

***An Investigation into the Value of
Children's Reading Programmes from the
Perspective of Irish Public Librarians.***

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Declaration:

'I declare that this dissertation that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of Information and Library Management is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.'

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Abstract:

The aim of this research is to investigate the value of children's reading programmes in Irish public libraries specifically 'Spring into Storytime', 'Family Time at Your Library' and 'Summer Stars'. This research focused in particular on the perspectives of Irish public librarians whose expertise lie within the area of children's reading programmes. A qualitative methodology was applied focusing on semi structured interviews with this key group followed by a thematic analysis of the data acquired.

This research found that Irish public librarians value the children's reading programmes as they facilitate collaboration and outreach with primary schools and positively engage children with the library services. Even though deemed as highly valuable the research identified ways in which the value of the children's reading programmes could be improved. These findings resulted in several recommendations which have been made. These recommendations include, a directive to be developed and implemented by the Department of Education in relation to the participation of schools in the reading programmes, the children's reading programmes should be improved to target marginalised groups and children who may require literacy supports, the re-evaluation of the programmes to address several issues that were discovered, the adoption of a qualitative analysis of the reading programmes to compliment the quantitative measures that are already in place.

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1.0 Introduction

This dissertation examines the value of children's reading programmes in Irish public libraries. It investigates the value of these programmes specifically from the perspective of Irish public librarians.

Reading programmes in Ireland are free national programmes that take place in all public libraries and online (Libraries Ireland, 2021). Irish public libraries organise different reading programmes throughout the year for children. These national programmes originated between 2013 and 2014 under the Right to Read campaign (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014). This campaign built on the strategy for libraries 'Opportunities for All: the public library as a catalyst for economic, social and cultural development'. These programmes are governmental programmes that are created through Libraries Development also known as Libraries Ireland, which is managed by the Local Government Management Agency and is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Supporting literacy and reading has been a focus of public libraries for many years, evidence of this was written in the first public library strategy in 1998, 'Branching Out: A New Public Library Service' (Department of Environment, Community and Local Development, 2013). where it states that public libraries are focused on providing community-based support for literacy and reading.

The most recent library strategy, 'Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities' (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2018), aims to build on the work started by the 'Right to Read' campaign. Public libraries have always encouraged the development of literacy skills and reading. Libraries believe it is important

to retain and enhance reading and literacy development as one of its core functions. In this most recent strategy, *Our Public Libraries (2018)* it states that it will “firmly establish the library as the centre for reading and literacy development in the community” and “promote the benefits of literacy and reading development for all ages and provide opportunities for people to develop as literate and informed individuals”. It also stated that “The value of the public library service to people and communities is reflected in the recent survey of library services in Ireland and the UK, ‘Shining a Light’, commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust in 2017.” (Peachy, 2017). The survey shows that libraries clearly remain very popular among local communities with almost 80% of people stating libraries were important to their communities.” (Peachy, 2017).

For the purpose of this dissertation three of the national programmes that are specifically for children were reviewed. These programmes are: ‘Spring into Storytime’, ‘Family Time at You Library’ and ‘Summer Stars’. These programmes were designed to promote children’s reading and literacy under the ‘Right to Read’ campaign.

1.1 Research Aim

The aims of this dissertation are:

- To understand the value of the Irish reading programmes for children from the perspective of Irish public librarians
- To examine the success of Irish children’s reading programmes and how it could be improved
- To develop recommendations to improve future reading programmes based on the research undertaken.

1.2 Research Question

The dissertation will be focused on the following research question:

What is the value of children's reading programmes from the perspective of Irish public librarians?

It is envisioned that by investigating this topic the pros and cons of the three children's reading programmes will be highlighted. It will provide recommendations from library staff as to how children's reading programmes could be improved. It will also showcase what Irish public librarians feel is the true value of the reading programmes.

1.3 Background

Previous research on the topic of children's literacy and public libraries reading programmes have been predominantly carried out internationally, in countries such as the United Kingdom through the 'Summer Reading Challenge' by the Reading Agency (Court, 2011), in Norway where research was carried out by Hareide et al, in 2020 on the 'Sommerles' reading programme which saw the gamification of their reading programmes for children, and the United States of America through the research carried out by Bogel (2012) on how Public Library Reading Programs Contribute to Reading Progress and Proficiency. The research that has been carried out internationally also revolves around the impact of the reading programmes on toddlers and young children. There is no evidence of research having been carried out on the reading programmes in Irish public libraries or a perspective of the programmes from Irish public librarians. The research carried out in this dissertation provided a new insight into the topic of children's literacy by investigating the reading programmes from an Irish perspective and thus explains the rationale for choosing this dissertation topic.

2.0 Literature review

Library reading programmes for children have been part of the public library service across the world for many years. Reading programmes generate interest and value in the library service (Court, 2011). There has been a large volume of research carried out on the topic of children's reading programmes. The research that has been carried out focuses on a number of topics such as the impact of the reading programmes, the effect the reading programmes have on reading skills, the retention of reading skills during the summer months and the link between public libraries and early literacy in children. However, it is evident that there is a gap in the literature relating to the perspective of Irish public librarians on children's reading programmes in Ireland.

For the purpose of this dissertation reading programmes from the United Kingdom, United States of America and Norway were explored due to the lack of research conducted on Irish reading programmes for children. This literature review is divided into five key themes:

- Children's reading programme in Irish public libraries.
- Children's reading programmes in international public libraries.
- The value of storytelling.
- The relationship between public libraries and schools.
- The value of public library reading programmes.

Research shows that library reading programmes encourage children to create a lifelong habit of reading. It encourages reluctant readers who will be drawn to the programmes, reading helps children keep skills up during different periods of the year, for example, in the summer months when they are not attending school (Court, 2011).

2.1 Children's Reading Programmes in Irish Public Librarians:

This section will examine the reading programmes produced by Libraries Development for children each year. They are: 'Spring into Storytime', 'Family Time at Your Library' and 'Summer Stars'. Public library reading programmes are run in Ireland each year as literacy is a fundamental skill an individual must hold. Literacy is no longer about a person's ability to read and write. It is a function that allows one to participate in society in various roles, as a person, citizen, employee, or a parent. We are living in a literacy dependent society in 2021 and if a person lacks literacy skills it impacts them in several negative ways, for example, it could affect their employment opportunities, reduce self-esteem and they may lack ambition (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014).

Public libraries in Ireland provide a service to communities in 31 local authorities through 330 library branches and 31 mobile libraries (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2018). In 2018, there were 1,195,909 valid library members and 17,067,255 library visits by communities across Ireland (Department of Rural and Community Development, Local Government Management Agency, 2021). The *'Our Public Libraries 2022'* strategy aims to bring greater structure and consistency in the library's role in supporting literacy. Through the promotion of literacy supports the library complements, facilitates, and supports mainstream education and provides a space and acts as a resource for the development of literacy skills.

The Right to Read campaign was built on from what was laid out in the library strategy, *'Opportunities for All: the public library as a catalyst for economic, social, and cultural development 2013-2017'*. The 'Right to Read' campaign is a nationally co-ordinated framework for literacy and development that is managed through the Local Government

Management Agency (LGMA) through a department called Libraries Development and the Department of Environment, Community, and local Government as well as nationwide local authorities. The Right to Read campaign aims to support children, parents, and families with low levels of literacy and developing a locally cohesive, integrated, and sustainable approach which is standard across the country (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014).

The public library service is crucial for the delivery and success of the 'Right to Read' campaign. Public libraries provide an array of services to local communities across Ireland with reading and reader development remaining the fundamental objective. The Right to Read programme includes four sub reading programmes specifically for children. They are 'Spring into Storytime', 'Family Time at Your Library', 'Summer Stars' and 'Children's Book Festival'.

For the purpose of this dissertation, three of the four programmes will be investigated. The three programmes are, 'Spring into Storytime', 'Family Time at Your Library' and 'Summer Stars'.

A description of the three programmes declared by Libraries Ireland (2021) is as follows:

Spring into Storytime: 'Spring into Storytime' offers storytime sessions both in person and online, depending on Covid-19 restrictions. The programme takes place from April until the end of May. It celebrates the importance of sharing stories and reading as a family.



Figure One – Spring into Storytime Logo (Libraries Ireland, 2021)

Family Time at Your Library: The purpose of this programme is to engage family members in the enjoyment of reading and sharing stories. The programme aspires to support a family focused approach to reading with children as part of the Right to Read programme.

The programme aims to increase awareness of the benefits of reading and to promote it as a fun activity for the whole family to enjoy. The programme was first introduced in December 2020.



Figure Two – Family Time at Your Library Logo (Libraries Ireland, 2021)

Summer Stars: This is a national programme that runs from June until the end of August. The programme invites children to join the adventure and enjoy the fun and pleasure of

reading during the summer months. There are prizes given to each child who takes part – every child that joins in is a winner.



Figure Three – Summer Stars Logo (Libraries Ireland, 2021)

One in ten children in Irish schools has difficulty with reading or writing, in some disadvantaged schools this is as high as one in three students (Department of Education and Skills, 2011 p.12).

For this reason, it is vital that the public libraries encourage children to take part in these reading programmes and encourage reading in the home. Libraries are seen as the hub of the community; it is important that they support literacy in all formats to their borrowers. This support can be seen during current times with the Covid-19 pandemic where public libraries have had to bring their reading programmes to online social media platforms and continue the encouragement of reading and listening to stories at home through the use of their online eResources BorrowBox and TumbleBook (Dublin City Libraries, 2021).

2.2 Children's Reading Programmes in International Public Libraries:

This section will discuss three international reading programmes used by public libraries in the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Norway.

United Kingdom:

Reading programmes for children are not only carried out in Ireland but are at the heart of public libraries across the world. The 'Summer Reading Challenge' (SRC) is one of the largest reading opportunities available to children in the United Kingdom (UK). It is run by The Reading Agency and delivered to children by public librarians across the UK. Each year over 700,000 children take part. The challenge is aimed at children aged 4 to 11 years (The Reading Agency, 2021). It is a free programme, where a child reads six books over the summer holidays, all books are chosen from the library. There are different incentives that each child collects along their reading journey to keep them motivated. At the end of the summer the children receive medals, certificates, and a ceremony to celebrate their achievement of completing the challenge. The idea is to form a closer relationship with their local library and library staff. Research has shown that the children who take part in the programmes are more enthusiastic about reading and that taking part in the challenge can help prevent the 'summer reading dip', when they lose reading momentum and motivation (Kennedy and Bearne, 2010).

The SRC co-ordinators invite children to consult in the planning of the programme, choosing illustrations, provide feedback on themes for the challenge and ideas for the website. They help library staff create a list of books that other children might be interested to read during the programme. By involving children in the programme in this way it has helped the Reading Agency know what children like about the reading challenge and what they want. The website is a useful tool for engaging with the children during the summer months ensuring to support their literacy development. The website provides games based on the

years themes, places where children can discuss books and a place where they can chat to participating authors.

There was research carried out in 2009 where it showed that the summer reading challenge makes a significant difference to the children who take part. The research was carried out by the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA). It found that the children who take part tend to be 'committed readers' before they take part in the challenge but 80% of participants believe that they are better readers after taking part. The research showed that the children who took part enjoyed the challenge and would participate again. The children liked visiting the library and visit more often after taking part. It is said the challenge boosts the tendency for children to read at home. Children who took part read more books than children who did not take part. The 'Summer Reading Challenge' contributed towards the prevention of the 'summer holiday dip' in reading motivation and attainment. Teachers said that more children who took part either maintained or improved their reading compared to those who did not (Kennedy and Bearne, 2010).

United States of America:

In America summer reading programmes or SRP's aim to encourage students to continue reading throughout the summer months. They believe that the reading programmes they run will allow them to practice communication skills and develop a voluntary reading habit with children (Small, Ruth V. et al, 2017).

American libraries find themselves competing with other activities or recreational facilities that children may visit during their time off from school in the summer. The libraries feel that they must offer an incentive to children to attract their attention and to motivate them to engage in their SRP's. Libraries measure the success of the SRP's quantitatively by seeing

how many books a child has read or how many pages they have read. Rather than researching if any impact was made on the children's literacy or vocabulary (Small, Ruth V. et al, 2017). Celano and Nueman in 2001 found that when it comes to reading programmes, most studies that were carried out concentrated in the US showed that major emphasis is placed on the number of books that have been circulated and the number of participants in the programmes.

Celano and Nueman in 2001 stated that a librarian serves as a "reader advisor" by suggesting and interoperating resources that are available in the library. In their evaluation report on 'The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development' they carried out a study. In this study 204 surveys were filled out by libraires in Pennsylvania. This study showed that visits to the local library during the summer were as common as visits to the pool or park by children in the State. Results from the study show that more that 37% of the libraries surveyed said that their summer programme attracts over 200 children each summer. 22% serves 51-100 children. The study showed that it is the parents that are most likely the people who will bring the children to the library.

There is little up-to-date evidence on the success of these programmes, international libraries could also invest time into creating a survey to find out the needs, wants and impact of their programmes (Small, Ruth V. et al, 2017).

Norway:

The 'Sommerles' reading programme was created by Vestfold County library in 2012. It was originally created as a reading programme for public libraries in that specific county. The goal of 'Sommerles' was to stimulate children between the ages of six – twelve to enjoy

reading for pleasure during the summer months when they were not attending school (Hairde et al, 2020).

At the beginning of the reading programme the procedure was similar to reading programmes in Ireland where children recorded the books they read and visited their local library to receive prizes. The programme was introduced to the concept of gamification, which is defined as “the process of applying game mechanics and game thinking to the real world to solve problems and engage users” (Felker, 2014). After some consideration to the concept Sommerles.no was launched.

The website combines elements such as storytelling, gamification, and digital and physical rewards systems with physical events such as parties at the end of the programme. Each child develops an anonymous profile using a nickname to cover any cyber safety issues parents may have. The children then earn “experience points” for every page they read, the children reach higher levels based on these points (Hairde et al, 2020).

Children receive digital and physical rewards during the programme, this ensures that they come into the library during the programme to encourage the habit of coming to the library. The programme was successful from the get-go and quickly spread across the country to many libraries. In 2015 less than 20,000 children participated, that number in 2020 was a little over 120,000 (Hairde et al, 2020).

2.3 The Value of Storytelling:

This section will examine the value of storytelling for children and their families specifically from an Irish perspective. Storytime sessions have been a part and parcel of the services that public libraries provide to children for a long time. In the mid 1950’s librarians began to

place emphasis on using storytime to support literacy in young children (Albright, Delecki, and Hinkle, 2009).

Now in 2021, storytime is still seen as a main focus in the early literacy support that libraries provide. Storytime sessions are the main theme throughout library reading programmes in Ireland, whether it is storytime at home, in the library or from library social media platforms.

The impact that storytime and other library programmes that are provided to children have been left largely undocumented because empirical research of library services for young children is uncommon. There seems to be a general agreement that these programmes are valuable without a precise understanding of their outcomes (Campana, et al. 2016 p.369-388).

It has been established that the first few years of a children life are critical to their physical and cognitive development. Howard (2013) expresses how library programmes for children have come to be recognised an informal learning environment.

'The Storytime Project' began in 2010 in the north side of Dublin City, Ireland. The project evolved from a story reading programme with parents from the travelling community in Ireland in 2005. The project targets parents and children from areas of socio-economic disadvantage in Dublin north. The project aims to support children's oral language development and enable participants to become users of the library at the end of the project period. The project also aims to get parents to continue to read with their children as well as developing and nurturing the child's interest in storybooks. Dublin City Libraries joined the programme in 2011 by providing books for the project and getting local parents

to take part in the project, this goes back to the public library strategies of collaborating with other agencies in literacy reading programmes through the 'Right to Read' campaign.

The project targeted marginalised groups within the community and supported parents in reading stories to children and into the future through the use of the public library system, the parents also take part in a workshop on story reading in the Marino Institute of Education. Parents are encouraged to read 5 books with their children over 5 weeks with a visit to their local library during that time. Findings from the storytime project showed that 91% of parents agreed that the children showed an increased interest in listening to stories and 68% said that their children were more confident in picking out their own books. The storytime project strengthened the relationship between children and their families with their local library. Parental anxieties in relation to library usage was reduced. (Kiely, 2017).

This research that was carried out shows the importance of storytime to children and their families and the reason why two of the three reading programmes that are used in this dissertation revolve around storytime in the library and at home.

2.4 The Relationship Between Public Libraries and Schools:

This section will analyse the relationship between public libraries and primary schools.

Literacy and numeracy skills are crucial to a person's ability to develop fully as an individual and participate fully in society. It is the case that not all children are developing these skills as well as they should be. Research has shown that up to 30% of primary school children from disadvantaged areas in Ireland, have literacy difficulties and that children who are encouraged to read at home quickly develop better literacy skills (NALA, no date). Literacy skills of students in Irish primary schools measured by national assessments of English

reading showed that it has not improved in over 30 years (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

Libraries are a valuable resource for families and communities not only in Ireland but across the world, especially to the children who are struggling with their literacy levels. Libraries have always been an important resource in supporting children's literacy. The 'National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People' (2011), states that the relationship and having strong links between schools and public libraries will be an important facet of the literacy and numeracy plans in schools. Public libraries enable families to support their children's literacy development (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

Libraires, parents or schools cannot make children into successful, independent readers by forcing them to read. Children need to be motivated and supported to pick up a book and dive into the story that is waiting to unfold. If the government targets in Ireland are to be met, then links between public libraries and primary schools should formally established and where contact with libraries and schools becomes essential. Ensuring that children take part in the programmes would have to come from the top down. There is no doubt in saying that the relationship between both organisations has always been important. The foundation of literacy and learning to read resides with teachers in a school but the role that librarians have in achieving this is seldomly recognised. Teaching children to read is a prime function of primary schools, to carry out this prime function a teacher will need access to books. This is where public libraries are an important organisation for schools to liaise with and where it is vital that primary schools have a relationship with their local libraries (Court,2011).

2.5 The Value of Public Library Reading Programmes:

As discussed during the other sections of this literature review, public libraries across the world organise children's reading programmes. These programmes go as far back as the 1890's, when Linda Eastman established what is to be said the first reading programme in the US. She created a list of the best books in the library suitable for children and distributed it to local schools in Cleveland, USA in June (Bertin, 2004). Eastman reported that she saw an increase in the number of children visiting the library after her recommendations to the schools (Bertin, 2004).

Further work carried out by Eastman in 1897 saw the introduction of Cleveland 'children's library league'. The purpose of this was to introduce children to the world of books and reading. The library league was also used to publicise the resources the library had to offer, which would enable communities in Cleveland to learn about their local library (Bertin, 2004).

In comparison, in recent years, New York State Libraries expressed how the value of the library reading programmes is that it enables the library to facilitate for children who do not have access to books. The library gives these children an opportunity to borrow books which will allow them to continue to read during the summer when they are not attending school (New York State Library, 2021). The 'Summer Reading Programme' also helps to address the issue of the "Summer Slide" that children encounter during the summer months when they are not attending school (Barack,2019).

Librarians in New Jersey make the point that the value of the programmes that their local libraries run is that young patrons will now realise all the resources that the public libraries

have to offer them. The 'Summer Reading Programme' helps to get the word out to the underserved population (Barack, 2019)

There has been little research done on what public librarians feel is the true value of the children's reading programmes that are run in their branch libraries each year. From the research that has been carried out it can be said that generally they feel it holds value in facilitating them in outreach to local schools, advertising what the public library has to offer to their local communities and encourages reading during the summer months to help with the issue of the "summer slide" so children are not losing their reading skills over the summer months when they are not in school.

2.6 Literature review conclusion:

Public libraries play a major role in children's literacy and it has been this way for many years. As the Library Council or An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (2006) states: 'Their (libraries) purpose is to provide access to the world of the imagination; to the cultural memory of communities and society at large, and to sources of information and knowledge.'

From carrying out research on this topic it can be seen that the main focus of value of children's reading programmes has been for a long time based on the number of participants that have taken part or the number of books that a child has read during the programmes. There is little evidence in relation to the true value of these programmes, especially from an Irish perspective.

The public library is a valuable and much-loved resource to local communities across the world. They are institutions that are encouraging young children and their families to read and improve literacy skills. However, from carrying out this research it can be seen that there is a gap where the value of these programmes is not being sufficiently measured not

only in Ireland but across the world, and some might ask if this is not being sufficiently measured, then one might ask the question, what is the point?

A gap of literature also appears in research based on Irish public library programmes. There is a lot of research done on international programmes, but if the LGMA are including reading programmes for children in their strategies since 2013, they must have some feedback in relation to its value from participants, their families, or the front-line staff in the public libraries. The research that has been carried out in this dissertation aims to fill the gaps in literature outlined above.

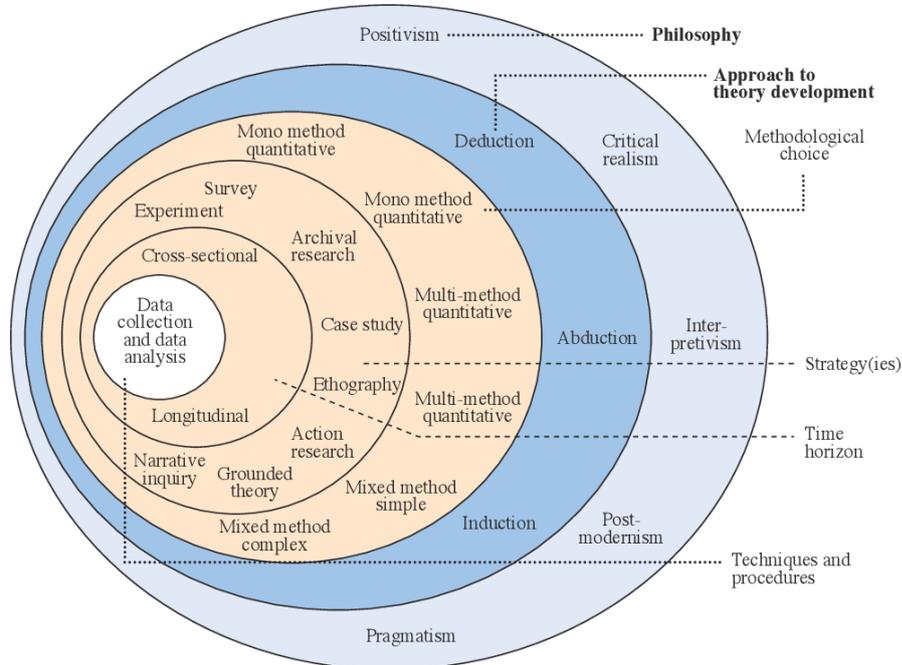
3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Methodology introduction:

This section describes the research methodology that was used to answer the research question “What is the value of children’s reading programmes from the perspective of Irish public librarians”. The methodology consisted of several different layers that the researcher worked through. These layers are identified in Figure 4 The Research ‘Onion’ (Saunders et al, 2019). This research tool guided the steps taken as part of this research process.

This section examines the first step of the methodology which is research philosophy and will then work through the layers of the onion and discuss the research approach, research strategy which includes research design and sampling, the data collection method, and data analysis. Ethics and limitations to the methodology will also be discussed.

Figure 4: The Research Onion (Saunders et al,2019. P130).



3.2 Research Philosophy:

“The term research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge” (Saunders, 2009 p.124).

This dissertation draws from the research philosophy of pragmatism. Pragmatism refers to research that will make a difference to organisational practice. It considers theories, concepts, ideas, research findings etc. and the role they play as instruments of thought and action. Pragmatism gives practical solutions to problems that can be used in future practice (Denscombe, 2017).

This type of philosophy starts with the idea that there is a problem, issue or that something is out of place. The researcher enquires about this problem or issue but recreates belief in the matter when the problem is solved. Pragmatism philosophy matched with the research question as the research aims to investigate the real value of the children’s reading programmes from the perspective of Irish public librarians. The researcher originally chose this research topic and question as there was no evidence of the value of children’s reading programmes in Ireland ever being measured. There was also no evidence available on the value of children’s reading programmes from the perspectives of the people who organise and contribute to the programmes every year, the people on the front line, Irish public librarians. Therefore, this research and its findings will be of value to the public library sector in Ireland and can be used to contribute to children’s reading programmes in the future.

3.3 Research Approach

An inductive approach was applied to this research. Gabriel (2013), states that an inductive approach to research involves researching questions to narrow the scope of a study, where

new theory will emerge from the data collected. It can involve a different perspective of work and exploring new territory of work. This research also adopts a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an approach dedicated to generating theories. It is an approach that emphasises the importance of empirical research. It allows the theory to emerge from the data. Grounded theory researchers must collect their data throughout the course of their research (Denscombe, 2017, P111). The grounded theory is a flexible approach that allows the analysis of data as the researcher collects it. A key element of the theory is the development of codes. A constant comparison of these codes is made to form relationships, this reverts back to the inductive approach (Saunders, 2019, P205). Simply, grounded theory develops as data is collected and the research project progresses.

3.4 Research Strategy:

“A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a specific goal. It entails a broad approach that has a distinct research logic and rationale that shapes a plan of action to address a clearly identified research problem.” (Denscombe, 2017 p. 3)

The research strategy of qualitative design was deemed most suitable for this research process. Qualitative research focuses predominately on collecting data in the form of words be it in written or spoken terms. Examples of qualitative methods include focus groups and interviews (Denscombe, 2017).

The qualitative methods used to gather data for this dissertation involved conducting one-to-one semi structured interviews. By carrying out semi-structured interviews it allowed specific questions to be asked by the interviewer but ensuring the questions are flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered. This can mean allowing the interviewee to develop ideas and speak more widely on issues raised by the researcher. By

using this method, it gives interviewees an opportunity to elaborate on points of interest (Denscombe, 2017).

The questions that were asked in the interviews were both open and closed, closed which involved a simple yes or no answer, and open where the interviewee was able to voice their thoughts, opinions, and recommendations in relation to the topic and questions asked. The questions that were asking during the interview process can be found in Appendix A.

3.4.1 Research Design:

Research design is a critical element of any research project. After developing a research topic and question, selecting an appropriate research design is perhaps the most important decision a researcher must make (Abutabenjeh, S. and Jaradat, R, 2018).

For the purpose of this research on the value of children's reading programmes from a perspective of Irish public librarians, a qualitative method was selected. Qualitative methodologies involve generating meanings from words and images not from numerical data (Denscombe, 2014). The qualitative methodology used in this dissertation focuses a single data collection technique in the form of a semi-structured interviews. This research acknowledges that "The success of the qualitative researcher's role is dependent not only on gaining physical access to those who take part, but also building rapport and demonstrating sensitivity to gain cognitive access to their data. Those who consent to take part in qualitative research are therefore not seen as mere respondents but as participants in the collection of data" (Saunders et al, 2019). This is known as a mono method qualitative study. (Saunders et al, 2019). The research method used by the researcher was chosen as it was considered the best approach to answer the research question. An exploratory approach was selected to allow the researcher to discover what is happening and gain

insights about the topic of interest. This approach would also allow the researcher help to clarify and issues or problems and allow the researcher to interview experts in the field (Saunders et al, 2009).

3.4.2 Sampling:

The use of sampling involves a decision by the researcher to use a selection of the research population rather than all of it (Denscombe, 2017). Non-probability sampling was used in this dissertation along with the technique of purposive sampling as to ensure interviewees with the most relevant knowledge on children's reading programmes in Ireland could be interviewed.

As there are approximately 1,600 members of staff in public libraries across Ireland, the researcher chose participants in a non-random way. Purposive sampling runs on the principle that we can get the best information through focusing on a smaller number of instances that have been selected on the basis of their known attributes and the knowledge of the topic (Denscombe, 2017). For the purpose of this dissertation the population that was selected was small and based on a specific group of people. Public library staff who are specifically involved in the organisation and running of the children's reading programmes were chosen. These people were selected as they deemed the most knowledgeable in the area and could provide the best information and feedback in relation to the children's reading programmes.

In order to gain information from this group a sample size of twelve was deemed appropriate. The sample size was appropriate as out of thirty-one local authorities that participate in the programmes, gaining an insight from twelve key players would give the researcher adequate information to investigate the research topic. The twelve participants

were the people who could provide the best possible answers to the interview questions, some of which included 'Right to Read co-ordinators'.

All participants work in the Irish public library sector and have experience in the children's reading programmes that are organised each year for children. These participants were asked sixteen questions by the researcher, a copy of the questions that were asked can be found in appendix A.

Contact was made with all City and County librarians in the Republic of Ireland seeking permission to interview their staff whilst explaining the purpose of the research. The email addresses for the City and County librarians that were used were gathered from the Libraries Ireland website. Permission was given by all City and County librarians many of which replied with the contact details of their specific staff dealing with children's reading programmes. Emails were then sent to these experts in the area and in total twelve respondents agreed to take part in an interview. A copy of the original email sent to City and County librarians in Ireland can be found in Appendix B.

3.5 Data Collection:

In order to collect data from participants an interview guide was developed with a series of questions (Appendix A). These questions were developed as it would give the researcher the opportunity to enquire about the reading programmes in Irish public libraries from the people who held the most knowledge in the area. The questions ensured that the researcher gained an insight into how the programmes were measured for success and failure, the pros, and cons of the programmes from the perspective of Irish public librarians and what the participants considered to be the value of the programmes.

To collect data for this dissertation interviews were carried out with library staff from across Ireland. All interviews that took place were carried out via the Zoom application. By using Zoom the recording of the audio and video of each interview was easily obtained with downloads of both files automatically made available upon completion of the interviews. Zoom was the first option given to the participants and not in a face-to-face format due to the Covid-19 pandemic. By using Zoom and conducting all the interviews through this platform it would be more comfortable and safer for everyone involved. Using Zoom also made access to the research participants easier for the researcher as many of the participants were located countrywide.

All interviews conducted lasted between twenty minutes to one hour. The time varied depending on the information and length of answers participants had to answer each question. Some interviewees were happy to be able to give in depth answers along with their own personal experiences. Several participants asked for the interview questions to be sent to them prior to the interview. After sending the first participant the interview questions prior to their interview, which resulted in gathering insightful and knowledgeable information from the interviewee, the decision was made to send all participants the questions prior to their interview. This would enable the researcher to get the best possible answers from each interviewee and would give the interviewee an opportunity to prepare their answers. This made the interview process more comfortable for both parties as there were no questions that interviewees were unable to answer.

3.6 Data Analysis:

Qualitative research focuses on collecting data through words (Denscombe, 2014). Words can originate in two forms, written and spoken. For the purpose of this dissertation words

were chosen by the researcher in the form of spoken interviews. These interviews were transcribed, and thematic analysis was then used to generate themes. This process involved looking closely at the data that was gathered to identify any patterns or themes (Denscombe, 2017).

One of the main benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question”. Themes or patterns can be identified in two ways, inductive and deductive. An inductive or bottom-up approach was used during this analysis. This type of analysis approach means the themes identified in this dissertation were strongly linked to the data gathered by the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

There are six phases of thematic analysis, they are:

1. Familiarise oneself with the data gathered.
2. Generate initial codes.
3. Search for themes and gather data relevant to each theme.
4. Review themes and check if they relate to the coded extracts.
5. Define and name the themes.
6. Produce a report which includes selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, finding analysis to these extracts, and relating back to the research question and literature reviewed.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The thematic analysis that was carried out during this research process followed the process outlined above.

Coding:

Once the data was transcribed the data was coded. Descriptive or topic codes were used which allowed the researcher then to sort the data gathered into categories and subcategories, also known as themes.

How Data Was Coded:

To begin the coding process, each participant and local authority was given a code. These codes can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: List of participants and relevant local authority

Participants Name	Local Authority
P1	LA1 (PARTICIPANT FROM THE SAME LOCAL AUTHORITY AS P8)
P2	LA2
P3	LA3
P4	LA4
P5	LA5
P6	LA6
P7	LA7
P9	LA1.1 (PARTICIPANT FROM SAME LOCAL AUTHORITY)
P9	LA8
P10	LA9

P11	LA10 (PARTICIPANT FROM THE SAME LOCAL AUTHORITY AS P12)
P12	LA10.1 (PARTICIPANT FROM THE SAME LOCAL AUTHORITY)

The next step involved the researcher listening back to the audio copy of each interview. This was carried out so the researcher could become familiar with the data and noting any important information given by participants during the interview process. Each extract that was noted was given a code. The themes from these codes were analysed and some were not used.

Names for each theme were created, the names that were chosen were concise but also allowed the reader to understand the subject of each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Five main themes were developed; outreach and collaboration with primary schools; positively engaging children; marginalised groups; re-evaluation of the Irish reading programmes for children; and measurement of success.

3.6.1 Responses:

Every City and County librarian in Ireland was contacted, out of thirty-one local authorities, ten took part in the interview, four of the interviews were with library staff from two of the same local authority.

As stated in the methodology limitations section, originally there was a quantitative method of a survey included in the research process. More respondents agreed to take part in the survey, but the researcher could not use these people as they were not willing to take part

in an interview, but it is worth nothing that they still showed interest in the research topic and taking part in the research process. As can be seen from Table 1 outlined section 3.5.

Some County and City librarians put the researcher in contact with public librarians whose expertise lie within the research topic, some were 'Right to Read' co-ordinators or people known as children's librarians. The City and County librarians also granted permission for them to take part in the interview process, should they be willing to participate.

The participants of each interview will remain anonymous. Codes will be used in place of their names and the local authority that they work for.

3.7 Ethics:

Research ethics relates to the standards of behaviour /practical procedures that researchers are expected to follow. The researcher is expected to approach their task in an ethical manner. There are four key principles which should were followed as part of this research:

Principle One: Participants interests should be protected.

The researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity to individuals and the public libraries that they work in.

Principle Two: Participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent.

The researcher made it clear to participants of the interviews that the interview was completely voluntary and that they were entitled to withdraw from participating at any time. The researcher provided an adequate amount of information about the research and the commitment that would be needed from each participant. This was done by supplying each participant with an Information and Consent form to read and sign after they stated that they were happy to take part in the interview process. A copy of the Information and

Consent form is included in Appendix C. Interviewees were never pressured into taking part in an interview. In the current time of Covid-19 something may crop up which could mean that an interview needed to be cancelled or re-scheduled at any moment. It was also made clear that the interview would be held over the internet via Zoom, as some people are not comfortable using Zoom it was stated that they did not have to take part and during one of the interviews a participant did not turn on their camera and the researcher reassured the participant that this was okay.

Principle Three: Researchers should operate in an open and honest manner with respect to the investigation.

The researcher clearly explained to participants the purpose of the research and the topic that was being covered in the dissertation.

Principle Four: Research should comply with the laws of the land.

The research topic being investigated was not of sensitive manner. The researcher ensured that all data that was gathered from the interviews would be kept private, not shared with anyone else and that it would only be used for the purpose of this dissertation. The data that was gathered was also kept securely in a password protected folder on a password protected laptop which only the researcher had access. The data will be destroyed after a 12-month period.

(Denscombe, 2017).

3.8 Limitations of Methodology:

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study and are weaknesses that are out of the researcher's control. The limitations for this research methodology are outlined below:

Online interviews:

The Covid-19 pandemic hit the world in March 2020. During this time in the Republic of Ireland many public libraries were closed, and staff were not allowed to go to work. Due to the severity of the virus, it meant that any of the interviews that were carried out for the purpose of this dissertation could not be done in a face-to-face capacity. This was to ensure that everyone involved was comfortable and most importantly safe, when taking part.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the interviews were then to be hosted over the internet on Zoom. By the time it came to the researcher interviewing participants most were up to date and were familiar with using Zoom and understood how it worked. But by relying on technology for hosting the interviews, it does not always go as planned. During the first interview that was carried out on Zoom, the record function would not work on the researchers Zoom account and the researcher therefore had to use their own mobile phone to record the audio of the interview and then send it to their laptop after the interview had ended.

By using the Zoom application, it is also dependent on the quality of a person's internet connection. At times during some interviews the video would freeze or there was a lag in the sound due to poor connections.

Timing:

Timing of the interviews was another limitation to the research. The interviews were carried out during the summer months when a lot of public service employees take different forms of leave from work. Although twelve participants took part in the interview, the researcher

did not get responses from some people that were contacted and received out of office replies to the initial email.

Governance:

At the initial planning of this dissertation the methodology approach was a mixed method approach which included a quantitative method of a survey. This survey needed approval from management of the researcher's workplace as the researcher currently works in a public library. The researcher contacted management, who were slow to respond and due to their worries about approaching the public and feeling pressure to take part in a survey it was agreed by the researcher and the dissertation supervisor that the survey was to be withdrawn from this research process. The interviews were deemed of good enough quality to produce the qualitative data required to answer the research question outlined above.

4.0: Results:

4.1 Introduction:

The aim of this research was to investigate the value of children's reading programmes in Ireland specifically from the perspective of Irish public librarians. The reading programmes for children became a national initiative from the government in Ireland when the 'Right to Read' campaign was established in 2013/14. Each local authority has a Right to Read co-ordinator or a Children's Librarian who is responsible for the organisation of the programmes in their respective library branches.

This section of the dissertation presents the results from the analyses of the data that was gathered during the twelve interviews that were carried out with librarians across Ireland. The data that was gathered during the interview process showed that there is current value in the reading programmes, but it was evident that there is room for improvement to increase the value of the reading programmes in the future. From the data analysis that was carried out, five main themes were established under two headings which are outlined below.

Heading 1: Current values of the reading programme

Introduction: Participation in the children's reading programmes

Theme One: Outreach and collaboration with primary schools

Theme Two: Creating a positive rapport with children

Heading 2: Future values of the reading programme

Theme Three: Outreach to marginalised groups

Theme Four: Re-evaluation to increase value

Theme Five: Measurement of success and failures

4.1 Current values of children's reading programmes

The results below show how the current children's reading programmes: 'Spring into Storytime'; 'Summer Stars'; 'Family Time at Your Library' are valued from the perspective of the participants.

4.1.1 Participation in the Children's Reading Programmes:

The results show that all librarians interviewed were working in libraries who were participating with the three children's reading programmes (Table 2). These librarians were also involved in the organisation of the programmes highlighting their deep knowledge of the programmes in question.

Table Two: Participation in Reading Programmes

Reading Programme	Participating libraries	Involved in development of programme
<i>Spring into Storytime</i>	12	12
<i>Summer Stars</i>	11	11
<i>Family Time at Your Library</i>	12	12

The table shows that only eleven out of the twelve participants took part in the 'Summer Stars' programme. One local authority group organise their own summer reading challenge throughout their respective library branches, this participant still contributed to the questions as they are also obliged to report their statistics of the programme to their local authority for funding etc.

The results show that the most popular programme with the participants was 'Summer Stars' and the least popular was 'Family Time at Your Library' as this was the programme that generated the least amount of feedback during the interview process.

4.1.2 Outreach and collaboration with primary schools

The first theme which was identified from the research was 'outreach and collaboration with primary schools. This was identified as one of the main values of the children's reading programmes from the perspective of the interviewees. This theme is consistent with literature reviewed in chapter two which identified the positive relationship between public libraries and schools. The literature review notes how important the relationship between libraries and schools are for both parties. Analysis of the data shows how this was reflected on by all interviewees. For example, P6 mentioned:

“Even during the Covid-19 pandemic schools were eager to keep the relationship they had built with the public library and an arrangement was made so children had access to the library during specific hours”.

The importance of this relationship to both parties shows how schools are key partners for public libraries. The importance of this relationship or link up can be backed up from the vision set out in the 'Our Public Libraries 2022' development plan from Government where it states that over the next 5 years libraries will “strengthen relationships with key partners, locally and nationally, to deliver more co-ordinated, impactful and sustainable library services” (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2018).

Even though the value of the children's reading programmes was their ability to link the libraries with schools participants made a point of how “an official link up” or “directive” was needed between libraries and the Department of Education in Ireland to improve their impact. They stated that some schools will only take part fully in the reading programmes if the need for participation comes from the top down and there is an official collaboration made with schools and public libraries. P8 commented on this:

“If libraries link in with the Department of Education it would make it look like libraries are players in children’s literacy”.

Interviewees discussed how even though there is huge value in the reading programmes more commitment is needed from teachers. P12 noted:

“A teacher needs to understand what benefit a reading scheme has, the commitment is needed from the teacher to get kids (from school) into the library”.

It is common practice for public library staff to visit schools to promote their services throughout the academic year, which includes a promotion of the reading programmes. P3 commented on the library visits to school in which they state that:

“We do library and school visits and they (children) come in afterwards, but this does not create a habit of visiting the library as they are not used to it”.

If there was an official directive from government about attending the library or participating in its services, then this would not be the case. In contrast, P6 said that schools in L6 are “very happy to promote Summer Stars, it is a testament that it is a good strong programme”.

Four participants made a point that it would be beneficial for Libraries to carry out a literacy test so they could officially measure the impact that the reading programmes were having on the children that take part. In particular it was noted that the impact of the programmes with DEIS schools would be interesting. P7 noted how the value of their efforts (library staff) could be tracked through measuring impact:

“It would be interesting to see if it has any impact by linking up with the Department of Education. We don’t see the follow through from our efforts”.

Although many participants mentioned testing literacy in children that take part other participants made it clear during the interview process that they would not like to see the library turn into a formal setting, P9 makes a point that it is “above our remit to be measuring impact officially”. The library should be seen as a facilitator for reading. Libraries are not classrooms and librarians are not teachers. The library should be trying to engage children in reading and giving them a means to do so. The library is a safe and enjoyable space. P9 stated that the public library service aims at “providing an informal way of improving literacy and is an alternative to the classroom environment”.

4.1.3 Creating a positive rapport with children

The second theme which emerged from the data is the value of creating a rapport relationship with children. As previously mentioned in the literature review, in chapter one, summer reading programmes are organised in libraries not only in Ireland but across the world, so one would assume that they are valuable to the children who take part. The data shows how the three programmes were deemed to have a positive effect on the children who participate “Summer Stars is a runaway success, the programme gave (concept of reading programmes) a coherence and cohesiveness, it tidied it up and made it look better” and “Parents say it is the best thing ever, the kids love it” was a statement made by P6. By having this positive effect on the children who take part it gives public libraries and their staff to create a positive rapport with the children.

It was interesting to note that the topic of the ‘Summer Stars’ programme generated the most amount of feedback in relation to the reading programmes. Participants were very passionate about the programme and were eager to give their honest opinions and feedback to the researcher. It was also noted how the online version of the reading

programmes were also a great way to positively engage with children during and allowed libraries to continue their relationship with children in the community during the COVID 19 pandemic. During the Covid-19 pandemic public libraries closed their doors and Spring into Storytime was taken online via social media platforms. It was expressed by P6 that, “Spring into Storytime online was a great addition to the service”.

The value the participants place on the children’s reading programmes is evident from the data gathered. Question 16 of the interview process asked the participants “Are these reading programmes successful enough to continue into the future?”. The twelve participants all answered, yes. Comments made by participants when asked this question showed that the programmes are worthwhile and the passion each local authority has towards them. A selection of the comments made include, “They are vital” (P2), “They would be missed, and the kids would miss it in the Summer.” (P7), “Reading programmes are worth it but not in the current format.” (P3), “Without a doubt.” (P6), “Yes, there is more recognition as national campaigns, and they help raise the profile of the libraries.” (P9).

4.2 Improving the value of children’s reading programme

Even though the data highlighted the many ways in which Irish librarians value the children’s reading programmes it was also evident that there was a consensus amongst participants that the value of the programmes could be improved.

4.2.1 Marginalised Groups:

The theme of ‘marginalised groups’ was a unique and interesting finding from the data analysis. This topic was identified as an area where future value could be derived from the reading programmes.

Marginalised groups can be defined as “those excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational, and/or cultural life” (Sevelius et al, 2020). In relation to the children’s reading programmes in Ireland, marginalised groups are considered as:

- People experiencing homelessness
- Travellers and Roma
- Migrant communities including undocumented migrants
- Disabled people
- People living in poverty
- People experiencing poor mental health
- Children at risk of educations and other disadvantages
- LGBTI people
- Disadvantaged women and women experiencing domestic violence

(Community Work Ireland, No date)

Marginalisation was discussed by interviewees, especially during the discussion of ‘Family Time at Your Library’. Interviewees stated that the programme is “not inclusive for kids who do not have a good family set up or who are marginalised in any way.” “It is dependent on the nuclear family status that libraries do not have and is aimed at a middle-class model of a family.” (P12). If ‘Family Time at Your Library’ aims “to encourage reluctant readers it needs to come from the parents but there needs to be an alternative to the home as not all families are interested.” (P2). “Family Time at Your Library should also provide reading skills to parents so they can read with their children.” (P11)

P12 made reference to ‘Spring into Storytime’ when they stated that, “Parents might have literacy problems.” (P12). P4 recommended that ‘Spring into Storytime’ should encourage

sharing stories orally, where literacy may be a problem or English may not be the child or parents first language.

Interviewees discussed how the programmes could be used to target the children of marginalised groups to support them with their literacy skills. The 'Right to Read' campaign under which the children's reading programmes form part of was developed to provide a nationally co-ordinated framework for literacy support and development. P4 mentioned how the value of the children's reading programmes could be improved by:

"Linking up with family resource centres and people who are marginalised" "Survey the marginalised people, if they attend the library, what they think the barriers to the library are and how their children feel about the library".

It is clear that the theme of marginalised groups and marginalisation is important to all participants who were interviewed. It is important to the library staff that public libraries in Ireland are seen as inclusive institutions, it was apparent from analysing the data for this research project that not all members of staff in public libraries feel that this is being carried out by public libraries in Ireland. P11 commented on this:

"Family Time at Your Library should be focused on the hard-to-reach families not the families its currently aimed at", "Summer Stars should be more inclusive and have themed supports" for example, libraries should have "collections in different languages for children whose first language is not English".

P11 also discussed how the programmes could become more inclusive and increase their value to the communities which libraries are there to serve:

“Summer Stars is successful for a particular child and family that read but there could be parallel support and make it more inclusive for marginalised groups”.

The overall consensus found from all participants interviewed was that libraries should “look at the barriers to the library and reading programmes and base new children’s reading programmes on that” (P11).

4.2.2 Re-evaluation of Irish reading programmes for children:

The theme of re-evaluation of the children’s reading programmes was the dominant theme which emerged from the data analysis. It was evident that there are several issues with the current reading programmes which need to be addressed. Issues were identified with the availability of resources, adaptability, sophistication of online content, merchandise, target groups and timing which are outlined below

Availability of Resources:

Resources for the children’s reading programmes was raised as an issue which needed to be addressed to improve the value of the programmes. For example, the issue of copyright was discussed during the interviews by P5. When library staff had to make the transition from face-to-face storytime sessions to online storytime. It was reported that library staff were only permitted to use books published by specific publishers when recording storytime videos for their social media platforms, as these were the only publishers that Libraries Ireland had permissions from. Participants mentioned that most of the publishers were Irish publishers. Due to this issue, library staff did not have access to a large variety of books they could use without breaching copyright laws when recording these videos and posting them on public social media pages. This caused stress amongst some local authorities as this was the only way they were able to run the programme and measure the success of ‘Spring into

Storytime’ and also ‘Family Time at Your Library’ in their branches, through the engagement on social media posts and videos. In some instances, P4 mentioned that library staff contacted publishers themselves to seek permission to use their books, so they were not reading the same books as everyone else across the country.

When the researcher looked at the value of ‘Spring into Storytime’, one statement by P3 really stood out. There is “no more benefit of kids taking part in ‘Spring into Storytime’ than them attending normal, weekly Storytime” in a branch.

Adaptability:

Interviewees noted how the programmes needed to be able to adapt to the needs to the children who take part and their families. Interviewees discussed how programmes such as, ‘Spring into Storytime’ “should be complemented with providing reading skills to parents. As ‘Spring in Storytime’ is aimed at young children, the ‘Right to Read’ programme should aim to develop parents skills for them to be able to read to their young child. This would enhance ‘Spring into Storytime’.” (P11). This process is part of ‘The Storytime Project’ created by Joan Kiely in 2017, where parents attend workshops to help them to develop the skills they need for storytelling with their children. A statement by P4 also touched on this topic, “Keep books but encourage storytelling in all forms” to ensure that ‘Spring into Storytime’ is fully inclusive to all groups.

Sophistication of online content:

The Reading Agency, ‘Summer Reading Challenge’ was discussed in the literature review, in chapter two of this dissertation. During the interview process five of the participants made several strong comments and comparisons between the Reading Agency website and the

Libraries Ireland website. Participants said that the Irish programmes should examine how the Reading Agency programme works or link up with the Reading Agency, if possible. One interviewee noted how they felt that the 'Summer Stars' programme "is a watered-down version" of the 'Summer Reading Challenge' in the UK.

In 2021 children are used to having high quality content at their fingertips. They are familiar with playing video games and using websites to watch videos. The topic of the Libraries Ireland website was brought up as an issue during the interview process. Several participants made comments in relation to the website, "Website needs to be revamped" (P3), "Our own website is not sophisticated enough and needs to be looked at" (P12). P8 stated that a "Website for children is needed with quizzes, author videos and fun merchandise".

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a lot of services moving to online platforms, it is feared that because of the simplicity of the Libraries Ireland website that public libraries in Ireland are missing out on certain cohorts of children. "Older kids are directed to the Reading Agency" website (P12). Libraries are "trying to cover too many cohorts and therefore at risk of alienating kids by not recognising they are different when they are older". (P12). During the interview with P12 an interesting keyword was noted by the researcher of "gamification". Gamification was discussed during the analysis of the Norwegian reading programme, 'Sommerles', that was discussed in the literature review in section 2.0.

Even though 'Spring into Storytime' was seen as a relatively good programme it was mentioned by some participants that this was not how all library staff members felt across Ireland. "Spring into Storytime has been hard over the last two years online" (P3). This

statement was made in relation to trying to encourage staff members to record Storytime videos for social media platforms.

Merchandise:

The topic of merchandise was also heavily discussed during the interview process. Every year libraries are supplied with different merchandise as incentives for children to complete the reading programme. Interviewees discussed how in 2021 the merchandise for the 'Summer Stars' programme that was received was less than previous years, this was due to Libraries development wanting to use less plastic in relation to the environment. The libraries did not advertise this in any way and could have made a good marketing campaign in relation to the programme and engage with specific groups who would be interested in this matter. The Summer Stars programme was described as "basic and could do with some jazzing up, the 'Reading Challenge' in the UK has a lot of incentives". (P1)

Several comments were made in relation to the merchandise. "The current quality of the merchandise is not as good" (P4). P4 also believes that the 'Summer Stars' programme is "A great programme, we used to work with the reading agency and the merchandise was better, cost was an issue and that's why the LGMA took it over. The incentives could be better, there are other options out there that are not expensive". P12 agreed that "Better prizes are needed".

Unfortunately, this year some of the merchandise arrived late to the libraries. "Merchandise and supplies should be good quality and arrive on time" (P7). "There is nothing to keep them (children) going through the Summer. The same prizes are given for children who are 3 years old and 10 years old. Materials have arrived late and has ruined launches of the programme; the momentum is then gone" (P3).

Target Groups:

It is worth mentioning that participants also brought up an issue with the target groups of the reading programme. The pareto principle was used by one participant to explain the issue, 80% of the results is produced by 20% of the cause. The reading programme is “designed to help reluctant readers and encourage them but the best readers are the ones who benefit the most.” (P2). “Summer Stars is successful for a particular child and family who reads” already. (P11). Another participant stated that libraries are “Preaching to the converted” in relation to the reading programmes. (P3)

Timing:

Although the theory behind the reading programmes is a good idea, the topic of timing presented negative feedback from participants. Participants made particular reference to the time of year the ‘Family Time at Your Library’ programme is held, during the month of December.

One interviewee stated that there is “very little interest as the public do not visit in December.” P8 notes how the programme “Needs to be re-tweaked, it is so close to Christmas.” and the “time of year should be changed.” P7 discussed that this issue could be resolved by hosting the programme in January instead “join the library as a New Year’s resolution.” (P7). Although it is seen as the programme is “More difficult to get off the ground (compared to the other programmes), I can understand why libraries introduced ‘Family Time at Your Library’, as December is a quiet time of the year, but it is a tough market.” (P6)

The topic of re-evaluation was a strong discussion from all participants throughout the interview process. Re-evaluation is key to addressing the issues raised and increasing the value of the children's reading programmes. A striking pattern that was found from conducting the interviews was that eleven out of the twelve participants stated that the Summer Stars reading programme needs to be re-evaluated by Libraries Ireland and the Local Government Management Agency.

4.2.3 Measurement of success:

How the library reading programmes are measured for success and impact was a topic that was discussed during the interview process. Interviewees were asked by the researcher how their libraries keep track of the children that take part in the reading programmes and if they review the number of participants, and if so, then how. Overall, this topic generated a negative response from participants.

All twelve participants stated that they do not receive any official qualitative feedback from any of the parents/guardians/teachers of the children that take part in the reading programmes. Some participants noted how recently they would receive feedback from parents/guardians on their social media platforms or via email. They also stated that they receive qualitative feedback through informal conversations they would have in their branches with parents or teachers when they visit.

The quantitative measures that are used to measure the success or failure of the reading programmes includes statistics that are drawn from the library management system, Sierra, used in Irish public libraries, statistics such as number of attendees at a storytime session, engagement figures from social media which includes the share, views and comments on

videos. A comment made included “We are only measuring quantity.” (P8). P3 used an example to explain the situation:

“100% of ‘Summer Stars’ cards could be collected and 40% returned full. But you are reporting back on the number of cards collected, not the cards that were returned”.

This means that Libraries Ireland just want to know the overall number of children that collected a reading card for the ‘Summer Stars’ programme, not the number of children who completed the programme, which would be the number of cards that are returned to public libraries at the end of August. P12 stated they would like to see a “reinstatement of how many kids finish Summer Stars”.

The researcher found from analysis of the data gathered on this topic that a lot of library staff would like to see some sort of measurement carried out by Libraries and the Local Government Management Agency in a qualitative manner. P7 noted:

“It is interesting that we are conditioned to think about numbers and footfall, but it (measuring impact) might make us more focused on what we are actually trying to produce, what are we at, are we just ticking boxes, is it numbers to help or just to be able to say it was a success.”

As libraries are not offering a full service to members of the public during the current Covid-19 pandemic it was mentioned by P4:

“Due to covid we have more time, and it is a great opportunity to find out opinions or feedback” from parents/guardians/teachers.

An important element that was noted during the qualitative analysis was that P3 took the initiative and decided to conduct a pilot project with children from an area in L3. Children

from a particular school were to be tested on their reading skills and level at the start of the summer and then again in September after taking part in the Summer Stars challenge. The teacher would then write a report on the impact the reading programme had.

It was discussed that due to the fact that the children's reading programmes are measured in a quantitative way, librarians in Irish public libraries receive statistical targets from Library Management that they are encouraged to reach. There are approximately 1,600 members of staff across 330 branch libraries in Ireland. All cities, counties and local communities are different. They have different populations, staff, genders, ages, and people are at various stages in life. Comments were made during the interview process from various librarians that these factors are not taken into consideration when they are designated their statistical targets at the beginning of the year.

If targets are not made it is seen as a failure from library staff. Some libraries are given "unrealistic figures" to produce. (P7). It was mentioned that by sending reports to all members of staff, particularly staff from libraries that may not have done as well as others for a number of reasons, it could have a negative impact and "Devalue staff efforts" (P12). "Targets are weighted by population for libraries Ireland statistics" "The playing field is not level" (P12).

To be seen as successful in reaching targets, local authorities must reach "30% participation rate, this is in the 'Right to Read' guidelines." (P8). The evaluation reports produced are telling Right to Read co-ordinators "who's been bold and who's been good." Just because the numbers of a certain local authority are not as high as another is "not down to laziness." (P6). It is vital that if public libraries in Ireland are requesting that librarians report on statistics gathered that they are all producing the same statistics and that statistics are fairly

distributed amongst local authorities. The researcher noted during one interview that there are “inconsistencies in the data recorded” “Different local authorities are recording different figures.” (P11).

5.0 Discussion:

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter of the dissertation will include a discussion of the findings from the results section and answer the overall research question. The analysis in this discussion will include the theory developed from the literature review. Limitations to the study and recommendations for any future research will also be discussed.

The aims of the research were as follows:

- To understand the value of the Irish reading programmes for children from the perspective of Irish public librarians
- To examine the success of Irish children's reading programmes and how it could be improved
- To develop recommendations to improve future reading programmes based on the research undertaken.

5.2 Outreach and link up with schools:

As mentioned in the literature review, the relationship between public libraries and schools is important. In Ireland, according to the Department of Education, one in ten children have difficulty with literacy in some way. In the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy from 2011 it was stated that the literacy levels in the country had not improved in thirty years. In 2017, a Progress in International Reading Literacy Study took place and Irish ten-year-olds were among the best in the world when it came to literacy. It stated that 21% of children were classed as "advanced" readers compared to just 10% internationally. Ireland was ranked higher than the likes of the US, England, and Germany. The Department of Education said this was down to the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy from 2011 (RTE, 2017).

It is essential that Ireland continues to tackle the low literacy levels, in 2021 the figures for literacy in adults show that one in six adults has a literacy difficulty (NALA, no date).

Therefore, it is evident that the relationship between public libraries and schools is more important now than it ever has been.

For the reading programmes in Ireland to be successful from the perspective of Irish public librarians, there needs to be an official collaboration with the Department of Education and the Local Government Management Agency. It is important for the teachers in Irish primary schools to understand the value and benefits of not only taking part in the reading programmes but the value of the children in their classrooms being involved in library service. Not all children participate well in a classroom setting. It is important that libraries are seen as an alternative to the classroom setting, where children are not compelled to come into the library to read or to be told they must read, rather that it is a fun, safe place in the community that encourages children to read for pleasure.

Responsibility lies with government of Ireland under the Department of Education and the Local Government Management Agency, to not just print words in a strategy but to realise the importance and value of the relationship between these two institutions. This research recommends that a directive should be developed and implemented to ensure all parties are on board to tackle the problem of literacy in Ireland.

5.3 Marginalised Groups:

It was interesting to see the topic of marginalisation being important to the librarians that participated in this research project. This topic was introduced in the literature review in section 2.0, when librarians in New Jersey stated that one of the values of the reading

programmes was that it helps them get the word out to the underserved population about the library and its services.

The topic of marginalisation is laid out in various strategies in Ireland, where they state that the public library services must “meet the needs of a diverse range of individuals and communities, facilitating inclusion and participation by all” (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2018). The Our Public Librarians, 2022 plan states that one of the public libraries key values was ‘inclusion’. Through this strategy, public libraries also plan to build on the existing relationships and develop new relationships with local agencies and groups to ensure that they are engaging with hard to reach, marginalised and disadvantaged communities (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2018).

It is evident from the findings of this research that reading programmes in Irish public libraries are not viewed as being as inclusive as they should be, as laid out in several of their strategies. The current reading programmes are currently aimed at middle class families who you could argue are not in urgent need of targeted reading programmes. There are other marginalised groups who could benefit from targeted reading programmes for example children in Ireland under international protection or those who are experiencing homelessness. The results of this research show the desire from Irish public librarians to address this gap in the current children’s reading programmes and make them inclusive and accessible to all. This research recommends that children’s reading programmes should be examined as to how they can be improved to target marginalised family groups and children who may require supports with literacy.

5.4 Re-Evaluation of Reading Programmes:

The topic of re-evaluation was a dominant topic during the research process. The official start of the reading programmes on a national level began in 2013 with the publication of the 'Right to Read' campaign. Previously, libraries in communities across Ireland would have run their own summer reading programme or similar. Some libraries would have also used the 'Summer Reading Challenge' from the United Kingdom that was mentioned in the literature review of this dissertation.

Little has changed since the introduction of the 'Summer Stars' programme, the rules are still the same and the style of incentives is being used each year, even though in 2021 the quantity of merchandise received was lowered and nothing put in its place. The only element that changes each year is the design of the marketing and promotional artwork.

As mentioned previously, the world is at the biggest advantage it ever has been with the availability of information at our fingertips. Children are used to high quality content. Be it from playing video games, surfing the web, watching YouTube videos and using apps such as Tik-Tok. Many of the participants during the interview process mentioned that the Libraries Ireland website needs to be re-vamped. They made comparisons to the Reading Agency's website and how they conduct their reading programmes. The Reading Agency and the 'Summer Reading Challenge' was analysed in the literature review. The topic of gamification was also marginally discussed during the interview process and was also analysed in the literature review in section 2.0. The gamification of the reading programmes is a topic that should be explored by Libraries Development to positively enhance the programmes.

The 'Summer Stars' reading programme is aimed at children up to the age of 18, when they are considered adults in the eye of the Irish law. There is, however, no difference in the

incentives that children receive from libraries when taking part in the programme. The libraries face losing out on certain age cohorts of children if they are not seen as being different to each other. Is a pencil going to incentivise a 13-year-old the same way it will a 3-year-old child?

Libraries Ireland need to establish what children of different ages want when it comes to their local library and the reading programmes they have. This can be related back to the Reading Agency where they engage with children in their target groups for their opinion on the themes, merchandise and features for their website in relation to the reading programmes. Libraries in Ireland are missing out by not investing heavily into this style of evaluation. There is no better feedback they could get than the feedback of the children who would be taking part in their programmes.

The 'Spring into Storytime' and 'Family Time at Your Library' reading programmes need to be assessed. It is worth noting the success of Joan Kiely's 'Storytime Project' that was discussed in the literature review. During the project parents take part in a workshop to help them build their storytelling skills. This was a recommendation given by participants during the interview process and something that could encourage more families to take part. It would be worthwhile for Libraries Development to use this feature from the 'Storytime Project' to reassess how they run the two programmes related to storytime and storytelling.

The staff in Irish public libraries have made tremendous efforts to be resilient and have had to deal with bringing the three reading programmes online at the flick of a switch when the Covid-19 pandemic came to the library door. But where was the help from management when staff did not even have enough books to read for 'Spring into Storytime' without

breaking copyright law? P1 even stated that the “LGMA could give us (library staff) a hand a bit more.”

It is clear from the researchers’ findings that librarians across Ireland are of strong opinion that the reading programmes although great in theory, need to be re-evaluated and re-vamped.

This research recommends that the children’s reading programmes are re-evaluated to address the issues of availability of resources, adaptability, sophistication of online content, merchandise, target groups and timing.

5.5 Measurement of success:

The true value of the three reading programmes should be that the children who take part are developing their reading skills in some way, not losing their skills during the summer and are becoming familiar with their local library and the library staff.

Instead, the value of the programmes from the view of libraries is merely statistical.

Libraries Ireland wants to know how many children are taking part, not how many children completed the programmes or benefitted from them. It is important to note that P3 felt passionately about this and took the issue into their own hands and attempted to run a pilot project measure what impact the ‘Summer Stars’ programme was having on children in local primary schools in their local authority. The pilot project aimed to test their literacy levels before and after taking part in the programme. This year the project did not go as planned but P3 stated that they will be re-evaluate the project and run in the Summer of 2022.

A substantial budget every year is spent on the planning, organisation and running of these reading programmes. The staff that take part are committed to the programmes and put in so much effort. Yet, when they are being analysed at the end of the programme it does not matter how much effort the staff have put in, if the numbers of those participating in the programme are good then it has been a success. If the numbers of those participating in the programme are below target, the staff are seen to have in some way failed. This is not a true reflection of the success of the programme, and it was evident that this way of measuring success does not appear it is good for staff morale.

From the twelve participants that took part in the interview it was shown that the feedback that the local authorities give to government are from a quantitative aspect. Several participants stated they would like to see qualitative measures brought into measuring the value, impact, or success of the programmes. Therefore, this research recommends that the quantitative analysis of the children's reading programmes is complemented by qualitative measures.

5.6 Limitations to research:

The sample size used in this dissertation did not involve public librarians from all thirty-one local authorities in Ireland. Although the researcher contacted each local authority looking for them to participate, ten out of the thirty-one local authorities took part. Four of the interviewees were from two of the same local authority. The dissertation discussed the perspective from Irish public librarians, due to the sample size used there is scope for a more in-depth investigation into their perspective if more librarians were willing to take part.

The research question changed during the course of research due to the quantitative survey being withdrawn from the study as outlined in the limitations section of the methodology. However, the researcher was able to draw valuable and important information from the interviews conducted which provided an in-depth insight into how public librarians in Ireland value the children's reading programmes.

5.7 Future research

Future research could be carried out in relation to the impact that the reading programmes have on the children that take part. This could be done by interviewing or surveying public library staff, parents, teachers, children in school or children who visit the library.

The implications of this research are valuable. The findings from the research should show the Local Government Management Agency and libraries development, that although the sample size of participants was small, they were trusted members of staff that included coordinators of the reading programmes, they are considered to be people who are experts in the area of children's services in public libraries in Ireland. It was clear from speaking to the participants that they loved the library service and were passionate about the reading programmes. The participants had similar ideas, opinions and feedback and were all willing to be completely honest when talking to the researcher. It would be worthwhile for the Local Government Management Agency and Libraries Development to take the time out and give the library staff an opportunity possibly on a one-to-one basis to give feedback and voice their opinions. It is highly recommended that they also invest time and money into gaining the insight of the children who take part in the reading programmes to help re-evaluate them.

5.8 Conclusion:

The main focus of this dissertation was to investigate the value of children's reading programmes and specifically from the perspective of Irish public librarians. From carrying out this research and conducting interviews it was found that the relationship between public libraries and schools was an important aspect. It is important for libraires to link up with schools to ensure that the reading programmes were successful and that the only way this can happen would be an official collaboration between the Department of Education and the Local Government Management Agency, and Libraires Development.

The re-evaluation of the reading programmes was a dominant feature throughout the interview process, for the reading programmes to be successful in the future libraries management will need to consider the opinions and feedback gathered from library staff and the reading programme participants.

Marginalisation was a topic that was brought to light during the research process. In 2021, more children and families than ever are at risk of being marginalised. Library staff felt that it was important to focus on these people and ensure that the reading programmes were inclusive to all. How the reading programmes are measured for success was also raised an issue, participants stated they would like to see more qualitative measures being brought in to gain an insight of how the reading programme participants feel about the programmes and the library staff can see what impact their efforts are having. The targets that library authorities receive was also a topic of discussion, where interviewees felt that the "playing field" was not fair.

Interviews were used to gather the findings for this research, this gave the researcher the opportunity to talk with key players in public libraires in Ireland. It is evident from

conducting the research that library staff thoroughly enjoy the reading programmes and that they are vital to the service. Interviewees were asked if they enjoyed the programmes, all twelve participants answered yes.

There was no previous research carried out in relation to the Irish reading programmes for children in public libraries. Further in-depth research would be highly beneficial to the organisation and service. The research carried out in this dissertation has brought the topic to light.

Comments that were made during the interview process about the research that was being carried out included, "It is a good time for this, and I am glad you are doing this research." (P11). "What you are saying is so true, you have hit the nail on the head with the research topic. They (LGMA) need to listen to different groups and measure the impact of the programmes, it will help reformulate and make better projects for next year." (P4). This research project advocates for further research in the area of children's reading programmes in Ireland to ensure the impact and value of these programmes is maximised.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Does your library take part in any of the children's reading programmes mentioned below?
 - Spring into Storytime – YES/NO
 - Family Time at Your Library – YES/No
 - Summer Stars – YES/No
2. Do you contribute to the organisation of these programmes in your library branch?
YES/NO
3. Are the programmes popular with children who visit your library branch? YES/NO
4. To your knowledge how are library reading programmes such as family time at your library, spring into storytime and summer stars measured for impact?
5. How do you keep track of the children that take part? Please comment.
6. Do you review number of participants at the end of each programme? YES/NO
7. If YES, how do you review/measure the number of participants?
8. Do you receive any feedback from parents/guardians/teachers of the children who take part? If so, please comment.
9. Do you ask parents/guardians/teacher if there has been an improvement in the child's literacy skills after taking part in the reading programmes? YES/NO
10. Would you like to see better monitoring of impact of these programmes from your local authority/LGMA? YES/No
11. Do you have ideas on how the LGMA might measure the impact of these programs/resources over and above what is done already?

12. Would you like to receive results on the impact that was measured? The failure/success of the programme? YES/NO
13. How do you think the reading programmes could help measure the impact they have on children's literacy? Please comment.
14. Do you enjoy the programmes? Please Comment.
15. Are there any changes that you would make to the programmes to improve them?
16. Are these reading programmes successful enough to continue in the future?

**Appendix B – Original Email Sent to City and County Librarians in Ireland
MSc Information & Library Management - Library Staff Interview/Survey.**

Eimear Corcoran

Fri 16/07/2021 12:27

Bcc:

- admin@donegallibrary.ie
- leitrimlibrary@leitrimcoco.ie;
- sligolib@sligococo.ie;
- librarymayo@mayococo.ie

+24 others

Hello,

My name is Eimear Corcoran, and I currently work as a library assistant in Cabra Library with Dublin City Libraries. I am attending Dublin Business School where I am completing an MSc in Information and Library Management.

As part of this course, I am writing a dissertation which is based on the topic of children's literacy and public libraries, and I have reached a point where I need to collect data from library staff for my research.

I am emailing you to seek permission to interview/survey staff from your libraries.

The questions I will be asking library staff will be based on the reading programmes that public libraries run each year for children and in particular, Family Time at Your Library, Spring into Storytime, and Summer Stars.

My dissertation is due at the end of September, I therefore would like to begin to contact staff who may be interested in taking part as soon as possible.

If you would like any further information, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Any help would be greatly appreciated!

I look forward to hearing from you.

Many thanks.

Kind regards,

Eimear Corcoran.

Appendix C – Information and Consent Form
Information Form and Consent Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT TITLE: *How are public libraries in Ireland measuring the impact that reading programmes have on children, and is it effective?*

You are being asked to take part in a research study on what impact have the public library reading programmes have on children (0-12 years), how this impact measured and is it effective. This research will be undertaken by Eimear Corcoran, a student of the MSc in Information & Library Management course in Dublin Business School. The research supervisor is Caitriona Sharkey. This project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN:

In this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview online via Zoom with the researcher. The interview will be recorded to assist with the research process. You will be asked to answer questions in relation to the above research topic. Answers can be based on the participant's own experience with this area. Participants are permitted to decline to answer any questions. The interview will follow a semi-structured format, which includes some proposed questions but allows time for open discussion. The proposed questions are provided to the participant ahead of time.

TIME COMMITMENT:

The study typically up to one hour. One session should be sufficient. However, the researcher may request a follow-up session with the participant if more time or information is needed.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS:

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation required from you. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn / destroyed. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome. A full de-briefing will be given after the study). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The data I collect does not contain any personal information about you except... [describe as appropriate. Describe your intentions regarding use of the data, for use in your dissertation and e.g., presentation at conferences, publication, etc. In doing so, make clear the extent to which individual participants will or will not be identifiable, as appropriate]

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

I or / and Caitriona Sharkey will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact my supervisor at caitriona.sharkey@dbs.ie .

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: *How are public libraries in Ireland measuring the impact that reading programmes have on children, and is it effective?*

PROJECT SUMMARY: This project will investigate what impact have the public library reading programmes have on children (0-12 years), how this impact is measured and is it effective. This project will involve a literature review of previous research carried out in this field of study. Semi-structured interviews with library staff who are involved in the day to day running, organising and production of the programmes. This project aims to discover what impact the reading programmes have had on children, specifically children aged 0-12 years and also how the public libraires, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and Libraries Ireland measure this impact. Recommendations will be made at the end of the research that may be beneficial to the programme's success in the future.

By signing below, you are agreeing that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily, (3) you are aware of the potential risks (if any), and (4) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

Participant's signature

EIMEAR CORCORAN

Student Name (Printed)

04/08/2021

Date

Participant's Name (Printed)

Eimear Corcoran

Student Name signature

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