Pupil and Parent Perceptions of Factors Affecting Early Reading Development: A Case Study of a Year 1 Class in a Welsh Infant School.

Michelle Brake

Cardiff School of Education
Cardiff Metropolitan University.

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of candidature for the degree of M.A. (Education).

May 2016.
Declaration and Statements

DECLARATION
This work is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. (Education) and has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.
Signed ............................................................. (candidate)
Date ........................................................................

STATEMENT 1
This dissertation is the result of my own work and investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly indicated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A Reference Page is appended.
Signed ............................................................. (candidate)
Date ........................................................................

STATEMENT 2(i)
I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, for deposit in Cardiff Metropolitan University’s e-Repository, and that the title and summary may be available to outside organisations.
Signed ............................................................. (candidate)
Date ........................................................................

Approved by Cardiff Metropolitan University.
Signed ............................................................. (candidate)
Date ........................................................................
Abstract

Major reforms regarding education in the UK, and particularly in Wales, have led to increased interest into the factors affecting education and, in particular, early development within education. This case study was undertaken in an attempt to identify pupil and parent perceptions of factors affecting early reading development. The pupil sample for this study included four male and female pupils representing a range of abilities. In total there were 18 parents directly involved. The main aim of the study was to establish pupil and parent perceptions of factors affecting early reading development. Data for the research were collected through an online questionnaire for parents and pupil interviews, providing a range of qualitative and quantitative data which permitted detailed analysis to be conducted. The results from this case study suggested that, from pupil perceptions, there were three main factors affecting their reading development. The first factor was difficulties with reading, in particular decoding words and comprehension. The second factor was disengagement and the final factor was the need to be taught specific strategies for reading. Some parent perceptions matched those of the pupils. However, there were additional factors identified by parents. These were time constraints, quantity of reading material available and finally, the need for increased interaction between school and home. Results suggested that the factors were complex in nature and did not have immediate solutions. It was concluded that there would be merit in repeating the present case study and developing larger-scale research involving more pupils and parents, in order to fully explore the factors affecting early reading development and the reasons those factors affect early reading development. This information could benefit teachers, who could find ways to exploit the identified factors in order to positively affect early reading development.
Acknowledgements

Completing this research project has been a tumultuous journey and there are many people I would like to thank for helping me and encouraging me throughout the experience.

Firstly, I would like to thank parents and pupils for their willing participation, allowing me to complete my research.

I would also like to thank my personal tutor, Dylan Adams, for helping me stay focused and on-track, despite my tendency to find obscure tangents and to change my mind repeatedly!

This project would not have been possible without the full cooperation of my colleagues who have been very patient in listening to my ideas and who have all agreed to trial various pedagogical changes, and report back their experiences, in order for me to collect data for this research. Thank you all.

I am also very grateful to Mike Saunders for providing sound advice on many occasions and for being a ‘critical friend’ throughout the research.

Finally, I must thank my husband, David, who has been extremely supportive and patient throughout this process.
Contents

Declaration .................................................................................................................................................. i
Abstract.................................................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................................. iii
Contents ................................................................................................................................................... iv
List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................... vii
List of Acronyms ....................................................................................................................................... viii

1. Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Research Statement ........................................................................................................................ 1
   1.2 Research Questions ........................................................................................................................ 4
   1.3 Rationale ......................................................................................................................................... 5

2. Literature Review ................................................................................................................................. 9
   2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 9
   2.2 Factors Affecting Early Reading Development of Pupils within School .................................... 10
      2.2.1 Attitudes towards Reading ...................................................................................................... 10
      2.2.2 Teaching Early Reading ........................................................................................................ 12
      2.2.3 Reading in the Curriculum ..................................................................................................... 14
   2.3 Factors Affecting Early Reading Development at Home ............................................................. 16
      2.3.1 Parent Involvement in Early Reading Development .............................................................. 16
      2.3.2 Reading Material .................................................................................................................... 17

3. Research Design and Methodology .................................................................................................... 20
   3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 20
   3.2 Methodology .................................................................................................................................. 22
   3.3 Research Methods .......................................................................................................................... 23
      3.3.1 Questionnaire .......................................................................................................................... 23
      3.3.1.1 Piloting .................................................................................................................................. 26
      3.3.1.2 Likert Scales ....................................................................................................................... 27
      3.3.2 Interviews with Pupils ............................................................................................................. 27
Appendices

Appendix 1 – Letter to parents with link to online questionnaire..............................59

Appendix 2 – Questions asked during pupil interviews........................................61
List of Figures

Figure 1 – Pupil sample according to gender.................................................................35
Figure 2 – Pupil sample according to reading ability.....................................................36
Figure 3 – Reasons for parents enjoying reading..........................................................37
Figure 4 – Parent perceptions of requirements for additional support with supporting their child’s reading development.................................................................49

Word Count: 13,120
List of Acronyms

BERA  British Educational Research Association
CPRE  Consortium for Policy Research in Education
EAL   English as an Additional Language
LNF   Literacy and Numeracy Framework
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA  Programme for International Student Assessment
PDG   Poverty Deprivation Grant
RR    Reading Recovery
UKLA  UK Literacy Association
UNCRC United Nations *Conventions on the Rights of the Child*
WG    Welsh Government
1: Introduction

1.1 Research Statement

In recent years there have been a number of reforms regarding education in the UK, and particularly in Wales. Literacy and Mathematics are often the subjects prioritised by governments and the same is true in Wales, with the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) announced in 2011 (Wales, 2011a, p.6) as a means of raising standards of education in Wales. Perhaps the importance placed on these subjects stems from countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessments – an international system testing the literacy, science and mathematical skills of 15 year old pupils. Countries are then ranked according to PISA scores which may have led to literacy and numeracy being seen as synonymous with standards.

In 2012 the Welsh Minister for Education and Skills said, “We should aim to be in the top 20 of school systems measured in the PISA scores in 2015.” (Wales, 2012a, p.2). To support this aim, in 2012 the Welsh Government (WG) introduced funding known as the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) to help schools address and reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment (Wales, 2012b). There is already considerable research pertaining to the link between poverty and underachievement; such as work by Gorard and See (2013) and that of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009, p.105) who noted that “Children do better if their parents have higher incomes...”. This suggests that poverty is regarded as one factor that can affect education. However, it could be argued that standards of education are likely to be affected by a number of different factors. Research into establishing what some of these
factors are could lead to a better understanding of how they affect pupils and education development. In turn, these insights may help raise standards of education.

Development of the LNF has required substantial investment from WG, with schools being held accountable for pupils’ progress in these subject areas (Wales, 2011a). Therefore, for this research I felt it was appropriate to conduct a case-study to explore factors which could affect early development in either Literacy or Numeracy. This is a small-scale case study and so for practical reasons I chose to limit my research into factors affecting early reading development.

As a teacher I have my own perceptions regarding factors affecting early reading development. However, I felt that pupils and parents may highlight factors which I had not considered from my teaching point of view. Subsequently, the aim of this research was to establish pupil and parent perceptions of factors affecting early reading development.

Pupils featured in this research came from a cohort of 58 pupils in Year One (ages five and six). The pupil sample for this study included both genders and represented pupils of a range of abilities with regard to reading. Parents who participated were parents of the same cohort of Year One pupils.

This year group was chosen for two reasons. The first reason was that I had previously established a rapport with Year One pupils, having been one of their Year One teachers at the school. I felt this rapport was important to ensure the pupils were comfortable answering my questions, in the hope of securing richer detail for later analysis. The second
reason was that pupils in Year One had already received at least one year of formal schooling education and so were familiar with the learning processes in place at the school, but most were still classed as ‘early’ readers in terms of reading development. Therefore, it could be argued that they had experienced enough education to be able to form their own perceptions of factors affecting early reading development which, again, would provide a rich source of data. Similarly, parents of Year One pupils were familiar with the school’s strategies for supporting early reading development and their child would be likely to still be within the ‘early’ reading development stage. Therefore, parent perceptions would be formed on recent experiences, which may have been a more reliable source of data.

The evidence gathered for the research was collected over the course of the 2014-2015 academic year. Data were quantitative and qualitative in the form of pupil interviews, observations of Year One pupils and parent questionnaires. The use of mixed methods of data collection afforded both pupils and parents the opportunity to voice their opinions and perceptions and to explain their answers. My own observations of the pupils provided an additional source of data. Mixed methods of collecting a range of qualitative and quantitative data also permitted detailed analysis to be conducted.

Overall, the aim of the research was to gain insight into factors affecting early reading development by identifying parent and pupil perceptions of such factors. It is possible that these insights could then be used to attempt to formulate conclusions and recommendations for future research or implementation by those involved in developing early reading.
1.2 Research Questions

Question 1:

What are Year One pupil perceptions of factors that have an influence on their reading development?

Question 2:

What are parent perceptions of factors that have an influence on their child’s reading development?

Question 3:

How do parents feel they could improve their child's reading development?
1.3 Rationale

Schools are becoming increasingly accountable for pupil progress and standards, with assessment of individual pupils against the LNF statutory from September 2014 (Wales, 2013a) and National testing in both Literacy and Numeracy for pupils from Year Two to Year Nine introduced in 2013 (National Assembly for Wales, 2013). Additionally, teacher pay-scale progression has become dependent on teachers meeting performance management objectives set by schools, which are often driven by Literacy and/or Numeracy-based data (Department for Education and Skills, 2011). In order to support schools with when making decisions regarding early reading development it is arguably becoming increasingly more important to conduct research into factors affecting early reading development.

Learning to read is a complex process:

The autonomous model of literacy identifies learning to read as a technical and neutral skill, based on memorization and application of phonic patterns, and the irregular exceptions, in order to crack the reading code. (Metcalf et al., 2013, p. 10)

Arguably, this explanation of reading development is too simplistic, since there are other factors not featured in the above definition, which can have an effect on a pupil’s reading development. For example, the UK Literacy Association (UKLA) cites engagement and differentiation as two of many factors having an effect on reading development (UKLA, 2010, p. 5).

Another researcher, Marie Clay, believes that early intervention is a factor:

...a child with reading difficulties had to wait until the third or fourth year of school before being offered special instruction... The learning difficulties of the child might have been more easily overcome if he had practiced error behaviour less often, if he had less to unlearn and relearn, and if he still had reasonable confidence in his own ability. Schools must change their organization to solve these problems early (Clay, 2013, p.27).
There may also be additional factors not always acknowledged by research which has gathered its data from internal, school-based sources. For example, quantity of appropriate reading material available at home. As a practitioner I have witnessed the impact that parental involvement has on a child’s development and support the views of researchers such as Sanders and Epstein (1998, cited in UKLA, 2010, p. 9) who suggested that future academic success could be influenced by the extent to which parents were involved their child’s education. Also, it is a statutory requirement that schools have a school council in place “…thus ensuring representative mechanisms for listening to and acting on learners’ concerns, and involving them in the planning and management of their learning environment.” (Wales, 2011b, p. 5). However, I have found there to be little recent research into pupil perceptions of factors affecting early reading development.

For this reason I have designed my first research question to establish pupil perceptions of factors that have an influence on their reading development. One such factor may be that of how far pupils perceive ‘engagement’ to affect their reading development. If schools were aware of what specifically can affect ‘engagement’ then potentially schools could take steps to address this factor, which may help to increase levels of engagement and therefore impact positively on reading development.

I also felt it was important to design a research question which would allow for exploration of the perceptions of parents of Year One pupils, regarding the factors they felt influenced their child’s reading development. As previously stated, particularly in the early stages of reading development, parental involvement is extremely important. For this reason my
The school in which the case study was conducted is situated in the south Wales valleys and caters for pupils from the ages of three to seven years, from a range of social and economic backgrounds. However, pupils featured in this research were selected from the 2014-2015 cohort of 58 pupils in Year One (ages five and six) using gender and reading ability as criteria for selection. The pupil sample for this study consisted of an equal number of female and male pupils. The sample also equally represented pupils of both ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ reading ability (as previously identified by the school). Every pupil is different with different attitudes, having had different educational experiences and so although a sample cannot reflect wider population, working with a sample of pupils was a necessity for practical reasons. This will be discussed in greater detail in the methodology section. Parents who participated were parents of the same cohort of Year One pupils. In total there were 18 parents directly involved.
The study was undertaken in adherence with the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA).

BERA (2011) highlights many issues which must be considered by researchers prior to undertaking research. Much of the data collection will be from a focus group and so this is potentially an ethical issue for my research project; however, this and all other issues were fully considered within the context of the present research. An explanation of the steps taken to adhere to BERA guidelines, alongside how ethical issues have been addressed will be fully discussed in the methodology section.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research is interested in pupil and parent perceptions of factors affecting early reading development. Parents are stakeholders in education and many researchers have acknowledged the important role parents play in early development:

> Results indicated a statistically significant association between parent involvement and a child's academic performance, over and above the impact of the child's intelligence. (Topor et al., 2010, p.183)

Despite the research suggesting that parents themselves are a factor affecting early reading development, there appears to be insufficient recent research into parent views or perceptions of additional factors, particularly with regard to reading.

The importance of ‘early years’ research and intervention in general has been recognised by a number of researchers and organisations, including WG:

> The early years are a critical time for children’s physical, cognitive, language and social and emotional development. Research is also beginning to show that what happens to pupils in the early years can have physiological effects that are lasting. (Wales, 2012b)

Robinson, similarly, agrees arguing that “...that all sections of society [must] recognize the profound influence of the quality of the care and nurture in the early years.” (Robinson, 2011, p.103). Arguably ‘nurture’ is associated with development and so these views helpfully corroborate the reasons why I believe the present research to be relevant and of importance.
Pupil perceptions were gathered from a Year One cohort from a Welsh infant school. Clay believes that this age group are particularly important when considering factors affecting reading development, observing that “The most critical time in the life of a reader or writer is a year after instruction has begun.” (Clay, 2013, p.30). I believe Clay's findings to be relevant in the UK due to similarities between the New Zealand and UK schooling systems and given that one of Clay's one-to-one interventions has been in use in the UK, including Wales, since 1990 (Department for Education, 2010, p.21).

2.2 Factors Affecting Early Reading Development of Pupils within School

The mechanics of learning to read are complex, as noted by many researchers, including Didau (2014), Metcalfe et al. (2013) and Richmond:

Successful teaching of reading does not depend on allegiance to a particular method, but on an overall understanding of what it is that the beginning reader does in successfully encountering a text. (Richmond, 2015, p.6)

Teaching methods, or strategies, are frequently discussed by researchers investigating early reading development. Didau (2014, pp. 109-110) discusses how at least nine different reading strategies are taught in schools. Literature by researchers such as Metcalfe et al. (2013) and Wyse and Goswami (2008) indicates there are additional factors affecting early reading development of pupils within school, including pupil engagement with reading and integrating reading into the curriculum.

2.2.1 Attitudes towards Reading

In my professional context I have observed that there are few Year One pupils with an apathetic attitude towards reading: most exhibit either positive or negative attitudes. Didau (2014) postulates that pupils who are not participating in reading activities may be
disengaged because they are lacking the cognitive skills required to complete the task. 

Whilst disengagement may be a result of cognitive difficulties with reading, it could also be argued that cognitive difficulties for pupils could have originated as a result of disengagement. This view is supported by research from the Clark and the National Literacy Trust:

Children... who do not enjoy reading at all are ten times as likely to be reading below the expected level for their age compared with children who enjoy reading very much. (Clark, 2014, p.11)

Moreover, the UKLA said “Children...only become effective and committed readers through reading texts that interest them.” (UKLA, 2010, p. 13). This suggests that there is a correlation between enjoyment of reading and reading attainment, which is further supported by this view:

When children are young, a love of reading for pleasure can run parallel with an eagerness to learn to read better and confidence in their ability to do so. (Save the Children, 2014, p.20)

Arguably, it is in the interests of both pupils and schools for schools to foster positive attitudes towards reading, since enjoyment of learning has been “promoted largely as a step towards school improvement” (Dugdale, 2009, cited in Gorard and See, 2013, p.74). Schools are becoming increasingly more accountable for standards (Donaldson, 2015, p.6). If positive attitudes can lead to school improvement then interest from schools into this factor may account for why pupil engagement with reading is discussed frequently by researchers.
2.2.2 Teaching Early Reading

Methods employed for the delivery of explicit teaching have varied over time, although curriculum reforms in England appear to place an emphasis on utilizing phonic approaches, particularly ‘synthetic’ phonics (Metcalfe, 2013, p.18). These researchers explain ‘synthetic’ phonics “This system breaks down the sounds of words into...phonemes and links them with their...graphemes. These phonic units are then ‘synthesised’...to make words.” (Metcalfe et al., 2013, pp. 18-19)

Synthetic phonic approaches are also used in Welsh schools which appears to be an approach endorsed by WG, since the LNF makes explicit references to pupils requiring phonic knowledge, such as having the ability to segment and blend (Wales, 2013b).

However, large volumes of literature discuss the potential problems that can occur when reading is taught using a limited number of strategies:

There is a huge body of experience and research which tells us that pupils are very diverse in terms of personality, and in terms of what kinds of linguistic and emotional expertise they bring to the classroom where they are learning how to read. They cannot be given a one-size-suits- all approach. (UKLA, 2010, p.2)

This suggests that strategies for teaching early reading should be varied and not restricted to one method. Clay’s views support those of the UKLA:

Instruction which emphasizes one information source as paramount over all others places all children at a severe disadvantage; they would have to learn by themselves many skills that their teachers were not teaching, if they were to become successful readers (Clay, 2013, p. 32).

The observations of these researchers appear to support the views of Freire (2000, cited in Metcalfe et al., 2013, p.10) who would argue that reliance solely on phonic strategies is
unacceptable as a measure of ‘literacy’: “For him, encoding and decoding alphabetic print must be integrated into a far wider context” (Metcalfe et al., 2013, pp. 10-11).

Achieving integration into a ‘wider’ context could refer to a pupil’s ability to comprehend texts. Didau (2014, p.103) comments that “In order to be a skilled reader we need to master both word recognition and language comprehension”. However, is teaching comprehension skills appropriate when developing early literacy? Hattie and Yates (2013, cited in Didau, 2014, p.104) observed that comprehension is almost impossible if reading speed is less than 60 words per minute, which is a speed unlikely to be achieved by developing readers. It could be argued that attempting to teach comprehension skills before phonic knowledge is established is ineffectual.

On the other hand, Dombey (2006, p.6, cited in Metcalfe et al., 2013, p.19) comments that “The most successful schools and teachers focus both on phonics and on the process of making sense of text. Best practice brings these two key components together...”. Literature suggests that this could be achieved by ensuring that pupils have access to a range of texts at varying degrees of difficulty, since “all children need both easy and challenging books from which they learn different things...On easy material they practise the skills they have and build up fluency.” (Clay, 2013, p.25)

Another strategy for combining these key components could be through the use of group guided reading sessions. Teaching early reading in this way is a method supported by other researchers, such as Vickery (2014, p. 201) who found that “...Multiple readings around a text were shown to be particularly effective...” and “...Children’s responses...make visible the...
extent to which they know the rules of the literacy game…” (Vickery, 2014, p.200). Of course, some pupils will not know the ‘rules’ and so there is also extensive literature pertaining to supporting reading development to pupils identified as ‘underachieving’.

‘Reading Recovery’ (RR) is one long-established intervention used to support learners in Year One who have been identified as underachieving with regard to literacy. This strategy has been recognised by many researchers as a successful strategy for improving literacy development for many low-attaining learners: “The Reading Recovery programme used...provides strong evidence of improving pupil’s reading at Key Stage 1” (Tanner et al., 2011, cited in Department for Education, 2012, p.9).

Also, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) found that, “Reading Recovery’s Year Two effects were 2.8 times greater than the reading outcomes of similar programs.” (CPRE, 2014, p.27). This research suggests that early intervention as a strategy to improve the reading development of learners is successful. However, RR is only one strategy, or teaching method amongst many available.

2.2.3 Reading in the Curriculum

Donaldson states:

The specific form that the curriculum takes will change over time in response to circumstances. Some changes...are a response to developing social, political and economic circumstances and are given added impetus by international measures of performance. (Donaldson, 2015, p.6)
Arguably, the reasons behind curriculum reforms are not important: researchers appear to be more concerned with curriculum design. There are many different views concerning how reading should be incorporated into a curriculum:

Society – and especially parents and carers – often expects to recognise what children are doing at school in terms of their own past experiences. The infrastructures that emerge to support education are inevitably geared towards ensuring that current expectations are met... (Donaldson, 2015, p.6)

Clay also notes the reluctance for change:

In recent years there have been shifts in our understanding of some psychological processes and yet old theories remain encapsulated in our teaching methods and assumptions. Some of these shifts need to be reviewed... (Clay, 2013, p. 15)

WG recognize the need for curriculum changes to allow pupils to succeed beyond school:

...Each child and young person in Wales should be able to benefit from curriculum and assessment arrangements that will best meet their present needs and equip them for their future lives. (Donaldson, 2015, p.5)

Clay also discusses how the Internet should play a role in developing reading competencies. (Clay, 2013, p. 36). This supports my own views: we are living in an age of technology and so there is a need for curriculum changes to reflect the growing presence of ICT in society.

Unsurprisingly, there is an abundance of literature referring to ‘digital literacy’ when considering how to integrate reading into the curriculum. Vickery (2014, p.118) argues that digital literacies are widely used at home and should therefore be acknowledged in school.

However, other researchers such as Gorard and See (2013, p. 109) have warned that the efficacy of utilising ICT to teach reading has not been fully established and so this should also be considered.

On the other hand, Stone found that pupils are “…Motivated to read online texts related to their interests and will persevere when they would have given up on school texts.” (Stone,
This is another argument in favour of incorporating digital literacies into the curriculum.

2.3 Factors Affecting Early Reading Development at Home

Parents can be hugely influential in a child’s reading development journey. When considering reading development outside of the school environment there are a number of factors which can affect reading development in addition to attitudes to reading. These include parent involvement and reading material available at home.

2.3.1 Parent involvement in Early Reading Development

Recent data from the PISA and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that:

Students whose parents reported that they had read a book with their child “every day or almost every day”...during the first year of primary school performed higher...than students whose parents reported that they had done this “never or almost never”... (OECD, 2010, p. 10).

Although PISA tests older pupils who are not ‘early readers’, researchers have also found that:

Children whose fathers read with them less than once a week at the age of five had, by the time they were seven, a reading level half a year behind those who had been read to daily.’ (Save the Children, 2014, p. viii).

This literature, and evidence from other researchers such as Robinson (2011, p. 44) indicates that parent involvement is essential for early reading development. However, it could be argued that some parents perceive reading with their children to be something
that happens at school and not something they need to do at home. (Egmont 2013a, p.6).

To this end:

Parents [need to be shown] how they can support them in improving their learning...Increasingly, the use of digital media can allow more frequent feedback and also has the benefit of encouraging parents...to become more directly engaged with their children’s learning. (Donaldson, 2015, p. 82)

There may be additional reasons why parents are not always actively involved in early reading development, for example, Egmont (2013a, p. 6) suggests that many parents also work full-time and may find it difficult to make time for reading amongst other duties they have when at home. This could be true even for parents who do not work, as the window between finishing school and the pupil’s usual time for going to bed is usually only a few hours and there are often other routines which must be completed within that timeframe which may take precedence over reading.

2.3.2 Reading Material

The use of phonics as a teaching method has received great emphasis in early reading development. However, “...Some synthetic phonics schemes discourage children from interacting with actual books for the first few weeks of tuition” (Metcalfe et al., 2013, p. 19). It could be argued that, without books, developing reading at home is a difficult task for a parent who has not received teacher training. Fortunately “Most teachers and schools will not apply one approach or another rigidly, no matter how much they are encouraged to do so” (Metcalfe et al., 2013, p. 19). In my experience this opinion is correct and many pupils will participate in some form of ‘reading scheme’ where often, books are sent home.
Nevertheless, there are still difficulties associated with sourcing appropriate reading materials to support early reading development. For example, Clay states:

> For learning to occur it is very important to ensure that the difficulty level of the reading material presents challenges from which the child can learn and not difficulties that disorganise what he already knows. (Clay, 2013, p.24).

This could prove challenging to monitor if the reading scheme chosen is not directly comparable with the phonics stage a child has reached. Also, particularly with early reading, pupils can make rapid progress and so reading material may need to be changed almost daily, which is often impractical to arrange.

However, if the reading scheme provides books which are ‘rich’ texts then it could be argued that one book per week is sufficient for developing early reading, since the same text could be used for practicing phonic skills such as decoding, before developing comprehension skills, such as responding to what has been read. This argument is supported by other researchers, such as Vickery (2014, p. 201) who found that “…multiple readings around a text were shown to be particularly effective…”.

There is much literature discussing the emergence of digital literacy and how it could impact on reading development. Egmont found that “Most teachers think reading for pleasure can co-exist with the digital world” (Egmont, 2013b, p.10). It could be argued that, in addition to reading for pleasure, digital literacies may also support early reading development. Research by Stone indicated that “…Many [children’s websites] are at least equivalent to school texts” (Stone, 2007, cited in Metcalfe et al., 2013, p.20).
Additionally, many of the major publishers of reading schemes have invested in creating online content to accompany their print books. Providing parents with access to a wealth of online texts, appropriate to the reading development needs of their child, may solve some of the traditional problems associated with printed reading materials, such as issues with quantity or how frequently books can be exchanged.

In summary, there are many school-based factors affecting early reading development including pupil engagement with reading, teaching strategies for developing reading and integrating reading into the curriculum. In addition, there are a number of lesser explored factors affecting early reading development outside of the school environment, including parental attitudes toward reading, parent involvement and access to reading material appropriate to the needs of the pupil developing their early reading. This research is interested in establishing pupil and parent perceptions in order to further explore some of these lesser explored factors.
3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

According to Roberts-Holmes (2011, p.23), a child-centred methodology is research intended to “take children’s voices seriously” by ensuring the research design is such that pupil needs are prioritised, for example, through appropriate questioning. Therefore, given the exploratory nature of this case study and my desire to uncover pupil perceptions of factors that influence reading development, I felt a child-centred methodology underpinning this research would be most appropriate. A child-centred methodology has many benefits: “With a clearer understanding of children’s lives, parents and practitioners are able to... meet their diverse needs and to improve care and services” (Lancaster and Broadbent, 2010, cited in Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p. 54). I agree with these researchers because I feel that within current curriculum guidelines, particularly with the recent introduction of the prescriptive Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF), pupils’ voices are not always heard or used as effectively as they could be. I believe that in general, teachers have a good understanding of factors affecting reading development but I am interested to discover whether these ideas correlate with the perceptions of both pupils and parents.

Additionally, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) also says “State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child” (UN, 1989). Pupils may highlight factors which I had not considered from my teaching point of view and these perceptions could support teachers when considering how best to develop reading skills.
However, this research concerns pupils of a young age and so their parents have a large role in their education. As such, I also wanted to explore parent perceptions of factors affecting early reading development, which has resulted in this research being mainly qualitative in approach. Overall, its validity is “dependent upon accurately representing the voices and experiences of the research participants” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p. 70). The parent questionnaire design had a qualitative approach to allow parent perceptions to be expressed fully.

This study prioritises the voices of pupils and parents by examining their perceptions in order to gain insight and understanding into factors affecting early reading development.
3.2 Methodology

During a case study “the aim is to gain a rich, detailed understanding of the case by examining aspects of it in great detail” (Thomas, 2009, p.115) and so I felt it was appropriate to choose a case study research strategy due to the specific and in-depth nature of this research. Furthermore:

All organisations and individuals have their common and their unique features. Case study researchers aim to identify such features, to identify or attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work, to show how they affect the implementation of systems and influence the way an organization functions. (Bell, 2005, p.10)

Within the time constraints of this research it was not possible to exert any influence on developing reading strategies utilised within the professional context; however, I agree with Bell’s interpretation of the role of a case study research as this case study was intended to identify factors that pupils and parents perceived to affect early reading development which could be of future use to teachers within the context. Furthermore, Roberts-Holmes (2011, p.82) commented that “Case studies are good for drawing out the detail and complexity of intricate social relationships within an institution.” Again, this viewpoint confirms why a case-study methodology was an appropriate choice, since examining pupil and parent perceptions in detail, in order to gain greater understanding, was a primary aim.

I had considered that one limitation for employing a case study methodology could be that it is not possible to establish whether the perceptions of this particular group of Year One pupils and parents were ‘typical’. Although with additional research time it would be feasible to repeat this case study with another Year One cohort of pupils and their parents, there is no guarantee that doing so would yield parallel results. However, as with
qualitative data collection methods, generalising results is not expected with case study methodologies (Roberts-Holmes, 2011). Also, Thomas (2009, p.115) notes that:

You are choosing this very restricted sample in order to be able to gain greater detail. But at the expense of being able to make useful generalisations to a broader population.

However, I believe that it is the *detail* which gives this case-study value and purpose and I believe outweighs any limitations such as the inability to make generalisations.

### 3.3 Research Methods

#### 3.3.1. Questionnaire

The level of literacy required to complete a questionnaire meant that the questionnaire was only suitable for completion by parents. Other researchers, such as Booth and Ainscow (2004, cited in Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p. 167) also warn against the use of questionnaires with young pupils, since “Researchers cannot assume young people will attach the same understanding to questions used [by literate adults].” Therefore, different research methods were needed for collecting data from parents and from pupils.

Roberts-Holmes (2011, p.165) notes that questionnaires are a means of “rapidly collecting a wide range of views” which was important given the limited time-scale of the research.

The Year One cohort during the 2014-2015 academic year comprised of 56 pupils. All pupils were given a letter to pass on to their parents which advised them of this research and the implications it may have on their children, who may be invited to participate in an interview. (See Appendix 1) The letter contained a link to an online self-completion questionnaire,
hosted through Google Forms. Alternatively, parents who responded to the letter by providing their email addresses were directly sent a link to the same questionnaire. I chose to gather data from parents through the use of an anonymous questionnaire to aid triangulation and to increase the research validity but also to allow more respondents than would have been possible if I had chosen to interview parents within the same time frame.

In addition “Questionnaires which are sent by post or by email involve little or no personal interaction and hence can encourage frankness of response due to the anonymity afforded” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p.165). I felt that use of an anonymous questionnaire might generate more candid parent perceptions of factors that can influence reading development, particularly when parents were considering negative factors. The questionnaire design ensured it had a semi-qualitative approach since the questions featured spaces for the parents to type extended answers or to include additional information they felt was relevant. I chose to structure the questionnaire in this way in an attempt to gather detail: Thomas (2009, p. 175) advocates structuring questionnaires in such a way if “…you are aiming to get at the central concerns of an issue as your respondents see them”. One of the aims of this research was to gather parent perceptions of factors that have an influence on reading development and this could not have been achieved if the questionnaire had consisted of closed questions. Extended responses were analysed separately and data were then organised by ‘themes’ as similar responses emerged.

The first part of the questionnaire focused on parents’ own attitudes to reading: I felt it was important to include these questions because I wanted to attempt to gain an insight into
their disposition towards reading, given that a particularly positive or negative disposition may have been relevant when analysing the data. Also, if ‘enjoyment’, or lack of, was identified as a factor influencing reading development then it could be important to establish what ‘enjoyment’ was defined as by parents and then establish how closely those reasons matched with pupil responses to the same question.

The next part of the questionnaire focused on uncovering factors parents felt could both positively and negatively influence reading development. The final section of the questionnaire focused on how parents generally felt they could improve their child’s reading development at home, with further questions focusing on how parents felt they could be supported by the school to improve their child’s reading development.

In total, 18 parents completed the questionnaire, which suggests a response rate of 32.1%. However, letters were sent home with pupils and so some degree of sample loss should be expected where letters may not have been passed on to parents. Additionally the cohort had two sets of twins and their parents were unlikely to complete the questionnaire twice, on behalf of each child. It is therefore difficult to establish an accurate response rate and although it appears that the questionnaire had a low response rate many researchers have found that an average response rate to an online questionnaire is around one-third:

...Most of the online surveys achieved response rates that were much lower than the paper-based ones (on average, 33% compared with 56% = 23% lower)... In the research by Watt et al. (2002), the overall response rate for online surveys was 32.6%... (Nulty, 2008, p. 303)
Also, a response rate of approximately 32% does not necessarily indicate a bias in results. This is because it is unlikely that the non-respondents would have answered the questions any differently given the similarities in responses that were given by participating parents. Therefore it could be argued that the following results to be valid and reliable and adequately representative of parents of pupils who were in Year One during the 2014-2015 academic year.

### 3.3.1.1 Piloting

Before carrying out the research I felt that it was important to pilot the questionnaire for parents. My rationale for this was that a pilot study would allow me to validate the questions I wanted to ask and ensure the wording was appropriate for the intended participants. One suggested modification to wording was that I exchange ‘facilitate’ for ‘help’ in order to keep the meaning of the question clear and more easily accessible to all participants. The pilot also helped me establish that one question was quite vague, which I refined by replacing the word ‘anything’ for the more specific ‘genre or type of reading material’. Many of the questions featured in the questionnaire were also featured in the interview with pupils and so the questionnaire pilot had the added benefit of helping me to reconsider and accordingly refine the wording of some of the questions I asked in the interview with pupils.

There are other benefits to using a pilot study, for example “it will alert you as to whether or not your research questions, approaches and proposed methods are specific, ethical and actually doable” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p. 37). For all of these reasons I piloted the
questionnaires on personal friends who had children in Year One. I chose these particular friends in order to increase validity of the pilot through utilising a group of parents similar to the one which formed the basis of the final research, which Bell (2005) also believes to be an important factor to consider when choosing pilot participants.

3.3.1.2 Likert Scales

The pilot parent participants provided valuable feedback including how long the questionnaire took them to complete and whether they had understood each question. For a number of questions I had originally employed the use of a five or seven point Likert scale in order to gauge how far parents agreed or disagreed with different statements. Feedback from the pilot group suggested that allowing up to seven response options through the use of a Likert scale question was not necessary given the relative simplicity of the questions: this was because the pilot group had found it difficult to decide where on the scale they wanted their answers to be because there was not a big difference between ‘Agree’ and ‘Somewhat agree’. After considering the feedback I decided those questions could be answered using one of three responses: ‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Other’. In hindsight, continuing with the use of Likert scales may have unnecessarily diluted the data given the small-scale nature of this research and so I feel it was the correct decision to restrict the answer options to three possibilities.

3.3.2 Interviews with Pupils

One of the key aims of this research was to establish the perceptions of both pupils and parents regarding factors they felt had an influence on reading development. In order to fully explore the perceptions of Year One pupils I felt it would be pertinent to conduct
interviews. This was because “…Interviews are able to elicit the sort of subtle, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory issues that arise…” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p. 87). I discounted the use of questionnaires with pupils because their current level of literacy was insufficient for them to be able to complete a questionnaire independently. If I had supported the pupils to complete the questionnaire I may have influenced the results: Brooker (2001, cited in Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p.159) discusses the issue of ‘test’ questioning, where pupils are conditioned to give the response they believe the adult is looking for. In my professional experience I have witnessed that many pupils are keen to please and may have adapted their answers to what they thought was the ‘correct’ response I wanted as their teacher.

The interview sessions took approximately fifteen minutes per pupil. Each interview was conducted in the school library, which was chosen as it was a familiar venue for pupils but provided a quieter space than would have been achievable within a busy classroom. The questions were similar to those posed in the parent questionnaire but were worded in child-friendly language to allow all pupils to fully participate. An informal style was utilised throughout the interview in an attempt to make the pupils more comfortable and with the hope of encouraging some extended responses from the pupils. After explaining the purpose and structure of the interview the session was recorded, with verbal permission from all pupils, to allow me to transcribe responses later and give the pupils my undivided attention during the interview. As mentioned previously, I was aware of ‘test’ questioning and ensured the pupils understood that there were no ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ answers and that I wanted to know both the things they liked and did not like about reading. I also decided to conduct the interviews when the pupils had completed Year One and had started
in Year Two. This decision was made because I felt the pupils may be better able to reflect on their Year One experiences after the six week summer break.

3.3.3 Observations of Pupils

Many researchers note that “Observation is one of the most important ways of collecting data in social research” (Thomas, 2009, p. 183). Clay also argues:

Carefully recorded observations can lead us to modify our instruction to meet the learning needs of particular children in the formative stages of new learning like beginning reading...Direct observation in research about young learners is not only acceptable but has a complementary role to play alongside other research and assessment approaches. (Clay, 2014, p.4)

As a classroom practitioner I have previously witnessed the benefits of careful pupil observations on informing future planning and therefore agree with these researchers. Subsequently I chose to include observations of pupils as an additional method of data collection and analysis.

3.3.4 Sampling

Given the time constraints of this research it was necessary for me to choose a sample of Year One pupils to interview. I employed ‘convenience sampling’ to sample from my own professional setting because I had previously established good working relationships with both pupils and parents. Researchers such as Bell (p.83, 2005) agree that convenience sampling is acceptable as long as limitations of such a method are appreciated.

I wanted the sample to be representative of as many different ‘groups’ of pupils as possible in order that the results could be potentially generalised in relation to the wider population.
of the school. However, in order to achieve this I had to initially employ purposeful sampling in order to create specific groups from which pupils could then be randomly selected. The first specific group was gender: the cohort list was split into gender. The second group was ability: each gender listed in order of ability, starting with pupils previously identified as working at an ‘above average’ level with regard to Literacy, down to those identified as working at a ‘below average’ level. Once the two gender groups had been listed by ability I picked the 12th and 24th pupil on both gender lists in order to employ random sampling whilst ensuring I could equally represent both gender and higher and lower ability pupils. I was unable to create further groups, such as English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils, or ethnic minority groups due to the cohort not having any pupils who would fit into those categories. Therefore, it could be suggested that the sample was adequately representative of the entire Year One cohort.

3.4 Triangulation

Although I have previously stated that this research is mainly qualitative in approach it is essential to validate the research through the process of triangulation. Triangulation can be defined as “the research practice of comparing and combining different sources of evidence in order to reach a better understanding of the research topic” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p. 72). This perspective on the benefits of triangulation is also shared by other researchers including Thomas who noted that, “…viewing from several points is better than viewing from one” (2009, p. 111). After analysis of data from parent questionnaires and pupil interviews I compared the results with my own pupil observations in order to provide an additional source of data analysis. This approach further provided my research with triangulation.
Triangulation is a broad term which can be classified further into different types (Thomas, 2009). This study utilised ‘methodological triangulation’ which is described as “…using different methods on the same objects of study’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.142). Specifically, triangulation was achieved through different methods of data collection: pupil interviews, personal observations of the pupils and parent questionnaires. I found these methods to be suitable for this case study because:

...We can learn more about our research topic if we can combine the strengths of qualitative research with the strengths of quantitative research while compensating at the same time for the weaknesses of each method. (Punch, 2009, p.290)

Comparing the results from the pupil interviews and parent questionnaires helped me to analyse how far parent and pupil perceptions about factors affecting reading development correlated. I also found it of interest to learn what the differences were in perceptions between pupils and parents. Using these different methods provided my research with triangulation.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Reliability “refers to the extent to which a research instrument such as a test will give the same result on different occasions.” (Thomas, 2009, p.105). Time constraints did not allow for ‘re-testing’. However, if I had repeated the interviews using the same questions but asked to different Year One pupils I could expect “test-retest reliability” (Thomas, 2009, p.105) particularly due to the sampling techniques I employed to ensure a range of pupils were represented. On the other hand, due to the qualitative approach for this research, pupils were not subjected to a ‘test’ but rather an interview and the answers given were subjective.
Throughout the research I also strived to improve reliability of the data by minimising biases as much as possible. Christensen and James (2008, p.98) discuss how pupils’ responses can be “subject to the standard biases…like context effects, acquiescence bias, social desirability and the like.” These biases can affect the reliability of data. However, Christensen and James as well as other researchers, such as Roberts-Holmes (2011, p.54) suggest that the effect of some of these biases can be minimised by a strong relationship between the adult researcher and child: “…The rapport between interviewer and child are crucial” (Christensen and James, 2008, p.98). Therefore, I believe that the rapport I had previously established with the pupils (as their former class teacher) helped to minimise any bias in the pupil responses.

Although I could attempt to generalise findings from the data collected it is important to remember that they would remain as generalisations and not as absolutes. However, “Good generalisations – generalisations that provide accurate predictions – are at the cornerstone of scientific progress.” (Thomas, 2009, p.109). The full reliability of this research could only be ascertained by repeating the study with another Year One cohort, which was not possible within this time-scale. Nevertheless, much care was taken to ensure bias was eliminated as far as possible and despite the subjectivity of the answers given at interview I believe the data to still be valid and reliable.

3.6 Data Analysis

One means of analysing qualitative data is through the use of the ‘constant comparative method’, whereby “from the constant comparison you emerge with themes that capture or summarise the contents of your data.” (Thomas, 2009, p.198). This is similar to topic
coding, which is “...a process of classifying chunks of data into key themes...” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, pp. 186-187). For this research, I felt that topic coding was an appropriate method of data analysis. This was because it allowed for organisation of the pupil responses and led to the establishment of ‘themes’ relating to pupil perceptions of factors affecting early reading development. Due to time constraints I chose not to fully transcribe each interview. Rather, I felt it more pertinent to transcribe a cross-section of comments to ensure representation of all different pupil perceptions across the different themes which had emerged through the use of topic coding.

Extended responses from the parent questionnaire were also organised using topic coding in order to collate data into ‘themes’, as similar responses emerged.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Pupil voice is an incredibly important tool in education research and the UNCRC recognises this by declaring that children have rights to participation (UN, 1989). Also “Children have the right to hold an opinion about issues concerning them” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p.41). In line with BERA (2011) I sought parental consent for the participation of the pupils who were deemed to be too young to independently give consent, however, I ensured that all pupils fully understood that they had the right to withdraw at any point if they no longer wished to participate in the research.

All parents of the 2014-2015 Year One cohort received a letter explaining the purpose of this research with an online link to the parent questionnaire. As such it was the decision of
each individual parent whether or not to participate. Additionally the letter to parents explained that their child would not be included in the sampling selection process without parental consent. It was also made clear that pupils who were selected would be given the right to withdraw at any time if they chose not to participate.

The parent questionnaire was hosted through Google Docs and so responses remained anonymous. Due to the convenience sampling employed I knew the identities of every pupil I interviewed: however, I explained to parents and the pupils that the pupil identities would remain wholly anonymous. I assured parents that pupils would be referred to by code names or numbers where necessary, such as ‘Pupil A’. Although I recorded the interviews the voices were not included in the data in order to protect identities and instead, answers were transcribed.
4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

4.1 Introduction

Data from the pupil focus group and results from the parent questionnaire responses were assimilated for analysis.

4.1.1 Pupil Focus Group

The sample of Year One pupils included in this research were selected using convenience and purposeful sampling. Although the pupils were randomly selected from within specific groups they shared many other characteristics, for example, all were aged six at the time of interview and all had completed an entire academic year in Year One with the same teachers and with access to the same curriculum.

The research sample of four pupils consisted of two females (50%) and two males (50%) (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 – Distribution of pupil sample according to gender (n=4)](image)
The pupils were of varying ability, with two pupils identified as ‘above average’ with regard to reading ability (50%), and two pupils identified as ‘below average’ with regard to reading ability (Figure 2).

![Reading Ability Distribution](image)

**Figure 2 – Distribution of pupil sample according to reading ability (n=4)**

As discussed in the methodology, data from pupils were collected through informal interviews and through my personal observations. Questions asked during pupil interviews have been compiled into Appendix 2.

### 4.1.2 Parent Questionnaire

Almost all parent responders (89%) stated that they enjoyed reading and were asked to explain their choice with a written comment. This seems to suggest that any negative perceptions of reading development regarding the pupils was interrelated to the parents’ own dislike of reading, since such a high percentage indicates a generally positive perception of reading. Additionally, 100% of parent responders answered, ‘Yes’ to the
question, ‘Do you think reading is important?’ which could indicate that parents would be less likely to have an unduly negative perception of reading development.

Using topic code typing I was able to establish the most recurrent ‘themes’ relating to why parents stated that they enjoyed (Figure 3) or did not enjoy reading. I have used ‘Other’ to indicate where a parent has given a response which does not typify a theme. The results in Figure 3 suggest that the majority of parents enjoy reading because they perceive it to be a ‘relaxing’ activity, with the second most popular reason being that reading is perceived to be a form of ‘escapism’ and perhaps, therefore, a brief suspension from the demands of reality.

**Figure 3 – Distribution of parent responses (n=16) according to reasons for enjoying reading**
*Some respondents mentioned more than one reason in the comments box, therefore percentages add up to more than 100%.

It is also interesting to note that the majority of respondents (94%) selected fiction as their preferred genre of reading material. This result correlates with findings from other researchers, such as Barnes et al., who suggest:
In most circumstances, it would not be socially acceptable for adults to engage in elaborate games of pretend, but they can spend a great deal of time engaged in the imaginary world of books and movies without anyone batting an eye. (Barnes et al., 2015, p. 255)

Arguably, this adds credence to the thought that the parental enjoyment of reading is linked to its ability to provide a reprieve from reality via a socially acceptable means.

Much of the data collated from the parent questionnaires were quantitative in nature and the results could be analysed through the use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets which allowed for statistical analysis alongside the creation of graphs and tables, highlighting key findings.

However, in order to allow parents to add detail to their responses I ensured space for typing comments was left at the end of each question for any additional comments which yielded qualitative data. Responses were analysed separately then organised using topic coding in order to collate data into ‘themes’ as similar responses emerged.
4.2 Discussion of Results

Results have been presented through detailed discussion of the three research questions which this case-study set out to answer.

4.2.1 Research Question 1:

What are Year One pupil perceptions of factors that have an influence on their reading development?

All of the pupils (100%) participating in the interview stated that they were happy to be involved in the research and so any negative attitudes towards reading displayed during the interview were unlikely to have stemmed from a reluctance to participate in the research.

Pupil responses showed that 100% believe reading to be important and 75% of the pupils stated that they enjoyed reading which may suggest that the majority of pupils in Year One have a positive attitude towards reading. However, pupil responses indicated that there were a number of factors that they felt influenced their reading development both positively and negatively. Negative factors were mostly determined by responses to the question ‘Is there anything you don’t like about reading?’ Reasons given included finding reading difficult, finding reading to be ‘boring’ and wanting to participate in other activities instead of reading.

Factors that had a positive influence on reading development were mostly determined by responses to the question ‘What advice would you give to a younger reader in Reception
class to help them to get better at reading?’ One piece of ‘advice’ given by the pupils included ‘Remember to use your sounds’ which was in reference to the synthetic phonics scheme ‘Read-Write-Inc’ utilised by the school to teach reading. Pupils also referred to other taught reading strategies as ‘advice’, for example ‘Read to the end of the line and go back to the word you are stuck on’. One pupil said, ‘I look at the pictures to help me make guess about the words’ which seems to indicate that the pupils rely on taught reading strategies such as using visual cues in order to help them with their reading. None of the pupils referred to choices of reading material or enjoyment of reading when talking about how they could improve their reading or advise a younger pupil on how to improve their reading. Individual factors perceived by pupils to affect early reading development have been discussed in more detail theme-by-theme.

4.2.1.1 Difficulties when Reading

As discussed in the literature review, Welsh Government made the Literacy and Numeracy Framework statutory from September 2013 (Welsh Government, 2013a). The 2013 document set out the expectations for pupils from age 5 to 14 and the statements were broken down by year group. One of the Reception statements is: “read simple words such as consonant-vowel-consonant words”, however, the Year One statement for the same aspect is: “read suitable texts with accuracy and fluency” (Welsh Government, 2013b) which is arguably a large leap from the expectation for Reception-age pupils and was also identified by one pupil during the interviews:

…[Reading] is harder in Year One[…] you have to read long books with lots of writing but in Reception [the teacher] reads you the story. You just have to use your
sounds [in Reception] and say the word but in Year One there’s lots to read all the time.

Many teachers would argue that to read with accuracy and fluency requires many basic reading skills to already be firmly embedded. It is arguably unlikely that after only one year of formal schooling that Year One pupils will have had sufficient opportunity to embed specific reading skills which would enable them to progress on to reading with accuracy and fluency. Overall, 75% of pupils stated that finding reading difficult was a factor when considering reasons for not ‘liking’ reading. This could be because the expectation for their reading ability in Year One is arguably more demanding than expectations for reading ability during the first year of school (Reception).

4.2.1.2 Reading Disengagement

Dugdale and other researchers have suggested that enjoyment and attainment have become interrelated, as discussed in the literature review. These researchers proposed that increased enjoyment is perceived to lead to increases in attainment and/or ability (Dugdale, 2009, cited in Gorard and See, 2013, p.74). However, 75% of pupils answered yes to the question ‘Are you a good reader?’ even though 50% of the sample had been formally identified by the school as being below average in reading ability (Figure 2). This result could suggest that with regard to early reading development, ability and enjoyment of reading by pupils are not necessarily perceived by those pupils to be interrelated. It could also suggest that many pupils do not measure their own reading ability by the same standards as adults or formal testing.
However, as highlighted in the literature review, Didau (2014, p.97) argues that difficulties with reading and perceived boredom are linked since many pupils who struggle to read will not comply with teacher requests and will use ‘boredom’ as an excuse when challenged. The pupil interviews seem to support that view since the same pupils who stated that they did sometimes find reading difficult also stated that they sometimes become disengaged and find reading ‘boring’:

...It’s hard to read sometimes, then it gets boring [having] to look at the same page for ages. When I don’t know what the story is about I don’t want to read it anymore and I get bored...I just want to play.

However, some pupils who reported disengagement as a ‘factor’ contributing to why they did not like reading did so not because of difficulties they had with reading but because they appeared to be reluctant to invest time in reading when there were alternative activities they could do, as can be seen in the above quote when the pupil said, ‘I just want to play’.

Also, when answering the question ‘Do you ever read at home’ one pupil said:

I have lots of toys and sometimes I want to play with those [because] [...] in school we have to write and read and do maths and when I get home I want to play with different things...Mummy makes me read at bedtime but not my school book...Different books I like...I read my school book when I get it but then I put it in my bag so I don’t forget to give it back.

This clearly shows that some pupils perceive reading in school as a separate activity from their ‘leisure’ time at home. It also indicates that there is a perception that school books are not as interesting as toys or books that pupils have at home, for example when the pupil said, ‘Different books I like...’. This implies that pupils do not always like the school books they are allocated and that this is also a contributing factor to reading disengagement. As previously discussed in the literature review, this further confirms the views of researchers, such as Stone, who suggests children are more “…Motivated to read online texts related to their interests and will persevere when they would have given up on school texts.” (Stone,
cited in Metcalfe et al., 2013, p.20). Furthermore, the UKLA said “Children...only become effective and committed readers through reading texts that interest them.” (UKLA, 2010, p. 13). Therefore, researchers appear to support the pupil perception that reading disengagement is a factor affecting early reading development.

4.2.1.3 Utilising Taught Reading Strategies

Despite 75% of pupils stating that finding reading difficult was a reason for not ‘liking’ reading, all pupils interviewed were able to identify many reading strategies which they could rely upon to help them if they did encounter difficulties. When asked ‘What advice would you give to a younger reader in Reception class to help them get better at reading?’ the majority of pupils (75%) indicated that they thought utilising reading strategies they had been taught was an important factor. This perception is corroborated by a number of researchers, as discussed in the literature review. One pupil’s comment further confirms Didau’s view:

...You have to say all of the sounds then fred [blend] them and then you will know the word...If you still get stuck you could see if the picture gives you a clue...

However, one pupil, identified as below average with regard to reading ability, did not identify the use of reading strategies when considering how to develop early reading skills:

...[Reading] is just hard. You should keep trying and then you might get it...You need to listen to the teacher and she will help you.

Although this pupil has not referred to a specific reading strategy they are still aware that they can ask for help and that effort is required to develop reading skills.
In conclusion, after analysis of pupil interview responses, pupils were found to have identified the following main factors which have an influence on reading development: difficulty with reading; disengagement and the need to be taught specific strategies for reading.

4.2.2 Research Question 2:

What are parent perceptions of factors that have an influence on their child’s reading development?

Parent responses to the questionnaire indicated that there were a number of factors that they felt influenced their child’s reading development both positively and negatively. Parent perceptions of negative factors were very similar to pupil perceptions, including the issue of finding reading difficult, and the issue of disengagement.

Parent perceptions of factors that may have a positive influence on reading development were centred on enjoyment and allowing pupils to have greater autonomy over reading material/book choices. Other factors included finding more time to practise reading and receiving more frequent progress updates from school to inform parents of specific skills they can practise at home. Deeper analysis of these results follows:

4.2.2.1 Difficulties when Reading

Parents were asked to answer questions about both themselves as readers and their children as readers. One question directed at the parents was ‘Do you think you are a good
reader?’ which received a ‘Yes’ answer from two-thirds of parent responses (66.6%). All responses from the remaining third (33.3%) were given as ‘Other’ and the written explanations given to accompany the answer suggested that those parents did not perceive themselves to be particularly good or bad readers. Some responders explained that they had selected ‘Other’ because although they could read they did experience varying difficulties when doing so, for example, one response said, ‘I’m OK [at reading] I’m [sic] just unsure of certain words I don’t [sic] use everyday. or haven’t [sic] seen before’.

Another responder who had selected ‘Other’ said:

I’m not a particularly good reader but I can read so I don’t think I’m a bad reader. I’m dyslexic so some words are more difficult for me than others.

Overall these results indicate that the majority of parents do not have difficulties with reading themselves. A small number of parents (22.2%) did not feel there were any factors that would prevent their child from liking reading. However, 55.5% of parents suggested difficulties with reading as a factor that may prevent their child from liking reading. Although this percentage was lower than the pupil response (55.5% of parents compared with 75% of pupils) this result still correlates with the pupil responses since the majority of both parent and pupils indicated that finding reading difficult was a main factor when considering reasons for not ‘liking’ reading.

4.2.2.2 Time Constraints

Topic coding data from parent questionnaire responses revealed that ‘time constraints’ was a factor parents perceived to have an effect on early reading development. ‘Time
constraints’ related to both the length of time parents had available to read with their child and the length of time they felt their child was willing, or unwilling to spend reading.

In total, 33.3% of parent responses mentioned ‘time constraints’ directly when considering factors affecting early reading development. However, the questionnaire included space for parents to provide typed explanations and I could infer from some of these responses that time was a factor, even if those parents had not directly referred to time constraints in their previous answers. For example, one parent said they felt they could improve their child’s reading development by asking them more questions about the texts and so this response was not included within the 33.3% of parent responses which directly mentioned time constraints as a factor. However, when asked to explain why they did not already do those things to help the parent responded with: ‘I have two other children and find it difficult to fit everything in’. This implies that time constraints were indeed a factor, even though that parent had not explicitly mentioned time constraints previously.

When analysing the questionnaire results as a whole, 66.6% of parent responses indicated that they perceived their own time constraints to be a factor affecting early reading development although this figure increases to 83.3% when including parents who felt that the length of time their child was willing to spend reading was a factor. Therefore, it could be argued that the majority of parents perceived time constraints to be a factor affecting early reading development.
This parent perception regarding time constraints as a factor is also acknowledged by many researchers, such as Dearing et al. (2009, cited in Gorard and See, 2013, p. 143) and Topor et al.:

Results indicated a statistically significant association between parent involvement and a child's academic performance, over and above the impact of the child's intelligence. (Topor et al., 2010, p.183)

The research of Topor et al. supports the parent perception that time constraints affect early reading development.

4.2.2.3 Quantity of Reading Material

Another factor which parents perceived to affect early reading development was that of reading material: just over half of parents (55.5%) stated that they felt their child’s reading would develop if they were exposed to either more books or different books to the ones their child received from school.

Altogether, 94.4% of parents said that they would like the school to provide more than one book a week in order to help their child’s reading development, as explained by one parent response:

I would like to have the opportunity to have 2 or more books through the week as my books at home are too hard and have lots of pages which then [my child] don’t [sic] want to finish as its [sic] loads to read.

The school serves a wide catchment including a number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. As pupils’ reading development changes so rapidly it is reasonable that many parents may not have enough suitable texts at home to support their child’s reading development, particularly when considering the cost of books. This may account for why such a large percentage of parents were concerned with the quantity of suitable reading
material available to them to support their child’s reading development. This analysis was also supported by another parent response:

We need more books and a larger variety. [My child] should be able to bring home books [they] have chosen from the school library because [they] says theres [sic] lots of good books to read [in the library] but [they] only ever has 1 reading book. We read it on Friday then theres [sic] nothing to read after that.

On the other hand, it could be argued that one book per week is sufficient if that book is a rich text which could be used to develop a number of different reading skills. For example, as discussed in the literature review, Didau (2014, pp.109-110) states how many different reading strategies are taught in schools and so it could be argued that encouraging pupils to become extremely familiar with one text could support the development of many different reading strategies. This view is supported by researchers such as Hattie and Yates (2013, cited in Didau, 2014, p.104) who have noted that comprehension is almost impossible if reading speed is less than 60 words per minute. Therefore, as discussed in the literature review, one book per week could allow pupils time to first decode the words and then provide them with enough time to re-read the text, focusing on developing different skills, such as comprehension.

4.2.2.4 Increased interaction between School and Home

Many parents (94.4%) indicated their desire for additional books to be sent home from school each week and so it could be reasonably expected that a high percentage of parents would indicate that they would like additional support from school to support them with developing their child’s reading. However, Figure 4 shows that only 6% gave an affirmative
response to the question ‘Would you like additional support with helping your child’s reading development at home?’

![Additional Support Requirement](image)

**Figure 4 - Distribution of parent sample according to parent requirements for additional support with helping their child’s reading development at home (n=18)**

Even more surprisingly, almost half of parents (44%) responded that they did not want any additional support at home. However, parents were asked to explain their answer and the typed responses indicated that 77.7% did have requests or suggestions for how school could provide them with support, which suggests that, in fact, 77.7% of parents would like a form of support from school to help them with their child’s reading development. For example, one parent who responded ‘No’ to the question regarding additional support went on to explain ‘I would just like to know what questions to ask and how to sound out the harder words’. Another parent who had responded ‘Other’ said ‘I would like more communication about how [my child] is doing and how I can help’.

Although neither of these parents had responded ‘Yes’ to receiving additional support, arguably their explanations indicate that they would like additional support, in varying ways.
Perhaps the surprising results in Figure 4 are a result of differing teacher and parent perceptions of what additional support means or entails.

In conclusion, parents were found to have identified the following main factors which have an influence on reading development: difficulty with reading, time constraints, quantity of reading material available and the need for increased interaction between school and home.

4.2.3 Research Question 3:

How do parents feel they could improve their child’s reading development?

Many of the parent responses to this specific question could be categorised into two main themes: interaction between school and home and increasing time spent reading. These themes match the parent perceptions of factors which affect early reading development.

As discussed in the results for research question 2, 66.6% of parents indicated that they felt reading could improve if they were able to increase the amount of time they had available to spend reading with their child.

Overall, 55.5% explicitly stated they felt they could help improve their child’s reading if they received regular updates from school regarding their child’s reading development. Additionally, 50% wished to receive a form of ‘training’ from school in reading strategies to help them to better support their child at home.
Finally, I would like to make the point that parent perceptions of how they could improve their child’s reading development can be significantly different since people are so diverse, with different backgrounds, attitudes and dispositions. For example, some parents were willing to take a great level of responsibility for their child’s reading development, as can be seen in the following comment: ‘I try to make [them] read all the time. [They] reads signs, shopping lists even my text messages’.

This is in juxtaposition with other responses which indicated that some parents believe school should bear the brunt of responsibility for their child’s reading development, for example, ‘Teachers have more time for reading than me. When [my child] gets home [they] just want to play.’

4.3 Summary

In conclusion, gathered data revealed that there were two main ways in which parents felt they could improve their child’s reading development: working around time constraints in order to dedicate sufficient time to reading development, and increasing the interaction between school and home so that parents could support their children in purposeful ways at home.
5. Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

The aim of this research was to establish pupil and parent perceptions of factors affecting early reading development and to allow for better understanding of these factors. To achieve this aim, research questions were formulated, a review of literature was conducted, data were collected from both pupils and parents and the results were analysed. Conclusions from the research are detailed within this section.

5.1 Conclusions

Information gathered from the questionnaire and pupil interview group indicated that there were a number of similarities between parent and pupil perceptions regarding factors affecting early reading development. One example is that both pupils and parents identified difficulty with reading as a factor.

Pupil perceptions of factors included difficulty with reading, disengagement and the need to be taught specific strategies for reading.

Parent perceptions of factors included difficulty with reading, time constraints, quantity of reading material available and the need for increased interaction between school and home. Parents were aware of the difficulties their children had when reading, despite the majority of parents not experiencing reading difficulties themselves.

Parent responses indicated that there were two main strategies they could utilise in order to improve their child’s reading development: working around time constraints in order to
dedicate sufficient time to reading development, and increasing the interaction between school and home so that parents could support their children in purposeful ways at home.

5.2 Limitations

The research was found to have the following limitations:

This research is a case study of only one class in a Welsh Infant School. Therefore the presented results cannot be generalised to the entire Year One cohort or to other schools in Wales, or indeed, the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the pupil sample consisted of 4 pupils out of a class of 26, therefore, data gathered from these pupil responses cannot be generalised to all Year One pupils. Whilst the data collected was of importance, this was not an expansive case study and so cannot possibly have identified all factors which could affect early reading development.

Another limitation was that the three research questions yielded mainly qualitative data and therefore its validity is, “dependent upon accurately representing the voices and experiences of the research participants” (Roberts-Holmes, 2011, p. 70). However, the factors which were discussed during the results were identified to have been the most important factors because they were most prominent in discussion by both parents and pupils.

Finally, another possible limitation is that of ‘test’ questioning, as discussed by Roberts-Holmes (2011, p.159), where pupils participating in the interviews may have given responses they thought I wanted to hear rather than their honest thought and opinions.
5.3 Recommendations

After considering the conclusions I have made from the research, and discussing the possible limitations, I would like to make the following recommendations:

This case-study was small-scale and therefore further research is required into the parent and pupil perceptions of factors affecting early reading development. Future research should be conducted over a longer period of time, including larger numbers of both pupils and parents. This could enhance the overall reliability of results.

The aim of this research was to identify pupil and parent perceptions of factors affecting reading development. However, further research should also consider the perceptions of teachers, classroom assistants and government policy makers. Furthermore, future research should aim to find solutions to overcoming the ‘negative’ factors affecting reading development.

The research has revealed that schools should work more closely with parents to support early reading development, especially with regard to informing parents of the reading strategies they can practise with their child at home. This could lead to greater parity between reading skills being developed at school and then at home, which in turn could lead to increases in reading ability.

Additionally, schools should consider alternatives to printed texts, such as online reading schemes which can provide access to multiples texts at the appropriate level for the pupil.
This could help address the issue of parents not having enough suitable texts at home.

Whilst recommendations have been made, I believe this research has enabled me to gain a greater insight into the perceptions, thought and feelings of both pupils and parents. I hope this knowledge will help me to become more sympathetic to the difficulties pupils face with reading and the difficulties parents face with supporting their children to read. I hope to continue developing my knowledge by sharing my findings with colleagues and taking time to determine how teacher perceptions correlate with the findings from this research. In time I hope to also extend this to establishing the perceptions of education policy makers in Wales.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1 – Letter to parents with link to online questionnaire

Wednesday 2nd September 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am currently completing a Master’s degree in Educational Research and Practice, part time, through Cardiff Metropolitan University. As part of my final project I would like to carry out small-scale research with pupils who have recently completed Year One. My research is concerned with reading development of these pupils and the findings will be useful for Hendre Infants in helping us determine future methods for improving reading.

In order to collect data I would like to ask a sample of pupils questions about reading such as: what they like and dislike about reading; if they have a preferred genre of reading material; who they read with at home and what they read at home.

Please read the “Research on Reading Development” information sheet included and discuss with your child any questions they may have. If you agree to your child participating in this research please sign and return the slip below. Only pupils who I have received consent for will be included in the sampling selection process. Pupils selected will be fully informed about the interview process and will be given the option to withdraw if they wish.

In addition to me asking the sample group of pupils questions I would appreciate it if you could complete an online questionnaire regarding your personal views on reading and reading development. The questionnaire is available at the following site: http://goo.gl/forms/xaO5J4e2fr. Alternatively, I can email a form directly to anyone who provides me with an email address. No names will be included in the final research report and all views will remain anonymous.

Many thanks for your continued support,

Yours sincerely,

Mrs M. Brake
Year One Teacher

I am happy for my child ___________________________ to participate in the reading development research described in the letter sent home dated Wednesday 3rd September 2014.

Signed ________________________________ (Parent/Guardian)
Research on Reading Development Information Sheet

This information sheet is to try and answer any questions you might have. You can also ask your teacher and/or your parent(s)/guardian other questions if you would like to. This information sheet will also be given to your parent(s)/guardian.

**What is research?**
Research is finding out information about something. People carry out research if they want to know more about a topic. If people have questions about something then research can usually help to answer these questions.

**What is this research about?**
This research is to find out more about reading development in Year One pupils. To help me find out information I would like to ask you some questions, for example: do you enjoy reading? Why/why not? Is there anything you don’t like about reading? What is the best thing you’ve read recently? What was good about it? Is there anything you’ve read recently that you didn’t enjoy? What didn’t you like about it? Do you read at home? Does anyone else read at home?

**Why have I been asked to help with this research?**
It is really important to me that as pupils you help to make decisions about the way you are taught and the way you learn. I need to speak to pupils to understand what pupils like and don’t like about reading. I also need to speak to parents/guardians to find out what they think about you learning to read.

**What will I have to do?**
I would like to talk to you about reading. I will ask you some questions to find out what you think about reading. This isn’t a test and there aren’t any right or wrong answers. I will use an iPad to record our talk to help me remember all of the answers you give me.

**What will my parent(s)/guardian have to do?**
I will send your parent(s)/guardian a questionnaire to ask them what they think about reading and how you learn to read. Parents/guardians can write their answers to the questions on the questionnaire.

**Will you tell anyone what I say?**
I will need to talk about my research with some other people and I will write about what I found out. Your name will not be in anything I write and no one will see a picture or video of you. We will only be discussing reading, but if you tell me anything that really worries me then you and I will need to talk about what we might have to do next.

**Do I have to take part?**
You can decide if you want to answer my questions. I hope you will find it interesting to talk to me about reading. I am looking forward to learning about you and what you think.

**What if I have more questions?**
You can ask me any other questions you might have when you see me. You can write down any questions you have or you can ask you parent(s)/guardian to speak to me about your questions.
Appendix 2 – Questions asked during pupil interviews

Reading Perceptions Interview Questions for Year One Pupils

1) Do you enjoy reading? Why/why not?
2) Is there anything you don’t like about reading?
3) Do you think reading is important?
   3a) Why/why not?
4) Are you a good reader?
   4a) Why/why not?
5) Is there anything you particularly like to read?
6) Can you remember anything you read when you were younger that you were particularly proud of?
   6a) If response is affirmative then why was that?
7) What is the best thing you’ve read recently?
   7a) What was good about it?
8) Is there anything you’ve read recently that you didn’t enjoy?
   8a) If response is affirmative then what didn’t you like about it?
9) Do you ever read at home?
   9a) If response is affirmative then do you ever read at home for your own pleasure?
   9b) What do you read?
10) Does anyone else read at home?
    10a) If response is affirmative then who?
11) What advice would you give to a younger reader in Reception class to help them to get better at reading?