

Abstract

This research project will explore what the benefits and limitations are reading with and to early years children from two early years settings in the same local authority. To determine the benefits and limitations and to gain a deeper understanding of the topic, additional study will be examined for further understanding. The participants will be a part of a small sample comprised of ten children and a teacher from each setting using purposive sampling. A mixed method approach will be used to conduct the ethnographic research, which will include observing the children as they listen and participate in the reading session, interviewing the teacher to gain the teacher's perspective and sending out questionnaires to parents or carers of the participating children. To assure the research project's validity and reliability, triangulation will be used. The benefits and limitations of reading to and with children will be assessed next based on the research findings. The research project will be planned and carried out with the ethical consideration outlined by British Educational Research Association (BERA) and Ethical Research Involving children (ERIC) with regards to gaining consent/assent from participants, information sheets will be provided with a full explanation of the research topic being conducted and what will be required of them. The researcher will be transparent and will gain voluntary informed consent. The participants will be ensured that the information will be gathered, stored, and safeguarded in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Literature Review

The purpose of this research project is to determine what the impact of reading with and to early years children in school and with parents and to explore the potential benefits. This will be carried out in two different early years settings within the same local authority in South Wales.

In the study undertaken by Lee, B.Y., (2016) the findings show that books are valued as important objects by children and children choose to read for enjoyment and to fulfil own's curiosity this is reflected in Piaget' theory as cited in Stevens-Fulbrook (2020), where reading and language acquisition is gathered by sensory and motor information, also by reading and repetition children learn to remember stories and words. Fletcher and Finch (2015) and High *et al.*, (2014) both agree that reading

with children gives access to books, illustrations and written language that is rich in vocabulary.

The New Curriculum for Wales encourages settings to support children by sharing books and stories with one another. This can help inspire children to develop a love of reading by supporting individually or in a small group. Other reading materials such as digital e-books are also considered important (Welsh Government, 2022). Korat, Shamir and Segal-Drori (2014) and Wasik, Hindman and Snell (2016) agrees that reading good quality e-books with children also exposes them to new vocabulary and helps them develop language skills.

According to Kalogiannakis, Nirgianaki and Papadakis (2017) reading quality books to children encourages and ignites imagination and for it to be visualised as a mental picture making learning go further by scaffolding existing knowledge with new information this is demonstrated in Vygotsky's zone of proximal theory as cited in Stevens-Fulbrook (2020) where a child capacity is to learn new information with the assistance of a more knowledgeable person. When scaffolding is done well, a child can understand something that they otherwise would not have been able to comprehend.

Story reading aids children in developing theoretical and factual understanding according to Kelemen *et al.*, (2014) encouraging creativity, picture books according to Galvez, Santos and Dooly (2016) are also an attractive way of teaching children as it increases children's communication skills by encouraging discussion of what has been seen. However, Mutonyi (2016) argues that cultural resources such as anecdotes or proverbs can be utilised to support children's learning and understanding with the children's everyday lives.

The research carried out by Merga and Ledger (2018) and Kalb and Van Ours (2014) both found that reading aloud with children has links to improving reading and cognitive abilities. It can offer opportunities for increased language exposure which promotes language and vocabulary proficiency giving the children the confidence and the encouragement to communicate with others and a positive attitude towards learning. Hutton *et al.*, (2017) also agrees and states that reading aloud to children also fosters cognitive growth by stimulating the brain regions involved in mental imagery and story comprehension. However, Merga and Ledger (2018) study also

highlighted that reading aloud can be time consuming, physically tiring and may not be beneficial if the child shows lack of interest in the book, story or the activity itself.

The research by Canfield *et al.*, (2020) and Merga (2017) both found that reading with children fosters parent-child relationships and predicts parenting traits like sensitivity, warmth and lowers parental stress levels as well as harsh parenting. It also highlighted that children discovered that reading offered more than just a chance to learn, it also gave to chance to interact with parents on a personal level.

Reading aloud to children has a social benefit, it gives parents and children a vital opportunity for a more focused conversation and can help parents encourage the child to engage with texts more deeply Merga and Ledger (2018). However, a study by Hamilton, Thomas and Snowling (2021) highlighted that if a parent has dyslexia or any other language disorders this could be a barrier to a parent-child interacting as the words and story is unfamiliar and struggle to pronounce the words correctly, this means the child hears the pronunciation incorrectly. A discussion what the meaning of the pictures on the book may occur rather than reading the words of the story. The study by Myers and Ankrum (2018) also agrees it may delay development if there are any language disorders. Children may benefit from repeated exposure to books and words.

Methodological considerations

Before any research can take place according to Creswell (2014) a meeting must be organised with the chosen settings. Consent must be received from the person in charge and an agreement of timescale and what the research will include need to be agreed and discussed in depth. There must be total transparency between the researcher and with all the people working at the settings and attending the settings. It is important to choose an appropriate sample when carrying out a research project. Choosing the appropriate quantity of participants is also key to managing the collection of data. (Kumar, 2019).

The chosen participants for this research project are, twenty, two-year-old children, ten children from each of the two different settings within the same local authority. The two settings were chosen for convenient reasons, both close together and within

driving distance from the researcher's home. This will probability sampling as the researcher will know who will be observed (Creswell, 2014). The reasoning for a small amount is to gain a more thorough comprehension of the results collected (Kumar, 2019). This age group was also chosen because early years children are naturally inquisitive, enjoy the individual attention and to satisfy adults for praise (Mcdonald, 2019). The sample will also include parents of the participating children and the practitioners of the settings.

Once the researcher has received the consents needed from the settings, letters of consent along with an age appropriate information sheet will be sent out to all parents or carers of participating children, with an explanation of what the aims of the research will be and how the data will be collected, before the research takes place with verbal assent obtain from each child before each research session (ERIC, 2023).

The research project will be conducted over a period of three months. The researcher will spend the first four weeks in each setting, allowing some time for the researcher to get familiar with the setting and all the participants and for the participants to get familiar with the researcher before the research will commence during the second month. Ethical consideration and children's feeling will be a priority. Hopefully, this will allow everybody to be at ease and comfortable when the research takes place. It is important that children feel safe in natural environment, and are more likely to be oneself and the data collected during the research will be more a reliable results (Keenan, Evans and Crowley, 2016).

This research project will be conducted using a mixed method research. Lambert (2019) explains this method involves the use of more than one approach to collect the data. In this research the mixed method will include qualitative in the form of interviewing the teachers and observing the children and quantitative in the form of questionnaires being sent out to parents. The researcher will observe the children once assent has been obtained from the children. Observations takes careful study by the researcher and frequently yields the most accurate result despite taking a lot of time and effort (Newbury, 2014). Interviewing is simpler but has the drawback of potential for dishonest responses from participants.

The best method for conducting qualitative research is through interviews since they enable clarification, comprehension and investigation into beliefs, actions, and experiences and to achieve the best detailed information interview questions will be open-ended to gain as much data as possible (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). Kumar (2019) agrees but also states that although interviewing is simpler it has the drawback of the potential for dishonest responses from participants.

The researcher will be present during the reading session at both settings and when observing written notes will be taken, noting what the children's interactions, expressions, actions, and behaviours are during the reading sessions.

A discussion will take place prior to the research with the practitioner regarding the books that will be used. These will be used in both settings. The selection chosen will be age appropriate and guidance will be taken from The New Curriculum for Wales by fostering a love of books and tales in children through shared reading in small groups and maybe one on one for the best outcome (Welsh Government, 2022).

When observing the children, written notes will be taken either during or immediately after the observation. The researcher will collate all the written notes which will allow interpretation, supporting documentation and a more in-depth understanding from all the observations witnessed. Written notes are a qualitative approach to research. According to Coe, *et al.*, (2021) there may be some limitations to only one researcher observing, and it is the inability of observing all the children at the same time. There may be missed opportunities such as certain reaction or response or a child's state of mind. If a child is having a bad day the child may not want to engage in the activity how the child normally would, this would affect the outcome of the result. Another limitation could be researcher bias, due to the researcher's immersion in the group being observed and knowing what the aim of the research is there is a chance that the researcher's personal biases may skew the information gathered resulting in observer bias (Kumar, 2019). According to Newby (2014) the Hawthorne effect must be considered this is when participants' behaviour changes when aware of being watched or given special attention it could lead to increase in output in reaction of being observed, consequently, inadvertent distortion of the findings may occur. The halo effect also could be a limitation, this is a mental heuristic or a

shortcut that leads to rash conclusions, the researcher may acquire a general opinion after only considering one feature of the child's reaction (Newby, 2014).

The researcher will interview the practitioner separately, this will allow the researcher to compare the outcome of the written notes taken from the observations and what the practitioner's opinions and observations were. This information will be gathered through taking notes and voice recording. According to Newby (2014) this type of interviewing method is called semi-structured interviewing and it is a flexible interview style between the researcher and the participant through prepared set of questions. However, if the answer is open ended the researcher can ask further questions to obtain a more in-depth answer if needed. This will gain the opinion and the benefits the practitioner felt when reading to the children.

Questionnaires will be sent via Microsoft forms to the childrens' parents. it will include short and quick questions. According to (Lambert, 2019) this will be easier to analyse when the replies are received and they will be anonymous to the researcher, therefore confidentiality is paramount. However, (Walker and Solvason, 2014) states that there are some limitations to consider such as parents may not respond to the questionnaires as questionnaires can be time consuming, therefore consideration will have to be placed on the quality and the quantity of questions. Parents may lie and the responses may not be as in-depth as other methods. Parents need to be made aware that the responses received by the researcher will be confidential and are protected by The Data Protection Act 2018 and the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The information gathered will be used fairly, transparently, and lawfully and the way it will be processes and personal data stored.

A research method that was considered was video recording, however as stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) this type of method may raise concerns regarding privacy, informed consent, potential harm, or distress to the participating children. Video recording may only capture a specific moment in time and may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the children's behaviour, emotions, or interactions away from the camera. The presence of a video camera can influence the behaviour of children and the researcher, potentially altering the natural interactions. The awareness of being recorded may lead to self-consciousness or

change of behaviour, which can affect the validity of the data collected (Coe, *et al.* 2021).

Triangulation will be implemented in this research, it will examine the topic being studied by using a variety of sources, techniques, and viewpoints. It will improve the research's credibility, validity, and the reliability of the data gathered from many perspectives and the results must be compared. According to Creswell (2014) the use of triangulation in research also helps address the limitations and biases that may arise from relying solely on one method, data source, or perspectives. By integrating multiple viewpoints and evidence, researchers can strengthen the overall quality of their research and increase confidence in the validity and reliability of the data collected.

Ethical Considerations

According to Roberts-Holmes (2018) research ethics are moral standards that guide a researcher's conduct while conducting a research project. The researcher will implement the principles to help ensure the research is conducted in a responsible manner with a focus on protecting the rights, the welfare, and the dignity of all participants involved and the integrity of the research process.

The initial step would be to contact both settings, to discuss what the aim of the research project are and to ask if the setting would be interested in being involved. To gain consent a meeting will be arranged for the researcher to visit the settings in person to meet with the person in charge, with the parents, the potential participants and a discussion will take place regarding consent and any ethical issues in accordance with BERA (2018) and ERIC (2020).

The researcher will compile an information sheet to gain an informed consent from all participants, every component of the research will be outlined, the methods used, how the researcher will use the information and that the data collected will be secured by data protection. It is recommended by National Society for the prevention of cruelty to children (NSPCC) (2023) an age-appropriate information sheet is advised to be compiled by the researcher for the children involved, explaining what the research involves and what rights the children have throughout the research.

This is to prevent deceit or failing to notify participants of the researcher's activities. This will be sent with the consent forms to the parents or carers of the children to read.

Further consent will be needed from the children called assent, although the researcher will have received prior consent for the children from parents, it is advised by Kumar (2019) the researcher will need to obtain verbal assent from each child as they are not legally able to consent. According to University of Wales Trinity St David (UWSTD) (2022) it is important that all participants are made aware that as participants the option is there to withdraw from the research at any time, this is possible even with previous consent in place. The children participating are also informed by the researcher that the option is available to dissent from the research at any time (Walker and Solvason (2014).

Protecting the children and the well-being of the children, will always be at the forefront of the research. To ensure that all participating children and the well-being of the children are protected, it is crucial to consider the rights of the children when conducting research in compliance with The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 2023). Article 3 of the UNCRC emphasises that the child's best interests should always come first in all decision involving children. In terms of research, this means that the children's best interest always comes first and that any danger or harm to the child is minimised by putting in place suitable safeguards (BERA, 2018). In Article 12 of the UNCRC states that all children have the right to freely express their opinions in areas that concern them, hence it is essential that all children be able to participate in and be included in research. Excluding a child from the research has ethical repercussions (BERA, 2018).

It is important to consider how to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all involved, Christensen and James (2017) states that anonymity includes preserving people's identities, confidentiality involves protecting data from unauthorised access or disclosure. According to Wyse, *et al.*, (2017) it is crucial to remember that retaining confidentiality does not ensure complete privacy, especially when there are circumstances where disclosure to sensitive information such as child abuse or the researcher witnessing harmful behaviour which could cause risks to the participants or any other person. When appropriate, the researchers should seek advice from

legal and ethical experts and possible break the anonymity/confidentiality and divulge the information to the appropriate people (BERA, 2018).

According to ERIC (2020), protecting the privacy and the confidentiality of all participants, including the children entails a few factors being carefully considered. These include privacy in terms of how much information is gathered and stored in a way that is private to those involved, as well as privacy to the participants so they are anonymous. Both settings involved will have own protocols for safeguarding, therefore the researcher could adhere to those rules as needed (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2023).

The data collected from the observations will be written notes, responses from the questionnaires will be gathered together on Microsoft forms and the interviews will be recorded. To follow procedures according to The Data Protection Act 2018 the data will be securely saved on a university computer memory stick that is password protected and encrypted and all written notes will be locked away in a secured room (UWTSD, 2022). IT Governance (2019) states The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, controls and is in force to regulate how personal information is used by companies, schools, universities, and any establishments that hold any personal details of any person. It also safeguards a person's right to confidentiality, it is implemented in the United Kingdom through The Data Protection Act 2018 (BERA, 2018). In accordance with The General Data Protection Regulation 2018 participants have the right to view all data collected about them, and this information should be made available to them if they wish at any time (UWTSD, 2022).

Before the research is published upon completion the researcher's findings will be discussed with the participants and the children to make sure everyone is happy with the final draft and to give them a chance to talk about the data gathered during the research. It is important to follow the GDPR 2018 recommendations on when and how to properly dispose of the data (BERA, 2018). The researcher must destroy all participant contact information and data right away after the research project is finished. Confidential waste must be shredded and disposed in appropriate facilities in the university, and all recorded interviews must be deleted (UWSTD, 2022).

It is crucial to understand ways to lower any danger or risks that may arise during the research project. A participant may feel uncomfortable or experience emotional distress because of the researcher being present at the setting, this may lead to the session being disrupted. The researcher will ensure consent and assent is an on-going process. A discussion between the researcher and teacher may lead to rearranging the times or length of observations. The researcher will halt the observations immediately if any children show signs of withdrawal (Roberts-Holmes, 2018).

Another risk that may arise is the researcher may perceive as being dishonest or accused of improper behaviour about the way they interpreted the data. It is crucial for the researcher to be open, honest, and objective while conducting the research. It is important the researcher follows the guidelines set out in the Ethical Guidelines for educational research to minimise the risk (ERIC, 2023). If the researcher loses any data or recordings the researcher runs the danger of breaching confidentiality. This could lead to serious consequences for both the researcher and the university as the researcher is a student at the university. To ensure the data is stored properly, the researcher shall adhere to the Data Protection Act 2018 as previously specified in this portfolio and the ethical guidelines set out by the university.

The researcher and the University may suffer negative repercussions if any data or recordings collected are lost, this may lead to a breach of confidentiality the researcher will always follow the Data Protection Act 2018. The researcher will adhere to the university research ethical guidelines to avoid adverse publicity and negative publicity due to lost notes, sensitive data or confidentiality being broken. The university may suffer if the researcher fails to follow the rules set out by the university and the school or behaves improperly. To prevent this, the researcher will ensure that the person in charge of the setting informs the researcher of best practices and will discuss policies and procedures beforehand. This will be discussed at the initial meeting and throughout the research project if there are any changes to the guidelines, policies and procedures within the setting the research is being conducted (UWTSD, 2022).

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