



A study of the factors affecting attitudes towards reading displayed by first to sixth class students in a DEIS band 1 school

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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.

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Abstract

The goal of this research project was to examine attitudes towards reading amongst Irish primary school students, and to determine whether any particular factors could be seen to correlate with positive or negative attitudes towards reading. A quantitative method of data collection was employed in the form of a questionnaire, and was distributed to students from first class through to sixth class in a Dublin based primary school. Two major themes emerged from the research, namely that of gender and age. Indeed, the findings suggested that gender impacted greatly on attitude towards reading, with girls consistently reporting more positive attitudes towards reading than boys. Furthermore, the findings saw attitudes toward reading generally decline throughout the primary school classes, suggesting that reading attitudes become increasingly negative as children become older. According to the researcher, there is a need for intervention to be implemented in order to promote positive reading attitudes amongst male students and older students. Before this intervention can be implemented however, there is the need for research to be conducted surrounding what methods would be successful in increasing the positivity of the attitudes of these groups. Once these methods have been established, there is a need for time, resources and tools to be allocated to this curricular area, in order to allow teachers the best chance of increasing the positivity of their student's attitudes towards reading.

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Chapter One

Introduction

McKenna, Conradi, Bryant and Jang (2012) define the concept of reading attitudes as a child's affective response to reading. In other words, attitude towards reading constitutes a child's positive or negative response to reading. Taking this as definition, the topic of attitudes towards reading is one that has not gone without international attention. Certainly, large scale studies surrounding the topic were being conducted from the 1990s.

Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2020), after analysing the National Literacy Trust's annual literacy survey results, reported that the year of 2019 saw the lowest ever number of children reading daily for pleasure. Alongside this, they noted that reported levels of reading enjoyment had continued to decline from the previous year. With these results in mind, the researcher felt that an examination of attitudes towards reading was more imperative now than ever before. Indeed, the researcher hypothesised that in examining the factors that affect reading attitudes one would gain insight into which groups of children need the greatest support in order to develop positive reading attitudes.

Albeit a thoroughly investigated subject internationally, the research surrounding the topic of reading attitudes is decidedly more sparse on the Irish stage. The researcher thus felt that this project would provide new insight into factors affecting Irish children's reading attitudes, and whether or not these findings can be seen to correlate to international research.

Research Question

Specifically, this research project investigated the following research question: *What factors can be seen to impact on Irish primary school student's attitudes towards reading?*

Whilst conducting research surrounding this research question, the following sub questions were explored:

- Can gender be seen to correlate to a negative or positive attitude towards reading?
- Can class level be seen to correlate to a negative or positive attitude towards reading?

Outline of Research Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. This chapter introduces the study. Chapter two provides an overview of the literature. Chapter three describes the methodology implemented. Chapter four presents and discusses findings, whilst chapter five concludes with a summary of findings, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

The topic of attitudes towards reading has substantial international attention. Indeed, studies have been undertaken on this topic across the globe, with research conducted within the UK, Turkey, Australia and the USA, to name but a few. Despite looking at the same general topic of reading attitudes, many of these studies have approached the subject through strikingly different lenses. Some researchers have focused on an apparent link between attitude and wider reading success, while others have inferred a link between attitudes and children's age. Some have conducted longitudinal studies to examine the effect of curriculum literacy programmes, and others have considered the relationship between attitudes and gender. The sheer expanse of approaches to the topic has made for fascinating insights into an ever-unfolding research area.

With the wealth of studies that are available, the researcher has chosen to focus this literature review on studies concerning age and gender and their relationship to reading attitudes. Following this, the researcher will discuss the topic of reading attitudes and Irish research.

Why attitudes towards reading?

Before beginning an exploration of factors affecting reading attitudes, it is worth noting why the study of attitudes to reading has become such an examined area, namely, the apparent link between reading attitudes and reading success.

Large amounts of international research has attributed weight to the claim that reading attitudes are indicative of reading success. In other words, positive responses to reading generate reading success. This hypothesis has been supported by recent cross cultural studies, such as the Progress in International Literature Study (PIRLS). Conducted in fifty countries, PIRLS 2016 found that those with positive attitudes generally had higher levels of reading achievement (timmsandpirls.bc.edu, 2016). Although this association has been concluded by many studies, the degree of causality is still a point of contention.

Yaacov Petscher (2010) confirmed as much. After conducting a meta-analysis of the 1980s and 1990s research surrounding reading attitudes, he states that although there is a correlational relationship between reading attitudes and achievement, there “is yet to be a consensus on the magnitude and overall importance” (Petscher, 2010, p. 338).

In a study published by the National Literacy Trust - a London based charity promoting literacy, De Zoysa and Clark (2011) echo the sentiments of Petscher. They argued that although there is often an assumed relationship between positive attitudes and reading achievement the “lack of longitudinal datasets that explore both reading attainment and reading attitudes” has led to “very little evidence existing about the causal nature of this relationship” (De Zoysa & Clark, 2011, p. 8). Against this backdrop, De Zoysa and Clark went on to conduct an analysis of data “from a 2009 survey of 4,503 young people for whom we had attainment data as well as information on their reading enjoyment, attitudes and behaviours” (De Zoysa & Clark, 2011, p. 11). From this, they argued that attitudes towards reading affect reading behaviour, which indirectly links them to reading attainment. Put differently, the more positively a child felt

towards reading, the more likely they were to engage in reading (reading behaviour) and thus, become a proficient reader (reading success). In this way, De Zoysa and Clark concede the existence of a link between reading attitude and success, albeit an indirect one.

Another study examining the link between reading attitude and reading success is that of McGeown et. al (2015). In this study, questionnaires were distributed to “two hundred and three children aged 6 years 1 month and 7 years 4 months” (McGeown et. al, 2015, p. 394). These questionnaires asked the children about their reading habits and reading enjoyment. From this data it was concluded that “in general, children’s attitudes towards reading, reading confidence and enjoyment of learning to read were positively associated with their word reading skill” (McGeown et al., 2015, p. 396). To rephrase, the more positively a child felt towards reading the higher the likelihood of their reading proficiency.

Some scholars have embraced the idea of a link between attitudes and attainment wholeheartedly. Indeed, some view the link as being monumental, presenting literacy and attitude as inextricable from one another. For instance, Lockwood (2012) places so much emphasis on the link between positive reading attitudes and reading success that he conducted a two year study of schools in which children showcased positive attitudes. This was with the intention of looking “at ways in which schools were able to make the experience of reading more enjoyable for pupils and to encourage positive attitudes in them, thus increasing motivation to read” (Lockwood, 2012, p.232).

Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to ignore literature that deemphasizes the association between reading attitudes and reading success. Certainly, some studies remain sceptical about the link. For example, Kusdemir (2019) considered this connection, using a quantitative technique entitled “Attitude Scale towards Reading” to measure the reading attitudes of 165 fourth grade students in Turkey. She concluded from her study that, generally speaking, “it can be stated that primary school fourth graders have a positive attitude towards reading generally” (Kusdemir, 2019, p.7). She comments however that she could not correlate attitude and reading success from her own study specifically.

Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) also tackled this apparent association. These researchers investigated attitudes towards reading in 1998 and in 2003 in the UK. During this time, the National Literacy Strategy had been introduced in the UK, which had raised literacy levels nationally. Curiously, the researchers observed that although literacy levels had improved in the five years, there was a decrease in positive reading attitudes. This “decline in enjoyment over the five year period runs counter to the general tendency for higher achievement to be related to more positive attitudes” (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004, p. 385).

In light of these conflicting narratives, it is difficult to ascertain the relationship that exists between attitudes and attainment. With this being said, the majority of research does seem to report an indication of a relationship between the two, albeit the extent to which they affect one another is up for debate. With this in mind, perhaps it is unsurprising that there is such a focus on factors that affect attitudes towards reading. Indeed, if reading attitudes do affect

reading success, then surely it is beneficial to garner an understanding as to what affects reading attitudes themselves.

The study of reading attitudes and gender internationally

To what degree does gender predict the attitude of the child toward reading? One of the earlier studies which commented on this topic was published by Kush and Watkins (1996). They set out to examine long term stability of attitudes towards reading amongst children. The study requested the children to fill out a survey when they were in first grade and then once again, three years later, in fourth grade. Upon analysis of the data, the scholars noted that “girls in this study consistently expressed more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than did boys” (Kush & Watkins, 1996, p. 318). Since then, this topic has been addressed by several academic studies.

Christina Clark (2015) commented on gender in her report entitled “The Reading Lives of 8-11 year olds”. Clark also undertook a longitudinal study that collected data surrounding children’s reading attitudes over an eight year period between 2005 and 2013. Her results were consistent with the findings of Kush and Watkins. Indeed, Clark found that female students consistently reported a more positive attitude towards reading than their male counterparts. For example, 72.9% of girls reported they enjoyed reading “very much or quite a lot”. This was in comparison to just 59.0% of males in the same category. Similarly, boys were twice as likely to say that they didn’t like reading at all (Clark, 2015).

Gendered differences in attitudes are also considered by McGeown et. al (2015). Indeed, this study, which saw 203 children complete a questionnaire noted that “girls reported significantly more positive attitudes towards reading” than boys (McGeown et. al, 2015, p. 396). It also asserted that teachers should be aware that “boys may be in need of greater support to maintain and enhance their reading attitudes” (McGeown et. al, 2015, p. 398). It is worth noting that this study was conducted with children between the ages of six and seven, thus indicating that gendered differences in attitude may be present from an early age.

The research of gendered differences in reading attitudes has largely consistent results across the board. Certainly, Becker and McElvany (2018) concluded that differences in attitudes towards reading between males and females “already seem to exist at the elementary school level” (Becker & McElvany, 2018, p. 544). Moreover, recent research of the attitudes of 468 children in Canada found “consistent sex effect from fifth grade to eighth grade” (Nootens et. al, 2018, p.9). In this study, girls consistently rated their attitude towards reading more positively than males, both in relation to academic and leisure reading.

This naturally begs the question, why is it that girls exhibit a more positive attitude to reading? Logan and Johnston (2009) were two scholars who touched upon this question. They noted in their sample of 232 students that females charted more positive attitudes to reading, whilst also noting themselves as reading more frequently. They hypothesised that “higher frequency of reading and better reading ability could be an explanation for girls’ more positive attitudes to reading” (Logan & Johnston, 2009, p. 200). Indeed, the amount of time one spends reading is directly linked to reading success and positive attitude.

Furthermore, it was suggested that if boy's "experiences of reading are continually frustrating and negative, this will eventually lead to the belief that the inevitable result of reading is frustration" (Logan & Johnston, 2009, p. 201) thus affecting their attitude. Certainly, male's attitudes to reading "showed a significantly stronger association with their competency beliefs than it did for girls" (Logan & Johnston, 2009, p.208). This may suggest that males become discouraged more easily due to their perceived slow progress in reading.

Another interesting aspect of this discussion is the topic of book ownership amongst genders. Clark, Woodley and Lewis (2011) noted gender differences when it came to book ownership. This study found that "Girls are more likely than boys to say that they have their own books, with 7 in 10 girls compared with 6 in 10 boys saying that they have books of their own" (Clark, Woodley & Lewis, 2011, p.4). Interestingly, the study also indicates that a child having books of their own meant the child was more likely to "have more positive attitudes towards reading" (Clark et. al, 2011, p.4). This is a noteworthy statistic and sparks a number of questions in the mind of the academic. Indeed, do girls have an inherently more positive attitude to reading than males, thus resulting in more book ownership, or is it that higher book ownership offers girls exposure to reading, which in turn results in a more positive attitude? Whatever the case, the importance of book exposure is widely acknowledged, with Timothy Shanahan describing in a recent blogpost how "book access tended to have positive effects on a variety of outcomes including reading achievement, reading readiness, attitude and amount of reading in which students engaged" (Shanahan, 2018).

The study of reading attitudes and age internationally

Like gender, the age of a child appears to significantly impact reading attitude. One early study that observed a change in attitude towards reading was conducted by McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995). This study explored the attitudes towards reading of 18,185 students in grades 1 through grade 6 in the United States. Upon analysis of results, the researchers found that “reading attitudes, on average, were observed to become more negative gradually, but steadily, through elementary school years” (McKenna et. al, 1995, p.935). In other words, the higher the grade, the more negative attitudes found.

This finding was echoed in 1996, when Kush and Watkins, studying students from first to fourth grade, noted “a consistent decline across the elementary school years” (Kush et. al, 1996, p.317) of reading attitudes.

More recently, the link between age and reading attitude has again been established. For instance, in a 2012 study concerning middle school students, it was found that “attitudes towards reading generally worsen over time” (McKenna et.al, 2012, p.287). Echoing this, the National Centre for Education Statistics in the US noted on their “Nation’s Report Card” of 2015 that 34% of students in grade 4 reported reading as a favourite activity, whilst only 26% of students in grade 8 did so (National Centre for Education Statistics, n.d).

This relationship between age and reading attitude is outlined in the National Literacy Trust’s 2019 study of children and young people’s reading habits. Indeed, children aged 8 to 11 years were 22% more likely to rate themselves as enjoying reading “very much” or “quite a lot”,

in comparison to children aged between 11 and 14 years (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). Furthermore, older children were more likely than their younger counterparts, to confirm the statements of “I cannot find things to read that interest me” and “I only read when I have to” as being true (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020).

National Research and Findings

When speaking about the Irish national perspective, it is best to begin by conceding that the research surrounding reading attitudes is decidedly more sparse on the Irish stage. Nevertheless, there is evidence of weight being attributed to the importance of building positive attitudes surrounding literacy in general.

Indeed, the Primary Language Curriculum, which was introduced in 2019, emphasizes the importance of nurturing positive attitudes. Certainly, it lists the need for a curriculum which “supports students to develop positive dispositions towards language and literacy” (Department of Education and Skills, 2019, p.4). The Primary Language Curriculum has been designed as a follow on from the principles of Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. These principles include the need for playful experiences that are relevant to the children in order to encourage a positive view of learning (National Council for Curriculum & Assessment, 2019). This is evidenced in the Primary Language Curriculum as learning outcomes include the need for “appropriately playful learning experiences” in infants and “appropriately engaging learning experiences” (Department of Education and Skills, 2019, p.22) in the more senior classes. This inclusion and emphasis on the positive experiential side of the child’s education showcases an increased awareness in Ireland of the important role attitude plays in literacy education generally.

PIRLS 2016 also provides insights into attitudes on the national scale in Ireland. In 2016, Ireland scored higher than the international average, with 46% of Irish students stating that they very much liked reading, compared to 43% of equivalently aged students abroad. Alongside this, only 14% of Irish students stated they do not like to read, as opposed to the international average of 16% (timmsandpirls.bc.edu, 2016). Similarly, in 2019, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) echoed these results: Irish proficiency in reading ranked fourth out of thirty seven countries (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2019). Of course, studies like PISA and PIRLS serve only to provide a glimpse into students' attitudes. Thus, they are by all accounts positive, but only provide a brief insight into this area.

A more specific report published in Ireland regarding attitudes towards reading was conducted by Kavanagh, Weir and Moran, and published by the Education Research Centre. Entitled "The evaluation of DEIS: Monitoring achievement and attitudes among urban primary school pupils from 2007-2016", this report provides insight into reading attitudes of those enrolled in DEIS schooling. In this study, students from third, fifth and sixth class were asked to specify whether they liked reading or not. The results found that large majorities 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they liked reading (combined percentages ranging from 70% at sixth class to 82% at third class) (Kavanagh et.al, 2017). Although this study is DEIS specific, and does not speak for all Irish children, it is particularly relevant to this project given that the researcher conducted their research in a DEIS school.

Overall, however, it could be argued that Ireland needs further study in the area of reading attitudes and the factors affecting attitude in order to create a fully developed and nuanced picture of this topic, which is what makes this current study particularly exciting. Indeed, it's clear from studying the research that is available elsewhere in the world, that Ireland is missing crucial data on our school children, and their reading attitudes.

Conclusion

There is a generally acknowledged correlation between positive reading attitudes and reading success. Gender and age are two factors which appear to impact on reading attitudes themselves. There has been much international research surrounding these factors and their correlation with reading attitude, however they have been discussed less on the Irish stage. The following chapter will outline the methodology implemented for this study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design employed for this study. The chapter will begin with an overview of the research design, followed by a presentation of the positionality and philosophical perspective of the researcher. A detailing of mixed methods research and the research instrument will then be provided, before a review of the research sample. The researcher will examine the pilot study and data collection process, and explore the ethical considerations and limitations of the research.

Research Design Overview

This study sought to investigate the attitudes of primary school age children towards reading. Specifically, the study sought to explore the factors that can be seen to correlate with negative or positive attitudes towards reading, as is hypothesised in international research (Clark, 2015; McGeown et. al, 2015). A concurrent mixed methods approach was utilised, with a questionnaire being administered to first to sixth class primary school students which contained questions of both a closed and open nature.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher has been passionate about reading from a young age, both as an academic and leisure activity. The researcher places strong emphasis on the importance of developing positive attitudes towards reading amongst children. The researcher is concerned by their perception that extensive screen use is a growing trend amongst children, and believes that

reading should be actively encouraged throughout childhood. The researcher is a student teacher and their classroom experience is limited, so cannot comment in detail from experience as to whether they perceive varying factors to play a role in attitudes towards reading.

Researcher Philosophical Worldview

The researcher approached this study from a pragmatic philosophical standpoint, insofar that they were “not committed to any one system of philosophy or reality” (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018, p. 48). Indeed, pragmatists hold the view that decisions surrounding research methods should be “based on how useful the methods are for addressing a particular question” (Denscombe, 2014, p. 158), as opposed to an unwavering subscription to one research method. The researcher holds the pragmatic view that any knowledge obtained throughout a research study investigation is a “product of our times” (Denscombe, 2014, p.158), insofar that information must be examined under the cultural context and historical era of the time in which it was produced, and what is perceived to be truth in one study today may not be so in the future.

Mixed Methods Approach

Mixed methods is “an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data” (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018, p.41). Qualitative research involves an “in-depth understanding of social and human behaviour” (Hoy, 2010, p.2) whilst quantitative research emphasizes “control and quantified measures of performance” (Hoy, 2010, p.2), with measurement and statistics central to the research. Generally speaking, qualitative research is associated with open-ended questions, whilst quantitative research is associated with closed-ended questions (J. W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018). Mixed method research is based

on the belief that “the use of more than one method can enhance the findings of research by providing a fuller and more complete picture” (Denscombe, 2014, p. 147). Indeed, it was this reasoning as to why the researcher chose the mixed method approach for the project at hand.

However, worth noting is that mixed method research does “not necessarily attach equal weight” (Denscombe, 2014, p.152) to both quantitative and qualitative research, but rather can regard “one as the main and the other as the subsidiary counterbalance” (Denscombe, 2014, p.152). This is true in relation to this research project, in which the mixed method research saw “qualitative data collection and analysis within a quantitative experimental or research design” (J.W Creswell & J.D Creswell, 2018, p. 48). Indeed, this research project utilised a questionnaire, in which closed-ended quantitative questions make up all questions posed, with the exception of a singular open-ended qualitative question. The open-ended question was included as written opinions can “enrich a report by providing an authenticity and vividness which tables of figures seldom can” (Wellington, 2015, p.198).

The use of a questionnaire to collect both quantitative and qualitative data made the project concurrent in nature, wherein the “investigator typically collects both forms of data at roughly the same time” (J.W Creswell & J.D.Crewell,2018, p.52).

Questionnaire Design

The researcher chose to use a cross-sectional questionnaire as the research instrument as it would allow “a snapshot of how things are rather than tracing events over a period of time” (Denscombe, 2014, p.8), which complimented the timescale of this project. Alongside this, given

that “survey results can be used to test a hypothesis or add weight to a theory” (Wellington, 2015, p.191), a questionnaire seemed a suitable research instrument to explore the research theory that certain factors can be correlated with varying reading attitudes. Furthermore, the researcher felt a questionnaire would prove to be an economical choice which would provide “a rapid turnaround in data collection”(J.W Creswell & J.D Creswell, 2018, p.211). Finally, the researcher felt the questionnaire to be an appropriate research tool as they “can be quite short in length and therefore children are less likely to get bored” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.7).

The questionnaire used in this project (Appendix A) was designed with the intention to “collect information which can be used subsequently as data for analysis” (Denscombe, 2015, p.166). As questionnaires can “be developed from prior research methods” (Wellington, 2015, p.196), section one of the survey, in which the pictorial of Garfield the cat depicting several different moods is used, was adapted from the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix B). This survey was first designed by Dennis J. Kear in 1990, as a means of tracking attitudes to reading amongst elementary school children.

The researcher felt that the adaptation of this questionnaire suited the study at hand, not only due to the fact that it was a well-regarded questionnaire that has been extensively used, but also due to the pictorial format having “a natural appeal for the very young” (McKenna & Kear, 1990, p.2). Given the wide age range of this study, the researcher believed using pictures as part of the questionnaire was an appropriate way to “take into account the particular capabilities of those who receive the questionnaire” (Denscombe, 2014, p.168). It could be argued that using

pictorial representations in surveys leaves the questionnaire open to various different interpretations, insofar that a picture may “mean something different to other people” (Bell, 2005, p.138) than it does to the researcher. To combat confusion, the researcher verbally assigned a label to each picture at the time of distribution of the survey, with Garfield A representing excellent, Garfield B representing good, Garfield C representing okay and Garfield D representing not good.

It is worth noting that the survey questions were not directly copied from Kear’s design. Indeed, some of the questions in Kear’s survey contain Americanisms, such as vacation or bookstore, which may have been off putting for Irish children. Given the idea that when people “find it hard to complete a questionnaire, the response rate will suffer” (Denscombe, 2014, p.168), the researcher wished to keep the language of the questions clear and accessible. However, the researcher did keep the “how do you feel” format of the questions found in Kear’s survey in the hope that this personal nature of the questions would encourage participants to be open about their views.

Section B of the questionnaire is notably different from section A, although still strives to be child-friendly. Indeed, where section A only seeks to establish a child’s attitude towards reading, section B seeks to add to this picture, whilst also obtaining data on the factors that may be seen to correlate with a positive or negative reading attitude. Indeed, it is “vital to cover all key matters if the questionnaire is to supply data which permit a reasonable analysis by the researcher” (Denscombe, 2014, p.171), which is what section B strives to do. Section B is also notably different in format to section A due to the fact that the researcher sought to “introduce a

variety of question formats so that the questionnaire remains interesting” (De Vaus, 2002, p.111).

It is generally believed that a survey should begin with “questions that respondents will enjoy answering” (De Vaus, 2002, p.107). This sees the opening of a questionnaire filled with “straightforward, closed questions, leaving the open-ended, ‘matter of opinion’ questions to the end” (Wellington, 2015, p.195). The researcher strived to create this in the survey used in this project, beginning with the simple pictorial questions before continuing to ask more difficult, abstract questions.

Research Sample

Recruitment. This study sought to recruit a sample of children between seven and thirteen years of age, in order to explore their attitudes towards reading. A letter (Appendix C) detailing the project was first presented to the school principal, requesting permission for the participation of students within the study. Subsequently, the researcher spoke with classroom teachers providing them with “a timeline of when things need to be done, when class time is needed, when surveys need to be completed and returned” (Maruyama & Deno, 1992, p. 7). After liaising with teachers, the researcher visited the classrooms of the potential research participants to give an overview of what the study entailed. A parent/guardian consent form (Appendix D) was sent home with children interested in participating. The children who registered interest in participating were asked to fill in their own child-friendly consent form (Appendix E), allowing them “to make active decisions regarding whether they want to participate in the research project” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.15). This was only done

after ensuring, to the best of the researcher's ability, that the children had "received sufficient and accurate information" (O'Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.5) allowing informed consent. The researcher allowed for over-sampling, dispensing one hundred and forty two consent forms, in the knowledge that there would be some refusal of consent. The researcher proposed a minimum number of sixty participants for the questionnaire.

Participants. There were eighty three participants in total for this research project, all of whom were students at a Deis Band 1 School in Dublin. Informed consent from both parent/guardian and the child themselves was received before the questionnaire was commenced. The participants were ranging from first to sixth class, between the ages of seven years old to thirteen years old. The breakdown of gender was forty two female participants, forty male participants and one participant who opted to not disclose a gender.

Pilot Study

Despite section A of this questionnaire being adapted from another survey, "the use of a pilot is still essential" (Wellington, 2015, p.196) as it may showcase problems with wording that were unforeseen. For the pilot study of this project, the researcher administered the questionnaire to four of their nieces and nephews, who fell in the age bracket from first to sixth class. No wording was changed as the result of this pilot study, however, it gave the researcher some clarification in relation to the pacing of verbal instructions whilst administering the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Upon collection and recording of consent forms, the researcher administered the questionnaire to students in small groups. Prior to commencing the questionnaire, the researcher gave another overview of the survey, allowing space for questions. It was reiterated by the researcher that the children did not have to answer any questions that they did not want to, and “they were reminded at various junctures during the research process that they have the option” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni, & Dogra, 2018, p.17) to withdraw from the questionnaire process. When completing research with children it is worth bearing in mind that “adults typically have authority over children” (Greene & Hill, 2005, p.10) and “children may give answers that are determined more by their desire to please rather than their desire to be truthful” (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 9). In light of this, the researcher adopted an informal interpersonal approach to the administering of the questionnaires, using child-friendly language, reassuring the children that there was no incorrect answer, as well as “sitting in a position and at a level comfortable for the child” (Hill, 2005, p.63).

Ethical Considerations

Whilst research involving children is “necessary and beneficial” (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2012, p.8), a number of ethical considerations arise when researching children. Given “the nature of their vulnerability” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.4), it could be argued that questioning the ethics of a research project is even more paramount when children are involved.

Informed Consent. With a central ethical principle being “the need to respect a participant’s autonomy” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.15), the researcher paid particular attention to the ethical consideration of consent during this research project. The researcher sought the consent of the guardians of the children and the children themselves. It was ensured to the best of the researcher’s ability that the consent obtained was informed. Certainly, consent was only sought after “adequate information about the project’s aims, methods and potential outcomes” (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2012, p.2) was delivered to the participants in child-friendly language, and adequate time was provided for the asking of questions. It was also emphasized to the children on a number of occasions that the choice to take part in the research was completely their own, and they could withdraw this consent at any point.

Anonymization and Confidentiality. All data obtained in this research project was anonymized in keeping with ethical practices. As “it is clear that you need to spend some time with your child participants explaining what you mean by confidentiality and anonymity” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.23), the researcher discussed these concepts with the participants. Personal data in relation to gender was obtained, however the children were encouraged to self-elect their gender and were given the option of not disclosing a gender. Children who wished to disclose a gender were asked to write their gender on the questionnaire.

Nonmaleficence. Nonmaleficence, or “the means to avoid doing harm” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.16) also needs to be considered from an ethical perspective. In other words, before undertaking research, the researcher must “think about whether the children or parents will be distressed by participating in your study” (O’Reilly, Ronzoni & Dogra, 2018, p.16). This was considered by the researcher throughout this project, particularly in the

questionnaire design. The researcher considered the question of book ownership in particular to be a sensitive topic that children may feel embarrassed about. The researcher had “access to a designated liaison person” (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012, p.4) with whom they discussed this topic. The researcher decided to place this question towards the end of the survey, where children may feel free to not answer the question as they had already answered many. The researcher emphasized that the children did not need to answer any question they felt uncomfortable with. Additionally, the designated liaison person in the school was on hand to debrief with any child who felt the need after the questionnaire.

Limitations of the Research

Like all research, this project was not without limitations. There were three large limitations that the researcher identified.

Firstly, given that one hundred and forty two consent forms were dispatched to parents and guardians, with only eighty three being returned, it is worth considering the non-respondents. Perhaps the participants included in this research were children who already had a positive enough attitude to reading to push for parental or guardian consent to partake in the study, thus, creating a biased study. Alongside this, there may have been adult literacy difficulties in the home that prevented informed consent being given for some children.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that eighty-three participants is limiting in relation to quantitative data insofar that only tentative correlation can be made between varying factors.

Indeed, a much larger sample size would be necessary in order for any truly significant correlations to be established.

Finally, since “people answer survey questions so that they look good in their own eyes” (De Vaus, 2002, p.107) it is worth considering that children may have answered questions in the way they perceived was the ‘best’ way to answer, as opposed to the most truthful way.

Conclusion

This research project undertook a mixed methods approach, utilising a questionnaire as the research instrument. The project sought to examine varying factors that could be seen to correlate with either a positive or negative attitude towards reading. The project had eighty three participants in total, ranging in age from seven to thirteen years. Consent was obtained from the participants before commencing the study. The researcher tried at all times to remain aware of ethical considerations and limitations of the research. The following chapter will examine the results of the research project.

Chapter Four

Presentation and Discussion of Results

This chapter will provide a presentation and discussion of the results from this research project's questionnaire. These results will be displayed in table format.

Due to the large amount of data that was captured during this study, and the many ways in which this data could be examined, the researcher made the decision to refine their examination of the questionnaire results to specifically pay attention to the factors of gender and age. This was due to the fact that these factors displayed the most note-worthy results.

There will be two different sections to this chapter. The first section will provide a comparison of results under the theme of gender. The second section of this chapter will follow the same format, however, this time the results will be analysed under the theme of class level.

Comparison of results under the factor of gender

Table 1.1 *Breakdown of gender of participants*

Gender of Participants	Female	Male	Undisclosed
Number of Participants	42	40	1
Percentage of Total	50.6%	48.2%	1.2%

Table 1.1 showcases a breakdown of the gender of the participants who took part in this study. There was a relatively even split with 42 females and 40 males participating. This was beneficial for this study as the sample size for both genders remained within a similar margin and, consequently, more weight can be placed in findings. There was one research participant who opted to not disclose a gender. Thus, the data provided by this participant was not used in the breakdowns to follow.

Table 1.2 *Feelings towards reading*

Feeling towards Reading	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	26	14	2	0
Male Participants	20	13	8	0
Female Percentage	61.9%	33.3%	4.8%	0%
Male Percentage	48.8%	31.7%	19.5%	0%

Table 1.2 showcases the breakdown of participants' reported feelings towards reading. Immediately, the gender difference is striking, with females being 13.1% more likely than males to record themselves as having an excellent attitude towards reading . Furthermore, boys were 14.7% more likely to record their attitude toward reading as just “okay”. This result clearly showcases gendered differences in attitude, in accordance with international research findings (Clark, 2015; Logan & Johnston, 2009;McGeown et. al, 2015). However, neither gender grouping recorded their attitude as being “not good”. This suggests that although differences in attitude can be observed, this does not mean that these differences see attitudes as either wholly positive or wholly negative. Indeed, 80.5% of males in this study recorded themselves as having an “excellent” or “good” attitude towards reading. Thus, males could be considered to have a generally positive attitude, just less positive than their female peers.

Table 1.3 *Feelings about reading at home for fun*

Feeling towards Reading at Home for Fun	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	19	19	2	1
Male Participants	9	9	14	8
Female Percentage	46.3%	46.3%	4.9%	2.4%
Male Percentage	22.5%	22.5%	35.0%	20.0%

Table 1.4 *Feelings towards reading in school*

Feeling towards Reading in School	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	27	11	4	0
Male Participants	18	17	4	1
Female Percentage	64.3%	26.2%	9.5%	0%
Male Percentage	42.5%	45.0%	10.0%	2.5%

Table 1.3 and Table 1.4 are worthy of being commented on concurrently due to the fact they examine two sides of a coin - namely leisure reading (Table 1.3) and academic reading (Table 1.4). Firstly, these tables showcase that children collectively feel more positive towards academic reading. This is in line with previous findings. Indeed, in a study that examined attitudes towards reading of both an academic and recreational nature amongst fourth grade students a preference for academic reading was reported (Hossu, 2019). Secondly, these tables showcase the difference found between male and female reading attitudes once again. Indeed, although both genders showcase a preference for academic reading, male participants showcased a notably more negative attitude towards both categories. This is in line with previous findings. Certainly, in a study of 18,185 elementary students in the US, it was noted that girls displayed more positive attitudes to both academic and recreational reading at all class levels (McKenna et. al, 1995).

Table 1.5 *Feelings towards getting a book for a present*

Feeling towards Getting a Book for a Present	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	24	12	5	1
Male Participants	9	12	8	11
Female Percentage	57.1%	28.6%	11.9%	2.4%
Male Percentage	22.5%	30.0%	20.0%	27.5%

Table 1.5 showcases the most notable difference in relation to gender recorded thus far. 47.5% of male participants recorded themselves as feeling “okay” or “not good” towards getting a book for a present, in comparison with 14.3% of the female participants. On the other hand, over half of the female participants noted themselves as feeling “excellent” towards getting a book for a present. This echoes the findings of the National Literacy Trust who reported females as being 16.9% more likely than males to say they were happy receiving a book as a present (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020).

Table 1.6 *Feelings towards going to a bookshop or library*

Feeling towards Reading in School	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	27	11	4	0
Male Participants	16	15	7	1
Female Percentage	64.3%	26.2%	9.5%	0%
Male Percentage	40.0%	37.5%	17.5%	5%

Once again, female students record themselves as feeling more positively towards activities centering on reading. As the bookshop and library are linked with recreational reading, it is unsurprising that females feel favourably towards visiting them as they record higher frequency of recreational reading (Logan & Johnston, 2009).

Table 1.7 *Feelings towards reading different types of books*

Feeling towards reading different types of books	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	29	8	4	1
Male Participants	21	11	4	4
Female Percentage	69.0%	19.0%	9.5%	2.4%
Male Percentage	52.5%	27.5%	10.0%	10.0%

Table 1.8 *Feelings when starting a new book*

Feeling towards starting a new book	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	29	11	2	0
Male Participants	23	10	5	2
Female Percentage	69.0%	26.2%	4.8%	0%
Male Percentage	57.5%	25.0%	12.5%	5.0%

It has been reported that males are more likely to agree with the statement that they “cannot find things to read that interest me” whilst disagree with the statement that there “are lots of things I want to read”(Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). Table 1.7 relates to these findings insofar that it showcases males feeling considerably less positive towards reading varying types of books.

It has also been reported that males are ten percent more likely to “only read when I have to” (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). It could be argued that table 1.8 relates to this statistic as it shows males reluctance, in comparison to females, to starting a new book, and thus, reading generally.

Table 1.9 *Feelings when asked questions about reading by a teacher*

Feeling towards starting a new book	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Female Participants	17	20	3	1
Male Participants	10	15	13	2
Female Percentage	40.5%	47.6%	7.1%	4.8%
Male Percentage	25.0%	37.5%	32.5%	5.0%

McGeown et. al (2015) hypothesised that males need greater support to develop positive reading attitudes. The question depicted in table 1.9 was included by the researcher to examine as to whether teacher input in the form of conversations surrounding reading could be seen to be something that students desire, and thus, be a means of creating more positive reading attitudes. Overall, this question saw 88.1% of female students rate their feeling as being “excellent” or “good” when asked about reading by a teacher, in comparison to 62.5% of males. Thus, although speaking about reading is a desire of many students, other means of teacher input is needed in order to develop student’s reading attitudes.

Table 1.10 *Responses to “I find reading..”*

“I find reading”	Fun	Okay	Boring
Female Participants	27	14	1
Male Participants	18	20	2
Female Percentage	64.3%	33.3%	2.4%
Male Percentage	45.0%	50.0%	5.0%

The researcher chose to include this question, albeit its similarity to question 1 “How do you feel about reading?” (recorded in table 1.1). This was due to the fact that when working with children you “need to include questions which may contradict previous ones to check that the child is not simply ticking random boxes” (O’Reilly et.al, 2018). Fortunately, the results were consistent to the opinions showcased in question 1, thus lending weight to the answers being authentic.

Table 1.11 *Responses to “do you have books of your own at home?”*

“I have books of my own at home”	Yes	No
Female Participants	42	0
Male Participants	30	10
Female Percentage	100%	0%
Male Percentage	75%	25%

It has been reported by the National Literacy Trust that “the degree to which children enjoyed reading, how often they read in their free time and how they felt about reading were

related to book ownership” (Clark & Teravainen, 2017, p. 1). This finding is particularly interesting in light of the results depicted in table 1.11. Indeed, 25% of male participants reported owning no books, whilst all female participants reported book ownership. With the link between book ownership and positive attitudes acknowledged, it is little wonder to see males recording more negative attitudes than females, given their reported ownership.

Table 1.12 *Numbers of books at home*

How many books do you have at home?	Under 10	10-20	20-30	30+
Female Participants	9	15	2	6
Male Participants	6	10	3	5
Female Percentage	28.1%	46.9%	6.3%	18.8%
Male Percentage	25.0%	41.7%	12.5%	20.8%

Table 1.12 is interesting as it showcases a similar amount of books being owned by male and females, of those students who did report book ownership. Indeed, males were slightly more likely to report having over 30 books of their own. Shanahan (2018) describes the importance of book exposure for reading achievement and attitude, thus it is positive to see the students who do own books being exposed to an averagely similar amount.

Table 1.13 *Favourite things to read*

Favourite Genre	Adventure	Fantasy	Comic	Factual	Magazine	History	Other
Female Participant	7	18	5	3	1	1	4
Male Participant	14	4	14	3	0	2	3
Female Percentage	17.9%	46.2%	12.8%	7.7%	2.6%	2.6%	10.3%
Male Percentage	35.0%	10%	35.0%	7.5%	0%	5%	7.5%

This question was included by the researcher to gain an insight into what genres of books to include in a classroom in order to encourage positive attitudes towards reading. The results clearly showcase the need for adventure and comic books for males, whilst females show a preference for fantasy novels.

Table 1.14 *Participant's response to "I read at home.."*

Reading at Home	Everyday	Most Days	Once a Week	Once a Month	Never
Female Participant	11	24	2	2	2
Male Participant	4	10	5	10	11
Female Percentage	26.8%	58.5%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%

Male Percentage	10%	25.0%	12.5%	25.0%	27.5%
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Logan and Johnston (2009) recorded female participants as reading at a higher frequency, and hypothesised that this could be an explanation for their more positive attitudes towards reading. This is an intriguing concept indeed, however, the researcher believes it is difficult to say whether females read because they have a more positive attitude, or have a more positive attitude due to greater frequency of reading. Nevertheless, table 1.14 showcases results that mirror Logan et. al (2009) insofar that females are 16.8% more likely than males to record themselves as reading everyday, and 22.6% less likely to record themselves as never reading.

Table 1.15 *Perception of reading ability*

Are you a good reader?	Yes	Sometimes	No
Female Participant	24	15	3
Male Participant	25	14	2
Female Percentage	57.1%	35.7%	7.1%
Male Percentage	61.0%	34.1%	4.9%

Table 1.15 runs counter to some research hypotheses insofar that it showcases males as having a higher perception of their reading ability in comparison to females. Indeed, Logan and Johnston (2009) put forward the idea that reading attitudes were linked to competency beliefs for males. If this were the case, then the response of males would have been expected to be more

positive overall throughout this study, as only 4.9% of them recorded their reading ability as poor.

Comparison of results under the factor of class level

Table 2.1 *Breakdown of the class level of participants*

Classroom Group of Participants	Sixth Class	Fifth Class	Fourth Class	Third Class	Second Class	First Class
Number of Participants	19	8	13	18	17	8
Percentage of Total	22.9%	9.6%	15.7%	21.7%	20.5%	9.6%

Table 2.1 showcases the breakdown in class levels of the participants of this study. The researcher will analyze class levels in three categories - junior classes made up of the data from first and second class, middle classes made up of the data from third and fourth class, and senior classes made up of the data from fifth and sixth class. Sixth and fifth class students come to 27 students, fourth and third class to 31 students, and second and first class to 25 students.

Table 2.2 *Feeling towards reading*

Feeling towards Reading	Excellent	Good	Okay
Junior Classes Participants	16	6	3
Middle Classes Participants	19	11	1
Senior Classes Participants	11	13	6
Junior Classes Percentage	64.0%	24.0%	12.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	61.3%	35.5%	3.1%
Senior Classes Percentage	40.7%	37.0%	22.2%

Table 2.2 showcases the differences in attitude that can be seen between class levels. The data presented generally echoes the results of international research that reports a decline in attitudes across the primary school years (McKenna et. al, 1995; McKenna et. al, 2012, Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2020). However, it is worth noting that although children in the junior classes were the most likely to report their feeling towards reading as excellent, they were more likely than middle classes to report their feeling as “okay”. This may suggest that junior class participants see a larger spectrum of feeling towards reading, than middle classes.

Table 2.3 *Feelings towards reading at home for fun*

Feeling towards Reading at Home for Fun	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Junior Classes Participants	15	4	4	2
Middle Classes Participants	9	13	5	4
Senior Classes Participants	4	12	7	4
Junior Classes Percentage	60.0%	16.0%	16.0%	8.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	29.0%	41.9%	16.1%	12.9%
Senior Classes Percentage	14.8%	44.4%	25.9%	14.8%

Table 2.4 *Feelings towards reading in school*

Feeling towards Reading at Home for Fun	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Junior Classes Participants	14	6	4	1

Middle Classes Participants	20	9	1	1
Senior Classes Participants	10	14	3	0
Junior Classes Percentage	56.0%	24.0%	16.0%	4.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	64.5%	29.0%	3.2%	3.2%
Senior Classes Percentage	37.0%	51.9%	11.1%	0%

Tables 2.3 (leisure reading) and Table 2.4 (academic reading) are particularly interesting in relation to international research, insofar that they echo findings in one regard and dissent in another. Indeed, McKenna et. al (1995), in a study of 18,185 students in elementary schools, found that both recreational and academic attitudes gradually became more negative as a child progressed throughout school. Whilst table 2.3 showcases recreational attitudes gradually becoming worse, and thus aligning with previous international findings, table 2.4 presents a more complicated picture in relation to academic reading. Certainly, the researcher found that junior classes were the most likely to report themselves as feeling “not good” when faced with academic reading time whilst senior classes were the least likely to report this option.

Table 2.5 *Feelings towards getting a book for a present*

Feeling towards Getting a Book for a Present	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
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Junior Classes Participants	15	5	1	3
Middle Classes Participants	13	10	2	6
Senior Classes Participants	5	9	9	4
Junior Classes Percentage	62.5%	20.8%	4.2%	12.5%
Middle Classes Percentage	41.9%	32.3%	6.5%	19.4%
Senior Classes Percentage	18.5%	33.3%	33.3%	14.8%

Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2020) recorded a clear diminishment in positivity surrounding receiving a book as a present as children grew older, with 8-11 year olds 21% more likely than 11-14 year olds to record themselves as being happy with a book as a present. Table 2.5 clearly aligns with this finding, as we see a steady decrease in positivity reported by children from the junior to senior classes.

Table 2.6 *Feelings towards going to a bookshop or library*

Feeling towards going to a Bookshop/ Library	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Junior Classes Participants	14	7	2	2

Middle Classes Participants	18	11	2	0
Senior Classes Participants	11	8	7	1
Junior Classes Percentage	56.0%	28.0%	8.0%	8.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	58.1%	35.5%	6.5%	0%
Senior Classes Percentage	40.7%	29.6%	25.9%	3.7%

Table 2.6 sees junior classes as being the most likely to rate their feeling towards attending a bookshop or library as being “not good”. With this being said, 56% of junior class participants rated their feelings as being excellent towards visiting these places. This finding could be argued to suggest that attitudes may be more severely juxtaposed in junior classes.

Table 2.7 *Feelings towards reading different types of books*

Feeling towards reading different types of books	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Junior Classes Participants	22	1	0	2
Middle Classes Participants	19	7	3	2

Senior Classes Participants	9	11	5	2
Junior Classes Percentage	88.0%	4.0%	0%	8.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	61.3%	22.6%	9.7%	6.4%
Senior Classes Percentage	33.3%	40.7%	18.5%	7.4%

Table 2.8 *Feeling towards starting a new book*

Feeling towards Starting a New Book	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Junior Classes Participants	17	6	0	2
Middle Classes Participants	20	8	3	0
Senior Classes Participants	15	7	4	1
Junior Classes Percentage	68.0%	24.0%	0%	8.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	64.5%	25.8%	9.7%	0%
Senior Classes Percentage	55.6%	25.9%	14.8%	3.7%

Table 2.7 and 2.8 generally showcase a deterioration in attitudes towards reading different types of books and starting new books across the academic years, in keeping with international research. With this being said, these findings once again showcase the wide spectrum of attitudes found in junior classes. Whilst 88% of students in junior classes felt their attitude towards different types of books was excellent, 8% of students felt that it was not good. This is noteworthy when compared to middle and senior classes, who showcase attitudes across the board.

Table 2.9 *Feeling when being asked about reading by a teacher*

Feeling towards Being asked about Reading	Excellent	Good	Okay	Not Good
Junior Classes Participants	17	5	2	1
Middle Classes Participants	6	16	8	1
Senior Classes Participants	4	14	6	3
Junior Classes Percentage	68.0%	20.0%	8.0%	4.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	19.4%	51.6%	25.8%	3.2%
Senior Classes Percentage	14.8%	51.9%	22.2%	11.1%

Table 2.9 showcases a stark contrast in reactions to being asked about reading by a teacher. Indeed, where 68% of junior class participants see this as being excellent, only 14.8% of senior class students see this to be the case. One could argue that this data suggests that senior class teachers need to incorporate a myriad of methods to encourage attitudes towards reading in the senior classes.

Table 2.10 *Responses to “I find reading...”*

I find reading	Fun	Okay	Boring
Junior Classes Participants	16	9	0
Middle Classes Participants	19	12	0
Senior Classes Participants	10	14	3
Junior Classes Percentage	64.0%	36.0%	0%
Middle Classes Percentage	61.3%	38.7%	0%
Senior Classes Percentage	37.0%	51.9%	11.1%

As mentioned in the previous section, the researcher chose to include this question to ascertain whether children were contradicting their answer to question 1, “How do you feel about reading?”, thus suggesting their disengagement with the questionnaire. Fortunately, the responses remained generally consistent with question 1.

Table 2.11 *Responses to “Do you have books of your own at home?”*

Do you have books of your own at home?	Yes	No
Junior Classes Participants	22	3
Middle Classes Participants	26	5
Senior Classes Participants	24	3
Junior Classes Percentage	88.0%	12.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	83.9%	16.1%
Senior Classes Percentage	88.9%	11.1%

Table 2.12 *Numbers of books at home*

How many books of your own do you have at home?	Under 10	10-20	20-30	30+
Junior Classes Participants	4	2	2	4
Middle Classes Participants	8	11	1	1
Senior Classes Participants	4	9	5	6
Junior Classes Percentage	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	33.3%

Middle Classes Percentage	38.1%	52.4%	4.8%	4.8%
Senior Classes Percentage	16.7%	37.5%	20.8%	25.0%

Table 2.11 and 2.12 are particularly intriguing due to the consistency of reported book ownership and book levels across the classes. Although the link between book ownership and positive reading attitudes is widely acknowledged (Clark & Teravainen, 2017; Shanahan, 2018), it is clear that students' reading attitudes still decline across primary school years, despite possessing books. Furthermore, middle classes reported owning the least amount of books, yet consistently showcase more positive attitudes to reading than their older peers. Thus, it could be argued that increased book ownership is not the mechanism to combat negative attitudes.

Table 2.13 *Favourite things to read*

Favourite Genre	Comic	Fantasy	Adventure	Factual	Magazine	History	Other
Junior Participant	9	8	2	4	0	0	0
Middle Participant	6	10	11	0	1	0	3
Senior Participant	4	4	9	3	0	3	3
Junior Percentage	39.1%	34.8%	8.7%	17.4%	0%	0%	0%
Middle Percentage	19.4%	32.3%	35.5%	0%	3.2%	0%	9.7%

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Senior Percentage	15.4%	15.4%	34.6%	11.5%	0%	11.5%	11.5%

Table 2.13 may serve as an indication to teachers as to what genres of books should be included in varying class level libraries to encourage positive attitudes. Indeed, both middle and senior classes note a preference for adventure books, whilst junior classes enjoy comic and fantasy themed books.

Table 2.14 *Frequency of reading at home*

Reading at Home	Everyday	Most Days	Once a Week	Once a Month	Never
Junior Classes Participant	9	8	1	4	3
Middle Classes Participant	4	17	2	2	6
Senior Classes Participant	2	10	4	6	5
Junior Classes Percentage	36.0%	32.0%	4.0%	16.0%	12.0%
Middle Classes Percentage	12.9%	54.8%	6.5%	6.5%	19.4%
Senior Classes Percentage	7.4%	37.0%	14.8%	22.2%	18.5%

Unsurprisingly, due to the documented link between reading frequency and reading attitude (McKenna et. al, 1995; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Shanahan, 2018), we witness the highest frequency of reading amongst junior classes who were most likely to record themselves as reading everyday, thus correlating with their largely positive attitudes.

Table 2.15 *Perception of reading ability*

Do you think you are a good reader?	Yes	Sometimes	No
Junior Classes Participant	18	7	0
Middle Classes Participant	18	9	4
Senior Classes Participant	13	13	1
Junior Classes Percentage	72.0%	28.0%	0%
Middle Classes Percentage	58.1%	29.0%	12.9%
Senior Classes Percentage	48.1%	48.1%	3.7%

Table 2.15 showcases a gradual decline in student's perception of their reading ability throughout the school years. With this being said, middle classes were more likely than senior classes to rate themselves as bad readers, thus calling into question Logan and Johnston (2009) suggestion that reading attitudes may be linked to perception of competency.

Conclusion

The analysis of this data suggests that reading attitudes are affected by the factors of gender and age. The research found that males are more likely to display a negative reading attitude than females. Alongside this, a general decline in attitudes across the primary school years was established. However, junior classes did display polarizing opinions, with the majority of the class being very positive towards reading, whilst some were very negative. In comparison, middle and senior classes were more tempered in their attitude range. The following chapter will conclude this research project.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research sought to investigate what factors could be seen to impact on Irish primary school children's reading attitudes. The research itself was conducted using a questionnaire. The data was presented and discussed under the themes of gender and age. This was due to the fact that gender and age displayed the most noteworthy results in relation to reading attitudes. This chapter will continue to give a summary of the findings of this project, before providing recommendations for further research.

Summary of Findings

The key findings of this research project were as follows:

Under the factor of gender

- Female students were more likely to rate their attitude towards both leisure and academic reading as excellent.
- 57.1% of female students reported feeling “excellent” about receiving a book for a present, in comparison to just 22.5% of their male counterparts. Furthermore, 64.3% of female students reported feeling “excellent” about attending a bookshop or library in comparison to just 40% of male students.
- Female students were more likely to report feeling “excellent” about reading different types of books or when starting a new book.

- 40.5% of females felt excellently when a teacher asked them questions about reading, in comparison to 25% of males.
- 25% of male students reported owning no books of their own. In comparison, every female student reported owning books of their own.
- 83.5% of female students reported reading at home either everyday or most days. 30.8% of male students reported the same.
- Male students were 3.9% more likely to perceive themselves as being good readers.

Under the factor of age

- Junior classes, made up of first and second class, were the most likely to report feeling excellently about leisure reading (60%), whilst middle classes, made up of third and fourth class, were the most likely to report feeling excellently about academic reading (64.5%). Senior classes, made up of fifth and sixth class, were the least likely to rate their feeling as excellent towards either of these categories.
- Junior classes were the most likely to rate themselves as feeling excellent about receiving a book for a present (62.5%), whilst senior classes were the least likely (18.5%). It was middle classes that rated themselves the most positively towards attending a bookshop or library.
- Junior classes were the most positive about reading different types of books, whilst middle classes were the most positive about the feeling surrounding starting a new book. Senior classes were least likely to report feeling excellent surrounding either of these categories.

- 68.0% of junior classes particularly enjoyed being asked questions by a teacher surrounding reading, whilst only 19.4% of middle class students and 14.8% of senior class students did so.
- All class levels reported a consistent level of book ownership.
- 68% of junior class students reported reading at home everyday, or most days, closely followed by 67.7% of middle class students reporting the same. In comparison, only 44.4% of senior class students reported reading everyday or most days.
- Finally, perception of reading ability declined across the class levels, with 72.0% of junior class students reporting themselves to be good readers, with only 48.1% of senior class students doing the same.

Recommendations

The researcher has a number of recommendations for research in this area going forward. Firstly, the sample size of this study was one of the project's limitations. Indeed, the study was made up of eighty three participants, which only allows for tentative correlations to be made between factors. Therefore, in future research surrounding this topic, the researcher recommends a significantly larger sample size of participants. This would benefit research insofar that any correlations established between factors and reading attitudes would hold greater weight due to the larger participant population.

Furthermore, the researcher believes future research should include an examination of possible strategies that may help to increase the positivity of reading attitudes amongst male students and older primary school students. For example, the researcher would wish to examine

whether the availability of particular genres of books, that are appealing to certain groups at risk of negative reading attitudes, may help increase positive reading attitudes. Whatever the approach, if strategies were found to support the growth of positive attitudes, educators could implement these strategies within their classroom and impact on reading attitudes long-term.

Finally, the researcher believes a particularly intriguing study would include an examination of the Primary Language Curriculum's longitudinal impact on reading attitudes. Given the emphasis in this programme on creating meaningful, fun educational experiences, the researcher believes it would be worthwhile to examine whether this new curriculum changes the spectrum of reading attitudes in the Irish classroom over the years to come.

With all of this exciting research still left to be conducted, the researcher believes that reading attitudes is one subject area that will receive attention in the world of literacy for many decades to come.

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Appendix A

Student Questionnaire

Part 1

Circle the Garfield that best represents your feeling

How do you feel about reading?



How do you feel about reading at home for fun?



How do you feel when it is time for reading in school?



How do you feel about getting a book for a present?



How do you feel about going to a bookshop or library?



How do you feel about reading different types of books?



How do you feel when you start a new book?



How do you feel when your teacher asks you questions about reading?



Part 2

Tick the box under the answer that best describes you

1. I find reading.....

Fun

Okay

Boring

--	--	--

2. I have books of my own at home

Yes

No

--	--

If yes, around how many books do you have?

3. My favourite thing to read is....

Comic Books

Fantasy Books

Adventure Books

Factual Books

--	--	--	--

Magazines

History Books

Other (Write down what it is)

--	--	--

4. I read at home.....

Everyday

Most Days

Once a Week

Once a Month

Never

--	--	--	--	--

5. I think I am a good reader

Yes

Sometimes

No

--	--	--

Do you have anything else you would like to say about reading? You can write it or draw it below.

--

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

School _____ Grade _____ Name _____

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?



2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?



3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?



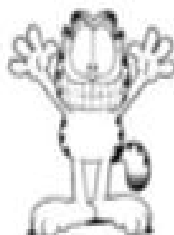
4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?



Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

5.

How do you feel about spending free time reading a book?



6.

How do you feel about starting a new book?



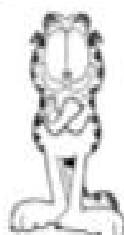
7.

How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?

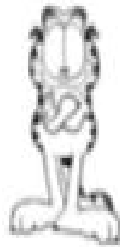
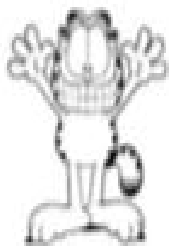
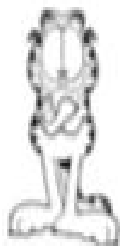
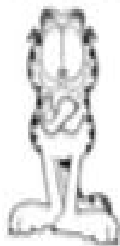


8.

How do you feel about reading instead of playing?



Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

9.	How do you feel about going to a bookstore?			
				
10.	How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?			
				
11.	How do you feel when a teacher asks you questions about what you read?			
				
12.	How do you feel about reading workbook pages and worksheets?			
				

Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

13.

How do you feel about reading in school?



14.

How do you feel about reading your school books?



15.

How do you feel about learning from a book?



16.

How do you feel when it's time for reading in class?



Please circle the picture that describes how you feel when you read a book.

17. How do you feel about stories you read in reading class?



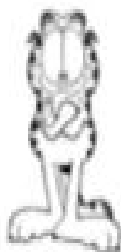
18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?



19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?



20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?



Appendix C Information Letter to the Principal

5th February 2020

Dear X,

I am writing today to ask for your consent to conduct a research study that will investigate factors affecting attitudes towards reading amongst students from second to sixth class. The aim of the research project is to learn more about children's attitudes to reading and the factors that can be seen to correlate with a positive or negative attitude towards reading.

The students will be asked to fill out a questionnaire for this study. The questionnaire has two parts. In the first part, I will ask the children to respond to closed questions surrounding their general reading habits and opinions of reading. The second part asks some general multiple choice answer questions about factors that may affect children's attitudes toward reading, eg. whether they read at home. This section will also provide a space for the children to comment on reading. Of course, the consent of both the parents and the child will be obtained before the questionnaire is distributed, and this can be withdrawn at any point.

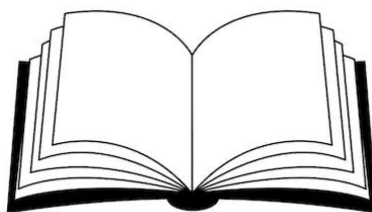
After obtaining consent, my hope is to distribute the questionnaire during class time. Of course, a time for this to occur will be arranged with the class teacher, at a time that suits them.

I hope you will be happy for this study to be carried out with the children. Their participation will remain strictly confidential. At no point will the school be named, or any specific identifying factors be discussed regarding the school.

The school, teachers, and children's involvement in this study would be greatly appreciated. I know that their time and input is very valuable.

Should you have questions regarding the study, I would be happy to meet with you to discuss it in further detail. You can contact me at mshackletonpme18@momail.mie.ie or on 0862448491. You may also contact my research supervisor for the project, Clara.Fiorentini@mie.ie. *This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee.*

Yours faithfully,

Appendix D Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am writing to ask for your permission for your child to take part in a research study. The aim of the research project is to learn more about children's attitudes to reading from first to sixth class in primary school, and the factors that can be seen to affect these attitudes, such as age or gender. I am completing this research project as part of my Professional Masters in Education course in Marino Institute of Education.

Your child will be asked to fill out a questionnaire for this study, which will be handed out in class. The questionnaire will ask about their opinions of reading and reading habits. It will take no more than ten minutes to complete. Of course, your child will also be asked if they would like to take part themselves. They can change their mind at any point.

Your child's participation will remain private. Their name will not be attached to any of the answers they provide. Each questionnaire will be given a number. If at any time before publication of the research project, your child wishes their answers not to be included, simply contact me with their questionnaire number and it will be shredded.

Please fill out the form provided indicating whether you would like your child to take part, and send it back to school with your child for collection.

Your child's input in this project is sincerely appreciated.

Should you have questions relating to the research, please contact me by email at mshackletonpme18@momail.mie.ie or by phone at X. You may also contact my research supervisor for the project, Clara.Fiorentini@mie.ie. *This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee.*

Yours faithfully,

Statement of Consent:

Please tick the appropriate box.

I _____ parent of _____

Give permission

☐

Do not give permission

☐

For my child to participate in this questionnaire about attitudes towards reading amongst children.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E Student Consent Form

Dear Student,

I am writing to you today to ask if you would take part in my study about reading. In this study I am hoping to find out more about primary school students' feelings about reading, and if there are any particular things that might make them feel a certain way about reading, such as feeling better about reading the older you get.

If you would like to take part, you will be asked to fill out a sheet with some questions. I will explain the questions with the class before you begin.

It is entirely your own decision if you would like to take part or not in this study. If you decide you would like to take part in the study, and then change your mind, you do not have to do it. Simply let me know.

If you have any questions at all, you can ask me. I will be visiting your class again to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your help.

Best Wishes,

Ms. Shackleton.

Statement of Consent:

Please circle the thumbs up if you would like to take part, and the thumbs down if not.

I would like to take part in this study by completing a questionnaire:

