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An Investigation into the Role of Learning Experiences and Teaching Methods in Irish Language Education

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An Investigation into the Role of Learning Experiences and Teaching Methods in Irish Language Education

Emma Gilheany

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of Professional Master of Education in
Post-Primary

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Abstract

This investigation explores favourable teaching approaches that promote positive attitudes towards the Irish language by investigating the role experience has played for current and former learners of the language. Using quantitative methods, data was collected through an online survey from 50 participants in a mix-gendered post-primary school. The data centres the participants ability to recall learning activities from their experience and describe their current motivation to continue learning Irish. Favourable teaching methods have been uncovered such as collaborative learning, gamification, and immersive experience, which align with literature reviewed in this investigation. However, the data outlined an area of further investigation regarding the use of ICT in the Irish language classroom.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis proposes to explore the role of experience and teaching methods in Irish language education. This thesis subject arose from the growing respect seen for the language in Northern Ireland with regards to the Identity and Language Act (2022) and the constant differing opinions regarding the place of Irish in education. The aims in this research are to determine favourable teaching methods to garner respect for the language. This will be explored by reviewing literature and by employing a quantitative study to investigate the experience of both past and present Irish language learners.

1.2 Origin of the Thesis

Throughout my experience in post-primary teaching, I have employed a great deal of active teaching methodology such as communicative learning, collaborative learning, and role playing. Such active learning is not something that I had encountered in my own Irish learning experience. Although I enjoyed the subject in second level, I can acknowledge that I was bounded with rote learning and repetition when acquiring the language.

Although, it can be acknowledged that some students yield advantage from rote learning (Tinkham, 1989, p.697), it has occurred to me that, for others, this may have been a barrier to their enjoyment of the language. I have noticed this from the professional interactions with colleagues during my academic career in Hibernia College (most of whom scorn at the idea of Irish and attribute their distaste to the way it is taught in schools). These interactions have enlightened me to the differing experience and motivations of past and present Irish learners and have led to the curiosity driving this research.

1.3 Background to study

The Irish language has held a significant position in the Irish education system for a century now and it has supported the status of the Irish language in wider society. Esteem for native

bilingualism in Irish society is something that can be partially attributed to the language policies that have been implemented by the education system. Most notably, in 1924, the new Leaving Certificate programme affirmed the Irish language's place in education, by assigning it as a compulsory subject. This meant that it was now compulsory to pass Irish for an overall pass in the Leaving Certificate programme (O'Donoghue and O'Doherty, 2019). At the time, the compulsory Irish component was met with much criticism. In a criticism written anonymously in *The Irish Monthly* (1927) the overwhelming agitation is described and is predicted to continue into the future where Outis (1927) writes:

'Occasion is likely to be taken soon at various [...] functions to renew the agitation [against compulsory Irish]' (p.68).

The writer was correct in their prediction as nowadays the Irish language has received a share of backlash in education. Particularly with the overwhelming suggestions to abolish Irish as a compulsory subject in secondary schools, some of which have come from major Irish political parties (Flynn, 2012, p.51). Nevertheless, with the above criticisms considered, Irish has maintained a place of importance in the Irish education system for 100 years.

1.4 Rationale

Many people across Ireland are introduced to the language through education and this is seen in the high majority of young people that are able to speak it. The 2022 census published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) has outlined that two thirds of the population aged between 3 and 19 years, are able to speak the Irish language (CSO, 2022). This research project targets young people due to their current capability in the Irish language as well as former Irish language learners to garner varying responses. In doing so, this research hopes to discover favourable methodologies in language learning to promote a positive experience in learning the language.

1.5 Dissertation Layout

The dissertation is organised using six chapters: the Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion. The Introduction has served to introduce this subject to highlight the background and inspiration motivating this research. The Literature Review will provide an examination of relevant literature surrounding Irish language education including journals, policies and census data. The information obtained during the review will underpin this investigation and will provide an effective means of comparison for the primary research. The Methodology chapter serves to rationalise and detail the methodologic approach employed in this research. The Findings and Discussion chapters will review and examine the results of the data collected regarding favourable teaching approaches in Irish language education. Finally, the Conclusion will suggest favourable and non-favourable teaching methods deemed by the data collected.

1.6 Conclusion

To summarise, this research will evaluate the ways in which the Irish language is taught and has been taught in post-primary education. The aim is ultimately to determine favourable methods of teaching Irish that successfully encourage respect and interest for the language. This chapter has outlined the origin of this research along with the motivation driving the investigation. The background of Irish language education has been acknowledged and will be further developed in the succeeding chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review aims to offer an overview of how far the provision of Irish language education has come since its earliest days in Irish Hedge Schools, all the way to the current implementation of the new Junior Cycle. Before acknowledging how we can improve our practice to foster appreciation in students in the language, we must look at the current state of the Irish language in Ireland by use of statistics offered by the State Examinations Commission and the Central Statistics Office's Census and look at the previous methods of incentivisation established to encourage Irish language learners. We will also inspect the areas of the Irish language that are currently emphasised in Irish education and examine approaches and methods to language teaching.

2.2 The provision of Irish language education in Ireland

Throughout history, there has been a struggle to both provide for and motivate students in terms of Irish language education. The provision of Irish language education was initially suppressed because of the penal laws of the 17th century. This resulted in the furtive foundation of non-denominational educational bodies called Hedge Schools. These Hedge Schools provided clandestine Irish language education to those students for 136 years. Although the inclusion of Irish as a subject in these schools is significant in the reintroduction of Irish to education, Irish was still in decline as a desired subject at the time due to the outlook that English language education was required for social advancement. By 1878 Irish was an optional subject in Intermediate education and although it had disadvantage with an unequal allocation of marks in comparison to other languages, it became a popular choice in the first twenty years of the 20th century (Walsh, 2021).

The early 1900s saw many reforms in education following Ireland's independence. A notable change was in the new focus on Irish language in education (Coolahan, 2017). In order to make Irish more than just a school subject, 1924 saw the incentivisation and obligation of Irish

brought into education. Firstly, in 1924 the new Leaving Certificate for second-level education reported that it was now compulsory to pass Irish to successfully pass the entire senior cycle programme (O'Donoghue and O'Doherty, 2019). This marked a significant endeavour for the Department of Education in the provision of Irish language education.

Additionally, to foster motivation in both students and educators in the provision of Irish incentivisation was established. Grade schools were established in the 1900's. Financial incentives were offered to Grade A and Grade B schools as they operated wholly or partly through the medium of Irish. Incentives were also offered to the students themselves wherein students that chose to answer papers through Irish were given a bonus ten percent of the marks they did not achieve added to their grades. This saw a rise in motivation for students as by 1935, 36% of public examinations were answered through Irish (Coolahan, 2017, p.61). An incentive such as this still exists for students nowadays to a much smaller scale. Students are awarded bonus marks for answering through Irish on papers such as Mathematics or Geography, however this incentive is not frequently utilised by students outside of Irish-medium education.

Nowadays there are ongoing demands to make the subject optional in English medium schools (Murray, 2023) due to the ever-growing cultural diversity in Irish society. In 2006, Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny, announced the party's intention to make the subject optional at Leaving Certificate level in the Republic of Ireland. However, as Murray points out when referring to respondent 10879 in the Department of Education and Skills survey about compulsory nature of Irish, 'studying the language should be seen not as an exclusionary mechanism but rather as a route to inclusion and community' (Murray, 2023, p.254).

Nevertheless, with the above information in consideration, the modern lack of incentivisation and the question of inclusion surrounding the Irish language have not hindered the place of the Irish language in education. This outlines the necessity to examine methods of teaching the language that will motivate students in the absence of such incentives.

2.3 Attitudes and abilities regarding the Irish language in education

The new Junior Cycle framework includes the Junior Cycle Irish specification which outlines that students' attitude towards the Irish language as a living language correlates to their exposure to the Irish language in the classroom and their experience as language learners (Department of Education, 2023). As Darmody and Daly (2015) state, there has been a 'growing formal recognition' for the Irish language since the Good Friday Agreement (Darmody and Daly, 2015, p.86). Recently, the 2022 census has shown an overall six percent increase in Irish speakers in Ireland since 2016 (CSO, 2022).

Such statistics correlate the growing emphasis put on the communicative abilities of the Irish language learner in the last 20 years. In 2007, the Department of Education and Science (DES) published a circular 0042/2007 assigning 25 percent of the Leaving Certificate Irish grade to an oral exam (DES, 2007). This has grown since 2012 to an oral exam worth 40 percent at Leaving Certificate level, with the majority of marks in the exam being awarded for a conversation in the language (DES, 2010). This emphasis on the communicative competence is further supported in the implementation of the new Junior Cycle framework with major emphasis being placed on the *Communicative Competence* (Department of Education, 2023) of the learner. When referring to the communicative competence of the learner, the Department of Education is referring to the five skills: listening, reading, writing, spoken production and spoken interaction (Department of Education, 2023). The presence of two separate elements for the speaking abilities of the learning outlines the emphasis being placed on oral communication for the learner.

There has been vast research conducted in the realm of outlooks on the presence of the Irish Language in Ireland, with constant varying responses. From their survey conducted in 2013, Darmody and Daly (2015) concluded that, in the Republic of Ireland, attitudes towards the Irish language from younger students could often be negative with many of them preferring other subjects like English and Maths (Darmody and Daly, 2015). Similarly, students in post-primary

education perceived Irish to be a difficult and pointless subject (Darmody and Daly, 2015). As they further point out, this attitude can detrimentally result in students solely viewing Irish as a school subject and as something they will leave behind once they leave education (Darmody and Daly, 2015). which is certainly not attainable if one were to hope for an Irish Language Revival. As Slatinská et al. (2017) appropriately states,

‘The Irish language is not just solely a teaching subject, but it is deemed as one of the substantial signs of national and cultural identity of the Irish nation’ (p.318).

Fortunately, however, the same 2013 survey conducted by Darmody and Daly (2015) also outlined that four-in-five adults agreed that the Irish language should be taught to all students as a subject in school. This is not a fluke as, similarly, surveyed university students share the same opinion. According to a publication by the Union of Students Ireland (USI), over two-thirds of the Irish university population believe Irish should remain compulsory in second-level education (USI, 2021), and a further 41 percent of students believed themselves to be somewhat fluent after their Leaving Certificate (USI, 2021). These results show that a significant number of students have confidence in a revival of the Irish language. More importantly, from these findings, it seems like older generations have more esteem for the Irish language than the younger students that are required to study it.

2.4 Language teaching and learning methods

As Chamot et al. (1999) describes, a learning or teaching ‘strategy’ is, typically, a combination of mental procedures that assist the teaching or learning and that are sometimes used in conjunction with clear activities (Chamot et al., 1999). The strategies and methods discussed in this literature review are the immersive approach, flipped classroom and the use of ICT to aid student interaction.

2.4.1 The immersive approach to language teaching

There are 76 *Gaelcholáistí* in Ireland (all-Irish speaking secondary schools), with only 29 of these situated in *Gaeltachts* (Irish speaking areas) (Gaeloideachas, 2024). Therefore, the students at

the other 47 all-Irish schools are experiencing what is referred to as an 'immersive education' in Irish, wherein they arrive to school, solely working in the target language and then they arrive home and speak English to their families and friends. In other words, the student is immersed in their second language (L2) rather than learning it through their first language (L1). This is a beneficial educational experience for any language learner. Dewey (1946) outlines in *Interaction and Transaction* that, due to the process of natural evolution, it is plausible to suggest that the knowledge of man is the outcome of the entire environment and interactions of the being (Dewey, Bentley, 1946). This method has been supported by language teachers for quite some time. Qualitative research conducted by Walker and Tedick (2000) included the voice of teachers when determining the efficacy of immersive education in language learning. In this study, all teachers firmly supported the efficacy of L2 immersion (Walker and Tedick, 2000).

The efficacy of Irish immersion schools is undoubtedly visible as Irish language achievement in all-Irish schools, tends to be considerably higher than in either English-medium or Gaeltacht schools (Harris et al., 2006). Therefore, there is evidence to support the benefit of L2 immersion in the Irish language classroom.

2.4.2 The active learning and collaborative approach

As Hardan (2013) states, throughout the 21st century we have seen a major shift in responsibility in language learning wherein there is additional emphasis placed on the language learner and their learning rather than solely the teacher and their teaching (Hardan, 2013). The new Junior Cycle Framework in Ireland is one area where we have seen a major shift in responsibility from teacher-led instruction to student-centred learning. The new Junior Cycle framework places emphasis on developing key skills, along with meaningful learning and assessment. Additionally, there is a direct focus on active-learning and collaboration under this framework (Ireland, Department of Education and Skills, 2015).

In her study of implementing active learning strategies from the Junior Cycle Framework, Dunne (2021) created a collaborative class assessment task in the form of a table quiz). In her research, she noted the students' excitement in realising they had the support of peers in this activity however was keen to note that she would not have been able to inform students of this group assessment beforehand as it may have resulted in a lack of work put in (Dunne, 2021). Overall, Dunne (2021) deemed the active learning activity to be successful and beneficial in achieving learning intentions, allowing for social interaction and for overall retention of the content. Ultimately, the implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework may serve to benefit students' communicative competency and retention of the language with the collaborative and social aspects that are incorporated into the active learning.

2.4.3 Cross Curricular Links in language teaching

In her study of language teaching methods, Johansen (1999) describes the 'Classical' method of language teaching wherein the teacher speaks in L1 and primarily works with texts in L2. She also suggests the potential for links to be noted between both languages used this method which may aid student learning (Johansen, 1999, p.3). In a study conducted by Bruen and Kelly (2016) on the diverse methods of teaching a language, she found various opinions from students on the methods that benefitted them most. From their study, they suggested the success of cross-curricular links when language learning, particularly with other languages. She stated that the survey results outlined a positive attitude with activities that 'facilitated the identification of similarities and differences between groups of languages' (Bruen and Kelly, 2016, p.343). This is an interesting angle to look at, as students learning Irish may also benefit from comparing it to English or an MFL studied in their school. Although the students favoured having a connection with another language, Johansen (1999) describes this method as 'stubborn' and as having very little student interaction and speaking (p.3). Johansen (1999) further attributes the long-standing survival of this method in teaching to the minimal preparation required from the teacher. With that in mind, it is foreseeable that Bruen and Kelly (2016) also acknowledge the lower but still potent number of responses to their survey that

showed a negative attitude to these cross curricular links. Learners stated that the discussion of other languages brought confusion upon them and that they found it more beneficial to focus on 'one language at a time' (Bruen and Kelly, 2016). Overall, there can be benefits from using cross curricular links between languages, but it is a very intricate process and may not serve to benefit all students.

2.4.4 The Flipped Classroom approach

In another study, brought forth in this research by Batardière et al. (2023), the effectiveness of an inductive style of teaching came into judgement. In this study, researchers examined twelve Irish classes wherein students were taught grammar by being guided by their teacher and then were asked to 'construct the rules themselves'. This method of teaching and learning almost mirrors that of the commonly employed *flipped classroom* method. This reversed method of teaching showed positive effects with the results of a pretest, post-test, and another later post-test. The results of these tests showed a high increase in results from pre-test to post test and Batardière et al. describes the results as then 'levelling off' in the later post-test. This shows some potential in the reversed method of teaching grammar, and students in the study also showed enthusiasm towards the methods, however the results were not astounding (Batardière et al., 2023).

2.4.5 Interaction in the language classroom with Realistic Experience, Gamification, and the use of ICT

In his article, Yukselturk et al. (2018) suggests that the key to efficient language learning is engaging in real-life experience as it gives way to interaction. He suggests that the traditional methods of language teaching, i.e. focusing on grammar and reading, risk ignorance to communicative skills such as listening and speaking (Yukselturk et al., 2018). In this article, Yukselturk et al. (2018) directs their attention to the gamification of language learning. Yukselturk et al. (2018) argue that gamification, particularly technology-based games, tend to focus on the communicative and functional parts of the language and aid student motivation

(Yukselturk et al., 2018). Yukselturk et al. (2018) further argue that gamification allows for contextual learning and interaction between learners. As pointed out earlier in the research, interaction between learners is an important aspect of any education, according to Dewey (Dewey, Bentley, 1946). As DePietro (2013) states, the use of technology in a classroom allows for more interaction than a traditional 'lecture' style of teaching as the consumption of information from technology allows the student to read it, 'digest it, react to it, and *interact* with it' rather than the student taking notes in class as study material (DePietro, 2013, p.27). It is evident from this literature that realistic experience, gamification, and the use of ICT give rise to valuable interaction in the language classroom which is conducive to the communicative competence of the learner.

2.5 Conclusion

Although Irish is a minority language, it is still Ireland's first and primary official language. The Irish language revival seems to be slowly coming forth, with adults and university students holding appreciation for the place of Irish as a compulsory subject in the education system. However, as the Department of Education has suggested, experience and methods contribute to the attitudes of Irish language learners. Teaching methods that are evaluated under a positive light in this literature review are the flipped classroom method, cross curricular links, gamification and the use of ICT.

Having completed this review of literature regarding Irish language education, this research has been opened to questions such as:

Can the experience of an Irish language learner affect their attitude towards learning the Irish language, as suggested by the Junior Cycle Specification?

According to Irish student experience and opinion, what are the most effective teaching approaches used in Irish teaching Irish in Post-Primary classrooms?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research questions for this dissertation were created through personal observations in Irish language education as well as reviewing the literature provided above. This chapter outlines the methodologies used for this research along with a justification for these methods. Ethical considerations are further addressed in this chapter and exemplify compliance with ethical guidelines as set out by Hibernia College.

3.2 Research Paradigm

In the commencement of this research, the paradigms that came under evaluation were Interpretivism and Positivism. Ultimately a positivist paradigm underpinned the approach to this investigation as it aligned mostly with the epistemology of the researcher along with the objectives driving the research.

Interpretivism would be useful when examining cultures and situations and was developed in response to positivism (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). It allows for subjectivity, however, this research aimed to gain a broad, objective, scope of Irish language learner experience, henceforth this paradigm was deemed unfavourable. This research aimed to conduct a small-scale investigation into the incidence of teaching methods in Irish language classrooms and the response to incidence, which ultimately aligns it to the behaviourist stimulus-response associations. As Newman and Houchins (2018) elaborate, positivism is closely associated with behaviourism which deems it most suitable.

This investigation followed features of the positivist paradigm, as outlined by Cohen et al (2007), which are: Experience, Quantification, Discovery, and Approximation. Experience refers to starting point of any research endeavour (Cohen et al, 2007). In this research, experience resided in the researcher's personal experience in becoming an educator in the subject. The quantification feature is the measurement used for an appropriate mathematical analysis of

data which, in this instance, was the quantitative methods used to collect data. The discovery element is the stage in which patterns are identified among the analysis of data (Cohen et al., 2007). This can be seen later in the Discussion chapter. Each of these features of Positivism have allowed this research to take form and provide fruitful conclusions.

3.3 Methodology of Research

This study employs a quantitative approach that emanates from its positivist paradigm. Qualitative methodology came into evaluation in this investigation. As Atkinson (2017) deems, qualitative methodology as beneficial in gaining insight into the co-constructions of lived experiences. Although this is an insightful advantage, this research does not align with this benefit. This research aims to gain insight into the result of lived experiences, rather than the creation of them.

Quantitative methods are most favourable for this research due to the ability to collect large quantities of data to be analysed. Quantitative methods are useful in analysing how certain factors can affect a particular outcome by using numerical data. In this instance, quantitative data will be useful for determining the frequency of certain language learning experiences and the outcomes related to that frequency i.e. whether the participant felt motivated after their experience or not.

Another favourable aspect of the quantitative approach is the potential to standardise primary research which in turn increases the research's 'reliability, comparability, and precision of data' (Lakshman, 2000, p.370). The comparability element mentioned here is the aspect that is most important to this researcher as the aim of this research is to collect a sufficient quantity of data to compare and subsequently give insight to trends and experiences in Irish language education. Therefore, this approach is deemed valuable in this study.

Overall, quantitative methods are deemed the most appropriate method for this research as it supports the overall aims and implementation of the research.

3.4 Approach

This study employs a survey approach to research, this simply means, as defined by Check and Schutt (2011), it 'includes the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their response to questions' (Check and Schutt, 2011, p. 160). The questions themselves that are included in this survey are deemed quantitative as they are mainly using numerical data for the questioning with the use of Likert Scales employed in questioning, for example, regarding the participants motivation for future participation in Irish language education. However qualitative research strategies have been employed with the final question being an optional open-ended question regarding the additional information and opinions of the participants.

3.5 Research Methods

When designing a questionnaire, the researcher should examine their aims of research and sample size carefully. Cohen et al (2007) suggests that the larger the size of the sample in a research project, the more structured the questionnaire should be (Cohen et al., 2007, p.321). The questionnaire piloted in this study primarily employed the use of closed questioning and numerical data due to the adequate size of the sample. The use of closed questions will also allow for pattern analysis in the experiences of past and present students of Irish.

Likert scales have been employed in some of the questions in this research as they provide a vice in which participants can be expressive while the researcher is also able to correlate their responses to other responses regarding frequencies or patterns (Cohen et al., 2007). There are, of course, limitations to the Likert scale, as Bell (2014) has outlined. It is not a numerical line exactly, it does not give us a guideline or measure for the space in between each answer (Bell, 2014). In the questions included on this survey, participants are indeed limited to stating 'Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree' when it comes to their opinions of the Irish language. We cannot know for certain the exact extent to which they agree.

Nonetheless, even with this limitation considered, the Likert scale proves useful for the purpose of this research to provide quantitative numerical data. In this research, all respondents, past

and present language learners, were asked the same questions to maintain consistency across language learning experiences. This questionnaire was made available to all participants in an electronic format, using an online poll site, Google Forms.

The questionnaire was piloted initially to a smaller sample size of eight participants to decipher any discrepancies in the questions. Ultimately, there were no required changes identified regarding the questionnaire or sample. The questionnaire will be officially administered to a sample of teachers and students (approximately 40) of a non-denominational, mixed gendered post-primary school.

3.6 Sample and Participants

As Cohen (2007) suggests, the minimum number of cases in a sample should be 30 but the researcher must account for any variables that come into play with the sample. Categorical variables are present in this sample as a result of having both student and teacher participants. As a result, the sample size of the study was raised to 50 cases to ensure there are, at minimum, 40 worthwhile responses to the questionnaire.

The sampling method used in this research is a combination of purposive sampling method and convenience sampling. When commencing the research other types of sampling came under evaluation such as snowball sampling. However, as Parker et al (2019) suggests, snowball sampling has its limitations as the networking aspect of it may cause distorted results with participants potentially only arising from specific social groups, for example if they were all male (Parker et al., 2019). Although this is a useful method for qualitative research, this level of specification was not required in this research as an undistorted variety of participants was desired.

For the selection of student participants, purposive sampling will be used to ensure practical results by approaching students in Irish classes. As Campbell et al. (2020) states, the benefit of purposive sampling is that it is practical for matching the research objectives, which may

improve the accuracy of results. Additionally, to aid the diversity of results, convenience sampling strategy will be used to gather past Irish language students. The teaching staff of the same school will be approached to answer the same questionnaire, at random. After determining sampling methods, participants were identified. To reliably identify the participants in any study, the researcher must adhere strictly to inclusion criteria (Garg, 2016). In this study, the researcher employed inclusion criteria as follows:

- Participants must be above the age of 14 years old.
- A student or a teacher attending or working in second-level education.
- Have experience of the Irish Language in second-level education.

Having both students and teachers participating in the study gave valuable insight into educational methods as it addressed people regularly attending an educational institution. Likewise, the researcher took caution regarding the authenticity of the study by employing exclusion criteria to omit any participants that were irrelevant to the study (Garg, 2016, p.642). The researcher examined the characteristics that could make a population ineligible for the study. In this case, the exclusion criteria omitted any students who did not have experience in studying the Irish language, and those under the age of 14.

3.7 Data Analysis

Before the commencement of any analysis in this study, it was important to screen the data, as Abulela and Harwell (2020) recommend. It is important to do so for the purpose of identifying outliers, irregularities or invalid responses (Abulela and Harwell, 2020). In this case, invalid responses may occur when a participant in the questionnaire does not take the study seriously. This could potentially be seen humorous or sarcastic questionnaire responses. The involvement of younger participants to this study poses a risk to invalid responses such as this, therefore the data requires thorough screening before analysis is commenced.

To begin to analyse data, it is important to account for the categories of your analysis to recognise the patterns that emerge within them (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009). It will be

beneficial in this research to begin by looking at the end product of the results first i.e. the motivation of the participant to continue learning or speaking Irish. In doing so, we can determine categories in the data as 'participants with positive motivation for the Irish language' and 'participants with negative motivation for the Irish language'. From there, the activities recalled from their experience will be analysed within each category and a potential causal relationship may be identified from the data. This potential causal relationship of methods and teaching activities with these two categories may help to determine or interpret the results of this questionnaire and offer some insight into which methods may be favourable.

3.8 Rigour

The rigour of this research lies in its the manner in which it maintains objectivity and reliability. Eisner (1993) states that without objectivity in research we chance falling into a 'bottomless pit of solipsism' (p.50). It is important to be objective in research to avoid the research being deemed subjective or unreliable. The purposive sampling method employed to gather participants allows for the research to be objective in its data. As Campbell (2020) states, purposive sampling aids the rigour of a study and the reliability of data and results in research. This is seen in this research through the objective purposive sampling of participants. The samples chosen will not focus on solely higher-level students, that already may be motivated in the language. Additionally, the context of a non-denominational, mix-gendered, school will permit a range of backgrounds amongst participants. The differing backgrounds and the varying levels of Irish language ability ensure that there is no bias in the results. This rigorous objectivity ascertains precision and reliability in results.

3.9 Limitations

Although the rigour of the study is prominent, there are limitations acknowledged in conducting this quantitative research. As this is a small-scale quantitative investigation, there is a lack of generalisability associated with it.

Additionally, while we can thoroughly examine the occurrence of teaching methods along with the motivations, or lack thereof, to reach suppositions about their efficacy, the researcher acknowledges that not all background information can be accounted for in quantitative research. Quantitative methodology is at a high risk for surface-level analysis as it cannot offer an in-depth understanding of the data, as Savela (2018) states. However, as this research aims to gather a broad scope of experience, and not individualised experience to acknowledge potentiality in teaching methods, this issue is not majorly concerning.

3.10 Ethical Issues

This research has received ethical approval from the Hibernia College Dublin Ethics Committee in adherence with the British Education Research Guidelines (BERA, 2018). As Cohen et al. (2007) states, distributing questionnaires will always be ‘an intrusion into the life of the respondent’ as it results in time taken out of their day to complete the questionnaire or an invasion of privacy (p.317). As Govil (2013) stresses, although there are detrimental risks in other fields of research, medical research for example, malpractice in educational research affects a larger amount of people as it can have a generational affect. Therefore, this research has examined all aspects of ethics for which it is responsible for.

As students are directly involved in this research, the researcher acknowledged the vulnerability that accompanies this (BERA, 2018, p.19). To ensure the safety of all participants, no research will be conducted without the school principal’s explicit written consent as can be seen in Appendix B. Additionally, consent forms will be distributed to all adult participants as seen in Appendix C. A separate consent form will be given to the parents and/or guardians of participants under the age of 18 as can be seen in Appendix D. Participants will be informed beforehand by the research information sheet, exemplified in Appendix E, that it is within the rights of the participant to withdraw consent at any time and will be reminded of this before the distribution of questionnaires. Participants will also be informed of the confidentiality of the research and that all names and information will remain anonymous, and that all data of their

questionnaire shall be stored on a secure, encrypted hard drive for three years after the research is completed.

Overall, the researcher will endeavour to carry out this educational study in a manner that would minimise any effects on participants and wider generations. In doing so, the researcher strictly conformed to the BERA, and Hibernia College data protection requirements.

3.11 Conclusion

In summation, this research has been shaped by a positivist paradigm. quantitative methods will be employed by the administration of a questions. The sample will be chosen using a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling, along with the inclusion and exclusion criteria employed. This will aid in reaching the desired, practical participants. This research is conducted in accordance with BERA Guidelines (2018) and adheres to a strict ethical code of conduct. The findings of this quantitative research will be outlined in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the findings of the questionnaire administered in this research. The chapter will focus on the recall of learning activities and teaching methods by participants and examine them under the scope of future motivation to continue Irish education. This chapter aims to outline recurring patterns in the recall of this information. The penultimate section of the chapter will also acknowledge the recommendations made by participants regarding learning activities and teaching methods.

4.2 Sample Information

The data for this research was collected within a non-denominational, mixed-gendered post-primary school. The school is located in a rural town, situated on the border of suburbs which results in a high variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The school is made up of approximately 750 students and 60 teaching staff.

The participants of the study are varied as the study aims to delve into the background of the participants as well as the current student experience in the language. The sample size in this study contains students from Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle classes (both Higher and Ordinary Level). The sample also contains adult participants that are teaching in the school to give insight to the experience of Irish language learners from the past. These participants were chosen at random with the gender distributed rather evenly, as seen below in *Table 1*, with 51.5 percent of participants being male, and 45 percent being female. One participant opted 'Prefer not to say' in the question.

Table 1: Demographic information regarding gender

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
MALE	21	52.5
FEMALE	18	45
NON-BINARY	0	0
PREFER NOT TO SAY	1	2.5
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	40	100

A demonstration of the distribution of ages can be seen below in *Table 2*. Due to the sample information stated above, we can assume that all participants below the age of 19 are current students of Irish and all participants above the age of 20 are past students of Irish.

Table 2: Demographic Information regarding age range.

AGE (YEARS)	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
12-15	13	32.5
16-19	5	12.5
20-30	14	35
30 AND ABOVE	8	20
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	40	100

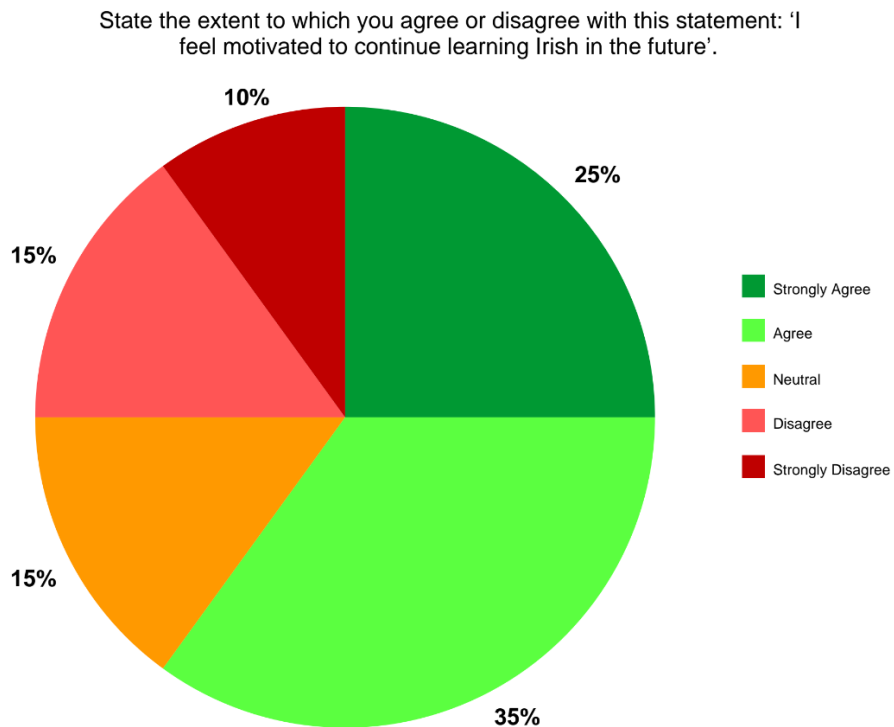
4.3 Attitudes and motivations in future Irish language learning and speaking

Various attitudes and comments regarding motivation arose as a result of this questionnaire. Question 15 and Question 16 of the questionnaire asked about the participants' motivation to continue interacting with the Irish language in the future. It is beneficial to direct focus on these questions first to begin an analysis of the attitude and motivation of the Irish language learners in this study. This will give insight into how these learners feel after experiencing Irish language education without directly asking 'Do/Did you like Irish in school?'. The reason for this is that

asking a direct question such as this is direct and may simply invoke prejudices for or against the subject.

In Question 16 of the questionnaire, participants are asked to agree or disagree with the statement 'I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future'. This question is valuable to this research as it may give insight to how participants feel about their experience of learning the language in second-level education. This will be beneficial in analysing the causal relationship between experience and motivation to determine methods that garner positive motivation. The results of this question can be seen in *Figure 1* below.

Figure 1: Participant's motivation to continue learning Irish in the future as per the responses to Question 16



Motivation triumphed in this question as 60 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, meaning that they felt motivated to continue learning the subject.

Participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed only accounted for 25 percent of the sample,

meaning that 25 percent of participants were not motivated to continue their Irish language education. This was an important question as it may correlate to the experience a participant had in Irish language class in school. This question will be referred to continually in this chapter to conceptualise favourable methods and activities.

For more information, the final section of the research offered participants an opportunity to add any additional comments about their Irish language experience. Regarding the question of motivation to continue learning Irish in the future, one participant stated,

'The Irish language is something I always wanted to be fluent in. When I was in school it did not really give me that opportunity, as it was heavily focused on writing essays, answering poetry etc.... This gave me a bad taste for Irish and I stopped enjoying it as a subject. In 6th year, when practicing oral exam work, it gave me a new interest and enjoyment for the subject. I undertook a 20-week spoken Irish course in UCC which I really enjoyed however I have forgotten a lot of what I have learned again as there is not enough opportunity to keep developing the language, unless you join these courses.'

This quote from participant 21 gives an authentic example of a student that once had the motivation and enjoyment of the language as a school subject but then lost it due to lack of resources and lack of interactivity in school. This is a small but potent response as it refers to an emphasis placed on writing and literature in second-level Irish language education.

4.4 Recall of Teaching Methods

Section five of the questionnaire contained two questions pertaining to teaching methods from Irish language education. These were:

'What methods do you remember/ recognise the most from your Irish language learning experience?'

'What methods have you found most useful when learning Irish?'

These questions contained optional answers wherein participants were able to choose multiple teaching methods to summarise their recall of Irish language experience. These methods were all explained in accessible terms, as follows:

Group learning (Splitting up into groups)

Individual learning (Completing tasks by yourself)

Inquiry-based learning (research projects etc.)

Technology-based learning (use of devices like computers or tablets in the classroom)

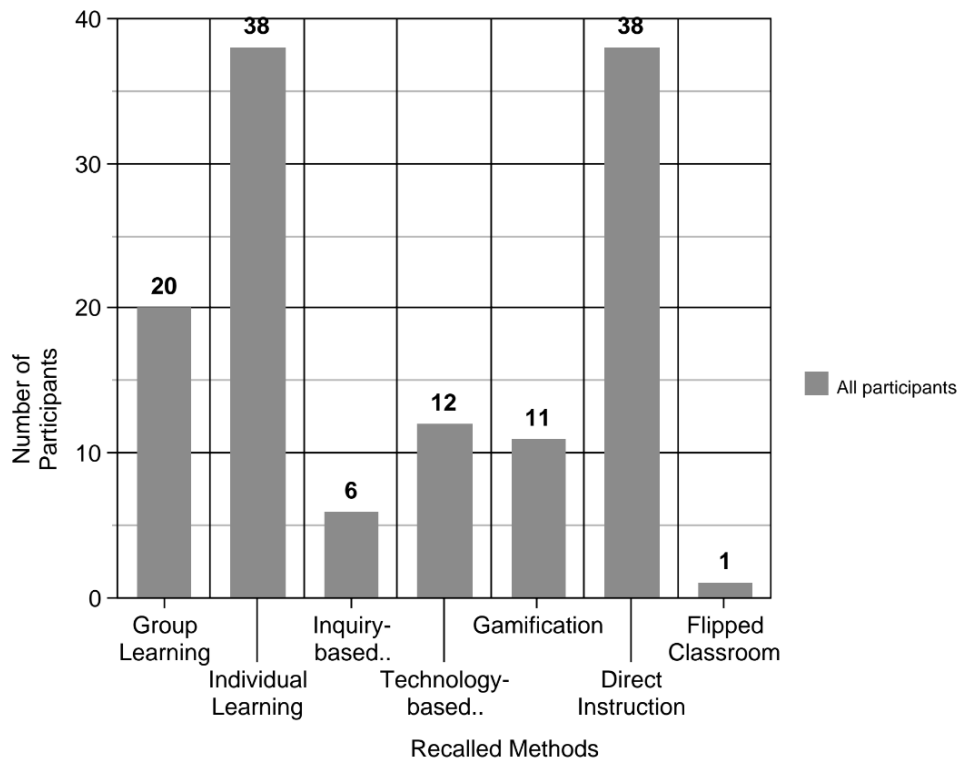
Gamification (Using game-like elements in learning, e.g. competition)

Direct Instruction (The teacher telling you all the information you need to know and not discovering information by yourself)

Flipped classroom (Where you read/watch the lesson beforehand, and you, the student, deliver the content in the form of a presentation/debate, instead of the teacher.)

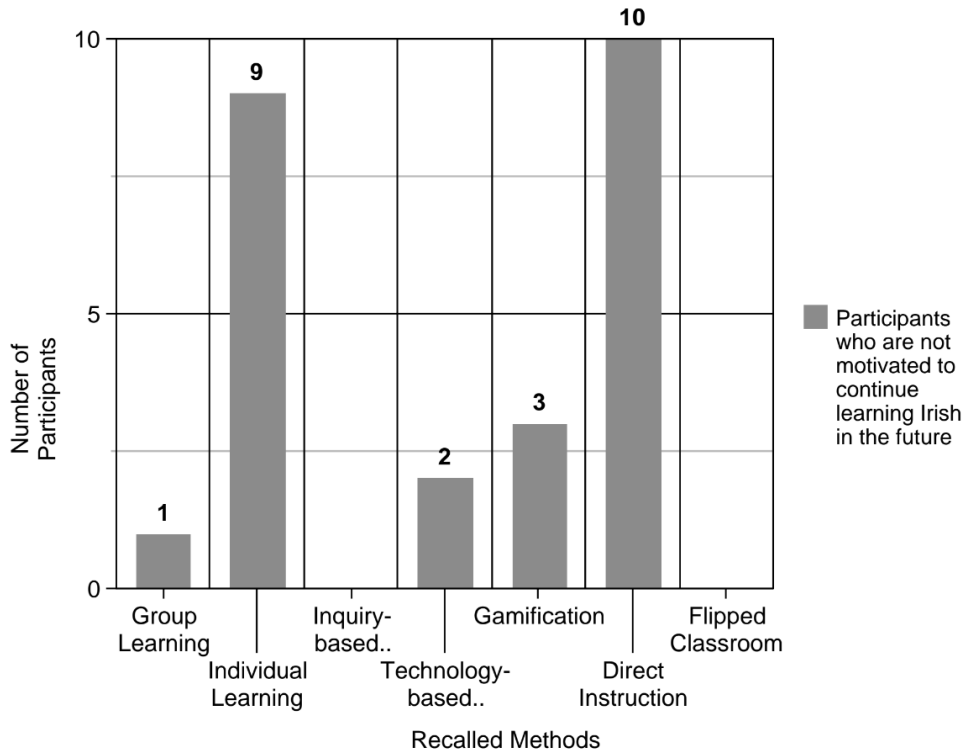
The data for the overall recall of teaching methods is demonstrated in *Figure 2*. This graph shows Individual Learning and Direct Instruction to be the most recalled methods with a resounding 38 out of 40 participants listing both of them as methods they remembered from school. Group learning was the second most frequent method listed with 50 percent of participants recalling group learning from their experience in Irish language education.

Figure 2: Overall recall of teaching methods by participants



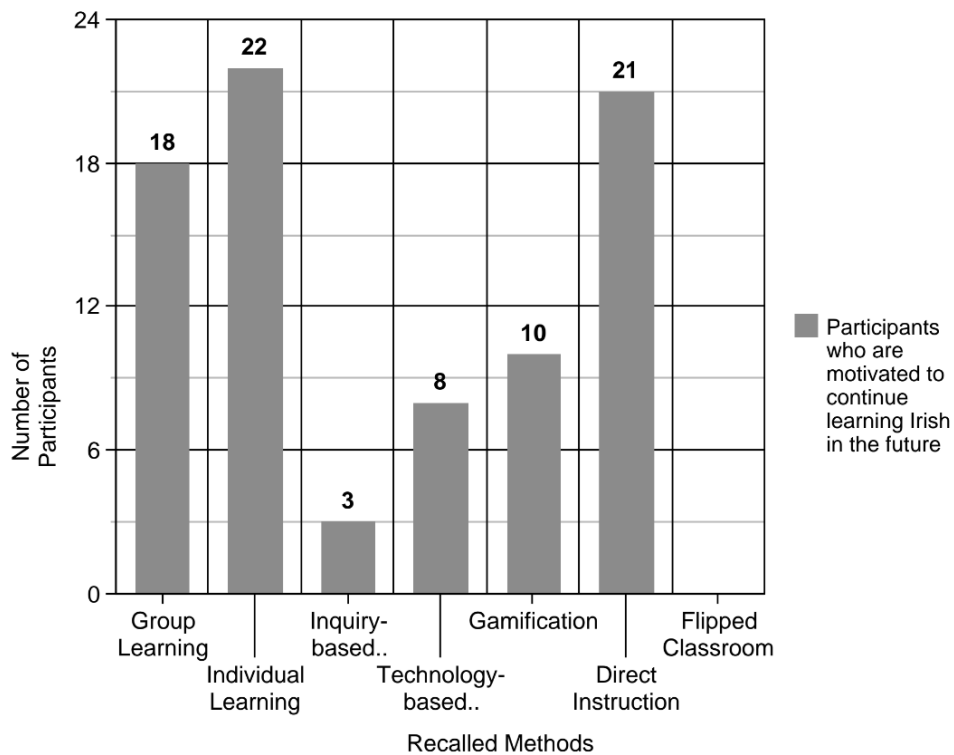
The ten participants who stated they were not motivated to continue learning the Irish language, as represented previously in *Figure 1*, are represented again in *Figure 3* with regard to the teaching methods recalled from their Irish language experience. These results showed a focus on direct instruction with 100 percent of participants who were unmotivated listing direct instruction as the method they recalled, and 90 percent of them listing individual learning. It should also be noted that there is a definitive lack of recall in the areas of group learning, inquiry-based learning, and flipped classroom among this subset of participants.

Figure 3: Participants who disagree/ strongly disagree with the statement 'I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future' and the methods they recalled from their Irish language experience



Conversely, the teaching methods recalled by participants who stated 'agree/strongly agree' to the statement 'I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future' differ considerably, as seen in *Figure 4 below*. Overall, it is clear that, regardless of motivation, the majority of participants in this research recalled Individual Learning and Direct Instruction. However, the results differ entirely regarding the recall of Group Learning and Gamification. Group learning was a method recalled by 75 percent of participants in the motivated subset and almost 42 percent recalled Gamification from their Irish language experience.

Figure 4: Participants who agree/ strongly agree with the statement 'I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future' and the methods they recalled from their Irish language experience



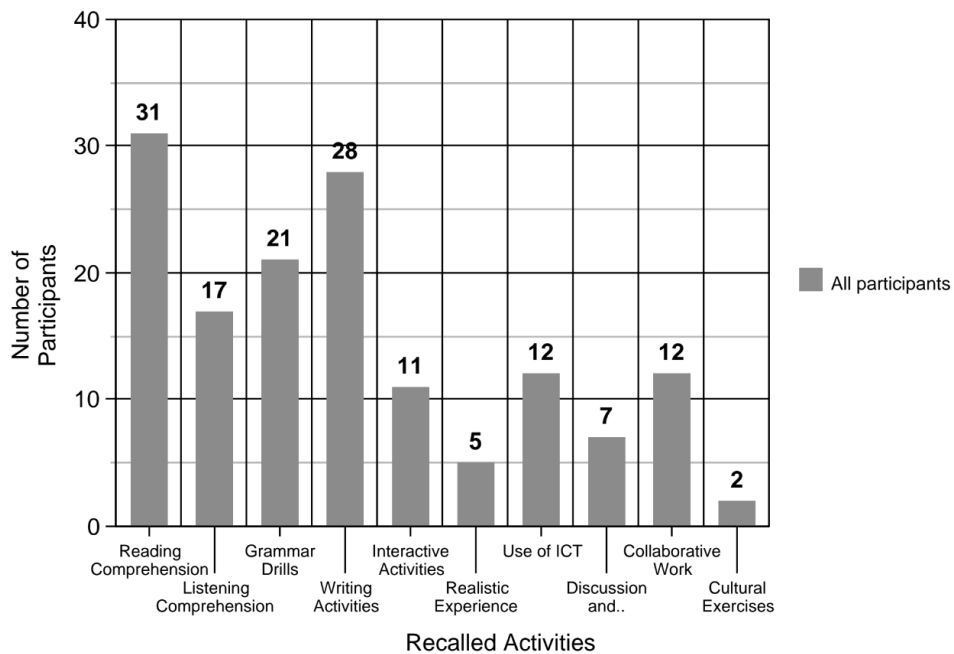
4.5 Recall of Learning Activities

In section five of the questionnaire, Teaching Methods and Approaches, participants were asked 'What activities do you remember/ recognise the most from your Irish language learning experience?'. For this question, participants were given ten options and were invited to choose as many activities as they could recall from their Irish language experience. Some activities listed contained additional information to aid understanding for the participant. They were listed as follows:

- Reading Comprehension
- Listening Comprehension
- Grammar Drills
- Writing Activities
- Interactive Activities
- Realistic Experience (such as asking, 'How are you?', and learning how to ask questions in the target language)
- Use of ICT (e.g. PowerPoint, Canva, Nearpod, Language Learning Apps etc.)
- Discussions and Debates
- Collaborative Work
- Cultural Exercises (Dancing, Singing, History)

The overall results of this question showed an emphasis on reading in Irish language classrooms with 77.5 percent of participants recalling Reading Comprehension as an activity used. Additionally, a focus on writing was seen with 70 percent of participants listing Writing Activities as something they recalled from their Irish language education experience. These results are demonstrated graphically below in *Figure 5*.

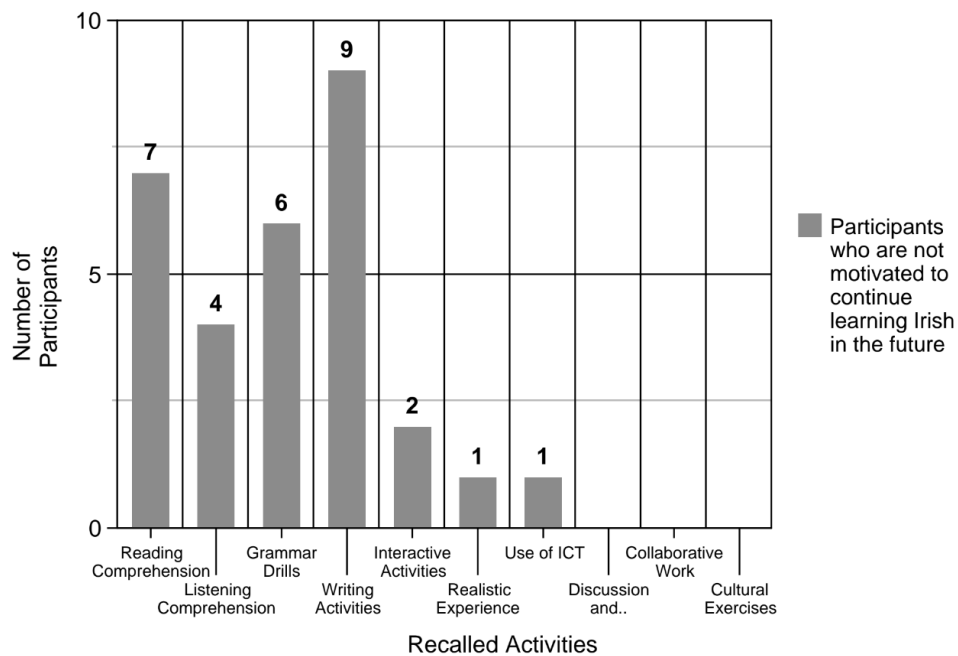
Figure 5: Overall recall of learning activities among participants



The activities recalled by the subset of participants that lack motivation to continue learning Irish are illustrated below in *Figure 6*. When examining the recall of activities listed by this

subset of participants, there is a notable lack of collaborative work, discussion, and cultural exercises. Additionally, a notable lack of realistic experience and use of ICT is present in their Irish language learning experience. The previously mentioned emphasis on writing is also prevalent in the unmotivated subset of participants, with 90 percent of these participants recorded writing as being present in their language classroom.

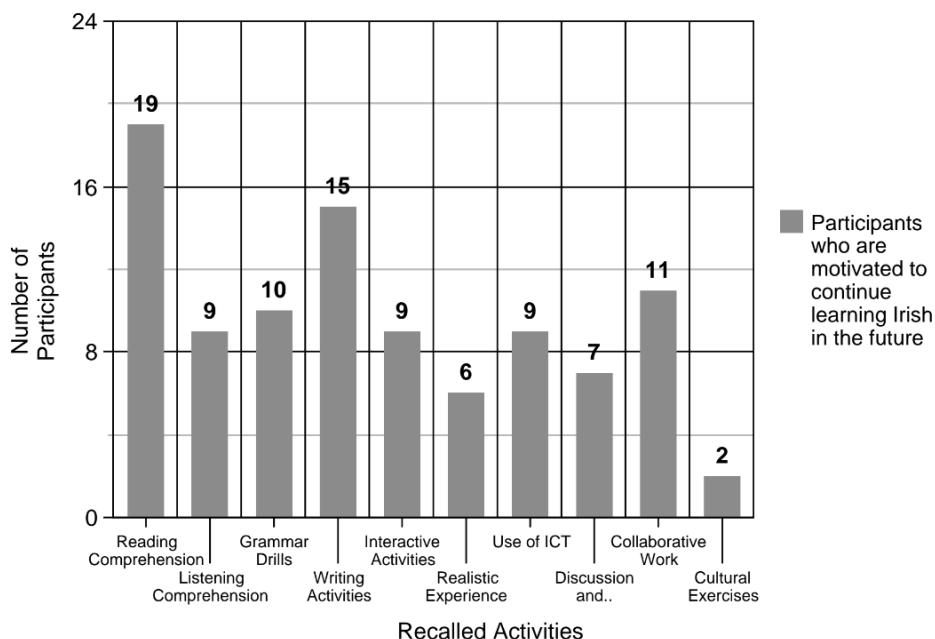
Figure 6: Participants who disagree/ strongly disagree with the statement 'I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future' and the learning activities they recalled from their Irish language experience



Participants who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future' are exemplified in *Figure 8* below. This subset showed a different perspective while also correlating with some of the trends seen in participants who lack motivation in learning Irish. The previous emphasis on reading and writing is matched in this subset, with 71 percent of participants listing reading comprehension and 63 percent of participants recalling writing activities from their experience. This corresponds the quote from Participant 21 referenced earlier in section 4.3. Overall, it can be noted that there is an emphasis on writing and reading in Irish language education.

However, in contrast to the unmotivated subset of participants studied, there is also a higher percentage of participants that have listed collaborative work as an activity that they recall. Collaborative work was an activity recalled by 45 percent of participants with motivation to continue learning Irish.

Figure 7: Participants who agree/ strongly agree with the statement ‘I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future’ and the learning activities they recalled from their Irish language experience

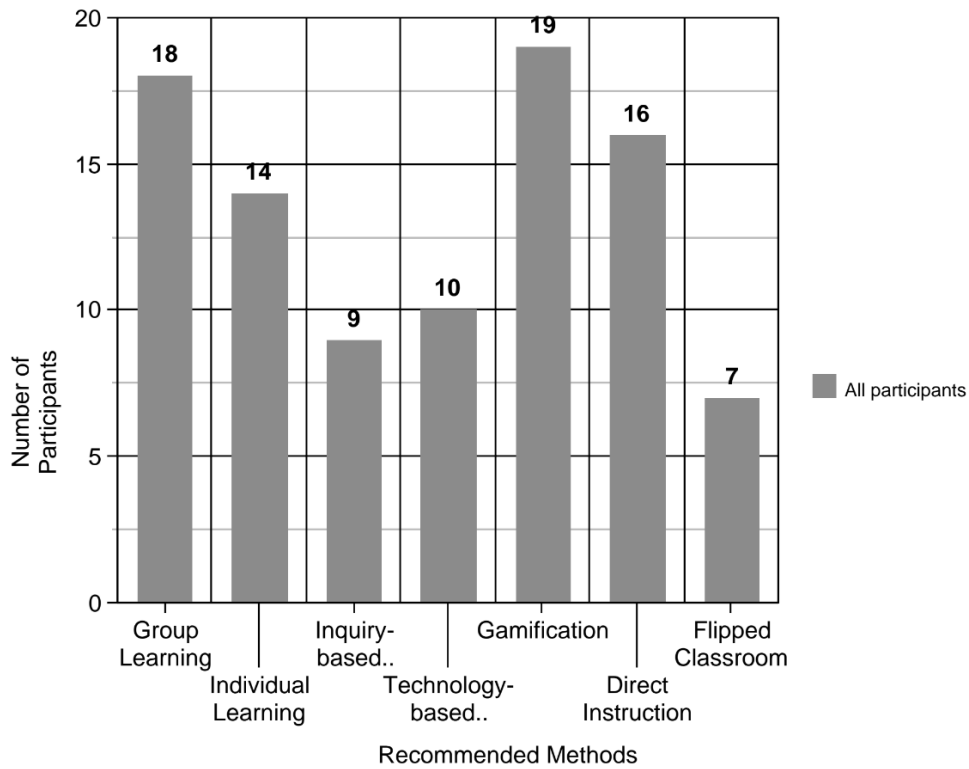


4.6 Recommended teaching methods and learning activities deemed by participants

In section 5 of the questionnaire, participants were also asked about the teaching methods and learning activities that they favoured most or that they saw potential in from their experience with the questions ‘What teaching methods do you/ have you found most effective when learning Irish?’ and ‘What learning activities do you/ have you found most effective when learning Irish?’. The methods participants were asked for were the exact same as the teaching methods included above. The results of this question saw 47.5 percent of participants recommend Gamification as a teaching method. Additionally, as seen in *Figure 8 below*, 45

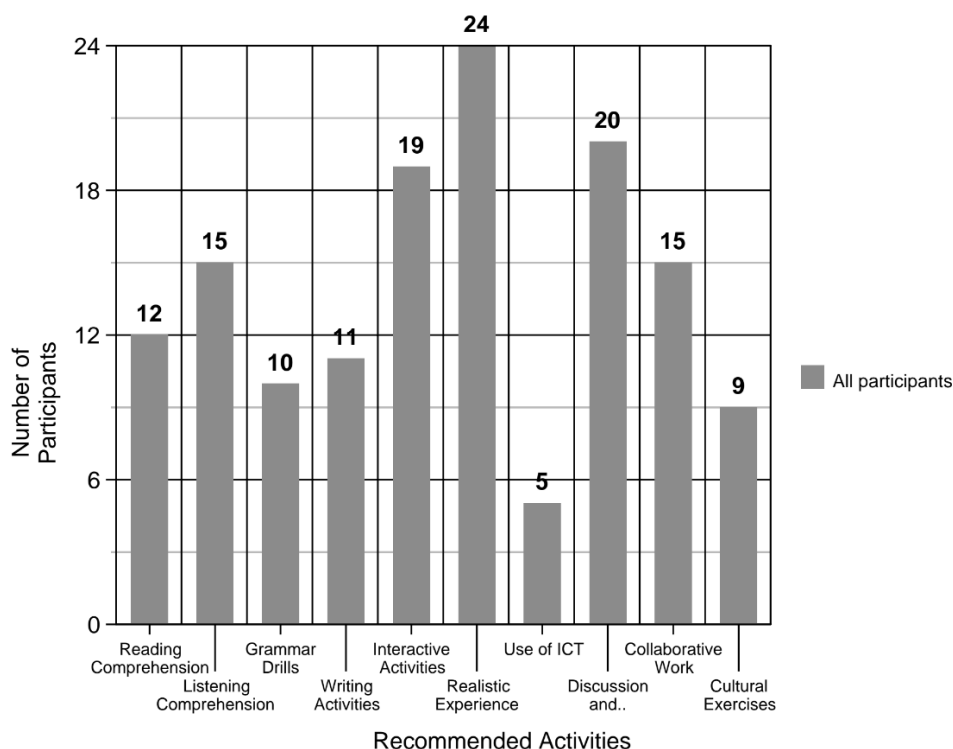
percent of participants listed Group Learning as an effective teaching method. This particular question received a high volume of interaction, and it should be noted also that flipped classroom lacked recommendation among participants. While noting this lack of acknowledgement for the flipped classroom method, it should also be considered that this method was not recalled by any participants in their past learning experience, and therefore, the lack of positive acknowledgement in this regard, may be due to the lack of experience in this method among participants.

Figure 8: Recommended Teaching Methods deemed by Participants



In *Figure 9* below, the recommended learning activities deemed by participants from Section 5 of the questionnaire are outlined. This graph shows that, when considering beneficial learning activities, 60 percent of participants listed Realistic Experience. As well as this, Discussion and Debates ranked highly in the participants' estimation with 50 percent of participants suggesting this learning activity. Surprisingly, there is a notable lack of ICT recommended in this section and it seems that the participants valued interaction and practicality over the use of technology.

Figure 9: Recommended Learning Activities deemed by Participants



4.7 Conclusion

Notable occurrences in the findings of this research include the emphasis placed on reading and writing in Irish language classrooms; the higher incidence of collaborative, interactive and group learning approaches recalled by the motivated subset of participants; and the value placed on realistic experience by participants overall. The emphasis placed on reading and writing in Irish language classrooms has been drawn from *Figure 6* above and is noted as being prevalent in both the motivated and unmotivated subsets of participants. Interestingly, a higher incidence of group learning and collaborative learning approaches among participants that are motivated to continue learning the language is acknowledged from the examination *Figure 5* and *Figure 8* above. This result may suggest a benefit in the employment of these approaches in Irish language learning. On top of that, results allude to the benefit of employing real life experience

in the Irish language classroom as a high majority of participants recommended this activity, as illustrated from analysis of *Figure 10* above.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research has investigated how the experience of an Irish language learner may affect their motivation in learning the language and, in turn, uncover beneficial teaching methods from reviewing their experience. Findings from this investigation have indicated that certain methods and activities, such as collaborative work and gamification, foster positive outcomes for learners. This chapter aims to elaborate on these findings by analysing the questionnaire results in detail and revising the relevant literature from Chapter 2: Literature Review. Additionally, this research aimed to identify methods and activities that Irish language learners themselves deem effective and ineffective. According to the quantitative data collected, participants highly valued realistic experience, discussion and debates, interactive activities and gamification. Curiously, the use of ICT was deemed the least effective by participants. Each of these teaching methods and learning activities will be investigated in detail in this chapter, with reference to the questionnaire and relevant literature referred to in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

5.2 The overall emphasis on Writing, Reading and Grammar in Irish language Classrooms

As described in Chapter 2, the Junior Cycle framework places emphasis on the communicative skills of language learning, which include: listening, reading, writing, spoken production and spoken interaction (Department of Education, 2023). The quantitative results of this research allude to an overall emphasis placed on writing and reading in Irish language classrooms in Ireland. When reviewing the recall of activities amongst all participants of the questionnaire, it is noted that 77.5 percent of participants listed reading comprehension and 70 percent listed writing as activities in their Irish language classroom. Therefore, it is clear that the communicative aspects of writing and reading, as instructed in the Junior Cycle framework, are being targeted sufficiently in Irish language classrooms. The high volume of recall for these activities also underpins the traditional method of teaching described previously in Chapter 2, wherein there is a focus on grammar and reading (Yukselturk et al., 2018).

However, as outlined in Chapter 2, Yukselturk et al. (2018) suggests that this traditional method of teaching is inefficient in language learning as it may risk a lack of familiarity to the other communicative skills. In accordance with the judgement made by Yukselturk et al. (2018), the questionnaire shows 90 percent of the subset of participants that showed no motivation to study Irish in the future listed writing activities as an activity they recalled. This highly contrasts the subset of motivated participants in the questionnaire, as only 62.5 percent of the motivated subset recalled writing activities.

These results give insight into the way in which a participant's experience in the Irish language classroom may impact their motivation to continue learning the language as the pattern shows that the participants who lacked motivation majorly recalled writing from their experience. They ultimately suggest a lack of efficacy in focusing solely on writing when it comes to encouraging Irish language learning. However, when it comes to reading comprehension, the contrary is visible. 70 percent of the unmotivated subset of participants listed reading comprehension as an activity they recalled from experience, and 79 percent of the motivated participants listed it. This even result renders the research unable to determine a lack of efficacy in reading comprehension activities in the language classroom.

However, due to the pattern shown in the data regarding writing activities and in relation to the literature provided by Yukselturk et al (2018), it is suggested that writing should not be the sole focus of a language classroom as it may hinder the motivation of the learner and their development of communicative competence. Overall, these results suggest efficacy in adhering to the Junior Cycle framework when it comes to Irish language learning, as they outline a need to address the learners' communicative competency, with not only reading and writing, but listening and speaking as well. This will not only, benefit their communicative competency, but foster a positive outcome when learning the language.

5.3 The benefit of Collaborative Work and Group Learning in the Irish language classroom

As outlined in Chapter 2, collaborative work and active learning are central to the new Junior Cycle framework (Department of Education and Skills 2015). In Chapter 2, we reviewed the implementation of collaborative work in the Junior Cycle carried out by Dunne (2021). This collaborative experiment showed great success for Dunne, and it was deemed beneficial for retention and for developing a learner's social skills. The success of Dunne (2021) in this experiment mirrors the appeal of collaborative work seen in the questionnaire carried out in this research. The results of the questionnaire notably indicate the presence of collaborative work in the responses from positively motivated Irish learners and the lack thereof amongst negatively motivated Irish learners. To break it down, from *Figure 7*, it can be seen that 46 percent of learners that are motivated to learn continue learning Irish listed collaborative work as being an activity recalled from their Irish language experience. This highly contrasts that of non-motivated participants. Remarkably, in the case of Irish learners with no motivation to continue learning the language, there were no participants that recalled collaborative work from their experience.

The results of the recommendations of activities deemed by participants showed that only 37.5 percent of participants recommended collaboration in the Irish language classroom. However, 50 percent of participants suggested the use of discussion and debates, and 50 percent of participants suggested the use of group learning. Both of which can be incorporated into collaborative work.

The results from the motivated and non-motivated participants outlined above, along with the participants' recommendations corroborate that of Dunne's (2021) investigation of implementing collaborative learning. Ultimately, this analysis places value around collaboration indicates a potential benefit in collaborative work and group learning in the Irish language classroom.

5.4 Potential advantages associated with Gamification in the Irish language classroom

The potential advantage of gamification in Irish language learning is an area that has come to light in this research. In Chapter 2, it was outlined, with reference to Yukselturk et al. (2018), that gamification has the potential to aid the communicative competence of the learner. Additionally, Yukselturk et al. (2018) states that gamification in the language classroom aids student motivation. This is something that can now be corroborated from the quantitative results in this research. Gamification can be seen as an aid to student motivation from reviewing the participants that described themselves as being motivated to continue studying Irish. Amongst the subset of participants that were positively motivated to continue learning the Irish language, 42 percent of these motivated participants listed Gamification as a method they recalled from school. This contrasts that of the unmotivated subset of participants wherein only 30 percent of participants listed Gamification as a method they recalled from their Irish language learning experience. Additionally, gamification was the highest recommended teaching method deemed by participants receiving 47.5 percent of participants' approval in the question 'What teaching methods do you/ have you found most effective when learning Irish?'

With the quantitative data of this investigation viewed concurrently with the estimations of Yukselturk et al. (2018), gamification can be deemed a favourable instrument in in Irish language education.

5.5 Potential advantages associated with immersive education in the Irish language classroom

As pointed out earlier in Chapter 2: Literature Review, according to Dewey (1946), interaction between learners is an important element of education. Interaction in the target language, in the form of immersive educational experience, has been seen throughout this investigation as having potential value in the Irish language classroom. Previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the study conducted by Walker and Tedick (2000) was constructive as it incorporated teacher input when determining the efficacy of the immersive approach to language education. In this study, Walker and Tedick (2000) noted resounding support from all teachers with regard to L2

immersion. Furthermore, the efficacy of Irish immersion schools was clearly outlined above in Chapter 2, with the acknowledgement of the higher achievement levels in Irish language education in all-Irish schools in comparison to other post-primary schools (Harris et al., 2006). Each of these reports outline the potential benefit aligning with immersive education and the results of the questionnaire firmly support this review.

In the questionnaire distributed in this research, Realistic Experience refers to the student's ability to have a standard conversation in the target language and ask questions in the target language. These questions may be questions of clarification relevant to the classwork or natural conversational questioning. This type of questioning is one that is experienced in an immersive language environment wherein the entire class is conducted in the L2. In the quantitative data of this research, students showed an obvious preference for realistic experience in Irish language classroom activities. With reference to *Figure 8* above, there is a notable lack of realistic experience listed as an activity recalled from experience amongst participants that deemed themselves unmotivated to continue their Irish language education. As well as that, when considering effective learning activities, in regard of *Figure 9* above, realistic experience received the highest number of votes with 60 percent of participants listing it as a beneficial learning activity.

Realistic experience, particularly in the form of questioning, is conducive to an immersive educational experience. Ultimately, immersive education is deemed effective from this research with the teacher opinion seen in the study conducted by Walker and Tedick (2000), and the positive responses to immersion aligning activities by participants from this quantitative investigation.

5.6 Negative response corresponding with the use of ICT in the Irish language classroom

This investigation has led to some unforeseen results regarding the use of ICT in the Irish language classroom. Earlier, in Chapter 2 of this research, the benefit of using technology to allow for interaction was acknowledged. Depietro (2013) was referred to regarding his belief

that the use of technology in a classroom allows for more interaction than a traditional 'lecture' style of teaching as it allows for individual interaction with the material online. Additionally, it was noted that Yukselturk et al (2018) also favoured the use of technology in the implementation of gamification in the classroom.

It was, therefore, unexpected from the quantitative results that participants did not seem to favour the use of ICT in the Irish language classroom. Only 12 percent of participants valued the use of ICT with regard to effective learning activities in the Irish language classroom. Similarly, only 25 percent of participants favoured technology-based learning as an effective method employed in the Irish classroom. The fact that this result does not align with previous literature deems it worthy of further review and investigation. It may be beneficial to look at the types of technology employed in the language classroom individually to deem where success lies in the implementation of technology-based learning.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the correlation between Irish language learner motivation and the activities or methods they experienced in education has given us scope to the potential methods and activities that are beneficial in Irish language education. Potentially beneficial methods that were revealed are collaborative work, gamification, and language immersion while technology-based learning and sole emphasis on writing have come under scrutiny. In the following chapter, final conclusions will be drawn regarding teaching methods, recommendations and areas for further investigation.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter intends to summarise the findings of this research, as a whole, by determining favourable teaching methods in Irish language education that generate fruitful outcomes. The chapter will make final recommendations for future teaching practice in the Irish language classroom. Additionally, this conclusion will identify limitations of the study along with possible areas for further exploration.

6.2 Summary of Findings

This investigation has been successful in addressing the main research questions which were:

Can the experience of an Irish language learner affect their attitude towards learning the Irish language, as suggested by the Junior Cycle Specification?

According to Irish student experience and opinion, what are the most effective teaching approaches used in Irish teaching Irish in Post-Primary classrooms?

Through the use of a quantitative approach, the research questioned current and former Irish language learners regarding their attitude and experience of the language. Participants were divided into two subsets: participants who were motivated to continue their study of Irish and participants who were unmotivated to continue studying Irish. In doing so, the research uncovered effective teaching approaches in Irish language education.

It was found that, the majority of unmotivated participants majorly recalled writing activities from their Irish language experience which suggests that sole focus on writing may hinder the attitudes of the learner towards the Irish language, as well as their communicative competence as suggested by Yukselturk et al. (2018). Conversely, collaborative work and group learning

were valued the motivated subset of learners, which aligns with Dunne's (2021) findings. This indicates that these methods may foster positive outcomes in Irish language education.

Immersive education has been highly esteemed in this investigation, with positive responses from teachers reported from Walter and Tedick (2000), and the participants in this study. Finally, the results regarding the use of technology were most unexpected as participants showed a lack of esteem for the use of technology in the Irish language classroom. This contrasts with findings from both Yukselturk et al. (2018) and Depietro (2013). This discordance suggests an area for further investigation regarding the place of technology in the Irish language classroom.

6.3 Limitations and areas of further exploration.

Although this research has been successful in achieving its overall aims, there are some limitations to be acknowledged regarding the research findings.

Firstly, there are some limitations regarding the reliance on participants to recall favourable teaching methods from their experience. A participant may have experienced the most favourable teaching methods; however, they may simply have had bad experiences in school as a whole or have had a bad experience in the Irish language. Therefore, their responses may be negative or lacking in data. Similarly, a participant may state they have a lot of motivation to continue their Irish language education but received poor experience in it previously. Their motivation to continue learning Irish may simply arise from their personality or other academic or career goals. Although this limitation may be present in the research, it is important that participants were not analysed individually but rather under a broad lens so that a conclusion can be drawn from the sample, as a whole.

There were also limitations surrounding the area of ICT in the Irish language classroom from the results. The study did not examine all areas of ICT in detail, and it may be a potential cause for the disregard shown in the research by participants. This deems it a suitable area for further exploration.

6.4 Recommendations

Recommendations are drawn from the findings of this research regarding future practice in the Irish language classroom. The first recommendation is that Irish language teachers should reap the benefits associated with the Junior Cycle framework, as it focuses on the communicative competence of the learner through the implementation of collaborative learning, group learning, and interaction. All of which have been deemed beneficial in this research.

Additionally, an Irish language teacher should endeavour to incorporate realistic experience in the Irish language classroom by making the classroom an immersive educational environment. As this approach was highly regarded in this investigation.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation has achieved its aim as the findings and analysis have highlighted the ways in which the experience of an Irish language learner can affect their attitude towards learning the language. As a result, the research has also achieved its secondary aim of determining favourable teaching methods and approaches in Irish language education. The insights uncovered in this research include the benefits surrounding collaborative learning, gamification, and immersive experience, as well as pinpointing domains for further research in the area of the efficacy of technology in the Irish language classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire distributed to participants

An Investigation into the Role of Learning Experiences and Teaching Methods in Irish Language Education

Outline of research study:

This research will examine student experience in learning the Irish language from both past and present students of Irish education. Overall, this research aims to determine methods that have proven to be effective for past and present students of Irish in this regard. In conducting this research, the goal is that methods will be devised to motivate and engage students in learning the language.

What do I need you to do?

If you agree to participate, you will participate in this short questionnaire regarding your experience in Irish language education. Any information you provide about your own identity or that of the school will be anonymous and confidential.

Section 1: Demographics

Information about age and gender.

1. Please choose the appropriate group for your age:

Please circle the appropriate answer

- A. 12-15 years old
- B. 16- 19 years old
- C. 20 - 30 years old
- D. 30 and above

2. Please state your gender:

Please circle the appropriate answer.

- A. Male
- B. Female
- C. Non-binary
- D. Prefer not to say.

Section 2: Experience in Irish language education

In this section, you will be asked questions about your personal experience in Irish language learning, in second-level education.

1. How many years of experience do you have in learning Irish in second-level education?
Please circle the appropriate answer.
 - A. 1 year
 - B. 2 years
 - C. 3 years
 - D. 4 years
 - E. 5 years
 - F. 6 years
2. Have you ever used the Irish language outside of the classroom setting? (e.g. in the home, in sports, in travel, or socially?)
Please circle the appropriate answer.
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
3. Have you ever participated in extracurricular activities that gave you additional experience in the Irish Language?
Please circle the appropriate answer.
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

If yes, please specify: _____

Section 3: Enjoyment and Difficulties in Irish Language Learning

In this section, you will be asked about the enjoyment and difficulties you may have experienced in Irish language learning.

4. Using a scale from 1 – 5, please describe how challenging you found, or are finding the study of Irish. (with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult)
Please circle the appropriate answer.
 - A. 1
 - B. 2
 - C. 3
 - D. 4
 - E. 5
5. What aspects of Irish do you/ did you find most enjoyable and/or engaging?
Please circle the appropriate answer.

- A. Reading
 - B. Writing
 - C. Listening
 - D. Speaking
 - E. Working with Others
 - F. All of the Above
 - G. None
6. What aspects of Irish do you/ did you find most challenging and/or difficult?
Please circle the appropriate answer.
- A. Reading
 - B. Writing
 - C. Listening
 - D. Speaking
 - E. Working with Others
 - F. All of the Above
 - G. None

Section 4: Teaching Methods and Approaches

In this section, you will be asked about your preferred classroom experiences from Irish language learning.

7. How effective have you found a 'teacher-led' approach to Irish language learning?
This is when a teacher delivers all the information of the lesson, and you take down notes.
Please circle the appropriate answer.
- A. Not effective at all
 - B. Slightly effective
 - C. Moderately Effective
 - D. Very effective
 - E. Extremely effective
8. How effective have you found a 'student-led' approach to Irish language learning?
This is when a student does most of the work and a teacher is there to guide them when they need help.
Please circle the appropriate answer.
- A. Not effective at all
 - B. Slightly effective
 - C. Moderately effective
 - D. Very effective
 - E. Extremely effective

9. What methods do you remember/ recognise the most from your Irish language learning experience?

Please circle all appropriate answers

- A. Group learning (Splitting up into groups)
- B. Individual learning (Completing tasks by yourself)
- C. Inquiry-based learning (research projects etc.)
- D. Technology-based learning (use of devices like computers or tablets in the classroom)
- E. Gamification (Using game-like elements in learning like competition etc.)
- F. Direct Instruction (The teacher telling you all the information you need to know and not discovering information by yourself)
- G. Flipped classroom (Where you read/watch the lesson beforehand, and you, the student, deliver the content in the form of a presentation/debate, instead of the teacher.)
- H. Other. Please specify: _____

10. What activities do you remember/ recognise the most from your Irish language learning experience?

Please circle all appropriate answers

- A. Reading Comprehension
- B. Listening Comprehension
- C. Grammar Drills
- D. Writing Activities
- E. Interactive activities
- F. Realistic experience (such as asking, 'how are you?' and learning how to ask questions)
- G. Use of ICT (e.g. PowerPoint, Canva, Nearpod, Language Learning apps etc.)
- H. Discussion and debates
- I. Collaborative work
- J. Cultural exercises (Dancing, Singing, History)
- K. Other. Please specify: _____

11. What methods do you believe are most effective when learning Irish?

Please circle all appropriate answers

- A. Group learning (Splitting up into groups)
- B. Individual learning (Completing tasks by yourself)
- C. Inquiry-based learning (research projects etc.)
- D. Technology-based learning (use of devices like computers or tablets in the classroom)
- E. Gamification (Using game-like elements in learning like competition etc.)

- F. Direct Instruction (The teacher telling you all the information you need to know and not discovering information by yourself)
- G. Flipped classroom (Where you read/watch the lesson beforehand, and you, the student, deliver the content in the form of a presentation/debate, instead of the teacher.)
- H. Other. Please specify: _____

12. What activities do you believe are most effective when learning Irish?

Please circle all appropriate answers

- A. Reading Comprehension
- B. Listening Comprehension
- C. Grammar Drills
- D. Writing Activities
- E. Interactive activities
- F. Realistic experience (such as asking, 'how are you?' and learning how to ask questions)
- G. Use of ICT (e.g. PowerPoint, Canva, Nearpod, Language Learning apps etc.)
- H. Discussion and debates
- I. Collaborative work
- J. Cultural exercises (Dancing, Singing, History)
- K. Other. Please specify: _____

13. Have you, or your Irish class, ever set learning intentions/ aims for your learning?

Please circle the appropriate answer

- A. Yes
- B. No

14. If yes, have you found learning intentions to be beneficial?

Please circle the appropriate answer

- A. Yes
- B. No

Section 5: Motivation and your future with Irish

In this section, you will be asked about your future with the Irish language.

15. State the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement:

'I feel motivated to continue learning Irish in the future'.

Please circle the appropriate answer.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree

- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly disagree.

16. State the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement:

'I feel motivated to make an effort speak Irish in the future'.

Please circle the appropriate answer.

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly disagree.

Section 6: Optional Question

17. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience learning Irish?

Please specify in the box below.

Appendix B: Consent form to Principal of the school

[Redacted]

16th March 2024

Dear [Redacted],

As part of my Professional Masters in Post-Primary Education with Hibernia College, I am researching the experiences of past and present Irish language students in Ireland. The title of the research project is 'An investigation into the evolution and experiences of Irish language learners in Ireland.' In examining this area, this research aims to determine favourable teaching methods and techniques that may encourage positive responses in Irish language learning. The experiences of both past students of the Irish language and present students of Irish language learning will provide valuable information of the methods that encourage an esteem for the language.

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 distribute a questionnaire among past and present students of Irish language learning, which can be found in teaching staff and in your Irish classes. Please find enclosed for your perusal, a copy of the information and consent forms. Only those respondents who return a signed copy of the consent form will be purposely selected to take part in the study. Any data gathering will strictly be underpinned by the school's ethical code of conduct. 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. All data will be securely held in an encrypted folder for three years, in line with Hibernia College Research Ethics guidelines and the Hibernia College Privacy Policy. 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: [Redacted]

Mobile: [Redacted]

Email: [Redacted]

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

Yours sincerely,
Emma Gilheany

Researcher's Signature: [Redacted]

Date: 8/4/24

Principal's Signature: [Redacted]

Date: 8/4/2024

Appendix C: Consent Form distributed to participants above the age of 18 years

Confirmation of Consent	
Researcher's name:	████████████████████
Organisation:	Hibernia College Dublin, Block B, The Merrion Centre, Merrion Rd, Dublin, D04 H2H4 (01) 6610168
Title of study:	An investigation into the evolution and experiences of Irish language learners in Ireland.
<p>Consent (to be completed by the participant)</p> <p><i>Please circle the answer that applies to you.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No – Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No – Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No – 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? Yes/No – Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No – Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No – 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. Yes/No 	
<p>Participant's name (in BLOCK CAPITALS) _____</p> <p>Signature: _____ Date: _____</p>	
<p>Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____</p>	

Appendix D: Consent form distributed to participants under the age of 18 years

Confirmation of Consent	
Researcher's name:	████████████████████
Organisation:	Hibernia College Dublin, Block B, The Merrion Centre, Merrion Rd, Dublin, D04 H2H4 (01) 6610168
Title of study:	An investigation into the evolution and experiences of Irish language learners in Ireland.
<p>Consent (to be completed by the participant)</p> <p><i>Please circle the answer that applies to you.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No – Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No – Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No – 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? Yes/No – Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No – Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No – 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. Yes/No 	
Participant's name (in BLOCK CAPITALS) _____	
Signed by Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____	
Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____	

Appendix E: Research Information Sheet as given to participants

Research Information Sheet	
Researcher	[REDACTED]
Organisation	Hibernia College Dublin, D04 H2H4 Tel.: (01) 6610168
Title of Study	An investigation into the evolution and experiences of Irish language learners in Ireland.
<p>Outline of research study:</p> <p>The Irish language has seen prominent decline since the 16th and 17th centuries. However, with the recent bill passed in Northern Ireland, The Identity and Language Act (2022), and with analysis of recent surveys conducted by Union of Students Ireland (USI) and Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), the language seems to be gaining traction in the 21st century. This research will examine student experience in learning the language from both past and present students of Irish. At present, it is seen that a broad portion of adults that are now on the outside of Irish language education have a high esteem for the language as a compulsory subject. The USI survey conducted in 2021, showed that two-thirds of university students saw benefits from the required element of Irish language education and encouraged its place in the education system. (USI, 2021, p.3) However, it is also important that students see Irish as more than just a language and that they can have experiences in the language that will not be left behind after they leave second-level education. Therefore, this research will examine the methods that have been proven effective for past and present students of Irish in this regard.</p> <p>Objectives of the project:</p> <p>The objectives of this research are to examine the evolution and experiences of Irish language learners in Ireland. Through using the history and experience of Irish language education, this research aims to determine favourable teaching methods and techniques to encourage positive responses to Irish language learning. In doing this research, the goal is that methods will be devised to encourage future students that Irish is not solely a school subject, but a cultural aspect of our heritage.</p> <p>What would I need you to do?</p> <p>Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. This research project has received ethical approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you agree to participate, you will participate in a short questionnaire regarding your experience in Irish language education. Any information you provide about your own identity or that of the school will be anonymous and confidential. Statistics from the questionnaire may be used and may also be published in the research however your name and the name of the school will not be published. This data will be stored securely in an encrypted folder for three years after data collection in line with Hibernia College's privacy policy. This research will be used in a publication of a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin. You are entitled to request a copy of your personal data. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.</p> <p>What is the purpose of this research?</p> <p>The purpose of the research is to complete a small-scale study into Irish language education and experience, which forms part of the final year of the Professional Master of Education (Post-Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin.</p>	

Appendix F: Sample of returned consent form

Confirmation of Consent	
Researcher's name:	[Redacted]
Organisation:	Hibernia College Dublin, Block B, The Merrion Centre, Merrion Rd, Dublin, D04 H2H4 (01) 6610168
Title of study:	An investigation into the evolution and experiences of Irish language learners in Ireland.
<p>Consent (to be completed by the participant) Please circle the answer that applies to you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No - Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No - Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No - 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? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No - Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No - Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No - 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. <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes / <input type="radio"/> No 	
<p>Participant's name (in BLOCK CAPITALS) [Redacted]</p>	
Parent/ Guardian Signature: [Redacted]	Date: 24/4/24
Researcher's signature: [Redacted]	Date: 8/4/24