Children's Responses

When asked, 69% (80) of the children responded that they were enthusiastic about reading, 2% (2) responded that they sometimes were, 29% (33) responded that they were not. Moreover, 77% (88) of the children indicated they had a positive attitude towards reading, 23% (27) did not. These research findings concurred with those of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study which reported that most children (60%) like reading (McCoy et al., 2012, p. 44). In their responses, children commented on what they thought was the best thing about reading:

- You *find out interesting things.*  (Child, Male, Urban 47)

- You will have a *better imagination.*  (Child, Male, Urban 25)

*Understanding the story and picturing it in your head.*  
(Child, Male, Rural 12)
It is when it is interesting and when you get better vocabulary and you discover new worlds and words. (Child, Male, Urban 35)

You can imagine what it would feel like to be in the book and be completely distracted from what is happening. (Child, Female, Rural 10)

The research findings indicate that most children welcomed opportunities to engage with literacy and suggest that children were enthusiastic about literacy as they recognised the immediate and long term benefits of reading. Moreover, children commented that reading was enjoyable, encouraged learning, promoted understanding and provided opportunities for children to use their imagination. Children’s knowledge and awareness of such benefits and subsequent enthusiasm for the subject suggest the importance of promoting intrinsic motivation (McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Pressley et al., 2003; Section 2.6) and relate to the concept of metacognition (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994) where children are aware of how they learn and consequently see the value in engaging in literacy practices to assist their learning. It is interesting to note that children commented that they enjoyed reading with their parents and that they received good support from mothers, fathers, other adults and siblings. In addition, they commented that they received many opportunities
to read at school and that they enjoyed reading independently and guided reading.

The children in this research were asked if they felt nervous about reading. Overall, 72% (83) of the children responded that they did not, 19% (22) responded that they sometimes did and 9% (10) responded that they did feel nervous about reading. When asked if they find reading difficult, 67% (77) responded that they did not, 25% (29) responded that they sometimes did and 8% (9) responded that they find reading difficult. The issues of reading aloud and in front of peers and difficulties with new words were noted when children were asked to comment on what they found most difficult in reading. When children identified challenges they experienced in reading, they referred to difficulties they had with the comprehension of words and phrases.

*Reading in front of people.* (Child, Male, Urban 8)

*It is difficult to read in another language.* (Child, Male, Urban 75)

*Reading words you don’t know.* (Child, Female, Rural 9)

*Understanding words in a sentence and pronunciation.*

(Child, Male, Urban 14)

*Words that you do not understand.* (Child, Female, Rural 5)
The views articulated by children in this research were similar to those expressed in the recent *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Williams et al., 2009a). Whereas girls were more positive than boys about reading in that study (64% of girls “always liking reading” compared with 53% of boys, McCoy et al., 2012, p. 44), in this research the differences in responses from boys and girls relating to attitudes to reading, such as, being enthusiastic about reading, feeling nervous, having a positive attitude, or finding reading difficult, were not found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.2$ df = 1, n = 115, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$).

In this research, children were asked about the types of reading materials they read most frequently. Overall, 76% (87) children responded that they read from books, magazines or printed sources most frequently and 24% (28) responded that they read from a computer screen most frequently. When asked if they would prefer to read a book or watch television, 38% (43) stated that they would prefer to read a book, 51% (59) stated they would prefer to watch television and 11% (13) were undecided. Interestingly, differences in responses from boys and girls were not statistically significant (54% (8) of girls preferred to read a book, 35% (35) of boys preferred to read a book; 33% (5) of girls preferred to watch television, 54% (54) of boys preferred to watch television, 13% (2) of girls and 11% (11) of boys were undecided; $\chi^2 = 2.2$ df = 1, n = 102, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$).
The children were also asked if they preferred to read a book or play a computer game. Overall, 35% (40) of the children preferred to read a book, 63% (73) preferred to play a computer or video game and 2% (2) were undecided. Significantly more girls than boys preferred to read a book than to play a computer game (67% (10) of girls preferred to read a book, 30% (30) boys preferred to read a book, 2% (2) of boys were undecided; $\chi^2 = 2.2 \text{ df} = 1, n = 113$, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$). It is noteworthy that significantly, more boys than girls stated that they would prefer to play a computer game than read a book (68% (68) of boys preferred to play a computer game, 33% (5) girls preferred to play a computer game, 2% (2) of boys were undecided; $\chi^2 = 2.2 \text{ df} = 1, n = 113$, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$). Their responses indicate that the children acknowledged the value of reading from ‘real books’. In this research, children expressed positive attitudes towards multimedia and welcomed opportunities to include multimedia activities in their approaches to learning. Interestingly, their responses indicate that the children were aware of differences in reading from printed texts and interactive books.

*I like reading real books when they are colourful and interesting and you can take them away with you.* (Child, Male, Urban 74)
When you read real books you have to picture things yourself, which can be fun because you can imagine what it is like to be in the book. If you read on a computer, then you see it the way someone else sees it, which can be good, but it can be different to what you might have thought. (Child, Male, Rural 10)

It is fun to read on the computer where you can see pictures and hear the sounds and you can get help with words you don’t know. (Child, Male, Urban 18)

In this research, children were asked if there were gender differences in reading, for example, reading habits, choices of reading material, differences in achievement in literacy. Overall, 83% (95) suggested that there were, 13% (15) stated that there were not and 4% (5) were undecided. Interestingly, significantly more boys than girls thought that there were gender differences in reading ($\chi^2 = 2.2$ df = 1, n = 110, at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$). Responses from the children indicate mixed opinions:

There is a different choice of subjects between girls and boys. (Child, Male, Urban 79)

Boys prefer action and adventure, girls like stories. (Child, Male, Urban 15)
Girls read loads and loads together, boys read a small bit at a time.  
(Child, Female, Rural 3)

There are differences as boys and girls do not read the same thing and there are different levels.  (Child, Female, Rural 12)

Everyone reads the same way.  (Child, Male, Urban 14)

In addition, children were asked about cultural references and if they saw people from their country in reading material. Overall, 70% (80) of the children stated that they did, 23% (27) stated that they did not and 7% (8) stated that they sometimes did. In their responses, the children commented on the importance of cultural references in the books they read and the representation of differing cultures around the world:

Sometimes people are more interested in other people’s culture.  
(Child, Male, Urban 71)

There are not a lot of Irish people in the books we read.  
(Child, Male, Urban 64)

It is good to read about people all over the world.  
(Child, Male, Urban 58)
These research findings indicate that children were aware of the benefits of reading, including the enjoyment of being introduced to new areas of learning and interests. When asked if reading is important, 90% (104) of the children indicated that it is and 10% (11) indicated that it is not. In their responses, children specified ways in which reading is important:

- *You can learn new things.* (Child, Male, Rural 9)

- *It helps me speak English better.* (Child, Male, Urban 18)

- *You have to know reading for a job.* (Child, Male, Urban 53)

- *It is important to know what signs and posters mean.*

  (Child, Male, Urban 28)

- *You need to read to get information.* (Child, Female, Rural 4)

### 4.4.1.3 Writing

Table 27 provides an analysis of responses in relation to writing. It refers to responses from children when asked if they receive enough help with writing at home and if they receive enough help with writing at school.
In this research, most children reported that they received sufficient help with writing at home and at school. In particular, the children acknowledged that they received good support from their parents and teachers, other adults and siblings. These research findings were similar to those in the *Growing Up in Ireland* study which reported that 72% of mothers and partners always provided assistance, or regularly assisted with the child’s homework (Williams et al., 2009a, p. 19). In their responses, children referred to assistance received in teacher-pupil conferencing, with the writing process including the discussion of topics on which to write, the process of redrafting, the correction of errors and editing. In addition, children referred to help they received with handwriting: the formation of letters in cursive script and with writing in different genres, for example, writing a letter, e-mail or postcard. Interestingly, children commented that they enjoyed creative writing and writing for specific purposes. Their responses indicated that children preferred writing on a topic in which they were interested and when writing occurred within a clear and appropriate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help with Writing at Home</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(86/115)</td>
<td>(20/115)</td>
<td>(9/115)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help with Writing at School</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(92/115)</td>
<td>(14/115)</td>
<td>(9/115)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27  Writing – Children's Responses
In their responses, children commented on the importance of writing:

*Writing is important for everything.* (Child, Male, Urban 34)

*Writing is important for texting on your mobile phone.*

(Child, Male, Urban 29)

*Writing is important for answering e-mails.*

(Child, Female, Rural 8)

### 4.4.1.4 Literacy and Personal Transformation

The children in this research were given the opportunity to express their views in relation to the ways in which literacy could influence personal transformation and social change. Table 28 refers to responses received when children were asked if reading could help one to become a better person and if reading could help people to change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy and Personal Transformation</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Can Help One to Become a Better Person</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(93/115)</td>
<td>(22/115)</td>
<td>(0/115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Can Help People to Change</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Values</td>
<td>(81/115)</td>
<td>(32/115)</td>
<td>(2/115)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28 Literacy and Personal Transformation – Children's Responses
When children commented on the ways in which reading can help one to become a better person, they included references to changing the way one looks at things, an increased access to knowledge and the introduction of new ideas and information. Interestingly the observation was frequently made by children in this research that much depended on the reader and the reading material in question. In their responses children provided examples such as reading the Bible, as well as many other well-known fables and stories.

*It gives people ideas.* (Child, Male, Rural 11)

*It will give people more information.* (Child, Female, Rural 7)

*You can learn from other people’s mistakes.*
(Child, Male, Urban 45)

*You can learn about what to do and what not to do.*
(Child, Male, Urban 70)

*You can become a better person by reading the Bible, English and Irish stories.* (Child, Female, Rural 10)

*If you read good books, you can change.* (Child, Male, Urban 73)
It can make you change your ways. (Child, Male, Urban 48)

In considering the ways in which reading can help people to change, some children commented that reading could affect changes in people’s attitudes and views:

People can change their attitudes. (Child, Male, Urban 70)

It can change people’s opinions on things.
(Child, Female, Rural 10)

It can change the way you look at things everywhere.
(Child, Male, Urban 38)

Interestingly, children recognised that reading could provide information about how people coped with difficult situations – an assertion applicable across the many challenges which present themselves life-long and life-wide (Rogers, 2011).

You learn how people coped with difficult situations.
(Child, Male, Urban 59)
In their responses, children commented on the more social and emotional benefits of reading:

You can be smart and *some books tell you to be nice if you are a mean person and it will help you to change.*  (Child, Male, Urban 34)

*It can stop bullying.*  (Child, Male, Urban 42)

*You can read a story if you are a lonely child or for a lonely child.*

(Child, Male, Rural 13)

It can give people *a new hobby, something interesting to do.*

(Child, Female, Rural 5)

*If you read you are happy.*  (Child, Male, Urban 18)

Interestingly, children commented on the ways in which reading can inspire aspirations for the future:

If you read about Barack Obama, *you might want to be president.*

(Child, Male, Urban 78)

*Reading can change the way you think in every way.*

(Child, Male, Urban 52)
4.5 Conclusion

This study explores the factors, challenges and most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in Ireland. Research findings suggest the importance of parental and family context and involvement and the influence of language, culture and socio-economic factors in children’s literacy acquisition. This research also outlines a number of challenges in relation to pupils’ attitudes and abilities and the support available to children at home and at school. In addition, findings from this research indicate the need to address some important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in an Irish context. These relate to school and curricular considerations and pupil specific considerations (Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2).

Overall, similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children in this research, in relation to many issues and were in keeping with findings reported in recent research literature in most instances. Similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children regarding the need for additional opportunities to improve oral language, pronunciation and comprehension (Sections 4.3.2.1.1, 4.3.2.1.2, 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.2). Findings from this research also suggest that teaching professionals and children recognised that literacy can influence personal development and acknowledged the associations between literacy and life-long learning (Sections 4.3.4, 4.4.1.4).
5 Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings. This is an original study examining the views of teaching professionals and children teaching and learning in an Irish context. It is unique as it addresses the research questions from the perspectives of teaching professionals and children, enabling them to draw from all of their related experiences rather than examining data from the implementation of a particular initiative in literacy instruction or the completion of a set of literacy assessments. Such an approach enables research participants to express their opinion in relation to a variety of relevant issues and facilitates a comparison of their views.

The following sections discuss the findings which emerged from data obtained from teaching professionals in the online survey and research interviews and from children in research questionnaires. Research findings are addressed in light of the relevant research literature outlined in Chapter Two. Section 5.2 addresses the factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children. Section 5.3 outlines the main challenges in children’s literacy acquisition identified in this research and elaborates on considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children. The chapter closes with a summary of conclusions in Section 5.4.
5.2 Factors Affecting the Acquisition of Literacy in Children

The following influential factors affecting children’s literacy acquisition (Table 29) were identified in a review and consideration of the relevant research literature in an Irish context (Sections 2.3.1–2.3.4) and acknowledged by principals and teachers in the online survey and in research interviews (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Sections 4.3.1.1–4.3.1.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Influential Factors in Children’s Literacy Acquisition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Parental and Family Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Parent(s)’ Language Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Child’s Language Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ School’s Language Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Parent(s)’ Cultural Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Child’s Cultural Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Socio-economic Factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Factor Analysis of responses received in the online survey (Table 10, Section 4.2.3.1) suggests that these factors relate to:

➢ Language
➢ Culture
➢ Gender, Parent(s)’ Religious Background and Socio-economic Factors

Table 29 Most Influential Factors in Children’s Literacy Acquisition
The following sections address the influences of parental and family context and involvement (Section 5.2.1), language (Section 5.2.2), culture (Section 5.2.3) and the impact of socio-economic factors (Section 5.2.4) on children’s literacy acquisition from the perspectives of teaching professionals and children in this research.

5.2.1 Parental and Family Influences

Research findings derived from responses to the online survey (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3) and subsequent follow-up questioning in research interviews (Section 4.3.1.1) emphasise the importance of parental and family influences in children’s literacy acquisition at primary level. These findings support the assertions made by many sources in the research literature as to the extent to which the parental and family context influences a child’s literacy acquisition, and concur with the notion that parents remain the first and are among the most influential teachers for their children (McCoy & Cole, 2011; Fan & Chen 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999; Williams et al., 2009a).
Parents have a very strong influence on their children in so many ways. These influences can be positive or negative and may evolve over time. Even if parents are not aware of the ways in which they are unconsciously communicating attitudes, their influences are an important consideration in promoting children’s attitudes to learning, participation and engagement in learning opportunities and activities. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

Table 19 (Section 4.3.1.1) outlines the main research findings in relation to parental and family influences in children’s literacy acquisition. Interestingly, teaching professionals acknowledged that the level of a mother’s education was an influential factor (Finlay & Gibbons, 2009, Williams et al., 2009a), but the observation was frequently made (by teachers in different school settings) that the education level and involvement of the father may be equally important. It is noteworthy that the majority of teaching professionals in this research suggested that parental practices, parenting styles, the nature of parental involvement, motivations and attitudes and their related effects were more significant than the educational level of both parents and socio-economic status on children’s literacy acquisition (Section 4.3.1.1). These findings reflect recent studies which have emphasised the positive effects of parental involvement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). It is encouraging that while most teachers expressed the view that there were
associations between the educational level of both parents and children’s achievement, teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings provided examples of exceptions where children apparently overachieved.

Interestingly, research findings suggest the need to consider the influence of parents’ experiences in literacy. For example, if parents had difficulties with literacy then this may subsequently affect their ability to help their child, or adversely influence their attitudes towards literacy and engagement with literacy activities (Sections 4.3.1.1, 4.3.1.2). Conversely, the observation was made by teaching professionals, in some instances, that parents who had experienced difficulties were even more motivated to ensure their child accessed opportunities to enable educational achievement (Section 4.3.1.1).

While it varies according to different circumstances, parents can encourage their children even if they have experienced difficulties with education, literacy or school. This may motivate them to encourage their children to seek out opportunities to overcome these difficulties. (Male, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 1)

An interesting finding which provides potential for further exploration relates to the ways in which key concepts of parental involvement are defined and can subsequently influence the way family literacy provision is established and implemented (Section 4.3.1.1). In
acknowledging diversity in family forms and literacies (Pahl, 2008), teaching professionals observed that families have different ways with words and engage in very diverse linguistic practices which vary across cultural, linguistic and social contexts (Section 4.3.1.1). Such observations are relevant as teachers in DEIS, rural, urban and Gaelscoil settings, recognised that children acquire literacy within a social and cultural environment (Section 4.3.1.2), an observation supported by a Vygotskian understanding of language acquisition (1978a) and by sources in the research literature (Dail & Payne, 2010; Flewitt, 2008).

Furthermore, as principals and teachers recognised that practices in the home can differ culturally or linguistically from those in the mainstream (Section 4.3.1.2), the integration, where possible, of home and school practices was recommended by teaching professionals in this research (Section 4.3.1.1); a recommendation supported by constructivist theories of learning (Bruner 1977; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky 1978a) and by sources in the research literature (Dail & Payne, 2010; Israel et al., 2001). Reading for special occasions such as family celebrations, becoming a regular member of a local library, or visiting cultural facilities were identified by educators and children as innovative opportunities to assist children in engaging with literacy in differing contexts (Sections 4.3.1.3; 4.4.1.2). These observations emphasise the importance of parental choices and access to cultural and social opportunities which can assist in the acquisition of children’s literacy and language skills for a variety of
purposes (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Williams et al., 2009a).

The influence of parental attitudes to education, literacy and different languages were identified by teaching professionals as important factors in encouraging children’s progress (Section 4.3.1.1) – findings which concur with observations made in the research literature (Edwards et al., 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Ryan et al., 1995; Smyth et al., 2010). It is interesting to note that principals and teachers in rural and urban schools commented that homes which were multicultural and multilingual in nature, were very often, open to, and embraced new languages and cultures without any great difficulty, and articulated the view that teachers must consider the importance of languages to individuals and families, and facilitate learning activities accordingly (Section 4.3.1.2). Such an awareness encompasses an understanding of literacy as more than a neutral cognitive skill (Dail & Payne, 2010).

In addition, it is important to emphasise that while principals and teachers across differing educational settings agreed that home background is an influential factor in children’s literacy acquisition (Section 4.3.1.1), it is not the only one. These findings concur with sources in the research literature which have suggested that children’s own engagement and attitudes to school can have a significant influence on their academic performance and that children’s own attitudes and actions can reinforce or mitigate the effect of social background (Smyth et al., 2010). Where
parental support was available, however, it was acknowledged as a significant advantage. Research findings suggest that although the nature and extent of parental involvement varies, such influences are among the most influential factors in a child’s literacy acquisition.

5.2.2 Language

Findings from this research suggest that factors relating to language (for example, the parent(s)’, child’s or school’s language background influence the acquisition of literacy in children (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3). It is useful to consider the impact of language factors on the acquisition of literacy considering the bilingual tradition in Ireland (that is, Irish and English), and particularly at the present time in acknowledging the presence of a multi-lingual context, where up to three or four languages may be in use in a home (Central Statistics Office, 2012; Sections 2.3.2, 3.7.3). Section 4.3.1.2 outlines the main research findings in relation to the relevance of language in children’s literacy acquisition.

It is noteworthy that the importance of facilitating the child in finding and expressing their voice as recommended by the National Children’s Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2000) was recognised by teaching professionals in this research (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.2.1.1). Furthermore, principals and teachers in both rural and urban schools described the need for children to express their voice in their own language and to acquire an appreciation of the voices of children from
differing language backgrounds. Such views reflected those expressed by the children in this research as they described the benefits of expressing their own voice and engaging with other children in literacy activities (Sections 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.2). These findings concur with sources in the research literature that have addressed the importance of finding and expressing one’s voice through literacy (Rogers, 2011; Sperling et al., 2011; Van Sluys, et al., 2005, Sections 2.6, 4.3.4).

In addition, responses from teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings emphasise the need to consider the influence of parent(s)’ attitudes towards a particular language, the ways in which these are communicated to children and their subsequent effects on children’s attitudes and engagement with literacy (Section 4.3.1.2); findings which are supported by sources in the research literature (Dail & Payne, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2011; Pahl, 2008; Wasik & Herrman, 2004). These influences are relevant in facilitating children in achieving success in literacy and in encouraging children of different backgrounds to seek out future learning opportunities (Section 4.3.4). Sources in the literature have acknowledged the need to encourage such life-long and-life wide engagement with literacy (for example, Rogers, 2011).

Interestingly, the issue of bilingualism, and the opportunities and challenges presented by a bilingual learning context for educators and children were addressed by teaching professionals in this research. The question whether introducing two languages simultaneously, helps or
hinders a child’s language, literacy acquisition and comprehension is one about which teachers expressed differing views (Section 4.3.1.2) and has been explored in academic discussion (Cummins, 1979; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012; Winsler et al., 2003; Section 2.3.2). The mixed opinions expressed in this study reflect the ongoing debate (Bialystok, 1997; Golash-Boza, 2005; Sparks et al., 2009) as to the opportunities and challenges presented by the bilingual and multilingual context in which children acquire literacy in Ireland (Sections 2.3.2, 4.3.1.2).

In noteworthy recommendations, principals and teachers across a variety of school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) described the benefits of collaboration among teachers within and between schools to enable the sharing and implementation of appropriate and effective teaching methods and resources to provide for children of different language backgrounds (Sections 4.3.3, 5.3.1.1).

*Approaches and methodologies can be shared across languages and between teachers and schools. Children can also transfer learning strategies between languages and enjoy making the connections across languages.* (Female, Teacher, Rural, non-DEIS 2)

Most prominently, observations were made by teachers across the different school settings in relation to the need for a more focused implementation of the curriculum (Section 4.3.2.2) and for an increase in
efforts and appropriate methodologies to assist children in using language for a variety of purposes (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.2). In addition, teaching professionals emphasised the importance of immersion and the modelling and scaffolding of language in informal situations to promote oral fluency. Such recommendations are supported by sources in the research literature (Bruner, 1977; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978a; Section 2.3.1).

We can assist children by providing a language rich environment and by making the most of opportunities to use informal language; for example, giving directions and instructions in class, providing positive feedback to children, and encouraging children during learning activities. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 2)

An interesting finding that emerged from this research relates to the importance of a positive attitude exemplified by the teachers towards language learning and expressed through informal and formal language use (Section 4.3.3). It is noteworthy that teachers emphasised the importance of enjoying learning in different languages as well as the promotion of competency and skills.
Children learn best when they are motivated and actively participating in learning activities. Language learning should be interactive and enjoyable. Children can participate in whole class, group or pair activities which promote language learning and encourage the use of language for different purposes in a range of different situations. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

The incorporation of interesting and innovative learning activities (Sections 4.3.2.2, 4.3.3) and appropriate resources (Section 5.3.1.1), in engaging and interactive ways, was recognised by principals and teachers as an effective means of encouraging a positive attitude towards language learning in children. Such findings are supported by responses from the children in this research (Sections 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.2) and sources in the literature advocating the importance of the social and emotional dimensions in encouraging children’s learning in literacy (Cambourne, 2001; Rushton et al., 2009).

Research findings suggest that teaching professionals were aware of the interrelations between language and culture (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.1.3, Table 32, Appendix B; Flewitt, 2008; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Rupley, Nichols, & Blair, 2008) acknowledged that language was inherently linked to the expression of culture and recommended that teachers and children take advantage of opportunities to integrate lingual and cultural diversity in literacy.
5.2.3 Culture

Findings from this research recognise the influence of cultural factors on the acquisition of literacy in children (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Section 4.3.1.3, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3). The associations between literacy and culture have been addressed by many sources in the research literature (Bedard, Horn, & Garcia, 2011; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Rupley, Nichols, & Blair, 2008). It is interesting that teaching professionals described the significance of the sociocultural environment (Section 4.3.1.3) in influencing children’s literacy acquisition as literacy is historically and culturally relative and it is challenging to define it in isolation from a specific time, place and culture (Flewitt, 2008).

In addition, the need for the teacher to be aware of cultural differences in family and home contexts was emphasised by teaching professionals (Section 4.3.1.1), as addressed by Dail & Payne (2010) and Pahl (2008). In recognising Ireland’s multicultural society, principals and teachers observed that differences can exist in attitudes towards literacy and the ways in which the value of literacy may be communicated to children of differing cultures (Sections 4.3.1.3, 4.3.4, 5.3.2). In some cases, parents may not view literacy as a priority (Section 4.3.1.1) or it may not be esteemed as an important life skill (Calkins, 2001; UNESCO, 2008). Furthermore, teaching professionals reiterated the need for an awareness of differing parental styles (Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Melhuish et al., 2008; Shiel et al., 2012) and to recognise, represent and
connect differing cultures (where possible) in practices to facilitate progression in children’s literacy acquisition through the provision of appropriate literacy experiences (Rose, 2013).

It is of note that principals and teachers expressed the view that if there were challenges in the home culture relating to attitudes towards literacy or specific types of literacies (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.1.3, 5.3.2) then such factors were often very difficult to overcome. Such observations relate to Bourdieu’s sociocultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and the difficulties that cultural mismatches between home and school present (Edwards et al., 2003; Reay 2004; Ryan et al., 1995).

*There are many differences in the language experiences of children.*

*In some homes, literacy may not be valued or parents may not be conscious of the value of early literacy experiences and children may not be encouraged to read. In others, parents are aware of the value of language and literacy in children’s lives and so provide a language and print rich environment and encourage their children to participate in activities which promote their learning.*

(Male, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 1)

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the importance of bridging the cultural gap (Valdes, 1986), where possible, (for example, in SESE) was recognised by the teaching professionals interviewed. The research findings
indicate the need for learning materials to be meaningful and connect with the lives of children and for adequate, innovative and creative resources which include references to many different cultures (Section 4.3.1.3; Harris, 2009). In addition, the principals and teachers emphasised the importance of maintaining self-esteem and respect for one’s own and ‘other’ identities and cultures (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.1.3). In considering these findings it is relevant to note comments made by Cavazos-Rehg and DeLucia-Waack (2009) who acknowledged the adverse effect on children’s self-esteem if the language spoken by those closest to them is perceived as a second-rate idiom, and if their home culture is degraded or disregarded. Research findings suggest that differences persist across class, gender, socio-economic, demographic and geographic situation and recommend that teachers reframe and adapt their instruction where appropriate to facilitate access for children of differing cultures and to incorporate differences within varying educational contexts (Section 4.3.1.3; Rupley, Nichols, & Blair, 2008).

The importance of promoting an ‘active reading culture’ in the home and in school where reading is modelled and valued (Sections 4.3.1.1, 4.3.2.1.2) is reiterated by findings from this research and is reflected in recommendations made by the inspectorate who acknowledged that there is a need for all education partners to become more active in establishing a culture of continuous improvement in the teaching of reading (Department of Education and Science, 2005). Furthermore, teaching professionals in
both DEIS and non-DEIS settings suggested that literacy should be understood as a social practice, and that its meanings, functions and the methods in which it is acquired differ from one culture to another (Section 4.3.1.3; Gafoor & Jayasudha, 2011; Gee, 1996; Klaas & Trudell, 2011; Rassool, 1999). Interestingly, the teaching professionals interviewed in this research described the potential for exploration of oneself and one’s family’s culture in literacy (Section 4.3.1.3) as addressed by Bedard, Horn, and Garcia (2011).

The need to be aware of the ways in which different cultures are represented in reading material was established by findings from this research (Section 4.3.1.3). Specific references were made by teaching professionals to the ways in which males and females were depicted in certain cultural references. In some instances, a cultural bias (in terms of social class and nationality) apparent from certain standardised tests currently implemented in Irish primary schools was observed by principals and teachers and concerns were expressed as to the impact this may have on some children’s engagement with the assessment and the subsequent interpretation of these results (Section 4.3.5). Such observations relate to comments made by Mulcahy (2009) that, in some cases, cultural literacy assumes the existence of a body of common knowledge which may inhibit students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Research findings indicate that teaching professionals were aware of the influence of cultural
references in books, other printed sources in the environment, and multimedia (Section 4.3.1.3).

While in some instances children’s problems with literacy acquisition were related to the influences of cultural factors (Section 4.3.1.3) teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings described complexities in individual cases which could not be accounted for by cultural factors alone (Li, 2003). Interestingly, the impact that culture may have on personal development was recognised by teaching professionals across differing educational contexts (rural, urban, DEIS and non-DEIS, Section 4.3.1.3). The influence of peer culture was also emphasised (Corsaro & Nelson, 2003). It is noteworthy that teaching professionals across different school settings recognised that cultural influences provided both challenges and opportunities and that cultural diversity provided possibilities for integration and cross-curricular learning opportunities (Section 5.3.1.2.4). Most notably, the potential for the transfer of ideas and attitudes across cultures (Kostogriz & Tsolidis, 2008) was recognised by teaching professionals and children in this research (Sections 4.3.1.3, 4.4.1.2, 4.4.1.4).
Children need to see that elements they identify in their own culture are replicated in other cultures. There may be similarities and differences but very often children enjoy making the connections and learning from children of other cultures. There is also the potential that knowledge can be transferred between cultures and this can motivate children and assist them in acquiring and assimilating new knowledge. (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Some parents and children of immigrant cultures are highly motivated and focused. They came to Ireland in search of a better life and see education as a means to better themselves and to achieve life-long and occupational success. This is communicated to their children and reflected in the ways children of these cultures engage and participate in activities in school. (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

In an interesting finding, the influence of cultural attitudes in relation to enthusiasm for certain subjects (for example, history, Gaeilge and Science) on children’s learning was noted by teachers across different school settings (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.3, 4.4.1.2, 5.3.1.1). The importance of facilitating the child in finding and expressing their voice within differing cultural contexts was reiterated by teaching professionals (Section 4.3.1.3) and has been acknowledged by Van Sluys et al. (2005), Sperling et al.
(2011), and the *National Children’s Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2000). Furthermore, the advantages of integrating culture and cultural experiences into literacy instruction were emphasised by teachers in DEIS school settings (Section 4.3.1.3) as such practices enabled children to construct their own narratives (Bruner, 2004; Ochs & Capps, 1997). Research findings emphasise the need to consider the interrelations between literacy and culture in facilitating the acquisition of literacy with children in different educational contexts.

### 5.2.4 Socio-economic Factors

The influence of socio-economic factors on the acquisition of literacy in children is conveyed by findings from this research (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3) and has been addressed by many sources in the research literature (Duncan & Seymour, 2010; Hart & Risely, 1995; Sancore & Palumbo, 2009; Section 2.3.4). In considering the relationship between the acquisition of literacy and socio-economic background, principals and teachers across different school settings suggested that while access to books and exposure to literacy and language remained a concern, the influence of parenting style was considered more significant (Section 4.3.1.1), an observation acknowledged by many sources (Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Melhuish et al., 2008; Shiel et al., 2012).
The relationship between socio-economic status, emergent cognition and academic achievement has been addressed in the research literature (Bloom, 1964; Davie et al., 1972; Feinstein, 2003). Interestingly, findings from this research suggest that the strength of such relationships differs across individual circumstances (Section 4.3.1.4) and cultures (Section 4.3.1.3).

In expressing their views, teaching professionals emphasised the need to consider the type of literacy experiences and learning opportunities parents engage in with their children to facilitate the promotion of cognitive skills (Section 4.3.1.4). Such assertions concur with comments made by Shiel et al. (2012) who suggested that variances may be related to the language input children receive at home or in early care settings, where mothers of higher-socio-economic status speak more to their children, provide more opportunities to use language, and use a wider range of vocabulary when talking to their children. In addition, the characteristics of language used in story book reading can also vary across social groups, and consequently disadvantaged children may be less well prepared for the language-related challenges of school (Shiel et al., 2012). Furthermore, Shiel et al. (2012) suggested that a key factor in understanding language differences between more and less disadvantaged children relates to the frequency with which complex language is used, as opposed to the children’s underlying ability.
While undoubtedly socio-economic factors had an impact, teaching professionals suggested that they were not the sole predictor (Section 4.3.1.4), a finding supported by sources in the research literature (Flouri & Buchanan 2004; McCoy & Cole, 2011). The research findings support assertions made by Fan and Chen (2001) who postulated that parents’ attitudes and support for their children’s learning influences performance on literacy assessments, irrespective of socio-economic status (Section 4.3.1.4). Interestingly, there were instances where teachers expressed the view that the literacy levels of parents had a greater impact than socio-economic factors (Section 4.3.1.1). Findings from this research suggest that while there may be a conflation of socio-economic status with parental involvement, socio-economic factors were not always a reliable indicator of parent’s interests, values or interaction with their children (Sections 4.3.1.1, 4.3.1.4). Furthermore, differences exist across situations of similar socio-economic background (for example, parental attitudes, motivation, access to resources and pupil ability). In addition, it is also relevant to consider the influence of factors relating specifically to socio-economics and those relating to social class. A review of the data suggests the need to be cautious in making assumptions and generalisations and to consider the individuality of cases.

Interestingly, research findings reiterate the importance of engaging children of all backgrounds in reading (Section 4.3.1.4), in keeping with suggestions by Guthrie & Wigfield (2000) who claimed that there is
evidence to suggest that engagement in reading can compensate for low family income and educational background. Such views and approaches focus on children’s own agency in determining educational attainment (Smyth et al., 2010). While teachers were realistic in their expectations, principals and teachers in DEIS schools expressed the view that engagement in reading can assist children in overcoming some of the challenges which present in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Sections 4.3.1.4, 4.3.4). The expression of such views suggests the potential for further experimental research to examine the ways and the degree to which engagement with literacy can assist children across different learning contexts (Section 6.5).

In particular, research findings acknowledge that parental expectations and vision are contributory factors in establishing and maintaining children’s motivation and engagement in literacy practices (Section 4.3.1.1). The ways in which parental support can assist and sustain reading habits and homework routines were acknowledged by teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings (Section 4.3.1.1) and have been recognised by sources in the research literature (Bedard, Horn, & Garcia, 2011; Heckman & Wax, 2004). While teachers were aware of the influence of socio-cultural capital (Edwards et al., 2003; Ryan et al., 1995) and differences which could be attributed to parental socio-economic status (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002) the research findings indicate that overall, variances in parental attitudes could not be consistently linked with differences in parental socio-economic status or socio-economic factors.
A review of the data provides many examples of the challenges faced by educators in addressing the inequalities that exist across different educational contexts and in addressing the differing language experiences of children (that is, positive and negative language experiences, negative attitudes towards reading, deficiencies in the provision of, or access to, reading material, Sections 4.3.1.1, 4.3.1.4, 4.3.4). These differences in language experiences have been acknowledged by sources in the literature such as Duncan and Seymour (2000), Hart and Risely (1995) and Sancore and Palumbo (2009).

*Socio-economic factors can impact on parent(s)’ priorities and concerns and consequently on circumstances which can affect children and children’s learning.* (Male, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 1)

*Socio-economic factors have an impact on children’s learning. It is not just a question of resources but of parental attitudes and expectations. Children can also be affected by what they see in their communities and their peers. This can affect individual children in different ways. If change is to happen it may take generations.* (Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)
Recent reports of progress in DEIS schools (Weir & Denner, 2013) and initiatives which are effective in assisting children’s literacy acquisition in challenging circumstances were acknowledged by teaching professionals (Section 4.3.1.4) as teachers in DEIS school settings, shared a realistic and practical view that children could still achieve in spite of difficult socio-economic circumstances where there was a strong commitment to achieving high levels of success.

The research findings emphasise the need to focus on assisting children from differing socio-economic backgrounds in improving their oral language (Section 4.3.2.1.1) and comprehension skills (Section 4.3.2.1.2, Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999a; Kennedy et al., 2012). Furthermore, this research reiterates the need to connect home and school literacy experiences and practices where possible and appropriate (Sections 4.3.1.1, 5.3.1.1, 5.3.2) and to ensure that pupils have access to educational opportunities and effective resources to enable children to achieve their full potential. (Sections 4.3.3, 5.3.1.1). Findings from this research suggest that while socio-economic factors can affect children’s literacy acquisition, there is also a need to consider the impact of other related factors, such as parental interaction, language and cultural influences.
5.3 Addressing the Literacy Needs of Children – Challenges and Considerations for the Future

The following challenges in children’s literacy acquisition (Table 30) were identified in a review and consideration of the relevant research literature in an Irish context (Chapter Two) and acknowledged by principals and teachers in the online survey and in research interviews (Chart 4, Section 4.2.2.2, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3, Section 4.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Challenges in Children’s Literacy Acquisition</th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ The Support Available to Children at Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ The Support Available to Children at School</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Pupil Enthusiasm</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Pupil Apprehension</td>
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<td>➢ Pupil Abilities</td>
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<td>➢ Pupil Specific Learning Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ The Availability of Appropriate Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Competition from other Sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Factor Analysis of responses received in the online survey (Table 12, Section 4.2.3.1) suggests that these challenges relate to:

➢ Pupil Attitudes and Abilities
➢ The Support Available to Children at Home and at School

Table 30 Main Challenges in Children’s Literacy Acquisition
It is interesting to note that many of these challenges were identified in the *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) which suggested the need to address an array of issues in relation to the content and implementation of the primary curriculum to improve the quality of literacy in primary schools (pp. 49-50). These issues relate to the support available to children at home and at school, the challenges presented in planning and teaching pupils with differing abilities, interests, and specific learning needs, and the availability of appropriate educational resources.

Furthermore, the *National Strategy* proposed the need to provide a clearer statement of expected learning outcomes for children in English and Irish at each stage of the primary years and to complement this with examples of children’s work and learning that illustrate clearly what these learning outcomes mean in practice. In particular, the Strategy recommended that the most effective teaching and learning approaches and strategies are used consistently in the teaching of Irish and English and that the curriculum reflects the reading interests of all pupils, including boys, and enables them to have access to a better balance of text types. An additional challenge identified by the *National Strategy* and acknowledged by principals and teachers in this research is that of insufficient time available to address all of the objectives contained in the primary curriculum and that the inclusion of new areas of learning may have compromised their ability to teach core skills such as literacy. Interestingly, the *National Strategy* recognised considerable variation in the amount of time devoted to
literacy teaching across primary schools and proposed that the suggested time framework for subjects contained in the primary curriculum needs to be reconsidered and better guidance and support needs to be provided to teachers on how they can teach and assess literacy skills across all areas of the curriculum. It also recognised that, in the shorter term, ways need to be found in which schools and teachers have sufficient time to ensure that all children acquire satisfactory literacy skills.

The following considerations in addressing children’s literacy needs in an Irish context were identified in a review of the relevant research literature (Chapter Two) and acknowledged by principals and teachers in the online survey and in research interviews (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3, Section 4.3). These considerations relate to the need for improvements in the following areas as outlined in Table 31.
### Addressing the Literacy Needs of Children

– Considerations for the Future

- Teacher Education
- Curricular Approaches
- Cross-Curricular Integration
- Literacy Approaches with Children with Special Educational Needs
- Literacy Approaches with Children in the Mainstream
- Literacy Approaches with Children with Exceptional Ability
- The Effective Use and Allocation of Appropriate Resources
- Parental Awareness
- Pupil Attitudes
- Multimedia Approaches to Literacy

A Factor Analysis of responses received in the online survey (Table 14, Section 4.2.3.1) suggests that these issues relate to:

- School and Curricular Considerations
- Pupil Specific Considerations (including the need to Improve Parental Awareness)

**Table 31** Addressing the Literacy Needs of Children – Considerations for the Future
A number of implications for practice emerged from the findings in this research and are outlined in Section 6.3. The following sections elaborate on some important issues related to school and curricular (Section 5.3.1) and pupil specific considerations (Section 5.3.2).

5.3.1 School and Curricular Considerations

A factor analysis of responses to the online survey and a review of the data acquired from teaching professionals and children suggest the need to consider several relevant issues (Table 31, Section 5.3, Sections 4.3, 4.4). The subsequent sections address school (Section 5.3.1.1) and curricular considerations (Section 5.3.1.2) respectively.

5.3.1.1 School Considerations

Findings from this research suggest the importance of considering the acquisition of literacy in children in different educational contexts. In particular, this research emphasises the importance of teacher education, the benefits of a whole school approach to literacy acquisition and the need for access to appropriate educational resources.

It is noteworthy that while all available resources were considered important, teachers across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) recognised that the most significant resource was the skill set of the teacher. Furthermore, principals and teachers emphasised the importance of educating and supporting the classroom teacher on a continuing basis (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3, Section 4.3.3). Such findings are in keeping with the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills,
2011, pp. 27-33) which acknowledged teachers as the most powerful of resources and that education and learning can be improved through the enhancement of the professional practice of teachers. It is noteworthy that principals and teachers recognised the benefits of further education for teachers in all categories of school (Section 4.3.3). While there were some instances where teachers expressed concerns relating to the quality and relevance of teacher education (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, pp. 27-33), it is encouraging that principals and teachers interviewed in this research acknowledged that newly qualified teachers were highly competent and well informed in relation to recommendations pertaining to best practice (Sections 2.5, 2.6).

*Teachers are well informed in relation to teaching approaches, methodologies and recent research and are enthusiastic and motivated in implementing initiatives in schools. Teachers can build and share expertise with other teachers and pupils.*

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

Interestingly, principals and teachers expressed the need for teacher education to assist teachers in incorporating the social and emotional components of teaching and learning (Section 4.3.3; Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2010; Payton et al., 2008; Zins et al., 2004; Section 2.6) and described the benefits of the influences of individual teacher styles, preferences and competencies in facilitating the social process of learning.
(Wray, 1999) and in interacting with and in engaging children in the educative process (Vygotsky, 1978b). In addition, teaching professionals recommended the creation of a stimulating learning environment; one purposefully designed to actively engage the minds of young children. Such suggestions were reflected in responses from the children in this research (Section 4.4.1.2) and incorporate constructivist principles of learning as described by Cambourne (2001) and Rushton et al. (2009). In particular, findings from this research reiterate the importance of an awareness of the effect of teacher expectations, questioning styles, the significance of positive and constructive teacher-pupil interactions (Cambourne, 2001; Elias et al., 1997) and the need for positive re-enforcements of pupils among teachers (Section 4.3.3). The research findings suggest that appropriate and ongoing teacher education can enable educators to enhance a child’s literacy skills and provide them with the foundations necessary to continue life-long learning (Section 2.6) as recognised by Calkins (2001), Gafoor and Jayasudha (2011), UNESCO (2008), Rogers (2011) and Wells and Claxton (2002).

An interesting recommendation to emerge from this research relates to the implementation of a whole school approach to literacy acquisition (Section 4.3.3). Principals and teachers acknowledged the need for co-operation and collaboration among teachers within schools and between schools (Section 4.3.1.2) as recommended by the inspectorate (Department of Education and Skills, 2005). Such an approach incorporates a
constructivist model of education (Bruner 1977; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978b) and the concept of the spiral curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). In addition, the importance of promoting literacy across the whole school community and the need for effective planning, communication and implementation was emphasised by the teaching professionals interviewed.

Children need to see that literacy connects with everyday life. This can be achieved in a meaningful way where children see their parents, teachers, other adults, children and members of the community reading for different purposes; for information or leisure. Children need to understand that reading is something they will do throughout their lives and can provide opportunities to learn and engage with the world. (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 2)

Findings suggest that the children in this research were aware of the ways in which literacy is integral to daily life, the benefits of reading for different purposes and the need to continue to engage in literacy throughout one’s life (Sections 4.4.1.2, 4.4.1.3, 4.4.1.4).

The role and vision of the principal (Section 4.3.3) was recognised as being particularly influential in implementing approaches that promote sustainable long-term progress in children’s literacy. These findings were in keeping with the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills,
2011, p. 39) which acknowledged that principals and deputy principals play a key role and that principals should lead, support and monitor improvements in literacy throughout their schools. In addition, the *National Strategy* suggests that in order to lead the improvement of literacy in their schools, principals and deputy principals need opportunities to further their own understanding of how best literacy skills are acquired by children and young people; to improve their understanding of how assessment can be used by teachers to plan pupils’ learning, to diagnose learning difficulties, to provide evidence of pupils’ learning, and to acquire the necessary skills to enable them to lead evidence-based school self-evaluation and school improvement.

Deficiencies in cohesive whole school and individual planning, and continuity in the implementation of such plans throughout the school, were noted as issues of concern by principals and teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings (Section 4.3.3). In their recommendations pertaining to whole school planning, the inspectorate recommended that additional emphasis should be placed on whole school planning at school level, and the relevant support services should emphasise the connections between the curriculum, school plan and individual planning (Department of Education and Skills, 2005). While models may need to be adapted to suit individual schools, a whole school approach enables collaboration, co-operation, communication and the sharing of expertise and knowledge between
teachers and provides a supportive learning environment which greatly benefits children.

Research findings indicate that the availability of appropriate educational resources presents a challenge for educators in facilitating the acquisition of literacy in children (Chart 4, Section 4.2.2.2) and was recognised by teaching professionals as an important consideration for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3)

The availability of appropriate resources is an important issue. Teachers are very good at managing what is available, and making decisions according to the learning needs of children in their class, for example, children with specific learning needs. While the availability of resources is a major issue, it is also important that resources are effectively implemented and are of benefit to pupils in the longer term. (Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

Table 22 (Section 4.3.3) outlines the main findings in relation to the availability of appropriate educational resources. Interestingly, the research findings suggest that differences relating to the access and availability of resources at home and the ways in which parents and children engaged with literacy activities and resources in school were associated with cultural and socio-economic factors (Sections 4.3.1.1, 4.3.1.3, 4.3.1.4). It is noteworthy that teaching professionals suggested that differences related not only to the provision of resources (such as access to books in the home, Williams et al.,
But also to parental attitudes about their value (Section 5.3.2). Such observations relate to theories of socio-cultural reproduction described by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Section 2.3.3). While the view was expressed by teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings, that in some cases there were associations between socio-economic status and parental and child attitudes towards literacy, there were many instances in the data where teachers suggested the need to consider individual circumstances and to avoid inaccurate assumptions and generalisations.

The introduction of new literacies and the use of ICT and multimedia approaches to literacy have had implications for the ways in which teachers and pupils interact with texts and with each other (Flewitt, 2008; Marsh, 2011). Such additions were noted as important resources in promoting the competencies necessary to be considered literate in the present day (Section 4.3.3; Coiro et al., 2008). In this research, teaching professionals addressed definitions of multimedia, the benefits and challenges of implementing multimedia approaches in differing educational contexts and the need for appropriate teacher education (Section 4.3.3) to best utilise such resources so that pupils may achieve their full potential. Findings suggest that children enjoyed engaging with multimedia resources and recognised the benefits provided by the inclusion of interactive educational resources and approaches in learning activities (Section 4.4.1.2).
Responses from teaching professionals in research interviews provided some critical information and reflection in relation to the advantages and challenges posed by the introduction and implementation of multimedia in modern classrooms and emphasised the need to provide a balanced literacy experience for children. The research findings indicated that, in some instances, competition from other sources (for example, television and other forms of multimedia) provided a challenge to children’s literacy acquisition (Chart 4, Section 4.2.2.2, Section 4.4.1.2) and were similar to those that emerged from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Williams et al., 2009a, p. 20), which suggested that watching television was a universal activity among nine year olds. The same source also reported that considerable amounts of time were spent playing video games, among boys in particular.

While the view was expressed by teaching professionals that spending an excessive amount of time watching television, playing computer games or using other multimedia may have negative effects on children’s learning, teachers also suggested ways in which multimedia could assist in supporting children’s literacy acquisition (Section 4.3.3). The quality and validity of information received from such sources was identified as an important consideration by principals and teachers. Nevertheless, teachers acknowledged that with innovation, creativity and teacher competence, multimedia can be effectively integrated into educational activities and promote children’s learning.
Similarly, teaching professionals and children in this research (Sections 4.4.1.1–4.4.1.3) recognised that multimedia can provide an alternative and innovative means for children to express their voices (Department of Education and Skills, 2000; Sperling et al., 2011; Van Sluys et al., 2005). Furthermore teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings acknowledged the potential benefits of the effective use of ICT with children with specific learning needs (Section 4.3.3) and recommended the appropriate use of multimedia as a resource rather than a teaching methodology (Section 4.3.3; Hatch, 2011; Steeves et al., 2012).

5.3.1.2 Curricular Considerations

Although teaching professionals in this research acknowledged that the curriculum documents in English and Irish provided much potential, it also emerged that recommended approaches and methodologies need to be selected and implemented more effectively to address the learning needs of children in different circumstances (Section 4.3.2.2). The diversity created by changing demographics (Central Statistics Office, 2012; Devine, 2009; 2005), and changes in policy and economic conditions (Kennedy, 2013; Williams et al., 2009a) have made this an increasingly relevant consideration in the facilitation of the acquisition of literacy in children in Ireland.

A review of the data provides many examples where teaching professionals in different school settings described the potential and challenges in implementing the current curriculum and possibilities for
future curricular reform (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3, Section 4.3.2). In this research, the principals and teachers interviewed reiterated the need for an increased emphasis on improving children’s oral language (Section 4.3.2.1.1) and comprehension skills (Section 4.3.2.1.2) in particular, as well as more effective curricular implementation in reading (Section 4.3.2.1.2) and writing (Section 4.3.2.1.3). Research findings are reflected in recommendations made by the inspectorate (Department of Education and Skills, 2005) which called for practical guidelines on the adaptation of the English curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. The following sections address curricular implementation in relation to oral language (Section 5.3.1.2.1), reading (Section 5.3.1.2.2) and writing (Section 5.3.1.2.3). Section 5.3.1.2.4 addresses the benefits of cross-curricular integration.

5.3.1.2.1 Oral Language

Findings from this research suggest that principals and teachers recognised the importance of promoting children’s oral language skills for different purposes and for use in various situations (Section 4.3.2.1.1). Furthermore, teaching professionals emphasised the benefits of providing children with opportunities to practise their receptive and expressive language skills (for example, to articulate needs, share and discuss an opinion) by actively engaging and participating in informal conversations and learning activities at home and at school (in whole class, group and pair activities). The inspectorate have emphasised the importance of teaching
oral language as a discrete and integral aspect of the English curriculum (Department of Education and Skills, 2005).

We need to talk to children and to read to them. The oral language children hear and use needs to be positive. We need to encourage children through oral language. We need to promote dialogue, and allow children to reflect so that they can think about what they are doing. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 7)

Section 4.3.2.1.1 outlines the main research findings in relation to oral language. It is noteworthy that findings from this research recognise differences in the language experiences of children from differing backgrounds (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.2.1.1), for example, differences in positive and negative language experiences, vocabulary and uses of oral language in different social contexts. Numerous sources in the research literature (Duncan & Seymour, 2000; Sancore & Palumbo, 2009; Shiel et al., 2012) have established connections between socio-economic factors and children’s difficulties in oral language, in particular (Sections 2.3.1, 2.3.4), with some suggesting that children from higher socio-economic backgrounds experience more positive statements (Hart & Risely, 1995). Interestingly, teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) suggested that progress and attainment in oral language was not inextricably linked to socio-economic factors but to parenting style and the prevalent culture in the home (Sections
4.3.1.1, 4.3.1.3, 4.3.1.4). Such findings are supported by sources in the research literature (Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Melhuish et al., 2008; Shiel et al., 2012) and relate to the understanding that literacy should not be considered as a single entity but rather a plural set of social practices (Klaas & Trudell, 2011; Pahl, 2008; Rassool, 1999).

It is noteworthy that teaching professionals (Section 4.3.1.2) and children (Section 4.4.1.1) suggested the need for additional opportunities to improve pronunciation. Sources in the research and official literature have described the diversity in language, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds from which children in Ireland currently acquire literacy (Central Statistics Office, 2012; Devine, 2009; 2005; Kennedy, 2013; Williams et al., 2009a) which would account to some extent for difficulties children may experience in oral language and pronunciation, although suggestions were made by teaching professionals in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings that such areas have always presented challenges for teachers and children.

Interestingly, the teaching professionals across different school settings (rural, urban, DEIS, and non-DEIS) acknowledged that facilitating children in improving their oral language skills in order to articulate their thoughts about their own lives assisted children’s self-confidence and social and emotional learning (Sections 2.6, 4.3.2.1.1, 4.3.4). Such comments are supported by the children in this research (Sections 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.4) and by many sources which have addressed the importance of facilitating children
in finding and expressing their voices (Bruner, 2004; Department of Education and Skills, 2000; Ochs and Capps, 1997; Sperling et al., 2011; Van Sluys et al., 2005). In addition, these findings reiterate the need for appropriate differentiation in assisting children to achieve attainable learning outcomes, addressing lingual and cultural diversity (Sections 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 4.3.2.2) and in maintaining children’s self-esteem (Cavazos-Rehg & DeLucia-Waack, 2009).

5.3.1.2.2 Reading

This research provided teaching professionals and children with an opportunity to express their views in relation to reading; an integral component of literacy. Table 20 (Section 4.3.2.1.2) outlines the main research findings in relation to reading. While these research findings reiterate the importance of promoting positive attitudes towards reading among boys and girls, it is noteworthy that the need to continue to engage boys in reading was emphasised by principals and teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings (Sections 4.3.4, 5.3.2; McCoy et al., 2012, p. 44).

Data acquired from teaching professionals and children in this research suggest that stories can be incorporated into literacy instruction in enjoyable and innovative ways to benefit pupils of different backgrounds (Sections 4.3.2.1.2, 4.4.1.2, 4.4.1.4; Boutot, 2011; McKeough et al., 2008; Scattone, 2007). Furthermore, the need for adequate provision of relevant literary resources, where children’s own stories, voices, cultures and
interests were normalised, respected and celebrated, was also noted (Section 4.3.1.3). Such comments relate to the need to integrate and respect cultural diversity in literacy instruction, as addressed by Bedard, Horn, and Garcia, (2011). In addition, the research findings emphasised the need to make learning material meaningful, where subject matter connects with a pupil’s own life experiences (Braun & Froese, 1977; Cooper, 2000). The reading of stories from an early age, and the benefits of a print-rich environment were recognised by teaching professionals as effective and informal ways of facilitating children in increasing their vocabulary, in improving their language skills and in establishing a positive attitude towards reading (Sections 4.3.1.1, 4.4.1.2, 5.3.2).

The implementation of a multi-strategy approach to reading and comprehension, different organisational arrangements in reading (independent, paired, and shared reading) and the effective use of interactive resources were recommended by teaching professionals for facilitating children’s literacy acquisition and promoting children’s communication skills and social and emotional learning (Sections 4.3.2.1.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 5.3.1.1).
A great deal of work is being done in DEIS schools and children are seeing the benefits. Teachers are highly motivated and use a multi-strategy approach. The focus is on early intervention and intensive literacy instruction. Children enjoy reading. It can provide a creative and imaginative space for children to explore stories independently and can also be interactive, something to be talked about and shared. (Female, Teacher, Urban, DEIS 8)

Interestingly, teaching professionals and children recognised the need for a variety of opportunities to improve reading comprehension (Sections 4.3.2.1.2, 4.4.1.2). Research findings reiterate the importance of access to continuing teacher education, in addition to the provision of effective teaching methodologies to enable teachers to assist children with comprehension (Sections 4.3.2.1.2, 5.3.1.1).

In particular, principals and teachers referred to the need to access appropriate resources for children of differing ability (Section 4.3.2.2) and emphasised the importance of a variety of teaching approaches to assist children in acquiring different levels of comprehension and higher order thinking skills (Kesner, 2005; Laura, 2008; Laura & Smith 2009; Merrotsy et al., 2008). Relevant recommendations pertaining to this area of curricular implementation have been provided by many sources in the literature (Duke et al., 2011; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Hall & Harding, 2003; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999; National Institute of Child
Health and Human Development, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Shanahan et al., 2010). Furthermore, teaching professionals addressed the importance of promoting understanding and empathy for children’s life experiences and for appreciating the experiences and voices of others addressed in reading material (Braun & Froese, 1977). Interestingly, these views were reflected in responses received from children (Section 4.4.1.4). Findings from this research suggest that comprehension appears to be a challenge for teachers and children across settings of differing demographics.

5.3.1.2.3 Writing

Findings from this research recognise the benefits of integrating oral language, reading and writing (Section 5.3.1.2.4) incorporating a spiral approach to literacy acquisition (Bruner 1977; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). Such integration is recommended in the implementation of the primary curriculum and is supported by many sources (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999; Cooper, 2000; Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012; Shiel et al., 2012). Table 21 (Section 4.3.2.1.3) outlines the main research findings in relation to writing.

It is noteworthy that teachers in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings, expressed the view that, in certain instances, there was an over-reliance on the writing process approach (Section 4.3.2.1.3). While this approach provides opportunities for children to practise their writing skills (Graves, 2004) it can also have adverse effects on children’s motivation if
the process is not completed within an appropriate time frame (Section 4.4.1.3). In addition, research findings reiterate the need for teachers to provide a good stimulus to inspire pupils to write, to differentiate appropriately in the selection of writing exercises children are asked to complete (Department of Education and Skills, 2005) and recommend that teachers engage in modelling, scaffolding (Bruner, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978a), conferencing, and appropriate intervention as required.

Most notably, the findings suggest that children should have the opportunity to enjoy writing, for example, to participate in creative writing workshops which encourage children to write for recreation or personal reflection (Sections 4.3.2.1.3, 4.4.1.3). Such activities provide opportunities for all pupils to express their creativity and for pupils with exceptional abilities to address issues of interest (Grainger et al., 2005; Gross, 2004; Laura & Smith, 2009). Furthermore, the research findings suggest the benefits of the implementation of a structured programme incorporating children’s interests and curricular objectives (Culham, 2003; Wilson, 2002) to promote children’s appreciation of the writing process. These practices encourage children to be in a “constant state of composition” and assist children in forming effective writing habits.
Writing can be a ponderous process. If the process goes on too long, children and teachers can lose interest. Teachers need to model the writing process and encourage free writing. Children need experiences of writing in different genres. There is a need to approach writing in a structured manner but we also need to ensure that creativity and motivation are sustained.

(Male, Principal, Urban, DEIS 1)

In addition, the benefits of ICT, for example, the integration of multimedia approaches involving interactive whiteboards, Powerpoint presentations, and spelling and grammar checks were recognised by teaching professionals and children in this research (Sections 4.3.3, 4.4.1.2, 4.4.1.3). The appropriate uses of these resources provide practical examples of how technology and digital literacy can assist in effectively facilitating the writing process with children of differing abilities.

5.3.1.2.4 Cross-curricular Integration

Findings from this research recognise the importance of cross-curricular integration (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3); it is noteworthy that all interview participants claimed that they implemented cross-curricular integration in their planning and teaching. The benefits for children’s language and literacy acquisition were acknowledged by teaching professionals, in oral language, vocabulary, reading, comprehension and writing (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012). Cross-curricular integration, which incorporates
constructivist approaches to learning (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) and the concept of the spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1977), is particularly useful to engage and motivate children experiencing difficulties with certain curricular areas and to assist teaching and learning in the more expressive and creative areas of the curriculum, for example, in art, drama and music (Heyning, 2000; Pane & Salmon; 2010). In this research, teaching professionals indicated that they implemented cross-curricular integration in these subject areas in ways similar to programmes such as content and integrated learning (CLIL) (Coyle, 2008) and that such practices facilitated the learning of language and content in meaningful and authentic contexts and incorporated children’s respective cultures (Section 4.3.1.3).

A review of the data provides many examples of instances where cross-curricular integration was implemented in the teaching of Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) and science in particular. Recent studies have shown how literacy and science can be effectively integrated and provide benefits for pupils and teachers (Cervetti et al., 2012; Goldschmidt & Jung 2011; Section 2.5). Most notably, teaching professionals elaborated on the benefits of enquiry-based learning activities for children (Section 4.3.2.1.1) as addressed by Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008) and Guthrie et al. (2004). Such approaches have much potential to promote learning as they have explicitly defined learning objectives and assessment frameworks operative in different contexts to improve an array of learning skills, such as clarifying, critically analysing,
discussing findings and making deductions and encourage pupil autonomy by facilitating pupil choices, intrinsic motivation, interest and self-efficacy. Research findings indicate that these activities are enjoyable for children as they facilitate the use of language and literacy in authentic contexts and involve hands-on experiences as well as co-operation and collaboration with other children.

In addition, cross-curricular integration facilitates the use of multiple entry points (Gardner, 1993) and incorporates multimedia approaches which enable children to engage with content that may otherwise be challenging.

_Cross-curricular integration can be useful for children of all abilities and is especially important for children with specific educational needs, as it can provide access to multiple entry points for learning, for example, through art, music or drama._

(Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 3)

_Cross-curricular integration is useful as it motivates children in a topic or subject which they enjoy._

(Female, Principal, Urban, non-DEIS 4)
Research findings suggest that cross-curricular integration is particularly effective for children with specific learning needs as it incorporates children’s interests, facilitates differentiation (Section 4.3.2.2) and enables the transfer of skills across subjects and curricular areas (Kennedy, 2008).

5.3.2 Pupil Specific Considerations

The findings from this research suggest that children’s literacy acquisition be considered in relation to pupil specific educational needs (Table 31, Section 5.3). In particular, the research findings emphasise the importance of increasing awareness of the ways in which parents can assist their children’s literacy acquisition and encouraging positive pupil attitudes towards learning in literacy in pupils of both genders and different abilities.

In addressing pupil-specific considerations, it is interesting to note that research findings reiterated the need to improve awareness of the ways in which parents can assist children in their literacy acquisition (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3, Section 4.3.1.1) as recommended by many sources in the research literature (Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; McCoy & Cole, 2011; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999).
Parents need to be informed of the methodologies and approaches teachers use in teaching literacy. Parents also need to be made aware of the ways in which they can assist their children, for example, in paired reading, talking to their children about the books they are reading and encouraging positive attitudes towards reading in a variety of situations. (Female, Teacher, Urban, non-DEIS 4)

It is noteworthy that teaching professionals acknowledged differences in the nature of parent-child interactions (Bradley, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Shiel et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2009a) and that the importance of the availability of other adults or siblings in assisting with homework and literacy activities was recognised by children in this research (Section 4.4.1.2). Research findings were in keeping with recommendations made by the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 77) which reiterated the need to strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children by sharing meaningful information with them about the progress that children are achieving in the education system. The findings from this research suggest the importance of supporting children in their reading and writing at home (Chart 4, Section 4.2.2.2) and are in concurrence with sources from the research literature which confirm the influence of the home environment on a child’s educational achievement (Bradley, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; McCoy & Cole, 2011; Section 2.3.1). Interestingly, research findings from this study (Sections 4.4.1.2, 4.4.1.3)
were in line with those reported in the *Growing Up in Ireland study* (Williams et al., 2009a), which suggested that the level of parents’ support and encouragement for their children’s education was high overall and was not strongly related to variations in social situation (p.151). In addition, findings relating to the nature of assistance received (Section 4.4.1.2), concurred with findings from the *Growing Up in Ireland study* (Williams et al., 2009a, p. 19).

While many similar difficulties were identified, such as deficiencies in parental support with homework and difficulties with access to appropriate reading material and multimedia resources, it emerged that challenges varied across different contexts and categories of school. A variety of reasons for these difficulties were identified, including parental literacy and interest levels (Section 4.3.1.1), the influence of parental attitudes and practical considerations, including family circumstances, as well as the nature of parent-child interactions (Section 4.3.1.4). Interestingly, teaching professionals, in both DEIS and non-DEIS school settings, acknowledged that socio-economic factors were an important consideration in the provision of support available to individual children at home (Section 4.3.1.4) and recognised differences in parenting styles (Melhuish et al., 2008), and language experiences of children from differing backgrounds (Hart & Risely, 1995; Section 2.3.4), although it should be noted that the views expressed by teachers were based on inference rather than direct observation.
The influence of language and cultural background (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.1.3) as well as values, every-day practices, and routines (relative to particular circumstances) were also recognised by teaching professionals in the different school settings as impacting factors on the availability of parental support and have been addressed by sources in the research literature (Dail & Payne, 2010; Pahl, 2008). Findings from this research suggest that although difficult to quantify, parental awareness and involvement are important in supporting individual children in their literacy acquisition.

Research findings emphasise the importance of encouraging positive pupil attitudes towards learning in literacy (Chart 4, Section 4.2.2.2, Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3). These findings are supported by sources from recent research literature advocating the importance of social and emotional attributes and learning in influencing academic achievement (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2009a). While this study indicates that most children had a positive attitude towards literacy (77%, Section 4.4.1.2) and findings reflect those reported in recent research (McCoy et al., 2012, p. 44), the teaching professionals recommended that efforts continue to address specific difficulties that individual pupils may have in relation to their attitudes to learning and literacy. Interestingly, teaching professionals across the different school settings emphasised the importance of clear and effective communication between teachers and pupils, and between teachers
and parents, as a way of addressing difficulties related to pupil attitudes and pupil apprehension for all children, and particularly for children with specific educational needs. In addition, principals and teachers recommended the implementation of effective teaching methods which facilitate appropriately pitched learning activities to enable children to experience success (Sections 4.3.2.2, 4.3.5). Furthermore, teaching professionals emphasised the need for teachers to model positive attitudes and to use appropriate language in directions and instructions during literacy activities in order to provide positive literacy experiences for children, to ensure optimum pupil learning outcomes and to prevent unnecessary pupil apprehension (Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.3).

It is interesting to consider the influence of gender in children’s literacy acquisition. A review of the data conveys that some differences were identified by principals and teachers in this research relating to boys’ preferences for factual material (science, history, geography) and girls preferences for fiction (novels, short stories). It is noteworthy that differences identified by teaching professionals reflected the views expressed by some children (Section 4.4.1.2) in relation to perceived gender preferences in subject material (boys preferring stories involving action, adventure and sport, girls preferring more personal stories) and reading habits (for example, there were suggestions from teaching professionals and children that girls were more likely to read continuously and boys were more likely to read intermittently, for less prolonged periods of time).
The research findings suggest the need to promote positive attitudes towards reading (Sections 4.3.3, 4.3.4), social and emotional learning (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2010; Laura & Smith, 2009) and effective reading habits in pupils of both genders, and emphasised that such interventions are particularly important for boys experiencing difficulties with literacy. In addition, findings from this research recognise the importance of establishing daily routines and practices, where reading is encouraged and facilitated, reiterate the need to consider the effect of the influence of the school environment (Geske & Ozola 2009), and recommend that children of both genders take advantage of opportunities to have positive experiences in literacy (Bedard, Horn, & Garcia, 2011; Heckman & Wax, 2004; Webner & Caccavale, 1991). The need for a curriculum that includes a broad range of reading material and text types and reflects the reading interests of all pupils, including boys has been addressed by the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 49). Moreover, the use of multimedia approaches was recognised by the teaching professionals and children in this research as an innovative and engaging means to engage both boys and girls (Sections 4.3.3, 4.4.1.2).

Interestingly, the principals and teachers cautioned against creating self-fulfilling prophecies (Below et al., 2010), stereotypes, and generalisations, and noted that a child’s personality, ability and interests may be more dominant factors than the child’s gender in affecting literacy acquisition. Research findings reiterate the importance of parental and family influences
(Section 4.3.1.1) as addressed by numerous sources in the research literature (Fan & Chen, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004) and the implementation of effective teaching approaches and methodologies (Kennedy et al., 2012; Department of Education and Science/National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999b) in influencing children’s literacy acquisition in pupils of both genders.

The challenges presented in teaching pupils of differing abilities were acknowledged by principals and teachers in this research (Chart 4, Section 4.2.2.2). In their responses, the teaching professionals acknowledged that the range of abilities and specific learning needs that present in every classroom is extensively broad and emphasised the importance of appropriate planning and differentiation. Section 4.3.2.2 outlines the main research findings in relation to the acquisition of literacy in pupils of differing abilities. In particular, teaching professionals recommended the implementation of individually designed programmes for children with specific learning needs (Section 4.3.2.2), early intervention and the need for regular, accurate and differentiated assessment (Section 4.3.5). Furthermore, research findings reiterate the importance of formative assessment in teaching and learning (Clarke, 2005; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999; Shepard, 2009) and suggested that children working at their appropriate ability level would be less likely to experience failure, and so children would be encouraged and motivated to attempt more challenging material (Section 4.3.4).
The use of multiple entry points (Gardner, 1993), recent innovations in multimedia approaches, such as the use of Powerpoint, computer-assisted instruction (Section 4.3.3), the appropriate use of cross-curricular integration (Heyning, 2000; Pane & Salmon, 2010; Section 5.3.1.2.4) as well as initiatives in social and emotional learning (SEL) (Bear & Watkins, 2006; Elias et al., 1997; Payton et al., 2008) have much to offer educators and their pupils in facilitating children’s literacy acquisition in different learning contexts. Many SEL programmes (Bear & Watkins, 2006; Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2005) emphasise the need for appropriate instruction, teaching methodologies and assessment practices, and an awareness of how children’s social, emotional and cognitive domains are engaged throughout the learning process. Such interventions are important for children with different learning needs as they promote resilience and persistence throughout the learning process which can be transferred to other areas of children’s lives. While there is agreement that a sense of resilience cannot replace the skills essential for reading, an expectation of being able to overcome challenges can assist in maintaining the effort and persistence to learn such skills and use them effectively (McGough, 2008; McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Pajares, 1996; Pressley et al., 2003).

The research findings suggest that teaching professionals recognised the need for an appreciation of the learning needs of children with exceptional ability (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3, Sections 4.3.2.1.2, 4.3.2.2). It
is noteworthy that principals and teachers acknowledged the importance of teacher education to assist in understanding these specific educational needs and to provide approaches which could best facilitate and structure learning activities for children with exceptional abilities (Gross 2004; Laura & Smith, 2009; Merrotsy et al., 2008). The importance of access to reading material which provides appropriately challenging content (Section 5.3.1.1), the effective use of library resources and the inclusion of research and project work incorporating an enquiry approach (Barron & Darling-Hammond., 2008; Cervetti et al., 2012; Goldschmidt & Jung 2011; Guthrie et al., 2004) were identified by teaching professionals as effective ways of providing for the specific educational needs of children with exceptional abilities.

Interestingly, the teaching professionals recognised the importance of the provision of opportunities for children with exceptional ability to engage with texts of differing levels of complexity (Sections 4.3.2.1.2, 4.3.2.2, 4.3.3). Examples are opportunities for children to explore and acquire an understanding of more complex issues and problems, as posited by Gross (1998) and Laura and Smith (2009), and for pupils to work with like-minded peers, noting the social and cognitive benefits of such interaction. It is noteworthy that teaching professionals and children in this research recognised that literacy activities facilitated group discussion and provided opportunities to engage with other pupils (Sections 4.3.4, 4.4.1.4). Such opportunities are of value to children of all abilities, and for children with
exceptional ability in particular, as addressed by Kesner (2008) who described the benefits of allowing children to complete activities and discuss issues in like-minded groups (Colangelo, 2002). Similarly, Gross (2004) agreed with the benefits of like-ability peers working collaboratively as did Merrotsy et al. (2008) who suggested that when working with, and relating to, like-minded peers, children with exceptional abilities tend to be intellectually challenged, engaged with their studies, perform closer to their ability and convey positive attitudes to learning and their peers.

Differentiation that is more personalised and responsive to individual pupil needs and that creates an environment more conducive to nurturing personal growth and achievement has been posited in the research literature (Kesner, 2005; Tomlinson & Demirsky, 2000) and is important to ensure that children of all abilities are provided with opportunities to continue to achieve their potential (Section 4.3.2.2).

5.4 Conclusion

This study identifies the most influential factors in children’s literacy acquisition from the perspectives of teaching professionals in this research. These include the influence of parental and family context and involvement, language, culture and socio-economic factors (Sections 4.3.1.1–4.3.1.4, Table 29, Section 5.2). The research findings convey that factors occur simultaneously and are interrelated; an important consideration in establishing an appreciation of the potential opportunities and challenges
presented in the current context and in addressing relevant implications for best practice (Section 6.3).

This study identifies a number of relevant challenges relating to pupil attitudes and abilities and the support available to children at home and at school (Table 30, Section 5.3). In addition, this research outlines some important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in an Irish context. These relate to school and curricular considerations and pupil-specific considerations (Table 31, Section 5.3). The research findings emphasise the importance of teacher education, a whole school approach to literacy acquisition, and the availability of appropriate educational resources. Additionally, the findings reiterate the need for effective curricular implementation in oral language, reading and writing and the benefits of cross-curricular integration. Furthermore, this research recognises the importance of parental involvement in influencing children’s literacy acquisition, the need to encourage positive pupil attitudes towards learning in literacy and the importance of appropriate differentiation in the teaching of children of both genders and different abilities.

Some important issues emerged in responses from the teaching professionals interviewed which have implications for curriculum revision. These include teachers’ criticisms of the primary curriculum (Section 4.3.2), their concerns about the specificity of objectives and a view that oral language objectives can be too low for children with exceptional ability
(Section 4.3.2.2). In this research, principals and teachers also emphasised the need for appropriate assessment and effective communication between teachers and pupils, teachers and parents, schools and relevant support agencies (Section 4.3.5). Whilst acknowledging the need for realistic and appropriate expectations, teaching professionals in DEIS school settings expressed the view that engagement in reading can assist children in overcoming challenges in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. In addressing the issue of gender, principals and teachers across different school settings suggested that teachers, parents and policy makers need to continue in their efforts to engage pupils of both genders with a range of texts and text types and to differentiate appropriately in teaching approaches and resources.

The research findings suggest interrelations between the most influential factors affecting children’s literacy acquisition, the related challenges in the current context and the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children (Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 32, Appendix B).

While findings from this research provide the potential for further exploration and discussion, a knowledge and awareness of the influential factors, challenges and considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children is of benefit to educators in their endeavours to promote and facilitate the acquisition of literacy in children in different educational contexts.
6 Chapter Six: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the main conclusions from this research. Section 6.2 describes the principal contributions of the thesis relating to the factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children in Ireland, the main challenges in the current context and important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children. Section 6.3 addresses the relevant implications for practice and Section 6.4 outlines the limitations of this thesis. The chapter closes with Section 6.5 which provides suggestions for further research.

6.2 Principal Contributions of the Thesis

In considering the relevant research literature and recent attempts to address the literacy needs of children in the current social context, this research sought to explore the current factors, challenges and important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in Ireland from the perspectives of primary professionals (primary school principals, primary teachers, academics) and children and to establish relevant implications for practice. This thesis makes many contributions to our knowledge, including the identification of the most influential factors affecting the acquisition of literacy, the relevant challenges presented in the current context and the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children (Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2) from the perspectives of teaching professionals and children in an Irish context. It also outlines relevant implications for best practice (Section 6.3).
The findings from this research recognise the importance of parental and family influences in the acquisition of literacy in children (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 17, Section 4.2.3.3). In particular, teaching professionals emphasised the importance of parental and family context and involvement and early literacy experiences in facilitating progression in children’s oral language, reading and writing (Chart 4, Sections 4.2.2.2, 4.3.1.1). These research findings suggest that parental involvement can affect the formation of attitudes and the setting of appropriate expectations and can encourage children to access future learning opportunities. Furthermore, the need to improve parental awareness of the importance of literacy and the ways in which parents can best facilitate their children’s learning emerged as one of the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children across all primary educational settings (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3). These findings concur with assertions made in the research literature, as to the extent to which the parental and family context influences a child’s literacy acquisition and supports the notion that parents remain the first, and are among the most influential teachers of their children.

In addition, the teaching professionals acknowledged the influence of language and cultural factors in the acquisition of literacy in children (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Sections 4.3.1.2, 4.3.1.3). Findings from this research, suggest that language and cultural factors interrelate but are frequently difficult to isolate and investigate, as they
occur simultaneously and influence, to varying degrees, the acquisition of literacy in children in differing circumstances.

The impact of socio-economic factors was also recognised by teaching professionals in this research (Chart 3, Section 4.2.2.1, Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Section 4.3.1.4). Interestingly, the findings of this study concur with existing findings from recent research literature but suggest a nuanced view expressed by teaching professionals as to the specific influences of socio-economic factors. Research findings indicate that it is not merely a question of economic resources and circumstances that have an impact, but rather parenting styles, parental interaction, attitudes, values, reading and social practices which may be affected by socio-economic factors, that must be considered. It is important to consider differences that exist across situations of similar socio-economic background (for example, parental attitudes, access to resources and pupil motivation and ability). This variability suggests that socio-economic factors are not a sole predictor of success or difficulties in the acquisition of literacy in children. Interestingly, teaching professionals noted that while socio-economic factors can affect educational achievement, pupil’s own agency, engagement in reading and motivation can compensate for the adverse effects of such factors (Sections 4.3.1.3, 4.3.1.4). In addition, the impact of parents’, teachers’ and children’s expectations and the need to be aware of the effect of self-fulfilling prophecies were recognised by the teaching professionals (Sections 4.3.4, 4.3.5).
In a consideration of the context in which children acquire literacy in Ireland, a number of relevant challenges were identified in the literature and emerged from responses received to the online survey and in research interviews with teaching professionals (Chart 4, Sections 4.2.2.2, 4.3). These challenges relate to pupils’ attitudes and abilities and the support available to children at home and at school (Table 12, Section 4.2.3.1).

This research outlines some important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children in an Irish context (Chart 5, Section 4.2.2.3). These relate to school and curricular considerations and pupil specific considerations (Table 14, Section 4.2.3.1). Findings from this research emphasise the importance of teacher education, a whole school approach to literacy acquisition and the availability of appropriate educational resources. In addition, findings reiterate the need for effective curricular implementation in oral language, reading and writing and the benefits of cross-curricular integration. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the importance of parental involvement in influencing children’s literacy acquisition, the need to encourage positive pupil attitudes towards learning in literacy and the importance of appropriate differentiation in the teaching of children of both genders and different abilities.

A number of important issues emerged in responses received from teaching professionals which have implications for curriculum revision. These include criticisms of the primary curriculum (Section 4.3.2), concerns
about the specificity of objectives and a view that oral language objectives can be too low for children with exceptional ability (Section 4.3.2.2). In addition, the teaching professionals emphasised the need for appropriate assessment and effective communication between teachers and pupils, teachers and parents, schools and relevant support agencies (Section 4.3.5). Whilst recognising the need for realistic and appropriate expectations, principals and teachers in DEIS school settings expressed the view that engagement in reading can assist children to overcome challenges in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. In addressing the issue of gender and its relevance in relation to children’s literacy acquisition, teaching professionals suggested that teachers, parents and policy makers need to continue in their efforts to engage pupils of both genders with a variety of texts and text types and to differentiate appropriately in their selection and implementation of teaching approaches and resources.

In considering the findings from this research it is necessary to acknowledge the interrelations between the most influential factors affecting children’s literacy acquisition, the related challenges in the current context and the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children. Such associations are suggested by a review of the literature and in responses received from teaching professionals (Table 16, Section 4.2.3.2, Table 32, Appendix B).
Overall, similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children in this research, in relation to many issues, and in most instances, findings reflected those reported in recent research literature. In particular, similar views were expressed by teaching professionals and children emphasising the need for additional opportunities to improve oral language, pronunciation and comprehension (Sections 4.3.2.1.1, 4.3.2.1.2, 4.4.1.1, 4.4.1.2). The research findings also suggest that teaching professionals and children recognised that literacy can influence personal development and acknowledged the associations between literacy and life-long learning (Sections 4.3.4, 4.4.1.4).

6.3 Implications for Practice

A number of important implications for policy and practice emerge from this research. These include the need to continue to create awareness of the ways in which parents can assist their children in their literacy acquisition by, for example, facilitating positive early literacy experiences, engaging in paired reading and participating in family, school and community literacy programmes. Research findings also suggest the importance of the provision of advice and information to parents to enable them to support their children’s literacy acquisition and to ensure that parental involvement in their children’s learning is integrated with children’s literacy activities at school. In addition, this research acknowledges the benefits of the promotion of models of good practice that enable the co-operation and support of parents, families, communities, and
schools to support children in their literacy acquisition, as recommended by the *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

This research recognises the importance of teacher education to ensure teachers are informed about recommendations for best practice. The *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) provided a number of actions to improve teachers’ skills in the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy (pp. 34-37). These involve co-operation with the Teaching Council to set new, higher standards in entry requirements for initial teacher education and to re-configure the content and duration of initial teacher education courses for primary teachers to ensure the progression of teachers’ skills in literacy teaching. These also include the provision of accredited post-graduate courses to equip teachers to teach in Irish-medium settings and continued support to newly qualified teachers generally and especially in the teaching of literacy. Furthermore, the *National Strategy* emphasised the use of assessment to ensure that adequate quality assurance mechanisms are in place for continuing professional courses for teachers.

Interestingly, a whole school approach to literacy acquisition with co-operation and collaboration among teachers, the sharing of resources and expertise is recommended in this research. Research findings recognise the importance of school leadership in implementing such approaches and are in keeping with recommendations made by the *National Strategy* (pp. 40-41) which advocated the importance of improving principals’ and deputy
principals’ understanding of the most effective approaches to improve the teaching of literacy. The National Strategy also advocated the support of principals and deputy principals in implementing effective school self-evaluation, focussing in particular on improvements in literacy.

Furthermore, this research recognises the need for effective curricular implementation in oral language, in particular, the implementation of methodologies and approaches to improve children’s pronunciation and the provision of opportunities for children to use oral language for different purposes. Research findings recommend the implementation of a range of strategies to further children’s levels of comprehension and to promote higher order thinking, reasoning and problem solving skills. In addition, findings from this research indicate the need to implement a variety of approaches to writing and to provide children with opportunities to write in different genres, within an appropriate time frame. Multimedia approaches to literacy have many benefits but should have clear educational objectives and be implemented in an effective and appropriate manner.

In this research, several important issues were addressed by teaching professionals which have implications for curriculum revision. These include teachers’ criticisms of the primary curriculum, teachers’ concerns about the specificity of objectives and a view that oral language objectives can be too low for children with exceptional ability. The National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, pp. 53-57) proposed the revision of the English (for all schools) and Irish curricula (for Irish-medium
schools) in primary schools to show clearly what skills children are expected to learn at each stage; and the subsequent revision of the Irish curriculum for English medium schools. It also recommended the revision of elements of the primary curriculum in infant classes and placing a greater emphasis on early language acquisition.

The implementation of cross-curricular integration where appropriate was recommended by teaching professionals in this research in order to provide multiple entry points to learning content and to assist children with specific learning interests and special educational needs. Cross-curricular integration can also provide an innovative and effective means of increasing the time spent on literacy instruction, as recommended by the National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

The research findings recognise the importance of the availability of appropriate and effective resources in facilitating children’s literacy acquisition. The National Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) acknowledged the difficulties caused by current economic circumstances, emphasised the importance of increased efficiency and reiterated the need to bring about change within available resources (p. 15).

It is noteworthy that research findings suggest the importance of social and emotional learning; its influence on the acquisition of literacy and the potential impact literacy can have on social and emotional competence. This research indicates the potential benefits of integrating social and emotional learning and literacy instruction. Research findings also
recognise the influence of gender and related implications for differentiation in approaches and resources used to assist children in their literacy acquisition. The *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) emphasised the need to ensure that the curriculum reflects the reading interests of all pupils, including boys, and enables them to have access to a better balance of text types (p. 49).

Furthermore, this research recommends the implementation of a variety of modes of formative and summative assessment to inform teaching and learning. The research findings emphasise the importance of early intervention, so that needs are accurately assessed and appropriate interventions are efficiently implemented. This research also recognises the importance of effective communication between teachers, teachers and pupils, and teachers and other relevant support agencies. Such findings are supported by recommendations made in the *National Strategy* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, pp. 80-84) which seek to ensure that the curriculum is presented in clear learning outcomes and supported by examples of students’ learning so as to enable teachers to use assessment to inform their teaching, that is, the use of assessment for learning. In addition, the *National Strategy* requires that teachers report to parents on the achievement of pupils and the putting in place of better arrangements for the transfer of pupil achievement data between schools. Such measures enable teachers to plan and teach effectively according to children’s specific educational needs and assist children in achieving their potential.
6.4 Limitations of this Research

While this thesis explores a variety of issues relevant to the acquisition of literacy in children, it does have some limitations. Although this research topic, the acquisition of literacy in children, provides numerous potential possibilities for exploration and discussion, the findings are limited to the scope of the research questions and pertinent issues addressed, the sample and the views of individual participants in this research. This must be taken into account when considering the overall conclusions.

This research was dependent on the individuals’ willingness and availability to participate. It includes teachers in schools of differing categories (rural, urban, DEIS, non-DEIS, and Gaelscoil) who chose to participate in the online survey, which received a respectable number of responses (162), and in research interviews which were subsequently conducted with respondents (33) available to participate. While this research also includes the views of 115 children, the size of this sample may be considered a limitation in considering conclusions from these findings.

The nature of the research design, the research questions and the data obtained from research participants means that a degree of generalisation features in the findings that emerge in this study. This research also involves self-reporting which may be considered a limitation in considering the subjectivity of views expressed by teaching professionals in the online survey and research interviews. While every effort was made in the implementation and administration of this research to ensure information
acquired was as impartial as possible, the issues of self-reporting and subjectivity must be taken into consideration in the interpretation of these research findings.

Although this research provided the opportunity to include and consider the voices and views of children, these contributions were structured, to some extent, due to the nature of this study and the design of data collection instruments.

As this is a qualitative study of educators’ perspectives relating to the factors influencing the acquisition of literacy in children, current challenges and most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children, this research does not focus on considering the causes and effects of literacy achievement in any one particular literacy assessment. Alternatively, this research design facilitates teaching professionals in expressing their views in relation to their relevant professional experiences, their knowledge about teaching and learning literacy and addresses these perspectives in reference to sources in the literature.

An exploration of this research topic provides numerous possibilities to engage with others and to share the human experience. There were many opportunities for learning in exploring the writings of scholars in relation to the subject, reviewing the work of previous studies conducted by educational researchers, and much to be gained from the sharing of knowledge and experiences with other teaching professionals and children.
Whilst there are numerous approaches to educational research, it is noteworthy that practical considerations play a considerable role in influencing the selection and implementation of approaches in practice.

This research provides an insight into the relevant opportunities and challenges in children’s literacy acquisition and suggests numerous possibilities for further investigation. A knowledge and awareness of the influential factors, challenges, considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children and implications for best practice is of benefit to educators in their endeavours to promote and facilitate the effective acquisition of literacy in children across different educational settings.

6.5 Suggestions for Further Research

A vast body of research continues to be conducted in the area of literacy in Ireland and internationally. This study suggests the need to explore the following aspects of literacy and literacy education in greater depth. The individual factors, challenges and important considerations relating to the acquisition of literacy in children provide opportunities for further investigation. These include the significance of parental and family influences, the importance of language and cultural factors and the ways in which they relate to, and affect, the acquisition of literacy in children. The influence of socio-economic factors also provides numerous possibilities for supplementary study. Research findings suggest the potential for further research to explore the ways in which engagement with reading can assist children in overcoming the difficulties associated with areas of socio-
economic disadvantage. Such studies may possibly examine the relationship between socio-economic factors, and parenting styles, the language experiences of children, engagement with literacy practices and learning outcomes.

There is also the potential for further quantitative and qualitative studies, to consider the influence of relevant factors in an Irish context and how they relate to similar studies in an international context. In addition, further research is required to explore literacy acquisition in children with differing abilities and specific learning needs.

This research suggests the need for investigations into the impact of socio-emotional attributes and pupil attitudes (for example, enthusiasm, apprehension) on children’s acquisition of literacy and the ways in which such attitudes can be promoted or changed to improve engagement with literacy. The appropriate use of social stories and social scripts, as well as effective teaching approaches to assist children with social and communication skills are issues which require extensive further investigation. In addition, this research establishes the possibilities for consideration of social and emotional learning initiatives and their effects on the acquisition of literacy and personal development in an Irish context.

There are also possibilities for further study exploring different approaches to teacher education in literacy. Such studies may, for example, consider children’s acquisition of literacy by incorporating recommended methodologies in implementing a whole school approach (for example, in
action research or a case study). There is potential for further exploration of
the effectiveness of curricular approaches in oral language, reading,
comprehension and writing with children of differing abilities and learning
needs. The factors affecting responses to such interventions are important
variables in the interpretation and consideration of such research findings
and provide multiple opportunities for further investigation. The need for
effective interventions which can support children in this regard provides
opportunities for further research. In addition, there are extensive prospects
for supplementary enquiry to ascertain appropriate and accurate assessment
procedures which adequately reflect progress attained by children.

While previous studies have included the voices of children in Ireland
(for example, McPhillips & Shevlin, 2009; Williams et al., 2009a), there is
the potential for further research to explore children’s perspectives, views
and relevant experiences in literacy. Although this study provides some
insights, investigations could be extended to include the views of children of
diverse backgrounds across differing educational settings. There is also
much potential for studies to explore the views of parents in relation to this
research topic in greater detail.

Prospective studies could consider the influence of gender and its
impact on the selection of teaching approaches, subject matter and pupil
achievement. The impact of the communication of the importance of
literacy to children, the ways in which this is achieved and possible effects
on motivation, engagement and pupil learning outcomes, are issues which
facilitate further enquiry. In addition, there are multiple possibilities for investigations into how literacy can effect behavior modification and personal transformation. These areas provide the potential for additional qualitative and quantitative studies. There are also many prospects for further research to explore the views of teaching professionals and children internationally and how they compare and contrast to those expressed by teaching professionals and children in Ireland.

This research advocates the view that a knowledge and awareness of the relevant factors affecting the acquisition of literacy in children in Ireland, associated challenges and important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children can inform educators as they select and implement approaches and methodologies appropriate for children in different learning contexts.
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Appendix A - Online Survey
1. Research Participant Information and Consent

The Factors affecting the Development of Literacy with Children at Primary Level
Angela Coyne, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin
Prof. Ann Devitt, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin

You are invited to participate in this research which is being carried out by Angela Coyne. Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

The study is designed to investigate the factors affecting literacy development in children at primary level.

Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media... when we refer to “literacy” we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media (Department of Education and Skills, 2011-2020, p.8). In line with the NCCA (1999) Irish Primary School curriculum, this study involves looking at the development of literacy in English and Gaeilge.

If you agree to participate, this will involve you completing a short online survey. If you wish, you may also participate in a brief interview.

This research may benefit educators and children in the development of literacy within their specific circumstances.

Responses will be collected via a weblink and processed by a facility (called Survey Monkey) which will represent responses numerically. All data collected will be kept securely and will remain anonymous. The above named researcher and supervisor will have access to it.

If you have any questions about this research you can contact Angela Coyne (coynean@tcd.ie) to seek further clarification and information.

☐ I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in this online survey.
☐ I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in this online survey and a short interview.
2. Are you male or female?

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

3. What category of school do you teach in?

- [ ] Mixed
- [ ] All Boys
- [ ] All Girls

4. Please select the terms which best describe your school

- [ ] Rural
- [ ] Urban
- [ ] DEIS Band 1
- [ ] DEIS Band 2
- [ ] Non-DEIS
- [ ] Gaelscoil

5. Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media... when we refer to “literacy” we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media (Department of Education and Skills, 2011-2020, p.8). In line with the NCCA (1999) Irish Primary School curriculum, this study involves looking at the development of literacy in English and Gaeilge.

What factors impact most on a child's developing literacy skills?

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*6. What are the greatest challenges facing the development of a child's literacy skills at primary level?

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**7. What are the most important considerations for the future of addressing specific literacy needs?**

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Other (please specify)

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**8. If you are involved in the development of literacy with children at primary level and you would be willing to participate in a short interview in relation to this topic, please include your email address and contact details in the box below. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.**
## Appendix B - Table of Correlations

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Notes:
- Sig. (2-tailed) column indicates the significance level for a two-tailed test.
- N values represent the sample size for each correlation coefficient.
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 32 Table of Correlations
9 Appendix C
- Questions for Research Interviews with Teaching Professionals
Questions for Research Interviews with Teaching Professionals

Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media… when we refer to “literacy” we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media (Department of Education and Skills, 2011-2020, p.8). In line with the NCCA (1999) Irish Primary School curriculum, this study involves looking at the acquisition of literacy in English and Gaeilge.

The following questions are intended as a guide in addressing issues in research interviews. Participants are encouraged to elaborate where appropriate.

1. What category of school do you teach in?
   Mixed _______
   All Girls _____
   All Boys _____

2. Please select the terms which best describe your school
   Rural _____
   Urban_____ 
   DEIS Band 1_____ 
   DEIS Band 2_____ 
   Gaelscoil ______

3. What factors impact most on a child’s literacy acquisition?

Parental and Family Influences
Language Background (Parent(s)’/Child’s/ School’s)
Cultural Background (Parent(s)’/Child’s (for example, ethnicity))
Parent(s)’ Religious Background
Gender
Socio-economic Factors
Other
4. What are the greatest challenges in the acquisition of a child’s literacy skills at primary level?

- The Support Given to Children in their Reading and Writing at Home
- The Support Given to the Teaching of Reading and Writing to Children at School
- Pupil Enthusiasm
- Pupil Apprehension
- Pupil Abilities
- Pupil Specific Learning Needs (including English as an additional language)
- Availability of Appropriate Educational Resources
- Competition from Other Sources (for example, television, multimedia)
- Other

5. What are the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children?

- Improve Teacher Education
- Improve Curricular Approaches
- Improve Cross-curricular Integration
- Improve Literacy Approaches with Children with Special Educational Needs
- Improve Literacy Approaches with Children across the Mainstream
- Improve Literacy Approaches with Children with Exceptional Ability
- Improve Parental Awareness
- Improve Pupil Attitudes
- Improve Multimedia Approaches to Literacy
- Other


- What language skills are in most need of progression?
- Have you any views in relation to the acquisition of literacy and the curriculum, curriculum implementation, curricular approaches and methodologies?

7. Literacy and Differentiation

- Is differentiation important in the acquisition of literacy in children?
- How do/should teachers differentiate in literacy for
  - children of differing abilities (children with specific learning needs, children in the mainstream, children with exceptional ability)?
  - boys and girls
  - children’s cultural backgrounds
  - children’s language backgrounds
  - other
8. Literacy and Language
Is literacy being acquired in more than one/different languages in your class/school?
What are the benefits of acquiring literacy in a monolingual/bilingual/multilingual context?
What are the challenges in acquiring literacy in such a context?
Is literacy being successfully acquired as Gaeilge (in Irish)?
What language skills are in most need of progression?
Have you any views in relation to the teaching of the English/Irish language, the current curriculum, curriculum implementation, curricular approaches and methodologies?

9. Assessment
Is assessment important in the acquisition of literacy?
Have you any views on the assessment of literacy?

10. The Importance of a Whole School Approach in the Acquisition of Literacy
How is literacy best acquired in schools?
What approaches are implemented in your school?
Does your school implement a whole school approach to literacy?
Are there advantages to this approach? Can you provide examples?
Are there disadvantages to this approach? Can you provide examples?

11. Social and Emotional Learning
Do you think the acquisition of literacy can affect social and emotional learning?
Can you identify ways in which literacy can affect social and emotional learning?
Do you use literacy to facilitate social and emotional learning in your school?
Can you provide examples?

12. Literacy and Personal Development
Can the acquisition of literacy affect personal development?
If so, can you identify ways in which literacy affects personal development?
Do you use literacy to encourage personal development in your school?
Can you provide examples?

13. Literacy and Personal Transformation
Can literacy affect personal transformation?
If so, can you identify ways in which literacy affects personal transformation?
Do you use literacy to encourage personal transformation in your school?
Can you provide examples?
14. Literacy and Social Change
Can literacy affect social change?
If so, can you identify ways in which literacy affects social change?
Do you use literacy to encourage social change in your school?
Can you provide examples?

15. Communication of the Importance of Literacy to Children
Do you think children understand the importance of literacy?
Do you think the importance of literacy is communicated to children?
How should the importance of literacy be communicated to children?
Other
Appendix D - Questionnaire with Children
Questionnaire with Children

1. Are you a boy or a girl?
   ✓ Please tick
   I am a boy. _______
   I am a girl._______

2. What languages do you speak at home?
   ✓ Please tick
   I speak only English at home. _________
   I speak other languages as well as English at home. ______

   __________________________________________
   I speak English and Irish at home. _________

3. Do you read with your parents at home?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes. _____
   No. ______
   Sometimes. _____

4. Do you feel you get enough help with your reading at home?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes. _____
   No. _____

5. Do you feel you get enough help with your reading at school?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes._______
   No._______

6. Are there books which you can read at home?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes.____
   No.____

7. Are you a member of a library?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes.____
   No.____

8. Do you enjoy reading?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes.____
   No.____
9. Are you enthusiastic about reading?
   ✔ Please tick
   Yes._____
   No._____

10. Do you feel nervous about reading?
    ✔ Please tick
    Yes._____
    No._____
    Sometimes._____

11. Do you find reading difficult?
    ✔ Please tick
    Yes._____
    No._____
    Sometimes._____

12. Would you prefer to read a book or watch television?
    ✔ Please tick
    Read a book._____
    Watch television._____

13. Do you prefer to read a book or play a computer/video game?
    ✔ Please tick
    Read a book._____
    Play a computer/video game._____

14. Do you have a positive attitude towards reading?
    Yes._____
    No._____

15. What do you read most often?
    ✔ Please tick
    Books/magazines/printed sources._____
    Information from a computer/screen._____

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16. Do you think there are differences between boys and girls in their reading?
   ✔ Please tick
   Yes._________
   No._________

17. What is the most difficult thing about reading?

18. What is the best thing about reading?

19. Do you think reading is important?
   ✔ Please tick
   Yes._____  
   No._______  
   Why?

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20. Do you think reading can help you to become a better person?
   ✔ Please tick
   Yes. _____ 
   No. _____ 
   How?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

21. Do you think reading can help people to change?
   ✔ Please tick
   Yes. _____ 
   No. _____ 
   How?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

22. Do you see people from your country in the books you read?
   ✔ Please tick
   Yes. _____ 
   No. _____ 

23. Do you feel you get enough opportunities to speak at school?
   ✔ Please tick
   Yes._____ 
   No._______
24. Do you feel you need more help with speaking, for example, answering questions, talking in a group, presenting to the class?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes.______
   No. ______
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

25. Do you feel you get enough help with your writing at home?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes.____
   No.____

26. Do you feel you get enough help with your writing at school?
   ✓ Please tick
   Yes.____
   No._____ 

27. Comments
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
Appendix E - Ethical Review Checklist
Ethics Form

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, TRINITY COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Ethics Review Checklist

This checklist should be completed by the researcher (with the advice of the research supervisor if relevant), for every research project which involves human participants.

Project title: Primary Perspectives: The Acquisition of Literacy in Children in Ireland.

Researcher(s)/student: Angela Coyne.

Supervisor (where relevant): Prof. Ann Devitt.

Programme of study (where relevant): Ph.D. in Education.

Part One

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<td>2. Will the study require the co-operation of an advocate for initial access to the groups or individuals (for example, children with disabilities; adults with a dementia)?</td>
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<td>3. Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in their normal lifestyles?)</td>
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<td>4. Will deception of participants be necessary during the study (for example, covert observation of people)?</td>
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<td>5. Will the study involve discussion of topics which the participants would find sensitive (for example, sexual activity, drug use)?</td>
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<td>6. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing or physical testing (for example, the use of sports equipment such as a treadmill), and will a health questionnaire be needed?</td>
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7. Will the research involve medical procedures (for example, are drugs, placebos or other substances such as foods, vitamins to be administered to the participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind)?

8. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses or compensation for time) be offered to participants?

9. Will you be able to obtain permission from the school and parents to involve children under sixteen in the study? Please also seek children’s permission.

10. Are there problems with participants’ right to remain anonymous or to have the information they give not identifiable as theirs?

11. Is the right to freely withdraw from the study at any time made explicit?

If you have answered NO to all of the above questions, please forward this completed form to the Chair of the Ethics Committee, Dr. Aidan Seery (seerya@tcd.ie).

If you have answered YES to any of the questions, please complete Part Two of this form below, and send the form to Dr. Seery.

Part Two

For each item answered YES, please give a summary of the issue and action to be taken to address it.

Permission was obtained from respective principals, teachers, parents and children who participated in this study.

The right to freely withdraw from the study, at any time, was made explicit.

Signed:

Angela Coyne

Date:
12 Appendix F - Consent Forms
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Primary Perspectives - The Acquisition of Literacy in Children

Angela Coyne, School of Education, TCD
Prof. Ann Devitt, School of Education, TCD

1. You are invited to participate in this research which is being completed by Angela Coyne. Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media… when we refer to “literacy” we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media (Department of Education and Skills, 2011-2020, p.8). In line with the NCCA (1999) Irish Primary School curriculum, this study involves looking at the acquisition of literacy in English and Gaeilge.

If you agree to participate, this will involve you completing a short online survey. If you wish, you may also participate in a brief interview.

This research may benefit educators and children in the acquisition of literacy in their specific circumstances.

Responses will be collected via a weblink: (http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JQCY8VP) and processed by a facility (called Survey Monkey) which will represent responses numerically. All data collected will be kept securely and will remain anonymous. The above named researcher will have access to it.

If you have any questions about this research you can contact Angela Coyne (coynean@tcd.ie), to seek further clarification and information.

Please tick
I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in the online survey. ______

I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in this online survey and a short interview. _____
Primary Perspectives -  
The Acquisition of Literacy in Children in Ireland  
Angela Coyne, TCD  
Prof. Ann Devitt, TCD  

Your child is invited to participate in research which is being conducted by Angela Coyne. The study explores the views of teaching professionals and children in relation to the acquisition of literacy in children in an Irish context. It investigates the factors which influence the acquisition of a child’s literacy skills, the greatest challenges and the most important considerations for the future in addressing the literacy needs of children. This study involves the completion of a research questionnaire.

The identity of research participants will remain anonymous. The data collected will be viewed by the researcher. This research may be of benefit to primary educators and their pupils as it will help to deepen our understanding of how we can promote the acquisition of literacy in children in Ireland.
Signature of research participant

I understand what is involved in this research and I agree to participate in this study.

-----------------------------------------   ------- ---------
Signature of participant    Date

Signature of research participant’s parent or guardian

I understand what is involved in this research and I agree for my child to participate in this study.

-----------------------------------------   ------- ---------
Signature of participant’s parent/guardian Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

-----------------------------------------   ------- ---------
Signature of researcher    Date