An investigation into the selection and implementation of high frequency word instruction in Irish infant classrooms

Marino Institute of Education

Name: Julie McCormack

Student Number: 14314849

Word Count: 10,997 words

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer O’Sullivan

Submitted to Marino Institute of Education on 10th May 2020
Supervision Meeting Form Number 4

Marino Institute of Education

PME

2019 – 2020

Student No: 14314849

Name: Julie McCormack

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer O’Sullivan

Dissertation title: An investigation into the selection and implementation of high frequency word instruction in Irish infant classrooms
Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University. I agree that the Marino Institute of Education library may lend or copy the thesis, in hard or soft copy, upon request.

Signature: _______Julie McCormack_________

Julie McCormack

Date: 11th May 2020
Abstract

The main aim of this research project is to investigate the selection and implementation of high frequency word (HFW) instruction in Irish infant classrooms. It also aims to discover whether or not Irish infant teachers’ instructional approaches reflect current research. This research was done in the context of the interpretive paradigm. A qualitative research approach was adopted in the form of semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis in the form of photographs. From analysing the data, key themes emerged. Uncertainty existed amongst participants regarding HFW terminology and instruction. Another theme that emerged was that teachers use their own discretion and creativity for HFW instruction. The last theme in the findings is the participants’ interest in additional support. This research project discusses teachers’ reliance on published programmes and the extent to which Irish infant teachers’ HFW instructional approaches reflect current research.

Findings suggest that language programmes should be rooted in research. They also recommend researchers and authors of language programmes use the term ‘sight word’ correctly to avoid confusion amongst teachers and thus, children. Findings also suggest the need for more initial teacher education (ITE) and continual professional development (CPD) regarding HFW selection and instruction. This research project concludes by stating that Irish infant teachers rely on published programmes for the selection and implementation of HFW instruction and that Irish infant teachers’ HFW instructional practice does not reflect current research.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Jennifer O’Sullivan. Without all of her guidance and encouragement, this research project would not have been possible.

I am also greatly indebted all the participants who agreed to be interviewed and gave consent for their displays and resources to be photographed. Their help and cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their encouragement and support throughout my studies.
**Acronyms**

High Frequency Word (HFW)
Initial Teacher Education (ITE)
Continual Professional Development (CPD)
Professional Masters of Education (PME)
Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
International Literary Association (ILA)
Word Wall (WW)
Marino Institute of Education (MIE)
Teacher 1 (T1)
Teacher 2 (T2)
Teacher 3 (T3)
Teacher 4 (T4)
Teacher 5 (T5)
Teacher 6 (T6)
Junior Infant (JI)
Senior Infant (SI)
English as an Additional Language (EAL)
# Table of Contents

Form Number 4.................................................................................................................. 1

Declaration.................................................................................................................................. 2

Abstract.......................................................................................................................................... 3

Acknowledgements...................................................................................................................... 4

Acronyms...................................................................................................................................... 5

Table of Contents....................................................................................................................... 6

Chapter 1: Introduction..................................................................................................................... 9
  1.1 Introduction............................................................................................................................. 9
  1.2 Research Questions.................................................................................................................. 9
  1.3 Research Aims.......................................................................................................................... 9
  1.4 Research Design...................................................................................................................... 9
  1.5 Motivation............................................................................................................................... 10
  1.6 Outline of the study............................................................................................................... 11

Chapter 2: Literature Review......................................................................................................... 12
  2.1 Introduction............................................................................................................................. 12
  2.2 What is reading?..................................................................................................................... 12
  2.3 Theoretical framework .......................................................................................................... 13
  2.4 Definitions of high frequency words.................................................................................... 15
  2.5 High frequency word lists..................................................................................................... 16
  2.6 Teaching HFWs in an Irish context ....................................................................................... 17
  2.7 Current approaches to teaching HFWs.................................................................................. 19
Chapter 3: Research Methodology......................................................... 30

3.1 Introduction................................................................................. 30
3.2 Researcher Positionality......................................................... 30
3.3 Ethical Considerations.............................................................. 31
3.4 Participants.............................................................................. 32
3.5 Research Design....................................................................... 33
3.6 Semi-Structured Interviews.................................................... 35
3.7 Piloting the interview schedule................................................. 35
3.8 Procedure................................................................................. 36
3.9 Data Analysis: Thematic Approach......................................... 37
3.10 Limitations of this study.......................................................... 38
3.11 Conclusion.............................................................................. 38

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion................................................. 40

4.1 Introduction.............................................................................. 40
4.2 Similarities among participants............................................... 40
4.3 Teacher uncertainty................................................................. 41
4.4 Teacher’s discretion and creativity......................................... 44
4.5 Interest in additional support.................................................. 53
4.6 Discussion point 1: Reliance on published programmes........... 54
4.7 Discussion point 2: Do Irish infant teachers HFW instructional approaches reflect current research?.......................... 55
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Summary of Findings

5.3 Recommendations

5.4 Future Research

5.5 Conclusion

Reference List

Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Principal

Appendix 2: Consent form for Principal

Appendix 3: Information Sheet for teachers

Appendix 4: Consent form for teachers

Appendix 5: Interview questions

Appendix 6: The Dolch List

Appendix 7: The Fry List

Appendix 8: Curriculum Generated Lists

Appendix 9: Fry’s 1000 Instant Word List

Appendix 10: Sample of Thematic Coding

Appendix 11: The Starlight Programme’s ‘sight word’ list for Junior Infants

Appendix 12: The Starlight Programme’s Yearly Plan for Junior Infants

Appendix 13: The Starlight Programme’s Yearly Plan for Senior Infants
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research questions, research aims and research design of this research project. This chapter also includes the motivation for the topic that was chosen for this research project and provides an outline of the study.

1.2 Research Questions

Defining clear and specific research questions is an integral part of a research study. The research questions which this research project seeks to answer are:

- How do Irish infant teachers select and implement high frequency word (HFW) instruction in their classrooms?
- Do Irish teachers’ instructional approaches reflect current research?

1.3 Research Aims

The primary aim of this qualitative research study is to investigate the selection and implementation of HFW instruction in Irish infant classrooms. This is the primary aim of this research study because, as Chapter 2 will discuss, HFW instruction is central to children’s ability to progress in their reading. This research study also aims to address the gap in national research on high frequency word instruction in Irish infant classrooms.

1.4 Research Design

The sample for this research project consisted of six primary school infant teachers (teachers who specialise in providing an educational environment to children roughly between the ages of 4-6 years). All participants teach in the same school. A qualitative methodological approach was adopted in this study in the form of semi-
structured interviews. This approach was adopted in the hope that semi-structured interviews would provide a true insight into the current selection process and instruction of HFWs in Irish infant classrooms. Documentary analysis was also used in this study in the form of photographs. This gave further insight into HFW instructional resources in the participants’ classrooms and formed a comparison between what the literature recommends and what is being used in practice. Chapter 3 will discuss the rationale behind this research design further.

1.5 Motivation

This research topic was chosen because of my interest in literacy. I did English Literature as part of my undergraduate degree. My favourite module in the Professional Masters of Education (PME) was also ‘English’. While on my infants school placement, I made a number of observations about early reading. The class teacher that I had for my infants school placement wanted me to continue her instructional approach to reading with the children in her class. This approach contrasted with how I had been told to instruct early reading in my PME. There was a lack of HFW instruction in the classroom and HFWs were not something that the class teacher wanted me to cover. This made me curious about the significance of HFW selection and implementation in infant classrooms. Literacy is something that I am very passionate about and I would like to instill this love in my future students. By doing research into HFW selection and implementation, I aspire to make that process easier. I hope that the contents of this study will inform my practice in my future teaching career as well as contributing to national research on HFW selection and implementation.
1.6 Outline of the study

This chapter has outlined the research questions, research aims and the research design of this research project as well as the researcher’s personal motivation for conducting this research. Chapter 2 reviews existing literature on HFW selection and implementation to contextualise this research project. Chapter 3 describes the methodological approaches of this research study and provides a rationale for the research design. Chapter 3 also explains the data collection process, how the data was analysed, researcher positionality, ethical considerations and the limitations of this study. Chapter 4 analyses the data that emerged from this research and discusses it. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of the overall findings of the study and provides recommendations for future research relating to the selection and implementation of HFW instruction in Irish infant classrooms.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will start by examining what reading is and how high frequency word instruction helps a child to read fluently. It will then state the theoretical framework within which this research project defines the teaching of reading in early childhood education. Definitions of HFWs will then be explored and a definition for a HFW will be stated. Following this, HFW lists will be discussed and their significance will be examined. This chapter will then examine current Irish HFW research and explain how this research project will be filling a gap. Current approaches to teaching HFWs will then be examined, drawing from research completed by experts in the area of literacy. To conclude, this chapter will investigate what HFW instructional resources literature recommends.

2.2 What is reading?

Children’s ability to process language is said to be “deeply impressive”, they are said to learn up to ten new words per day between the ages of two and six (Saxton, 2010, p.8). The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) (2020) describes the reading process as “complex and multi-dimensional” (p.2). Ehri and Rosenthal (2010) state that it is specifically a child’s ability to learn new words which is central to their “academic achievement” (p.922). Denton and Otaiba (2011) believe that inadequate reading skills can make life more challenging for students and increases the risk of school dropout as well as delinquency. A research report by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2012) lists five components that must be considered in the teaching of reading; vocabulary,
comprehension, phonological awareness/phonics, attitude/motivation, and reading fluency. Fluency is therefore a key component in the reading process. Included in the components of reading fluency are; accurate word recognition, automaticity, and appropriate rhythm and intonation of speech (McKenna & Stahl, 2009). From this we can deduce that word recognition plays a central role in a child’s reading fluency. Fluent readers do not rely on “letter by letter decoding procedures” or pay attention to individual sounds or parts of words, they recognize words instantly and accurately (Fraher, Jones, Caniglia, Crowell, Hastings, Zumwalt, 2019, p.38). Kuhn, Schwanenflugel and Meisinger (2010) also believe that the ability to recognise words automatically is “central” to the “construct of fluency” (p.233). Automatic word recognition is in fact crucial because it is “highly unlikely” that “excellent reading comprehension [another component of reading] will be observed in the face of deficient word recognition skills” (Stanovich, 1991, p.4). In order for children to recognise words in their reading, they must receive some kind of formal instruction.

Word recognition is central to reading fluency. This research project is concerned with how words that occur frequently in the English language are selected and taught to children. This high frequency word instruction should “contribute to reading words fluently” (Sullivan, Konrad, Joseph & Luu, 2013, p.102).

2.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework within which this research project defines the teaching of reading in early childhood education is derived from the work of Ehri (1995). Ehri (1995) believes that there are four phases in the process of word recognition. These phases are the pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic phase (Ehri, 1995). Hickey (2007) believes that Ehri’s model of how
children develop word recognition “shows the phases in their developing decoding skills on the way to recognising words by sight” (p.491). Gaskins, Ehri and Cress (1996) discuss these phases. In the pre-alphabetic phase, a child’s letter knowledge has not yet developed. Children remember visual features of logos such as “the two tall posts” in the middle of the word ‘yellow’ “rather than letters in print itself” (p.316). The partial alphabetic phase involves children acquiring knowledge of some letter names or sounds. Children might be able to read the first and last sound of ‘kitten’, “but not the sounds in the middle” (p.316). At this phase children have difficulty decoding “unfamiliar words” and also have difficulty with vowels (p.316).

In the full alphabetic phase, children are able to analyze the spellings of words and match letters to sounds. This greater knowledge of letter-sound relationships enables them to decode “unknown words” (p.316). The last phase is the consolidated alphabetic phase where children have the ability to recognise “commonly occurring patterns” in words and segment words (p.316). This ability to recognise patterns and segment words makes reading “chunks of letters” easier (p.317).

Gaskins et al (1996) hope that the instruction of HFWs “might promote development through the four phases based on Ehri’s work” (p.316). For example, they believe that teachers need to help their children “advance to the full alphabetic phase” before they teach them to read words such as HFWs by sight (p.317). This is because children need to be able to “analogize” to store “the full forms” of words in memory (p.317). In order for children to reach the full alphabetic phase where sight word learning (being able to recognise words instantly by sight) is possible, teachers need to get their children into the habit of “processing all the letters and their related sounds in printed words” which is achieved in Ehri’s first two phases (the alphabetic phase and the partial alphabetic phase) (p.317).
2.4 Definitions of High Frequency Words

High frequency words, as the name implies, are words that occur frequently in written and spoken language. Examples of HFWs are ‘the’, ‘or’, ‘a’ and ‘for’. Many HFWs “refer to abstractions”, things that cannot be seen or conceptualized (Anderson, Scanlon, Sweeney, 2017, p.272). HFWs can be more challenging to teach to children as they are generally not something you can explain through an image or action. They can also be “regularly or irregularly spelled” (Duke & Mesmer, 2016, para.2). This means that many HFWs “are not entirely decodable” (Anderson et al., 2017, p.272). Ehri (2005) discusses how some people incorrectly use the term ‘sight word’ to refer only to HFWs or to irregularly spelled words. She says “this is not accurate” (p.169). HFWs are not synonymous with sight words. Perhaps it is the desire for HFWs to become a part of a child’s sight word vocabulary that has caused this misuse of terminology and confusion amongst teachers. Sight words are any words that a reader can identify automatically with no cognitive effort. If a word is read sufficiently, it will become “a sight word that is read from memory” (Ehri, 2005, p.169). Duke and Mesmer (2016) say that any word can and should be a sight word. It is therefore in the interest of every teacher for HFWs to become part of a child’s sight word vocabulary.

In this research project, I will be using the following definition for high frequency words: “words that are very common in English, whether regularly or irregularly spelled” (Duke & Mesmer, 2016, para.2).

Macalister and Webb (2019) state that HFW lists which assist a learner’s progression in their reading “deserve attention in the English language learning classroom” (p.74).
2.5 High frequency word lists

HFW lists are lists that contain words that are very common to a particular language. Johns (1970) discussed how in the 1930s, there was a need to find out which words “appeared in practically all reading matter” (p.35). Knowledge of these HFWs was sought after with the view to “help make a child's reading easier and more fluent” (p.35). Literary researchers such as Edward William Dolch and Edward Fry compiled HFW lists. They did this by choosing a “reasonably small number of words” and sifting through reading materials, noting how many times those words appeared and forming conclusions about what words were most common in the English language (Johns, 1970, p.35). Rawlins and Invernizzi (2018) state that HFW lists can offer “valuable information about word’s rank frequency of occurrence in early texts” (p.713). These HFW lists can provide useful insight into what words a child will come into contact with most during their reading. These HFW lists “have much in common” but differ in “the number of words that appear” and “the specific words that appear” (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2008, p.13). Example of HFW lists include the Dolch List (1936), the Fry List (1980), or curriculum generated lists (see Appendix 6, 7, 8). Anderson et al. (2017) name Fry’s 1000 Instant Words (1999) (see Appendix 10) as “the most recent compilation of high frequency words” with every twenty five words containing “one-third of any text” and every hundred words containing “approximately half of any printed text” (p.274).

The National Educational Psychologial Services (NEPS) (2015) cite The Dolch List as the HFW list that teachers should be referring to. The Dolch List contains conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, and verbs (Johns, 1972). NEPS (2015) believe that “the first 100 most frequently occurring words from The Dolch List make up approximately half of the words a young child is likely to
meet” (NEPS, 2015, p.44). The Special Education Support Service (2004) state that The Dolch List makes up from fifty to seventy percent of all ordinary reading matter excluding proper nouns.

There is very limited research on HFW lists both nationally and internationally. This is surprising given the significance that is placed on them by researchers such as Macalister and Webb (2019). Johnston, Smith, and Jensen (1971) argued that “the need to keep word lists for beginning readers seems apparent” (p.162). Published HFW lists have faced criticism over the years regarding their relevance to early readers who are using the HFW lists decades after they were published. However research into the relevance of HFW lists, for example The Dolch List (1936), is dated. Research that was undertaken proved that the words contained on The Dolch List (1936) list were still relevant to the time of the study (Johns, 1970). Perhaps this explains the lack of recent research into the relevance of HFW lists to twenty-first century classrooms.

2.6 Teaching HFWs in an Irish context

The current Irish Primary language curriculum (2015) has four learning outcomes for reading. Two of these outcomes are “Phonological and phonemic awareness” and “Phonics and word recognition (alphabetic principle, word identification strategies)” (p.33). This indicates that the current Primary language curriculum (2015) recognises the importance of a child’s ability to recognise letters, understand sound-symbol relationships, and understand spelling patterns in learning new words. However there is no explicit mention of HFWs or even sight word learning in the current Primary language curriculum (2015). This is surprising given that HFWs are the words that infants (children aged 4-6) will encounter most in their
reading. The previous Irish *English language curriculum* (1999) has a learning objective related to HFWs. In the ‘Infant Classes’ section under the strand ‘Competence and confidence in using language’, a learning objective states that the child should be enabled to “build up a sight vocabulary of common words from personal experience, from experience of environmental print, and from books read” (p.18). Therefore, Irish curricula for the teaching of the English language in the past twenty-one years has not explicitly mentioned the term HFWs. Despite the lack of explicit mention of the term HFWs in the *English language curriculum* (1999), it does place emphasis on children building a “sight vocabulary of common words” (p.18).

Since the publication of the *Primary language curriculum* (2015), emphasis has not been placed on HFWs in the Irish English language curriculum.

NEPS’s (2015) *Good practice guide* aims “to help teachers plan and deliver a balanced approach to literacy in the early years” (p.3). This guide gives information on sight word instruction, but does not explicitly mention the term HFWs. There is one Irish researcher, Tina Hickey (School of Psychology, University College Dublin), that has an article specifically about HFW instruction and its’ significance to reading fluency. She states that “instruction that focuses on analysis of the high frequency words as part of an integrated approach to teaching reading has been shown to be useful in moving children towards automatic sight word recognition” (Hickey, 2007, p.491). However Hickey (2007) examines how HFW instruction can promote reading fluency within the context of teaching the Irish language. This highlights how important this research project will be in filling a gap in HFW research in Ireland.
2.7 Current approaches to teaching HFWs

Nell K. Duke and Heidi Anne E. Mesmer are Professors of Literacy in the United States of America (Duke & Mesmer, 2016). They were both members of the International Literary Association (ILA) Literacy Research Panel and have both published work on reading instruction (Duke & Mesmer, 2016). Their involvement with the ILA combined with their own extensive research proves that they are experts in the area of literacy. Duke and Mesmer (2016) believe that “memorizing high frequency words holistically is not the answer” and provide five principles for teachers to “keep in mind” when teaching HFWs in their article entitled ‘Teach “sight words” as you would other words’ (para.3).

The first principle advises teachers to teach HFWs alongside phonemic awareness, individual letter-sound relationships and a concept of a word. They believe that without any concept of alphabetic or word insight, children will believe that words are “unsystematic” and learning will be “insufficient” as a result (para.4). HFWs should be taught on “basically the same pace as instruction in word decoding in general” (para.4). Teachers should not be getting their children to memorize “letter sequences” in HFWs before their children have developed a concept of what the alphabet is and what words are (para.4).

The second principle states that teachers should ask their children to use graphophonemic analysis (drawing attention to the letters, the sound-symbol relationships and the spelling patterns in a word) to read HFWs. By doing this, a “phonological representation of the word” is built which “supports learning of the word” (para.5). For example, when teaching the HFW ‘to’, “focus them on the /t/” (para.5). When teaching the HFW ‘was’, “teach that w says /w/, a says /ă/, and the s says /z/” (para.5). Rawlins and Invernizzi (2019) and NEPS (2015) agree with this
principle. Rawlins and Invernizzi (2019) believe that graphophonemic analysis in HFW instruction lays “the foundation for words to stick” (p.715).

The third principle encourages teachers to draw similarities between HFWs and other words that have similar patterns such as “come, above and love” (para.6). Teaching HFWs in groups that have similar patterns will encourage children to recognise similarities in HFWs as opposed to irregularities. Rawlins and Invernizzi (2019) agree with this principle. They believe that HFWs should be taught “in groups according to common spelling patterns” and suggest a “friends and enemies” activity to highlight these similarities (p.716). In this activity, words that look and sound alike and have similar spelling patterns are “friends” and words that may sound alike but have different spellings are “enemies” (p.716). Examples of words that are “friends” are ‘no’, ‘go’ and ‘so’ (p.716). Examples of words that are “enemies” are ‘no’ and ‘toe’ (p.716). These “friends” and “enemies” groups can include “both high frequency words and other words” in an effort to simplify and organise the learning process (p.716).

NEPS (2015) and Anderson et al. (2017) disagree with this principle. Anderson et al (2017) recommends introducing “only one new word at a time” (p.275). They also believe that the first HFWs introduced to children “should be as different as possible from one another in the way they look” (p.275). NEPS (2015) recommends teachers to “present the first word on a flashcard/whiteboard” (p.44). This would suggest that HFWs should be presented individually and not in a group. However both NEPS (2015) and Anderson et al. (2017) believe that teachers should draw childrens attention to the letters, sound-symbol relationships and spelling patterns in words (principle 2) which is what Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) third principle is reinforcing. It can be deduced that NEPS (2015) and Anderson et al.’s (2017)
statement that HFWs should be taught individually is at odds with their belief that children should pay attention to the graphophonemic analysis of HFWs.

Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) fourth principle urges teachers to show their children how HFWs can be used to decode new words that they encounter in text, for example “If I know long, then I know strong” (para.7). Children who are taught HFWs with “full graphophonemic analysis” (principle two) will be able to use this graphophonemic analysis to their advantage when they encounter new words to decode (para.7). Another example of this could be a child decoding the word ‘herd’ because of their graphophemic knowledge of the HFW ‘her’.

The fifth principle advises for HFW reading to be practiced in sentences and books. Duke and Mesmer (2016) “want children to analyze words individually” and “within the context of sentences and books” (para.8). This will allow children to realise that they can use HFWs to “unlock meaning” in their reading (paragraph 8). NEPS (2015), Rawlins and Invernizzi (2019) and Anderson et al. (2017) agree with this principle. They believe that HFWs should be taught in isolation and in context. Anderson et al. (2017) suggests an activity where children must find a HFW in context “in several different locations in the book (or another text) that was originally read” (p.276). NEPS (2015) advises teachers to “ask the child to put the word into an oral sentence” (p.44).

Anderson et al. (2017) note the lack of research for how many HFWs should be explicitly taught to learners. Since, to their knowledge, there is no research to guide a response to this question, they asked teachers how many HFWs their schools expect them to teach to their pupils. The answers they received varied and they concluded by saying that it was better to set higher expectations for HFW knowledge as it benefits
children’s reading ability. Teachers should therefore attempt to teach as many HFWs as possible to the children in their class so their reading can progress.

The following points summarise the main instructional components that research recommends when teaching HFWs to children.

- HFWs should be taught at the same pace as word decoding in general.
- Teachers should ask their children to use graphophonemic analysis when reading HFWs.
- Similarities should be drawn between HFWs and other words.
- HFWs should be taught in groups that have similar spelling patterns.
- Teachers should present HFWs as a valuable tool for decoding new words.
- HFWs should be taught in isolation and in context.
- Teachers should try to teach as many HFWs as possible to their children.

2.8 HFW instructional resources

Appropriate HFW instructional resources should support Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) five principles for teaching HFWs. Gibbon, Duffiel, Hoffman and Wageman (2017) believe that HFW games are a powerful tool which engage children and prove highly effective in HFW achievement. Playing HFW games with the children would be an example of teaching HFWs in isolation and also a tool to assess HFW knowledge. Anderson et al. (2017) concur with this and say that a variety of HFW games and activities build childrens reading fluency and help them to identify words (p.283). Each game they suggest involves reading HFWs repeatedly and having to identify them in order to win the game. Games they suggest include Tic-Tac-Toe (see Diagram 1.1) and Bingo (see Diagram 1.2). Marck (2009) recommends HFW games
that involve the whole class such as ‘Write the Room’ (children are encouraged to search the print posted around the room for HFWs).

Diagram 1.1 Tic-Tac-Toe game

Diagram 2.2 Bingo game

Anderson et al. (2017) believe that giving a learner a special way to store the HFWs that they have learned, such as having a collection of words in envelopes, small plastic pouches or boxes “is very motivating” for students to learn more HFWs (p.277). They state that this collection of HFWs could also be used as a resource for HFW games and for work at home. This could also be a valuable way of tracking how many HFWs a child has learned in isolation and help teachers when choosing readers for their children.
NEPS (2015) advises teachers to “provide reading material or texts for the children which contain these [HFWs]” (p.44). Anderson et al. (2017) also urges teachers to choose books for children “which include the high frequency words they are learning” (p.278). These resources enable children to read the HFWs they are learning in context which supports Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) fifth principle.

Mano and Guerin (2017) state that print exposure such as displays or resources for HFWs is an “important causal factor” in reading development (p.483). Word walls are a collection of words displayed in visible letters on a display surface in a classroom with the intention to assist word learning. Anderson et al. (2017) discuss how word walls (WWs) “encourage automaticity with high frequency words” and can also help with “internalizing the conventional spelling” of HFWs (p.291). WWs are said to “support instruction” (Jackson & Durham, 2016, p.78) This implies that a WW should be used as a resource that helps the children to learn HFWs. Kocaarslan (2015) provides some examples of effective WW activities that engage students in an interactive way with the WW in their classroom. Whole class activities could include everyone counting the number of letters in the HFWs together, comparing the lengths of HFWs, comparing the first letters of HFWs, “demonstrating [syllables] with applause”, and “singing about letters” (p.836). Interactive WW activities such as this support Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) first and second principle of HFW instruction.

Coppens (2018) says that a WW should ideally be placed in a space in the classroom “that can be seen easily by students” (p.29). This does not necessarily have to be on a bulletin board, it could also be “on cupboard doors” or even “a large trifold poster displayed on a table”, so long as it is visible for the children (p.29). Anderson et al (2017) states that the words should be listed alphabetically so they can be found easily. It is evident that listing words alphabetically on a WW does aid the viewer to
find a word easily (see Diagram 1.3, Diagram 1.4, Diagram 1.5). By comparing these images with a WW that does not list words alphabetically (see Diagram 1.6), it is evident that words are harder to locate when displayed in no discernible order.

Johnston, O’Kelley and Rutledge (2014) believe that pictures or other visuals should be provided “for the more difficult words” on a WW (p.54). Anderson et al. (2017) do not agree. They state that words should be printed on a standard background in standard print so that nothing other than alphabetic features displayed are what the learners will “rely on” when attempting to find a word (p.292). By observing a WW with images (see Diagram 1.4), it is evident that the inclusion of images in a WW is more appealing and helpful to the viewer.

*Diagram 1.3* Word wall with words listed alphabetically
Diagram 1.4 Word wall with words listed alphabetically and pictures included

Diagram 1.5 Word wall with words listed alphabetically
Diagram 1.6 Word wall with words not listed alphabetically

The following points summarise the main HFW instructional resources that research recommends when teaching HFWs to children.

- HFW game resources such as bingo cards or a whiteboard for Tic-Tac-Toe.
- A collection of printed HFWs and something that the children can store them in such as envelopes or plastic pouches.
- Reading material for the children which contains the HFWs that they are learning.
- A high frequency word wall where; all words displayed are visible to each child in the class, words are listed alphabetically, images accompany difficult words where possible.
2.9 Summary

Studies highlight that HFW instruction can benefit a child’s reading fluency. The theoretical framework which underpins this research project is derived from the work of Ehri (1995) who believes that there are four phases in the process of word recognition; the pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic phase. HFWs were defined in this chapter as “words that are very common in English, whether regularly or irregularly spelled” (Duke & Mesmer, 2016, parag.2). HFW lists such as The Dolch List (1936) and The Fry List (1980) “have much in common” but differ in “the number of words that appear” (Beck et al., 2008, p.13). Despite criticism of the relevance of HFW lists such as The Dolch List (1936) and The Fry List (1980) over the years, any research into the relevance of HFW lists is dated. Research that was undertaken, for example research into the relevance of The Dolch List (1936), found that the words contained on The Dolch List were still relevant to the time of the study (Johns, 1970). Although other studies surrounding HFWs have explored their effectiveness in achieving reading fluency and various instructional advice, no studies have focused on Irish infant teachers selection and implementation of HFWs in their classrooms. This research study will fill that gap.

According to the literature, HFWs should be taught both in isolation and in context. The research says that teachers should not ask children to memorise HFWs. HFWs should be taught at “basically the same pace as instruction in word decoding in general” (Duke & Mesmer, 2016, para.4). Teachers should draw their childrens attention to the letters, the sound-symbol relationships and the spelling patterns in HFWs (graphophonemic analysis) and teach HFWs in groups that have similar spelling patterns. HFWs should be presented by teachers as a tool for decoding new words and similarities should be drawn between HFWs and other words rather than
differences. Teachers should attempt to teach as many HFWs as possible to their children so their reading can progress.

According to the literature, good instructional resources for HFWs include; reading material which includes the HFWs the children are learning, a storage system where the children keep the HFWs they have learnt and use them during games and for further learning, HFW game resources such as bingo cards, and a high frequency word wall that is used in an interactive way to support HFW instruction. An attractive high frequency word wall should display all HFWs in a way that is visible to all children. It should also list the words alphabetically and include pictures beside difficult words where possible. Chapter 3 will discuss the research methods that the researcher used to collect their data.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this research study was to gain an insight into how Irish infant teachers select and implement HFW instruction in their classrooms. After researching relevant literature in the field of HFW selection and instruction, qualitative research in the form of one-to-one interviews was carried out with six primary school infant teachers in a mainstream Irish school. The study focused on the HFW selection process undertaken by infant teachers and how they teach these HFWs in the classroom. The study also examined the HFW instructional resources used by infant teachers. Documentary analysis in the form of photographs was used as a means of gathering additional data on these HFW instructional resources.

3.2 Researcher Positionality

I am a female final year PME student in Marino Institute of Education. I attended lectures in the area of HFW instruction in my PME however I have not explicitly taught HFWs to an infant class for a prolonged period of time. I am therefore not an expert in the area of HFW selection or instruction. The rationale for this study comes from my personal interest in literacy. Smith and Noble (2014) believe that bias can be present in all research due to a researcher’s positionality. Sikes (2004) believes that this positionality can be influenced by the researcher’s morals and beliefs. The researcher has therefore taken steps to reduce the extent to which bias may be present. One way that I attempted to reduce this bias was by formulating the interview questions to be open ended. This was done deliberately so that interviewees were not led by the researcher. I also chose semi-structured interviews as my main research
approach in an effort to eliminate this potential bias to my research. I did this because, as Robson (2011) states, the semi-structured interview format enables interviewees to express their beliefs candidly.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) believe that all interview research is permeated with “ethical issues” (p.10). As this research project has interviews as its main focus, it was vital to ensure that all interviewees were protected and that all ethical guidelines were considered. The Marino Ethics in Research Committee granted full ethical approval for this study to take place. All steps proposed in the application process were followed and adhered to. My first application for ethical approval was not granted as my proposed title was ‘Teachers’ knowledge and practice of teaching high frequency words to children’. The Ethics Committee felt that I should re-think the focus of my research. Interviewing teachers about their knowledge and practice of teaching HFWs was considered problematic and I was warned that many teachers would be wary and uncomfortable about this. After changing the focus of my research to an investigation into the selection and implementation of HFW instruction in Irish infant classrooms, my second application for ethical approval was granted.

Prior to teachers being approached regarding participation in this study, the Principal received a letter of information which set out the details of the research project and what the proposed study would involve (see Appendix 1). The Principal also received a consent form which sought permission for infant teachers in the school to be approached for participation (see Appendix 2). Once the Principal granted consent, all infant teachers were given a letter of information which provided details of the research project and the role participants would play in the study (see
Appendix 3). The consent forms for participants stated that interviews would be recorded and the data would be kept in a password protected database (see Appendix 4). Participants were also made aware that they were free at any time, without explanation, to withdraw from the study before or any time after the interview and that their identity and the identity of the school would be kept confidential. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in the study instead of the participants’ real names and no details of the school are provided. Participants could choose the interview location and time most convenient to them. Consent forms were signed by the participant before each interview and stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s residence. All data is contained on an encrypted personal laptop. This data will be destroyed in due course in compliance with the research data protection policy of Marino Institute of Education (MIE).

3.4 Participants

Six infant teachers participated in this study. All participants were teaching in the same urban DEIS Band 2 school. The school is co-educational and there are twenty six teachers in the school. No participant has been teaching for more than eight years. Participants in this study select the HFWs for instruction with their fellow infant class teachers. Participants do not plan for HFW instruction together, they do this individually. Sometimes the participants collaborate over HFW homework to give to the children. No teacher has done Continual Professional Development (CPD) explicitly on the selection or implementation of HFW instruction.
3.5 Research Design

This research was done in the context of the interpretive paradigm. This is the foundation on which this research study was constructed. The interpretive paradigm was chosen for this research study because it is characterized by “a concern for the individual” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.21). The interpretive paradigm, as opposed to other paradigms such as the normative paradigm, sets out to understand the “subjective world of human experience” and understand the person “from within” (Cohen et al., 2007, p.21). The interpretive paradigm is closely affiliated with this study as its main research question (‘How do Irish infant teachers select and implement HFW instruction in their classrooms?’) is based on the perspectives of the participants (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). In an interpretative approach to research, the researcher focuses on the “participants view of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2003, p.8). According to Mertens (2005), this approach to research suggests that reality is based on human experience. The researcher believed that this worldview would encourage participants to conscientiously discuss how they select and implement HFW instruction in their classrooms.

A qualitative approach was selected as being the most appropriate method of data collection for this study. Dawson (2009) advises researchers to follow their “instincts” when choosing what methodology to use to best suit their research. She advises researchers to go through their research questions and note the type of words that appear. Words such as “test”, “verify” and “how often” would suggest leaning towards a quantitative approach, whereas words such as “experiences” and “discover” would suggest leaning towards a qualitative approach (Dawson, 2009, p.20). A quantitative approach could have been selected for this research study. It is a “powerful research form” and a small scale investigation would have been possible (Cohen et
al., 2007, p.501). However when I scrutinized the research questions that I wanted to answer for this research project, the wording suggested using a qualitative approach.

Qualitative research, according to Agee (2009), interrogates the whys and the hows of human interaction. Creswell (2014) believes that a qualitative approach allows the researcher to focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issues as opposed to the meaning that the researchers bring to the research. A qualitative approach is best suited to this research study as it allows the participants to fully express their opinions and views on the selection and implementation of HFW instruction. Bryman (2016) noted that in qualitative research, the researcher seeks close involvement with the participants so they can understand the world through their eyes. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain a more accurate and honest representation of Irish infant teachers selection and implementation of HFW instruction in their classrooms.

Documentary analysis was also used in this study. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) explain how documents take a multitude of forms, including photographs. This was the form of documentary analysis that was used in this study. Documentary analysis enables the researcher “to reach inaccessible persons or subjects” (Cohen et al., 2007, p.201). By obtaining documentary evidence in the form of photographs, the researcher was able to draw comparisons between the HFW instructional resources that the literature recommends and what is actually being used in practice. Documentary evidence also gave the researcher a greater depth of data to analyse. The inclusion of documentary analysis in this research project gives its readers access to HFW resources in the participants’ classrooms. The researcher must be aware of selective bias when doing this research. To avoid this, all teachers’ HFW displays and resources were photographed and included in this research study.
3.6 Semi-structured Interviews

Bell (2010) contends that interviews “put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses” (p.161). Alongside documentary analysis, semi-structured one-to-one interviews were chosen to collect data for this study. This method was chosen because it allowed the interviewer to ask predetermined questions during the interview whilst allowing room for spontaneity (Cohen, Manion & Marrison, 2018). Newby (2010) believes that an interview schedule should have a clear list of questions while also allowing for flexibility. This allows the interviewee to speak specifically about the topic in question without being pigeon-holed (Bryman, 2012). It also allowed flexibility on the part of the researcher. The inclusion of open ended questions allowed the researcher to ask probing questions if the participants’ answers were particularly unusual.

3.7 Piloting the interview schedule

Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim & Yusof (2017) consider pilot interviews to serve as an opportunity for the researcher to evaluate the phrasing and relevance of their proposed interview questions. A pilot interview allows the researcher to analyse and reflect on the researcher’s design (Sampson, 2004). An infant teacher known to the researcher was asked to participate in a pilot interview. This acted as a trial run and was carried out as the researcher intended the real interviews to be. The participant in the pilot interview helped the researcher to obtain relevant information regarding how participants interpret and react to her interview questions. The pilot interview also allowed the researcher to get comfortable in their role as interviewer and to practice skills and techniques required for this role.

After the pilot interview was completed, the researcher changed the phrasing and
ordering of some questions. Prior to the pilot interview, the first interview question was ‘Do you feel like you got sufficient training on the teaching of high frequency words in your initial teacher training?’ I realized during the pilot interview that a question relating to the participants’ initial teacher training should be asked at the end of the interview. I felt that this change would allow the participants to answer the question in a more reflective way after discussing HFW selection and instruction in depth during the course of the interview. After the pilot interview I also added two questions to the start of the interview regarding practicalities that I felt were necessary. These questions were ‘What infant class are you teaching at the moment?’ and ‘Do you follow a particular language programme in your class?’. The responses that were collected in the pilot interview did not form part of the research data gathered and has not been analysed in this research project. The amended interview questions were used in the interviews with the six research participants.

3.8 Procedure

Six semi-structured interviews with infant teachers were completed in total. All participants expressed the desire for the semi-structured interviews for this research study to be conducted in the school at times that were convenient to them. Four interviews took place between 1.30pm and 2.30 pm when the participants’ children had left school. Two interviews took place earlier in the school day at a time where the participants’ children had a separate teacher for violin lessons. The twenty interview questions were planned in a way that provided the researcher with a clear insight into the interviewee’s understanding of the term ‘high frequency words’, their perspectives towards HFW selection and instruction, what assists them in the instruction of HFWs and their experience to date with HFWs in the classroom (see Appendix 5). Each interview was recorded on two devices and field notes were also
Field notes can “fill in some of the relevant information that a recording alone might miss” (Denscombe, 2011, p.187). This could include pauses or non verbal gestures. The interviews were later transcribed by the researcher.

3.9 Data Analysis: Thematic Approach

Bernard (2006) describes data analysis as a lengthy process that involves searching for themes in the data collected. Six interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analysed in combination with the field notes taken at each interview. Once the data was organised, the researcher moved “deeper and deeper into understanding the data” (Creswell, 2009, p.183). The aim of this analysis was to recognise a range of recurring themes in the data.

After each interview was transcribed, the data was organised into pages where all participants’ answers to each question were visible. This was done by cutting up each participant’s answer to the same question and sticking them on the same page. Twenty pages (one page per question) were compiled in total. When this was complete, highlighters were used to note the similarities and differences between participants’ answers to each question. A summary sheet of each participants’ answers were then handwritten. Six sheets, one per participant, were created in the form of bullet points. This enabled the researcher to acquire a profile of each teacher’s selection and implementation of HFW instruction. The researcher then revisited the twenty pages of data compiled to begin the coding process.

Coding involves the researcher noting key words and ideas that reoccur in their data that designate a particular ‘code’ that correspond to a broader theme (Robson, 2011). Whilst reading through the data, the researcher colour-coded key words and ideas that reoccurred. An example of a key word that appeared in the data was ‘power
hour’. This corresponded to the broader theme of participants interest in additional HFW support. This coding process was repeated until all the data was analysed (see Appendix 9). The data was grouped into three main themes. The final step of the data analysis was noting questions that arose from the research.

3.10 Limitations of this study

The relatively short length of time afforded to this research project limited the researcher as it was impractical to include a larger sample size. The sample was confined to the experiences of six primary school infant teachers in Ireland that all teach in the same school. As a consequence, this research project provides a limited insight into infant teachers’ selection and implementation of HFW instruction in their classrooms. The sample chosen was not representative of the wider population of teachers in Ireland. No follow-up interviews were carried out. Excluding the documentary evidence gathered for this study, one-off interviews were the method for gathering data for this study. Bricher (1999) states that follow-up interviews can lead to different findings and that one-off interviews can result in limited data. I also did not get to observe the participants teaching HFWs in their classrooms. This insight would have strengthened my research.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the rationale behind the selection of the interpretive paradigm used in this research study. A clear rationale was given explaining why each approach was adopted such as the the qualitative research approach and the semi-structured interview. A brief profile of the participants in this study was also provided. The rationale behind doing a pilot interview was discussed and the changes
this brought about were described. The procedure of the research approach was explained and researcher positionality and the relevant ethical considerations were discussed. This chapter also explained how the data obtained from this research was analysed. Lastly, the limitations of the study were considered. Chapter 4 will present the data obtained from this research project and discuss it.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine and discuss the recognised themes that emerged from coding the data, in order to investigate the selection and implementation of HFW instruction in Irish infant classrooms. The findings have been organised so that the similarities between all participants are presented first. This will give the reader a base from which to read the three recognised themes; teacher uncertainty, teacher’s discretion and creativity, and interest in additional support. The findings are then outlined in two key areas of discussion. The first discussion point details the reliance on published programmes and the second addresses the extent to which Irish infant teachers’ HFW instructional approaches reflect current research.

4.2 Similarities among participants

All participants used the Starlight programme.

Starlight integrates oral language, reading and writing around a single theme and genre. This seamless blend of the three curriculum strands will allow you to effectively deliver the PLC. The programme covers all genres recommended by the PDST and has a strong emphasis on comprehension skills and strategies. (Folens, 2020, para.1)

The HFW list that the participants used comes from the Starlight programme. The HFWs in this list are in their Starlight readers. No participant has altered the selection process of the HFWs that they teach to their children. All participants
expressed confidence in the Starlight programme and the HFW list that it provides. All teachers have a high frequency word wall in their classroom and resources to assist them in HFW instruction.

*Diagram 1.7 Balloon popping ‘sight word’ game from the Starlight programme*

**4.3 Teacher uncertainty**

The first recognised theme that emerged from coding the data is uncertainty surrounding HFWs. Many teachers showed uncertainty regarding what terminology they should be using to describe HFWs. When asked what words they use to describe HFWs to the children, all teachers said ‘tricky words’. However three teachers either stated or suggested that they don’t always say ‘tricky words’. Teacher 1 (T1) and Teacher 5 (T5) said that they use ‘tricky words’ and ‘sight words’ to describe HFWs to the children. Teacher 6 (T6) said that “we usually say tricky words”, implying that this terminology is not consistent. While discussing assessment, Teacher 3 (T3)
referred to HFWs as “sight words”. While talking about games, T6 mentioned how she does “sight word bingo” with the children. T5 has a “sight word sea” display in her classroom and admitted that she does refer to HFWs as ‘sight words’. This clearly is what Ehri (2005) was referring to when she discussed how some people “incorrectly” use the term ‘sight word’ to refer only to irregularly spelled words or HFWs (p.169). The Starlight programme itself uses the term ‘sight word’. It is therefore not surprising that participants are confused regarding HFW terminology when teaching HFWs from a ‘sight word’ list (see Appendix 12).

This confusion amongst participants regarding the terminology of HFWs has a clear link to their ability to teach them to the children in their class. All participants expressed the opinion that teaching HFWs to the children in their class can prove difficult. Five participants said that they considered the teaching of HFWs more challenging than teaching other aspects of English, such as letter formation. Only Teacher 2 (T2) disagreed. Teacher 4 (T4) said that she struggled to explain HFWs to the children in her class, “I can’t really explain why it’s hard”. T3 admitted that she struggles to do sole lessons on HFWs for this reason. T1 also expressed that she finds it difficult to explain what HFWs are to her children, “they just have to learn them”. T3 stated that her children “definitely” find HFWs challenging to learn. T2, T5 and T6 noted that the English as an Additional Language (EAL) children they have in their class find learning HFWs particularly challenging. It is clear that confusion regarding HFW terminology has a direct correlation to a teacher’s confidence in teaching them. This in turn creates confusion amongst the children in their class regarding HFWs and has a negative impact on learning.

The participants also showed some confusion regarding where the HFW list they use comes from. When asked how they select HFWs to teach the children,
participants gave varying answers as to what exactly the HFW list in the Starlight programme is. T1 started by stating that they are using “The Dolch List”. She then said that Starlight has “come up with a list for us” and that it’s “slightly different” from the Dolch List. However when the same teacher was later asked about what resources assist in her in the teaching of HFWs, her first answer was “the Dolch List which you can get online”. T5 also stated “We’re using the Dolch List”. This differed from the other two SI teachers answers who simply stated that the HFW list was “off Starlight”. T3 stated that “there’s like a Starlight kind of rubric” and that it “would be similar to the Dolch word list”. Although most HFWs in the Starlight programme (see Appendix 12, 13, 14) are contained in The Dolch List (see Appendix 6), there is overt confusion over where the HFW list that the participants have selected for the children comes from.

Participants also showed some confusion about how many HFWs they teach to the children in their class. T1 mentioned twice that the Junior infant (JI) teachers “put [the HFWs for] September and October together”. However neither of the other JI teachers mentioned this. All JI teachers gave different answers for how many HFWs they teach in a year. T1 believed there is “thirty six words throughout the year”. T2 stated “thirty two in a year”, and T3 said that there was “thirty words in the year”. The Starlight programme lists thirty two ‘sight words’ to be learned in JI, meaning that only T2’s answer was correct. All SI teachers stated that they taught five HFWs a month, but their answers on how many they taught a year differed. T6 did not answer how many were taught a year and T4 and T5’s answers differed. T4 said that they taught “about forty something in the year” and T5 said that they taught “about fifty”. The Starlight programme lists forty eight ‘sight words’ to be learned in SI. Therefore, only one
participant gave the correct answer to the number of HFWs they explicitly teach in a year using the Starlight programme.

4.4 Teacher’s discretion and creativity

The second recognised theme in the data is that teacher’s use their own discretion and creativity for HFW instruction. It is clear from the data that each teacher uses their own discretion and creativity for a number of things related to HFW instruction. T3 prefers to teach HFWs predominately through games as she feels that the words “lack… concept” and that “you do just have to embed it through games”. T3 feels like ‘find the dot’ and ‘snakes and ladders’ are the most enjoyable HFW games whereas T5 feels like ‘snap’ and ‘tie-tac-toe’ are the most attractive HFW games. T6 likes doing the HFW fly swatter game with the children in her class and T1 likes doing hide and reveal games with her children where the children have to guess what HFW has been taken off the board/table. T4 prefers to teach HFWs through a sensory approach. T2 likes to organises high frequency word hunts for the children in her class.

Participants have their own creative ways to teach HFWs to the children in their class. T5 gets the children to pretend they’re lifting a weight, “like a bicep curl” and spell the letters of the HFW every time they do a “bicep curl”, “then you say the word like you do a thruster at the end”. T5 also gets the children to “do it like a rocket” where they “get down low” and gradually get higher for each letter of the HFW. The children “explode up when they say the word”. The children in T4’s class showed creativity themselves when they asked the teacher for the HFW list to be displayed inside the socio dramatic play area when they were doing the doctor’s surgery during
Aistear (play) time. The children used the list to judge whether or not their peers’ eyesight was satisfactory while carrying out their ‘appointments’.

All participants answered differently when asked what resources they find most useful to assist them in the teaching of HFWs. Four teachers (T1, T3, T5, T6) expressed the view that the most effective resources for the teaching of HFW’s are ones that teachers make for themselves. T3 wishes that the Starlight online games “were more editable” for this reason. All teachers have a preference for what HFW resources they use. T4 prioritises sensory resources such as sand and playdough when teaching HFW’s with the children. T2 uses the flower HFW prints from her HFW display as resources during HFW games whereas T5 prefers to get the children to write the HFWs on card/ mini whiteboards for HFW games. No participant has a storage system for their children to store the HFWs that they have learned, which the research recommends.

![Diagram 1.8 T3’s ‘read and roll’ game](image)
Diagram 1.9 T3’s ‘find the dot’ game

Diagram 1.10 T1’s HFW bingo cards
T6 has many creative HFW resources to get her children excited about learning HFWs. T6 has a classroom teddy bear who often disappears and “brings back a new word”. T6 likes to “make it fun” for the children and has a high frequency “word of the day” that the children high five on their way out to the yard each day. T6 also has a HFW password system around the classroom where the children must say the HFW to do things such as turn on the lightswitch, go to the toilet or use the laptop. T6 also does a “trace and reveal activity” where she writes a HFW with a glue gun and the children have to trace it to see what HFW it is. T6 made a HFW early finisher activity where the children have to make HFWs out of magnetic letters.

*Diagram 1.11* T6’s ‘Word of the day’
Diagram 1.12 T6’s ‘passwords’

Diagram 1.13 T6’s HFW early finisher activity
All participants had a word wall (WW) in their classroom where HFWs were visible to all children. This is what the literature recommends. Despite the WWs being very colourful and creative, no WW listed the HFWs alphabetically or contained images to accompany difficult HFWs which is what research recommends. The literature also recommends that a high frequency word wall should “support instruction”, it should be an interactive resource (Jackson & Durham, 2016, p.78).

T1 mentioned her WW multiple times and “finds it really useful” for the teaching of HFWs. When T3 was asked if she finds her WW useful for the teaching of HFWs, she replied “Not particularly to be totally honest”. She uses it “as a point of reference” and doesn’t refer to it every day. She prefers having the HFWs “way more close to hand… in front of them on the table”. T6 gets a child to “play teacher” with the WW and point to a word with the fly swatter for the class to read out. Children behaving well get to “play teacher” next. T5 does “word wall chants” with her children and HFW activities to get them “active as much as possible”. T5 would often get the children to “read out the words in red on the sight sea” or ask “what words are on the wow wall and the sight sea?”. These whole class WW activities are in line what Kocaarslan (2015) recommends. T4 uses her HFW display mainly for revision and would refer to it occasionally throughout the school week. T4 also has HFWs on her board in magnetic letters for the children who cannot see the WW on the other side of the room. T2 would mainly refer to her WW when she introduces a new HFW. It is evident that some participants use their WW as an interactive resource to support HFW instruction more than others.
Diagram 1.14 T2’s ‘word garden’

Diagram 1.15 T3’s ‘humpty dumpty wall’
Diagram 1.16 T4’s ‘wow wall’

Diagram 1.17 T4’s ‘sight word sea’
Diagram 1.18 T5’s word wall

Diagram 1.18 T6’s word wall
4.5 Interest in additional support

The third recognised theme in the data is the participants’ interest in additional support for the selection and instruction of HFW implementation. There was a strong desire among the participants to teach HFWs in small groups and many participants cited power hour as a great opportunity to do this. ‘Power hour’ is an hour which gives children the opportunity to practice their work at their own level of competency. This is done through station teaching where additional teachers enter the classroom and rotate teaching different stations. T3 thought that power hour “was excellent because it was…. more concentrated learning”. She also said that the children being “levelled… really did help” to assist children who needed extra HFW support. T4 felt that she got “to revise the sounds a lot more” when she had power hour and that she “had the full week” to do HFW lessons whereas now she can only do two or three HFWs lessons a week. When asked what HFW games they played with the children, T2 and T5 mentioned how certain games are easier to play when they have power hour. T2 occasionally does HFW snap with the children, “that was easier to do when we had power hour”. T5 said that she used to do HFW bingo or snap with the children, “we did them in power hour”. Having additional support for HFW instruction is something that interested all participants. Power hour clearly enabled more concentrated HFW learning to happen in the participants’ classes.

Participants also expressed the opinion that more support on the instruction of HFWs should have been given to them in their initial teacher education (ITE). T1 believes that “you have to link theory to practice” and that she wouldn’t have seen HFWs “in any programme before I started teaching”. In T2’s ITE “there wasn’t specific instruction on how to teach [HFWs]”. T3 feels that “we probably should have got more” HFW training in her ITE. T4 stated, “I don’t feel like we went through it
properly in college” and T5 couldn’t “remember any specific” about HFW training in her ITE. T6 “wasn’t really doing it in context in college” and “definitely” doesn’t remember it “being very practical”. Perhaps for this reason, all participants expressed an interest in doing CPD in the selection and instruction of HFW implementation.

4.6 Discussion point 1: Reliance on published programmes

Although participants have great confidence in the Folens (2020) Starlight programme, it is unclear who actually designed its HFW list and resources. Folens (2020) state on their Starlight information page that “Starlight’s oral language resources were developed with Dr. Áine Cregan, former lecturer in oral language at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick” (para.2). However the page does not mention who developed its reading or writing resources. The Starlight programmes use of the term ‘sight word’, a term which Ehri (2005) states is used incorrectly, indicates that a literacy expert such as Dr. Áine Cregan may not have compiled Starlight’s reading resources.

In Starlight’s Junior Infants Yearly Plan (see Appendix 13), they recommend teachers to begin teaching ‘sight words’ in January and teach four ‘sight words’ per month from January onwards. This supports Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) first principle of HFW instruction which states that HFWs should be taught at the same pace as word decoding in general. However the advice of the Starlight programme differs to the responses from T1, T2 and T3 who all said that they start teaching HFWs to their children in September with T3 beginning them “immediately”. In Starlight’s Senior Infants Yearly Plan (see Appendix 14), they recommend revising JI ‘sight words’ until November and then teaching four ‘sight words’ per month. This differs to Senior infant (SI) teachers responses who said that they begin teaching HFWs to the children in September whilst revising the HFWs from JI. Despite the
participant’s reliance on the Starlight programme, no participant teaches HFWs at the pace that the Starlight programme or Duke and Mesmer (2016) recommend.

The Starlight programme online resources for ‘sight words’, such as games where the children hear the HFW and have to tap the right word, do draw attention to sounds in HFWs. However because JI participants’ start to teach HFWs in September, HFW instruction is not intersecting with the children’s developmental stage of graphophonemic analysis. Even though the Starlight programme may comply with Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) second principle, the JI participants HFW instructional practice does not. The Starlight programme does not advise teachers to teach HFWs in groups that have similar patterns or present HFWs as a tool to decode new words. This does not comply with what research says. The HFWs that are on the Starlight HFW list are contained in the children’s readers. This supports Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) fifth principle which states that children must practice reading the HFWs they are learning in context.

4.7 Discussion point 2: Do Irish infant teachers HFW instructional approaches reflect current research?

As the literature suggests, all participants were teaching HFWs in isolation and in context. The activity that T1 described regarding getting her children to find HFWs in books in the classroom from home is almost identical to the activity that Anderson et al. (2017) suggests for teaching HFWs in context. Although T1 does teach HFWs in isolation and in context in her classroom, she did express the belief that she considers HFW instruction to be similar to “rote learning”. This is at odds with Duke and Mesmer (2016) who believe that “memorizing HFWs holistically is not the answer” (para.3). The JI teachers all stated that they started HFW instruction in September. This does not support research which advises HFWs to be taught at the same pace as
word decoding in general. Despite participants mentioning discussions with the children regarding the graphophonic analysis of HFWs, the fact that HFWs are taught too early in JI means that children in JI do not have enough graphophonemic knowledge to benefit from these discussions. Thus, only the participants teaching SI can be said to be complying with Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) second principle for HFW instruction.

Research recommends introducing HFWs in groups that have similar patterns. Only T4 and T6 stated that they introduce HFWs as a group to the children in their class. However these groups of HFWs are based off the Starlight HFW list and are taught in a group so that T4 and T6 have a longer period to revise and go over them with the children in their class. Research advises teaching HFWs in groups for the purpose of drawing children’s attention to common spelling patterns and similarities in HFWs. As this is not the rationale for T4 and T6’s instruction of HFWs in groups, it cannot be stated to reflect current research.

Participants do not present HFWs as a tool for decoding new words. This is not in line with current research. Perhaps doing this would help participants in their HFW instructional practice such as T1 who stated that some of the children in her class “find it really really hard to retain” HFWs. Apart from T1 mentioning that she “would teach other HFWs if they came up”, no participants have deviated from the Starlight HFW list. As research recommends teaching as many HFWs to children as possible, participants should try to teach more HFWs to their children.

4.8 Conclusion

Through data analysis conducted in this study, three common themes were identified in Chapter 4. Data analysis revealed that participants displayed uncertainty
regarding HFW terminology, where the HFW list they use actually comes from and the number of HFWs that they teach. The data also showed that each participant uses their own discretion and creativity to approach HFW instruction. An interest in additional support in HFW selection and instruction was also evident in the data. The findings in this chapter were framed within the context of the research questions and outlined in two key areas of discussion. The reliance on published programmes such as the Starlight programme for the selection and implementation of HFW instruction was discussed. The chapter then discussed whether or not the participants HFW instructional practices complied with current research. Based on these findings, Chapter 5 will present the conclusions and recommendations of this study.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the main findings of this research project as well as highlighting relevant recommendations. This chapter also discusses possible avenues for future research which may be of interest to those undertaking research in the field of early childhood literacy. This research has addressed the following questions:

- How do Irish infant teachers select and implement high frequency word (HFW) instruction in their classrooms?
- Do Irish teachers’ instructional approaches reflect current research?

5.2 Summary of Findings

The main findings of this research project present an insight into how Irish infant teachers select and implement HFW instruction in their classrooms. The findings of this research have found there is uncertainty among teachers surrounding HFW terminology and instruction. Another major finding of this research project is that teachers use their own discretion and creativity regarding many aspects of HFW instruction. A further key finding is that Irish infant teachers are interested in additional support regarding HFW selection and implementation.

From the analysis of data, two key discussion points arose:

1) Reliance on published programmes. Although participants showed huge confidence in the Starlight programme, it is unclear who designed the
programme and its HFW lists. Furthermore, participants’ HFW instructional practice was not in line with the advice of the Starlight programme. Uncertainty among teachers regarding HFW terminology and HFW instruction explain why there is such a reliance on published language programmes.

2) Do Irish infant teachers’ HFW instructional approaches reflect current research? Overall, participants HFW instructional approaches can only be said to reflect one out of Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) five principles for HFW instruction. Therefore, Irish infant teachers’ HFW instructional approaches do not reflect current research.

5.3 Recommendations

This study was conducted as a small scale research project. By the nature of this, limitations of time impacted the depth of data analysis and the range of data collection methods available for use. Despite this, the data gathered would support the following recommendations with regard to HFW selection and implementation:

- Language programmes to be chosen that are rooted in current research.
- Researchers and authors of language programmes to use the term ‘sight word’ correctly to prevent confusion amongst teachers and children.
- More HFW training in ITE on the selection and implementation of HFW instruction which links theory to practice.
- CPD to be available explicitly in the selection and implementation of HFW instruction from the PDST. Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) five principles for HFW instruction should inform this.
5.4 Future Research

The limitations of this research were described in Chapter 2 and they present opportunities for further exploration in this area. Similar research should be carried out involving infant teachers from a variety of schools with a greater sample size. Observational research of HFW instruction in Irish classrooms would also be beneficial. An investigation into the relevance of current HFW lists would also be valuable. A comparative study should be carried out investigating the benefits of introducing HFWs in groups with similar spelling patterns across two schools, one introducing HFWs in groups with similar spelling patterns and another introducing HFWs individually.

5.5. Conclusion

A child’s ability to read high frequency words plays a central role in their reading fluency. Thus, teachers’ selection and implementation of HFW instruction is extremely significant. This research project investigated how Irish infant teachers select and implement HFW instruction in their classrooms through a qualitative research approach. Semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis in the form of photographs were used as a means of gathering the data. The study found that Irish infant teachers rely on published programmes for HFW selection. This research project has also examined the extent to which Irish infant teachers’ instructional approaches reflect current research. Based on Duke and Mesmer’s (2016) five principles for teaching HFWs, Irish infant teachers’ instructional approaches do not reflect current research. This study has filled a gap in HFW research in Ireland.
Reference List


Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Principal

24/2/2020

Dear X,

I am writing to ask for your consent to conduct a research project in your school. The research project involves learning more about high frequency words and the methods teachers use to select and teach them to children in the infant classes.

The proposed study would involve two elements: (i) interviewing teachers in the infant classes about their initial teacher education and current selection and instruction of high frequency words and (ii) photographing displays and resources which assist high frequency word learning in the classroom. The proposed interview with infant teachers should take no longer than twenty minutes.

The proposed study would be carried out during my school based activity block (24th February- 6th March). During this period, we are asked to collect data for our research project. It would be during this time that I intend to interview infant teachers.
Interviews will be recorded in a location in the school that is convenient and comfortable for teachers.

The name of the school or the teachers participating in this study will be completely anonymous. Any data and recordings will be stored in a password protected database.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Should you have any questions regarding participation in this study, please contact me. You may also contact my advisor for this project, Jennifer O’Sullivan. This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact MERC@mie.ie

Yours faithfully,

Julie McCormack

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records
Appendix 2: Consent form for Principal

Statement of Consent:

Please read the questions below and indicate whether or not you would be willing to participate in the study as described.

Do you consent to your school participating in the research project described?  
Yes  No

Do you consent to your infant teachers being approached for participation in this research project?  
Yes  No

Do you consent to resources and displays being photographed in your infant classes, given the class teacher’s consent?  
Yes  No

Do you consent to a voice recorder being used during an interview with an infant teacher in your school, given their consent?  
Yes  No

Signature: ________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Researcher: ___________________ Date: ________________
Appendix 3: Information Sheet for teachers

24/2/2020

Dear X,

I am writing to ask for your consent to participate in a research project. The research project involves learning more about high frequency words and the methods teachers use to select and teach them to children in the infant classes.

The proposed study would involve two elements: (i) interviewing teachers in the infant classes about their current selection and instruction of high frequency words and (ii) photographing displays and resources which assist high frequency word learning in the classroom. The proposed interviews should take no longer than twenty minutes.

The proposed study would be carried out during my school-based activity block (24th February - 6th March). Interviews will be recorded in a location in the school that is convenient and comfortable for teachers. The name of the school or the teachers participating in this study will be completely anonymous. Any data and recordings will also be stored in a password-protected database.
Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Should you have any questions regarding participation in this study, please contact me. You may also contact my supervisor for this project, Jennifer O’Sullivan. *This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact* MERC@mie.ie

Yours faithfully,

Julie McCormack

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records*
Appendix 4: Consent Form for teachers

Research Topic: How do Irish infant teachers select and implement HFW instruction in their classrooms?

Consent to take part in research

- I ……………………… voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview after the interview, in which cause the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves answering questions relating to my knowledge and my teaching of high frequency words. It could also involve my resources and displays being photographed.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
• I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

• I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recording will be retained in a secure location until the exam board confirms the results of the dissertation that will arise from this research.

• I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.

• I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

• I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher: Julie McCormack

Contact email: XXXXXXXXXX

Contact phone number: XXXXXXXXXX

Signature of research participant

------------------------------------------------
----------------------
Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

------------------------------------------------
----------------------
Signature of researcher Date
Appendix 5: Interview Questions

“To start, I will explain my definition of high frequency words so that when I refer to high frequency words in my questions, you will know what I am referring to for the purpose of this research project”

What are High Frequency Words?

“High frequency words, as the name implies, are words that occur frequently in written and in spoken language. Examples of high frequency words are ‘the’, ‘or’, ‘a’, and ‘for’. Many high-frequency words “refer to abstractions”, things that cannot be seen or conceptualized (Anderson et al, 2017, p.272). High frequency words can be more challenging to teach to children as they are generally not something you can explain through an image or an action. They also can be regulary or irregularly spelled (Duke & Mesmer, 2016). Examples of high frequency word lists include the Dolch List, the Fry List, or curriculum generated lists. High frequency words are not the same as sight words. Sight words refer to any words that a reader can identify automatically with no cognitive effort. Any word that a child can read instantly without any word is a sight word for that child. Duke and Mesmer (2016) say that any
word can and should be a sight word. It is therefore in the interest of every educator for high frequency words to become part of a learners sight word vocabulary. This research project is interested in how teachers select high frequency words for their children to learn in the English language and how they teach them. In this dissertation, I will be using the following definition for a HFW: “words that are very common in English, whether regularly or irregularly spelled” (Duke & Mesmer, 2016, para.2).

*Ask the interviewee if they have any questions about this definition*

*Show interviewee examples of HFW lists and resources*

Practicalities

1. What infant class are you teaching at the moment?

2. Do you follow a particular language programme in your class?

Questions in relation to selection and instruction:

3. At what stage in the year do you begin teaching high frequency words to the children in your class?

4. How do you introduce a new high frequency word to the children?

5. What words do you use to describe high frequency words to the children? (i.e. ‘tricky words’ or ‘puzzle words’)

6. How do you select what high frequency words to teach to the children? (Dolch List, Fry List etc)
7. Have you ever altered this selection process?

8. Have you used any games to assist you in the teaching of high frequency words, for example, the fly swat game?

9. How many high frequency words do you aim to teach in a week/month/year?

10. How do you revise high frequency words that you have covered with the children in your class?

11. What actions do you take when you notice a child who has difficulty learning high frequency words?

12. How do you assess the children on their knowledge of high frequency words?

Questions in relation to resources:

13. What resources have you found effective to assist you in the teaching of high frequency words?

14. Where did you hear about these resources?

Questions in relation to displays:

15. Do you incorporate your displays into your instruction of high frequency words?

16. Is there any type of display in particular that you have found useful?

Questions in relation to personal opinion:

17. Would you consider the teaching of high frequency words more challenging than teaching other aspects of English, such as letter formation?
18. Do you find that your students find it harder to learn high frequency words such as 'the' as opposed to other words, such as nouns?

19. Have you completed CPD in this area?  
(if not mentioned already):

Questions in relation to initial teacher education:

20. Tell me about the training on the teaching of high frequency words in your initial teacher training, did you feel prepared to teach them?
# Appendix 6: The Dolch List

All 220 Dolch words in frequency order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the</th>
<th>with</th>
<th>did</th>
<th>long</th>
<th>know</th>
<th>ran</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>bring</th>
<th>ate</th>
<th>own</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>right</td>
<td>let</td>
<td>seven</td>
<td>goes</td>
<td>full</td>
<td>found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>came</td>
<td>put</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>eight</td>
<td>write</td>
<td>those</td>
<td>wash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>look</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>ask</td>
<td>too</td>
<td>make</td>
<td>cold</td>
<td>always</td>
<td>done</td>
<td>show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>got</td>
<td>going</td>
<td>today</td>
<td>drink</td>
<td>use</td>
<td>hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>were</td>
<td>an</td>
<td>take</td>
<td>sleep</td>
<td>fly</td>
<td>once</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>get</td>
<td>over</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>brown</td>
<td>myself</td>
<td>soon</td>
<td>say</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>every</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>made</td>
<td>light</td>
<td>live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>out</td>
<td>like</td>
<td>its</td>
<td>pretty</td>
<td>five</td>
<td>tell</td>
<td>run</td>
<td>pick</td>
<td>draw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>as</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>ride</td>
<td>jump</td>
<td>six</td>
<td>much</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>hurt</td>
<td>clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>this</td>
<td>into</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>keep</td>
<td>open</td>
<td>pull</td>
<td>grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>said</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>just</td>
<td>four</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>give</td>
<td>has</td>
<td>cut</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>would</td>
<td>blue</td>
<td>away</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>work</td>
<td>find</td>
<td>kind</td>
<td>upon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>old</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>first</td>
<td>only</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>from</td>
<td>by</td>
<td>eat</td>
<td>try</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>sit</td>
<td>sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>then</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>their</td>
<td>again</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>which</td>
<td>together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>here</td>
<td>play</td>
<td>must</td>
<td>our</td>
<td>fall</td>
<td>please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>down</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>about</td>
<td>saw</td>
<td>who</td>
<td>start</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>carry</td>
<td>thank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>around</td>
<td>call</td>
<td>been</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>hold</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>come</td>
<td>want</td>
<td>after</td>
<td>may</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>buy</td>
<td>under</td>
<td>many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>could</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>don’t</td>
<td>well</td>
<td>stop</td>
<td>ten</td>
<td>funny</td>
<td>read</td>
<td>shall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>him</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>now</td>
<td>how</td>
<td>think</td>
<td>off</td>
<td>does</td>
<td>warm</td>
<td>why</td>
<td>laugh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

www.dolchword.net
Appendix 7: The Fry List

Fry Sight Words
First 100 Words (#1-100)

the of and a to in is you that it he was for on are as with his they I at be this have from
or one had by words but not what all were we when your can said there use an each which she do how their if
will up other about out many then them these so some her would make like him into time has look two more write go see
number no way could people my than first water been called who oil sit now find long down day did get come made may part
### 100 High Frequency Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the</th>
<th>that</th>
<th>not</th>
<th>look</th>
<th>put</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>with</td>
<td>then</td>
<td>don’t</td>
<td>could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>were</td>
<td>come</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>said</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>into</td>
<td>too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>as</td>
<td>back</td>
<td>by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>from</td>
<td>day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>had</td>
<td>mum</td>
<td>children</td>
<td>made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>I’m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>get</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>just</td>
<td>help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>out</td>
<td>down</td>
<td>now</td>
<td>Mrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>this</td>
<td>dad</td>
<td>came</td>
<td>called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>oh</td>
<td>here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>about</td>
<td>off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>it’s</td>
<td>got</td>
<td>asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>like</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>their</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>looked</td>
<td>people</td>
<td>make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>an</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visit twinkl.com for more resources.
# Fry Words – The First Hundred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List 1</th>
<th>List 2</th>
<th>List 3</th>
<th>List 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>or</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>had</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>by</td>
<td>about</td>
<td>could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>words</td>
<td>out</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>but</td>
<td>many</td>
<td>my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>then</td>
<td>than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>these</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>were</td>
<td>so</td>
<td>been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>your</td>
<td>would</td>
<td>oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>make</td>
<td>sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td>said</td>
<td>like</td>
<td>now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with</td>
<td>use</td>
<td>into</td>
<td>long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his</td>
<td>an</td>
<td>time</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>each</td>
<td>has</td>
<td>day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>which</td>
<td>look</td>
<td>did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>she</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>more</td>
<td>come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this</td>
<td>how</td>
<td>write</td>
<td>made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>their</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>may</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>part</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Fry Words – The Second Hundred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List 1</th>
<th>List 2</th>
<th>List 3</th>
<th>List 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>over</td>
<td>say</td>
<td>set</td>
<td>try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>put</td>
<td>kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>end</td>
<td>hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>does</td>
<td>picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only</td>
<td>through</td>
<td>another</td>
<td>again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little</td>
<td>much</td>
<td>well</td>
<td>change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know</td>
<td>line</td>
<td>must</td>
<td>play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place</td>
<td>right</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>spell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>years</td>
<td>too</td>
<td>even</td>
<td>air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>live</td>
<td>means</td>
<td>such</td>
<td>away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me</td>
<td>old</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>animal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>back</td>
<td>any</td>
<td>turn</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>here</td>
<td>point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most</td>
<td>tell</td>
<td>why</td>
<td>page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very</td>
<td>boy</td>
<td>ask</td>
<td>letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>follow</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>things</td>
<td>came</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our</td>
<td>want</td>
<td>read</td>
<td>found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>just</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>need</td>
<td>study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>name</td>
<td>also</td>
<td>land</td>
<td>still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>around</td>
<td>different</td>
<td>learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentence</td>
<td>form</td>
<td>home</td>
<td>should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>move</td>
<td>world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 11: Sample of Thematic Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teacher 6</strong></th>
<th><strong>Thematic Coding</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you used any games to assist you in the teaching of high frequency words, for example, the fly swat game?</td>
<td>• Uncertainty surrounding terminology of high frequency words (“sight words”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeah so we have sight word bingo in there em we do the roll and read on twinkl you can get the blank ones so I just type in the ones for the month into that em what else do we do, we use the bubble popping game on starlight, fly swatter games, sometimes, at the start I’ll just do it that I bring two up and let them sit down but then like when they know them make it into a competition, wherever gets them first gets to stay on. Also I’ve done that I do the word</td>
<td>• Starlight- likes the programme as the children enjoy it’s online games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creativity- trace and reveal with glue gun. Something no other interviewee mentioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher’s discretion. T6 is doing “fly swatter games” which no other teacher mentioned. She is editing the roll and read resource to suit her class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with the glue gun and put a piece of paper over it and they have to trace and reveal what the word is.

**How many high frequency words do you aim to teach in a week/month/year?**

Five a month but I’d kind of introduce them all together so I introduce the five and then I keep going over them. And I revise the ones from junior infants I have them over there (word garden) and we go over them aswell.

- Teacher’s discretion. T6 is the only teacher that introduces all SI HFW’s together for the month. She also has a word garden for JI HFW and no other SI has a HFW display with HFW’s from JI’s.

- Creativity. Making a display for JI HFW’s.
Appendix 12 – The Starlight Programme’s ‘sight word’ list for Junior Infants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starlight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>my</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>he (she)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>has</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>with</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>they</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>like</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>what</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>the</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>to</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>are</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>look</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>for</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>said</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>some</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>where</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Junior Infants sight words</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>was</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>here</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>go</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>this</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>you</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>that</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>his</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Starlight Senior Infants: Yearly Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme/poster</th>
<th>Reading genre</th>
<th>Interactive Big Books</th>
<th>Core/Foundation Reader</th>
<th>Book band</th>
<th>Sight words</th>
<th>Phonics focus</th>
<th>Skills Book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>What Do You Like to Do?</td>
<td>Reader 1: Let's Play Tennis!</td>
<td>Core: Yellow Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>a, y, e, i, 3</td>
<td>p. 1-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Recount</td>
<td>Anyone for Cake?</td>
<td>Reader 1: Mark’s Party</td>
<td>Core: Yellow Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>a, i, e, o, u, 3</td>
<td>p. 3-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>The world around us</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Winter Sleep</td>
<td>Reader 1: Don’t Wake the Animals!</td>
<td>Core: Yellow Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>a, i, e, o, u, 3</td>
<td>p. 9-12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The world around us</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Kate’s Garden</td>
<td>Reader 1: In the Garden</td>
<td>Core: Yellow Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>a, i, e, o, u, 3</td>
<td>p. 13-16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>How to Groom a Dog</td>
<td>Reader 2: How to Have a Bath</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3</td>
<td>p. 17-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Recount</td>
<td>My New Cousin</td>
<td>Reader 2: A Trip to the Post Office</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>a, o, s, w, l, i, e, i, 3</td>
<td>p. 21-24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Ice Cream Saves the Day!</td>
<td>Reader 2: A Trip to the Toyshop</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>d, o, w, h, e, e, i, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 25-28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Let’s Go Shopping!</td>
<td>Reader 2: Winter Sale!</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Red</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3</td>
<td>p. 29-32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>What Kinds of Schools are There?</td>
<td>Reader 3: My Classroom</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 33-36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Recount</td>
<td>The School Play</td>
<td>Reader 3: Cow Takes a Bow!</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 37-40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Under the Sea</td>
<td>Reader 3: All About Whales</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 41-44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Kate’s Cool Hat</td>
<td>Reader 3: Sea Lion Splash!</td>
<td>Core: Blue Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 45-48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>How to Make a Chicken Salad Sandwich</td>
<td>Reader 4: Super Smoothie</td>
<td>Core: Green Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 49-52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Recount</td>
<td>Jack’s First Chili Pepper</td>
<td>Reader 4: Let’s Eat Outside</td>
<td>Core: Green Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 53-56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>All the Fun of the Fair</td>
<td>Reader 4: A Ride at the Fair</td>
<td>Core: Green Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 57-60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Sunny to the Rescue</td>
<td>Reader 4: Kate’s Sandcastle</td>
<td>Core: Green Foundation: Yellow</td>
<td>Revision of 8 sight words</td>
<td>b, o, a, i, e, i, 3, 3, 3</td>
<td>p. 61-64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>