

HIBERNIA COLLEGE

**Teacher Perspectives on the Practice of Teacher Read Alouds in
Senior Classes of Primary School, to form part of Students' Literacy
Learning Experiences.**

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation was to explore the extent to which the practice of the teacher reading aloud is evident in senior classes of primary schools in Ireland. It endeavoured to gain an insight into the motivations, benefits, and possible challenges of implementing this practice. A mixed-method data collection approach was applied with online questionnaires (n=27) and semi-structured interviews (n=2). Results indicate that all respondents read aloud to their students at varying levels. Modelling good reading, language development opportunities and fostering a love of reading were the primary benefits, with finding a suitable book as the most prevalent challenge to the practice.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SET	Special Education Teacher

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the research topic. The origin of the dissertation and the rationale for the chosen research topic are presented, along with a brief outline of the remaining chapters.

1.2. Origin of the Dissertation

Routman in (Layne, 2015, p. xiii) states that all teachers have the capacity to showcase the works of exceptional authors to students, through reading aloud to them. My most vivid memory of primary school was the daily reading of a novel by my sixth-class teacher. A truly enjoyable experience, that transported me to another world or to a different country, depending on the book. It has served to empower me to instil a love of reading and books in the students that I teach. This research topic was borne out of this memory. During my school experiences to date, I have relished the opportunity to read aloud to students in some capacity, whether it be from picture books, novels, poetry, or informational texts. From my own experience, the sheer mention of a picture book in the junior classes is always greeted with heartfelt enthusiasm. The senior classes never rebuke an offer to be read aloud to them, but I have found that there can be challenges with choosing a suitable text, finding adequate time and engaging all the students, that can impact the regularity of the read aloud. This has directed me to explore the practice of the teacher reading aloud, specifically in the senior classes of primary school in Ireland.

1.3. Background to the Project

According to PDST Literacy Development in the Primary Classroom (2020), the practice of the teacher reading aloud is one of the most effective instructional strategies for helping children grow as readers, at all class levels. The Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019, p. 13) advocates for the development of children's attention and listening comprehension through the engagement of 'relevant and meaningful linguistic experiences with adults'. There is often a presumption that reading aloud only occurs with very young children, those who are not yet equipped with all the tools to read independently (Layne, 2015). However, there is now a fresh surge of research that focuses on the importance of continuing to read

aloud to older independent readers. This fresh research supports the positive correlation between student's being read to and their own ability as a reader and writer (Giorgis, 1999). However, Lane and Wright (2007) contest that in order to enhance the potential of the teacher reading aloud in the senior classes as an effective literary strategy, further deliberation needs to be given to the amount of time dedicated to this practice, the choice of text and the method of the practice itself.

1.4. Rationale

The practice of reading aloud to children to increase language development begins as a precursor to primary school, in the form of poetry and nursery rhymes (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). This practice continues when the pre-schooler starts primary school and throughout the junior classes. In the senior classes, children's language development is still ongoing, and skills such as fluency, intonation and comprehension must continue to be expanded. The goal moves from learning to read, to reading to learn (Eivers and Clerkin, 2013). This research aims to serve as a comparator to research the literature into the benefits and challenges of the practice of reading aloud in senior classes, and the effectiveness and challenges of the practice itself in Ireland today. With such emphasis placed on the teacher reading aloud to promote good readers (PDST, 2020), it is our duty as teachers to ensure this practice is allocated the dedicated time and resources to develop and nurture lifelong readers.

1.5. Dissertation Layout

This research project comprises six chapters. This chapter has outline the background and rationale of the project. Chapter two presents a broad overview of the research topic. The practice of the teacher reading aloud is discussed in both a national and international context. Chapter three outlines the study methodology including; research paradigm, research design and data collection. The framework utilised to undertake thematic analysis is discussed and a rationale for its selection is outlined. Chapter four furnishes the findings from the survey. Visual graphics and individual participant feedback are provided. Chapter five presents a discussion and interpretation of the findings. The limitations of the study are also discussed. Finally, chapter six concludes this dissertation and provides recommendations from the findings.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined both the rationale and aims of the research. The chapter has also indicated the format through which the research will proceed in investigating teachers' perceptions on the practice of the teacher reading aloud in the senior classes of primary school. This research topic will now be explored further through the literature to establish what is already known about the practice of teacher read alouds.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Storytelling has been used throughout the generations as a means to amuse, teach and communicate with one another (Pellowski, 1991). This literature review will investigate the power of the read aloud, specifically with pupils in senior classes of primary school, from third class to sixth class. There is a tremendous amount of research on the benefits of the teacher reading aloud to younger children. However, in the last two decades there has been a surge of research showcasing the benefits of the teacher reading aloud to older children (Layne, 2015).

This chapter will critically discuss a) the benefits of the teacher reading aloud to the senior classes, b) student perspectives on the teacher reading aloud, c) possible challenges for teachers to this practice, and finally d) the position of read alouds within the Irish Education context.

2.2. Benefits of the Teacher Reading Aloud

The power of the read aloud is now an annual celebration, with 2023 marking the 13th anniversary of World Read Aloud Day; a global non-profit organisation, founded by literacy expert and children's advocate Pam Allyn. One of the leading directors, Dorothy Lee, (Lee, Morrell and Morrell, 2019, p. 6) states that 'when we read aloud and listen deeply to the words of others, we discover who we are and what makes us strong'. The organisation was initially established to enable young people around the world to share stories as a means to create social change. However, it is now a global movement embraced by schools in 170 countries worldwide, all striving to magnify the power of reading and sharing stories, so to expand the definition of global literacy.

Jim Trelease, author of *The Read Aloud Handbook*, was an American Educator and author who stressed the importance of reading aloud to children to instil a love of reading. He argued that 'reading aloud to a child is the single most important factor in raising a reader' (Trelease, 2001, p. xiii). He also claimed that students' listening level remains higher than their reading level until the eighth grade when they balance out (ibid). Due to this, 'sixth graders can hear, understand and enjoy stories they might not be ready to read yet'

(Trelease, 2014, p. 48). Compounding on this, Routman (2018, p. 200) states that ‘children of any age who routinely hear books read aloud, score higher on national and state literary tests’. Children who hear more words through read alouds, learn more words (ibid). Students encounter more complex words through books and dialogic reading than through spoken language, therefore, their vocabularies increase more through read-aloud experiences than through casual conversation (Giorgis, 2019).

Layne (2015) in his book ‘In Defense of Read Alouds’ explores the many benefits of the teacher reading aloud. These include:

1. increase in children’s accessibility to texts,
2. vocabulary acquisition,
3. comprehension,
4. fluency,
5. reading skills such as pronunciation,
6. improving children’s writing,
7. developing thinking,
8. broadening their imagination,
9. building a rapport between the teacher and student
10. foster a love of reading

Merga and Ledger (2019, p. 134) further subscribe that ‘reading aloud in the classroom is considered one of the most highly effective literacy strategies in contemporary classrooms’ highlighting benefits of vocabulary acquisition, ‘enriched language exposure that supports further development in reading, including phonological awareness and word recognition’. According to Ivey (2003, p.812) when teachers read to students, they improve students’ comprehension and motivation to read independently. Short read-alouds can also be “used to introduce a new topic, to illustrate practical applications of content area concepts, and to inject a measure of humor into the classroom” (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998, p. 384).

Albright and Ariail (2006) claim that students are motivated to read when they are engaged in read aloud texts. Zehr (2010) maintains that older children need to be read from a variety of different texts, because if all the teacher does is read to the child from a text book, then there will be less inclination for them to select a book at their leisure. Professor Timothy Shanahan (NCCA, 2019, p. 24) in his paper 'Improving Reading Comprehension in the Primary Classes', further elaborates on this point by stating that in order for reading comprehension to take place, there has to be 'context of the particular text being read'. There is such diversity in the genres of texts from narratives to informational to newspaper articles, and unless children are exposed to these texts through reading and discussion, then children will not recognise the 'purpose, vocabulary, sentence structure, cohesion and text organisation' of these varying texts (ibid, p. 24).

Wiseman (2011) also emphasises the importance of the teacher reading aloud as a means to enable children to discuss their personal and cultural understanding of the world. Routman in Layne (2015, p. xiii) contests that reading aloud may be the only way for some students to experience and notice different writing styles, authors' craft, a wide variety of genres, and information they might not read on their own, as well as to reflect on what a particular book means to them.

Labbo and Teale (1990) contend that there is an expectation when children move into the upper classes in elementary school that their reading will be fluent but this is not always the case. They argue that teacher modelling of reading, along with oral discussion of the text and providing opportunities for the students to practice their reading are all fundamental to increase fluency levels (ibid).

2.3. Students Attitudes to the Teacher Reading Aloud

Clark and Andreasen (2014) carried out research on sixth grade students, aged 11 to 12 and found that students perceptions of teacher read aloud differed according to their ability. Those who struggled with reading enjoyed when the teacher read, because it generated a relaxed classroom atmosphere, free of expectations or pressure of having to read. These students could sit back and listen. For the more avid reader, they also enjoyed the teacher reading aloud, but for them, this enjoyment came from the teacher's engagement with them during the read aloud; the discussion, questioning and whole class participation (ibid).

In a study of more than 1700 sixth grade students, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that 62% of the students had a preference for the teacher reading aloud. Students valued teacher read-alouds as 'scaffolds to understanding because the teacher helped to make the text more comprehensible or more interesting to them' (ibid, p. 367).

Ledger and Merga (2018) found in their research of children from aged six to twelve, that overall children had a positive attitude about being read to. The children associated the time as a happy experience, where they could escape and visualise the story. Those that did not enjoy the teacher read aloud did so because of reasons such as interruptions by other children, the teacher not using enough expression and the text itself not been stimulating enough.

2.4. Possible Challenges

Roche (2015) asks the question, if reading aloud to children is essential to literacy development then why is it not been done more in the classroom? She reports that fewer schools read to senior primary school classes, and questions if this in part is due to 'the lost art' of reading (ibid, p.54). In an article in the Irish Times (23 July 2022) it was reported that one in five pre-schoolers are not experiencing being read to. Coupled with this is the loss of print, books, newspapers, magazines around the house as everything has become digital (ibid).

Albright and Ariail (2005, p. 587) noted in their research that teachers understood the value of reading aloud but 'little attention was given to the aesthetic purposes of reading'. They found that many of the books read were text books and were read aloud to give clarity to subjects but there was a lack of variety of books or genres. Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010) collected data from 400 schools around Ireland and found that there was an emphasis on reading for pleasure in the senior classes of Irish schools, as opposed to using the read aloud as a tool to teach comprehension strategies. They found that although teacher read aloud's were a central practice, they had a simplistic function in the senior classrooms, where there was a lack of comprehension strategies and high order thinking skills. In the results of the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) in 2021, the data confirmed that while overall comprehension levels in Ireland are high relative to most other countries, there is room for improvement, especially on items that ask pupils to

interpret or evaluate (Concannon-Gibney and Shiel, 2013). According to Concannon-Gibney and Shiel (ibid), further improvement needs to be done on high-level reading skills, use of discussion to build on comprehension, inferencing, visualising, creating mental imagery, generalisation and summarisation.

2.5. Context within the Irish Primary Education System

2.5.1. Ireland's Reading Literacy on a Global Scale

In 2009, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) undertook their international assessment of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science. Ireland was ranked 21st out of 65 participating countries for reading literacy along with the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (Perkins et al., 2009). One in six students in Ireland was estimated as having poor reading skills with twice as many of these students being males (ibid). Ireland's overall performance in reading had dropped 31 points since 2000, which was the largest decline across all participating countries (ibid). The Irish Government set about to tackle the results of the PISA 2009 report by publishing the National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011 – 2020 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

This policy set about creating targets for primary schools in terms of literacy, and highlighted the need for children to develop 'positive attitudes and motivation' as a means to progression (ibid, p.45). 'All readers should benefit from the opportunity to experience the joy and excitement of getting lost in a book' (ibid, p.43). Along with this, the policy looked specifically at teaching the 'building blocks of reading' of phonological, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (ibid, p. 31). It also looked at developing high order skills and strategies for reading comprehension (ibid).

Every five years, PIRLS measures the reading achievement of primary school children near the end of fourth class (Eivers and Clerkin, 2013). By fourth class, children have transitioned from learning to read, to reading to learn (ibid). In 2011, Ireland ranked 10th out of 45 participating countries in terms of reading literacy. (Concannon-Gibney and Shiel, 2013, p. 129). In 2016, only two out of 50 countries achieved a mean score higher than Ireland; Russia and Singapore (Eivers, Gilleece and Delaney, 2017). The results of PIRLS 2021, released on 16 May 2023 show that Ireland has retained its place among a list of high-

achieving countries. Some points to note from PIRLS 2021 that are relevant to this study were that:

- Girls in Ireland achieved a mean score of 583 compared to 573 for boys (Delaney et al, 2023, p.67).
- Students demonstrated a relative strength on Literary texts and a slight relative weakness on Informational Texts (ibid).
- Students in DEIS Band 1 and DEIS Band 2 schools scored significantly lower than students in non-DEIS schools (ibid).

2.5.2. Primary Language Curriculum

The Department of Education and Skills (2011, p. 8) states that literacy is not just simply reading and writing but it ‘includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media’. The new Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019, p. 12) echoes this with their vision of children as ‘communicators, readers, writers and thinkers’. When creating the new curriculum, feedback from the teachers highlighted the need for this curriculum to ‘develop positive dispositions toward language and literacy’ (ibid, p.4).

One of the main aims is to instil ‘a lifelong interest in and love of language learning’ and to ‘encourage children to engage personally with and think critically about a broad range of texts’ (ibid, p.13). The Support Material for Teachers advocates for the practice of read alouds for all classes, by using picture books to encourage book talk and critical thinking so that the children can become critical thinkers (NCCA, 2019). PDST The Reading Process (2013) and Literacy Development in the Primary Classroom (2020) argue that motivation is key to this and calls explicitly on teachers to read every day to the class from a wide variety of texts, to be a role model and share enthusiasm for reading.

The new curriculum sets out three elements of language learning within the three strands of the oral language, reading and writing. These are 1) understanding the content and structure of language, 2) developing communicative relationships through language and 3) exploring and using language (NCCA, 2019). Listening comprehension is central to these elements;

building communicative relationships through listening and speaking, interacting with vocabulary and language structures and critically appraising the text (ibid).

The curriculum strives to enable children to achieve development of constrained (letter knowledge) and unconstrained skills (comprehension and vocabulary) and notes specifically that once these skills are achieved, they must be further developed across the lifespan of the child (ibid).

Under the learning outcomes of the oral language strand, students in stages 3 and 4 should be able to;

- recognise themselves as listeners (ibid, p.22),
- actively listen and extract meaning and enjoyment from texts in a range of genres (ibid, p.22),
- choose, listen to and critically respond to texts in a range of genres, across the curriculum for pleasure, interest and specific purposes (ibid, p.22),
- respond creatively and critically to what they have heard and experienced (ibid, p. 23).

Under the learning outcomes of the reading strand, students in stages 3 and 4 should be able to;

- develop their interest and enjoyment of literature and reading in a variety of genres across the curriculum (ibid, p. 26),
- engage with texts of increasing complexity (ibid, p. 26),
- acquire deep and broad vocabulary knowledge to facilitate independent comprehension of texts (ibid, p. 26),
- respond to the aesthetic, creative and imaginative aspects of a wide range of texts (ibid, p. 27),
- compare, contrast and critically reflect on the intend of different authors and discuss various interpretations of text in a wide variety of genres (ibid, p. 27).

In stage 3 and 4, from third class to sixth class, engagement, motivation and choice are all pivotal to this development where 'children become more autonomous and motivated language learners through opportunities for enjoyable interaction with others' (ibid, p. 35).

2.6. Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted the growth in research advocating the benefits of the teacher reading aloud to senior classes in primary school. Benefits range from vocabulary acquisition and broadening the imagination to enjoyment and pleasure. Research carried out with students in middle to senior classes in primary schools validated the practice of the teacher reading aloud. Students were relaxed, free of pressures and could escape to visualise the story. This chapter also looked at possible challenges to the practice, citing loss of print in favour of digital, lack of comprehension strategies used by teachers and relying on the textbook as the only text that teachers chose to read aloud from. Ireland's reading literacy levels have increased steadily since 2009 following the introduction of the National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011 – 2020. This coupled with the Primary Language Curriculum introduced in 2019 and the PDST Literacy Development in the Primary Classroom (2020) place greater emphasis on children's language development, developing a positive attitude towards literacy, instilling a love of reading in children that spirals up along primary school, and most importantly on the teacher reading aloud to all classes.

Having reviewed the literature outlined above, the research will now seek to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are teachers reading aloud to children in the senior classes of primary schools in Ireland?
2. What is the purpose and motivation for the teachers in using read alouds in the senior classes?
3. What are the teacher's perspectives on the benefits and potential challenges of using read alouds in the senior classes?

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology used by the researcher in conducting the data collection for this dissertation. The researcher describes the research design that was chosen for the purpose of this study and the reasons for this choice. This chapter also details the data collection methods utilised and deemed most suitable for addressing the specific research questions. It highlights the ethical considerations and potential limitations and gives a brief overview of the sample of participants.

3.2. Research Paradigm

Bryman (2016) acknowledges that positivism is a philosophical paradigm that incorporates the use of scientific methods and it is based on the idea that knowledge can be acquired through observation and experimentation. However, where positivism is 'less successful is in its application to the study of human behaviour because of the complexity of human nature and the intangible quality of social phenomena' (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011, p. 7). Interpretivism, on the other hand, is a paradigm that uses the subjective nature of social phenomena, and the importance of understanding individuals' opinions on their own experiences (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). The main objection with interpretivism is that 'interpretivists cannot engage in an explicitly critical evaluation of the social reality they seek to portray' (Schwandt, 1998, p. 248).

When viewed as an alternative paradigm, pragmatism avoids the conflicts of truth and reality, and accepts that there are singular and multiple realities open to enquiry and gravitates itself towards addressing practical problems in the world (Feilzer, 2009). The pragmatists believe in using specific procedures dependent on the nature of the research so as not to limit themselves, and that many methods should be adopted in order to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2014). Bridges (1999, p. 609) states that pragmatic theory 'is very clearly represented in the world of the classroom action research'. He contests that educational principles have no truth until they have been tested in action, and that these principles are best derived from the results of practice in the classroom (ibid).

In considering this, the researcher has taken a pragmatic approach to the methodology because it allowed the researcher to both measure and understand the practice of the

teacher reading aloud in senior classes of primary school. The researcher explored the perspectives of established and experienced teachers who currently read aloud in the senior classrooms, or tested the theory in action as outlined by Bridges (1999) above. This provided an insight to the extent that teachers utilise the practice of reading aloud, and the benefits they see from doing this. The researcher needed to increase the parameters of the research through quantitative methods to gain a larger teacher perspective on the practice of the teacher reading aloud in the senior classes. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005, p. 376) suggest that there are common links between quantitative and qualitative research and that it is imperative that students learn to utilise both methods in order to become 'pragmatic researchers'.

3.3. Research Design

Efrat Efron and Ravid (2020) believe that practitioners should choose which methods to use, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed, based on the nature of their research questions, the focus of their studies, the specific settings in which the research takes place, and their own interests. All three approaches were considered for their suitability to this research by comparing their advantages and disadvantages to the research aims.

3.3.1 Qualitative

Scott and Morrison (2006, p. 182) define qualitative research methods as 'seeing the world through the eyes of those being studied'. Qualitative data allows the researcher to delve deeper into the topic by incorporating the ideas and opinions of experienced professionals in the field, such as primary school teachers (ibid). In terms of education, qualitative methods are deemed to suit small scale areas of research, but with this opens up uncertainty to the quality of the research because it is in direct contrast to the larger scale data collection methods of quantitative research (Bassey, 1999).

3.3.2 Quantitative

The quantitative approach allows researchers to study a large sample size, use statistical tests to analyse the data, and generalise the findings to a larger population while minimising bias and maximising impartiality (Babbie & Rubin, 2010). In terms of education, teachers are deemed as objects of research that can be measured through the knowledge they have gained

from their experience, but unlike qualitative research methods, the teacher's attitudes can not be measured (Scott & Morrison, 2006).

3.3.3 Mixed-methods

Scott and Morrison (2006) contest that using both qualitative and quantitative research methods should be used if it aims to address the research question. Creswell (1998) compounds on this by stating that if the researcher uses both methods, then they can compare the findings to see if they validate each other. This will give the research a deeper understanding of the research topic.

3.3.4 Approach

In this research, the researcher applied a mixed-method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. In doing so, the researcher gained a more in-depth view from experienced teachers, in the way of a semi-structured interview, as to the reasons they choose to/chose to read aloud to students in the senior classrooms. 'A skilful interview can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do' (Bell, 2006, p. 157). The researcher also created online questionnaires to teachers from various schools regarding the implementation of the practice of the teacher reading aloud in their own classrooms. The researcher was then able to compare the interviews with the questionnaires to gain a deeper understanding of the practice of the teacher reading aloud in senior primary school classrooms in Ireland today.

3.4. Data Collection

In applying a mixed-method approach to the study, the researcher used non-probability sampling methods to conduct two interviews and issue forty questionnaires.

Given the difficulties in implementing probability sampling, the non-probability sampling approach was deemed appropriate for this small-scale research study. Access to the entire population of primary school teachers would be required for probability sampling so that all participants have an equal chance of being chose, as opposed to allowing certain people to participate in a non-probability approach (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). Probability sampling would produce more accurate and comprehensive results, but it was not feasible in this study due to limited population access and the time constraints of the study.

3.4.1. Interviews

The researcher used purposeful sampling in selecting two experienced teachers for the purpose of the interview. Purposeful sampling is a technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases in order to make the best use of limited resources (Palinkas et al, 2015). This sampling method was deemed most suitable due to the nature of the study, because it enabled the researcher to obtain first-hand knowledge about the practice of the teacher reading aloud. According to Schatzman & Strauss (1973, p. 624), the power of purposeful sampling lies in choosing information-rich cases to study, because 'one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research'. The teachers were selected based on the following criteria.

They:

- currently read aloud to their students in the senior classes, or have previously read aloud to their students in the senior classes.
- are fully qualified, experienced teachers.
- have taught in 3rd to 6th class in primary school.

(See Appendix 4 Interview Questions).

3.4.2. Questionnaires

The researcher created forty online questionnaires on Survey Ireland for the purpose of the study. The questionnaires were sent to forty primary school teachers based in rural, urban and DEIS schools. Convenience sampling was selected over random sampling due to the small-scale nature of the research and the time constraints of the research. Members of the population are selected due to 'easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate' in the research (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016, p. 2). As the sample 'does not represent any group apart from itself, it does not seek to generalise about the wider population' (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011, p.156). The teachers selected to complete the online questionnaires will also be subject to similar criteria like the participants for the interviews. They:

- must be fully qualified teachers.

- must be currently teaching in senior classes, from 3rd to 6th class in the school or have previously taught in these classes.

In applying this criterion, the researcher excluded student teachers, children, parents, SNAs and teachers who have not previously taught in the senior classes of primary schools. (See Appendix 5 Online Questionnaire).

3.5. Data Analysis

Creswell (2014) advises that there are six steps involved in analysing and interpreting qualitative data. These range from storing and transcribing the data, to exploring the data in order to code it and form themes, to interpreting the data to representing it (ibid). Thematic analysis was used as it 'is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data and minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). As this study analysed teacher's perceptions and attitudes around the practice of the teacher reading aloud, it is important to identify whether there were common themes in the responses.

The quantitative data was analysed by interpreting the results of the online questionnaire correctly and accurately using data analytics within the online research tool Survey Ireland, and statistical analysis on Microsoft Excel.

3.6. Rigour

Cohen, Morrison and Manion (2011, p. 133) contest that 'it is impossible for research to be 100 percent valid; that is the optimism of perfection'. In this small-scale study, the researcher used both purposeful and convenience sampling as a means to collect the data efficiently and effectively. However, because of this the findings of the study were subject to concerns relating to reliability and validity. Bell and Waters (2014) compound on this by stating that research has to be on a smaller scale if that is the only means to do it.

Nevertheless, every effort should be made to use more than one method of data collection which is known as triangulation (ibid). The main aim of triangulation is to 'see the same thing from different perspectives' (ibid, p. 120). The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods and as such this helped to assist the reliability of the study. Bhandari (2021) advocates for methodological triangulation because 'you avoid the

flaws and research bias that come with reliance on a single research technique'. Great effort was made by the researcher in the wording of questions, both on the questionnaire and in the interviews, to ensure there is no bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher also piloted both the interview and the questionnaire prior to collecting the data. In doing this it increases the validity and reliability of the research because it gives the researcher the opportunity to reflect on the research and to adapt it if deemed necessary (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011). Upon reflection, the researcher reduced the questions of the interview as it was deemed too long, and risked the possibility of interview fatigue.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Prior to undertaking the research, full ethical approval was sought and granted by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee. This was in line with the British Educational Research Association Guidelines (2018). Creswell (2014) contests that ethical considerations must be an integral aspect of any particular study. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) also add that gaining permission and consent to collect data is a very important aspect of any study. All data collection instruments were therefore made to contain an informed consent form (See Appendix 3). Interviewees and participants in the online questionnaire were informed of the purpose the research and how the data would be used, guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. It was also imparted to participants that their information was protected under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Confidentiality was of utmost importance and this was upheld through the use of anonymity in the data collection of both methods. The names of participating schools and respondents were not used in interview recordings or transcripts. It was also imparted to participants their right to withdraw at any stage of the process.

3.8. Limitations

There are several limitations in this research dissertation. There are currently 3,300 primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. As this research is a small-scale study, the results are limited to twenty survey respondents in addition to two face to face interviews carried out within in the West of Ireland. It is acknowledged that these are limitations within the research based on the assumption that more surveys and interviewees would further support the data collected.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the purpose of the study in order help justify the methodologies and methods that are used to conduct it. This chapter has also discussed how the data will be analysed as well, the robustness of the research and ethical considerations. The findings of this research will be set out in detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter Four – Findings

4.1. Introduction

The researcher adopted a mixed-method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, to gain a deeper understanding of the practice of the teacher reading aloud in the senior primary school classrooms in Ireland today. The aims of the research were to explore a) the extent that teachers are reading aloud to their students in the senior classes, b) the purpose and motivation for reading aloud and c) teachers' perspectives on the benefits and potential challenges of this practice. This chapter presents thematic analysis of the research findings gathered from the two semi-structured interviews, and data analysis of the results of the 27 returned online questionnaires.

The themes that emerged from both the interviews and the online questionnaires were 1) establishing time for reading aloud, 2) choice of books, 3) the process of reading aloud, 4) personal influences & motivation, 5) benefits, 6) student engagement and 7) challenges.

4.2. Background of Participants

The teachers who were interviewed are both currently teaching in the infant classroom. Teacher 1 has been teaching for thirty-one years, with twenty-four of those in the senior classes. Teacher 2 has been teaching for fifteen years, with ten years' experience in the senior classes. During their time teaching in the senior classes, they both read aloud to their classes regularly.

To provide context on the scope of the online questionnaires, the following details can be noted:

- Thirteen of the teachers have been teaching for over 15 years, five between 11 to 15 years, two between 6 to 10 years and seven between 0 to 5 years. (See Figure 1).

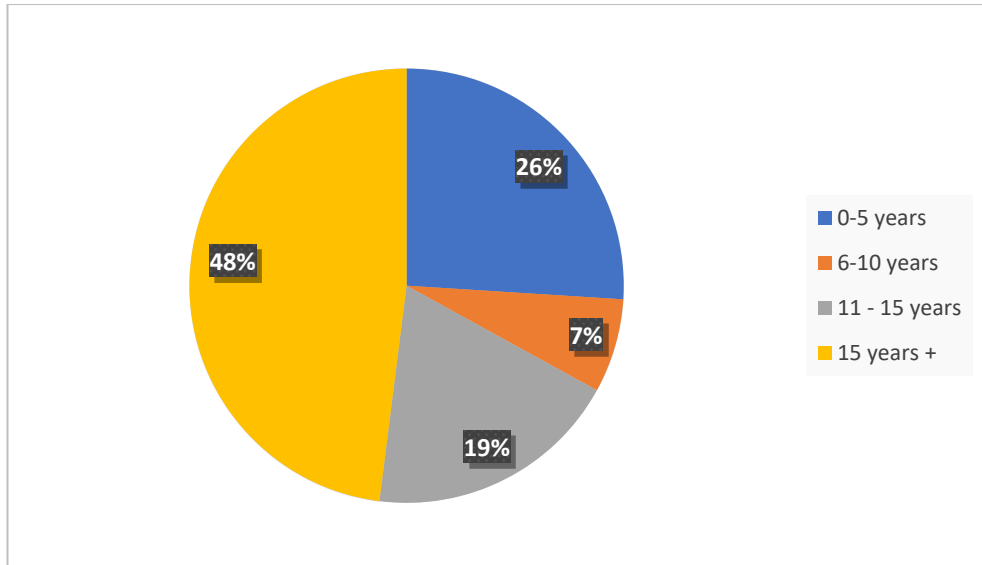


Figure 1: Number of years teaching

- The current classes taught range from single stream classes from third up to sixth class, to multi-grade classes of third and fourth and fifth and sixth. (See Figure 2).

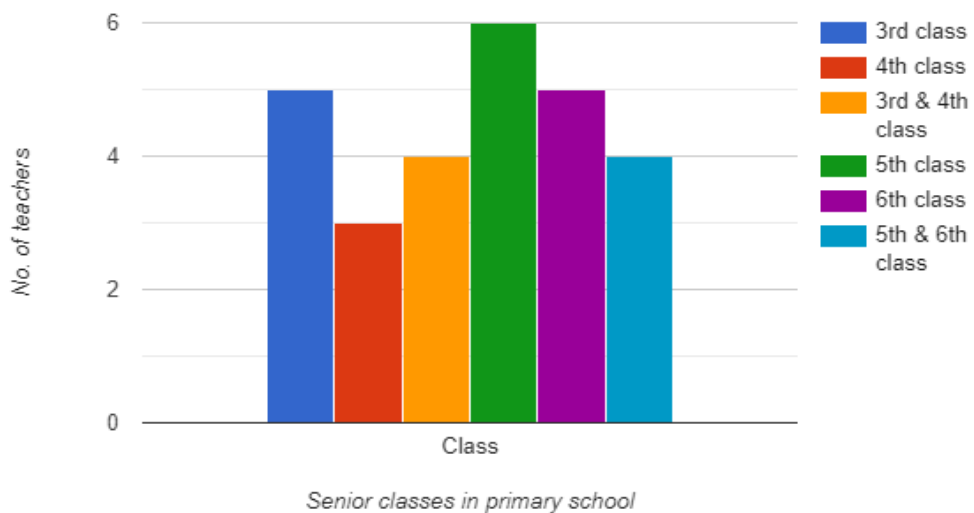


Figure 2: Current Teaching Class

- The average number of students in the classroom are between 25 to 29. (See Figure 3).

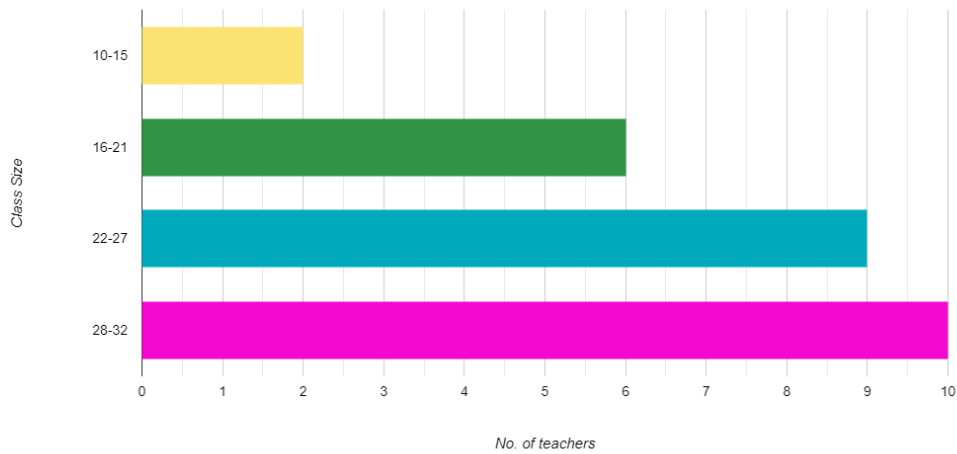


Figure 3: Class Size

- 74% of the teachers advised that the reading ability within their current class was between a sTen score of 5 to 6 (average). 17% cited this as a sTen score of 7 to 10 (above average) and 9% as a sTen score less than 5 (below average). (See Figure 4).

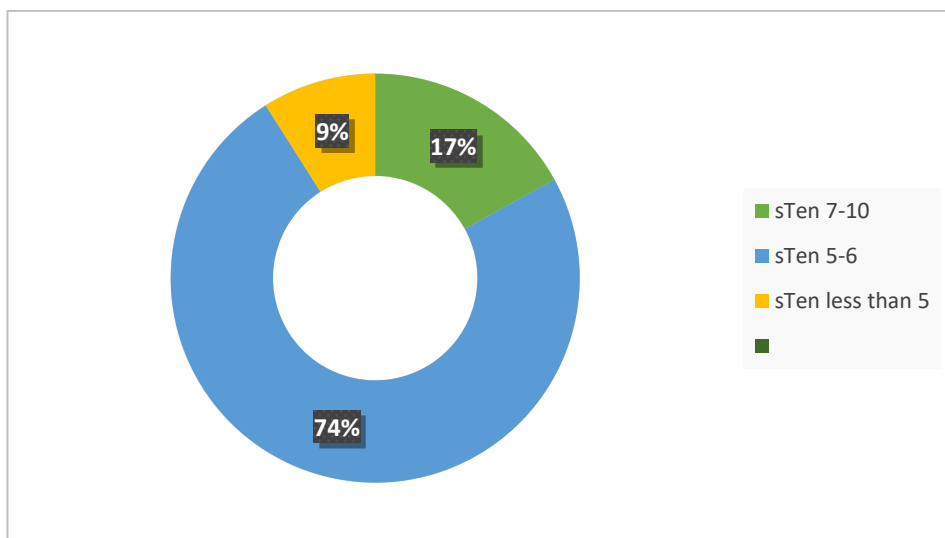


Figure 4: sTen score of class

4.3. Establishing time for Reading Aloud

73% of the teachers in the online questionnaire reported that they currently read aloud regularly to their students, with 27% advising that this was occasionally. (See Figure 5). Two main reasons emerged for reading aloud only occasionally. These were due to time constraints and behavioural problems. Teachers found it difficult to find dedicated time to read aloud in an overloaded curriculum and busy day. Two teachers cited behavioural problems in DEIS schools as a reason. They reported that the children find it difficult to stay focused and seated when not actively involved with something. The teacher spends a portion of their day dealing with behavioural issues with no time left for reading aloud once other work is done.

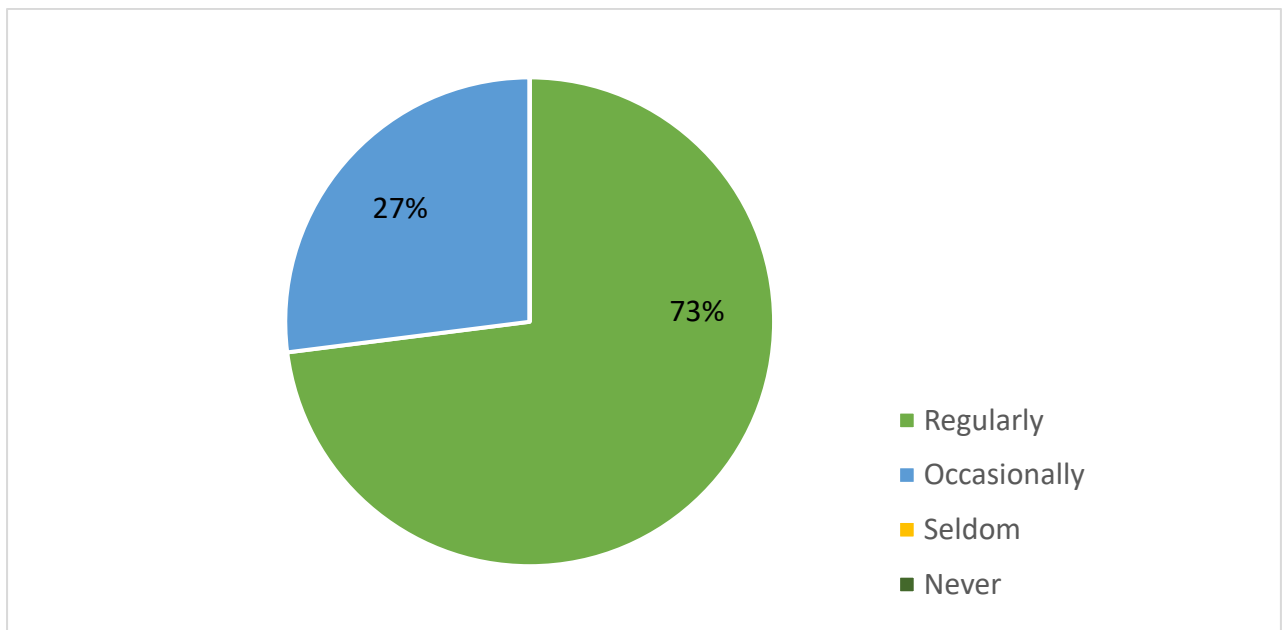


Figure 5: Current Practice of Reading Aloud

The teachers that were interviewed calculated the frequency of engaging with read alouds in conjunction with the volume of books they read. They advised that they would aim to read up to three novels per year. Teacher 1 stated that reading aloud was set in time blocks per year, usually two or three of these, wherein each novel was read aloud. Teacher 2 also covered the same amount of novels but read every day. Both teachers read at the last part of the day, before the children went home. Teacher 2 elaborated on choosing this time by stating that during the day children were often withdrawn from the class to work with their SET, so this time ensured that all of the children were in the classroom. When asked about

tips for new teachers to the practice of reading aloud, the teacher advocated that choosing the right time is very important but alongside is the frequency to which you do it. *'Choose a time when you do it everyday instead of every now and then, because you will lose sight of doing it'*.

4.4. Choice of Books

Both interviewed teachers advised that novels were their choice of books during the read alouds. This was mirrored in the results of the online questionnaire where 32% of teachers also opted for the novel. 2% opted for 'other' and cited auto-biographies as their choice of book. (See Figure 6).

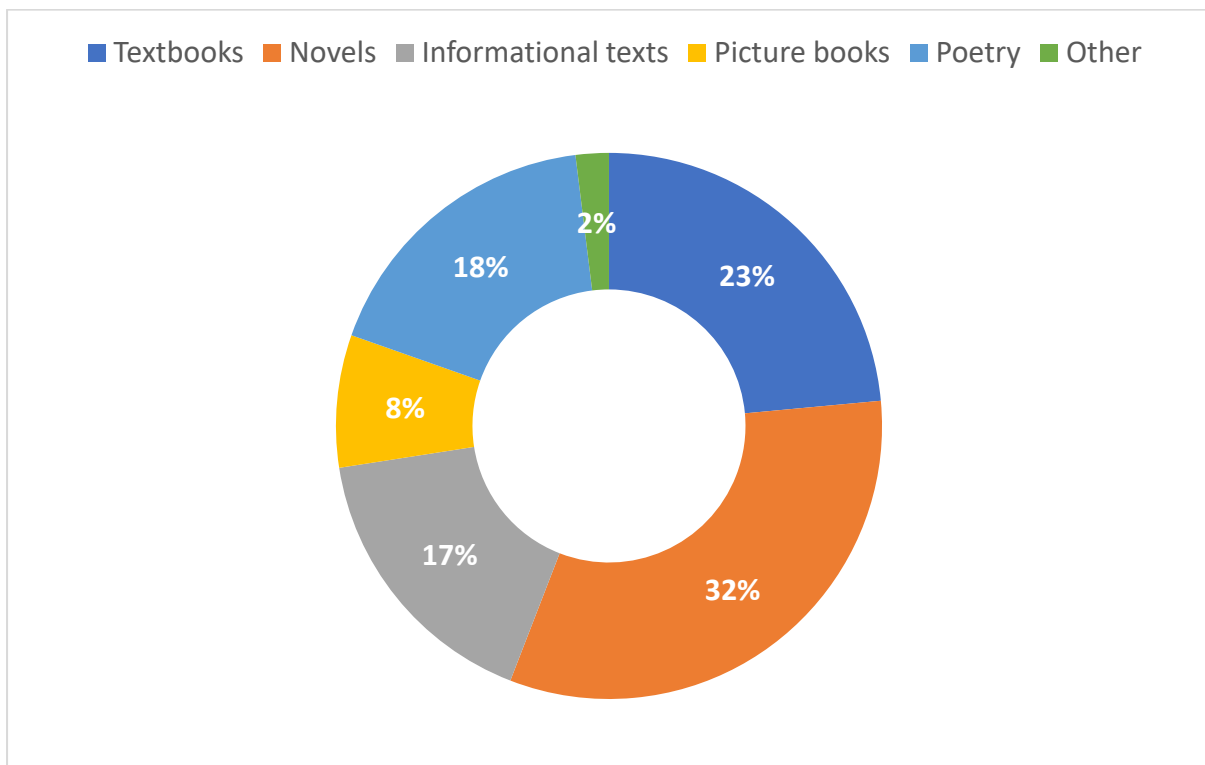


Figure 6: Book Choice

Teacher 1 advised *'I tried to choose books that the students might not have seen as appealing and obvious choices when they themselves went to the class library. They may have been written decades previously and their covers may not have been particularly attractive but their stories were always well worth hearing'*. The teacher always encouraged the students to keep an open mind regarding the book and selected some novels that explored social themes such as poverty.

Teacher 2 chose books based around the themes they were covering in class such as World War I or the famine. The aim was to extend their learning further with the book and provide more insight to the theme itself. However, the teacher also referred to the fact that choosing a book for the senior class was a challenge at times. It was hard to find a book that appealed to everyone and that was age appropriate.

4.5. The Process of Reading Aloud

The teachers who were interviewed emphasised the importance of fluency without interruptions during the reading aloud process. *'I usually stood or sat at the front of the class, staying in one place to avoid distracting students from the story. I would read in a flow without interruption'*. They would read the chapter of the book without stopping and then discuss it afterwards. Teacher 2 stated that if a chapter was very long then *'I would break it up and stop and discuss the parts'*.

Both cited good classroom discussion following the read aloud as common practice and this also served as a method to observe student engagement. *'They would all have their hands up to answer questions'*. Teacher 2 expressed that discussions would take place about the main characters, exploring the theme in more detail and opportunities for the children to give their opinion on the book. *'The discussion was just as important as the reading'*. The teacher also declared that because the discussion was all oral, it encouraged more of the children to participate.

4.6. Personal Influences and Motivations

Neither of the interviewees remembered an experience of been read aloud to by teachers during their school days. Both placed huge importance on reading in their own lives, something that was evident from their childhood. *'As a child I was an avid reader and lived in a village where I visited the local library once or twice every week without fail'*. This love of reading from an early age was a motivator in choosing to read aloud to their students. *'I wanted the children to be able to enjoy a book for leisure and not for school work'*.

Teacher 1 acknowledges the world of technology now and the power it has to curb good reading habits. The teacher's motivation is to promote a love of books amongst the children *'when their interest may begin to wane as more options begin to present themselves to*

them. e.g. many students in the senior end of the school get mobile phones, tablets etc’.

Teacher 2 also adds to this by advocating the read aloud process as an enjoyable experience for the children. The objective is for the children to be able to sit back and relax and listen to the story, with no pressure of a task sheet after. It was important that it was a different experience to their class novel.

4.7. Benefits of Reading Aloud



Figure 5: Benefits of Reading Aloud

The analysis of the comments from the teachers in the online questionnaire led to the benefits of the teacher reading aloud been categorised into 7 main areas. Modelling good reading, language development opportunities, and fostering a love for reading were accentuated regularly. Comments included:

- *‘Modelling how to read with fluency, expression, pace and obeying the rules of reading through reading aloud to the class is essential. It helps the pupils to be very aware of the different strategies that are needed to read proficiently’.*

- *‘Extending their vocabulary and comprehension skills, enhancing reading fluency’.*
- *‘It promotes a love of reading and enables children to see reading as something to be done for enjoyment as well as being functional’.*

The teachers that were interviewed also cited some of the benefits noted above. Teacher 2 felt very strongly about the power of read alouds to give reluctant readers a chance *‘to access something that they might not necessarily have access to because they were not avid readers’*. The teacher affirmed that these children should not miss out on a world of books because they might find it difficult to read, process or comprehend text. The read aloud should be a time when they can relax without worries of the work associated with the book. This fuelled the teacher’s decision to delegate the last fifteen minutes of the day to read aloud so that all children were back from learning support. Another point that the teacher made when modelling reading was the importance of the children hearing mistakes if they were made. *‘Also, when I read, I can make mistakes which is natural and it is important that the children see this because they know that we all make mistakes’.*

4.8. Student Engagement

When asked if the children enjoy been read aloud to, 100% of the teachers in the questionnaire confirmed that they did. Evidence of this from their own perspectives are showcased in Figure 8.

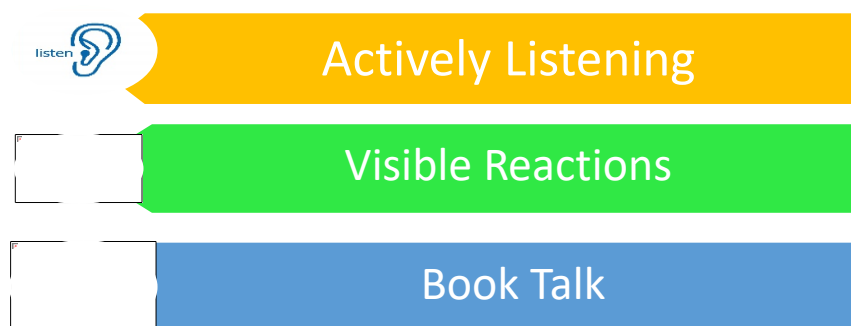


Figure 8: Student Engagement

- Actively listening
 - ❖ *‘Quiet while listening to reading, not chatting, or messing’.*
 - ❖ *‘Teacher observations. Minimal disruptions. Children focussed and not distracted’.*

- Visible reactions
 - ❖ *'Their expressions their pleas for you to read more how it inspires them to read more books by that author'.*
 - ❖ *'They ask questions, laugh and give unprompted responses to the text'.*
- Book Talk
 - ❖ *"The stories often prompt discussion about their own personal experiences. It provides opportunities for the children to connect/ relate to".*
 - ❖ *"Engaged physically Questioning Discussion about the illustrations or text".*

Both teachers interviewed also agreed that the children in their class enjoyed when they were read aloud to. Evidence of this came from shouts of 'yes' from the students, and a scurry to get their bags packed to go home so that they were ready for the reading to begin. Both also commented that when 3pm came, so too did little *'groans of exasperation at having to wait until the following day for the next instalment'*. Further evidence of engagement came from the discussion where children expressed their desire to share their thoughts through putting up their hands and been able to provide inciteful answers in relation to questions asked. Teacher 1 also commented to say that *'at different times students would have been asked to comment on their favourite or least favourite aspects of school life and being read to aloud was often mentioned positively'*.

4.9. Challenges

The teachers that were interviewed did not list many challenges and each cited specific ones in relation to their own experiences. Teacher 1 stated that students with attention difficulties can find it difficult during the read alouds. This can then lead to them distracting other students. The teacher also recognised that EAL students have found the experience challenging because of the language barrier. Teacher 2 placed emphasis on the difficulty in having all students in the classroom. *'The biggest challenge for me was if children are pulled out of the class for learning support, they might sometimes miss the reading time and I didn't want this to happen because they all enjoyed it'*.

Both teachers had great words of encouragement for teachers to begin the process and did not convey that the challenges outweighed the benefits in anyway.

The main challenge that teachers cited in the survey was in finding a text that was suitable for the class levels. (See Figure 9). Teachers wanted to find material that was relevant and that the children could relate to their own lives, so that they could make connections. If the children are not interested in the book choice it has a knock-on effect which can cause behavioural issues within the classroom. Teachers in the multi-grade classroom especially found the book choice difficult. These teachers are trying to engage children from 3rd to 6th. One teacher also commented that for EAL students, there are very little picture books for that age group.

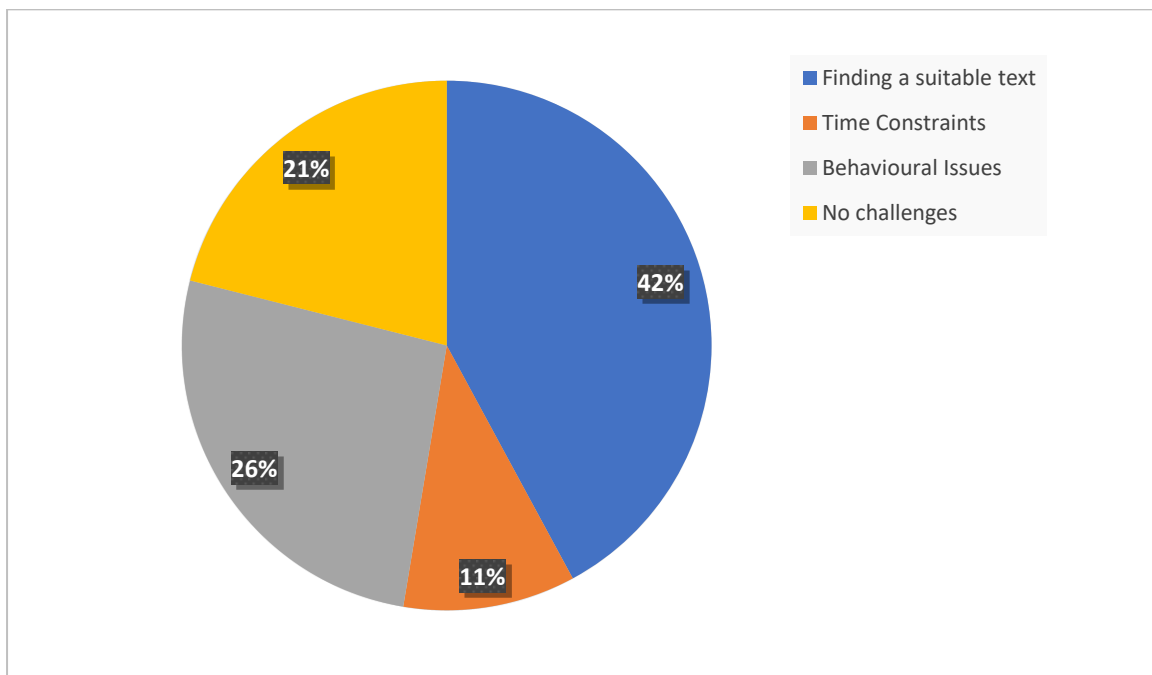


Figure 9: Challenges of Reading Aloud

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed and explored the data gathered from both the online questionnaires and the semi structured interviews. This chapter has reported and highlighted key themes that arose from both survey results and the interview results. The findings highlighted in this chapter will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five – Discussion

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings of the semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires were comprehensively presented and supported by visual graphics and individual participant feedback was captured. In this chapter, these findings are further investigated to explore the extent to which a correlation exists with the literature, and whether any new findings have been identified throughout the course of this research.

It is first necessary to return to the overarching objectives of this research which are the vehicle through which the research proceeds. This research was built upon the following three questions:

1. To what extent are teachers reading aloud to children in the senior classes of primary schools in Ireland?
2. What is the purpose and motivation for the teachers in using read alouds in the senior classes?
3. What are the teacher's perspectives on the benefits and potential challenges of using read alouds in the senior classes?

With these research questions in mind, this chapter will now investigate the extent to which the findings of the research correspond with the above questions and determine whether the data yielded has any significance to the research.

5.2 . Extent to which Teachers are Reading Aloud to Children in the Senior Classes.

5.2.1 Are Teachers Reading Aloud?

Layne (2015) argues that so much research is available to emphasise the importance of reading aloud to the younger classes. However, when researching the practice of reading aloud in the senior classes, he found that 'reading aloud reportedly decreases as grade levels increases' (ibid, p.8). Roche (2015, p. 55) reported that 'classroom reading is infrequent, especially in senior classes' and that if reading aloud is so important then why were schools not doing it. Out of the 27 online questionnaires that were returned, 73% of the teachers stated that they read aloud regularly to their senior classes. Out of the remaining 27%, they advised that they read aloud occasionally. They cited time constraints, an overloaded

curriculum, and behavioural problems as the reasons for not reading regularly. With regards to time and curriculum, Sanacore (1992) compounds on this further by stating that teachers feel the pressure of teaching subjects in designated timely blocks that are routed towards the completion of standardised testing and assessments. Interestingly, none of the teachers selected 'seldom' or 'never' when asked how often they read aloud. This would indicate that the practice of reading aloud is evident in the senior classes in primary schools in Ireland. The teachers who were interviewed read aloud every day during their time in the senior classroom. They set aside the last fifteen minutes of the day to partake in this practice.

5.2.2. Choice of Books

The teachers that were interviewed and 32% of those who completed the questionnaire cited 'novels' as their book of choice when reading aloud. The interviewees selected the novel around the general theme of work they were doing in the classroom to draw on further context and to extend the learning in that area. Leyland, Lewison and Harste (2013) assert that older children can find it hard to concentrate if there is no 'story' to engage them. They advocate for providing context such as that mentioned by the interviewees to engage the students and in doing so, the 'fictionalized version encourages students to read the textbook more actively and critically' (ibid, p. 23). Following on from novels, 23% of the teachers participating in the online questionnaire selected textbooks as their book of choice. 18% selected poetry, 17% selected informational texts, 8% chose picture books and then 2% chose 'other' or autobiographies. Professor Timothy Shanahan (NCCA, 2019, p. 23) in his paper 'Improving Reading Comprehension in the Primary Classes' argues that 'better readers read more and those who read more are better readers'. He further states that children should be exposed to a variety of genres and texts 'to expose students to a variety of purposes, language and discourse features that readers have to learn to negotiate in order to comprehend such texts' (ibid, p.24). Looking at the results, 55% of teachers chose novels and textbooks and the teachers that were interviewed advised that they read up to three novels per year. This would indicate that children are arguably exposed to a less diverse range of books in primary schools in Ireland. Picture books are specifically referred to in the Primary Language Curriculum, yet only 17% of teachers use them as part of their read aloud practice. The reasons for this might be related to some of the challenges the teachers had

noted when choosing their book of choice. This will be discussed further under the challenges.

5.2.3. The Read Aloud Process

Leland, Lewison and Harste (2013, p. 18) argue that 'no one is too young or too old, too good a reader, or too poor a reader to get something positive out of a well-chosen and well prepared read aloud'. They maintain that the education system can focus too much on teaching the children to read, with little emphasis on 'setting the stage for them to want to read' (ibid, p. 18). When interviewing the teachers, the recurring themes that resonated during the read aloud process were uninterrupted reading, fluency, and book talk. The teachers read without interruption, only stopping if the chapters were very long. The teachers read to model fluency. Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010) noted in their own research that teachers were reading solely for pleasure and that the function of the read aloud was simplistic in nature, with a lack of comprehension strategies. However, the teachers did advise that when the read aloud was over, the class engaged in book talk. They discussed themes, characters, their opinions about the book. This was deemed to be pivotal in the process. Wiseman (2011, p. 438) emphasises that 'children's literature can be a platform for discussions' about a range of issues, which help the student connect the book to their own lives. The comments provided from the online questionnaire also relayed many references to comprehension and literacy skills, all of which will be discussed further down in the benefits. However, when considering the above it is important to remember that this book talk following the read aloud was largely in relation to the novel. Stead (2014, p.399) contests that if read alouds enable the teacher to impart effective comprehension skills, then 'why do children struggle with comprehension of informational texts?'. The reason for this according to Stead (2014) and supported by Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010) is that non-fiction or informational texts are not been utilised in the practice of read alouds. This also coincides with the results of PIRLS 2021, where students' comprehension skills in relation to information texts was weaker than that of literary texts (Delaney et al, 2023). The results from the questionnaire only show 17% of teachers use informational texts which would support the above argument.

5.3. Purpose and Motivation for the Teachers in using Read Alouds in the Senior Classes.

5.3.1. Lifelong Readers

Trelease (2001) stressed the importance of the read aloud process in creating readers and those that nurtured a love for books. Both teachers that were interviewed are avid readers since childhood. Their love for reading was a strong motivational reason for introducing read alouds to their senior classes. They wanted to create a relaxed environment for the children at this time, free of any stress associated with a textbook.

Routman in Layne (2015) highlighted that read alouds might be the only way for some children to experience books. Roche (2015) questions if the loss of print in the homes and schools are to blame for the decreased practice of read alouds. There was also an awareness on behalf of all the teachers in the survey and interviews of the lack of access children had to books, whether it was due to their personal circumstances, their learning abilities or technology. They acknowledged that not all children have access to books, and in order to create some equilibrium in the classroom, the practice of the teacher reading aloud could provide access to all. Teacher 2 made the specific point to start the process during the last fifteen minutes of the day when any child who had been withdrawn by SET was back in the classroom. The children who were deemed as 'reluctant readers' could relax knowing they would not be called upon to read and would enjoy the story. Leland, Lewison and Harste (2013, p.18) believe that if students are motivated and engaged through read alouds then 'it gives them a reason for wanting to learn to read, and for keeping them reading after they know how'.

5.3.2. Student Engagement

When Ivey and Broaddus (2001) surveyed over 1700 students in their research, they found that 62% of them enjoyed the teacher reading aloud. The results of this research corroborates with Ivey and Broaddus (2001). All the teachers reported, in both interviews and online questionnaires, that their students enjoy been read aloud to. This is evident by gasps of delight at the end of the day when the time comes to read the novel, to groans when the time is up. It is evident in the quietness of the room, the pleas for more, the laughs, smiles and looks of despair at different points of the book. Other teachers noted evidence of this from the questioning surrounding the book, the uptake in the discussion of

the passage, and making connections to their own world as examples of positive engagement. Merga and Ledger (2018) argued that although the practice of the teacher reading aloud was deemed as an enjoyable experience overall, there were students who did not share this sentiment. These students cited interruptions by other students, lack of expression and the book itself as reasons for this. Although, the teachers in this research all reported their students enjoyed the experience, they did cite classroom behaviour and book choice as challenges to the process.

5.4. Benefits and Potential Challenges of using Read Alouds in the Senior Classes.

5.4.1 Benefits of the Practice

Layne (2015) highlights the recent surge in research platforming the benefits of reading aloud in the senior classes in primary school. He documents vocabulary acquisition, fluency, comprehension, fostering a love of reading, building rapport with the teacher, critical thinking, and access to different texts as some of these benefits. All these benefits were cited in the interviews and the online questionnaires. Teachers reported that the practice of the teacher reading aloud promotes a love of books, creates a relaxing environment where the students can simply enjoy the book without pressure, language development, whole class discussion and vocabulary development. Two benefits that were cited throughout, were modelling reading skills and developing listening skills. Labbo and Teale (1990) state that there is an expectancy when children move into the senior classes that they are fluent readers. This is not always the case, so the practice of reading aloud gives the teacher an opportunity to model good reading (ibid). The participants in the questionnaire reported that they can model punctuation, showcase expression, intonation, pace, along with exposure to new vocabulary. Coupled with this is the opportunity for the children to develop active listening skills. Trelease (2001) stated that students' listening skills were higher than their reading skills up to grade 8, age thirteen to fourteen. Therefore, the more children hear, the more they can absorb. Active listening is then a central component in weaving the benefits mentioned above.

5.4.2. Challenges to the Practice

21% of teachers surveyed stated that they found no challenges in reading aloud to the senior classes, although some cited that this was dependant on the class itself. For the most

part, children from third class to sixth class still enjoyed being read to. The teachers that had reported challenges quoted finding a suitable text, behavioural issues and time constraints as the key challenges. Zehr (2010) advocates for teachers to read from a variety of texts, not just rely on textbooks. However, the teachers surveyed and interviewed stressed the difficulty of finding suitable texts to engage the students. This was harder again in multi-grade class settings where there is a range of ages or in classes with EAL students. The lack of book choice or choosing a book that did not stimulate the whole class, had an adverse effect on the behaviour which led to interruptions during the read aloud. Another challenge that was referred to during the interview was that of technology. Roche (2015) places an emphasis on the lack of print at home as a precursor to children not reading. With students and teachers living in a digital age, the book can lose its value (ibid). So, although this was not a challenge that the online participants reflected on, it is a challenge to the art of reading nonetheless.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter explored the findings from the research study and investigated the extent at which these findings correlated with the current literature. It is evident from the findings that teachers in senior classes of primary school are currently reading aloud to their students on a regular basis. All the participants place significant value in this practice as an effective strategy for teaching components of literacy. Challenges of book choice, behavioural issues and time constraints have been noted by the participants, but for the majority, they do not seem to hinder their practice. With this in mind, the next chapter will propose suitable recommendations that may be used as a basis for future research.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This chapter draws together the main conclusions reached. The findings are assessed concerning the research questions posed in this research dissertation. Recommendations for future research and professional practice are considered. The limitations of the study are identified and finally, the chapter considers whether the research questions were addressed.

6.2. Overview of Findings

This research aimed to explore teacher's perspectives on the practice of reading aloud to senior classes in primary school in Ireland, from third to sixth class. Firstly, this study sought to investigate the extent to which teachers are reading aloud to their students in the senior classes today. Secondly, it sought to understand the perspectives of teachers with regards their motivations for reading aloud. Finally, it sought to ascertain the benefits of this practice and any perceived challenges.

The data yielded the following findings:

6.2.1. Principal Research Findings

- Contrary to Roche (2015), the vast majority of teachers in this research study are reading aloud to their students on a regular basis. There were no reports of teachers not reading aloud, only some that read aloud occasionally as opposed to regularly.
- Novels are the main choice of book for teachers, with textbooks following suit. Poetry, informational texts, picture books and auto-biographies were also cited but to a lesser extent. PDST Literacy Development in the Classroom (2020) advocates for the teacher reading from a variety of texts to engage the students, so there is evidence from the data that there is an over dependency on novels and the textbook.
- The benefits of reading aloud highlighted by the teachers correlate with those in the literature review. However, there is more focus on modelling reading skills and developing listening skills. Although Albright and Ariail (2005) and Concannon-Gibney and Murphy (2010) argue that teachers apply too much prominence on fostering a love for reading and not enough on literacy skills, it is clear from the data

that teachers are aware of the numerous benefits that read alouds have as an effective literacy tool also.

- Lack of book choice, behavioural issues and time constraints were reported as the three biggest challenges to the practice of reading aloud. Teachers find it difficult to select a text suitably engaging for all students. The Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019) states that from third class to sixth class, engagement, motivation and choice are all pivotal to the development of constrained and unconstrained skills. However, if a student is not engaged by the book itself, then this can create obstacles to the read aloud practice by enhancing behavioural issues within the class, eventually hindering and possibly ending the read aloud.

6.3. Limitations

As this is a small-scale research study with limited resources available to the researcher, the findings of the study are not generalisable beyond the sample population tested. Although the instruments through which the data was collected were carefully chosen and supported by the literature, the sample population is too small to extend the findings to the overall population of primary teachers. However, the findings provide some insights into the practice of the teacher reading aloud in Irish classrooms today. Despite the limitations, the study has achieved the intended outcomes.

6.4. Recommendations

The researcher has identified the following recommendations arising from the findings of the study:

6.4.1. Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this small-scale research study were limited due to its sample size. However, more in-depth research into the practice of the teacher reading aloud in a variety of primary schools around the country, would be both intriguing and invaluable. Further research could also focus on the student perspectives to give a more accurate account of student engagement within this practice, especially regarding the topic of book choice.

6.4.2. Recommendations for Future Practice

One of the main findings from the research was that students in the senior classes of primary school are not being read to from a variety of texts. A correlation can be noted between the dependence on the novel as the text of choice, and students' competence with the comprehension of literary texts, as per the PIRLS 2021 report. Given the cited over reliance on novels and textbooks, there is an opportunity for the Department of Education and Skills and the PDST to eliminate the challenge that teachers face in relation to book choice, by providing schools with recommendations of highly acclaimed children's literature, specifically in relation to senior classes. This may help to motivate more students in the classroom.

6.5. Conclusion

The Primary Language curriculum accentuates children as 'readers' and the results of the most recent PIRLS report indicate 'that there was a positive association between enjoyment of reading and reading achievement' (ibid, p. 82). This research has shown that the practice of the teacher reading aloud is an effective literacy strategy utilised in the senior classes of Irish classrooms today. It highlights the continued value that teachers place in the practice of read alouds, and their commitment to instil and nurture a love of reading within their students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to Principals

Principal's name

School address

[Date]

Dear Principal,

As part of my Professional Masters in Primary Education with Hibernia College, I am investigating the area of read alouds in the senior classes in primary school. The aim of the research project is to explore the practice of the teacher reading aloud to pupils in the senior classes of primary school, as part of their literacy learning experiences.

Classroom teachers are key stakeholders in identifying if strategies such as reading aloud enhance the student's literacy skills and instil in them a love for reading. This letter aims to provide you with an introduction to the research project and to seek consent from you for the project to move forward in order to inform my future professional practice as a teacher.

With your permission, I would like to interview a classroom teacher. The teacher will be asked to partake in a semi-structured interview to gain an insight into the aims of the project. Please find enclosed for your perusal, a copy of the information and a consent form. Any data gathering will strictly be underpinned by the school's ethical code of conduct. No students will be interviewed.

Information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. The school's name will not appear on any research findings. Interviews will be recorded, and the data will be securely held under Hibernia College Research Ethics guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my research project and may be disseminated through professional publication.

I would appreciate your cooperation in providing access to the staff at the school over the coming weeks. If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Researcher:

This research study has received Ethics approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

School of Education, Hibernia College Dublin. Tel (01) 6610168.

Your sincerely

[Researcher Name]

Date:

Appendix 2: Letter to Participants

Dear X

I am writing to you in relation to a research study I will be undertaking in fulfillment of my Professional Masters in Education degree. I would like to provide you with information about my study.

The purpose of my research study is to explore the extent to which teachers read aloud to pupils in the senior classes of primary school, as part of their literacy learning experiences.

The objectives of my research are to: identify to what extent teachers are reading aloud to children in the senior classes of primary schools in Ireland, the purpose and motivation in reading aloud to senior classes, and to examine the benefits and potential challenges to this practice. To address these areas, I would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes to complete this short survey which will form part of my research dissertation.

Please note that by completing this survey you are agreeing to have your responses collated and included in my research dissertation. These responses will be stored anonymously and no identifiable data will be recorded.

Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time without providing a reason.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at the above-mentioned email address. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

[Researcher Name]

Appendix 3: Consent Form to Participants

Researcher's name: [Name]

Organisation: Hibernia College Dublin

Title of study: Teacher Perspectives on the Practice of the Teacher Reading Aloud in the Senior Classes of Primary School to form part of Students' Literacy Learning Experiences.

Please tick the box

	Yes	No
Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?		
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?		
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?		
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you?		
Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference?		
Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher?		
Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential? Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report.		

Name of Participant (print)

Signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Could you begin by telling me how long you have been teaching?
2. How many years have you spent teaching the senior classes in primary school (3rd class upwards)?

Reading aloud in the senior classroom

3. How often would you have read aloud to your students in the senior classes?
4. What types of books would you have read aloud to your students? What influenced your decision in the types of books that you chose?
5. Did students have a preference to the books they liked to have read to them?
6. Can you give me a brief description of how you would have read aloud to the students?

Reasons for reading aloud

7. Can you tell me about your own personal engagement with reading?
8. What were some of the reasons that you decided to begin the practice of reading aloud to your students in the senior classes?
9. What was your own experience of being read aloud to by teachers in the past?

Benefits of reading aloud

10. Many benefits have been documented for reading aloud to children in the Junior classes. In your own opinion, what are the benefits of reading aloud to senior classes in primary school as opposed to just the junior classes?
11. Did the students in the senior classes enjoy you reading aloud to them? How did the children show you this?
12. Do you feel that there are any challenges to teachers using the strategy of reading aloud in the senior classes? What would these be?
13. What advice would you give to teachers of senior classes in the beginning to introduce read aloud as part of the children's literacy learning experience.

Appendix 5: Online Survey Questions

1. How long have you been a primary school teacher?
 - a. 0 - 5 years
 - b. 6 - 10 years
 - c. 11 - 15 years
 - d. 15 + years
2. Class level you currently teach:
3. Number of students in your class:
4. How often do you read aloud to your class?
 - a. Regularly
 - b. Occasionally
 - c. Seldom
 - d. Never
5. Can you state some reasons for your choice above?
6. What types of books do you use in your read alouds?
 - a. Textbooks
 - b. Novels
 - c. Informational texts
 - d. Picture books
 - e. Poetry
 - f. Other (please state)
7. How would you describe the reading ability of the majority of students in your class?
 - a. Above average (STen 7-10)
 - b. Average (STen 5-6)
 - c. Below average (STen less than 5)
8. What do you see as the benefits of reading aloud to your class?
9. From your own observations, do the students enjoy you reading aloud to them?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. What feedback (verbal/non-verbal) from your students leads you to your answer above?
11. Are there any challenges of reading aloud in the senior classes? If so, please note below.
12. Any other comments.

Appendix 6: Thematic Coding Example

Interviewee:

It was a fairly simple process. At quarter to three every day I would take out the novel and if the chapter was short, I would read the whole chapter and discuss the chapter after. We would all discuss it after. I didn't want to stop and start the chapter because the children need to hear the flow of the text and not to dissect every single part. Now saying that, if the chapter was long, I would break it up and stop and discuss the different part. Or sometimes words might come up that might have been hard to understand so I wanted to explain them. We would also discuss the characters and what we liked about them. We would explore the theme in more detail and the children would give their opinion on what they liked or did not like about the book. They were always forthcoming with their opinion. For me, the discussion was just as important as the reading.

15:11

Researcher:

Yes, I can understand that completely. Just moving on then, many benefits have been documented for reading aloud to children in the Junior classes. In your own opinion, what are the benefits of reading aloud to senior classes in primary school as opposed to just the junior classes?

For me, the reason that I wanted to do it was because it would appeal to the more reluctant readers. I wanted them to be able to enjoy books even though they were not the best readers. This was my main driving force really and spurred me on to continue. Some children might not ever get to read different books, you can't assume they have all been read aloud to before. You want to be able to give them access to something that they might not necessarily have access to because they were not avid readers. They should not miss out on books because of this and fear the book because they associate it with work. These students could sit back and relax without pressure which I think is so important and you could sense from them that they enjoyed it.

Oh, just something else that I have thought of which for me was very important. When I read I can make mistakes which is natural and it is important that the children see this because they know that we all make mistakes. No-one is perfect.