Books, babies and bonding: the impact of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library on parental engagement in book-sharing and on child development from 0-5 years old.

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91553 words

Submitted to Swansea University

in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree

of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Swansea University   January 2022

A child

A book

A read

A chat.

This is the way

The mind grows.

Not with a test

But a tale.

Michael Rosen

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis investigates what parents and carers think about sharing books with their children from birth to 5 years of age. It explores parental views on the impact of receiving books gifted monthly from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and the academic impact of participation in the Imagination Library.

Sharing books with children from birth is widely believed to have a positive impact on many aspects of their development. A significant body of research correlates frequent early reading experiences with a wide range of positive cognitive and emotional outcomes.

This study uses a mixed-methods approach grounded in a realist paradigm to combine survey data, interviews and analysis of assessment data to explore the impact of receiving Imagination Library books. It also documents wider parental views about the value of early book-sharing. Phase 1 consisted of a national survey of parents of children aged 0-5 years old, recruiting families receiving Imagination Library books and those outside of the programme. Phase 2 compared the academic progress of children in North Lincolnshire who had participated in the Imagination Library programme for over 12 months with those who had not, using end of reception year assessments to quantify the reading and developmental gains made by children within the programme. Phase 3 surveyed parents in the same locality, to better understand what book-sharing looked like within the home, and Phase 4 consisted of three interviews with programme participants.

The findings of this research indicated a positive difference for families within the Imagination Library programme in reading frequency and in children's assessment scores at the age of 5. It also highlighted the parental focus on bonding as a key benefit of book-sharing for parents and for children. This study enhances the Imagination Library's conceptual model by redesigning it to include a wider focus on the emotional and family benefits of gifting books to children.

Declaration and Statements

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ███████████████████████

Date: 31/1/2022

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by in-text citations giving explicit references. A reference list is appended.

Signed ███████████████████

Date: 31/1/2022

Statement 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed ███████████████████

Date: 31/1/2022

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List of Acronyms

A Level – Advanced Level Qualification

APP – American Academy of Paediatrics

CAQDAS – Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software

CLL – Communication, Language and Literacy

DPIL – The Dolly Parton Imagination Library

ELG – Early Learning Goal

EPPE – Effective Provision of Preschool Education study

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

GLD – Good Level of Development

HLE – Home learning environment

KS1 – Key Stage 1

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

RCT – Randomised control trial

ROR – Reach Out and Read

RQ – Research question

SES – Socioeconomic status

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

The singer and philanthropist Dolly Parton grew up in a home where, despite her father's illiteracy and the family's financial constraints, knowledge and reading were valued. She decided to honour her father through the creation of a charity, The Dollywood Foundation. This charity is dedicated to inspiring children to love reading so that children can grow up in a home full of books. It aims to achieve this through the creation of a book-gifting programme: Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021a, p. 182). This thesis explores the impact of Dolly Parton's charity on parental involvement and engagement in sharing the gifted books with children in the United Kingdom.

Sharing books with young children is considered to be an important mechanism in developing literacy-related knowledge (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001) with the early years period being seen as a crucial time for engendering both literacy interest and skills. Early book reading has long been understood to correlate with later literacy achievements (Mol & Bus, 2011). By the late 1980s, home-based interventions focused on shared book reading had started to become prevalent as a means to support children who were perceived to be at risk of later academic challenges (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001) and to embed a culture of reading for enjoyment (Burnett et al., 2014).

Book-gifting programmes are broadly founded on three principles (Burnett et al., 2014): early reading experiences foster a love of reading that has later academic benefits (Clark & Rumbold, 2006), the involvement of a parent or carer enriches early literacy learning (Sylva et al., 2004) and book ownership correlates with literacy attainment (Clark & Poulton, 2011). The Imagination Library, discussed briefly in the following section, follows these principles to guide its work.

1.2   Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (known hereafter as the Imagination Library or DPIL) is a worldwide book-gifting programme that posts one book each month to registered children from birth until their fifth birthday. To date, over 160 million books have been gifted, and within the United Kingdom over 40,000 books are distributed each month to children free of charge to their families. The programme is funded by The Dollywood Foundation, which provides the infrastructure for selecting and posting books alongside meeting administrative expenses, in partnership with local affiliates such as community groups, charities, local authorities and schools, who meet the cost of the discounted books for all children within their designated locality.

The overarching aim of the Imagination Library is "to inspire a love of reading in the hearts of children everywhere" (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021a, p. xix). The organisation has constructed a logic model (Figure 7 p87) which focuses on kindergarten (reception year in the United Kingdom) literacy readiness as a long-term goal, achieved by increasing the quality and quantity of parent and child book-sharing experiences and enhancing the home literacy environment, emergent literacy skills as well as creating positive attitudes and interactions around book reading.

The Dollywood Foundation and Swansea University, funded this research project (see Section 5.7 for a discussion of the ethical implications of conducting funded research).

1.3   Aims of the research study

This thesis seeks to explore parental views, beliefs and practices regarding parents sharing books with their children and any impact of changes on these through receiving gifted books from the Imagination Library. I explore what is important to parents when they are sharing books with their child, what the impact of receiving Imagination Library books has on the parent and the child and whether participation in the programme changes parental beliefs and behaviours. The key methods employed in this thesis are online questionnaires for parents and a statistical examination of attainment data from the end of the reception year

of schooling. Bivariate analysis and binary logistic regressions are used to isolate the impact of the Imagination Library from other significant variables which affect early reading experiences when analysing the attainment data. The research questions, which are explained further in Chapter 4.0, are as follows:

1) **What is important to parents about reading with their child aged 0-5?**

2) **To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect:**
   i) **the quantity of daily book-sharing experiences?**
   ii) **children's early literacy development?**

3) **What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library books on:**
   i) **parental beliefs and practices when book-sharing?**
   ii) **children's experiences of books and book-sharing?**

1.4 Contribution to the field of study

Much of the research on book-sharing in general, and on book-gifting programmes in particular, focuses on outcomes that are led by a school-centric education agenda (Bus et al., 1995; de Bondt et al., 2020; Lindsay, 2010; Sénéchal & Young, 2008). This is the case even though book-gifting schemes often articulate alternate aims, such as inspiring "a love of reading in the hearts of children everywhere" (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021a, p. xix). Parental views, where sought, are often constrained by closed questioning or pre-framed potential responses. In this thesis, I seek to address this gap and to make an original contribution to the field by providing opportunities for parents to share their beliefs, views and practices in book-sharing and the impact they feel book-sharing has on them and their children. The research includes the views of over 5,000 parents on book-sharing with 0-5-year-olds in the United Kingdom, making this research the largest to date nationally.

Additionally, there is a significant body of literature concerning the value of book-sharing and early reading experiences but there is little focus on this practice in the first few months

of life. In this thesis, I establish parental views on the value of commencing book-sharing in the first few months of life as a foundation for future investigation into the empirical changes or benefits which may occur with this practice.

This thesis is also the largest study conducted to date on the Imagination Library's association with literacy outcomes, with over 7,800 children's attainment scores analysed. A key strength of this aspect of the research is that it was a census study, analysing the results for all children in one geographical area, over a period of four years.

1.5   Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2.0 defines book-sharing and the associated terms and concepts. Chapter 3.0 encompasses the literature review where the benefits of book-sharing and factors which impact the experience are discussed, along with an overview of the research on book-gifting schemes worldwide. Following the definition of the research questions in Chapter 4.0, Chapters 5.0 and 6.0 explore the methodology and methods respectively which frame and are employed in the study. Chapter 6.0, which describes the methods used, is broken down into four phases, each representing the different aspects of data collection which were utilised. This is followed by an overview of the descriptive findings from each phase in Chapter 7.0. Chapters 8.0 to 11.0 discuss the findings for each research question and draw on aspects from the relevant phases of the research using a mixed-methods approach that utilises qualitative and quantitative data in a pragmatic way to best serve the needs of each research question. Chapter 12.0 draws the discussion together, addressing the overall thesis title and making connections between the findings for the different research questions. Chapter 13.0 concludes with a reflection on the thesis journey and considerations for future research.

1.6   About the researcher

As parent, former teacher/headteacher and postnatal support worker, I have seen my own children and those in my care enjoying early experiences with books. When this research project was advertised, I was drawn to is as it encompassed many strands of my

professional and personal life experiences. I explore the impact of my personal experiences on the research and researcher positionality in Section 5.2, but it is important to initially state that I came to the research with a positive view of the potential benefits of book-sharing with babies and children through my lived experiences of this practice. I acknowledge the culturally embedded notion of reading with your child as a positive parenting action. The idea that what the nation desires for all children should be what a wise parent would desire for their own children (Tawney, 1931) is pertinent to the place of book-sharing within the UK parenting community and this expectation formed part of my own parenting journey. My position is one of intrinsic positive bias towards the content of the research. I addressed this bias through a focus on collecting free-text data from parents rather than researcher-led questioning, to minimise intrinsic bias within the study.

The data-gathering, analysis and writing up phases of this thesis took place during times of national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This impacted not only on the data-gathering itself, but also changed the nature of departmental, library and peer support available for the second and third years of my doctoral journey. Nevertheless, virtual and electronic support enabled the journey to be completed although participation in the wider academic community was restricted due to the reduced opportunities available for interdisciplinary working.

2.0 Understanding Book-Sharing

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the definitions of book-sharing and why I have adopted this term in the thesis. I consider who is involved in book-sharing interactions and the intentions of the participants when book-sharing. I look at what constitutes parental engagement in book-sharing and finish with a brief history of book-gifting programmes which utilise this mechanism to facilitate changes in early literacy outcomes.

2.2 What is book-sharing?

Book-sharing is the act of two or more people, often a parent and a child, sharing a book together. Interactions between an adult carer and a child focused on or mediated by a book, often called "joint parent-child reading" (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994 p. 246), can take many forms. Scarborough and Dobrich talk about reading aloud to preschool children, and this is often the main element or expectation when a parent sits with their preschool child and their chosen book. Within this research, a liberal definition of reading is favoured and, as such, 'shared reading', the common term within educational circles to describe child-adult-book interactions is not the most appropriate term for the behaviours I am exploring. I chose instead to use the term book-sharing as in the period from birth to 5 years of age, interactions between a child, an adult and a book can encompass a myriad of activities instead of, or alongside, text reading (Meyer et al., 1994). Parents may focus on:

- phonic instruction;
- direct reading of the text;
- storytelling around the text and/or picture cues;
- extra-textual talk relating the book to the situation; and
- experiences related to the child's wider life.

Early or pre-reading behaviours such as pointing and naming items in the text, holding a book or turning pages, and experiences with books made of cloth or card alongside those made of paper will all be included within the scope of the term 'book-sharing'.

At the heart of what is commonly called shared reading is a triad: the child, the parent or carer and the text – the book to be shared (Martinez & Roser, 1985); Van Kleeck (2003). Teale and Sulzby (1986a) described three categories of interaction – children exploring print, children observing adults modelling literacy behaviour and children interacting with the carer around the text. As this study considers experiences from birth, rather than only those of preschool children, these categories need to be widened and this illustrates where terminology of 'book-sharing' is more useful in this context than 'shared reading'. The first category of children exploring print can be expanded to include children exploring books as physical objects (mouthing, manipulating and focusing on books including cloth books). The second category of children observing adults modelling literacy behaviour could be made more explicit to include the habit-forming behaviours of sitting down with a book. The third category of children interacting with the carer around the text can be expanded to include all interactions with the carer, including those which are about the experience of book-sharing not just those that are focused on the text. All these interactions are defined as book-sharing within this research, although the term shared reading will be used where it is appropriate, for example due to it being the term specified or used by others or when it was directly used in a question to research participants.

2.3 Who is book-sharing?

2.3.1 Parents and carers

Although book-sharing experiences take place in many settings, such as school, home and childcare placements, books gifted by the Imagination Library are sent to the child's home, so this study focuses on the people who primarily reside in the child's home.
This is most often a parent (mother or father, biological or parental figure including foster carers), most frequently mothers (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Nichols, 2000; Nutbrown & Hannon, 2003), but this could also be a relative, an older sibling or an alloparent (an individual who is providing care but is not a relative) (Billings, 2009a).

Although there is a statistical likelihood that the parent book-sharing with their child self-identifies as a mother, the positive role that fathers can play in the home literacy

environment has been shown to influence educational attainment up to the age of 20 (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Morgan et al., 2009). The majority of fathers are involved in their child's literacy development (Morgan et al., 2009) but may, however, be less visible participants. There is some research to suggest that the likelihood of a father reading regularly with his child is linked to his own educational level, as it is with the mother (Morgan et al., 2009).

Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 includes in its definition of "parent" "any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person; any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person" (Education Act, 1996). Within this research I use the term 'parent' to refer any adult person with a duty or responsibility towards the child (Goodall, 2017), except where the gender of a specific carer is being referred to (mother, father). This inclusive approach is sited within the literature of parental engagement, as children within research have shown that the adults in the home who impact on their learning and development are not limited to simply biological parents (Adelman, 1992; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The term 'parent' within this research will be taken to mean "a biological, adoptive, step or foster parent, as well as another relative or other adult who interacts with the child around their learning" (Goodall, 2018, p. 223). This definition allows respondents to self-identify as parents and draws on the Education Act's spirit with particular reference to care regarding learning and development.

2.3.2   The child

The recipients of books from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library are children, and books are gifted from birth to the month of the child's fifth birthday. In this research, I refer to babies from 0-11 months as infants, 12-35 months as toddlers and 36-60 months as preschoolers, although children in the United Kingdom generally join school's reception classes in the academic year they turn 5 years of age, which could be any time between 49 and 60 months. The overarching term used for all these age groups will be 'child' or 'children' and should be understood to refer to the whole age range from 0-60 months. The division between 0-11 months and 12-35 months is novel within this field and addresses one of the

primary gaps in the field – the understanding of the impact of book-sharing within the first year of life. Thus the division between infants and toddlers is one which will create opportunities for detailed study of this less-studied age group within the field of early reading. The division at age 36 months is because this is the age at which children in England become eligible for free or subsidised nursery attendance to support their learning and development.

Book-sharing may be one way to meet several rights of the child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) including Article 28, the right to an education, Article 31, the right to relax to play and to take part in cultural activities. This research will also ensure that it complies with Article 12, having respect for the views of the child.

2.4   What is being shared?

While the development of technology means that the notion of reading has and is changing and must rightly take account of digital texts and literacies, this study focuses on children's books – physical, age-appropriate texts and how they are shared between the parent and the child. This includes cloth, board and paper books spanning fiction, non-fiction and picture books which may be gifted, owned by the child or family, or loaned from nurseries, schools or libraries.

Although the study is focused on considering the impact of Imagination Library books, a carefully curated selection of texts chosen by a panel of experts, the study does not ask respondents to differentiate between the books received as gifts and others in the household.

2.4.1   Imagination Library books

Imagination Library recipients receive a book each month which has been selected for their year group by a panel of educators, librarians and others experienced in working with families and early literacy who form the selection committee. The committee considers milestones in child development and related book features such as novelty elements

including flaps to lift, mirrors, or touch elements. When considering the diversity of books to be presented, the committee considers the variety of experiences - first concepts such as numbers, shapes, rhyming books, ethnic diversity, bright colours, non-fiction and information books, photographic and illustrated books and selections that include licensed characters - alongside trends in children's publishing (R. Todd, personal communication, 4th October, 2019).

2.5   Why do families share books?

Understanding how and why families read is key when planning reading interventions. There are many reasons why families share books; the experience may be child-initiated (Knowland & Formby, 2016), it may be to meet perceived educational aims (Thacker, 2014), to cement familial relationships (Hill et al., 2014) or to meet societal expectations around parenting (Auger et al., 2014).

Reading to your child, certainly in the English-speaking world, has been normalised as "good" parenting, part of the display of being a family (Finch, 2007; Hall et al., 2018). For many generations, it has formed part of family life (Nutbrown et al., 2017) and since the 1980s preschool reading has become more directly linked to school preparation.

Many parents see book-sharing as a valuable activity, due to being pleasurable or enjoyable (Venn, 2014), alongside valuing book-sharing for child development-related reasons (BookTrust, 2016). The frequency of reading for many families is embedded into the bedtime routine, with reading seen as intrinsic to that routine, rather than as an educational endeavour for its own ends (Hall, 2010; Hall et al., 2018; Nichols, 2000). A positive association between reading as part of the bedtime routine at age 3 years and a longer sleep duration aged 5 years has been noted in one study (Hale et al., 2011). Reading is also sometimes considered as a 'treat' or tool for behaviour modification: "'I use it like a reward system. Now if he's been naughty in the day, I'll tell him 'it's your bedtime story' ... it works' (Tania)" (Hall et al., 2018 p.370).

Another way that reading can reflect and develop family structures is through older siblings exercising their hierarchical status by reading to younger siblings (Hall et al., 2018). Here, older children are codifying behaviours which are valued within the school system through re-enactment of a 'teacher' role with their younger siblings. However, children are also active agents in their own lives (James & Prout, 1990 cited in Hall et al., 2018) and much family book-sharing can be seen to be prompted by the child by requesting their parents to engage, the active selection of books, or mention of books read elsewhere, for example, at nursery (Hall, 2010).

2.6   What is parental engagement in book-sharing?

Parental engagement in its broadest sense in is defined by Goodall as "any engagement that parents (or other adults with a duty or responsibility) have with their children" (2017, p. 56). When a parent and child engage with a book as an object of joint attention, this is here defined as book-sharing, and where the parent enters discourse or otherwise participates with their child, this is here defined as parental engagement in book-sharing. Although there is much discourse around parental engagement in learning, which may be defined as "parents' engagement in children's lives to influence the children's overall actions" (Goodall, 2017, p. 56), it is important not to make a prior assumption that parents who are book-sharing are attempting to influence their children's actions, or act either solely or partially with a learning goal at the heart of their interaction.

Parental engagement in book-sharing is expected to occur primarily within the home, as part of the home learning environment (Sylva et al., 2004). Here, learning can be understood as all forms of child development, including but not limited to: cognitive, social and emotional, motor and language development. It can also be considered to encompass parental learning and development, both personal and around increased knowledge of their child. Parental engagement in book-sharing involves any act where the parent and the child interact with a book, whether it is an equal venture, or one initiated by one or other party.

Although the value of parental engagement in early literacy development is now well established (Cremin et al., 2019; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hannon et al., 2006; Nutbrown

et al., 2005; Topping & Wolfendale, 2017), educators are "not necessarily well equipped conceptually to appreciate its nature or power" (Hannon & Nutbrown, 1997, p. 406). This study aims to clarify the impact and value of parental engagement in book-sharing, and recommendations for educators and book-gifters will be shared in Section 12.9.

2.7   What is book-gifting?

Book-gifting programmes distribute free books to children or their families. Commonly, book-gifting programmes focus on young children, often from birth, or families with additional vulnerabilities such as children who are in local authority care (Burnett et al., 2014). Book-gifting programmes frequently aim to improve a child's home learning environment through the provision of books and support or motivation to encourage parents or carers to read with their children (de Bondt et al., 2020). Book-gifting programmes have become increasingly popular interventions due to a low overall cost (de Bondt et al., 2020), and an underlying basis of supportive research into their efficacy (High et al., 2000; HighScope, 2003; O'Hare & Connolly, 2014).

2.8   Summary

In this chapter I defined book-sharing and considered who and what is involved in the activity and why book-sharing occurs. A brief explanation of book-gifting set the scene for why organisations such as the part-funder for this thesis have an interest in book-sharing. The benefits of book-sharing and book-gifting and the factors which can affect book-sharing interactions and book-gifting programmes will now be discussed at length in Chapter 3.0 through a review of the literature on this topic.

3.0 Review of the Literature

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the literature which surrounds book-sharing and book-gifting and some of the broader literature on early literacy skills and dispositions. A short explanation of the process of searching the literature can be found in Appendix A. I explore in depth the potential benefits of book-sharing with children in the early years before considering what affects book-sharing interactions. This includes demographic considerations alongside behaviours and dispositions of the individuals involved in book-sharing as well as the role the book itself plays in book-sharing. I consider the mechanisms through which book-gifting programmes might be beneficial before giving an overview of book-gifting programmes and the key research studies which have assessed their impact. I then use this overview to dissect the issues that may be found when researching book-gifting programmes. These findings were used to guide my original contribution to the field by identifying the gaps within the literature, and I conclude by placing this study within the context of the wider research landscape.

3.2 What are the benefits of book-sharing for children aged 0-5 and their parents?

When thinking about the benefits of book-sharing, these can be considered in terms of the child and the parent separately and together as a reading dyad. For the child, benefits can be discussed in two main areas: the developmental skills and the learning dispositions which early book-sharing may support. For the parent too, benefits may encompass both their personal dispositions and the development of parenting skills. Considering the reading dyad together, the benefits linked to the development of the relationship between the child and parent will also be explored.

3.2.1 Book-sharing and the development of literacy skills

The literature on the positive impact of preschool book-sharing on early development is extensive, with book-sharing at home being associated with emergent literacy development including vocabulary gains (Blewitt et al., 2009; Payne et al., 1994; Sénéchal, Cornell, et al., 1995; Whitehurst et al., 1988), knowledge of story (Sulzby, 1985), language acquisition (Fletcher & Reese, 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011) and later reading achievement (Bus et al., 1995; Mol & Bus, 2011; Raikes et al., 2006; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Wells, 1985; Whitehurst et al., 1988). A meta-analysis of the literature investigating the effect of shared reading on language skills showed an 8% variance positively linked to exposure to print materials (Bus et al., 1995). However, there may be a "snowball" effect (Raikes et al., 2006) or an "upwards spiral" (Mol & Bus, 2011) leading to further gains from this base in a positive feedback loop of reading enjoyment leading to development of skills (O'Farrelly et al., 2018). Broader literacy skills such as the development of knowledge of story (Harkins et al., 1994) and the acquisition of positive attitudes towards reading (Bingham, 2007) are also linked with book-sharing experiences, and the interplay between all these aspects of literacy skills forms a complex system (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). This is where the development of individual skills predisposes the individual reader to enhance skills in other areas of literacy to become proficient readers. Complex systems and their relationship to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's work are discussed further in Section 5.4. Parental responses to a large-scale United Kingdom survey indicated that the improvement of literacy skills was a reason for reading for more than 50% of parents surveyed (Venn, 2014).

3.2.2 Vocabulary development and language acquisition

In early childhood children are already primed to grow their vocabularies, and book reading exposes children to novel vocabulary (Raikes et al., 2006) and concepts (Fernald et al., 2013). When young children are read to from books aimed at infants and preschoolers, there is an expectation that the text will be read by an adult reader (or other more experienced reader) and so books to be read *to* children often have more complex structures (both in terms of vocabulary and grammar) than those aimed at beginner readers reading on their own. For example, Quentin Blake's book 'All Join In' (Blake, 1990) was

gifted to 4-year-old children by the Imagination Library in May 2020. This text contains vocabulary such as "wailing", "concentrate", "serenade" and "murky", yet children within this year group achieving the expected reading level for their age might be tackling reading scheme books such as 'Push' by Roderick Hunt (Hunt, 1995), from Oxford Reading Tree Level 1+, where the most challenging vocabulary is "pushed", "pulled", "stuck" and "tractor" as the book is designed to be phonetically decodable by children working on Phase 4 of Letters and Sounds (i.e., at the expected level of phonic study for their age).

Research comparing preschool books which were not reading scheme readers, with preschool television programmes found that the books had an average of 16.3 rare words per 1000 (defined as words with a rank order of lower than 10,000, roughly outside the vocabulary of a 10-12-year-old) compared to 2.0 per 1000 for popular preschool television shows, with children's books showing 30.9 rare words per 1000 compared to 20.2 for popular prime time children's shows and indeed 22.7 for prime time adult television (Hayes and Ahrens, 1988 as cited in Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Although there is little further research into the frequency of complex words within children's television, I extrapolated a rate of 2.3 rare words per 1000 from the vocabulary analysis of children's television (Fraggle Rock, Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers) included in a more recent exploration of the vocabulary demands of television programmes (Webb & Rodgers, 2009), which is not dissimilar to the rate of 2.0, as found by Hayes and Ahrens. The vocabulary found in picture books has also been found to be richer than child-directed speech from parents (Montag et al., 2015). The plethora of rich vocabulary found in books for preschool children and infants anticipates that the books will be read aloud to the child by the parent or carer, which gives the opportunity for both the word-reading of complex vocabulary and the parental mediation of the text through explanation of the vocabulary's meaning.

The presence of novel vocabulary in children's books may play a particularly important role for children from families of lower socioeconomic status. Longitudinal research demonstrated that 86% - 98% of children's vocabularies at 2 years old were words present in their parents' vocabularies, and that families with lower SES had smaller vocabularies than their higher-SES peers (Hart & Risley, 2003). Thus, the more expansive vocabulary of

children's books may have a particularly positive impact for children in families where less complex vocabularies form their daily aural diet.

Alongside vocabulary acquisition sit other forms of linguistic extension, often found in the parent-child book-sharing interactions as well as in the text contained in the book itself. Additional object labelling, questioning and responsiveness to the child's prior knowledge (Fletcher & Reese, 2005; Ninio, 1983; Ninio & Bruner, 1978) alongside the sophisticated language (Crain-Thoreson et al., 2001) and the opportunities for re-reading and overlearning (Robbins & Ehri, 1994) all interact to provide a rich experience focused on the object of joint-attention – the book. It seems that book-sharing can provide a platform for children to hear more complex, grammatically diverse speech than they do at other times in the day (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991; Ninio & Bruner, 1978).

Debaryshe's early work on picture-book reading experiences with 41 2-year-old children and their mothers examined the relationship between book-sharing and language skills (DeBaryshe et al., 1992). Debaryshe found that the age of book-sharing onset was closely correlated to later expressive language skills. The mean age for commencement of reading was around 7 to 8 months and the book-sharing families reported sharing an average of 18 (and as many as 100) stories each week, so there was considerable parental investment in book-sharing. In a large-scale (n = 2,581) study of low-income American families, it was found that daily reading at 14, 24 and 36 months was positively correlated with vocabulary scores and that regular maternal reading at 14 and 24 months correlated with children's verbal ability and language outcomes, for both the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking participants.

Looking further at the age of commencement of book-sharing interactions, a relationship was found between book-sharing at 8 months of age and language ability, but not with book-sharing at 4 months of age in a study of 87 children in a small midwestern town in the United States (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005). The study authors noted that reading at 4 months was a predictor of reading at 8 months, "therefore, one positive effect of shared reading in early infancy might be the establishment of reading habits that persist until infants can take advantage of them cognitively" (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005, p. 145).

Research examining early vocalisations found that compared to during play with toys, infants aged 12 months produced more developmentally advanced (consonant-vowel syllable) vocalisations during book-sharing activities (Gros-Louis et al., 2016).

Overall, the relationship between regular reading and vocabulary and language outcomes for children seems to have a significant positive relationship, albeit one which is likely to have a bidirectional component (Raikes et al., 2006). The relationship between an early start to reading and language gains needs further investigation, with fewer studies exploring the impact of beginning book-sharing within the first few months after birth. There are complex mechanisms involved in how these reading experiences may influence development. These latter areas are ones where there are opportunities for further research, particularly considering the considerable national investment in supporting parents to start reading with their babies early both through the provision of books to babies (BookTrust, 2019) and the public health messaging around the importance of starting to read early (Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, 2020).

3.2.3   Reading attainment

Book-sharing in the preschool years has been correlated with higher on-entry attainment scores at the start of formal schooling (Wade & Moore, 2000) and at age 8-9 (Shahaeian et al., 2018). In the 2018 study, a 6-year longitudinal exploration of book-sharing at age 2-3 and later academic achievement, the frequency of early book-sharing was the single most important predictor of academic outcomes of all the other home learning activities. This trend continues into later childhood, with children whose parents read frequently to them in their first year of school attaining an average of 14 points better than their peers, when socioeconomic attributes were taken into account (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

The degree of impact of early book-sharing has been questioned widely over the last 25 years, with many studies noting correlation rather than causation between book-sharing and wider literacy gains in early schooling (Bus et al., 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Sénéchal & Young, 2008), and questioning whether there is a weak or a moderate effect.

There are many variables which have been identified within book-sharing which may play as important a role as the frequency of reading (Bergin, 2001), including the quality of interaction and the level and type of attachment between the parent and the child. This finding has implications for my research, as whereas reading quantity may be an easier factor for parents to report, reading quality is multi-dimensional and any exploration of it will only be able to consider a few of these facets. I will start to explore some of these variables in subsequent sections. There is also a conundrum in teasing out book-sharing from other home literacy activities. Meyer (1994) questions whether parents who are either pre-disposed to reading with their children or supported to be so may also be involved in other pre-literacy activities such as teaching letter sounds which also contribute to children's development.

While book-sharing has been an expected part of the preschool experience for many years, there is a creeping movement to begin formal teaching of reading (specifically phonics) at ever earlier phases of children's development (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022). Large-scale international studies show that by age 14, reading levels are not affected by the age at which formal instruction was started (Schweinhart, 2005; Suggate, 2007; Suggate, 2009), but that over time (to age 15) children who had been learning within social constructivist style environments (where reading activities were co-created rather than adult-directed) were reading greater quantities of books and remained more engaged with their learning than those in the direct instruction settings (Suggate, 2009). It has also been suggested that the formal instruction of very young children in reading focused on decoding could be actively damaging to their future reading engagement (Adams et al., 2004). When considering book-sharing as a phenomenon, it is important to differentiate engagement with books (discussed further in Section 3.2.5) from phonic learning or print-based decoding (Boardman, 2019). We can surmise that although frequent book-sharing is linked with the development of early literacy skills and later academic outcomes, frequent book-sharing should not be conflated with formal reading instruction. The early literacy skills valued in formal educational settings are discussed in the next section.

3.2.4   Emergent literacy skills and 'school readiness'

Emergent literacy skills, the term having been originally attributed to Clay (1966) and explored further by Teale and Sulzby (1986b), include the developmental precursors to reading and writing such as the acquisition of vocabulary, phonological awareness, understanding of print and knowledge of narrative form alongside the social skills of attention, interaction and print motivation (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). More recently, emergent literacy skills have been acknowledged to encompass a wider field of traits and behaviours. The English Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum, which spans the period from birth to 5 years old, divides literacy into the areas of language comprehension, word reading and writing (Department for Education, 2017). The non-statutory curriculum guidance for the EYFS distinguishes very early skills for infants, such as turning toward familiar sounds and enjoying sharing books with an adult, through skills for toddlers and preschoolers such as remembering much of what happens in a story and making marks which they ascribe meaning to, to skills for children within their reception year at school, for example reading exception words and forming letters correctly (Department for Education, 2020).

Some of these emergent literacy skills can be seen as aspects of pre-reading and are often used as a proxy for 'school readiness', particularly with the need (driven by the English national education agenda) for children to start "phonics first and fast" (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005, p. 13) upon entry to school and increasingly in nursery settings too. The term 'school readiness' implies that "there should be a *fixed standard* of physical, intellectual, and social development that prepares children to meet school requirements and assimilate curriculum, typically embracing specific cognitive and linguistic skill" (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011, p. 6).

The term 'school readiness' or the desire for children to arrive at school ready to learn is problematic as all children are "ready to learn" but some are more practiced in certain traits valued within the school system (Whitebread & Bingham, 2011, p. 1). The three elements (the child, the family and the school) are not found in a linear relationship, where the family prepares the child for the school, but there should be a more complex interaction which

also requires the school to prepare itself for the child as they are presented to the school (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017b). The readiness to learn in the way prescribed by the school system is perhaps a more accurate description of what has been sought by successive government interventions in early years practice. While not commenting on the appropriateness of such policies to the age group, it is clear that children who begin their school journey with specific literacy skills will have an advantage in the school environment over those for whom school is their first encounter with reading experiences. These include: an understanding of grapheme-phoneme correspondence, knowledge about concepts of print and storytelling, as well as characteristics of effective learning such as the ability to concentrate and listen while a story is read and enjoyment of book-sharing (Fiorentino & Howe, 2004; Ramey & Ramey, 2004).

The idea that book-sharing and related emergent literacy activities at home are fundamentally preparation for the school environment is pervasive (de Bondt et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2018; Sénéchal & Young, 2008). Early experiences that align with school expectations of reading progression can end up being valued above other experiences. This approach is likely to alienate some families whose home literacy practices are divergent from those frequently practiced by White middle-class parents who are particularly attuned to the requirements of the school system (Barrett DeWiele & Edgerton, 2016; Justice et al., 2015; Tett & Crowther, 1998). Indeed, the nature of what is valued in terms of the home literacy environment is often dictated outside of the home, as "dominant literacies originate from the dominant institutions of society. Vernacular literacies have their roots in everyday life" (Barton, 2017, p. 39). Because of this dichotomy, Hall et al. (2018) argue for the need for interventions to start with understanding how the family interacts rather than starting with an intervention-based aim.

Van Kleeck and Stahl identify the question of whether the generally shared assertion in the research that early book-sharing is a "panacea for reading difficulties and illiteracy" (2003 p. vii). They noted that it is "by no means a universal practice across cultural, linguistic and social lines" (van Kleeck et al., 2003 p. vii) and that research based on White, middle-class families may not lead to conclusions that are appropriate or generalisable to other populations. The implicit bias of much research in conflating the literacy practices of cultural

groups whose early book-sharing practices mimic those found in state educational settings may be inadvertently promoting certain types of print-sharing as preferred social practice rather than exploring what multiple literacies in multiple family structures may lead to (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). This is a key point to consider in the light of my own research, where the respondent cohorts were predominantly White and disproportionately university-educated (see Section 7.2). In questioning parents about their home literacy practices, the concept of which practices to explore is itself culturally biased.

Van Kleeck and Stahl see the arguments about book-sharing's role in preparation for school polarising into two deficit models. The first puts the impetus on families to prepare their children for the current western schooling model and sees any resistance or disengagement with this as neglectful parenting to be 'solved'. The second blames the school system's lack of interaction with the multiplicity of literacies that children and families bring and their different cultural practices for creating divides between children's early academic outcomes. They propose the idea of enabling children to become "bicultural" to bridge the possible divides between home and school practices and values (2003, p. x). While this idea is pragmatic, it puts the onus on the family or child to change and become bicultural, rather than on the school or setting to enact institutional change to better serve the child and family as they are. Tett and Crowther suggest that to be successful, family literacy programmes should see home and school learning as reciprocal rather than unidirectional and note the importance of recognising that "literacy education is essentially a political process" (1998, p. 455). They suggest that the focus should be on understanding "the way in which literacy operates as a culturally normalising tool that can limit participation in civic life for those that do not have full access to the dominant code" (Tett & Crowther, 1998, p. 455). Despite the issues which arise when trying to apportion responsibility to either parents or schools in supporting the child's transitions from home to educational establishments, the role of book-sharing within these transitions is clear and positive, as summarised below. Whereas individual parents or carers cannot make system changes to the home-school transition processes and expectations, individual changes in the home learning environment can and do positively affect the transitions which children will experience as they move into the school system.

Broadly speaking, frequent book-sharing is linked to the development of early literacy skills and related academic outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). To summarise the benefit to children of book-sharing in terms of 'school readiness', it seems that book-sharing experiences which follow a model which is compatible with the school system the child will be entering are likely to position the child well for early success in that environment. This will disadvantage children whose families, through choice or cultural practice, value alternate early childhood experiences, therefore, it is important to site the benefits in the context of a culturally-situated notion of education and educational success.

3.2.5 Book-sharing and the development of reading for pleasure

The impact of book-sharing is not only found in the domains of reading acquisition and other emergent literacy skills but also on enjoyment (Johnson et al., 2008; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994) of both the parent and the child (Preece & Levy, 2018). Definitions around reading for pleasure typically focus on reading that is continued independently for one's own enjoyment, and "involves materials that reflect our own choice, at a time and place that suits us" (Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p. 6). This is summed up succinctly as "getting lost in a book" (Burnett et al., 2014, p. 9). Infants and toddlers develop their skills by engaging with books and stories over time, and this engagement is often mediated by their parents or carers supporting their development both in the handling of books, the choice of books and understanding and interpretation of the content. A significant national survey was undertaken in 2014 into family reading habits, commissioned by the Bookstart charity, which runs the BookTrust book-gifting programme within England and Wales. The survey found that a majority (68%) of parents surveyed felt that their child's enjoyment was a key reason for reading together (Venn, 2014). As defined in Section 2.2, interactions with books are included here as book-sharing, rather than taking a narrow definition of reading, and in the same vein, reading for pleasure will here be defined as interactions where infants or young children appear engaged with books or show - according to their developmental ability - signs of choosing to initiate or to continue with a session of book-sharing.

The benefits of reading for pleasure can be viewed as intrinsic, "writing and reading literature, if nothing else, are acts of imagination to explore possible worlds" (Cliff Hodges, 2010 p.65), as well as undeniably linked to educational outcomes (Burnett et al., 2014; Clark & Rumbold, 2006). In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) evaluation of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores across countries, reading enjoyment was shown to be a more important indicator of educational attainment than the socioeconomic status (SES) of the child's family (Kirsch et al., 2003). Reading enjoyment and reading achievement are thought to have a somewhat reciprocal relationship, with intrinsic reading motivation being linked to reading competence (Schiefele et al., 2012).

The role of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) in later reading enjoyment has been clarified (Clark & Rumbold, 2006), so, it is important to consider the role of early book-sharing in building learning dispositions such as later intrinsic motivations to read.
It is impossible to quantify the intrinsic benefits of reading for pleasure but looking to what parents and children say about the personal impact on them is a useful aspect to help understand this area. Many of the research papers and reports focused on book-gifting enquire into this parental view, although few look directly at the child's views (Nutbrown et al., 2005). An example of this is found in the Kellogg evaluation of the Imagination Library programme in Michigan where 71% of the 207 participants reported an increase in their child's interest in reading linked to participation in the programme and that 62% of the children requested stories more than they had previously (Lelle, 2011). One participant reported, "my daughter LOVES to read. She enjoys sitting to look at pictures and hearing stories. She brings books to me" (Lelle, 2011 p.10).

For infants and toddlers, the importance of the parents' attitude toward reading (which may be linked to their own reading competence, upbringing and expectations) and their behaviours in facilitating early book-sharing is key. Preece & Levy found that "a key factor in parental enjoyment was receiving feedback to show that children benefited from the experience" (2018, p. 11). Considering what may affect parental attitudes and behaviours, parents who view reading as a pleasurable activity for the child are more likely to provide more reading opportunities than parents who view book-sharing as a primarily

developmental activity (Sonnenschein, 1996). Parents who felt that book-sharing was a worthwhile or pleasurable activity were more likely to continue to book-share with their child than those who perceived their child's reactions as negative (Preece & Levy, 2018). When thinking about how parents might interpret whether their child finds reading a pleasurable activity, parents may observe behaviours such as asking to be read to, being willing to listen, giving an affective response to the story or interacting with the book or story as indications that their child is enjoying the book-sharing experience (Sonnenschein et al., 2000). Earlier signals of enjoyment or pleasure in young infants may be seen through a visual focus on the book or on the carer and these behaviours can be observed in infants as young as a few months old (Tsuji, 2013). These interactions could all be considered indicators of the child's engagement in and enjoyment of reading. Conversely, parents who felt that their children were not enjoying or benefiting from the reading interaction considered the encounter to be more challenging. Where parents were concerned that their children did not seem to be enjoying book-sharing encounters, the parents were reluctant to force children to participate. This was explained through reference to the respondents' intrinsic parenting values as "being child-led was an important value underpinning shared reading" (Preece & Levy, 2018, p. 12).

In terms of developing pleasure in reading, positive affective qualities in book-sharing, "behaviours reflecting an enjoyable, engaging interaction" were found to be "a significant predictor of children's motivations for reading" (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002, p. 323). Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002) found that children who experienced a greater number of these positive interactions at the beginning of kindergarten (around 5 years old) had the most positive personal attitudes toward reading at first grade age (around 6 years old). As Preece and Levy argue, "parent and child enjoyment is inextricably linked and critical to sustaining shared reading" (2018, p. 15). Research on book-sharing needs to be situated within an understanding of the whole family context, rather than solely focusing on the outcomes for the child, and the parental benefits of book-sharing will therefore be discussed in the following section.

3.2.6   Book-sharing and parental development

Parental engagement "in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's attainment" (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 4). The literature on the collateral benefit of book-sharing on parental development of skills and dispositions is not extensive, with most analyses focusing on the child as recipient or beneficiary of the activity. However, there is a small body of research which considers outcomes for parents. Engagement in programmes which support parenting do have positive impacts on the parents themselves, in the form of improved self-confidence and enhanced social and cultural capital (Swain et al., 2009). Interviews with family literacy programme stakeholders revealed that "even in programmes in which it was not a core objective, parental empowerment of low-income, poorly educated and/or migrant mothers was a common output of family literacy initiatives" (Carpentieri et al., 2011, p. 12).

One study which focused on parents whose babies were in neonatal intensive care found that reading to their baby supported the parents to feel closer to their baby and that it was an enjoyable experience. This research was built on in a recent randomised controlled trial with a sample of 293 mothers in the United States. The study found that early book-sharing was associated with "increases in observed parental warmth and observed sensitivity and decreases in parenting stress at 18 months" (Canfield et al., 2020).

In terms of parenting skills, early reading is associated with less harsh parenting later in life, (Jimenez et al., 2019). The directionality of this relationship is unclear, although the authors posit that reducing parental negative behaviours supports positive child behaviours to flourish, and that the early positive child behaviours associated with book-sharing as an activity supports parents to parent less harshly through a reduction in negative child behaviours. The reciprocal links between parent and child behaviours and attitudes, both of which may be facilitated through positive early book-sharing experiences, are further discussed in the following section.

3.2.7   Book-sharing and building attachment

A third benefit of book-sharing in the infant and preschool years is growing and reinforcing familial bonds and parent-child attachment. The link between early book-sharing and positive parent-child attachment has been noted (Bus et al., 1997; Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1988) but its directionality is not clear (Jimenez et al., 2019). At an age where children might not be expected to spontaneously choose book-sharing as an activity, children in dyads who showed secure attachment on other measures showed higher levels of attention to the book-sharing and there was a resultant reduction in behaviour management required by the adult (Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1988). There is not yet clarity within the research about the direction of influence within reading interactions. It could be considered that children stimulate their parents to give positive reading interactions through their attention, and conversely that parental positive interactions shape the child's early book-sharing behaviours. These behaviours may interact to either bolster or mitigate against future positive reading interactions. Parents in an interview-based study discussed how their child's feedback and reactions influenced their own book-sharing behaviours, with children's perceived interest and enjoyment as a key factor in motivating them to read with their child (Preece & Levy, 2018). Parents in the Bookstart family reading habits survey were most likely to note that reading with their child was a good way to spend time together than any other reason for reading together (Venn, 2014). The transactional nature of the book-sharing experience where the child and the parent and their environment influence each other (Sameroff, 2009) may sensitise the parent to their child's current developmental needs (Fletcher & Reese, 2005), thus, starting this relationship earlier may lead to greater gains both in the relationship and the development of reading skills (O'Farrelly et al., 2018). However, Tsuji (2013) suggests that if the relationship is transactional, that the infant's dispositions would influence how their parent interacts with them, which again leads to questions about the directionality of the effect between book-sharing and changes to attachment and behaviour.

Vanobbergen et al. (2009) in their evaluation of the Flemish 'Bookbabies' programme concluded that the vast majority of parents interviewed noted that book-sharing provided opportunities for close contact with their child, often involving cuddling and kissing, and

that this contributed to a positive bond with their child. This finding was previously noted in other interview-based studies such as Hardman and Jones (1999) who commented that with babies, their inability to hold and manipulate a book necessitated parental closeness and joint working to share a book together. Much parental attention in the infant stage is focused on keeping the baby actively engaged with the book (Bus et al., 1997; van Kleeck et al., 1996). Children who were less securely attached were less attentive and less likely to respond to the content through direct touch, related sound or role-play which led to the parent reacting by being more controlling (Bus et al., 1997; Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1988; Shahaeian et al., 2018). Bus et al. (1997) hypothesised that secure and insecure attachments are likely to impact book-sharing behaviours, rather than that book-sharing experiences create the underlying attachment type. It seems likely that book-sharing experiences could reinforce underlying attachment and parenting behaviours both positively and negatively but are unlikely to create them per se. The correlation of certain types of parental attachment on the parent's interaction style was also noted by Bus et al. (1997), with some of the mothers in insecurely attached dyads tending to simply read the text rather than engage in extra-textual talk, and the children showing more unresponsive or uninterested behaviours with regard to the book-sharing experience. Bus et al. (1997) also observed other parents engaged in overly dialogic reading processes, insisting that all aspects of a page were covered and explored before the child could move on, which seemed to result in children sometimes showing aggression towards the mother or the book, or showing frustration in other ways. In contrast, securely attached dyads were more likely to engage in joint interaction, focused on and led by the child's interests and without feeling the need to stick wholly to the printed text.

Maternal responsiveness, which is defined as "mothers who respond promptly, contingently and appropriately to their children's activities" (Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2001 p.748), is linked to success in book-sharing (Nathanson & Rasmussen, 2011) and this sensitivity to the child's particular interests and needs is intrinsic to the Vygotskian model of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) which underlies the effective book-sharing experience. Although it is likely to be somewhat bi rather than unidirectional, the benefit of book-sharing on the parent-child bond cannot be overstated.

3.2.8   Summary of the benefits of book-sharing for parents and children

The benefits of book-sharing in the early years seem to interact to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The relationship between attachment and reading enjoyment is clear with securely attached dyads who engage well with book-sharing creating a positive feedback loop of success, while those who are insecurely attached have parents who engage in less extra-textual talk and children who show more disinterested behaviours, creating a negative feedback loop (Bus et al., 1997). Both secure attachment (Jacobsen et al., 1994) and, separately, reading enjoyment (Kirsch et al., 2003) are indicators that are associated with positive cognitive function and later academic success. The literacy skills which are developed by early book-sharing activities are extensive. These are linked both directly to the content of books and to the behaviours and language occur in book-sharing activities. Although the primary focus for benefits is on the child, there seem to be benefits for the parent or carer too in terms of enjoyment and reductions in stress and reductions in negative parenting interactions.

3.3   What affects the book-sharing experience and outcomes?

In this section I consider the factors known to influence the frequency and quality of book-sharing. I start by considering known models of the book-sharing process and then I take in turn some of the key variables which are considered to influence the book-sharing interaction between parents and children. I look at potential changes over time through infancy and early childhood, along with socioeconomic and demographic factors, and the role of the book itself in the book-sharing experience. It is important to understand that book-sharing is not a singular homogenous activity as might be studied in a clinical drug trial, or even a specific intervention delivered with fidelity by trained individuals, but a malleable experience, moulded by the participants. Thus, the factors which influence the book-sharing experience and outcomes are best explored as a complex system (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), which acknowledges the complex interplay between the factors and the participants.

Book-sharing between parents and children usually takes place within the home learning environment (the HLE). This is defined as including "the physical characteristics of the home, but also the quality of the implicit and explicit learning support they receive from the caregivers" (Department for Education, 2018, p. 6). It includes physical aspects such as books and toys alongside the experiences of the child, such as being nurtured, everyday conversations and visits such as to the park. The home learning environment is understood to be a key factor in the development of children's communication and literacy skills, emotional and physical development (Melhuish, 2010; Sylva et al., 2004).

3.3.1 Models of book-sharing

Models related to book-sharing and early shared reading cover many facets, including the variables that affect the experience, the aspects of the HLE which can build literacy skills, the relationship between home and school reading experiences and the changing nature of the experience over time.

Previous explorations of factors that might affect the quality of book-sharing with young children have used the triad model (Figure 1 p45) to show the interplay of factors between books, parents and children (Fletcher & Reese, 2005). Parents' socioeconomic status, sex and cultural background are known to impact on their contribution to the home literacy environment, but the model negates the inclusion of parental attitudes toward reading and their intrinsic motivation to do this with their child, which may be a factor which is independent of the other variables (Sylva et al., 2004). The child's sex was not included in this model, despite a small body of evidence showing parents, particularly as children age, may vary their book-sharing style based on their child's sex (Anderson et al., 2004).

Figure 1 A proposed overview of factors that affect the quality of picture book reading (Fletcher & Reese, 2005)
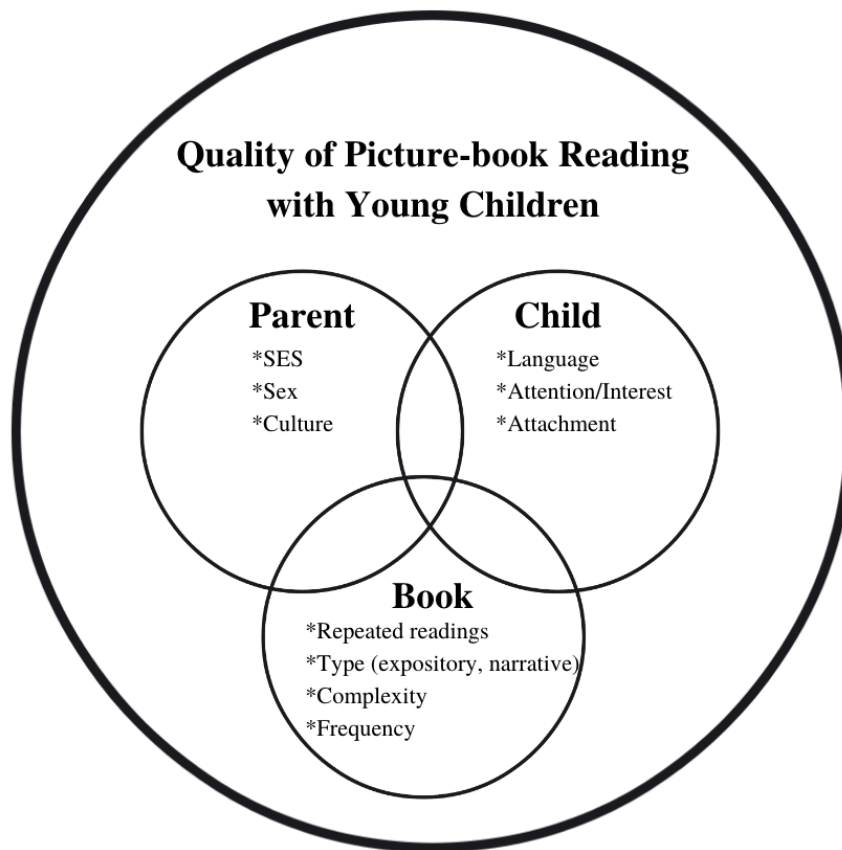
The model might be improved by greater emphasis on the quality of interaction between parents and children separate from the parental demographics or the child's language and behaviours. More recent research has shown that the quality of parental interaction with their child in the context of book-sharing overrides socioeconomic status (Sylva et al., 2004) (see Section 3.3.4); therefore, an addition to the 2005 model would be to look further into what comprises a quality interaction when book-sharing.

The second model (Figure 2 p46) aims to map out aspects of the home learning environment and related activities which support early literacy development. It was used in the Making it REAL project (Nutbrown et al., 2005) and it examines how families support children's developing literacy thinking. It was developed from an earlier model which did not include interaction (Hannon et al., 1991) which has since been found to be a key role for parents to take (see Section 3.3.2). This model suggests that parents can provide

opportunities for literacy such as mark-making materials and books, recognition of the child's achievements, interactions such as book-sharing or writing a card together and modelling their own literacy in real-life situations. These roles can extend across the four domains of environmental print, books, writing and oracy. While the model concentrates on what parents can do and the resources they use, with regards to books these are seen as objects to experience, rather than exploring them as facilitators of experience. Thus, the model doesn't show an interaction between, for example, books as facilitators of oral language experiences. It also relies on parental inputs, positioning parents as the providers, rather than describing a reciprocal model where children can initiate and lead literacy experiences in the home.

Figure 2 The 'ORIM' framework used in designing the family literacy programme (Morgan et al., 2009)

Strands of early literacy experiences
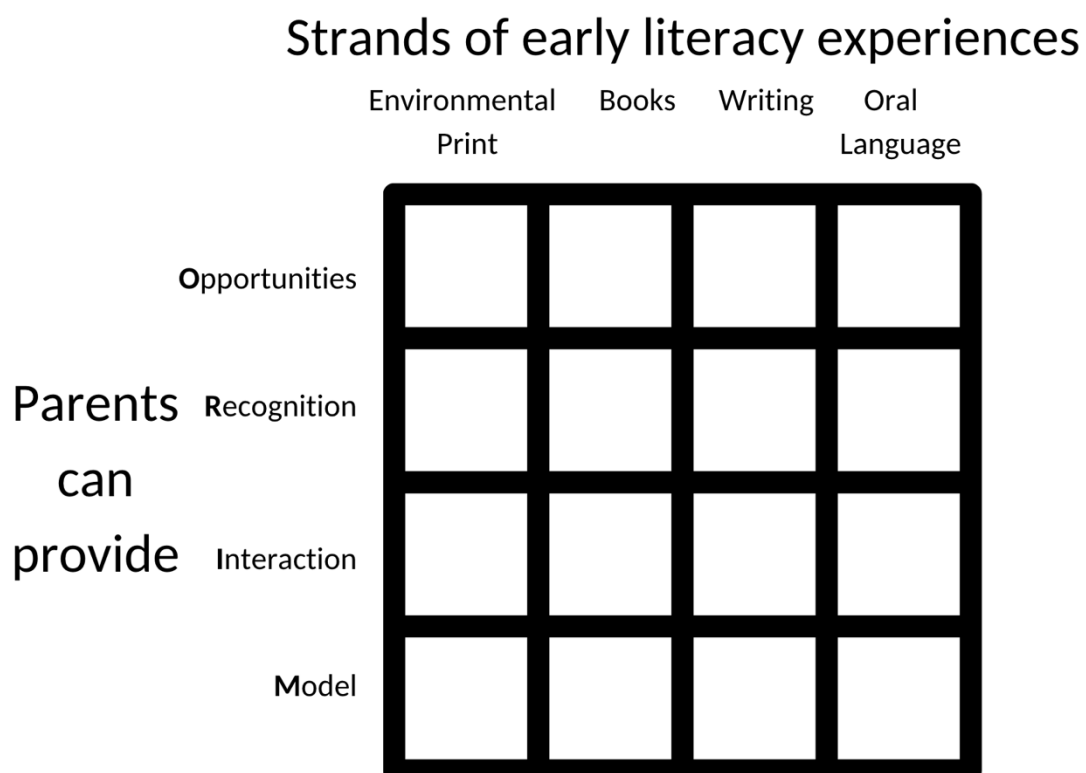
Figure 3 p47 (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002a) models the relationship between home reading experiences and later school-based outcomes. The model has several flaws, not least the siting of home reading experiences as taking place before school grade progress, rather than also alongside grade progress. The model also makes a distinction between parental teaching about reading and writing and parental book-sharing at home, rather than

connecting these experiences within the single book-sharing activity. Alongside this, there is a situating of child book exposure as a result of language, rather than the other way around with book exposure leading to language gains. The last significant concern with this model is its failure to articulate the place of reading for pleasure or enjoyment within the home literacy experiences leading to child outcomes. The concerns with this model perhaps stem from the model assumption that the home literacy environment exists before, but not alongside the school experience, negating the ongoing relationship between the home learning environment and child achievement over time.

Figure 3 Model representing the relations among home literacy experiences and child outcomes (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002a)

Shared Book Reading at Home → Language → Child Book Exposure

Phonological Awareness

Parent Teaching about Reading and Writing → Emergent Literacy → Reading End of Grade 1 → Reading End of Grade 3

Home Experiences   Beginning of Grade 1   End of Grade 1   End of Grade 3
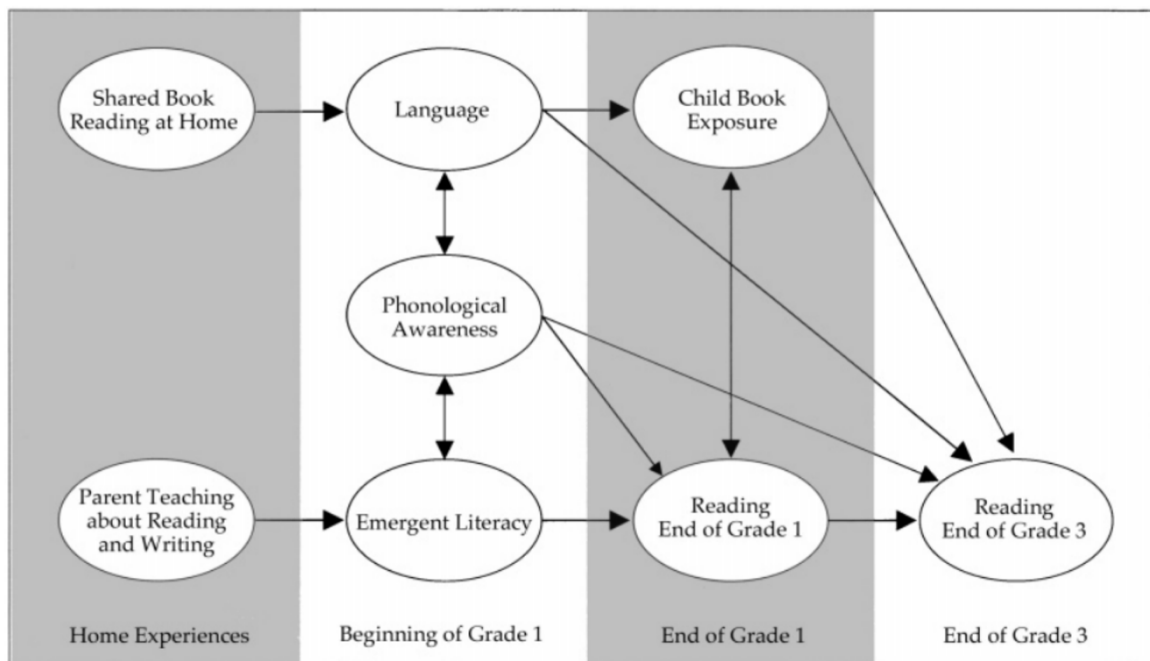
Changes over time are considered in the fourth model (see Figure 4 p48) (van Kleeck et al., 2003). The un-adapted model distinguished between seven stages for both the adult and the child, noting how the control passes from one to the other, moving from the child mimicking and replicating adult behaviours to the adult helping the child to self-monitor their new behaviours. Although the model may represent broad change over time, the nature of learning is not strictly linear so to and fro movement between stages should be expected, rather than the wholly linear approach suggested by the model. When children

are exposed to new challenges, the balance of child/adult-directed behaviours may change, which, in this model, would be seen as regression. Taken as a 5-year overview however, this may be a useful representation of the changes to the shared reading experience of the dyad as the child ages.

Figure 4 Changes to shared reading over time (adapted from Van Kleeck et al., 2003)
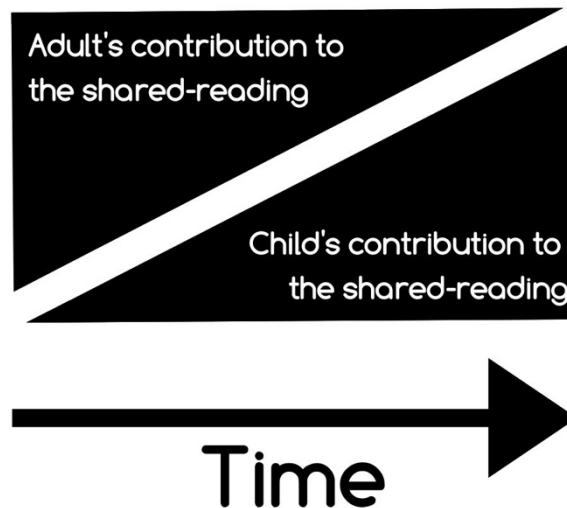
The fifth and final model to be considered takes as its base Bronfenbrenner and Ceci's bioecological model (1994) as a base for considering the development of oral language through shared reading (Figure 5 p49) (Grolig, 2020). The model situates the triad of adult, child and book (found in Fletcher and Reese's model, Figure 1 p45) within the home learning environment framework (Figure 2 p46) and wider systems such as socioeconomic, societal and legal frameworks. This model includes the child and the adult but does not provide details on the aspects of their individual qualities that affect the proximal process described by the model. However, this model is the first of those featured to explore the impact of macrosystems on shared reading, and to acknowledge the interplay between the different system layers and the triad at the heart of the book-sharing process.

Figure 5 A bioecological model of oral language development through shared reading (Grolig, 2020)
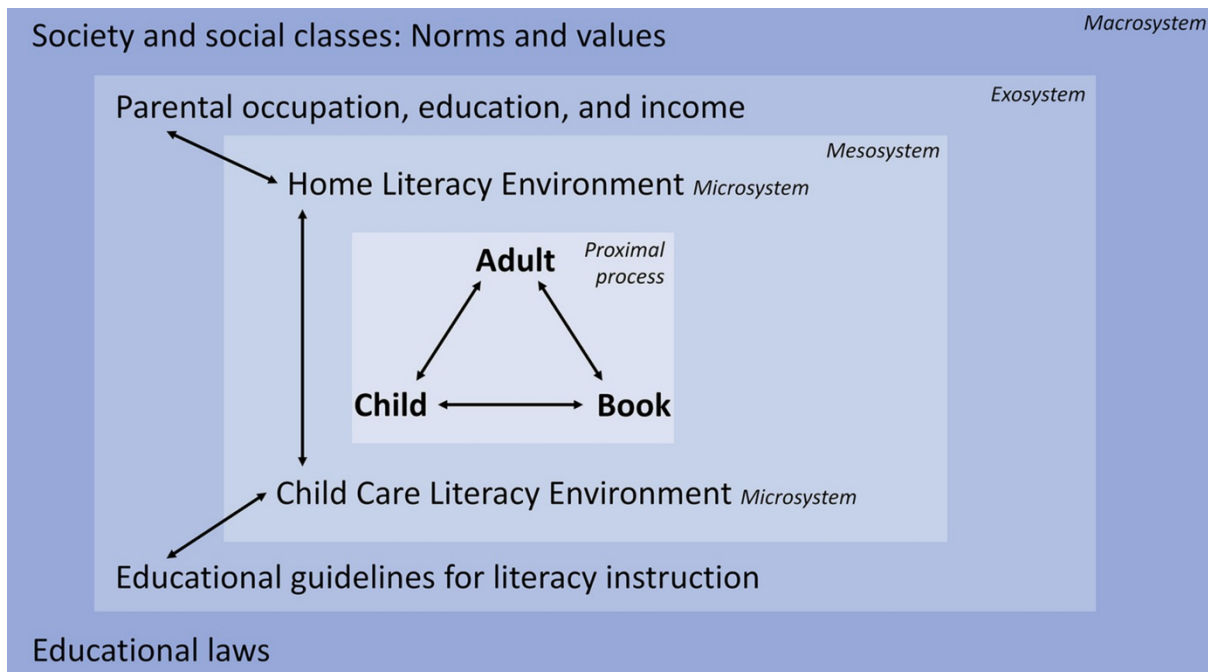
Each model explores a different aspect of the book-sharing process: the factors which affect book-sharing, the ways in which parents can support book-sharing and the changing nature of the interaction over time. My own model of book-sharing is explored in Section 12.7, where I combine the findings of my research with the existing literature to describe the factors which affect the book-sharing process and as well as the outputs linked with frequent book-sharing experiences. In considering the existing models which theorise book-sharing experiences, a better understanding can be gained of the multifaceted nature of the interaction, where many different factors impact the relationship between the book, the child and the parents. When planning research on book-sharing, it is important to consider these factors and control for the differences when drawing conclusions. I will further explore how the variables I consider in my research interact, drawing on these models, in Chapter 6.0.

3.3.2 Quality of Interaction

Much historic research in this field draws on Vygotskian principles, considering parents as guides and mediators of children's early reading experiences. The parents' role influences

the child's development "through imitating adults and being instructed how to act, children develop an entire repository of skills" (Vygotsky, 1978 p.37).

More recently, constructivist perspectives have influenced the discussion of quality interactions, (Anderson et al., 2004; Anderson et al., 2018; Reese et al., 2019; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002a), theorising that parents support their children by scaffolding the next steps in their reading journey. It is not, however, necessary to be limited to one tradition and instead one might suggest that both elements, the imitation and the scaffolding may play a part in quality book-sharing interactions.

Whichever theoretical tradition leads the research, parental attitudes toward reading have been found to have a significant impact on their children's future reading behaviours, with parental enthusiasm supporting reading-related competencies (Sonnenschein et al., 2000). The EPPE project identified "sustained shared thinking" as part of quality interactions (Sylva et al., 2004, p. 36), although in the context of this thesis it is important to note that the EPPE project focused on verbal children rather than infants.

Van Kleeck (2003) proposed that the emotional quality of the book-sharing sessions is more important than content-related interactions. Interpreting the quality of parent-child interactions is complex, and often requires close analysis of the interactions, such as that found in the observations of bedtime reading interactions between fathers and children (Goodwin & Cekaite, 2018) where the emphasis of words and the physical interactions were afforded as much value as the words exchanged. Fletcher and Reese (2005) found that through frequent early book-sharing, parents develop a sensitivity to their children's learning and developmental needs, and can then more successfully mediate the book experience for them (Fletcher & Reese, 2005). The children of parents who treated book-sharing as an entertainment activity made more progress than those who focused on skill acquisition in the early school years (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Parents can mediate the text in a variety of ways such as labelling pictures, defining vocabulary, questioning and commenting alongside relating story to the life of the child (extra-textual talk). The relationship between emotional and instructional interaction means that through

frequent book-sharing, parents can improve and target their interactions to develop what they feel their child needs at the time.

The type of interaction that parents choose with their child when book-sharing is both a function of the age of the child, and the aims of the parent with regard to the purpose of the book-sharing. Parents who interact with their children outside the scaffold of the written text benefit their children (Sénéchal, Thomas, et al., 1995) and parents who ask questions tend to have children who make more narrative contributions as a result (Luo et al.). Cultural differences have been noted within parental interactions, for example, mothers of African and Latino heritage tend towards narration and European and American mothers are more likely to suggest to their child that they co-create the story together (Anderson-Yockel & Haynes, 1994; Melzi & Caspe, 2005). A New Zealand study focusing on White mothers of European ancestry found two broad types of interaction – "describers" and "comprehenders". Mothers in the first group tended to label, define and identify content (pictures and text) while the second group showed more interactions classified as inference and relating content to personal experience (Reese et al., 2003, p. 40). Reese et al. related their describer style to Whitehurst et al.'s dialogic reading style and noted that the dialogic style engendered more child interaction with the text. They went on to describe further styles such as "collaborator", which was found in a set of American mothers and a "performer" style, which is commonly found in preschool classrooms. Their research did not find one reading style which was consistently the most supportive of children, rather that different styles worked for children with differing needs and at different ages (Reese et al., 2003, p. 47).

The different types of parental talk outlined above can challenge children in various ways. Question and answer or IRE (teacher Initiation, child Response, teacher Evaluation) formats mirror schooling techniques (Heath, 1986). Children 'schooled' in this approach in the preschool years or at home are more likely to be recognised by teachers as meeting educational goals once at school (van Kleeck et al., 1996). Extra-textual talk can cognitively challenge children to participate rather than passively receiving information (Bingham, 2007; Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Sénéchal, Thomas, et al., 1995). Recent research by the Reese et al. noted that interactions may also be classified as "reminiscing" or "book-

reading" (Reese et al., 2019, p. 6), and found that children's speech was grammatically more complex with a more diverse vocabulary when "reminiscing" or extra-textual approaches were used.

As discussed with regard to learning theories, it could be considered that children will benefit from a range of different techniques at different stages, both developmental stages and within different parts of a single book-sharing interaction.

3.3.3 Frequency of reading

The 2019 Reading for Pleasure survey reported that 46% of 0-2 and 56% of 3–4-year-olds have books read to them daily (Egmont, 2019), which is comparable to the 53% of parents of 0–4-year-olds reported reading daily to their children in the Reading for Pleasure National Literacy Trust research overview (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Research commissioned by the Bookstart charity found that 38% of parents read daily to their 0-11-month-old, rising sharply after 12 months of age to 57%. However, in the first year of life, nearly half of the fathers and approximately one third of mothers had never read with their children. By 3 years of age, approximately two-thirds of parents report reading daily with their child. A total of 67.9% of families with 3-year-olds receiving the Bookstart pilot intervention reported daily book-sharing (Wade & Moore, 1996) which is on par with the 68% reported when the pilot became a universal provision (Eliot & Venning, 2014). Although commissioned by interested parties, these research reports were conducted by independent agencies. Although there was variation around the figures (including within-year variation between two reports commissioned in the same year for the same agency – see Figure 25 p306), most of the parents reported reading daily with their child on most measures. Although all the surveys discussed here used parent reports, which could be subject to social desirability bias, they provide a somewhat triangulated example of reading frequencies across the 0-5 age range.

A meta-analysis examining the frequency of book-sharing concluded that it accounted for 8% of the variance later found in children's literacy achievement (Bus et al., 1995). However, book-sharing is not an event which only responds well to frequency measurement, but is a

"microenvironment in which experiences occur" (Snow, 1994, p. 271). Therefore, while reading frequency can be *an* indicator of enjoyment or progress, it may only be useful when coupled with qualitative information about the nature of the interaction taking place.

Although we know that reading ability at age 11 is not predicated on the age at which formal reading tuition starts (Kirsch et al., 2003; Whitebread & Bingham, 2011), it seems that an early start to reading correlates with later tendencies to engage in literacy activities (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). This early start seems to be a predictor of the future engagement regardless of the level of reading comprehension of the child at the point of assessment. The frequency of shared reading aged 4-5 has a significant positive correlation with reading skills of 10–11-year-olds (Kalb & van Ours, 2014), and for boys, this effect grows with age. Reading three to five days a week seems to give the equivalence of being 5 months older, and when reading six or seven days a week, this extends to 12 months gain against chronological age.

Whilst formal instruction in reading has little difference in outcome whether it starts at 5 or 7 years old, early engagement with books primes children to take best advantage of this schooling. This allows them to enter the positive feedback loop of participation in reading leading to gains in reading comprehension, leading to ability to further engage with reading or "Matthew effect" where experiences of reading contribute to a positive feedback loop of increasing skills in reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998, p. 137). The benefits can be seen when looking at internalisation and understanding of stories: the more experienced a child is with stories, the quicker they understand and recognise the structures and events in new books (MacNeil, 1989 in van Kleeck, 2003). Children who had been book-sharing with their parents before 14 months could remember (internalise) more from a new book after just four re-readings than children who had come to book-sharing later.

While data-collection of reading frequency at given ages is subject to the vagaries of the collection methods and thus we do not have a conclusive picture of reading frequency in the United Kingdom for children from birth to 5 years of age, there is a broad consensus of research opinion that reading frequency positively correlates with academic outcomes later in life.

3.3.4 Home environment

"Scholars have employed the term 'home literacy environment' to refer to the subset of environmental factors thought to be most germane for literacy growth" (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 446). The "curriculum of the home" (Walberg, 1984, p. 400) is understood to influence school readiness although the discussion as to which aspects are the primary influencers – exposure to books, parental 'teaching' of reading, dialogic reading and so forth is ongoing. The occupational status of the parents, books in the home, home educational resources and cultural communication are all correlated with achievement in reading literacy. The correlations are positive for every PISA country (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2002, 2012). Interestingly, the correlation between engagement in reading and socioeconomic background was only about one-third of the correlation with achievement: 0.12 compared with 0.34. In contrast, engagement in reading has a much higher correlation with books in the home and cultural communication (Kirsch et al., 2003 p.124). In the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) study, the home learning environment was found to have only a moderate association with maternal educational level or the social and economic circumstances of the family (r = 0.3), so the idea that material poverty or limited parental education have to be significant barriers to early learning can be challenged by this evidence (Sylva et al., 2004). The EPPE study found that after controlling for other variables, the home learning environment had the second strongest effect on cognitive development, the first being age. It was also found that aspects of the home learning environment at preschool age still have academic and social impact at the end of Key Stage 1 (7 years old).

Historically, even as far back as the late 1800s, there have been initiatives to promote reading in the home (Nutbrown et al., 2017). Parents' role as educators in their children's development has been recognised over several decades. In the Encyclical Gravissimum Educationis parents were recognised as the "primary and principal educators of children" (Second Vatican Council, 1965 para. 9) and in the Rumbold Report (1990, p. 4), parents were described as "first educators" of their children. There has been a subsequent focus on interventions involving parents and improving the home literacy environment to give

children more equitable "cultural capital" (Nutbrown et al., 2017, p. 554). This notion is complex, as it stems from a deficit model in which the social and cultural capital from one subset of the population is presumed to be more advantageous in and of itself. However, the influence of thinkers such as Bourdieu suggests that the school system worked to convert social hierarchies into academic ones, as part of a self-perpetuating cycle (Bourdieu, 2018). Thus, consideration of the ethics which underpin interventions within the home is key to ensuring that families and their home practices are appropriately valued and supported in a way which celebrates, rather than stigmatises the home environment. To achieve this, interventions which focus on improving the quality of parent-child interactions in the home for preschool-aged children (Debaryshe, 1993) appear to be a key principle of good practice when looking to provide support to families (Harris & Goodall, 2009). Acknowledgement that the family is a participant in, not a barrier to their children's development is important when designing any intervention programme, as described by Bronfenbrenner.

> The family is the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the development of the child. The involvement of the child's family as an active participant is critical to the success of any intervention programme.
> (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, p. 17)

3.3.5   Socio-economic background of parents

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a construct that "represents [the] social and economic background of an individual or group unit (e.g., household)" (Villalba, 2014, p. 1). It provides an overview of an individual's position within the prevalent social hierarchy and is commonly measured with attention to income, educational level and occupation, but no universal definition or measure exists. Parental occupation (as a proxy for social class) at age three is more closely correlated with children's academic progress at age five than a range of parenting practices, including daily reading with the children (Sullivan et al., 2010).

Many home literacy interventions in the United Kingdom have been targeted at families who are perceived to be socioeconomically 'disadvantaged', drawing on the concept of SES as being a key variable within the home literacy environment (see Figure 2 p46).

Socioeconomic disadvantages (low socioeconomic status or SES) have frequently been correlated with educational disadvantage (Burnett et al., 2014) including variance in language development (Fernald et al., 2013). Research suggests that "mothers with lower educational levels tend to ask fewer "why" questions than do high SES mothers" (Carpentieri et al., 2011, p. 45) and explain aspects of the book rather than support their child through questioning to understand the story for themselves (Bus et al., 1995). Parents with lower SES may also be less likely to read for pleasure themselves and thus struggle to develop this attitude in their children (Mol et al., 2008). The notion of educational disadvantage linked to low SES is problematic as it places the burden on the family as not engaging the 'right' ways with the predominantly White middle-class expectations of parenting (Goodall, 2019), which is itself influenced by the expectations of fitting into the schooling system. Change is expected through organisation-led intervention and the families are expected to "take on middle class attitudes and practices" (van Kleeck et al., 2003 p. 237). The "literacy as a social practice" paradigm looks at how certain types of literacy practice are privileged, for example, the "initiation-reply-evaluation" sequence common to school teaching can also be found more predominantly in middle-class homes (Heath, 2004, p. 51). This paradigm, combined with the 'culture of poverty' discourse seems to position the role of the state as needing to intervene and to 're-educate' parents with more appropriate values and practices (Goodall, 2019). This approach is at odds with the view that effective intervention is most likely when it stems from the parents' own values and goals (DeBaryshe et al., 1992; Harris & Goodall, 2009).

Despite the continued focus on interventions for families with a low SES, some studies suggest that "the importance of the home learning environment indicates that what parents do is more important than who parents are" (Sylva et al., 2004 p. 14). This ability of parents to overcome socioeconomic differences – at least in part – through actions within the home is made clear within other research also. The Australian longitudinal study by Shahaean et al. (2018) found that the association between frequency of early book-sharing and academic achievement was higher in the low and medium SES groups than in the higher SES group, demonstrating, the increased importance of the home learning environment for families who experience other barriers to education. There is still an underlying pattern, however, of reading frequency being broadly associated with socioeconomic factors. The National

Literacy's most recent parental survey found that daily reading activity is more prevalent in families with parents who have university qualifications, and has a linear relationship with increasing parental age and socioeconomic class (59.7% for DE parents through to 68.9% for AB parents) (Knowland & Formby, 2016). The study also finds that the related factors of parental confidence and book ownership also follow the same pattern, which gives pause for thought as to whether these more malleable factors which are susceptible to positive influence through intervention, are worthy of targeting when aiming to increase overall reading frequency. One way of achieving this may be through book-gifting programmes.

It is important not to forget the actual effects of financial poverty, which should not be underestimated, as "children from disadvantaged backgrounds own, on average, 25% fewer books than their peers" (Clark & Picton, 2018 p .2) despite the Book Trust gifted books virtually eradicating zero book ownership among preschool children (Formby, 2014). Nonetheless, within a socioeconomic banding, there is a large variance in the home learning environment and attitudes towards book sharing, and it is important to note that most parents in all categories are book-sharing daily with their children.

To explain the differences in parental engagement rates within advantaged and disadvantaged populations, a lack of information about the importance of such interactions could be considered as a possible factor. In the field of book-sharing this view is not supported by evidence, as large-scale national surveys clearly show that the vast majority (95%) of parents of 0-5-year-olds understand the importance of reading to or with their child, regardless of their socioeconomic background (ranging from 89% to 98% dependent on income bracket). Almost as many (91%) felt it was a special time with their child (ranging from 85% of lower earners to 97% of those earning in a mid- to high-income bracket, but then declining to 92% of the very wealthy) (Scholastic, 2014), and the majority of parents of 0-5-year-olds (51%) believed that they were the primary influencers of their child's literacy and language development (Knowland & Formby, 2016).

One explanation for this may arise in the field of public health economics. The economic phenomenon of 'discount investment' (Agee & Crocker, 1996) can be used to explain the psychological tendency for people to discount the future benefits of present-day actions

(Mayer et al., 2019), in this case, the future benefits of investing time in reading with their child today. Mayer et al. (2019) found in their exploratory study, that using behavioural 'nudges' such as commitments, reminders and social incentives induced positive results in terms of increasing the time spent by parents on reading digital texts with their child and helped parents to make decisions which would positively affect their child's future self.

Another way to explore the differences in parental engagement rates within home literacy interventions is to use the "affordance network framework" (Carr et al., 2010; Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2012, p. 181) and to consider home literacy interventions in terms of their "availability", how "inviting" they are and the degree of "personalising" which takes place (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2012, p. 181). This approach puts the onus on those responsible for the intervention to ensure that the intervention is not merely just available, that is, possible for a family to access, but that those responsible for the opportunity actually invite families to take part. This may involve describing the benefits of participation or wider measures to build family agency to ensure that the family feels that the opportunity is appropriate and permissible for them to engage in. A further supportive step is for the opportunity to also be personalised, either through utilising existing connections with the family, through linking it to their interests or through encouragement to take part as a valued participant, rather than seen as "being part of a 'needy' collective" (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2012, p. 182).

Overall, the socioeconomic status of parents and its impact on child attainment can be mediated or overcome through the creation of a positive home learning environment. It is important to note, however, that there are significant cultural biases to consider, with home learning environments which mirror or feed into the practices of the prevalent educational system being seen as more favourable based on the outcome measures of that educational system. In this way, intrinsic bias may be perpetuated with the potential to devalue home learning environments which do not support the accepted norms of the society in which they are being viewed.

3.3.6   Heritability

Heritability is an aspect of exploring variance in reading ability which is often unaccounted for in general research into reading outcomes. Heritability refers to any genetic disposition towards a particular characteristic and a phenotype is a set of observable characteristics, such as reading, which result from the interaction between genetics and the environment (Friend et al., 2009; Pennington et al., 2009). Although widely discussed in the context of dyslexia, where genetic predisposition is widely accepted as a factor in later dyslexic tendencies (Gialluisi et al., 2020; Snowling, 2001), the growing body of knowledge (Andreola et al., 2021; Friend et al., 2009; van Bergen et al., 2017) on the heritability of general reading ability is often not included in the analyses of reading attainment. In their discussion of associations between the home learning environment and children's reading ability, van Bergen et al. suggest that "heritability could account for the association between parent and child literacy-related measures" (van Bergen et al., 2017, p. 147). They posit that assumptions such as those based on environmental causes for increased reading attainment, for example, larger home libraries (Evans et al., 2010), disregard the implicit heritability of "genetic proclivities" to reading and may be a consequence of "masked genetic effects" (van Bergen et al., 2017, p. 155). The concept of "active gene-environment correlation", where children seek out environments which match their inherited genotype may also contribute to a virtuous circle where parents pass on a genetic heritage conducive to reading attainment, alongside creating an environment which matches their child's inherited genotype, leading to favourable reading outcomes.

Heritability should be considered more frequently as an explanatory factor for variance in reading outcomes, alongside within-family factors such as those considered in the following section.

3.3.7   Family size

Across many measures of educational attainment, increased family size is correlated with decreased educational outcomes for children including reading attainment (Downey, 1995). One of the theoretical reasons for this is resource dilution – the stretching out of finite

parental resources including time across larger numbers of children. This concept was borne out in Yarosz and Barnett's (2001) large-scale parent-report study on reading frequency which found a significant correlation between family size and reading frequency, although the effect wasn't linear. There were relatively large decreases in reading frequency when families expanded from one to two or three children, with smaller decreases as the family size increased further. An adjunct to family size is birth order, and Price and Kalil (2019) demonstrated that both birth order and familial spacing are factors which have a relationship with reading frequency. Older siblings are generally read to more frequently than younger siblings (at the same chronological age), and increased birth spacing increases reading frequency also. These findings seem to fit well with the parental resource theory (Tanskanen et al., 2016) with firstborn or highly spaced siblings receiving more parental resources than later-born or closely spaced siblings. It is also directly correlated with reading scores, with older children tending to outperform their siblings.

Overall, even where the home learning environment may be similar, birth order, sibling spacing and family size may mean that younger children have less access to parent resources to take advantage of the home learning environment offered to their older siblings.

3.3.8   The sex and gender of the child and their parent

Although much of the literature in this area uses the term gender to consider differences between males and females in research, I will refer here to the biological sex of the child or parent recorded or their gender identity as different concepts, as succinctly explained by the Office of National Statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2019b). Only recently has educational research started to consider the terminology used, so much research has considered the gender identity of a child which is sometimes not yet known, instead of the sex characteristics which are more commonly known. A recent study considering differences in reading motivation and attainment in children by sex and by gender found that although there were no sex differences found in reading skill, gender identity "explained additional variance in children's intrinsic reading motivation after sex had been taken into account" (McGeown et al., 2012, p. 6). There are known reading attainment differences between

male and female children as early as the age of five (Department for Education, 2019b) and the perception of reading as a feminine activity may, even in the early years, affect parental dispositions toward reading with their children. In a study of 1,091 Swedish families, being a female child was associated with a higher frequency of parental reading (Westerlund & Lagerberg, 2008), which may be linked to parents gendered views of reading (McKenna et al., 1995), favouring the idea that girls are predisposed to enjoy or be better at reading than boys.

Considering the parents' gender, mothers are consistently reported to read more frequently with their children than fathers (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014), with no reported studies found that considered nonbinary parents. Although fathers tend to be less frequently involved with reading and other developmental activities with their children, evidence suggests that the quality of this involvement may be more important than the quantity (Goldman, 2005). The gendered links to the practice of reading may favour female children and those presenting with feminine gender characteristics, which, in leading to better early reading outcomes for girls, may create a cycle of achievement for girls, with boys being at an early disadvantage in reading outcomes and attainment (Clark, 2009).

3.3.9 Age of child

The way in which children interact with books changes over time, as they develop. Over the first 5 months of life, babies' visual capacities develop, allowing them to focus more consistently on picture books after this age (Krishnan, 2014). In the first 6 months of life, babies develop an interest in books by touching, grabbing and mouthing them with enjoyment becoming clearer for the parent to see as the children start to smile or verbalise. At about 6 months of age, joint reference, or looking in the same direction as their carer is beginning to become established. By 12 months of age, infants can often point and verbalise in relation to books and may have begun to turn pages when assisted. In the second year of life and beyond, toddlers often learn small chunks of text by heart and can toddle to an adult with a book, in expectation of being read to and by preschool years, may be recognising letters or whole words in familiar texts (Honig & Shin, 2001). Right from their time in utero, however, babies can listen to their parents reading a book, and many parents

enjoy reading to their bump or new baby as a way of talking with them. A study of parents whose babies are in neonatal intensive care showed that parents often enjoy reading to their infants as a way of connecting with them and supporting their early development (Lariviere & Rennick, 2011).

Much of the research on the effects of early book-sharing has focused on preschoolers (aged 3 years plus) and older (Bus et al., 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994), with a smaller body of work on children looking at outcomes for children below the age of three (Debaryshe, 1993; Dunst et al., 2012; Fletcher & Reese, 2005; Honig & Shin, 2001) and even less considering children younger than 12 months of age (Needlman, 2018). A recent meta-analysis showed that 22 months was found to be the average onset of reading to children (with a range of 7-41 months) (Dunst et al., 2012), but many individual studies put this age lower, for example 7-8 months (Debaryshe, 1993). Reading to newborns (measured at 2 weeks old) was found to take place in only 5% of families, and the key predictor of this occurrence was the parent reporting to enjoy reading themselves. Reading to infants younger than 36 months, and particularly to those younger than 12 months was the factor "most strongly related to early literacy and language development" (Dunst et al., 2012, p. 2) although the effect sizes overall were not great. The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) recommends reading from birth, and since that recommendation was introduced, reading to 0–3-month-olds has risen by 50% to 43% of parents in the United States (Scholastic, 2014). A very small number of studies have examined the value of reading for children under 6 months of age, but the positive impact on language and vocabulary development in these younger infants is not yet clear. Most studies only identify children as above or below 12 months (Dunst et al., 2012) rather than further dividing experiences in the first year of life. From the few studies that exist in this area, there is very limited evidence as to whether book-sharing prior to 6-8 months has developmental value; this is a relatively new field of study with only small cohort results. Some advantages of linguistic development were found when reading commenced before 6 months of age (Niklas et al., 2016; Niklas & Schneider, 2015) although it was noted that this may be due to the language input rather than the relationship to book reading per se and could realistically be achieved in other ways. Given the complex nature of picture-book content, compared to everyday speech, early book-sharing may induct infants into speech patterns and semantic knowledge (Apps et al., 2016a) as well as setting patterns for positive interactions. Other studies found no

developmental benefit for reading commencing earlier than 8 months (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005), (Tomopoulos et al., 2006), yet these were primarily seeking relationships between literacy skills and early book-sharing, rather than considering wider developmental benefits such as those related to the development of attachment and enjoyment. Most studies have concluded that the benefits may be limited to habit formation with regard to reading frequency (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005; Niklas et al., 2016; O'Farrelly et al., 2018; Tomopoulos et al., 2006) which then correlates positively in later childhood with literacy skills and development. Anecdotal views that reading with babies had little practical impact were found by researchers investigating the mechanisms by which Bookstart may benefit children (Apps et al., 2016a) but they discussed a wide research basis for the importance of developing positive habits around reading from the earliest opportunity (Whitehead, 2004) and to support the development of secondary intersubjectivity (Hobson, 2002) which is "the change in the infant's awareness of the feelings and intentions that are shared in the relationship between the parent and infant" (Trevarthen & Delafield-Butt, 2016, p. 12).

An alternative view of the value of book-sharing with young infants may come from neuropsychology. There is already evidence that parental ostensive cues including parental speech (Wass et al., 2020) and affectionate touch (Carozza & Leong, 2021), such as those found when cuddling up to book-share, play an important role in early neural development (Carozza, 2020; Carozza & Leong, 2021). However, the element of gaze being directed at an object of joint attention - "triadic attention" (Wass et al., 2020, p. 331) - only emerges sometime after 6 months of age (Mundy & Newell, 2007). This leads some researchers to question the developmental appropriateness of book-sharing, with its joint focus on the book as an object (Sinclair et al., 2018). However, the clear opportunities for the other parental ostensive cues of speech and affective touch alongside the opportunities for modelling and supporting the development of joint attention may, in neurodevelopmental terms, outweigh concerns about detracting from the infant's preference for gazing at their parent's face rather than at an object. Indeed, book-sharing could support the development of secondary intersubjectivity "a subtle shift in the infant's awareness of what the other person is aware of" (Hobson, 2002, p. 63) through giving regular opportunities for the development of this skill.

Parents may feel that the lack of feedback from younger babies is a signal that they are not ready to enjoy book-sharing (Preece & Levy, 2018) though others reported perceived benefits: "even if she doesn't realise she's getting anything out of it she will be, just from hearing the language (Elizabeth)" (Preece & Levy, 2018, p. 16). This second opinion demonstrates the parents' understanding that a benefit could exist independently from overt positive feedback from the child. As with much parenting, the best people to judge whether book-sharing is a developmentally appropriate activity for their very young babies would be the parents themselves (Needlman, 2018).

3.3.10 Temperament of child

In book-sharing interactions, it is important to understand the role of the child as one where they have agency and where their own likes, interests and temperament will impact the experience of the reading dyad. Temperament is often defined as individual differences in emotion, attitude, reactivity and regulation which are "genetically based and open to experiential influences" (Wang et al., 2017, p. 3). Children who have "high effortful control" such as the ability to sustain attention and self-regulate own behaviour, "low surgency" for example more restrained motor movement such as being able to sit still and "low negative affect" including fewer displays of anger, fear or sadness are found to attain higher in school-based measures such as reading ability (Wang et al., 2017, p. 3). In addition, children displaying these temperamental states are likely to elicit positive parent-child interactions during book-sharing sessions (Laible, 2004) and those displaying more challenging temperaments correlate with higher parental stress (Noel et al., 2008) which may lead to more limited interactions within book-sharing experiences.

3.3.11 Size of the home library and impact of book ownership

Home library size has been clearly correlated with literacy attainment in areas such as reading performance and vocabulary. Children aged 3-5 years who had a below average number of books (owned or borrowed) in the home were more likely to have below average standardized scores on the British Picture Vocabulary Scale than their peers, and higher

than average book ownership was correlated with higher than average standardized scores (Knowland & Formby, 2016). The vocabulary scores also correlated with parental educational qualification and reading frequency. In older children (8-18 years of age), book ownership is clearly correlated with reading ability. Those who have over 60 books in the home are 5.5 times more likely to be reading above their chronological age than peers who have fewer than 10 books in the home (Clark & Poulton, 2011). The OECD also demonstrated through the PISA survey in 2000, the correlation between mean number of books in the home and reading engagement at age 15. Although the OECD has not released further research on this topic, basic analysis I have run on the latest release of 2018 data suggest that this relationship pervades (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). In a landmark study covering 27 countries, Evans et al. analysed over 70,000 cases across a variety of political and economic environments, and concluded that "children growing up in homes with many books get three years more schooling than children from bookless homes, independent of their parents' education, occupation and class" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 171). They concluded that having many books in the home was an equivalent advantage to having a university educated parent compared to an unschooled one, and twice the advantage of the father being a professional compared to an unskilled worker. This reiterates Sylva et al.'s (2004) assertion that what happens in the home can be more important than who the parents are, in socioeconomic terms Of course, it can be inferred that simply having books in a home that were unread would not confer the same advantage as having books which were read and interacted with. Instead, the parental engagement with acquiring and reading books with their child may be what the marker of numbers of books is actually correlating with future achievement.

In Sections 3.3.2 to 3.3.10 I have considered aspects related to the child and parent with regard to how they affect book-sharing and related outcomes. I now turn to the third participant in the reading triad, the book, to consider how it changes and mediates the parent-child book-sharing experience.

3.4   The role of the book

In her discussion of evaluations of early literacy intervention, Burnett notes that studies of book-gifting organisations often "referred to books in generic terms" (Burnett, 2016, p. 535) and Van Kleeck (2003) talks about the type of book and book characteristics as the "ignored dimension". The genre of the book has been shown to make a difference to the type of parent-child interaction, which is compounded by differences in adult interaction due to the age of the child (Stahl, 2003). These aspects of the gifted books are examined further in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.9. Although this study does not investigate the differing roles or effects of specific books or types of books that have been gifted, it is useful to consider the many ways in which books gifted into the home may be viewed and used.

Books can play many roles (Burnett, 2016); they can act as *connected artefacts*, to connect the child to other family practices and real-world events and interactions, they can *broker* parent/child relationships (see Section 3.2.7), they can be *comfort*, focusing emotional interactions and nurturing the reader or the reading dyad, or they can be *stories,* where the focus is on the content as given by the author. Burnett also explored the ways in which books can be perceived by those sharing them: they can be a *proxy* for educational improvement, a *portal* to build cultural capital (which is defined as what is valued by the giver), and they can act as *visitor* – bringing different cultural practices to those usually existing within the home. As an example, the "slipperiness" of books – the way that they "become different things and act differently in relation to different practices" (Burnett, 2016, p. 530) - was illustrated even with the differing views of survey respondents on the appropriateness of different books as part of the Imagination Library offering. An example of this was comments about the inclusion of books with licenced television characters within the Imagination Library selection, with some parents feeling that they were of less value than other titles and other parents welcoming the link with their child's interests. Related to this "slipperiness", books may also be seen as transactional objects, where some of the benefits of book-sharing are not attributable to the books themselves, but what happens during the interactions which supports early infant and child development (Raikes et al., 2006). As a transactional object, a particular book could not be linked to a particular

outcome, but instead the way in which the reading dyad interacted with the book would be central to the outcomes from the interaction.

A related way to view books within the home is as boundary objects (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Carr, 2000), items which can provide a bridging function from one state to another. The nature of the boundary to be crossed may vary depending on who is perceiving the boundary - gifters, parents and educators may have differing assumptions on the role of the book at the point of it being gifted into the home. At the point of acceptance of the book into the home, it is the child and parent who co-create the role and meaning of the book as an object. The boundaries they cross with the book will differ according to the developmental stage and interests of the child and the expectations and motivations of the parent.

In this study, it is important to acknowledge the implicit bias that exists when centring books as an intervention tool. Within the research, the role of the gifted book is assumed to be related to the likelihood of sharing the book, and potentially related to literacy practices or subsequent attainments. Burnett elaborates on the alternative role of the book, which is not 'just' a book, but is a signpost to expected behaviours:

> Books here do not seem significant in their own right but rather for their role in promoting practices which are assumed to be significant for language and literacy development. Books appear as proxies for the encouragement of shared reading which, in turn, is seen as a proxy for future attainment and ultimately life chances. (Burnett, 2016, p. 532)

This relates to the research previously considered on the number of books in the home, (see Section 3.3.11) and the use of the number of books as a proxy for adult-child engagement with those books within the home.

In the previous sections, I outlined the variables that might affect the book-sharing experience, considering both child and parent factors alongside the role of the book itself. In this study I aim to give parents every opportunity to define the role of the gifted books for

themselves and their children, as free as possible from the cultural and educational expectations in which my own assumptions are rooted.

In the following section I consider book-gifting schemes and their potential benefits. These benefits should be understood as potential benefits, because the factors illustrated in the current section clearly show the variability of book-sharing experiences which can be influenced by aspects as diverse as sibling order and the frequency of reading within the home. Book-sharing is not a single activity, experienced in the same way in each family, and nor should book-gifting be expected to influence families through a single mechanism or through a universal strategy.

3.5   A brief history of book-gifting

Book-gifting programmes have become prevalent both nationally and internationally over the last 30 years. The programme Reach Out and Read began in the United States in 1989 with Bookstart following in the United Kingdom in 1992. Key similarities across book-gifting programmes are aims to encourage enjoyment of reading, building of an ownership model for children and often facilitating a young starting age for book-sharing. Often, book-gifting programmes aim to engage families early through gifts of books soon after birth (Council on Early Childhood, 2014) and following large quantities of broadly positive research (Burnett et al., 2014; de Bondt et al., 2020; High et al., 2000; Venn, 2014), many charities have initiated book-gifting programmes at local, national and international levels (see Table 1 p71). There are also many variations between programmes, including the number of books distributed, the length of involvement time and the support given to parents. Other variables between programmes include which books are selected and the process of distributing them alongside the context of the distribution and the families targeted for involvement. Reach Out and Read, for example, is based on a paediatric intervention, with doctors and healthcare professionals advising parents on the value of reading with their child. The significance of the recommender, here the paediatrician or their staff, "may give special significance and weight to caregiving advice" (de Bondt et al., 2020, p. 367). This means that parents may place more weight on recommendations received in a healthcare setting than on other parenting advice. The BookTrust model of universal, often

government-funded book-gifting at key points in a child's early life has been adopted across many countries in Europe and beyond. In the United Kingdom, children in England, Wales and Northern Ireland receive books from BookTrust through the Bookstart programme within the first year of life and at between 3- and 4-years-old (although due to funding cuts there was a hiatus in book-gifting through BookTrust in Northern Ireland from 2015-2020) (BookTrust, 2020). Children in Scotland receive books from the Scottish BookTrust through the Bookbug programme as babies, and then three additional age points up to 5 years old. As these are universal programmes, it is important to note that the majority of my study participants can be expected to have received gifted books from these programmes.

The third large-scale book-gifting programme is Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. This started in 1995 with the singer and philanthropist funding books for children through the Dollywood Foundation in her hometown of Sevier, Tennessee in the United States. The programme began to be replicated across the United States from 2000 and in the United Kingdom in 2007, where over 200 affiliate partners support the distribution of over 40,000 books each month to children in communities across the United Kingdom (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021).

3.6   Overview of book-gifting schemes worldwide and in the United Kingdom

Book-gifting schemes began to emerge in the early 1990s, with Reach Out and Read in the United States and Bookstart in the United Kingdom both spreading nationally by around 2000. Many countries have followed suit. In Europe this was through the BookTrust affiliate programme, now EU Read and there exists a Global Network for Early Years Book-gifting where organisations such as Bookstart Japan and Better Beginnings in Australia join with the European schemes to share best practice. Inclusion in the network is limited to schemes which had available research which was at least in part in English, and where the scheme is reaching more than 5000 children per annum.

The 'big three' book-gifting schemes internationally are: Reach Out and Read (United States) (4.8 million recipients annually), Bookstart (United Kingdom) (3.9 million recipients annually) and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (international) (1.4 million recipients annually). Many

other schemes exist worldwide and are detailed in Table 1 p71 in the order of their size (EURead, 2020). This means that around 14 million children out of 650 million 0-5-year-olds worldwide may be accessing book-gifting schemes annually, which is around 2% of the children in this age bracket (Unicef, 2021).

Table 1 Book-gifting programmes

Scheme name	Country	Offer	Key references
Reach Out and Read	United States	4.8 million children receiving books and advice given by paediatricians	(Billings, 2009b; Diener et al., 2012; High et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2000; Mendelsohn et al., 2001; Needlman & Silverstein, 2004; Sharif et al., 2002; Yeager Pelatti et al., 2014)
Bookstart	United Kingdom	3.9 million children in the United Kingdom receive book packs given at two (previously three) preschool points (universal)	(Apps et al., 2016a; Demack & Stevens, 2013; Just Economics, 2010; Moore & Wade, 2003; K. Pahl et al., 2010; Wade & Moore, 1996; Wade & Moore, 2000)
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library	United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Ireland	1.4 million children worldwide including 40,000 children in the United Kingdom receive book a month sent in the post from 0-5 years.	(Becket, 2009; Conyers, 2012; Hall & Jones, 2016; HighScope, 2003; Johnson, 2016b; Neyer et al., 2018; Ridzi et al., 2017; Samiei et al., 2016; Whitehurst et al., 1988)
Lesestart 1 2 3	Germany	800,00 children (50-60% of the receiving book packs in three tranches (at 1, 2 and 3 years)	(Schorb, 2010)
Bookstart Japan	Japan	500,000 children Book pack and advice given before 12 months	(Tsuji, 2013)
Book Bug (Previously Bookstart United Kingdom)	Scotland	240,000 children receive book packs at five points from antenatal to aged 5	(Davidson, 2015)

Bookstart Korea	Korea	120,000 children receiving a book pack	(Kim, 2010)
Boekstart	Netherlands	67,500 babies receive a book pack between 3 and 18 months	(van Den Berg, 2015)
Raising Literacy Australia	South Australia	65,000 children receiving book packs in three tranches (universal)	(Hill et al., 2014)
Boekstart (previously Boekbabies)	Belgium	65,000 babies and toddlers receiving book packs in two tranches	(van Nuffel et al., 2013; Vanobbergen et al., 2009)
Better Beginnings	Western Australia	31,500 babies (90% of those in the state) receive a book pack given at 6-8 week check	(Barratt-Pugh & Allen, 2011; Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016)
Buchstart Schweiz	Switzerland	30,000 children receiving a bag of books in their first year of life with some receiving follow up pack	
Let's Read	Australia	10,000 children receiving book packs and advice in three tranches	(Goldfeld et al., 2012)
Read to Me, Nova Scotia	Canada	10,000 children receive a book pack given in the maternity ward	(Veldhuijzen van Zanten et al., 2012)
Books4Babies	Ireland	9,000 receiving one pack aged 7-9 months	(MacDonald & Kinlen, 2017)
Booktime	Northern Ireland	Scheme closed.	(Connolly et al., 2012; O'Hare & Connolly, 2014)

I chose the three largest schemes for detailed investigation (see Sections 3.6.1, 3.6.2 and 3.6.3). These schemes were chosen because of the scope of their reach, with over a million children accessing each programme over time. The scheme sizes meant that there were larger bodies of research on their efficacy than for any of the other schemes, and because they were English-language schemes, the research was accessible to me as an English-speaking researcher. It was important to consider the programme evaluation data on these three schemes in order to understand the common areas for investigation and research limitations found within this area. I draw out considerations for my own research in Section 3.10.

Reach Out and Read, Bookstart and the Imagination Library were subjected to a recent meta-analysis (de Bondt et al., 2020), the results of which are outlined in the scheme-specific sections. It is important to note that the meta-analysis excluded all studies which did not have a control group, those which were qualitative in nature or those which did not have enough data to calculate the effect size. These decisions skew the findings in favour of those which can be quantitatively measured using control groups, which bias the data in favour of assessments of early literacy. This excludes potential benefits which are measured in other ways, such as parent satisfaction and child reading engagement. A literature review from 2014 also considered book-gifting schemes (Burnett et al., 2014) and again highlights from this review will be considered within the scheme sections which follow. This literature review (referred to erroneously as a systematic review by de Bondt) did not privilege randomised control trials and notes that "a meta-analysis may neglect other rich and varied evidence of the value of bookgifting" (Burnett et al., 2014, p. 46).

3.6.1   Reach Out and Read

The Reach Out and Read (ROR) programme adopts a paediatric model - one where the doctor is instrumental in utilising health appointments as wider opportunities to encourage child-development. Children are gifted books at each well-child appointment as a 'prescription', alongside advice for parents on how to read with their child and modelling through the creation of literacy-rich waiting rooms. The underlying hypothesis of the ROR programme is focused on attainment, and believes that by improving the home literacy

environment, particularly of families in poverty, children's preschool language and later literacy skills will be improved (Mendelsohn et al., 2001). As a national programme, ROR reaches around one-third of all children in the United States. The programme aspires to reach 91% of all children in the United States. Each child receives an average of four or five books over a three-year timespan and these are available in 26 different languages. This number is lower than the number of books in the home which correlates with later academic attainment (Clark & Poulton, 2011). As this intervention is run primarily by clinicians, several medical-style trials have been run looking at cohorts in receipt of book-gifting. Two significant research reviews have been conducted on the ROR intervention, (Needlman & Silverstein, 2004; Yeager Pelatti et al., 2014), although the most recent review specifically excludes qualitative data such as parental views on the impact of the programme. The contents of both reviews differed only slightly, despite the ten-year gap, with one additional study included in the 2014 review (Needlman et al., 2005) and one study which was not included in the 2014 review (Theriot et al., 2003).

Three of the studies considered the impact on children's vocabulary compared to peers not receiving the intervention, and directly measured this through child testing. In one cross-sectional study, 200 dyads across two sites were subjected to expressive and receptive vocabulary tests and a home literacy environment scaling exercise. This was a retrospective study in which the cohorts attended one of two medical centres which served the same population, one where ROR had been running and one without access to the scheme. After controlling for the first language by looking only at the English-speaking families, the study found a 7-point difference in standardised receptive vocabulary score, in favour of the cohort receiving the intervention (Sharif et al., 2002). This finding was also present (8.6 point difference after adjusting for confounders) in an earlier study (Mendelsohn et al., 2001) of Latino or Black dyads. A correlation was also found between receptive and expressive language scores and the number of books given by the clinic in a small (64 dyad) retrospective study (Theriot et al., 2003).

Most of the studies considered the impact of the programme on the frequency of reading and perceived child reading enjoyment. Almost unanimously, the studies found positive correlations with these aspects, ranging from 1.7x to 10x increase in parental reading

frequency (Golova et al., 1999; Sanders et al., 2000; Silverstein et al., 2002), 2x increase in reading listed among the child's favourite activities (Jones et al., 2000; Silverstein et al., 2002) and 4x increase in literacy orientation among the parents (High et al., 1998; Needlman et al., 1991).

One study considered by both reviews did not show any significant difference between the book-gifting intervention and non-intervention groups (Fortman et al., 2003). This was the only study which looked exclusively at a White, middle-class population, rather than the others which focused on socioeconomically disadvantaged families, particularly those from Hispanic backgrounds. In this study, no significant difference was found as a result of book-gifting, potentially because the population was already largely engaged with book reading and ownership, but the addition of videoed guidance on how to effectively read with your child was shown to have some impact. The inclusion of this study leads to questions about the effectiveness of book-gifting without parental training in populations that already read frequently with their children. This may relate to the population of the study being conversant with "expected" home literacy behaviours and bringing prior cultural capital which was not enhanced by additional small numbers of books. It seems likely from this study that simply enlarging an already extensive home library may not have much impact, which could have economic implications for universal schemes.

An additional study, not included in either of the reviews, looked into kindergarten performance of children in Utah, United States, following the ROR intervention. In this non-controlled study of 40 children from Hispanic families, children who had benefitted from the ROR programme, 77% showed emergent literacy skills (as measured by the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIEBELS) test and teacher reporting) in the average or above average range at the end of their kindergarten year. All of the children involved had at least two risk factors for poor kindergarten performance and would have been predicted to score in the lower quartiles on these measures. A protective factor may have been that their family reading frequency was similar to that of average/high-income Americans, despite living in poverty, and the study postulates that the programme's positive impact on reading frequency may have played a large role in the children's emergent literacy skills (Diener et al., 2012). This factor was also identified in an earlier study, which

placed ROR families as likely to read for an additional day each week compared with non-participant families (Mendelsohn et al., 2001).

There appears to be a wide evidence base for the impact of Reach Out and Read on the home literacy environment within socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, as well as evidence of its positive impact on expressive vocabulary and other skills likely to support thetransition to kindergarten or school. Indeed, a recent meta-review of book-gifting schemes (de Bondt et al., 2020) concluded that Reach Out and Read had significantly higher effects on literacy related skills than Bookstart or the Imagination Library. A key aspect of this scheme, compared to the European models, is the paediatric discussion which both places the intervention as a recommendation from a trusted source, and provides one-to-one guidance about its implementation in the home environment. This allows it to be somewhat tailored to each family's circumstances, with advice differing based on the starting point of the home literacy environment for each family. This model relies on families regularly attending well-child clinics which may mean that the populations researched were already invested in their children's development and were familiar with receiving advice and support via the clinic. Well-child clinics and the paediatrician involvement are not models which are found in the United Kingdom, where health visitors take much of this role.

3.6.2 BookTrust

Funded by the United Kingdom government, Bookstart packs are offered universally to all children in England and Wales and comprise two board books in the first pack (0-12 months) and a book at age 3-4 years. Each pack comes with guidance and support notes for the parents. There are also packs suitable for children with a variety of additional needs. Over the last 30 years, the offer has changed in line with funding availability, therefore, it is important to note that the current offer is not necessarily reflective of what was in place at the time of various research projects (Demack & Stevens, 2013; Moore & Wade, 2003; Wade & Moore, 1993). Northern Ireland has only just reinstated a universal book-gifting scheme in place following previous funding cuts. The first Bookstart pack a child receives is delivered by a health professional and the second is available from their nursery, library or

other early years setting. Although the initial pack should be delivered as part of discussion from a health visitor about the child's overall development, significant reductions in the number of health visitors within England have impacted on the amount of time that can be devoted to this aspect, so there is less similarity with the ROR model's paediatric discussion than might otherwise be expected (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021).

The evidence base for Bookstart changing family routines or attitudes is limited, despite some large-scale randomised control trials (RCTs) being undertaken. RCTs of this type of intervention are problematic, due to the intervention, at its core, being delivered in the home and thus both part of complex home systems (See Section 5.4) and enacted in different localities each of which have different support available around the book-gifting. One such RCT was conducted over 60 early years settings in 15 English Local Authorities (Demack & Stevens, 2013) that distributed Bookstart Treasure Chest books. However, a significant methodological issue arising from this trial was that the data gathered was mostly from opt-in parental survey responses, so it does not represent the full catchment of these areas. The matched samples from the control and intervention groups failed to show statistical changes in parental reading frequency or library membership after the intervention. The research demonstrated high levels of support and positive feeling for the scheme, both from parents and professionals alike. A second RCT, this time of Bookstart+, the gift for 2-year-olds, also found limited impact of change, reporting negative results regarding increasing library visiting and no statistically significant resultant change on parental attitudes towards reading with their children (O'Hare & Connolly, 2014). This study did report a positive change in parental attitudes toward their own reading, although the authors noted that significant attrition between the pre and post-test measures occurred. Parental views on the value of Bookstart were also gathered in a large-scale (n = 1,000) survey of families commissioned by BookTrust in 2014 (Venn, 2014). This study demonstrated measurable differences in reasons for parental book-sharing, with recipient families more likely to cite time spent together and child enjoyment as reasons for reading as well as improved reading frequency among recipient families. Again, high parental value was placed on the contents of the Bookstart pack, with recipients perceiving it to be of high quality, and nearly half (45%) of respondents believed that it has had a positive impact on the quality time they spent with their child.

A further report commissioned by Bookstart to discover the details of the book-gifting process (Apps et al., 2016a) included interviews with parents and professionals across England to gather views on the mechanisms of the book-gifting process. This research considered the differences in parental attitudes to the 'right' time to be gifted a book or to begin reading with a baby, as well as the place and person who gifted the books to the family. A key message from this paper was that the message that was shared with the family was, in the opinion of many of the participants, as important as the gift itself. Case studies of best practice were included, demonstrating how professionals engaged families with their gifted books and modelled book-sharing behaviours as part of the gifting process. Another key finding from participant interviews was the mixture of feelings on the place of books within bedtime routines, with some participants feeling it helped and others, particularly with younger babies, not finding that book-sharing fitted easily into getting their baby ready for sleep. The role of the baby as the "active ingredient" (Apps et al., 2016a, p. 37), regulating and sustaining book-sharing through their reactions was explored, as was the gap between reported and real-life experiences of book-sharing. The research was concluded by compiling a model of recipient attitudes (Figure 6 p78) demonstrating the breadth of parental opinions about book-sharing with their child, and a theory of change. The model of recipient attitudes provides a framework for considering groups of parents according to their responses to book-gifting offers, although the authors note that the groups are not exclusive but instead represent broad sweeps of opinion.

Figure 6 Bookstart giftee states at gifting (Apps, 2016)

'Dedicated'	'Reminded'	'Newly informed'	'Unconverted'	'Unreached'
We have a book sharing plan	This is a prompt to start	I hadn't thought about it	I'm not convinced	The message hasn't reached me
(My baby already has books; we've been reading from birth)	(I had intended to do it, I hadn't got round to it yet)	(I want to do my best as a parent so I'm going to start)	(It's too soon; my baby is too lively; there's too much going on)	(I've moved a lot; I haven't been seen by HV)

The theory of change proposed by the study authors in an unpublished report adjacent to the published report referred to above, consists of activities which support book-sharing and the Bookstart scheme, assumptions of parental behaviours, outcomes from book-gifting

through the scheme and an overall aim of "frequent, habitual, joyful book-sharing by all parents of babies starting as early as possible" (Apps et al., 2016b, p. 2). The outcomes covered parental views on child development, valuing and enjoying book-sharing, supportive routines and parental views of themselves as readers. It is of note that the outcomes and aims are at odds with some of the measures investigated by the RCTs and this tension between academic and holistic programme outcomes is at the heart of much book-gifting research.

Overall, the Bookstart programmes are valued and enjoyed by families and practitioners alike, but there is not yet a solid dataset showing a related increase in reading frequency or library membership. This may be due to the highly sporadic nature of the gifting, occurring at two or three points in a child's early years (dependent on area and programme), and the different ways in which the books are gifted, encompasing a variety of support levels for parents.

3.6.3   Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Launched in Tennessee in 1995, the Imagination Library partners with local affiliates to distribute a book a month to children in a given catchment area from birth to 5 years of age. The Imagination Library operates statewide in Tennessee and in programmes across the United States as well as in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the Republic of Ireland. In the United Kingdom there are over 200 schemes running, gifting books to over 40,000 children each month. Most of these catchment areas are geographical, but some cater to particular groups, such as children in Local Authority care.

The key differences between the Imagination Library and other large book-gifting programmes are 1) the number of books gifted, 2) the role of the local affiliate and 3) the impact of the celebrity benefactor.

The number of books gifted (60 books for a child enrolled from birth to 5 years of age), far exceeds any other national or international scheme and the charity aims not just to offer a taster of books but to help each child build their own home library. The books are selected

by nationally convened committees of childhood and literature experts. Books are chosen to suit the children's developmental stage; aspects considered include ensuring a mixture of classic and popular texts and the variety of books received across the 5-year experience.

The affiliate is a local partner, often a charity, local interest group or local government body, which is responsible for signing up families to the programme and interacting with them during the programme. The Imagination Library is often misunderstood in the literature to be purely a book distribution scheme (Burnett et al., 2014; de Bondt et al., 2020), rather than a programme where affiliates tailor the programme to their local needs.

> To provide the programl[sic] locally, sponsoring organizations have three primary roles: registering local children for the program, covering the cost of the books and mailing, and managing their local database. In turn, the Dollywood Foundation provides the books and mailing system; maintains the relationship with the publisher; provides technical support to establish the program locally; assists with public relations and marketing materials; works with Dolly on national/international promotional efforts; provides staff assistance to the national committees that select the books; drives efforts to keep quality high and costs low; and works to inspire, share, and innovate with partners. (Conyers, 2012, p. 224)

Another difference between the Imagination Library and other book-gifting programmes is the figurehead of Dolly Parton, a 'unique selling point' which is not replicated in any other large-scale scheme. As evidenced by the views of parents and children (see Section 11.4.3), the programme is positioned as a personal gift from Dolly, and this is demonstrated in the letters from Dolly to the recipient children which are printed in the first and last books in the scheme.

The Imagination Library has been subjected to extensive small-scale research, mostly of geographically separate investigations undertaken by researchers at the instigation of the local funding bodies. Ten papers have been published in peer-reviewed journals, with no RCTs having taken place and few studies using samples other than convenience samples. Although valuable, the purpose of local evaluations is different from that intended for submission to a journal, so the rigour of these studies is often not comparable to that of other large book-gifting schemes. The majority of the literature uses parent surveys and

interviews to define the impact on the family, which has an inherent problem in which parents may give an answer which they believe shows them in a positive light or is socially desirable (Cohen et al., 2017). There is also much scope for variability, with personal definitions of 'enjoyed' or 'frequent' differing among respondents.

In a published report analysing the available evidence base for the Imagination Library (Johnson, 2016b) and the full dataset obtained via personal correspondence (Johnson, 2016a), Johnson gave a rigour rating of medium-high to just one report (Thompson et al., 2017) with four others as of medium rigour (County, 2013; Sell, 2015; Singh et al., 2015; Westine, 2007). This was due to the scarcity of studies using experimental or quasi-experimental designs, with measures frequently taking place at the point of entry to kindergarten. This means that children have had up to 5 years of experiences which may have confounded the results, and that children may have been in receipt of the intervention for a variable amount of time. Johnson noted that none of the Imagination Library research includes baseline measures, although demographic variables have been noted in some studies. There were also no studies where specific assessments of Imagination Library recipients and non-recipients was carried out for the purposes of the research; rather, the data were extracted from assessments carried out for other purposes.

One of the most rigorous studies Johnson reported on used a two-group, quasi-experimental design and although random group assignment was not possible, a propensity score match was used. This worked to mitigate for the elective nature of the programme where participants must opt-in to receiving the books for their children, and where this opting in might intrinsically be linked to other attitudes which would influence outcome measures (Thompson et al., 2017). The study found that there was little effect (d = .043) on the quality of reading interaction and no impact on child interest, parents' feelings about their own reading, literacy materials or space was found. No impact was found either on post-intervention social-emotional or emergent literacy assessments conducted in kindergartens. The conclusion was that the lack of additional intervention (such as providing parent support) meant that the programme failed to produce measurable impacts in the areas investigated. This was different from the change found in evaluations of Bookstart (see Section 3.6.2) on parental self-perception, but the overall lack of impact found by

analysing pre- and post-intervention measures about literacy outcomes mirrors the Bookstart RCTs. The Thompson study was of a small size, with 56 matched participants in each of the treatment and control groups in Study 1, and 189 in each group in Study 2. Although these numbers met the power analysis calculations for the cohort (n = 2,409), the cohort and thus the sample size were small when compared to the national participation rate for the Imagination Library. One methodological problem which was not considered by the authors was whether their study cohort was representative of the wider Imagination Library recipient group, or of the national population in general. There was no explanation within the research for the selection of the districts with consideration of whether they were typical of Imagination Library participants more widely. Of particular note were the 81.4% of participants with college or undergraduate degrees, which is at odds with the 36% of people over 25 years of age nationally holding a degree (United States Census Bureau, 2020). This demographic anomaly, combined with the small sample size, raises questions over the generalisability of these findings.

In another 2017 study, published after Johnson's report, a kindergarten readiness measure for n = 2,731 participants in a Syracuse, New York neighbourhood with high rates of deprivation was analysed to determine whether Imagination Library participation correlated with increased letter-framing fluency (Ridzi et al., 2017). The authors found that children enrolled for at least 36 months of the 60-month programme scored statistically higher on this measure than non-participants or those enrolled for a shorter timescale. The authors considered whether the families who participated in the Imagination Library could be different from those who did not participate, so like the Thompson study above, propensity matching was used to consider potential demographic influences. They found that the findings held true when the students were propensity-matched for demographic factors. The authors noted that this was only one measure of kindergarten readiness, albeit "the most significant predictor of first grade reading, vocabulary and language" (Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2006, p. 352). This study had a more even distribution of Imagination Library versus non-Imagination Library participation than the Thompson study, with 37% of the cohort enrolled, but of these few met a further criterion for long-term enrolment in the programme, with only 90 children able to be cross-referenced for long term enrolment and kindergarten readiness data, which was a limitation of the study. The study did not use

parental demographic measures such as parental education level, but nearly 70% of students in both cohorts were eligible for a free or reduced school lunch which is an indication that parental socioeconomic status was likely to be low. The authors considered that a potential selection bias could be that parents who were more actively involved in their child's educational life might be more likely to sign up for the Imagination Library than other parents, although the local commitment to supporting sign-ups from at-risk families was a mediating factor for this potential variable.

A third recent American study which recruited n = 2,428 children in a Midwestern state, also demonstrated some gains in kindergarten literacy measures for children enrolled in the programme (Skibbe & Foster, 2019) . This study had a better representation from Imagination Library families (42%) than the Thompson (2006) or Ridzi (2017) studies explored previously, although the authors still noted a bias toward families who were not eligible for free school lunches and/or who had received preschool education being more likely to be scheme participants. This study found that Imagination Library participants performed significantly better than non-participants on some measures of early literacy such as rhyme awareness and alphabet knowledge, and that when controlling for demographic variables, Imagination Library participants still showed higher composite early literacy scores than non-participants. The authors noted that the length of participation in the scheme was linked to higher composite early literacy scores, which triangulated the findings of Ridzi (2017) that children who had participated for more than half the scheme length benefited more than those with shorter participation times.

All three pieces of research examined here (Skibbe & Foster, 2019), (Ridzi et al., 2017) and (Thompson et al., 2017), which were funded by universities and organisations linked with the delivery of the Imagination Library, also involved an element of parental reporting on the in-family success of the programme. Near-universal positive feelings toward the programme were reported in all three studies, with parents reporting that they felt participation in the programme increased the home literacy environment through additional books in the home and higher reading frequency. Overall, the studies noted that the low per-participant cost of the programme meant that even with relatively small gains

measured, the intervention remained cost-effective, but could be further supported by additional localised interventions.

3.6.4   Research on the Imagination Library in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, research into the Imagination Library has been primarily focused on local reports of parent views of the programme rather than peer-reviewed studies and until very recently no studies within the United Kingdom have utilised a control group as part of the methodology (de Bondt et al., 2020). To address this gap in the literature, a between-group design study in a socially disadvantaged area of Nottingham, compared n = 512 families of whom 63% received Imagination Library books by using self-report questionnaires (Tura et al., 2021). In this study, the Imagination Libraries participants were more likely to be from educationally more vulnerable groups such as parents who were unemployed or families where English was spoken as an additional language and Black families were also more likely to be in receipt of the books. The authors found that participation in the Imagination Library for more than a year was associated with greater reading frequency than non-participation, even when controlling for socio-demographic variables. Parents within the programme were also reported to engage in more frequent supportive behaviours such as talking about the pictures and content of the book than non-participants. The authors acknowledged the limitations of self-report within the research alongside reduced demographic variables captured which did not allow for parental education level and sibling presence to be considered.

Considering the findings of the meta-analysis of book-gifting programmes (which were limited to quantitative studies with control groups), data about the Imagination Library and its impact on the home learning environment showed a higher average effect size ($d = 0.50$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.68]) than for Reach Out and Read or Bookstart (de Bondt et al., 2020). Other findings include small positive effect sizes for literacy-related behaviours and skills ($d = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.31]). The authors hypothesised that more books did not have a higher impact per se on children's language and literacy development, as they noted that the programmes providing fewer books also had an impact in these spheres. However, this hypothesis assumes that the literacy skill data took precedence over the home learning

environment data (where the Imagination Library showed the highest effect size). As Reach Out and Read had a much larger database of quantitative studies to draw on within a clinical research tradition which matched with the authors' study preferences, it may be that the outcomes of the meta-analysis were intrinsically biased by the inclusion criteria. The authors acknowledged that differences in the emphasis of the bodies of literature about different programmes were a confounding factor in this research. The authors' conclusion also failed to focus on the home learning environment measures which formed 50% of their analysis, which is where the Imagination Library was demonstrated to be the most efficacious scheme.

Taking the Imagination Library research on its own terms, as generally descriptive of parent-reported measures, rather than through unfavourable comparisons with RCTs, there is a large body of research exploring the lived experiences of parents and their views of their children's experiences which were overwhelmingly positive (Pahl et al., 2010; Ridzi et al., 2017; Waldron, 2018; Westine, 2007). However, there is a literature gap to investigate a null hypothesis based on Thompson's (2017) findings that no discernible programme effects could be found and also a nation-specific literature gap on the impact of the Imagination Library on early literacy measures in the United Kingdom.

As an outcome of Johnson's review of the research on the Imagination Library, a logic model was constructed (see Figure 7 p87) theorising what and how change could be effected through participation in the Imagination Library (Johnson, 2016b). This model is deconstructed and improvements are suggested in Section 12.8. The model focuses on literacy skills as intermediate and long-term outcomes, with changes to the home learning environment being posited as short-term effects, both of which are based on the literature. The strategies, however, are not all drawn clearly from the available data, as few studies have considered what happens with the books in the home; indeed, Johnson noted that within the research "there were no observations of parents' literacy practices nor specific measures of implementation in home" (Johnson, 2016b, p. 16). This is a concern with the model, as the supposed in-home strategies are not yet supported by observation or parental reports of in-home behaviours. My research will consider parental reports of home literacy practices which will add to the knowledge underpinning this section of the logic model,

along with evidence of whether the outcomes are applicable to the United Kingdom context and whether other outcomes should be included within the model.

Figure 7 Imagination Library logic model

Logic Model

Based on Imagination Library Reseach Findings and Literature Review

INPUTS >	STRATEGIES >	SHORT-TERM >	INTERMEDIATE >	LONG-TERM
Books mailed to home in child's name **Book sharing guides included with books**	**Target families with children ages birth to five** **Caregivers read daily with children** **Caregivers read books multiple times**	**Enhanced home literacy environment** · Earlier onset of caregiver/child book reading · Increased frequency of caregiver/child book reading · Increased duration of caregiver/child book reading sessions · Increased number of picture books in the home **Positive attitudes about reading and motivation to read among caregivers and children** · Increased frequency of child requests for reading · Increased frequency of child book play **Increased interactions between caregivers and children during book reading** · Increased child responses/contributions during book reading · Increased reading skill practice	**Increased emerging literacy skills** · Concepts about print · Alphabet knowledge · Receptive and expressive vocabulary · Phonological awareness · Phonological memory	**Kindergarten literacy readiness**

(Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021a)

3.7 Why might book-gifting programmes be beneficial?

Book-gifting schemes have been built on a body of evidence regarding the efficacy of book-sharing as a tool for academic and socioemotional development (Blewitt et al., 2009; Bus et al., 1995; Fletcher & Reese, 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011; Payne et al., 1994; Raikes et al., 2006; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Sénéchal, Thomas, et al., 1995; Sulzby, 1985; Wells, 1985; Whitehurst et al., 1988), and an understanding of the pleasure of reading (Johnson et al., 2008; Preece & Levy, 2018; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). The implicit expectation is that families will benefit from both the economic gift of books for their child alongside the opportunity it provides for guidance and support in establishing effective reading behaviours (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016; Burnett et al., 2014; Clague, 2012). Book-gifting programmes are sometimes called "two-pronged programmes" (Carpentieri et al., 2011, p. 50) due to their two primary objectives – improvement of child literacy and improvement of parenting skill (Camilleri et al., 2005). The impact of book-gifting could therefore be measured on the amount the scheme leads to "changed behaviours associated with reading for pleasure, book ownership and book-sharing" (Burnett et al., 2014 p.4), However, presumably due to the focus of external funders on measurable literacy gains, much of the research instead attempts to chart impacts on factors which could be categorised as 'school readiness'. A comprehensive review of the efficacy of book-gifting schemes was undertaken for BookTrust in the United Kingdom, and this section builds on that comprehensive survey and analysis of book-gifting schemes worldwide (Burnett et al., 2014).

3.7.1 Reading frequency and duration

Gains in reading frequency are some of the most frequently reported benefits of participation in reading schemes. Considering 41 relevant studies drawn from Burnett's review of the literature (2014), further analysis conducted for this thesis noted that 20 of the studies demonstrated increases in reading frequency as a result of the interventions they were testing (noting that not all of the studies measured frequency of reading as part of their outcomes), with two noting no change as a result of book-gifting. The improvements found included increases in parents reading to their babies or children when they had not previously done so, as well as increasing reading frequency across the week, and increases

in families reporting daily reading as the norm (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016; Funge et al., 2017; Moore & Wade, 2003; O'Farrelly et al., 2018; O'Hare & Connolly, 2010; Samiei et al., 2016). This upsurge was noted across the age range, including with parents of newborn babies (Veldhuijzen van Zanten et al., 2012) – a group which sees less regular reading in comparison to older age groups and which is thus a key focus of this thesis. Following the introduction of the Bookstart project in Birmingham which gifted books to babies in the 6-9-month age bracket, 71% of families within the project bought more books for their children and 28% reported spending more time reading with their children when surveyed 6 months after the gift. These behaviours may be a function of the children's increasing age as well as the gifted books however, so studies in which there is a control cohort would strengthen these findings (Wade & Moore, 1993). The Imagination Library studies mirrored the general picture, with over half of the parents increasing their likelihood of reading daily (Fong, 2007; HighScope, 2003). In a meta-analysis of the three largest book-gifting schemes (Reach Out and Read, Bookstart and the Imagination Library), the pooled effect size for increased reading frequency was d = 0.36 95% CI [0.27, 0.45] (de Bondt et al., 2020) which indicates a small to medium effect size for book-gifting as an intervention (Cohen et al., 2017).

3.7.2 Impact on parental attitudes

Parents who feel that they are able to perform their parenting role successfully, which is known as 'parental self-efficacy', is a factor which has a positive relationship with a range of parent and child outcomes (Wittkowski et al., 2017). "Narrow-domain-specific" parental self-efficacy is described as "focusing on one specific area of the parenting role" (Wittkowski et al., 2017, p. 2960) such as reading with a child. As book-sharing is dependent on parental engagement, making a difference to parental attitudes towards the importance of book-sharing, increasing parents' views of their own self-efficacy and their willingness to participate regularly is a key intended outcome of many book-gifting schemes. As discussed in Section 2.5, the vast majority of parents understand the value of reading with their child, at least from the point at which the child can actively show interest.

Notably, for reading with the under ones, the Derbyshire Books for Babies scheme showed an increase in parents who thought that book-sharing with babies under 12 months was

appropriate (Millard et al., 2000). One of the key parental attitudes which seems to improve with book-gifting is parental confidence in reading with their child (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016; Demack & Stevens, 2013; Moore & Wade, 2003; O'Hare & Connolly, 2014), including in Imagination Library research (HighScope, 2003), and the key behaviour which changes is the frequency of reading (see Section 3.7.1). However, the directionality of this effect is unclear. A pooled effect size taken from studies on the three largest book-gifting programmes showed a small effect (d = 3.0, 95% CI [0.20, 0.40]) on increased parental interest in book-sharing as a result of programme involvement (de Bondt et al., 2020).

3.7.3 Children's interest in and enjoyment of reading

This aspect of book-gifting is often measured by parental responses for children in the 0-5-year bracket (Burnett, 2016; Demack & Stevens, 2013; HighScope, 2003; Wade & Moore, 1996). Proxies for enjoyment include parents identifying book-sharing as a favourite activity (Wu et al., 2012), an increase in children asking to read (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016), an increase in children talking about books and language (Demack & Stevens, 2013) and parents reporting children as being more interested in books than before (HighScope, 2003). Of course, with any measures taking place pre- and post-intervention, an increase in child maturity and developmental level would also be expected to positively impact on engagement in self-chosen activities such as choosing a book, which may be difficult to unpick from the scheme impacts.

3.7.4 Socioemotional gains

Although the positive socioemotional benefits of book-sharing have been widely documented (Bus et al., 1997; Hardman & Jones, 1999) few studies have focused on the affective qualities of book-sharing as a part of book-gifting. However, one Belgian study explored parents' feelings about how the gifted books enhanced their relationship with their baby and physical closeness was identified as a key factor in the pleasurable experience:

> Most parents explicitly mention that they think it is important for their bookbaby to be close to them during a book-reading session, both for practical reasons and

because it is cosy. This makes the book-reading sessions an enjoyable and pleasant time together. Sometimes it also involves cuddling or kissing. (Vanobbergen et al., 2009, p. 282)

Neurosynchronicity has recently been noted in mother-child positive interactions, with brain activity synchronising during cooperative activity, and this is linked to emotional regulation in infants (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Piazza et al., 2018; Reindl et al., 2018). This co-dependency, which is seen at the neural level, is yet to be explored fully with the activity of book-sharing, but the study of interactions around novel objects showed that "mothers' influence on and connectedness to their infant was consistently higher during positive than negative emotional states across all directed indices" (Santamaria et al., 2020, p. 12). We might surmise that the parent's attitude toward a book-sharing interaction might also be able to affect the infant's emotional state and, if so, that their connectedness to their baby might be increased through multiple positive interactions around a shared object such as a book.

3.7.5   Library membership

Library membership is considered to be a cornerstone of supporting children's literacy through access to books and support for reading (Crossley, 2015). The hypothesis that involvement in book-gifting schemes would increase library membership among participating families has yielded mixed results in research studies. Although the majority of correlations found suggested a small increase in the uptake of library membership following participation in a book-gifting intervention (Burnett et al., 2014; Wade & Moore, 1996) there was no evidence of increased library visiting in other studies (Connolly et al., 2012; Demack & Stevens, 2013) and one study noted a negative correlation (O'Hare & Connolly, 2014). The latter was a study of 2-year-olds, so it could be that age is an additional factor in a broadly positive correlation between participation in schemes and joining a library, or that an influx of books into the home as part of a book-gifting scheme made library use less of a family priority (Burnett et al., 2014). Book-gifting schemes vary in the level of additional intervention that runs alongside them, with some schemes explicitly running library sessions or promoting library use through the inclusion of a pack of joining materials. In England, Bookstart, which promotes library attendance and has linked library sessions running in

some areas, generally saw increases in library membership, with some 28% of parents attributing this to their participation in the project (Burgess, 2010). A pooled effect size drawn from a meta-analysis of three large book-gifting programmes indicated a negligible effect size of the schemes on library membership (d = 0.09, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.27]) (de Bondt et al., 2020).

3.7.6   Home learning environments

Home learning environments (HLEs) combine a number of different aspects which may impact on children's literacy development both separately and together. The home learning environment is defined by Sylva as the "activities that offer learning opportunities to the child" (Sylva et al., 2004, p. 29) and examples given include singing nursery rhymes and reading with children. The home learning environment was defined further in Sections 3.3 and 3.3.4.

A meta-analysis of the three largest book-gifting programmes considered the frequency of reading, number of books, parental interest and library use as measures of HLEs (de Bondt et al., 2020). The analysis found that the Imagination Library had a larger cumulative effect size when considering HLE measures than the Reach Out and Read or Bookstart programmes (d = 0.50, 95% CI [0.32, 0.68]). Clearly, as home library size was one of the measures and the Imagination Library gifts more books per family this aspect of the HLE would be more favoured by participation in the Imagination Library programme than through other schemes. Book ownership is also an aspect of the HLE which is impacted by socioeconomic constraints, unlike the frequency of or interest in reading which are broadly attitudinal. As the Imagination Library gifts up to 60 books - more than any other international scheme - its potential to impact this aspect of the HLE is profound.

3.7.7   Developmental and early literacy skill measures

Cohorts receiving book-gifting interventions have been shown to have increased language and literacy scores when matched to control groups (Wade & Moore, 2000), with this persisting through to the end of Key Stage 1 assessments (aged 7). Reach Out and Read

participants have consistently been found to score higher in receptive and expressive language tests (Sharif et al., 2002). This finding was borne out in a meta-analysis of book-gifting schemes which found a significant effect of the programme on children's literacy-related behaviours and skills (d = 0.42, 95% CI [0.31, 0.53]) (de Bondt et al., 2020). The comparable effect size for the Imagination Library on this measure had a small effect (d = 0.25, 95% CI [0.18, 0.31]).

Within Imagination Library specific research, a large-scale study of over 3,000 third grade children in the United States found positive statistically significant differences on language and reading measures for children who had participated in the intervention (Becket, 2009). This was also the case when baseline testing kindergarten children from Tennessee in reading and mathematics, (Samiei et al., 2016), although the authors acknowledged that there was no evidence of causation as the sample of participants was self-selected and not randomly assigned to the Imagination Library intervention.

3.7.8   Summary of the benefits of book-gifting schemes

There are many potential benefits to book-gifting schemes, with the clearest associations being with increased reading frequency and enjoyment of parents and children in the interaction. The benefits related to literacy skills and school readiness are some of the most difficult to prove causation for, partly because of the study design and partly because of the gaps between intervention and kindergarten/school baseline testing. However, the bulk of evidence suggests modest gains in areas such as expressive vocabulary and phonic awareness with greater gains in measures of reading frequency and enjoyment.

3.8   Limitations of book-gifting schemes

There is minimal literature addressing the possible limitations of book-gifting to families. However, there are potentials for negative impacts if parents feel that they are being targeted for not being 'good enough' parents (Nichols et al., 2009) or being 'needy' (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2012). Gifting books to families may impose a 'job of work' on parents, who are expected to find the time to support their child to interact with or read the books,

> The figure of the normative 'responsible' parent … once again here inscribed as a mother who reads with and to children as part of the social practice of rearing a healthy young child who will this be prepared for social and educational success in later years. (Nichols et al., 2009, p. 7)

Other potential (but unevidenced) concerns include that book-gifting is open to commercialisation, with sponsoring organisations benefitting from marketing opportunities afforded as part of the gifted pack (Nichols et al., 2009). Books which are gifted as part of a universal scheme may not meet the language needs of the parents and may thus be inaccessible to them and their children. They may also not meet the cultural needs of the receiving families.

3.9   Evaluating book-gifting schemes

In this section I consider the complexity of evaluating book-gifting due to its nature as an in-home intervention where the action (reading) occurs behind closed doors. When considering the efficacy of book-gifting programmes, the question 'does it work' needs to be answered. Hattie asserted that most educational interventions work to some degree (Hattie, 2009), and that family literacy programmes tend to have a greater impact than school-based interventions, at a lower cost (Carpentieri et al., 2011; Hattie, 2009). Policymakers tend towards a preference for quantitative evidence (Carpentieri et al., 2011), which, for book-gifting programmes, may mean that 'soft' outcomes such as the impact on motivation or parent-child attachment may be less well reported, understood or valued.

One of the benefits of an in-home intervention such as a book-gifting scheme is that they do not tend to be *instead of* other support to the family, but *alongside* other interventions (Carpentieri et al., 2011). Although meta-analyses and wide-scale reviews are available for both family literacy programmes in general (Bus et al., 1995; Manz et al., 2010; Mol & Bus, 2011; Sénéchal & Young, 2008; van Steensel et al., 2011), and book-gifting programmes in particular (de Bondt et al., 2020) (Burnett et al., 2014), there are issues in trying to synthesise effect sizes from disparate programmes with widely differing models of delivery (Pawson, 2002). Pawson (2002) identifies three key areas of concern. First, meta-analyses by virtue of the discipline must categorise programmes, which may lead to a broad overview of the mechanisms by which a programme works. An example of this is the recent meta-review

by de Bondt et al., (2020), where the affiliate involvement aspect of the delivery of the Imagination Library programme was not recorded or included. The second risk within meta-analyses is the oversimplification of outcomes, particularly in programmes with multiple, often less measurable goals. An example of this is with Sénéchal and Young (2008), where a focus on reading levels as outcomes negated an investigation into the impact of programmes on reading attitudes, a factor itself known to have long-lasting effects on reading attainment. Third, meta-analyses are unable to fully take account of contextual factors, which with complex systems such as those found in home learning environments, meaning that conclusions drawn about the efficacy of programmes may be less universal than might otherwise be expected. An example of this is with de Bondt et al. (2020), where the paediatric model of gifting described in the Reach Out and Read programme relies on a model of paediatric medical care not found in the United Kingdom, where the health visitor network is responsible for child development support in the first 5 years of life. Overall, Pawson (2002) urges caution when attempting to impose qualitative judgements on family programmes, as this may constrain our understanding of the mechanisms and outcomes of the programmes and also confer an unrealistic view of their efficacy in situations or contexts outside of the primary research context.

3.9.1   Securing the voice of the child

The first aspect to be considered is the ability to successfully gather the voice of the child within evaluation of book-gifting schemes. Although the child is the primary recipient and the focus of the intervention, gathering the views of young children, particularly those who are pre-verbal is reliant on the mediation of and access granted by their carer. Although successful consultation has been conducted with preschool children regarding their views on aspects of their lived experiences such as nursery provision (Cremin & Slatter, 2004; Williams, 2010), and a variety of exploratory methods have been documented for use with children old enough to draw, walk or talk (Brown & Perkins, 2019), less has been written about how to effectively engage pre-verbal babies within research. From the five key groups of participatory methods commonly used with young children - "observational, verbal, written, visual and active" (Haijes & van Thiel, 2016) - observational seems best suited to use with babies. However, this relies on the adult researcher or carer's interpretation of the

child's behaviour or utterances rather than direct sharing by the child themselves. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the issues for researchers, consideration of how to secure the voice of the child needs to be a part of all book-gifting scheme evaluations.

3.9.2   The appropriateness of the randomised control trial

Burnett (2016) noted that the growing expectation of quantifiable evidence for education practices has led to an increase in randomised control trials (RCTs) within education.

> Such methodologies are persuasive to policy makers and educational leaders in an age of financial restraint; they align with existing procedures for measuring children's progress through standardised tests and offer an apparently 'scientific' basis for making decisions with associated connotations of neutrality and rigour. (Burnett, 2016 p.525)

However, the statistical basis assumed with RCTs is often incompatible with real-life social science research (Gorard et al., 2017) with, for example, 26 out of 27 RCTs of mathematics interventions accepted by the What Works Clearing House as meeting their quality threshold being assessed as facing "important threats to their trustworthiness and usefulness" (Ginsburg & Smith, 2016, p. ii; Gorard et al., 2017). Ginsberg and Smith went on to note that RCTs "work especially well in highly controlled settings where the character of the intervention and the control groups are very clear" (2016, p. 1); however, educational and home settings are not highly controlled. Particularly for book-gifting, which exists as an in-home intervention, the mechanisms by which it is delivered are highly variable from family to family and often hidden.

A few RCTs of book-gifting schemes exist, but several challenges to this approach are apparent. Parents who are randomised to be given books still have to actively engage with them in their own home to draw any value from inclusion in the trial, and conversely, motivated non-intervention parents can borrow or purchase books to read with their child – it is not a commodity which can be given or withheld as with a medical drug. Another challenge is that the book-gifting experience cannot be completely extracted from the other factors and experiences influencing a child's development. With the Imagination Library, the

programme policy of providing books for all children in a designated area there is still a parental requirement to opt in and participate, so true randomisation to an intervention or to a control group is not possible as uninterested parents or those with multiple barriers to participation are less likely to opt-in. This creates implicit bias through the self-selecting participants, and this favours positive outcomes for any study, as a degree of parental motivation has already been invoked by agreement for inclusion in the programme.

There are many challenges to RCT research in terms of assessing and quantifying the benefits of book-gifting schemes. Book-gifting is frequently part of wider literacy or social support programmes which are rarely delivered on a large scale in the same way – there are frequent local variations in support, the target population or funding which make within-programme comparisons difficult and between-programme comparisons inequitable. Participation in book-gifting schemes is rarely by random assignment (Samiei et al., 2016), meaning that there are likely to be familial factors around which parents choose to engage with the scheme and indeed which parents choose to participate in subsequent research.

3.9.3   The place of small-scale research trials

Many of the research papers examining the efficacy of book-gifting schemes in general, and the Imagination Library in particular, are of a small-scale and local in nature. While this is not problematic within the context of the aims of each individual research study, it does not make replication easy and so generalised scheme benefits are more difficult to draw out in tangible forms across the many small studies. However, Burnett notes that these smaller studies can investigate "programmes' qualities in more depth and highlight themes worthy of further investigation" (Burnett, 2016 p.30).

3.9.4   The complexity of the intervention

In her evaluation of book-gifting programmes, Burnett described the macro changes that may take place over the duration of a child's involvement with a book-gifting programme, such as changes in government policy, meso changes such as local library closure or nursery school interventions, and micro changes affecting the child and their family such as the birth

of a sibling or moving away from grandparents (Burnett et al., 2014, p. 28). The length of the Imagination Library programme (up to 5 years) means that many other aspects of a child's life have changed over that time, and the impact of the intervention will not be as clear as an intervention which takes place over weeks or months (Johnson, 2016b). In addition, children will change and develop with age, as will their needs and interests. Complexity as a concept and in depth with regard to this research will be discussed further in Section 5.4.

The impact of a programme may also be related to its longevity and embeddedness within the local community, leading to ceiling effects where participant families have already benefitted vicariously from the programme through increased local societal expectations for reading, or through participation with an older sibling (Demack & Stevens, 2013). The participant involvement rate for research is likely to be skewed toward engaged families, particularly in research with a longitudinal design. There is a likelihood of social desirability bias, as the predominately White western populations sampled in the existing research might be expected to know about the social desirability of reading with one's child, whether they practice it or not in reality. The reliance on self-report questionnaires in the methodologies of many studies will do little to mitigate this aspect. Lastly, the population sampled in previous research has largely comprised White and disproportionately middle-class populations (Fletcher & Reese, 2005), which may be further exacerbated by language barriers to participation in research.

Additional issues specific to the Imagination Library research include the "black box" effect, where there is no certainty of parent-child interaction with the posted materials due to the invisibility of the interactions at home to the gifter or interested researcher (Johnson, 2016b, p. 6). This is a concern that the home becomes a "black box", where researchers cannot truly know or understand the mechanisms of scheme delivery or the true quantity or depth of interactions within the home.

3.10 How does the current study fit into existing research?

This study is situated within a large body of literature focused on what might be termed academic-developmental benefits of book-sharing and a specific body of mostly small-scale

local evaluations of the intervention in question. In developing my research there are three primary areas where this thesis adds to the body of knowledge: the efficacy of the Imagination Library programme in the United Kingdom, parental views on book-sharing and knowledge about reading frequency and practices with young babies.

To take the first of these, a review of research previously commissioned by the Dollywood Foundation into the Imagination Library concluded:

> The Dollywood Foundation should fund and support research which focuses on describing model implementations and establishing evidence of program efficacy and effectiveness. This research will contribute to both the knowledge base on DPIL's effectiveness and the broader knowledge base on effective home-based literacy practices. (Johnson, 2016b, p. 4)

This thesis provides unique research through offering evidence of efficacy at scale for the Imagination Library. It also contributes to the broader knowledge base on home-based literacy practices by focusing on parental views on the value of book-sharing and how the Imagination Library impacts on both beliefs about the benefits of book-sharing and literacy practices in the home. The focus on parental views around book-sharing and early shared reading with the use of free-text rather than closed-choice responses is possibly the largest investigation that has been conducted into this area in the United Kingdom. It offers both an original approach to considering parental views through the most extensive use of parental free-text responses in a national survey on this subject, and a scale which has not previously been undertaken. The literature is clear on what researchers and educators think are the benefits of early book-sharing, but the voice of parents has thus far been limited primarily to small-scale studies or closed-choice (researcher-defined) data gathering. There has also been a clear focus within this research on reading habits with young babies, where the practices with babies aged 0-3 months and 3-6 months old have been investigated separately from those with older babies. This focus on mapping the changes in book-sharing in these early months also represents a much-needed addition to the literature on early book-sharing, including both its practice and parental views on the right age to commence this activity.

3.11 Summary

In this chapter I considered and reviewed the literature on the benefits of book-sharing and what might affect the outcome of book-sharing with young children. This latter point was considered in terms of both literacy skills and socioemotional development. There is a broad consensus that early book-sharing is beneficial to children through developing their relationships with their adult carers, developing an early love of reading, and in developing literacy skills including pre-reading skills. There is less consensus on when it is optimal for book-sharing to begin, or on the degree of impact early book-sharing has on child development. I then examined book-gifting schemes, considering their rationale and potential mechanisms of influence. I reviewed the literature pertaining to the three largest book-gifting programmes internationally, focusing on the claims for efficacy and the methodologies used in the studies. This led to a discussion of the methodological choices made when evaluating book-gifting schemes. There was a statistical consensus that book-gifting schemes had the potential to improve the home learning environment, and that some scheme participation was associated with increased literacy attainment at kindergarten/reception year age. A final discussion about the appropriateness of various methodologies sets the scene for Chapter 5.0, which, following the outlining of the research questions in Chapter 4.0, details the methodological considerations for the current study.

4.0 Research Questions

4.1 Introduction

In this brief chapter, I share the chosen research questions and the process which led to their selection. I outline how the research questions relate to the different phases of the study and which research methods (see Section 6.0) are used for each aspect of the enquiry.

4.2 How were the research questions formulated?

The research project brief was to "understand the impact of the Imagination Library on parents' practices and beliefs about shared reading, and any discernible impact of the practice of shared reading on the children in receipt of the library's books" (University of Bath, 2018). From this brief I parsed the following components:

a) Identifying parental practices in shared reading, and how receiving Imagination Library books changed these.

b) Identifying parental beliefs about shared reading, and how receiving Imagination Library books changed these.

c) Identifying any impacts of shared reading on children who received Imagination Library books.

To investigate these components, I formulated the following research questions:

1) **What is important to parents about reading or book-sharing with their child aged 0-5?**

2) **To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect:**
   i) **the quantity of daily book-sharing experiences?**
   ii) **children's early literacy development?**

3) **What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library book on:**

   i)   **parental beliefs and practices when book-sharing?**

   ii)   **children's experiences of books and book-sharing?**

Table 2 p103 demonstrates how the research brief aligns with the chosen research questions. Each element of the research brief was explored using two research questions, allowing for thorough coverage and triangulation of the data.

Table 2 Research brief alignment with research questions

Research question	Research brief		
	a) Identifying parental practices in shared reading, and how receiving Imagination Library books changed these.	b) Identifying parental beliefs about shared reading, and how receiving Imagination Library books changed these.	c) Identifying any impacts of shared reading on children who received Imagination Library books.
1) What is important to parents about reading with their child aged 0-5?		X	
2i) To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect the quantity of daily book-sharing experiences?	X		
2ii) To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect children's early literacy development?			X
3i) What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library book on parental beliefs and practices when book-sharing?	X	X	
3ii) What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library book on children's experiences of books and book-sharing?			X

4.2.1 Research Question 1: What is important to parents about reading or book-sharing with their child aged 0-5?

The first research question has an important role in its own right and also to contextualise the rest of the data. Much that is written about the importance of early book-sharing experiences comes from the perspective of educationalists and psychologists and relates to the developmental nature of book-sharing. Sometimes this is in terms of the socio-emotional development of children but more often it is framed in terms of their language and literacy development. A study on parental practices and beliefs, however, needs clarity on what motivates parents to read with their children and to explore what value parents place on the experience, both for themselves and for their child. This first research question aims to build a body of evidence about what is important to parents of children in the target age group which will then enable differences that the Imagination Library might make in terms of parents' own values and beliefs to be explored. This will avoid imposing the values, beliefs and expectations of professionals and researchers, and then measuring parents' adherence to these. This element of the research will provide one of the largest resources of parental views about early book-sharing in the United Kingdom to date. Answering these research questions will add to the field of knowledge by giving parents an opportunity to share what they think about the benefits of reading with their children, both in terms of benefits for themselves as adults and their children.

4.2.2 Research question 2: To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect: i) the quantity of daily book-sharing experiences? ii) children's early literacy development?

The second question revolves around identifying and measuring changes resulting from the Imagination Library as an intervention. Point i) references what we know from the literature about reading frequency and its impact on child development. Point ii) allows me to look at a wider evidence base, including both elicited and extant data to form conclusions about the medium and long-term impacts of the programme relating specifically to the development of early literacy skills and learning dispositions. There is an existing literature base on reading frequency and book-gifting programmes, but this question seeks to enquire

specifically about the Imagination Library as it currently has fewer such research opportunities than those afforded to Reach out and Read.

4.2.3 Research question 3: What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library books on: i) parental beliefs and practices when book-sharing? ii) children's experiences of books and book-sharing?

The third question focuses on parental perceptions relating both to their own beliefs about reading and how they participate in book-sharing experiences with their children, and their thoughts about how their child experiences and responds to book-sharing and to books more widely. It focuses on parents who receive Imagination Library books, looking at perceived change since entering the programme. It will give space for parents within the programme to reflect on any changes that they perceive about their own views and experiences since commencing the programme. The data collected will build on that which exists within the United Kingdom, which is predominantly small, localised studies, by collecting a wider national dataset. The data will also allow for comparisons with non-participants, an aspect which has yet to be fully explored within a United Kingdom setting.

Together, the questions frame the overarching thesis, discussing the impact of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library on parental engagement in book-sharing and on child development from 0-5 years old. This thesis adds to the body of knowledge on the impact of the Imagination Library by giving parents a voice in explaining how the Imagination Library affects them and their children in their homes.

4.3 The relationship between research questions and research elements

To summarise the complex relationship between the research question and the research elements, as a variety of elements are used throughout the research, the following table (Table 3 p106) was compiled to support clarity over the planned use of each element.

Table 3 Research questions related to research elements

Question number	Research question	Research element
1	What is important to parents about reading or book-sharing with their child aged 0-5?	PQ1 PQ2 PI
2i	To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect the quantity of daily book-sharing experiences?	LR PQ1 PQ2
2ii	To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect children's early literacy development?	LR SD
3i	What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library book on parental beliefs and practices when book-sharing?	PQ1 PQ2 PI
3ii	What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library book on children's experiences of books and book-sharing?	PQ1 PQ2 PI

Key

LR: Literature review

PQ1 : Parental questionnaire (national)

PQ2: Parental questionnaire (North Lincolnshire)

PI: Parental interview

SD: School data provided by North Lincolnshire Council

4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I described the formulation of the research questions and their relationship to the project brief and to the research elements. This clarity was important because of the slightly unconventional thesis structure, which is due to some research elements contributing to multiple research questions. In the next chapters, I discuss the methodological choices that informed the choice of research elements (Chapter 5.0), and then Chapter 6.0 reports on the methods used in each phase of data collection. The thesis structure following this takes the four research questions in turn, reporting on the findings drawn from different phases of data collection as relevant, and reference to Table 3 p106 will be useful in linking the phases of data gathering with the research questions that they answer.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I consider myself as a researcher and also look at the influences on the methodological decisions I took during the course of this study. I discuss the methods I have considered and their appropriateness in my study. I look at the impacts that different study designs might have on the quality of the data which might be gathered. I present an overview of the decisions behind the changes made to the research design and the timeframe for the different research elements. Finally, I explain the ethical considerations which follow from my methodological choices.

5.2 Researcher positionality

Positionality is commonly understood as locating the researcher within three areas or domains: the subject of the research, the research participants and the research context or process (Malterud, 2001). Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p. 10) assert that all social science research is "saturated" with positionality, and that social research has a basis in political motivations. This section aims to articulate my positionality as a researcher. The act of writing this section was in itself a journey of exploration into my personal motivations for conducting this research.

I came to the research project as a recent teacher and educator, someone with strong beliefs about the importance of reading as an educational tool and as an activity in its own right and as a fluent and competent reader who had benefitted from being surrounded by books since early childhood. My home and career influences meant that I sought to create a book-rich environment for my own children, both of whom had frequent and positive early book-sharing experiences.

As a researcher part-funded by a charitable organisation, the Dollywood Foundation, my initial view of their work and its potential to impact children and families was an important part of my researcher positionality. My own life experiences had also predisposed me to

have a positive bias in my views on whether book-gifting is beneficial. I was motivated to conduct the research project through my interest in and engagement with the work of the charity. I also came to the research project as an experienced teacher and parenting practitioner, so valuing books and reading had been an implicit part of my professional practice for many decades. These experiences reinforced my assumption that book-sharing with children is a generally positive and valuable experience. My experience also situates my expectations around the book-sharing experience within the context of the English education system, where the early formal teaching of reading has become increasingly common. It was important within my research for me to take a reflexive position, reviewing and articulating my preconceptions and personal context within my plans, methods, instruments and analyses. I aimed to address this potential for personal bias by collecting a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data with a focus on using the voices of parents to talk about the impact of book-sharing and the Imagination Library rather than imposing a framework for their responses. The focus on collecting data through surveys rather than predominantly through interviews provided less opportunity for interpretative bias, as did the use of a second coder from outside the project for qualitative coding support detailed in Section 6.3.9). It is important to acknowledge that the questions that I chose will also have biased the research to some extent. I took a clear position that as the majority of parents do read frequently with their children in the United Kingdom (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014) my intrinsic biases were likely to match with a majority of parents' own (Holmes, 2020). As a result, I was able to frame questions assuming parents would be able to articulate the benefits of reading, instead of framing it as an either/or option (i.e., whether there are benefits and if so, what they are and what the potential pitfalls are). I aimed to address the potential for institutional bias (undue influence of the funder) by utilising the relationship with my university and supervisory team. Since two of my supervisors were not contractually linked to or funded by the charity, this was a guard against academic interference. The anonymised data also allowed respondents to be able to reply without influence from affiliate partners or the funder.

In terms of my connection to the participants, there was no known connection to me, and anyone who participated and knew me was unidentifiable due to the anonymous data-gathering techniques used. The research was largely shared through internet groups, of

which I became a member for the sole purpose of disseminating the questionnaire or shared by the affiliates to families with whom I had no direct connection. While sharing an overarching connection through parenthood, my own parenting experiences were sufficiently removed through the passage of time to limit my personal identification with the respondents' current family situations and lives. Fundamentally, my research position was that of an outsider with respondents as the research subjects (Holmes, 2020). This etic or objective approach fits within a realist tradition and aims to "describe differences across cultures in terms of a general external standard and from an ontological position that assumes a pre-defined reality in respect of the researcher subject relationship" (Nagar & Geiger, 2007, p. 268).

Considering the research design and process, it was an important part of my self-identification as an ethical researcher that I would draw a clear boundary around the role of my funder, in order not to unduly influence the study outcomes. It was a complex moral balance between wanting to ensure that a charitable organisation did not spend money on research that eventually had a null outcome (that is, one where no change was found) and not allowing my handling of the data to be influenced by the fact that the study was partly funded by an interested party. It was therefore important to me to use my literature review to choose productive avenues of study which would both be genuinely useful for the funder's study intentions but also where the outcomes studied would be unknown and independently verifiable: "If an intervention or a programme of activity does not work, but still claims to be effective, then this becomes an ethical issue" (Gorard et al., 2017, p. 4).

I came to the research with an open view of what constitutes data but with a traditional view of the hierarchy of research design, the so-called "research pyramid", which places greater weight on RCTs than on case reports (Agoritsas et al., 2015, p. 235). My reading has challenged this approach, and my research journey on this subject is explored further in the following section on the research paradigm.

5.3   Research paradigm

Coming to decisions and articulating the paradigm in which the research is situated was a journey which extended beyond the initial research planning stages and only crystallised after the analysis stage of the thesis-writing process. It is true to say that I did not approach my research from a defined research paradigm, but that it emerged as I reflected and challenged my own stances and choices throughout the research process.

Considering ontological approaches, I was cognisant that I was asking how different personal and social factors might influence behaviours, but that I was not restricting my research to only listening to views and presenting them as a truth in their own right as with a constructivist perspective (Crotty, 2020; Fryer, 2020). I was also looking for generalisations formed by grouping people's perspectives together, rather than wholly individual examples of experience, but not seeking out a single universal truth as with a positivist perspective. My views on the nature of reality in terms of the research subject were that there was an objective reality but that social constructs and individual agency were aspects which influenced this reality. I did not come to the research assuming that there would be one single outcome that could be extrapolated to the wider population.

Considering the underlying epistemology of my stance toward what is true in the context of this research, it was important to me to consider the lived experiences of families as their own truth, a subjective approach where I acknowledged that there were barriers to creating a single truth about the research subject. I also felt that it was likely that there would be some convergence of experiences which could be perceived as coming close to an empirical truth, with some generalisable findings which matched the experience of many families. However, I was aware of the lack of universality achievable when researching parental beliefs and feelings, as it can never be assumed that a population, however large or small, would be homogenous in their thinking. I felt that there might be empirical evidence of the benefits of book-sharing, for example, through the examination of reading outcomes for children within and outside of the programme, but that this evidence would be changeable based on the personal circumstances of the individuals involved. For example, one might hypothesise that reading daily would benefit a child's vocabulary, but this would not hold

true in all circumstances (if the parent read the same book each day, was unable to define new words for the child, or if the experience was not enjoyable, so the child was focused on other things). I thought that there would be ways to measure the benefits of the programme and that it should be examined using the most appropriate tools, but as the programme existed within complex systems, the tools should be guided by the circumstances. This view was articulated by Byrne, who talks about the production of theories to underpin research as being in themselves "a reflexive process in which the theory serves as a basis for the organisation of the model … [and the] data itself is also used to generate ideas in an exploratory way which are then taken back for further review" (Byrne, 2002, p. 66).

My mixed-methods approach to the research design was grounded in a realist philosophical approach. Realist approaches to social science were developed in response to the need for research to be useful to policy makers (Pawson, 2013) and that goal was relevant to this research study since it had been commissioned by a charity to help them evaluate their programme with a context-mechanism-outcome approach: "'What works, in what circumstances and for whom?', rather than a simple 'what works?'" (Emmel et al., 2018, p. 7). The underlying idea that the outcome is affected by the actions and reasoning of the participants underscores the moral purpose of this research project. It is important to seek and to understand what drivers bring parents to read with their child and to use this information to better understand how these drivers impact the outcome of the intervention. If a book simply arrives at the doorstep and does not move on from there, there will be no change because of the programme. It is the participant who causes the outcomes.

My use of mixed-methods might be seen as a pragmatic approach, and it certainly was in the lay use of the term. As a philosophy, pragmatism prioritises linking purpose (research questions) to procedures (research methods), and my methodological decisions were based on what best served the research questions rather than an underlying ideology (Morgan, 2014). However, my methodology departed from pragmatism by establishing a theoretical model prior to answering the research questions, an approach better defined by realism,

where programme theories "act as the unit of analysis and the gathering point for cumulative enquiry" (Pawson, 2013, p. 86).

Potential negatives within a mixed-methods approach include the resource implications of an approach which frequently leads to the formation of extensive datasets which require a combination of cross-discipline skills to analyse (Halcomb & Andrew, 2009). This can be a particular problem for time-limited research conducted in fulfilment of a postgraduate degree (Liamputtong, 2019).

Realism's focus on studying causal mechanisms (Fryer, 2020) lent itself to the core concepts of this research project which considers what parental viewpoints and behaviours are in order to better understand the impact of the intervention in question. Realism also recognises that outcomes will not be absolute but tendencies; gifting books will not *guarantee* any specific benefits to the child or parent, but it might be theorised that there may be a tendency for a regular gift of a book to result, through the causal mechanisms of the parent's mediation, in beneficial outcomes for the child. The last aspect of critical realism which aligns with this study is the intrinsic understanding that the intervention exists but is mediated through both individual agency (of the parent and the child) and through the social structures which surround them (for example, encouragement from professionals to read from an early age).

In conclusion, I found through the process of interrogating my own motivations and actions around the research aims and design, that I am "some kind of realist" (Pawson, 2013, p. xix).

5.4   Studying complex systems

The focus of this research – studying the impact of a reading intervention within families – is the convergence of two complex systems. When facing complex systems, mapping their complexity is both important and impossible. An "attempt to map complexity" (Pawson, 2013, p. 30) by mapping the landscape of the complex system, will help to narrow down a field of focus and, at the same time, demonstrate that not every aspect will be covered by the map and will reveal that only a partial understanding can ever be created.

In Figure 8 (p115) I illustrate the interplay between the complex systems of the family and of the book-gifting intervention. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) can be used to describe some of this interrelationship. The child's microsystems, including their family, and the book-gifting intervention, all sit within the exosystem, and this model is used as the basis for my own model. Grolig (2020) mapped the development of oral language within a bioecological model, and my work also draws on this (Figure 5 p49).

First we consider the proximal processes which occur between the child, the parent and the book (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1998; Grolig, 2020). Reciprocal interactions take place between people and objects such as the parent and the child, the child and the gifted book, and the parent and the book and are represented by the triangle at the heart of Figure 5. These processes themselves take place within several systems, which are represented by the concentric circles within Figure 5. The first system to be considered is the family, which is unique in its composition, beliefs, and participants, and is a complex system. To borrow from clinical psychology, Bowen's theory of family systems explores the role of the family unit in governing individual behaviour and development (Bowen & Kerr, 2009). The family create a unique environment for the intervention, one which is not replicable in any other family. It influences the child's behaviour and development, yet these factors cannot easily or comprehensively be mapped. Within this family system comes the book-gifting intervention which itself sits in its own complex system of educational development (Jacobson et al., 2016) in terms of the expected use of and outcomes from interaction with gifted books.

The child exists within their family microsystem interacting with others in the family group or household and their direct interactions with providers such as their nursery teachers. The child also sits within the family mesosystem which includes interactions between the wider family and nursery or school settings or the family and their developmental providers such as the health visitor or children's centre worker and the family as well as interactions between those providers. Outside of this sits the exosystem, which includes wider indirect influences such as the parents' educational establishments and workplaces, the community and the media.

The gifted book also sits within its own distinct complex system. The book's microsystem includes the gifting organisation and individuals who support its journey to the child. Within the book's mesosystem sit interactions between the provider and others with an interest in the programme, such as the school or local council. The book's exosystem includes indirect influences over the book-gifting programme such as other literacy schemes and the wider educational system in which book-sharing is discussed.

The child, parent and book all exist within the same macrosystem, which includes aspects such as governmental policy on education and wider societal expectations regarding book-sharing. The macrosystem of attitudes and ideologies embedded in a culture of reading with young children infiltrates both the microsystem and the exosystem. If we also consider the possible influences of the shared chronosystem, where over the 5-year duration of the intervention environmental changes will occur in the child's microsystems, we quickly see that it is not possible to achieve causal proofs of intervention efficacy which can be generalised on a population basis. Therefore, I needed to look for research designs which enabled me to use sample sizes large enough to find trends which could be generalisable to a wider population and which did not purport to find unrealistic causality within a complex system.

Figure 8 Mapping the complex systems of book-gifting
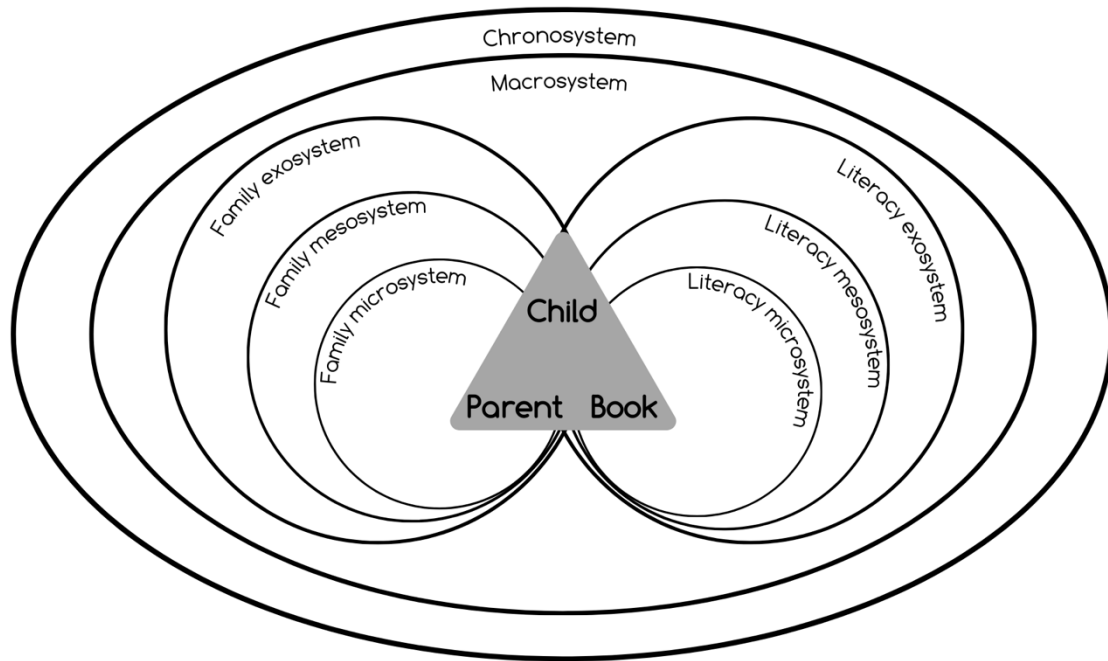
Pawson (2013) details seven aspects of complexity to consider when mapping a complex programme which I will use here to provide an overview of the specific complexities of the programme at the centre of this research.

5.4.1 Volitions

Pawson contests that it is not the intervention itself that "works" but how it is interpreted by the subjects that produces results (Pawson, 2013, p. 34). This research focuses on parental views and beliefs to better understand how this particular intervention and the behaviour it is seeking to impact (daily book-sharing) may change as a result of the intervention but it is important to remember that the participants are not a homogenous group but individual families with their own choice architecture (Thaler, 2008). This complexity is also important in situating the agency with the family – their choices with regard to the gifted books are what makes the difference to their child's development.

5.4.2   Implementation

Although the programme itself is relatively simple (a book is posted to the child's home address), the implementation of the programme – what happens to the book in the home – is complex and largely unknown. In addition, different programme affiliates (those who manage the scheme locally) provide different levels of intervention and support tailored to their own community.

5.4.3   Contexts

Pawson considers context within a multi-layered approach known as "the four 'I's" (2013, p. 37). As the programme is delivered universally within a postcode area, there will be a multiplicity of contexts (types of home, types of family, access to support and education) within those areas (individual contexts). Access to the programme is mediated in many ways, from digital to in-person offers and linked to affiliates who may or may not be welcomed into the homes of the potential recipients (interpersonal relationships). In the United Kingdom, the programme is also situated within a wider context of universal book-gifting through national schemes such as BookTrust and BookBug (institutional settings). Overall, the programme sits within a wider social and cultural expectation that early reading is an important step towards educational success, and reading with your child is widely recognised as complying with notions of a 'good parent' (infrastructure).

5.4.4   Time

A particular contextual concern when evaluating the Imagination Library is its longevity – ideally, children will receive a book a month over a period of 5 years. This timescale means that additional complexity is added though the likely changes to family circumstances as well as expected differing impacts at different ages throughout the programme journey.

5.4.5 Outcomes

The programme's perceived outcomes are currently stated in the conceptual diagram or 'logic model' produced by the Dollywood Foundation (see Figure 7 p87). As this research focuses on parental views and home experiences, I will propose additional outcomes and an updated conceptual diagram as part of the outcomes of this research. The outcomes of importance will differ for different stakeholders, and this is part of the core purpose of this research: understanding the outcomes from the point of view of parents and children within the programme.

5.4.6 Rivalry

This refers to the abundance of policies and interventions that surround families who are also receiving the programme to be studied. Interventions do not exist in a vacuum and in the field of early literacy there is a plethora of local and national initiatives that target family and child literacy. As Pawson notes, "it is ferociously difficult to evaluate the impact of a particular programme when all around revolve other schemes aimed at similar outcomes and common improvements" (2013, p. 41). Within the United Kingdom alongside national universal programmes affiliates, including the focus affiliate for this study, run a variety of family support and intervention programmes which make it impossible to truly disentangle the impact of the programme in question, particularly when the intervention is one lasting 5 years.

5.4.7 Emergence

This phenomenon refers to the ability of an intervention not only to change outcomes but also to change the surrounding context for the intervention, and to have unforeseen or unintended consequences. In the context of the Imagination Library this could have unintended consequences such as a possible reduction in library visits or book buying as a result of the gifted books or a societal shift in the parental expectations around early book-sharing as with the Bookstart book-gifting intervention in the United Kingdom (Moore & Wade, 2003).

5.4.8 Components of the complex intervention

Following Pawson's discussion of the importance of mapping complex systems, Figure 9 (p118) illustrates the complex interplay between factors which may affect the outcomes of a book-gifting programme – elements which may be found inside the "black box" of the home environment (Johnson, 2016b, p. 6). Some of these can be known and controlled for (age, gender, socioeconomic status), but others, such as attachment and attitude, may change over time. Although some measures of these factors can be made, they are too complex for reductive categorisation to completely explore or explain. This diagram, created as part of this study, is expanded in Section 12.7 as part of a model of book-sharing. It demonstrates the relationship between known, unknown and reported factors in the evaluation of book-gifting programmes. It aptly illustrates the issues with proving causation within programme evaluations, as even RCTs cannot randomise for the unknown elements and so a tendency to measure what can be measured, rather than what might need to be accounted for, can skew even these 'gold-standard' trials.

Figure 9 Factors affecting book-gifting programmes
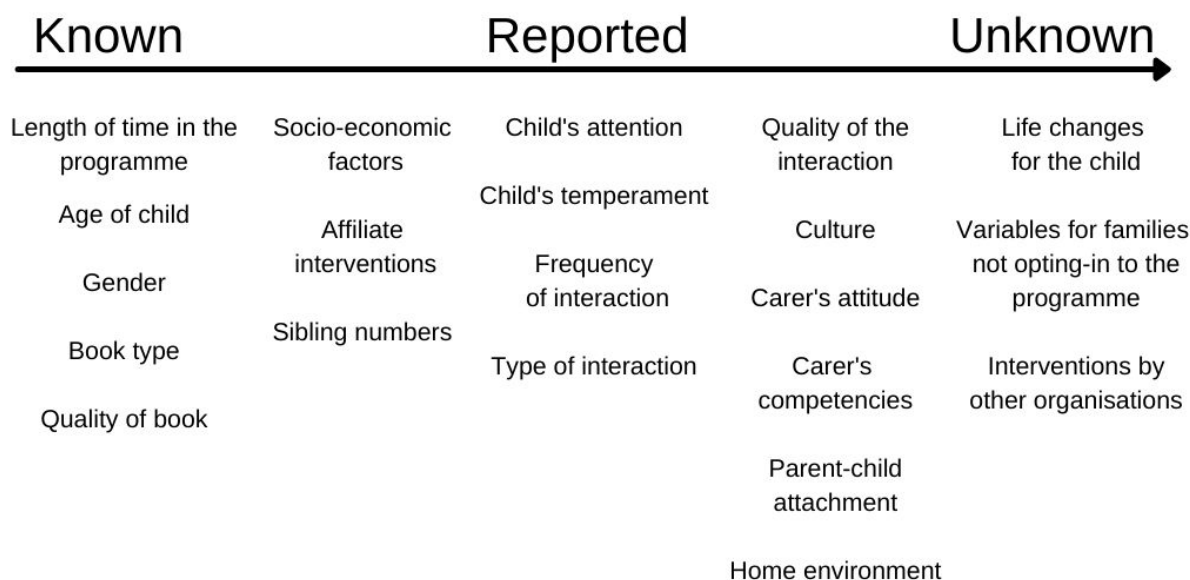
In this section I have attempted to map the complexity of the scope of my research (Pawson, 2013), both to narrow the field of focus and to articulate what cannot or will not

be covered within this research. With such research, aiming to present a wholly causal outcome is both unwise and impossible, due to the interplay of the known, reported and unknown factors.

5.5 Research designs

In this section I review the initial possible methods I considered to contribute to my research design, outlining the benefits of and concerns of each method.

5.5.1 Initial ideas

Initial ideas for research design were drawn from the literature review, particularly from research reviews across the field of early literacy interventions and book-gifting. These suggested a wide variety of potential research designs that could be considered: experimental methods such as the RCTs used to evaluate the BookTrust programmes (Demack & Stevens, 2013; O'Hare & Connolly, 2014), pre/post intervention testing (Gol*df*eld et al., 2012), quasi-experimental methods where the groups are not randomised (Mendelsohn et al., 2001; Needlman et al., 1991; Silverstein et al., 2002), large scale longitudinal studies (Barnes & Puccioni, 2017; Hill et al., 2014), case studies (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2016), surveys (Burgess, 2010; Eliot & Venning, 2014; Knowland & Formby, 2016; Venn, 2014), in home observations and interviews (Dexter & Stacks, 2014; Hindman et al., 2014), ethnographic study (K. Pahl et al., 2010) or focus groups (Funge et al., 2017).

When considering each of these potential approaches, I applied several tests:

- practicality / time constraints as a single researcher,
- ability to construct robust correlations,
- ability to generalise the results,
- suitability for the research questions.

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I explored these tests in relation to the potential research designs to provide a background for the process of making initial methodological choices to best suit my research questions and capabilities.

Much of the content of my research questions (RQs) focused on researching the views and perceptions of parents (RQ 1 and RQ 3i), and this could not be done without eliciting these specifically for the research, so a large-scale online questionnaire mirroring that used by the national literacy charities seemed to be a clear and sensible choice. It met my test of practicality – I could reach large numbers of parents which would support generalised results – and it was appropriate for many of the RQs around eliciting both the importance of early reading and quantitative information about reading frequency. With expected respondent numbers in the low thousands, I hoped to construct robust correlations around demographics and reading beliefs, values and habits. Therefore, I decided to focus most of my data collection on parental self-reporting of views, beliefs and practices using parent surveys; I will detail this data collection method further in Section 5.5.2, including the potential problems with self-report methods.

Working as a single researcher, approaches which were labour intensive at a child or family level such as home observations and interviews, case studies or a broad ethnographic approaches were likely to give me only a very small sample size which, whilst being rich in data, would offer the least scope to form generalisations. This would have limited the application of my results to such an extent that the research questions would have had limited use when considering the efficacy of the programme as a whole. As the Imagination Library serves around 40,000 families in the United Kingdom, this would have had the least real-world impact for the charity, so I decided to confine interview data and in-home observations to a small subset of my cohort with the intent of using them as illustrative data to give real voices to trends found elsewhere. The benefits of hearing and including parent voices alongside and as illustrative of the other data include the increased accessibility of the data which comes with hearing parents describing their own thoughts in their own words. In a programme which focuses on the impact on children and families, it is also important to ensure that the family voice is championed and not reduced to statistical analysis without the context that vignettes and verbatim quotations can bring.

Conversely, large-scale longitudinal studies offered robustness and the opportunity to make generalisations but were outside my reach as a single researcher due to the time constraints of a PhD. The length of the programme is 5 years, and a cumulative effect might be presumed, therefore, a longitudinal study would need to be reliant on retrospective data. Although extant academic early years data can be analysed retrospectively, it would not be easily matched with parental views and requesting self-reporting of measures such as reading frequency at a given age. This is because asking parents to recall the frequency at which they read with their child at different points over the preceding 5 years would seem to invite misrecollections.

Considering another approach, RCTs have a disputed place in education and wider social science research. They are held up as a pinnacle of evidence (Cartwright, 2007; Torgerson & Torgerson, 2013), predominantly due to their resilience to researcher or selection bias. Although the experimental method is widely held to be the pinnacle of research, it may not always be the most appropriate tool for all research. Particularly when applied to areas of research where there may not be one universal truth, the experimental method may be at odds with its research subject, "the essence of the experiment is that it attempts to 'wring truth from nature'… by holding all constant other than a supposed cause which is caused to vary" (Byrne, 2002, p. 63). The most ubiquitous form of the experimental method within social science, RCTs, are criticised by others as having limited generalisation outside of the cohort studied, a lack of attention paid to contextual factors and may not answer why an intervention will sometimes work or not work (Cohen et al., 2017; Gorard et al., 2017). It has also been argued that it is inappropriate and impossible to use RCTs within the complex system of education where students and teachers should not be treated as subjects to be manipulated or summed up as a collection of variable characteristics. Although challenged by Connolly et al. in a series of articles and responses between the authors and Stephen Gorard (Connolly et al., 2018), the published review of RCTs failed to show that they were effective and merely showed that they could be undertaken within the education sphere. Indeed, Connolly's own RCT within the area of book-gifting, while finding no effect of the intervention studied, could be held as a critique of why RCTs are inappropriate for the type of programme being researched here. Investigations to find significant differences in parental attitudes, behaviours and reading frequency as a result of a single gifted book

seemed an implausible outcome. Although the study gathered meaningful post-test data on parental views in the intervention group, these data were subsumed as less relevant or useful than the cluster RCT, which returned a null response (Connolly et al., 2012).

Considering RCTs, such as those carried out on behalf of BookTrust, RCT designs could be described as "giving very robust evidence of impact, but require a high degree of standardisation" (Demack & Stevens, 2013, p. 5). However, Byrne argues that "such approaches only work if nature is both simple and unconscious" (2002, p. 64) The intervention I am studying does not have a full standardisation of approach, indeed, one of the unique aspects of the programme is the ability of local affiliates to tailor support to the needs of their own community. In addition, once the book is posted through the letterbox of the family there can be no standardisation as to what happens with the book in the family home, so an RCT approach did not seem likely to serve the intervention well. I also found that many RCTs in my field employed small sample sizes; thus, "despite strong internal validity, these limitations raise concerns about the external validity of results" (Price & Kalil, 2019, p. 4). The requirement for aspects of RCTs such as post-testing does not suit home-based interventions well and would require either extensive one-to-one child testing by a blinded researcher (which would likely limit the cohort numbers on the grounds of practicality) or would rely on in-school or in-setting cohort testing, which introduces the potential for additional bias in the form of the influence of the school or setting on the child's development or performance. Overall, the problematic nature of RCTs did not seem well suited to this research project because of the inauthentic constraints and in-home standardisation required.

A quasi-experimental design (QED) approach was one I favoured, looking at a variety of extant and elicited data from two comparative localities. My original plans included this QED approach as it could allow me to construct robust correlations and generalisations about the effects of the intervention. However, there are still concerns about standardisation and how or whether it is possible to distinguish the intervention being studied from other supportive interventions offered within the locality. As for many such interventions, establishing causality within a complex system is very difficult; this intervention, when rolled out for a whole locality, was often a part of a package of measures designed to raise early literacy

development and improve home learning environments. Therefore, if adopting a QED approach, it would be difficult to truly attribute causality to the Imagination Library programme, as it was nested within other local interventions such as library programmes, home support and educational support. However, it would be unethical to request or require localities to deliver the Imagination Library to their cohorts for a significant (12 or 24 months plus) timescale in isolation from other interventions which they ran, as this might have a detrimental effect on the families involved compared to their current support offer. As it takes time (often a few years) to embed the programme within a community, studying only new Imagination Library areas which did not offer additional literacy or family support was less likely to show any potential outcomes due to the time it took to embed the programme with a large proportion of the local population. Having considered initial ideas for potential methods to adopt, the following sections explore in more detail their key features and appropriateness as tools in this study in more detail.

5.5.2   Parental Surveys as a data collection tool

Parental surveys featured in many of the research designs I reviewed, whether from convenience samples, RCTs, or QEDs. As my research question asked *how* receiving Imagination Library books changed families' book-sharing practices, I needed to consider the best way to gather family views, which included the views of the parents and children. Due to the age group of the children involved, infants, toddlers and preschoolers, and including those who were pre-verbal or in the early stages of language acquisition, it was clear that parents reporting on behalf of their children would form the majority of the voice heard from each family.

In her research review for the Dollywood Foundation, Johnson (2016) dismisses parent survey data as less rigorous than using extant data from assessments. However, this view does not consider the purpose of individual research studies and is reliant on the supposition that the research hierarchy is as appropriate in the social sciences as in the physical sciences. However, "a realist methodology tips this hierarchy on its side, recognising that the key is not some arbitrary measure of methodological rigour but the utility of insight in crafting a theory" (Emmel et al., 2018, p. 4). As explained in Section 5.5.1,

treating RCTs as a pinnacle of research, rather than one tool which may or may not be appropriate to use, is an unhelpful supposition. As emergent literacy skills are formed over years in the context of a complex family environment, an RCT would still be subject to a lack of ability to account for every potential confounder in the complex home life of a child. As a result, only a limited number of broad-brush variables could be used, which may not provide true randomisation within the trial. Marsh describes social surveys as instruments which are inherently realist, and which describe the world as it is, rather than abstracting the world from its complex realities as needed when using experimental methods. (Marsh, 1982 as cited in Byrne, 2002). Byrne describes this as describing "how the world is working" rather than "how the world works", which is an acknowledgement of the limitations of almost all social science research in describing how the world is working for the participants in the research, rather than expecting universal laws to be drawn as conclusions (Byrne, 2002, p. 66).

Much of the research on the impact of the Imagination Library uses parental reporting (Johnson, 2016b), and national literacy associations in the United Kingdom also frequently rely on parental questionnaires for many of their evaluation datasets (Knowland & Formby, 2016; Venn, 2014). There are concerns about the use of parent-reported data, whether gathered through interviews or surveys. Although convenient, parental self-reporting of behaviours may be at risk of response biases, both conscious and unconscious, including social desirability of the responses (Rothbaum, 1986), distorted recall or differing interpretations of questions (Holden, 1983). In my research, this could manifest particularly as inflated reporting of reading frequency or misrepresentation of parents' thoughts to fit with the perceived social expectations around book-sharing. The response bias of who chooses to respond to a survey on reading will also mean that my findings would not be generalisable to all parents, and the digital nature of the endeavour will also in itself form a bias through being inaccessible to families who are time-poor, who have less access to digital devices, or for whom the survey is not in their home language. As such, observational measures of parent-child behaviours might be considered more reliable or objective, although they may not accurately capture family behaviour over time and may be unduly influenced by the observer (Metsäpelto et al., 2001).

However, comparative research has examined the reliability of parent-reported versus observational data in the field of parenting behaviours. When looking at parental activity with their preschool child, the strongest agreement between the two approaches was found when looking at home activities with the child, as scored on the Indicator of Parent Child Interactions (observational) and the Home Activities With Child survey (self-reported) (Bennetts et al., 2016). Here, the 95% level of agreement in the parent-reported and observational measures lay between -2.52 and -2.7 standard deviations and the study suggests that for this area of research, self-reporting is a feasible alternative to the observational tool.

When considering how respondents are gathered for surveys, a gold standard might be considered to be a probabilistic sample designed to match the United Kingdom population. This is because a probabilistic sample minimises the risk of systematic bias within the respondent cohort (Daniel, 2012). However, as there are approximately 3,700,000 children in my target age in the United Kingdom (Clark, 2020), with somewhere in the region of 2,500,000-3,000,000 individual families represented (Office for National Statistics, 2020a) so even the most closely demographically matched population sample could not be assured to be genuinely representative of the whole population. It is understood that "people who participate in online surveys are different than the general population" (Andrews et al., 2003, p. 9) and that a sampling frame cannot be completed about all possible online users. This means that the nonresponse rates were unknown. Internet and social media use are not equal between different populations, particularly more vulnerable groups (Helsper & Reisdorf, 2017), and there were significant researcher limitations in which social media groups I had access to (e.g., many groups of and for particular ethnicities were not intended for use as a social surveying platform and thus (understandably and appropriately) declined requests from me as a White researcher to join them). My research was therefore negatively impacted by this skewed population sample, comprising predominantly White and disproportionately middle-class populations (Fletcher & Reese, 2005) which is a barrier to the validity of the work in terms of wider generalisation. This is explored further in the Section 6.3.16, on reliability and validity within the survey.

5.5.3 Extant data collection

When considering extant data collection, I felt that it had a part to play in answering RQ 2i "to what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect children's early development?". I planned to collect early years attainment data (reception baseline scores, phonics test scores and possibly Key Stage 1 reading teacher assessment scores) from both the target locality and one which had similar demographic data but no Imagination Library scheme access. The biggest concerns with the collection of academic data were firstly, the difficulty of linking school attainment data to a single intervention which takes place in the home over a 5-year period, and secondly, the difficulty of case-matching large numbers of participants. As any such study would not be able to conclude a causal relationship, I felt that my use of this data would need to be limited to a supporting role and viewed in the context of other such studies where a more rigorous matching of DPIL to non-DPIL participants could be achieved.

5.5.4 Video as a data collection tool

Looking specifically at RQ 3ii, investigating children's experiences of books and book-sharing, I was keen to give a voice to pre-verbal children and to view their experiences of receiving gifted books in their home environment. I was also interested in considering how book-sharing activities contributed to children's early literacy development (RQ 2ii) within their homes.

In the early stages of project planning, I was part of a separate project with the University of Cambridge's Baby Linc Lab, where they were researching the emotional valence between mothers and babies when they undertake shared activities such as reading (Carozza, 2020; Santamaria et al., 2020). The data collection from this project incorporated triangulated video recordings of the mother and baby pair, designed to capture all the gestures and speech or verbalisations made by the pair. I had supported the project with the development of a coding scheme for maternal-infant interactions during book-sharing. The coding scheme categorised infant verbalisations and maternal utterances, the latter of which I developed based on another study examining picture book sharing (Sénéchal,

Cornell, et al., 1995). I hoped to extend this work to the present study, using it to code videoed book-sharing sessions, to classify maternal talk and thus make a judgement on what types of talk were more prevalent in the book-sharing sessions recorded. I then hoped to identify whether there was synchronicity of the dyad during book-sharing sessions and to consider how this might be linked to child enjoyment as measured by positive physical gestures and verbal utterances. Owing to laboratory closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, and restrictions on conducting in-home and in-person research, this element could not be included in the final project.

5.5.5   Interviews as a data collection tool

Thinking about RQ 3i and 3ii, parental perceptions and children's experiences, I planned to interview parents or carers to gain a deeper understanding of their views on book-sharing to add substance to the data trends found in the surveys. Interviews allow the subject to "express how they regard situations from their own point of view" (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 506) and to "serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (van Manen, 2016, p. 66). Using interviews would allow me to probe trends found within survey data, but the technique is not without issues. One consideration is that the topic - reading with children - has a high degree of bias toward social acceptability, and parents may consider that it is desirable to be seen to read frequently with their child and to enjoy this activity. Additional factors in the potential for implicit bias are that the Imagination Library books are a gift to the families, which further compounds the social acceptability of showing positive responses to the books, and my researcher positionality as someone interested in the benefits of reading with children. I could then bias the interviews, both through my questioning and my responses or demeanour when with the participants.

5.5.6   Walking methodologies as an interview tool

To help site parents' interview recollections within the context of the places where they physically read with their children, I also wanted to trial and extend the use of a walking methodology tool which I had experimented with as part of engagement with a British

Educational Research Association seminar. This tool serves two main purposes: it seeks to address the power imbalance between researcher and participant by enabling the participant to take the literal lead within the interview, and it seeks to focus the participants on particular aspects of their lives, particularly the impact of geography which is where the methodology was developed (Carpiano, 2009; Lyseight-Jones et al., 2021). I hoped to develop the walking methodology as a 'microwalk' around participants' homes; instead of looking at the larger scale spatial factors which impact on respondents, I wanted to explore how their place-based recollections informed our interviews on reading with their children. Although it is a novel approach, I saw value in its use because of the way the tool places the participant as an expert in their own lives, changing the balance of power between the researcher and the participant in favour of the participant. This Foucauldian consideration relies on the idea that knowledge is a political and an ethical practice (Foucault, 1982) and considers the potential for power-sharing or redistribution within research to be a force for improving the quality of outcomes. I also thought that as the interviews might be prone to social desirability bias, asking the participants to show me where they read with their child might prompt them to respond with anecdotes, triggered by the memories that standing in those areas of their home generated. I thought that this might lead to more authentic responses than in interviews conducted in more traditional settings.

I anticipated that seeing the books and being in those spaces would improve the recollection of the feelings that parents had when book-sharing, allowing participants to easily access their episodic memory (Tulving, 2002), a little like recalling one's grandparent when walking down the street they used to live on, as it would be a visceral memory-enhancement tool.

Another benefit of utilising walking methodologies as a research design is the possibility of including children and their recollections in an accessible, participatory research format. Used to good effect with 3- and 4-year-olds in research investigating children's views of their childcare setting (Williams, 2010), a virtual tour with a camera was both popular with children and met the participating adults' criteria for data collection.

Concerns regarding this method include the potential intrusion on family life and use of in-home tours would bring the potential for parents to feel that they, their homes and lives were 'on show'.

5.6 Planning for Data Collection

5.6.1 Initial plans

I decided to adopt a concentric circles model of data collection, with each circle having an increasingly smaller cohort, but a deeper focus of investigation. This would enable me to find broad data trends among a wide population of parents and then to explore them in depth with a longer and more in-depth survey and then interviews with parents in their homes. This model also echoes Bronfenbrenner's systems model visually and methodologically with the idea of the child sitting at the centre with different layers of information around them. The layers (or 'phases' of data collection) are also not wholly distinct; as with Bronfenbrenner's model, there will be cross-pollination of research question answers from within different phases of the research, with one informing the others.

My initial plan included four aspects of data collection: a large-scale national survey for parents, an inter-area comparison of a locality in receipt of Imagination Library books and one which was not part of the scheme, interviews with parents across the two localities and then a video project gaining a 'child's eye' view of book-gifting and the book-sharing process (Figure 10 p130).

Figure 10 Research plan A
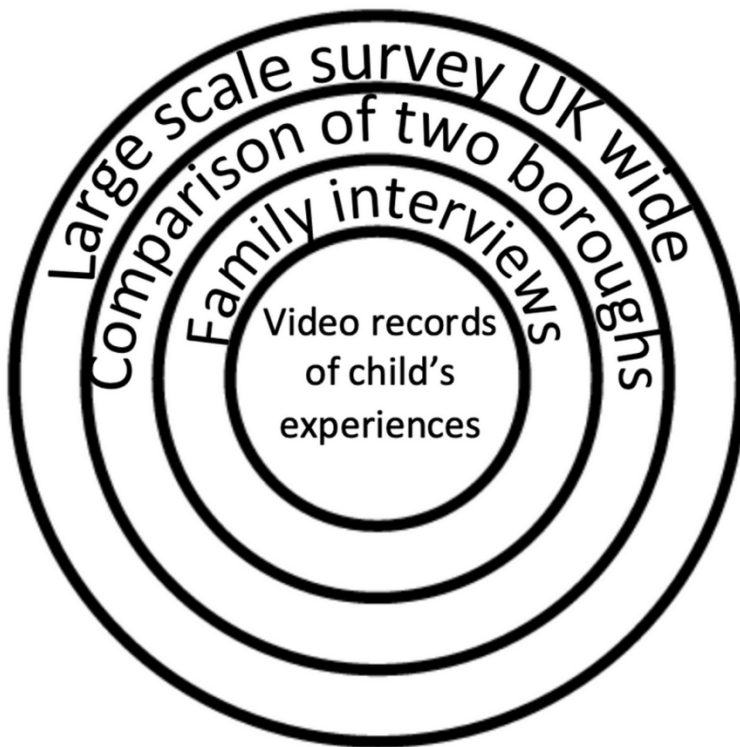
5.6.2 Changes to the plans

This initial plan changed over time, for three key reasons:

- restrictions on in-person data gathering work due to the COVID-19 pandemic,
- the unexpected response to the large-scale survey, numbering over 5,000 respondents,
- a better understanding of the time and practical constraints I would face in data gathering.

The options for in-person interviews using the walking methodology and setting up the three-camera video equipment to record infant and child responses to reading were suspended by the university in response to national restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I was able to replace in-person interviews with interviews via Zoom, however, this limited the ability to be shown around the places where the parent reads with their

child. I therefore had to abandon this methodology as well as the planned video recording of the child's view of the book-sharing experience.

Initially, I wanted to complete a fully matched cohort analysis of two areas or boroughs – one which was part of the Imagination Library scheme and one which was not – looking at both extant school entry data and elicited data via a comparative questionnaire for these areas. However, this proved to be beyond the scope of a PhD without severely curtailing the size of the cohort and thus any generalisation of findings. I therefore changed my plan to focus the comparison on the large-scale survey, hoping that larger numbers would allow for a robust comparison based on broad demographic characteristics rather than the more closely IDACI-matched but smaller cohorts I had originally planned.

Following these changes to the initial plans, the data collection plan was confirmed as follows: Phase 1) large-scale parental survey, Phase 2) brief overview of locality academic early years data, Phase 3) locality-based parental survey and Phase 4) family video interviews (Figure 11 p131).

Figure 11 Research plan B
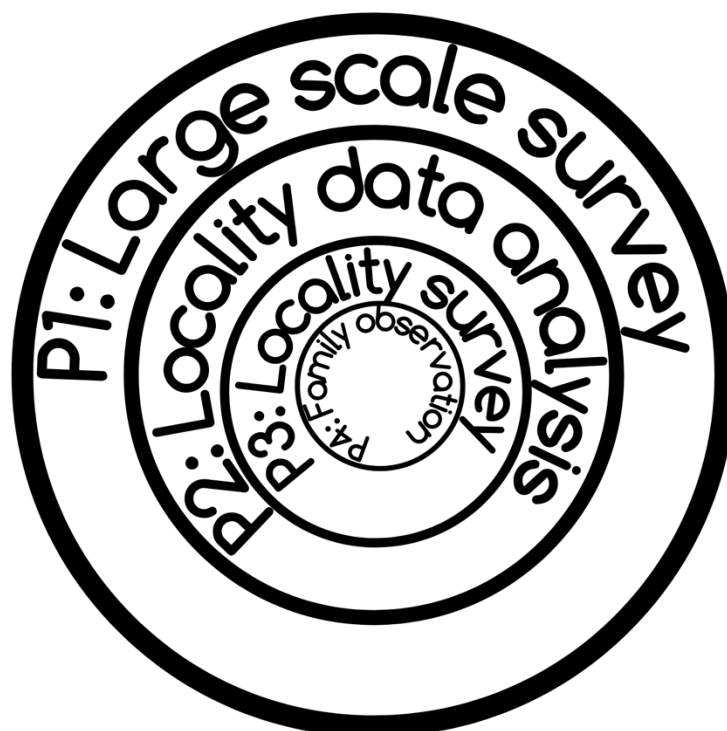
The research design followed a linear pathway with the Phase 1 questionnaire launch and completion prior to the launch of the subsequent data collection phases. The questionnaire (discussed further in Section 6.2) quickly received well in excess of the expected 1,000-2,000 responses and continued to rise to over 5,000 responses at the time of closure. The success of the response rate and the subsequent data generated meant that I had to reconsider my plans considering the time required to process, code and analyse the data. The large quantity of data generated necessitated considering alternate statistical analysis techniques alongside the planned coding of free-text data, as the unexpectedly large sample provided more opportunity for worthwhile regression analysis of the closed questions. I had to decide between using only part of the data gathered or reducing the subsequent planned aspects of my research. I decided that given the COVID-19 enforced changes to the planned interview aspects and because the large volume of responses to P1 would give me a solid dataset for all questions bar RQ 2ii and 3ii, I would amend my research plan to slim down the subsequent elements.

The planned brief look at academic data (Phase 2) ended up being much more substantive than originally planned, because of the high-quality data received from the locality. This numbered around 6,000 children's assessment information gathered over a 4-year period alongside in-depth demographic data on the children.

As the Phase 3 locality survey also returned more than 700 responses, the Phase 4 planned interview element was then further reduced to three interviews to be used as illustrative vignettes rather than as substantive data. This was another pragmatic decision in the light of a very substantial dataset within the timeframe and capacity of a PhD study.

The final research conducted consisted of a national survey (n = 5,009), an analysis of 4 years of academic assessments (n = 6,440), a locality questionnaire (n = 702) and three illustrative interviews. Figure 24 (p303) illustrates the overall timescales taken to complete the project, set against periods of national lockdowns and related COVID-19 restrictions.

5.7 Ethical considerations

Although I have touched on ethical considerations in earlier chapters and will continue to do so throughout the thesis, this section aims to provide an overview of the key ethical considerations and frameworks for ethics that I encountered in my thinking. I decided to use the British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA, 2018) as my key guidance tool and have utilised their guideline headings regarding responsibilities to participants and sponsors as starting points for my own ethical exploration in this section.

5.7.1 Responsibilities to participants

Consent

The participants in my research were both the parents who responded to my survey or interview requests and the children about whom they were answering. The children were participants as data about them was being gathered, but they were not respondents. In addition, there were child participants whose data were shared by the affiliate for research purposes. I encouraged participants to remain anonymous by not collecting identifying data where possible, and by disaggregating it where it was collected for a related purpose (for example respondents indicated their interest in being interviewed by leaving their contact details for this purpose). Consent was sought for each activity where respondents actively gave their data or opinions, and information regarding this was offered in plain English and in the case of the Phase 3 survey in two common languages used within the locality, to aid understanding (see Appendix C). Where participants were invited to participate in interviews, more detailed consent was requested, including explicit consent around the inclusion of their child within the research (see Appendix D).

Within the Phase 1 survey, I needed to approach gatekeepers to the respondents, such as administrators of online groups and those responsible for the online presence of institutions such as children's centres. I needed to give them clear information about the nature of the research, the content of the questionnaire and where the data would be collected and used. I designed the online form so that all this information was accessible without needing the user or gatekeeper to make any active choice to opt into the research, so that full informed

consent could be provided. Although I offered additional contact details for anyone who had further questions, these were not utilised by any gatekeepers or participants.

With Phase 2 data, individual children, parents, or schools were not approached regarding the use of school assessment data. It had been gathered by the local authority as part of their statutory duties and was already used within the authority to document the impact of the Imagination Library, and so it was publicly accessible in a format which details trends and groups rather than individuals or individual school performance. The local authority conducted their own internal ethical approval procedure prior to deciding to release the data to me, which happened via secure transfer. Although my analysis of the data was more in-depth than had already been carried out and released by the council, it was still using the same broad-brush, non-identifiable approach. Therefore, I did not feel that re-approaching schools as individual gatekeepers of their children's data was necessary, nor was this required by the ethical board.

Transparency

The funders for the research (Swansea University and the Dollywood Foundation) were named in consent documentation, which was then approved as part of the university's ethical approval procedures.

The right to withdraw

The right to withdraw was upheld until the point at which online data were submitted; as the data were gathered without identifying information it was impossible to find and delete an individual's responses. For the in-person interviews, the right to withdraw was upheld until publication. Should a school or individual have at any point wanted their data withdrawn from Phase 2, the local authority had the means to do this via their additional identifiable data held.

Incentives

Incentives were used for the Phase 3 survey; a small prize draw was administered by the local authority for families participating in the co-hosted survey. The Dollywood Foundation provided the prize of books and a signed photo, and the local authority collected and then

disposed of the email addresses of families who chose to opt into the prize draw. Following the Phase 4 interviews, a small gift of shopping token valued at £20 was sent to the participants; however, this thank you was not advertised as an incentive to participate in interviews to avoid changing the intentions of prospective respondents.

Harm arising from participation in research

As the research did not seek to withhold intervention participation from any participant but was instead a retrospective analysis of views and behaviours, no harm was considered to be likely for participants. In addition, the questions asked in the surveys and interviews were unlikely to be of a nature which could cause or trigger trauma, as the subject matter was not considered controversial.

Privacy and data storage

Data storage was facilitated by Swansea University for Phase 1, utilising their secure servers, and North Lincolnshire Council for Phase 2 utilising their own organisational secure servers. The online questionnaires did not seek to gather personal identifiable data, except for the additional opt in email address for respondents wishing to be considered for further study. The interview participants were given the choice of retaining their names within the thesis or using pseudonyms. Video recordings as part of the interviews were recorded on the software (Zoom) secure servers and kept for the minimum amount of time to allow for transcription, prior to being deleted. Addresses for interview participants, taken for the purpose of sending a gift, were handwritten and then disposed of immediately after posting.

Disclosure

No relevant incidents of a safeguarding nature have occurred. If the interviews had resulted in any safeguarding concerns, I would have sought advice from the Local Children's Safeguarding Board for the area, in conjunction with university advice.

5.7.2 Responsibilities to sponsors, clients and stakeholders

The sponsors of my research were Swansea University (first Bath University prior to a contractual handover) and The Dollywood Foundation, which administers Dolly Parton's

5.8 Summary

Within this this chapter I discussed myself as a researcher and how my positionality affected my methodological choices and decisions. By articulating my biases, prior assumptions and wishes for the research alongside practical considerations, I mapped out my thought processes in deciding on the tools to be used for this study. Following a broad overview of the research plans, I considered the ethical implications of my choices by using a framework from the British Educational Research Association to ensure that I had considered a wide range of potential impacts which could result from my research project. Following this process, I was then ready to explore in more depth the tools I would use for each phase of the research, which are discussed in the following chapter.

6.0 Methods

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explain for each phase of the research, which tools were used and the rationale for the choices, including addressing potential problems or pitfalls of the chosen methods. I describe the data gathering and analysis process for each phase, covering the research design, participant recruitment and ethical issues for the design alongside the data collection, preparation, analysis and statistical tests, used as well as the reliability and validity of the results.

6.2 Phase 1 – The Large-Scale Survey

To answer RQ 1, 'What is important to parents about reading with their child aged 0-5?', RQ 2i, 'To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect the quantity of daily book-sharing experiences?' and RQ 3i 'What is the parental perception of the impact of receiving Imagination Library books on parental beliefs and practices when book-sharing?' I used a large-scale survey. The aims of the survey were to probe the frequency of book-sharing events for parents within and outside of the programme, to elicit parents' views on what was important to them when reading with their children to find out about the experiences of Imagination Library recipients with the programme. Several large-scale surveys in the United Kingdom have addressed reading frequency (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Scholastic, 2014; Venn, 2014), but none of them have sought to elicit parents' values around book-sharing, and only one (Venn, 2014) asks why parents read with their children, although this was a closed-choice question. My survey aimed to address this gap in the literature and to determine what parents believed was valuable about book-sharing, both for themselves and for their child, and to enable comparison of these answers between recipients of Imagination Library books and the wider population.

6.2.1 Target population

In Phase 1, the target population consisted of parents or carers of children aged 0-5 who lived in the United Kingdom. Owing to the online nature of the research, the target

population was limited to parents who had access to social media, who were engaged in the groups where the request was posted, and who were able to access a survey written in English.

6.2.2   Designing the questionnaire

The questionnaire design took place before the terminology change from 'shared reading' to 'book-sharing' was fully formed as a theoretical standpoint. Therefore, the questionnaires used the term 'shared reading' throughout. As respondents could conceivably have answered differently when asked about their shared reading experiences compared to their book-sharing experiences due to the differences in nuance, the terminology used in the questionnaire has been mirrored in the analysis where it was appropriate to do this, i.e., to specifically record the answers to a question using the original terminology.

When deciding on the content of the survey questionnaire (which can be found in Appendix C) I needed to first consider what demographic data I would gather, how might I later want to sort my respondents and what demographic factors might be likely to influence the frequency and quality of parents' book-sharing with their children. I wanted some 'broad brush' demographics which would enable me to assess the respondent cohorts' similarity to each other (Imagination Library recipients and non-Imagination Library recipients) and to the general population. Considering demographic factors that are known to influence the home learning environment, specifically reading frequency, I opted to gather the age of the child or children (Question 2) (Clark & Poulton, 2011), number of children (Questions 2-7) (Downey, 1995), the gender identity of the parent (Question 12) (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004), and educational attainment data for the parent (Question 15) (Knowland & Formby, 2016). I also gathered ethnicity (Question 13) and location (Question 14) data which were chosen to help triangulate my respondent data against the wider population data for the United Kingdom so that I could try to ensure that my respondents were not only drawn from a small section of the population.

When gathering the age of the children, I decided not to have an equal interval scale (0-12 months, 13-24 months) but to have additional age options for children under a year old.

Although these would later be able to be conflated to produce an equal interval scale for analysis purposes, I was particularly interested in documenting any change over time during the first year postpartum as none of the widely available reading frequency data measured change over the first year of life.

When considering how best to assess potential socioeconomic status (SES), it became clear that this was a wide and problematic field, with many definitions relying on calculating a mixture of education, income and occupation. When considering if or how to collect these data from respondents, the confounding factor of surveying parents of young children who were likely to be taking maternity or parental leave or to have left the workforce to care for their baby or child had to be considered. Both of these situations had the potential to unduly skew income and occupation data gathered from respondents. Creating a validated SES measure from the three components of education, income and occupation was also a significant challenge as a single researcher creating a large-scale internet survey, so I considered which measure(s) were most closely associated with my variable of interest – reading frequency. This approach has been adopted in similar research (Lyytinen et al., 1998; Yarosz & Barnett, 2001), because of the correlations found between maternal educational level and reading-frequency measures. Indeed, Yarosz and Barnett (2001), in their study of family reading indicators where a large (n = 7,566) respondent base was selected randomly, found that parental education level was more closely correlated with reading frequency than parental income. This assurance that parental educational level gave a reliable correlation with reading frequency validated my decision to gather this demographic information instead of a wider SES measure. It is important to note that parental educational level is not used in the analysis as a proxy for SES but as a variable in its own right, and one which has known correlations with reading frequency.

Question 8 first asked about the parents' view of the optimum age for starting to read with children, with age options ranging from during pregnancy to 2 years or older. This was to ascertain whether parents saw a need to read with babies, to gather parental views linked to the programme's aims of supplying books from birth. Then, there was then a free-text option (Question 9) for parents to explain or justify their choices. This question would be

part of answering RQ 1 to see if or how parental views differed with regard to babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

I then went on to ask about reading frequency (Question 10) and whether this amount of reading was more or less than the parent wanted to do, or about right (Question 11). First, this would allow me to triangulate my respondent data with the reading frequency data gathered by other large-scale literacy surveys, to help identify respondent bias (i.e., did my respondents read the same, less, or more frequently than the wider population). Second, this question would be the basis for answering RQ 2i about daily reading experiences.

Questions 12 and 13 were deliberately chosen as free-text answers to explore parents' perceptions of the benefits of shared reading for themselves and for their child. I did not need to ask *if* parents thought that reading was beneficial as the existing data on reading frequency alongside significant social drivers since the national rollout of BookTrust packs has demonstrated that the majority of parents of infants and preschool children read to their child sometimes, often frequently (see Figure 12 p207) (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014).

Parents answering Question 14 to say that they did receive Imagination Library books, would then be taken to a scaled score (Question 15) to record any perceived change to their and their child's feelings about reading following involvement in the scheme, which addressed RQ 3i and RQ 3ii. They were then offered a free-text answer to record any comments about the scheme (Question 16), which, although not directly answering a specific research question, would be valuable for the Dollywood Foundation as the research funder and might provide additional unplanned insights into other research areas.

6.2.3   Pilot

The questionnaire was subjected to a small local pilot of around 30 respondents drawn from my private client group, who were tasked with providing false data to test and explore the online questionnaire platform and to ensure clarity of the questions. The results of the pilot led to some small amendments in the questionnaire wording and redesign of the age-

branching logic to ensure that age categories did not overlap and could not be confused (e.g., substituting age in months for an age band measured in years). As the pilot did not gather any usable data (the participants were tasked with challenging the tool by, for example, inventing very large families, or trying to miss out questions), it was conducted prior to receiving ethical approval.

6.2.4   Participant recruitment

When thinking about the recruitment of participants, I was unsure of the expected sample size for an online questionnaire and expected perhaps 1,000-2,000 respondents. I was aware that if I had been engaged in random sampling, a recruitment target of > 1,848 respondents which would have put my results at a confidence level of 99% with a 3% error margin (Cohen et al., 2017), so I used this as a 'rule of thumb' for my expectation setting, while acknowledging that my research design negated the use of confidence intervals due to the self-selecting nature of the respondents.

The questionnaire was shared via two primary routes: A) social media, predominantly through Facebook, and B) dissemination directly to families in receipt of the Imagination Library books. Route A was chosen to provide a comparator population that could be broadly matched through demographic data to provide an indication of how the Imagination Library cohort compared to the wider population of survey respondents. Route B was chosen to maximise the response rate from households participating in the Imagination Library programme.

Route A

As Phase A took place during the first national lockdown, no plans were made for the physical distribution of the questionnaire. Instead, it was optimised for social media dissemination by preparing an attractive picture of a parent and child reading alongside brief research details, a link to the questionnaire, and a call to action. The aim was to reach as many parents and carers (who met the target criteria) as possible, with a focus on trying

to ensure better representation from seldom heard groups and to achieve a balanced sample (see actions six and seven on the list below). This was achieved as follows:

1) Organic sharing through the researcher's own parenting networks, supported by colleagues, primarily via Facebook.

2) Organic sharing through the researcher's academic networks and associated reading organisations, predominantly via Twitter.

3) Direct approaches to reading organisations and prominent children's authors requesting 'reshares' on social media.

4) Sharing with local parent groups across the United Kingdom, found by searching 'parents' or 'baby' on Facebook groups.

5) Sharing with children's centres and Sure Start groups via Facebook.

6) Targeted requests to share were sent to children's centres or equivalent in the 20 most deprived areas in England, as identified by the Office of National Statistics and measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) (Ministry of Housing, 2019).

7) Targeted sharing with children's centres and their equivalents and parent groups in the other three home nations, to address the initial disparity of respondent locality data.

8) Demographically targeted Instagram account posting, with a small (< £50) advertising spending.

9) Posting in the research thread on the 'MumsNet' website at a cost of £30.

10) Posting on a research participant website "Call for Participants" at a cost of £24.

Route B

The second wave of respondent targeting was focused on accessing parents and carers who received Imagination Library books for their child or children. The main gatekeeper for this route was The Dollywood Foundation, a co-funder of the research, and through them individual affiliate organisations each of whom was responsible for a few hundred to a few thousand families. The families were contacted as follows:

1) The Dollywood Foundation directly emailed 40,149 households who received Imagination Library books, sharing the call to action with a photograph and questionnaire link.

2) Imagination Library affiliates resharing the questionnaire either via their own social media or through an additional email to their local families.

Route A was chosen to provide a comparator population that could be broadly matched through demographic data to provide an indication of how the Imagination Library cohort compared to the wider population of survey respondents. Route B was chosen to maximise the response rate from households participating in the Imagination Library programme.

Within Route A (described in Section 6.2.4), I decided to use a form of convenience sampling, voluntary response sampling (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Clark, 2017; Maxwell, 2012), as unlike similar surveys undertaken for national reading charities I did not have access to a demographically representative sample group to draw on. Instead, I relied on a large number of volunteer convenience samples to provide a broad selection of respondents.

Within Route B, the survey was shared with almost the entire target population (families receiving Imagination Library books), with only a small number of these families not receiving direct marketing of the survey due to bouncing email addresses (0.7%) or not being held by the Dollywood Foundation. Of the 40,149 emails delivered successfully, the read receipts detailed that 34.7% were opened, and 3.8% of those emailed completed the questionnaire, similar to the 4.8% response rate reported by the Imagination Library for its last biennial survey, representing a response rate of around 11% from families who opened the email request.

While the self-selection nature of my sample means that it cannot be expected to be directly comparable with those surveys which are able to ensure demographic accuracy, it could be expected to be internally consistent; for example, respondents from both the Imagination Library and non-Imagination Library cohorts may share the same intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to have completed the survey as there was no extrinsic reward

attached to completion. My expectation was that respondent bias would include those who already felt positively about reading with their child and who had time to engage in it frequently (as demonstrated by the time spent completing a survey about reading).

6.2.5 Ethical issues

Alongside the ethical considerations outlined in Section 5.7, the online questionnaire comprised a study overview and explicit opt-in consent, which needed to be ticked to allow the questionnaire to be accessed. Participants were made aware that their answers could not be able to be deleted after completion due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire. This information was provided in plain English to maximise its understanding.

The questionnaire itself was also in plain English, as assessed through the piloting process, and none of the questions asked the respondents to identify their own literacy levels. It aimed to be value-free in terms of underlying assumptions about what was valued in the family or what reading habits were expected, which was achieved by not using multiple-choice questions with predefined answers. There were two free-text questions about the benefits of reading which made an underlying assumption that there were benefits (although the question could be left blank or answered 'none'). This assumption was deemed appropriate because of the extensive literature showing that the majority of parents in the United Kingdom read with their children (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014). Closed questions were designed with a 'not applicable' option to ensure that respondents did not feel that they had to answer untruthfully to meet the survey requirements to answer particular questions.

The survey was only available digitally and was shared by social media which did not make it fully available to the entire target population. Again, its language being English limited its completion to those whose written English was of a standard to understand and answer the questions.

6.3 Data analysis for the Phase 1 survey

6.3.1 Data collection software

Microsoft Forms was used to collect the data because of its robustness and ability to easily branch within questions. It produced an Excel file of data which was then transferred into MAXQDA for analysis, and into SPSS for regression analysis. MAXQDA was chosen because of the balance of quantitative and qualitative data being gathered, however, it did not offer higher-level analysis functions, which necessitated the use of SPSS. MAXQDA was used for all coding activities including the creation of the codebook and intercoder reliability testing.

6.3.2 Data preparation

I prepared the data to ensure that the respondents met the survey criteria, excluding people with only children over 5 years of age, or who lived outside the United Kingdom. This left 4,770 responses. While preparing the data I used comparative population measures such as the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data to assess how representative my sample was. These comparisons are presented in Table 4 p181, and the respondent demographics are reported in Section 7.2.

6.3.3 Gender Identity

These data were prepared by moving responses which did not answer the question but instead focused on gender politics to the 'not given' category. Respondents who stated a gender in their free-text comments were allocated to the appropriate category. A couple of respondents talked about the gender of their unborn child; instead, they were coded as 'not given' to avoid making assumptions about the respondent. Of those who answered, 4,522 respondents were female, 216 were male, and 4 were non-binary. My data do not reflect an accurate split of gender identity ,and are strongly weighted to those identifying as females. Due to the small number of non-binary participants, this group did not meet the criteria for

inclusion in the statistical tests, therefore, further analysis of this variable was completed with a binary choice of female/male.

6.3.4   Educational level

This data was prepared by looking at each of the individual 'other' responses and where possible identifying the corresponding level of the course stated (e.g., an entry saying PhD would be coded as postgraduate). The educational level of the respondents does not match the profile of the United Kingdom as a whole, which I took from OECD figures for the age bracket most closely fitting the mean age of parents of young children within the United Kingdom and is strongly weighted towards graduate respondents. When looking at the broad percentage figures for reading frequency at each educational level, a distinction was clear at the above/below Level 3 (A level or equivalent) division, so further analysis of this variable was completed with a binary choice of above Level 3 / not above Level 3.

6.3.5   Ethnicity

These data did not require any changes in preparation, however, the full ethnicity descriptors were shortened for the key. Comparing the data to the ONS census data on the percentage ethnicity of households with dependent children, the data collected did not accurately reflect the ethnic mix of the target population. Although the survey was widely shared in parenting and community groups as well as children's centres and similar, predominantly via Facebook, approaches to ethnicity-based parenting groups were broadly unsuccessful, as the content of the research was not seen to benefit their members or to meet their group goals.

6.3.6   Number of children

My data are broadly in line with the ONS data for the number of children in the family. When looking at broad percentage figures for reading frequency, there was a clear linear relationship with decreasing reading frequency between one child, two children, and three or more children. Further analysis of this variable was completed by considering families with two or more children and three or more children.

6.3.7 Age of youngest child

It could be broadly assumed that because the national birth rate is relatively static at around 700,000 births per year, the sample would be evenly distributed across each year group. However, there was a declining trend in the data, with families with younger children being more likely to respond than those families with older children. This may be explained by the increased likelihood of parents returning to work as their child ages, and thus having less time to notice or complete internet surveys. Over half of the respondents had their youngest child in the 0-24-month range. Missing data for this variable again comprised pregnant families with no other child under 5 years. When looking at broad reading percentages, there was a clear delineation at 12 months of age with less frequent reading taking place in infants, with a second smaller decline in the oldest age bracket. Further analysis of this variable was completed both with all age categories present and with a divide at 36 months to enable comparison with other recent research in the field, and with a divide at 13 months which represented the key change in reading frequency data.

6.3.8 Qualitative data

The qualitative data gathered encompassed parental reasoning for beliefs about the preferred reading start age, benefits for both adults and children of book-sharing, and comments on the Imagination Library programme.

6.3.9 Coding

Within the Phase 1 survey were four free-text questions: two looking at the benefits of reading, one about why start reading at a given age, and one allowing for general comments about the Imagination Library. This was the content which I decided to code. Overall, around 4,600 respondents answered each of the first three free-text questions (a response rate of over 95%) and around 1,300 of the 1,500 Imagination Library recipients offered further open comments on the scheme (over 85%). When split into phrases and coded, this became approximately 34,200 pieces of individually coded data were obtained.

When I set the questions as free-text, the impetus to do this was to enable respondents to answer without being constrained by my preconceptions of what they might think the benefits of book-sharing would be. Continuing this methodological choice into the coding framework, it was important that the coding was an inductive process (Boyatzis, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) which allowed research findings to emerge from the dominant themes within the raw data, without prior constriction from deductive codes. It was important to do this, as the literature review revealed a field which was sparse in terms of parental views and beliefs. In this context, pre-supposing that parental responses would align with the benefits identified by researchers and educators could deny the respondents an authentic voice (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Thus, I focused on using an inductive approach to code the free-text data, according parents' voice primacy in the process.

My coding process was exploratory and initially descriptive (Saldaña, 2021; Wolcott, 1994), where I coded initially for the topic rather than the content of the topic, for example 'vocabulary' rather than whether respondents were considering this to be something that had or had not been a benefit. This descriptive process comes from a broad ethnographic base, and helped to identify a "basic vocabulary" (Turner, 2002, p. 199) on which to build my codebook. The analysis pathway I took falls broadly into the content analysis tradition (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Weber, 1990) which allows for large quantities of text to be classified into an efficient number of categories, to aid understanding of the underlying content (Weber, 1990). Content analysis allows for both qualitative and quantitative analyses of text or transcripts, and combining methods adheres to the realist principles of pragmatic use of methods to meet the stated research goals (Emmel et al., 2018).

My initial reading of the data, alongside the literature on reading benefits, generated some provisional broad categories and individual codes. This initial process formed the bare bones of the codebook (Appendix B) and a sample of the data was test-coded, a process that, working inductively, generated more codes for use. As the free-text answers were relatively short, with an average of one to three sentences long, I split each response and coded each phrase for its broad topic. Because of the number of responses (around 5,000 for each of

the three questions, and 1,500 for a fourth totalling over 15,000 separate responses) I refined my coding not in a linear fashion with a first full coding cycle and a second coding cycle, but at points within a single coding cycle where the balance of evidence showed that an adaptation (split, conflation or generation of a new code or category) was needed. At this point, I would then review the responses coded previously under that code to assess whether they still met the code criteria or whether they needed re-assignment.

Examples of when I considered the need to split codes were when two or more distinct themes appeared to emerge within one code. An example of this was a code of 'age related development' which had at the start been used to code responses where the parent was relating their child's developmental stage to whether they were enjoying or should start book-sharing. After a time, I noticed that there were two distinct response patterns within this code, one set which were primarily saying 'it's never too young to start, it's good for development at any age' and another which suggested waiting till a particular developmental milestone was reached 'he's more interested now he's older'. I therefore split this code into two new subcodes of 'supports early development' and 'benefits identified later' to better reflect a more homogenous set of views within each code.

As I moved through the data (rather than at the end of the process) I refined some of the codes into concepts which summed up a parental viewpoint, however this wasn't 'concept coding' per se (Saldaña, 2021) as I wasn't drawing further meaning out conceptually from the respondents' own words or attempting an interpretation of their words. Owing to the nature of the data, a descriptive stance sufficed to see trends and patterns in parental views on the topics in question. Examples included were 'good habits' or 'physical closeness'. Some parents used the words which formed the codes within their answers, and for other responses I coded what were synonymous words or concepts instead (for example 'cuddling' as 'physical closeness', ensuring that a principle of "semantic validity" was applied (Weber, 1990, p. 20).

Where codes had very few responses (< 50, or fewer than 1% of respondents) I considered combining codes unless the response was very distinctive. Some phrases from respondents were simultaneously coded, but overall, I tried to develop codes that would avoid this,

preferring to split phrases into their constituent parts to avoid double coding them where possible. The reason for this preference was that I wanted to use the number of responses quantitatively for further analysis and felt that double coding could undermine this work.

Having worked through the data inductively to ascertain codes, I then grouped them into themes, drawing out links between coded items to form categories. This was the stage of coding which I felt was most researcher-led, and decisions, for example, to have a category of attachment and nurture separate from parenting, took into account the volume of responses to help decide if category distinctions were needed. When choosing the titles for the categories, some of these were a priori codes which were drawn from the Early Years Curriculum for example, 'Communication, Language and Literacy', where any codes to do with these pre-defined aspects of development were situated (such as codes for 'vocabulary' or 'reading skill development'). Others were formed through pattern coding (Saldaña, 2021), for example, linking 'teaching the child', 'doing a positive thing for the child' and 'improving parental knowledge of the child' under a category of 'parenting', which overall could broadly be said to be taking a concept coding approach for these category distinctions. These categories and codes are outlined in Table 23 p334.

Lastly, I drew categories together into three overarching themes which covered the child's development, the relationship and interactions between the child and the adult, and the impact of the programme itself. These themes would help guide the later discussion of the findings and were drawn inductively from the data by considering the overall thrust of the comments received.

The codebook (see Appendix E) was created as an iterative process alongside the coding cycle. The function of the codebook was initially to document the decisions I made, with examples of the type of answer that should or should not be coded in a particular way. The large amount of data which was being coded meant that creating a robust, but changeable codebook was key in maintaining an overview of the emerging views and themes from respondents. The codebook had a second specific use when an additional coder was introduced to support the large number of respondents and codable responses. I sought approval for the employment of an additional coder which was granted by the university.

The coder first worked alongside me, coding against the codebook with me reviewing all of their coding decisions, and then more independently, with me reviewing their decisions after every 200 respondents and coding any data they had flagged as uncertain. Around three-quarters of the way through the process, I ran an intercoder reliability test which found a 95% correlation between the coders over a series of ten respondents and nearly 300 coded segments (see Table 24 p335).

6.3.10 Coding as a mixed-methods approach

The coded data could be used both qualitatively and quantitatively to answer my research questions, as well as via transformation (quantitating the qualitative data) using a convergent design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The coded responses informed my research questions through several mechanisms. These included direct answers, (for example respondents' stated answers to the question about what was important to them about book-sharing, through quantification) where I could analyse what proportion of the respondents had given a specific view, used a specific word or commented on a certain topic, and by providing a commentary to understand and explain the quantitative data gathered from other survey questions. This approach was chosen to maximise the internal validation opportunities for the data, as triangulation could occur through the various types of data collected, and by applying both a statistical and a qualitative lens to the data corpus. When reporting participant responses verbatim within my study I chose to correct them for grammar and spelling, to aid readability and text flow, following an etic approach (Holmes, 2020). Quantitative data gathered are discussed in the next section.

6.3.11 Quantitative data

The quantitative data gathered in the Phase 1 survey encompassed the demographic data on the parent and child alongside reading frequency data and data on preferred start age for book-sharing activities. Categorical data included questions on ethnicity, location and gender identity. Ordinal data were gathered about parental educational level, parental feelings about the impact of the Imagination Library, reading frequency and feelings about reading frequency, the age at which reading should commence, and the age of children

(which were not interval data due to the choice to split the first year of life into three age categories). Interval data were gathered on the number of children in the family.

6.3.12 Quantitative use of coded data

Following the coding of free-text questions, parental responses also became quantitative data with the number of responses to each code being charted, or the number of times a word was found within the data using a word-frequency list (Weber, 1990). I utilised the CAQDAS software capabilities of MAXQDA to generate word-frequency lists, which were then cleaned using stop words to remove common prepositions and similar words which did not convey meaning, and to group forms of a word (e.g., bond and bonding). The software also enabled me to cross-reference the appearance of different codes within the documents. In addition, simple percentages of code counts were used as the starting point for further statistical analysis.

6.3.13 Statistical testing: bivariate analysis

I carried out an initial demographic interrogation of the data and frequency counts of quantitative questions, before proceeding to crosstabulation analyses. The crosstabulation analysis then needed a test to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables being tested. I chose the Pearson chi-square test (Field, 2018) for this process. The benefit of using a chi-square test in the early stages of data analysis is to examine whether there is a relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The chi-square test (χ^2) compared the actual frequencies observed between the two variables with those which would be expected to occur by chance.

A χ^2 test has the following assumptions:
- there are 2 categorical variables, usually nominal,
- the data in the cells should be frequencies,
- each observation contributes data to one cell,
- the tested groups and observations must be independent,

- the value of each cell in the table of observed frequencies should be five or more in at least 80% of the cell, and
- no cell in table of observed frequencies should have a value of zero.

The outcomes of a χ^2 test are reported as a number (χ^2) which, when the degrees of freedom (*df*) are considered, produces an asymptotic (estimated) level of significance or '*p* value'. Conventionally, a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ is used, where only five instances in 100 where the relationship would occur by chance. Within the tables, a single asterisk denotes a *p* value at a significance level of ≤ 0.05 and two asterisks to denote a significance level of ≤ 0.01.

The chi-square test is a useful way to determine the likelihood of a relationship between two variables, although it is unable to detect causality (Cohen et al., 2017). Indeed, in his chapter "Significant tests: how to conduct them and what they do not mean" Gorard (2021) cautions that chi-square tests assume a likelihood of randomisation which is unlikely to be found in real-life research and specifically not with convenience samples (Gorard, 2021). They are also unable to explore the potential impact of any co-variables which might influence the model. While not negating their use, I took a cautionary approach to the findings generated by the chi-square tests and employed further analysis using logistic regressions to further explore the relationships which seemed to occur, as discussed in the next section.

6.3.14 Statistical testing: binary logistic regressions

Regression analysis enables the investigation of how the predictor variable, which in much of this research was Imagination Library participation, related to the dependent variable, which was often reading frequency in Phase 1, while considering other variables known to influence reading frequency such as age and parental education levels. I initially considered the use of multivariate linear regressions to examine which demographic variables had a statistical relationship with reading frequency, but then decided not to pursue this path as it did not directly answer my research questions. I employed binary logistic regressions to identify whether receiving Imagination Library books was a statistically significant factor in

reading frequency when holding the demographic variables equal. Binary logistic regression was chosen as I was able to simplify the dependent variable into a categorical binary response, for example, did or did not read daily, analysing the effect of multiple factors on the outcome of interest.

Binary logistic regression was an appropriate too, as there was no expectation of a linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Gorard, 2021) and it is effective when using categorical predictors. One of its limitations is that it can only model a categorical outcome, but because my data could be reported as binary options (did or did not read daily), this was not a concern for the purposes of this study.

Binary logistic regressions can be useful in analysis because they can produce odds ratios (known as 'exp (B)'). Field (2018, pp. 883-884) explains odds ratios as "the indicator of change in odds resulting from a unit change in the predictor". This could be shared as a likelihood change in, for example, reading frequency and provides an accessible statistical likelihood outcome with which to judge aspects of the programme's efficacy.

When considering how to enter data in the regressions, forced entry, stepwise and hierarchical models were considered and choices are described for each regression carried out, contained within the findings chapters (8.0 – 11.0). Forced entry methods were used as the default option unless there was a clear reason in the literature to suggest that an alternative should be used. In general, parsimonious models are aimed for, to create a simple rather than a complex outcome where possible. This involved steps such as assessing which age delineation had the largest predictor effect on the model, and such decisions are explained in the relevant chapters.

Concerns about the use of binary logistic regression models include the fact that the percentage of cases predicted correctly using a model may not increase much when the base model is far from 50% (Gorard, 2021) and a tendency for research not to report these figures. There is also a need to ensure that the underlying statistical assumptions are met (Cohen et al., 2017) to ensure that the tests are valid.

6.3.15 Model estimation in logistic regressions

There is discussion about how goodness of fit models relate to the social sciences (Gorard, 2021) and around the statistical flaws of these models for large datasets (Allison, 2014). Although I considered my data in light of existing goodness-of-fit models, I was cognisant of the underlying issues regarding how non-randomised data, particularly those related to human behaviours, are less suited to these models than in other fields.

When considering how to explore the data on the impact of participation in the Imagination Library I was able to use the information from my prior cross tabulations to ensure that the data would meet the goodness-of-fit tests assumed by logistical regression models (Field, 2018). When I considered my models (see Section 9.5.9) I could see from the initial Nagelkerke R Square test on the data that the model appeared a good fit for the data, with the Nagelkerke R Square value being much closer to 0 than to 1. However, the Hosmer and Lemeshow test indicated a p-value below the alpha model of 0.05, which may indicate a concern about fit. This led to concerns about the appropriateness of the model fit, and I noted specific concerns with the Hosmer and Lemeshow test, where there is sparseness in the data (Hosmer et al., 1997). In addition, in my dataset, the high underlying levels of reading frequency did mean that for some groups there was a sparsity of data when considering respondents who did not read frequently, for example within some of the ethnicity groups. My dataset has a previously acknowledged complexity which makes it unlikely that traditional goodness-of-fit models would be applicable. There are also the aforementioned wider concerns about the appropriateness of models of fit to non-randomised datasets, such as those found in social sciences (Gorard, 2021). Therefore, I decided to use logistic regression not as a predictive tool but to indicate areas for consideration where and further scrutiny would be appropriate. This approach is consistent with the concept of identifying patterns and trends within complex systems, as discussed in Section 3.9.4.

6.3.16 Reliability and validity

The key aspects for consideration with regard to reliability and validity of the Phase 1 survey were as follows:

- respondent authenticity - how likely were respondents to be honest in their answers (Andrews et al., 2003),
- respondent typicality - how reflective the respondent group was of the wider population (Rothbaum, 1986),
- coding accuracy - whether coding of responses reflects respondent intent (Creswell & Clark, 2017),
- inter-coder reliability - whether the secondary coder applied the code book in the same way as the primary coder (Saldaña, 2021), and
- mathematical accuracy - whether data entry was accurate and statistical tests were used correctly (Gorard, 2021).

Respondent authenticity was supported by the anonymity of the survey, and the voluntary nature of completing it. As respondents did not interact with the researcher, this would work to lessen the social desirability bias inherent in answering questions about parenting. However, self-reported measures such as reading frequency were still open to intentional and unintentional misreporting, and the nature of giving free-text answer spaces to questions meant that respondents might not record an aspect that was important to them, as it was not prompted as with a multi-choice question style.

In terms of respondent typicality, the gathering of demographic data allowed for comparisons with census data to gauge the proportional representation of different demographic groups within the sample population. I address the population skews found through this process in Section 7.2. The predicted skew towards White and middle-class populations (Fletcher & Reese, 2005) occurred, and thus presented an intrinsic bias within the research. In addition to demographic typicality (for example, an expected gender skew within the responses) there is an inherent bias in conducting a voluntary survey, particularly one which relies on any form of convenience sampling, as respondents who are not

interested in the topic would conceivably be much less likely to complete the survey (Andrews et al., 2003). The sample could also only include those with digital access which biases the sample population in favour of wealthier (financial and time-rich) families. All these factors meant that my sample population could be expected to be skewed toward parents and carers who had an active interest in, or specifically valued reading with their child. This meant that the thoughts, beliefs and practices of parents who held differing views would be less likely to be captured. This would be true of any research design, as informed consent would be part of an RCT or QED, but a research design in which parents have to actively become involved such as an online survey as opposed to actively saying no to a researcher's direct approach is likely to be even more at risk of this skew. However, as the respondents have all shown a similar degree of motivation to choose to complete an online survey, I could, as previously stated, expect a degree of internal consistency in the results, for example between recipients of the Imagination Library and parents from the wider population who also chose to respond to the survey.

Coding accuracy was addressed by coding small chunks of text which minimised the researcher's role in deciding the meaning of the answer. Instead of having to make a generalised view and code an entire sentence or paragraph with one overarching point, coding each phrase in a granular way supported an unbiased interpretation of the answers (Turner, 2002); for example, if the parent said 'comfort' as a benefit, this was unambiguous and would be coded as such alongside any direct synonyms (Weber, 1990).

Inter-coder reliability was addressed first through extensive training and then statistically, using a CAQDAS programme (MAXQDA) (Kurasaki, 2000; Lombard et al., 2010). It is important to understand that the addition and reliability testing of an additional coder does not in itself make the coded data more valid; the reliability rating here refers to the reliability that both coders would code the same text in the same way. This approach was tested on open-ended interview data from 20 respondents and was found to have an overall average agreement of .90 both in themes and in how the coders segmented the coded text (Kurasaki, 2000). This finding was particularly pertinent to my work, as although the data were free-text written responses rather than interview data, the coders each had to decide on the length of the coded segment, rather than coding an entire answer as one segment. It

does not follow that this was the right or only way to code that text; indeed, untrained coders or alternate researchers are likely to make different choices in coding the data, reflecting their own positionality and biases. Inter-coder reliability testing ensured that the data were coded in the same way as the codebook intended, rather than providing the codebook itself with additional validity (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

Following the creation of the first-cycle codebook, the additional coder coded 200 responses at a time, which I then reviewed and amended where miscodes had occurred. We maintained an ongoing dialogue which supported the refinement of the codebook, with second coder queries being logged and then discussed until a visually good degree of accuracy was achieved (measured by fewer errors perceived by the primary coder on work submitted by the second coder). Up to this point, the aim was not to test for inter-coder reliability but to train the second coder, who had no involvement with the broader project and was from a different subject discipline. After the training process, an inter-coder reliability exercise was performed to ensure ongoing reliability and validity (see Section 6.3.9 and Table 24 p335). The choice to add a second coder was primarily expedient because of the large amount of data collected. Utilising a second person meant that I did not have to limit the number of codes or code larger sections of text purely for time reasons rather than as a methodological choice. However, following this practical decision the additional validity provided by a second coder was utilised by helping me to develop clarity of meaning and to articulate my choices within the codebook, as these had to be communicated to the second researcher.

The accuracy of the data and the statistical tests carried out were ensured through researcher training and regular 'sense checks' of the data to identify erroneous inputs such as double-counting of results or data-entry mistakes in the data (Saldaña, 2021). As the addition of a second coder was because of expediency rather than pre-planning, the methodological basis for using a second coder is less well-explored than it might have been with a planned approach to this decision.

6.4   Phase 2 – school assessment data

As part of answering RQ 2ii, the impact of receiving Imagination Library books on children's early development, I decided to examine academic data from one locality with a high take-up of the Imagination Library programme.

6.4.1   Collecting extant data

The academic data commonly gathered in England in the first few years of schooling comprise the end of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) scores which are compiled at the end of the reception year when most children are 5 years old, phonics test data, taken at the end of Year 1 at 6 years of age, and Key Stage 1 (KS1) teacher assessment data, comprising reading, writing and mathematics levels when children are 7 years old. These data can be compared on a yearly basis with both regional and national means calculated, as well as with close statistical neighbours, chosen for their similarity of deprivation levels.

6.4.2   Finding a data partner

For the locality-based data gathering in Phases 2 and 3, I needed to find an affiliate (partner in book distribution). The criteria for this choice were: where the Imagination Library programme had been in place for as many years as possible (in order to capture data on children who had been part of the programme for the full 5 years or close to this), where uptake was high (demonstrating an embedding of the programme within the community) and where data on educational attainment were available. To choose a locality, I attended two events run by the Dollywood Foundation aimed at their affiliates, who were responsible for administering and funding the programme in their geographical area and presented to the affiliates. I then followed this up with a request sent via the Imagination Library to all affiliates outlining the research, their potential for involvement and an expression of interest. From this process, three affiliates expressed an interest in participation, and I evaluated their submissions against the three criteria (length of involvement, percentage take-up and data availability). From this process, North Lincolnshire Council was the affiliate who met all three of the criteria, so I progressed through a process of gaining the necessary

permissions from their key stakeholders to work with them in this phase of the project (see Appendix D).

6.4.3 Participants and sampling

After receiving permission from North Lincolnshire Council to access their extant school attainment data relevant to child participants in the Imagination Library, I was furnished with a wealth of original and summary data covering all aspects of academic data collection in the EYFS and KS1 over a 4-year period. This contained data on up to 2,000 children in each year group cohort (reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children) for each of the 4 years supplied. North Lincolnshire achieved an uptake for Imagination Library registration which averaged 84.2% over the 4-year period examined. For each of the children, participation in the Imagination Library was indicated, along with length of participation and demographic variables including term of birth, special needs status, gender, catchment area and school.

6.4.4 Ethical Issues

North Lincolnshire Council conducted its own internal ethical approval process for the project and then shared data with me, which was managed securely via Microsoft Teams. The data shared were anonymised, although they still contained personal data such as date of birth and postcode, so my initial data preparation involved disaggregating those aspects of the data so that I only accessed the parts of the data relevant to my research.

The children and their parents did not have any means of consenting to the children's academic data to be used for this research. The data were owned by and held by the council as gatekeepers and would have been collected by their school and shared under the 'public task' data protection permissions. In light of the absence of informed consent at an individual level for research purposes, it was particularly important that I was mindful of not misrepresenting the data, which meant offering full clarity about alternative explanations for any conclusions drawn and clarity about the confidence with which any conclusions could be drawn. If a parent was to read the thesis or a report based on it and were led to believe that their own decision to / not to participate in the programme had caused

educational harm to their child, then this would be a grave concern, particularly if they felt that their child's data had been used without their consent. Due to this concern, I decided to make very broad-brush statements, conflating the cohorts of the 4 years together where it was possible, to limit the possibility of a parent being able to make a specific judgement on their child's participation by situating any conclusions within the much broader 4-year dataset.

6.5   Data analysis for the Phase 2 assessment data

6.5.1   Data collection software

The academic data were supplied in Excel format alongside written reports supplied as Word files. Further statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software and Stata software.

6.5.2   Quantitative data

The data supplied by the council comprised raw scores and grades for each pupil for their EYFS summative assessments, phonics tests and KS1 teacher assessment scores. In addition, demographic data at the pupil level on gender, date of birth (from which term of birth could be derived) and any flagged vulnerabilities such as free school meals status or pupil premium status. The fullest dataset was that of the EYFS Profile data (EYFS data) and the sparsest was end the of KS1 results, as only one year group had, at the time of writing, progressed fully through the Imagination Library Programme to this point in their schooling. I decided to focus on analysing the EYFS data for two reasons. First, it was the most complete dataset, spanning 4 years of cohorts, and second, it was collected closest to the culmination of the Imagination Library programme, which ceases the month the child turns 5 years of age. Most children at the point of EYFS end of year assessment have turned five within the previous ten months or are about to do so. This meant that any impact of differences in schooling (reading teaching, access to books, etc.) was kept to a minimum, whereas using the data points at the end of a child's Year 1 or Year 2 experience exacerbated the potential (positive) impact of schooling and in-school interventions.

Although the on-entry data were collected by schools at the start of the reception year, this is not a publicly available dataset.

6.5.3   Data preparation

From the date of birth information for each child, I was able to calculate the term of birth (which was a variable to be used in the analysis), and then the personal identifiable data of date of birth and postcode was removed from the dataset. I decided to use the end of reception year data as my primary dataset, so the 4 years of this data were combined into one spreadsheet, which necessitated matching column headings where fidelity was not maintained across the years. An example of this is when the government's definition of deprived pupils has changed. The baseline testing itself was the same for all the years measured.

6.5.4   Statistical tests

North Lincolnshire council had previously conducted a basic analysis of their dataset, comparing Imagination Library participants to non-participants and breaking this down by demographic groups. As part of this thesis, additional binary logistic regressions were conducted, to understand the interplay between known variables which affect school attainment, such as gender (Sammons, 1995), ethnicity (Demie, 2018), term of birth (Borg & Falzon, 1995; Sammons et al., 1997), special needs (Parsons & Platt, 2017) and deprivation (Sammons et al., 1997) and participation in the Imagination Library programme. Using binary logistic regression allowed analysis of the cohort attainment taking into consideration these additional variables and thus providing a closer analysis of the impact of the Imagination Library than simple group comparisons would allow. Further discussion on the use of binary logistic regression can be found in Section 6.3.14. Stata was then used to extend the analyses possible from binary logistic regression to calculate marginal effects (Williams, 2012).

6.5.5 Marginal effects

Although binary logistic regressions were used to calculate odds ratios for the Phase 2 data, these resulted in odds ratios which, while statistically accurate, did not provide meaningful results for lay use, for example by the study funders. Odds ratios, particularly when the outcome of interest is not rare, can overstate the prevalence of a finding (Davies et al., 1998). With general pass rates for the outcomes of interest in this data – reading early learning goal (ELG) and good level of development (GLD) – being around three-quarters of all children, I was concerned that using odds ratios by themselves to interpret any increase in pass rates correlated to Imagination Library use would be prone to overstating any effect. I, therefore, calculated marginal effects to support understanding of the "practical significance" of the findings (Davies et al., 1998; Williams, 2012, p. 308).

Marginal effect calculations are additional calculations drawn from conducting binary logistic regressions (Williams, 2012). They can contribute to the interpretation of results by representing the hypothetical 'gain' for an 'average participant'. It is important to understand that the 'average participant' does not exist in reality; in this example the average participant would be a given percentage female, a state which does not exist. The results of calculating marginal effects tell us, for two otherwise average participants, the estimated percentage point difference which would occur if one participant had accessed the Imagination Library and the other had not.

Despite the inherent problems of calculating for a hypothetical average individual, when used to consider the overall population (particularly with a large sample size such as in this dataset) the overall estimated percentage difference for the hypothetical average participant can provide a more relevant indication of the likely change to outcome because of the impact from the variable of interest.

The variables used to calculate the marginal effects were: gender, term of birth, deprivation status, first language status, special needs status, locality and participation in the Imagination Library (the variable of interest). These choices were informed by the existing literature on variables which are known to impact academic achievement in primary school

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(Aram et al., 2013; Borg & Falzon, 1995; Demie, 2018; Hemmerechts et al., 2016; Judge, 2013; Marks, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014).

I decided against calculating marginal effects for the Phase 1 data, as that dataset was inherently skewed towards parents who read with their child, so calculating a fictional 'average parent' within an already skewed sample did not seem to be an appropriate use of the technique. In addition, the percentage reading gain across all variables was very similar when correlated against Imagination Library participation, so reporting an average of all parents, regardless of demographic factors seemed appropriate. With the Phase 2 data, however, this was a census sample drawn from all children in reception classes in North Lincolnshire over 4 years. There is a wealth of public data considering the differences in pass rates by various socioeconomic and demographic factors such as gender and term of birth, with which the data collected can be compared, including detailed analyses for each year data is published (Department for Education, 2019b). Thus, we can clarify the key variables which affect pass rates in end of year assessments within the EYFS, unlike with reading frequency, where a very broad range of variables have the potential to be included. These factors contributed to my decision to use marginal effect analyses on the Phase 2 data.

As marginal effects could not be calculated through use of the statistical programmes I was using for the vast majority of data analysis in this study, I received additional help for this element by utilising one of my supervisor's institutional access to a second statistical package, Stata, and support to input the data into Stata. The analysis of the output, however, was unassisted.

6.5.6   Reliability and validity

It is important not to accept external data at face value, therefore, appropriate checks on the extant data would include the following:

- appropriateness of treatment – ensuring that the statistical methods used to analyse the data are appropriate and robust,

- cohort size – evaluation of the cohort size and relative populations of programme participants and non-participants to ensure that robust conclusions can be drawn and at what confidence level,
- confounding factors – consideration of what other interventions, circumstances and family motivations might account for any relationships between programme participation and academic data.

The rationale for using binary logistic regression has been explored in Sections 6.3.14 and 6.5.4. This treatment choice allows for the variable of interest to be explored alongside variables known to have an impact on school attainment.

The cohort size was 7,815 children, comprising four cohorts of around 2,000 children each year in consecutive school years. The cohort was collected through census data rather than self-selection or opt-in data as all children registered with schools in North Lincolnshire. An average of 82.4% of the cohort participated in the Imagination Library, with 17.6% not participating, although the coverage of the Imagination Library increased over the 4 years from 74% in 2016 to 90% in 2019 (see Table 18 p304). Although the cohort data cannot be extrapolated to other settings or localities, the 100% compliance with recording EYFS data from all schools within North Lincolnshire means that the results of any analysis will be robust, as all children's data have been included unless they were not attending a registered school setting in the area.

Consideration will also need to be paid to potential confounding differences in the cohorts – what other factors which have not been gathered might be barriers to participation in the Imagination Library programme and could these also be educational barriers? For example, a parental language barrier to understanding the sign-up process for the programme would also have implications for the parent's ability to support schooling delivered in English. It could be that a small percentage of families that are not within the Imagination Library cohort have additional vulnerabilities which significantly impact their access to schooling and skew their academic attainment compared to other children who fall within the same broad categories.

6.6   Phase 3 – locality survey

To further explore RQs 2 and 3, I designed a questionnaire which was shared in a locality with a high uptake of the Imagination Library programme, as detailed in Section 6.4.2. The questionnaire was available to all parents who were registered through the Imagination Library in the locality, as the council held personal contact details for all those with electronic access and could also approach those without digital communication on a personal basis.

6.6.1   Designing the questionnaire

The questionnaire was co-produced with the participating affiliate on the principle of reciprocity (Brooks et al., 2014), and Questions 15-18 and Question 20, exploring the impact of the scheme during COVID-19, use of affiliate-created resources, and library membership were included to meet the needs of the affiliate but did not form part of my own analysis or discussion.

As the locality noted significant population growth from Eastern European families (North Lincolnshire Council, 2016), we decided to offer the survey in English and in the two most widely spoken languages in the locality – Polish and Lithuanian. This entailed finding translators whom I sourced from my local university societies for Poland and for Lithuania. The translated surveys (n = 38) were then released alongside the English survey, with the option of having any free-text answers translated back into English following data collection. As the surveys had identical questions and answers in the same order, direct translation of the majority of the data was unnecessary because the respondents' answers could be understood through reference to the English language version of the questionnaire. No free-text answers in languages other than English were received, so further translation, although available, was not required.

Demographic questions were utilised directly from the Phase 1 survey, covering gender identity (Question 22), ethnicity (Question 23), and education level (Question 24), but not location, as all respondents were drawn from one geographical locality and I did not require

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more exact data on their location within that area. The number of children in the household was again ascertained (Question 2) but only the age of the youngest child was gathered (Question 3), as I found that I had not needed to use information on other children's ages when analysing the Phase 1 survey (see Appendix C).

As parents generally receive Imagination Library books from birth or in the first months of life, I considered how to measure change in terms of the second research question which focuses on how receiving Imagination Library books has impacted on the parent and child, their beliefs and practices. For many parents, particularly first-time parents or those with multiple children in the scheme, the impact of the programme will have been for the majority or entirety of their book-sharing experience with their child, so it might be difficult for them to quantify the changes they may have made or feel due to inclusion in the project. I wanted to design the questionnaire to enable me to identify any differences between parents who had used the programme from the birth of their child, and those who had joined later. Therefore, I added a question about the starting age of the youngest child (Question 4).

Questions on reading frequency (Question 5) and whether this was perceived by the parent to be the right amount of reading (Question 6) were enhanced by the addition of a question around when in the day reading took place (Question 7). As many of the respondents to the Phase 1 survey had identified the role of book-sharing in bedtime routines, I wanted to explore further how parents might use books as routine-building or whether book-sharing experiences were spread more evenly across the day.

Parental feelings about book-sharing were measured on a rating scale in Question 8. Having gathered free-text answers on the benefits of reading in the Phase 1 questionnaire, Question 10 asked parents to consider the main value of reading using a multiple-choice answer which was derived from the Phase 1 questionnaire findings. This allowed me to triangulate the previous qualitative data where parents had answered in free-text by asking them with closed options, the most important factor in terms of the benefits of book-sharing.

Questions 9 and 11 explored RQ 3i, examining parents' beliefs and practices when book-sharing, with Likert-scale scores given to various reading behaviours in both the parent and the child. The questions were as far as possible reflective of each other, for example, asking if the parent cuddled their child and if the child cuddled their parent. Regarding the child's experiences of book-sharing, Question 12 asked who led the reading experience and Question 13 explored who else read with the child.

Question 14 explicitly asked about the parents' perceptions of change (RQ 3i) after receiving the Imagination Library books using true/false/do not know answers to set response options, with Question 19 asking about the overall difference that scheme participation made to the family and Question 21 allowing free-text answers about the scheme.

6.6.2   Pilot

The questionnaire was not subject to a formal pilot and built significantly on lessons learned from the Phase 1 questionnaire. As part of the co-creation process with the affiliate, it was stress tested through a series of false data entered by staff to ensure that the instrument design was robust.

6.6.3   Participant recruitment and sampling

In Phase 3, the target population was all families in North Lincolnshire currently receiving Imagination Library books, totalling just over 6,000 households. Again, these were parents or carers of children aged 0-5, who had internet access to complete the questionnaire or who had a paper copy from a staff member, and who could access the questionnaire in English, Polish, or Lithuanian, which were the three most widely spoken languages in the locality and into which the survey was translated.

The survey was shared with local families through the council's social media accounts, by emailing families for whom an email address was held, by placing it on the council's webpage and by individual family workers highlighting it with their client families using electronic or paper copies as appropriate. Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, copies

could not be placed in children's centres or other meeting places and postal copies were cost-prohibitive. As an incentive for completion, a small prize draw was used to encourage families to fill in the survey, with a prize kindly donated by The Dollywood Foundation United Kingdom.

The survey was open to all families in North Lincolnshire whose children received Imagination Library books (7,454 books delivered to around 6,284 households). The questionnaire was sent to 6,284 families that received at least one Imagination Library book each month (some families had more than one child in the scheme). A total of 702 responses were received, including 26 in Polish and 11 in Lithuanian. This represents 11% of all households in receipt of the books – a higher response rate than the 3.8% of Imagination Library families who completed the Phase 1 questionnaire.

6.6.4   Census and non-response

As all of the families within the programme in the chosen locality had contact details held by the affiliate, and as the survey instrument was able to be distributed online, I decided to use a census rather than a sample approach (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 1994) so my target population was the entirety of the cohort . As the population's gatekeeper, the affiliate, held an up-to-date contact list as part of the book distribution process, I was able to use this as a sampling frame. However, as the contact details were to be held by the council and the questionnaire was distributed by them on my behalf, I could not assess any biases or issues with the data held due to lack of access. It is reasonable to suppose that a small number of families will not have supplied or did not use email addresses, and that a small proportion of the data would be out of date due to house moves and similar issues. However, overall, I believe that the coverage of the entire population would be close enough for me to count this as a broad census approach.

My expectation was for a high non-response rate, based on the 4.8% response rate received by the Imagination Library's biennial survey. High non-response rates are problematic, as they increase the likelihood of bias and of the responses not being representative of the population as a whole (Cohen et al., 2017; Daniel, 2012). To help mitigate against a low response rate, the questionnaire was shared with families in different ways which acted as a staged reminder: publicity on the council's social media channels and then direct email

requests. Additionally, families whose particular circumstances might make them less likely to complete the questionnaire were approached by council family workers to utilise a personal approach.

With a population of approximately 6,000 families, I calculated that a sample size of 546 was needed to reach a 95% confidence level with a confidence interval of 4 percentage points +/-. The response rate of 702 families met this test, and retrospective calculations showed that a confidence level of 99% +/- 5% was achieved.

Considering a social exchange theory approach to maximise participation (Dillman et al., 1976), thought was given to how to minimise non-response through "minimizing perceived costs and maximizing perceived benefits and trust" (Daniel, 2012, p. 43). I considered that the perceived costs might be the time taken to complete the survey and concerns about what might happen to the data, alongside concerns about the usefulness of completing the questionnaire. To minimise perceived costs, the survey said it would take approximately three minutes to complete, it was easy to access for families who were online and was clear about who would be using the data and for what purpose. The purpose was linked back to the community benefits of participating in the research, to offset the immediate time cost of participation. In addition, an incentive (prize draw) was introduced to try and maximise perceived benefits, researcher information and the 'stamp of approval' from the council was highlighted to increase trust and the social benefit of completion was stated to address all the contributory factors of the social exchange theory. In terms of the effectiveness of these measures, as a cohort, the participation rate for Phase 3 was over 7% higher than the comparable Phase 1 survey which was also distributed by email to Imagination Library participants.

6.6.5   Ethical issues

North Lincolnshire Council again conducted their own internal ethical approval process for the project, and their governance recommended that they host the questionnaire on their own servers and then share data with me, which was managed securely via Microsoft

Teams. The questionnaire was shared with and approved by their internal governance alongside my own completion of the ethical submission to Swansea University.

The data shared by the affiliate were anonymised, although they still contained personal data such as date of birth and postcode, so my initial data preparation involved disaggregating those aspects of the data so that I only accessed the parts of the data relevant to my research. Where email addresses were collected as part of the prize draw and to (separately) indicate interest in further project involvement, these were disaggregated prior to data analysis.

The online questionnaire comprised a study overview and explicit opt-in consent, which needed to be ticked to allow the questionnaire to be accessed. Participants were made aware that their answers could not be able to be deleted after completion due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire. This information was provided in the language used for the survey (English, Polish or Lithuanian) to maximise understanding.

The questionnaire itself was designed to be in plain English (or equivalent) and none of the questions asked the respondents to identify their own literacy levels. It aimed to be value-free in terms of underlying assumptions about what was valued in the family or what reading habits were expected. However, I acknowledge that the intrinsic framing of some of the questions was around the benefits of book-sharing, which could lead participants to feel that reading more frequently would be valued more by the researcher.

6.7 Data analysis for the Phase 2 assessment data

6.7.1 Data collection software

Microsoft Forms was again used to collect the questionnaire data, with analysis using MAXQDA, as in the Phase 1 survey.

6.7.2 Data preparation

Personal identifying data submitted for the prize draw or for further research contact were disaggregated from the main dataset, and validity checks were performed to ensure that all respondents were participating in or had very recent experience with the Imagination Library.

6.7.3 Qualitative data

Only one question (21) in the Phase 3 survey had a free-text answer, and this invited comments about the scheme for use by the funder, rather than in response to a research question. These data were later used to illustrate quantitative findings through the use of verbatim quotations.

6.7.4 Coding

As no qualitative data were gathered in direct response to the research questions, coding was not required for this phase of the survey.

6.7.5 Quantitative data

The questions in the Phase 3 survey were designed to provide quantifiable evidence of reading habits and behaviours and of perceived change as a result of the Imagination Library intervention. A variety of scaled ratings, Likert scales, true/false and multiple-choice questions were used to support parents in considering their reading habits with regard to their youngest child.

6.7.6 Statistical tests

The majority of data gathered in the Phase 3 questionnaire were reported as frequencies, although some data were analysed by Pearson chi-square tests using the age of the youngest child or number of children in the household as the variables. In the main, as

parents reported multiple reading behaviours but at different frequency rates, analysis of the respondent cohort as a whole, rather than on demographic groups (which were largely homogenous with the exception of parental educational level) were more useful in answering the research questions.

6.7.7   Reliability and validity

Considering the key aspects of reliability and validity addressed in the Phase 1 survey again for the Phase 3 survey, respondent authenticity, respondent typicality and mathematical accuracy were relevant to this part of the study. The same concerns about the type of people more likely to respond to an internet survey, and how far their responses might be considered typical of the wider population (discussed in Section 6.3.16) were still present along with an additional concern introduced by the addition of a prize draw which could have influenced some respondents to fill in the questionnaire to have a chance of gaining a perceived benefit. To compensate for these concerns, I was supported by North Lincolnshire council whose officers approached families whom they considered less likely to fill in the questionnaire with paper copies and support to fill these in. This provided some balance to the digital access concerns although this approach also introduced some potential social desirability issues. The paper copies were transcribed into the digital survey by the collecting officers. The prize draw offered was deliberately small, with a prize that, although pleasant, was unlikely to engender any 'gaming' of the response system with multiple or false responses.

6.8   Phase 4 – parental interviews

6.8.1   Designing the interview process

As a result of the copious research data generated by the earlier phases of the research, my interview plans were out of necessity truncated so that they would be less numerous and the data gathered would not be as closely scrutinised via detailed coding, but instead would serve to highlight, using parents' own words, aspects of the themes and findings drawn from Phases 1 and 3. The primary concern with reducing this element of the research was that

the responses received would not be typical of respondents in general, as with so few interviews I would not be able to generalise or draw out response patterns from them. However, this danger was mitigated by changing the usage of the interviews, from data to be analysed for trends to illustrative data to flesh out points made by other respondents or quantitative findings.

I decided to use a semi-structured interview format (Adams, 2015; Maxwell, 2012), with questions which would help me better understand the parents as readers and what book-sharing looked and felt like within the home (see Appendix C). I made this choice because semi-structured interviews can be used as a "useful adjunct method to supplement and add depth to other approaches" (Adams, 2015, p. 367) as well as being an approach in their own right, and I wanted to use them to add depth and feeling to the qualitative findings.

I asked about the household composition and adults' own reading experiences as a child, to frame and better understand the reading experiences that the parent shared with their child. I asked what the parent thought their child felt about reading, what benefits they felt arose from the activity and what they looked for when choosing books for their child, relating to RQ 1. I then asked about where and when reading happened at home and if the participants could describe what happened when an Imagination Library book arrived. Finally, I asked if and how the Imagination Library made a difference to their family, all of which were related to RQ 2 and RQ 3.

The interview process also involved opportunities to revisit the consent process and to discuss the parents' preferences regarding the use of pseudonyms when writing up the interview.

At the very end of the interview, so as not to influence the interview content, I planned to let the parents know about the thank you gift of a voucher donated by the Imagination Library trust to thank them for their time. A postal address was gathered for this purpose only, which was unrelated to the content of the interview.

6.8.2 Pilot

Due to the small number of interviews finally planned to be carried out (three from an original twelve), there was no specific opportunity for piloting the questions. However, as the interview was now planned to generate vignettes rather than data for analysis, this was not a particular concern as no generalisations were going to be drawn from the data.

6.8.3 Participant recruitment and sampling

Participants with children aged between 24 and 36 months were recruited. Initially, this was intended so that the child could be an active participant in the book-sharing task which was originally planned, but before the child was likely to be reading independently. Due to the time pressures of analysing the Phase 1 and 3 questionnaires, I limited this phase to three interviews as an expediency measure in terms of the time and resources needed to transcribe the interviews, which were planned to last approximately 40 minutes.

In the Phase 3 questionnaire there was an option for parents to leave a contact email address if they were interested in participating in further research. I wanted to ensure that the interviews were held with a range of participants, with a focus on families with additional vulnerabilities because this is who the Imagination Library programme was intended to benefit. To do this, I filtered the respondents to the questionnaire first by those who had ticked to express additional interest and second by parental educational attainment, which was the closest measure I had to a likelihood of subsequent lower socioeconomic status.

Alongside the survey respondents, staff from the affiliate partner identified specific families who might be willing to be interviewed, and these families alongside those who had indicated interest in further research were contacted by email to ask if they were still interested in being interviewed. Information about the nature of the interview, its purpose and time commitment was also shared at this stage.

The first three families to respond were then contacted with further information about the project, and an initial information gathering and sharing phone call was set up. One family had been suggested by the affiliate as being from the local Polish-speaking community, and a translator from the council worked with me to make contact with the mother and also interpreted throughout the process. The second family was a young, single parent and she was supported by a council worker to make initial contact. The third family was a same-sex couple who had left education relatively early at the age of 18 years and who completed the interview without additional support. The three families embodied some of the characteristics of vulnerability which the Imagination Library programme had been set up to support: parents who were less likely to be supported in reading with their children through lower educational levels, language barriers and parents living in deprivation.

6.8.4   Ethical issues

Key ethical issues around conducting interviews lie around informed consent, confidentiality, the researcher's attitudes and position and how the interview data are disseminated (Cohen et al., 2017).

It was important to ensure that, at all stages, prospective participants were given full and frank information about the interview content and how they could decline to participate further at any stage, including after the interview had been completed. Indeed, one participant declined to have me video a reading session with their child, and their participation was not contingent on them agreeing to all of the interview elements.

Consent was given by the parent on behalf of their child in writing prior to the interview, and was then re-sought at the start of the interview process. As quotes from the interviews were planned to be used verbatim in this thesis, I offered parents the choice to use their real names or pseudonyms for them and their children, and the parents chose from these options. The participants all gave permission for their words to be used within this thesis and linked research reports and were made aware that locally disseminated research reports might be able to link to them via their first name if they chose not to use a pseudonym.

It was important that when devising the questions and when conducting the interview, I as the researcher, maintained an attitude of open interest and was not seen as someone who was judging or making validity decisions on their parenting choices. This was important to minimise the risk of social desirability bias (DeMaio, 1984) and included mirroring and empathising with comments made by the parents. For example, when they said that it was difficult to find the time to read regularly with their child, it was important to mirror this back "I hear it's really difficult finding the time" rather than judging or questioning the response.

Although the purpose of the interviews was to provide supplementary personal experiences to enrich the questionnaire data, it was important to maintain the intention of the participants' comments and not to 'cherry-pick' them to suit the study findings.

6.9   Data analysis for the Phase 4 interviews

6.9.1   Data collection software

The Zoom programme was used to record the interviews as it was familiar to most participants, and secure storage of the audio and video content was available, along with an auto transcription facility for speech collected in English (it could not translate the Polish interview content).

6.9.2   Data preparation

The interview data were saved as a speech-to-text file by the software and this was used alongside the audio recording to create an accurate transcript for each interview.

6.9.3   Qualitative data

The data collected were not coded, and no content analysis of the data was conducted as its purpose was to provide illustrative vignettes of reading in the home. Instead, a summary of

the interview content was written, using the participants' own words as much as possible (or their translated words in the case of the third interview).

6.9.4 Reliability and validity

Considering the key aspects of reliability and validity addressed in the Phase 1 survey again for the Phase 4 interviews, respondent authenticity and respondent typicality were relevant to this part of the study. Due to the small number of participants interviewed, no conclusions could be drawn about respondent typicality. Indeed, the purpose of the interviews was to better understand how book-sharing looked within that family home as a unique unit. In terms of respondent authenticity, there was a greater degree of likelihood that my direct involvement as researcher-interviewer would cause social desirability bias in the participants and directly affect the authenticity of their answers. Instead, I was reliant on trying to create an ethical and supportive interview environment that would best dispose the participants to feel comfortable enough to disclose their true thoughts, beliefs and habits about book-sharing.

6.10 Summary

In this chapter I have, for each of the four data collection phases, described the design of the data collection and the tools and mechanisms for its analysis. Within the design of data collection, I have explained the overall design of the phase, any pilots which took place and the outcomes of these alongside how the participants were recruited where relevant. This was followed by a consideration of the ethical implications related to the data collection. For each phase, I then described the analysis mechanisms for the data gathered, the software used, the process for preparation of the data and the analysis techniques employed alongside an indication of concerns or strengths around reliability and validity. I chose to break this chapter down by the data-gathering phase, as these were broadly sequential, and each had its own unique attributes. The following chapters address each research question in turn and draw from the current chapter by referring to the data analyses described here when considering the findings relevant to answering each research question.

7.0 Descriptive findings

7.1 Introduction

As the research phases do not align directly with the research questions, I will include all the descriptive findings of the cohorts with, where appropriate and available, national demographic comparators and a breakdown of respondents by participation in the Imagination Library programme. These descriptive findings are then referred to throughout the analysis chapters (8.0 - 11.0).

7.2 Phase 1

In total, 5,009 responses were analysed, of which 71 were not residents of the United Kingdom leaving 4,938 responses. Of these, 168 respondents who indicated that they did not have a child under 72 months old (e.g., over the age of 5 years 11 months), leaving 4,770 responses which were used for the majority of analyses. Where relevant, the 86 respondents who were currently pregnant but had no 0–5-year-old children were included (making 4,856 respondents in total). The respondents were classified according to their sociodemographic and family characteristics.

Imagination Library (DPIL) respondents were more likely than the wider group to have terminal qualifications up to Level 3 (A level equivalent) ($p < .0001$, $\chi^2 = 70.952$) and less likely to have received university level education. Overall, both groups were significantly over-represented in the higher educational qualification ranges, with 80.1% having qualifications at Level 4 and above, compared to a national picture of 41% in the working age population in England. The DPIL group was much closer to the national average when looking at ethnicity than the non-DPIL group, broadly matching the expectations of respondents from Black, Mixed, White and other ethnicities, whereas the non-IL group had a greater proportion of White respondents than ONS figures. DPIL participants were more likely than non-DPIL participants to be Asian ($p = .0003$, $\chi^2 = 12.783$) or Black ($p < .0001$, $\chi^2 = 89.547$). Neither group was representative of a gender mix, with over 90% of respondents

identifying as female in each cohort although males were better represented in the DPIL participants than the non-DPIL respondent group (p = .0001, χ^2 = 15.143).

There were similar family sizes (one, two or three or more children) across both groups but there was a notable difference within some age groups of children, notably the 0–12-month age group where non-DPIL respondents were over-represented compared to population expectations). This could potentially be linked to a socioeconomic propensity to take extended maternity leave and thus greater availability to undertake a social media survey. The DPIL families were over-represented in the broader category of children aged over 36 months (p < .0001, χ^2 = 78.217) compared to non-DPIL participants in the survey.

Overall, DPIL respondents were more likely to decline to answer demographic questions, although the numbers declining were no greater than 3% in any one category, meaning that the data were little affected by this.

Table 4 Phase 1 descriptive findings

Characteristic	Total		Non-Imagination Library		Imagination Library		*p*	χ^2	National comparator
	n	%	n	%	n	%			%
Gender of the carer									
Female	4,522	94.8	3,106	95.7	1,416	93.0	0.0001**	15.143	
Male	216	4.5	134	4.1	82	5.4			
Non-Binary	4	< 0.1	3	< 0.1	1	< 0.1			
Not given	28	0.6	12	0.6	16	1.9			
Highest Educational Level									
No qualifications	37	0.8	18	0.6	19	1.2	0.0110**	6.472	
Level 1 or 2	323	6.8	164	5.1	159	10.4	0.0000**	47.694	
Level 3	518	10.9	328	10.1	190	12.5	0.0140*	6.035	
Level 4	208	4.4	136	4.2	72	4.7	0.3954	0.722	
Level 5	290	6.1	178	5.5	112	7.4	0.0117*	6.362	
Level 6	1,592	33.4	1,161	35.8	431	28.3	0.0000**	26.130	
Level 7 or 8	1,729	36.2	1,233	38.0	496	32.6	0.0003**	12.966	
Not given	73	1.5	29	0.9	44	2.9	0.0000**	26.395	
None – Level 3	878	18.4	510	15.7	368	24.2	0.0000**	70.952	36
Level 4 - 8	3,819	80.1	2,708	83.4	1,111	72.9			41
Level 6 - 8	3,321	69.6	2,394	73.7	927	60.9	0.0000**	81.04	
Ethnicity									
Asian	171	3.6	95	2.9	76	5.0	0.0003**	12.783	8.9
Black	86	1.8	18	0.6	68	4.5	0.0000**	89.547	4.8
Mixed/Multiple	126	2.6	79	2.4	47	3.1	0.1898	1.719	1.6
Other	40	0.8	25	0.8	15	1.0	0.4479	0.576	1.2
White	4,301	90.2	3,008	92.6	1,293	84.9	0.0000**	70.076	83.5
Not given	46	1.0	22	0.7	24	1.6	0.0169*	5.708	0.0
Number of Children									
1	2,299	48.2	1,596	49.2	703	46.2	0.15	2.057	43.7
2	1,870	39.2	1,255	38.7	615	40.4			41.2
3	449	9.4	296	9.1	153	10.0			
4, 5 or 6	152	3.1	100	3.2	52	3.4			
2+	2,471	51.8	1,651	50.8	820	53.8	0.0537	3.723	
Age of youngest child									
0-12 m	1,365	28.6	1,071	33.0	294	19.3			
0-3 m	332	7.0	276	8.5	56	3.7			
4-6 m	377	7.9	301	9.3	76	5.0			
7-12 m	656	13.8	494	15.2	162	10.6			
13-24 m	1,144	24.0	792	24.4	352	23.1			
25-36 m	972	20.4	635	19.6	337	22.1			
37-48 m	685	14.4	396	12.2	289	19.0			
49-72m	604	12.7	353	10.9	251	16.5	0.000 **	78.271	
36m-71m	1,289	27.1	749	23.1	540	35.0			
Total	4,770	100	3,247		1,523				

(HESA, 2018; Office for National Statistics, 2013, 2019a, 2020b; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014) *Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.*

7.3 Phase 2

The dataset provided by North Lincolnshire Council provided full coverage of all children who underwent EYFS assessments between 2016 and 2019, numbering 6,440 children. Individuals were classified according to the variables known to impact educational attainment. Students enrolled in the Imagination Library programme were compared with those who had not been enrolled (Table 5 p182). A full breakdown of the cohort characteristics by year of assessment is presented in Table 18 p304.

Table 5 Phase 2 descriptive findings

Characteristic	Non-Imagination Library		Imagination Library		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Boys	686	50.1	3,248	52.0	3,934	51.1
Girls	689	50.3	3,192	51.1	3,881	50.4
Term of birth - Autumn	499	36.4	2,192	35.1	2,691	35.0
Term of birth - Spring	478	34.9	2,089	33.4	2,567	3.4
Term of birth - Summer	398	29.1	2,159	34.5	2,557	33.2
English as first Language	988	72.1	5,644	90.3	6,632	86.2
First language not English	286	20.9	641	10.3	927	12.1
Disadvantaged	223	16.3	1,049	16.8	1,272	16.5
SEN Support	107	7.8	582	9.3	689	8.96
Lowest 30% Super Output Area	528	38.5	2,375	30.9	2,903	37.7
Total	1,375	17.6	6,440	82.4	7,815	100

Note: The disadvantaged indicator was introduced in 2017; for 2016 the proxy of Deprivation Pupil Premium receipt was used. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

7.4 Phase 3

The Phase 3 survey was offered to all households in North Lincolnshire that were currently participating in the Imagination Library programme. In total, 702 respondents completed the questionnaire. Comparing the cohort to the Phase 1 survey, a greater percentage of parents with educational levels up to Level 3 (A levels) participated (40.5% compared with 24.2% of DPIL respondents in Phase 1, which is broadly similar to the national picture of 36% of working age adults), but were otherwise broadly the same demographically, with some

groups having very small cohorts which factored against accurate comparisons being drawn between the two surveys (see Table 6 p183).

Table 6 Phase 3 descriptive findings

Characteristic			National comparator where available
	n	%	
Gender of the carer			
Female	635	90.5	
Male	44	6.3	
Non-Binary	0	0.0	
Not given	23	3.3	
Highest educational level			
No Qualifications	8	1.1	
Level 1 or 2	122	17.4	
Level 3	155	22.0	
Level 4	33	4.5	
Level 5	73	10.4	
Level 6	142	20.1	
Level 7 or 8	117	16.9	
None - Level 3	285	40.5	36
Level 4 - 7	365	51.9	41
Not given	51	7.6	2
Ethnicity			
White	649	92.5	
Asian	15	2.1	8.9
Black	4	0.6	4.8
Mixed/Multiple	6	0.9	1.6
Other	1	0.1	1.2
Not given	27	3.8	83.5
Number of children			
1	323	46	0.0
2	242	34.5	
3	83	11.8	43.7
4	27	3.8	41.2
5+	10	1.4	

Age of youngest child		
In utero	16	2.3
0-12 m	153	24.1
0-3 m	38	5.4
4-6 m	39	5.6
7-12 m	76	10.8
13-24 m	175	24.9
25-36 m	143	20.4
37-48 m	101	14.4
49-60 m	93	13.2
61+ m	21	3.0
Age youngest child started receiving DPIL books		
0-3 m	393	56.0
3-12 m	213	30.4
12-36 m	40	7.2
36 – 60 m	18	2.6
Don't know	13	1.9
Total	702	100

(HESA, 2018; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2019; Office for National Statistics, 2013, 2019a, 2020b; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014)

7.5   Phase 4

Three families were interviewed as part of Phase 4. Their broad characteristics are presented in Table 7 p185.

Table 7 Phase 4 descriptive findings

	Parents	First Language	Children	Parental education Level	Age of parents
Family 1	Single mother, father visits several times a week	English	2, 10 months & 2 years	Completed college at 18	Early twenties
Family 2	Same-sex couple	English	1, 20 months, with additional learning needs	Completed college at 18	Late twenties
Family 3	Heterosexual couple	Polish	3, 2 years, 5 years, 8 years	Completed college at 18 followed by technical qualifications	Thirties

7.6   Summary

In this chapter I have outlined the key demographic data relating to respondents in each of the four phases of the research. The following chapters will now discuss each of the four research questions. Throughout the chapters I discuss my findings for each question, analysing and reflecting on the data gathered before briefly summarising the key points. Each chapter is completed by consideration of the implications for book-gifting organisations. Following the chapters exploring each research question I then discuss the broader implications of the research in Chapter 12.0.

8.0 Exploration of Research Question 1: What is important to parents about reading or book-sharing with their child ages 0-5?

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider parental views on book-sharing, covering the benefits for both parents and their children, alongside parental views on when book-sharing should begin. Finally, I draw together the themes for book-gifting organisations to review.

8.2 What are the benefits for book-sharing with children and parents?

To answer Research Question 1, 'What is important to parents about reading or book-sharing with their child aged 0-5?' I asked parents for free-text responses on the benefits both for them as adults (Table 8 p187) and for their children (Table 9 p188). My decision to ask about benefits rather than asking a question about whether there were benefits was related to the status of reading with your child as a culturally embedded positive parenting action. As the majority of parents in the United Kingdom are known to read with their children (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Scholastic, 2014; Venn, 2014) and because the notion of the value of reading with your children has become strongly embedded in the culture of parenting in the United Kingdom, including through the impact of the universal Bookstart programme (Moore & Wade, 2003), asking whether reading was beneficial seemed to be less useful than considering what parents found beneficial from it. Throughout the analysis, the Bookstart survey of family reading habits (Venn, 2014) is used to triangulate the findings. This is an imprecise comparison as the Bookstart survey used a series of closed, multi-choice questions to prompt parents' responses, but is nevertheless an interesting comparator.

I broke the benefits down into two questions: one about benefits to the adult and the other about benefits to the child, as much of the existing literature focuses on the latter (Apps et al., 2016a; Burnett et al., 2014; Tsuji, 2013; van Den Berg, 2015; Venn, 2014), with little

attention paid to the benefits perceived by the parents as relating to themselves. Consideration of these factors is important when thinking about parental engagement and when considering the reading pair as a dyad – child and parent. I chose a free-text approach to these answers as, having implied that there were benefits to shared reading within the question, I wanted to avoid putting further cultural expectations on the respondents through a closed list of potential benefits for them to tick. I wanted to explore what parents felt was important through their own voices, and to avoid a dataset which had encouraged parents to tick everything listed as important or to spend time weighing up closed choices on a Likert scale which might have created false hierarchies of importance.

Table 8 Benefits for adults

Code	n	%
Connections	3,923	84
Bonding	2,607	56
Time spent together	1,719	37
Physical closeness	390	8
Parenting	1,762	38
Adult enjoyment	1,082	22
Doing a positive thing for your child	329	7
Improving parental knowledge about the child	297	6
Other benefits		
Calming/relaxing/quiet	945	20
Communication Language and Literacy	239	5

Note: codes n = >5% of respondents are included in the table

Table 9 Benefits for children

Subcode	n	%
Connections	3,477	73
Bonding	2,157	46
Time spent together	1,483	32
Physical closeness	285	6
Comfort/reassurance	213	5
Communication Language and Literacy	2,954	64
Vocabulary and language	2,229	48
Speaking and communication	648	14
Reading skill development	623	13
Listening skills	438	9
Other benefits		
General development, learning and knowledge	1,813	39
Imagination and creativity	863	19
Good habits and love of reading	480	10
Child enjoyment	349	8
Calming/relaxing/quiet	636	14
Routines/bedtime routines	275	6

Note: codes n = >5% of respondents are included in the table

Following the Phase 1 survey, the Phase 3 survey asked parents to directly comment on the importance of enjoyment versus learning when reading with their child before they start school (Table 10 p188). As this is a known false dichotomy, the survey allowed for a choice of responses including indicting that both were equally valuable.

Table 10 What is most important when reading with 0-5s?

What is more important?	n	%
Learning through reading	13	1.9
Enjoying the reading	170	24.8
Both are equally important	503	73.3
Total	686	100

8.3 Parental perceptions of benefits of book-sharing

8.3.1 Connections

When asked about the benefits of shared reading, most parents talked in terms of the connections between parents and children. Approximately three-quarters of responses about benefits for the child were categorised as 'connections' (73%) and around four-fifths of responses about the benefits for the adult also fell in this code (84%). The aspects of connection included bonding, time spent together and physical closeness. This finding was similar to the 72% of parents who reported that reading with their child was a good way to spend time together in the 2015 Bookstart family reading survey (Venn, 2014). Although this category is not the same as 'connections', it is the closest comparator.

The focus on creating, securing and enhancing the parent child bond was found across the age ranges, from pregnancy, "my partner read to my bump most nights and I think it helped him bond with our daughter more easily" (Respondent 1/4334), "I think it's a lovely way to bond before birth too" (Respondent 1/3707), through the early days of parenthood, "My twins were born prematurely, and I often couldn't touch them, so reading was a good way to connect" (Respondent 1/426), "[it] help[s] develop a bond with parents - this is quiet, focused baby/parent time with zero interruptions" (Respondent 1/4207), to early childhood and beyond, "I think we have bonded over books, he enjoys choosing one for me to read to him and he has his favourite book which only I read to him" (Respondent 1/743).

It is significant to note that what is most of interest to researchers and educationalists in terms of the importance of early reading at home is different from the most frequently recorded responses from parents. That is not to say that parents were unaware or uncaring about the importance of early literacy skill development, indeed more than half of respondents (64%) spoke about skills which could be categorised as 'communication, language and literacy' (CLL), (see Section 8.3.2) but when looking at all of the free-text answers together, 92.6% of respondents wrote a response which was coded as 'connections' somewhere within their questionnaire, compared to 68.9% whose response

included 'CLL'. Although most of the research on early book-sharing focuses on developmental benefits for the child, most notably on literacy development (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994; Sénéchal & Young, 2008; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002; Whitehurst et al., 1988), it is notable that the parents' primary responses were around the relationship-building aspects of book-sharing, "as babies it's not the reading but building the bond between parent and child" (Respondent 1/750).

Parents used the specific word 'bond' or 'bonding' more often than any other single word in relation to the benefits of reading with their child (48.64% of respondents) apart from the word 'time', which was used by 57.62% of respondents, although this measure incorporated usage unrelated to benefits such as "we read at bedtime" or "when it is time to read we sit down" so was not an accurate reflection of "time" as a sentiment. When coded for context, answers around bonding were found more frequently than those talking about time spent together. When looking at the overall responses to both questions about benefits, 67% of respondents' answers included bonding as a topic, the same percentage as respondents whose answers included any element of CCL, showing the importance of this specific element of connection to parents.

There were many comments relating to time spent together which were complex to categorise separately from bonding; indeed, there was much overlap between the two categories when coding and there was an argument for conflating them. I decided against this as the word bond/bonding was so prevalent on its own that it was able to be seen as linked to, but distinct from, the concept of time spent together. Considering responses about time spent together, parents noted that "regular story times can mean guaranteed time to connect with little ones, especially when you're busy" (Respondent 1/3707) alongside the importance of physical closeness "it's a lovely relaxing snuggly way to bond with a new baby" (Respondent 1/4513). These aspects were closely correlated with respondents' answers about benefits to the adults and benefits to the child (37 % and 32% for time together and 8% and 6% for physical closeness), suggesting that parents saw these benefits as equally as beneficial for both parties. "Reading gives this safe space where you can relax forget about all that and spend quality time with your child, you can see they

aren't just what you see and do for them" (Respondent 1/2749, speaking about their child who has a disability).

Other aspects which I coded within 'connection' were comfort or reassurance, and physical closeness. Five percent of parents listed comfort or reassurance as a benefit for their child, and their elaborations were often linked closely to the responses coded as physical closeness, (6% for adults, 8% for children), and the "nice quiet snuggly time" (Respondent 1/2943) was a feature of many of these responses.

8.3.2   Communication Language and Literacy

Respondents commented on aspects of 'CLL' predominantly in relation to considering benefits to their child, with 64% of respondents mentioning one or more aspects of this, and 5% included 'CLL' in relation to benefits to themselves as adults. Within the Bookstart survey, 52% of all parents surveyed had reported that they read with their children to improve their child's reading skills (Venn, 2014). This increased to 63% of respondents who had received Bookstart packs. The most numerous category coded within this area in my data was vocabulary and language, with 48% of respondents discussing this benefit. The most common references were language (32% of respondents) and words (21% of respondents), and parents talked about conceptions of "the more words they hear, the more words they know!" (Respondent 1/3913) and linked this directly to reading, "we sit and read, she learns new words" (Respondent 1/1783). Many parents understood that language development started young and felt that reading and books could play a part in this, "to start the process of language learning" (Respondent 1/3649), "understanding language, even if they cannot yet speak" (Respondent 1/207). Some parents directly attributed their child's development in CLL to reading, "she has an amazing vocabulary for her age and I put that down (partly) to the amount of books we have read" (Respondent 1/3519). The importance of vocabulary development and extension was raised, "as words may be used in books we may not use day to day" (Respondent 1/3503), which reflects the research understanding of the rich vocabulary found in children's books (Raikes et al., 2006).

Speaking and communication was distinguishable within the responses from language and vocabulary, with respondents commenting specifically on their child's development of the

rudiments of verbal communication such as initial speech and understanding, "my daughter has recently started speaking and I believe that this is through my reading to her frequently" (Respondent 1/1824). The responses coded as vocabulary and language were more focused on extending language and vocabulary wider than that found in everyday usage. Looking at speech and communication, 14% of respondents commented on this topic, "our daughter's speech came along really quickly when she was one and we're sure this was from reading to her" (Respondent 1/2480), and "my son has down syndrome so communication is slower but by reading books we realise how much he understands even if he cannot talk to us yet" (Respondent 1/4247). The communication was also notably two-way, with parents noting their child's growing understanding and ability to communicate clearly, "I found the more I read to her the more she understands certain words, she can say certain words much clearer than what she did before" (Respondent 1/2749). Parents also used books as a reason or tool to aid communication, "we are told it is good to talk from newborn onwards but is hard to know what to say!" (Respondent 1/4702). Thinking about younger babies, parents often acknowledged that the experience of talking with their baby was more important than the content of the book, "they won't understand but the together time will promote bonding" (Respondent 1/3478). They also saw reading as more than sharing stories: "As parents, we're told (by experts) to 'talk' to your children from birth to help the bonding process and to facilitate language skills but that can be difficult as babies don't talk back. Reading can be a way to 'talk' to your child" (Respondent 1/2509). It is interesting to note that parents responding had clearly received and internalised the educational message that reading influences vocabulary, which may be due to the public campaigns led by BookTrust and others to support early reading in the home.

Other aspects of CLL which parents drew attention to were listening and concentrating (9%), "they learn to respond and concentrate on what you are saying!" (Respondent 1/4885). Parents linked sessions sharing books to the development of a specific ability to concentrate both on the book and on the parents' voice, and some noted distinct improvements in focus, "one of my twins had a very short focus time, reading books helps to attract her and she started to focus longer when I am reading" (Respondent 1/566). Thirteen percent of parents also drew out benefits which could be classified as specific reading skills such as "understanding that letters/words mean something" (Respondent 1/3756), or "learn[ing]

how to read them self and understand the book" (Respondent 1/2592). However, out of the nearly 5,000 responses only 21 people (0.43%) mentioned phonics despite this being a key focus of reading within the nursery and school education systems. This division is interesting, particularly within the context of wider public debate around the teaching of phonics and noting that over 10% of the respondent base shared that their youngest or only child was of an age to be receiving direct phonics teaching within reception classrooms.

When parents were asked directly whether they felt that receiving Imagination Library books had helped to develop their child's speech and language, in the Phase 3 survey, an overwhelming 97.2% of respondents agreed that the books did develop CLL. This indicates that parents (those surveyed) were fully aware of the language benefits of reading even when it was not reported as a benefit of book-sharing with regard to their children.

8.3.3   Parenting

Within the benefits for adults, responses which related to the adults' interactions with the child, their own enjoyment of the reading experience and their vicarious pleasure in watching their child grow and develop were coded as 'parenting'. Overall, 38% of respondents discussed benefits in this category with 22% referring to their enjoyment of shared reading, which was linked predominantly to watching and supporting the child's overall development and interaction with books "seeing your child develop" (Respondent 1/1202) and "seeing them engaged with the story" (Respondent 1/3133). This element was also seen through general vicarious pleasure at the child's pleasure, "to see the pleasure on a child's face is the best reward" (Respondent 1/2626) and the adult's overall enjoyment of reading with their child as a shared activity "being able to revisit old childhood stories and see the world through fresh eyes" (Respondent 1/4028). In the Bookstart survey, 57% of parents reported that their own enjoyment was a reason to read to their child, so it may be that the prompt provided by a pre-set multiple-choice question provided a reminder to parents to think about their enjoyment as a factor in shared reading.

Shared reading is often seen as a socially acceptable and expected parenting task, but responses which could be seen as linked to fulfilling a social parenting expectation rather

than enjoyment were much less numerous than those where the parent shared their delight in their child and the activity of sharing books. About 7% of respondents talked about doing a positive thing for the child, which was sometimes but not necessarily linked to enjoyment, "When you're doing it, you know that you are doing the right thing, whereas most of the time you're not quite sure" (Respondent 1/2017), "it's the feeling that if I can't do anything else right for my children (such as when having a bad day), then at least I can read to them" (Respondent 1/334). A further 6% talked about improving their own knowledge of their child's abilities, "it also allows parents/carers to share their own interests with their children and get to know their children's interests better" (Respondent 1/3707). The answers about enjoyment in helping, watching or sharing with their child were predominant in this code which may point toward parents seeing their parenting role as different from a teaching role; fewer than 5% talked explicitly about teaching their child as a benefit in and of itself.

8.3.4   Other benefits

Regarding other aspects of child development, parents talked about general developmental benefits (39%) such as "active mental stimulation" (Respondent 1/46), "an understanding of life beyond their immediate surroundings" (Respondent 1/4592) and specifics such as visual development "black and white books for babies are good stimulation" (Respondent 1/1499). Overall, 39% of parents made reference to learning within their answers, and this was found across a variety of categories, particularly in 'CLL' and 'general development'. Nineteen percent of parents talked about the benefits of reading in terms of imagination and creativity, "his imagination is completely fostered by the things we read about" (Respondent 1/4893) with many parents linking this either to stories, "stories to fire imaginations" (Respondent 1/4603) or to the pictures, "the pictures stimulate brains and the imagination" (Respondent 1/2075).

The idea of inspiring a love of reading and forming good habits around long-term reading behaviours was important for 10% of parents, "[you] inspire them the love of reading so they can do it by themselves later" (Respondent 1/4967). For 6% of parents this was particularly focused on the development of daily routines, often bedtime routines, "we use the books as part of his bedtime routine, so it helps us to create some structure and routine

for 'wind down time'" (Respondent 1/4054). In the Bookstart survey, 55% of parents reported reading as part of bedtime routines, but again this was in response to a specific prompt from a multiple-choice question.

Considering the emotional impact of a book-sharing experience, 14% of parents noted the calming or relaxing effect of reading on their child, "recognisable stories will calm the baby down" (Respondent 1/3034), "baby actually stays quiet for 10 mins" (Respondent 1/1152). Twenty percent of respondents discussed this quality as a benefit for themselves as adults, "my baby was premature and in NICU, I used to read during skin to skin as a way to keep me calm and centred and feel like I was doing something" (Respondent 1/3363). The calming and relaxation properties of book-sharing were often seen as mutually beneficial, "it's quality time together which soothes and nurtured everyone involved" (Respondent 1/3451). This compares with 38% of parents reporting that reading helps their child relax in the Bookstart survey (Venn, 2014).

A clear departure from the Bookstart comparator survey was in the area of child enjoyment, as 6% of the Bookstart survey respondents noted that child enjoyment was a factor in why they read with their child, along with 43% noting that their children asks them to read. In the Phase 1 survey, only 8% of respondents specified that a benefit for children was enjoyment. This difference in findings, and indeed the differences found throughout this section may be best explained by considering the wording of the questions for respondents. The Bookstart survey asked "for what reasons do you read with your child" (Venn, 2014, p. 17) whereas my Phase 1 survey asked "what benefits are there to reading with your child". The subtle change in emphasis from considering the 'in the now' reasons for reading with benefits – which encompass short-, medium- and long-term benefits of reading – may account for differences found within the data, alongside the key difference in methodology between allowing free-text responses versus offering multiple-choice answer options.

Benefits mentioned by fewer than 5% of respondents included reference to screentime, "chill down time away from screens" (Respondent 1/3244), generic activity, "it's something to do with a child that works at all ages" (Respondent 1/3025) and parental voice, "because they love the familiar sound of your voice" (Respondent 1/5036) - a response found more

often in pregnant respondents. Although babies in utero will hear their parents' voices as a matter of course, it may be that reading to an unborn child is a time in which parents can specifically focus on their baby and feel that they are doing something specifically which is positive for the baby's development.

8.3.5   Enjoyment and/or learning when reading

When parents in the Phase 3 survey were asked to weigh up the relative importance of learning through reading and enjoying the reading (Table 10 p188), nearly three-quarters (73.3%) chose to rate both as equally important, however, the other quarter of parents (24.8%) chose enjoyment of reading as most important, with only 1.9% choosing learning through reading. This trend was observed when analysed by age of the child, with no group having a high adjusted standardised residual score when age groups were analysed. This finding triangulated against the Phase 1 survey which found that 70% of parents who recorded a response coded as 'connections' also recorded a response within 'CLL', and 88% recorded responses within 'connections' and 'other development', which demonstrates parents' wide-ranging understanding of the broad range of benefits which can be derived from book-sharing, encompassing learning skills and enjoyment and emotional wellbeing. Parents rarely had a one-sided view of book-sharing; most understood the holistic benefits although overall, literacy benefits were not as important to parents as benefits focused on their child's happiness and a positive adult-child relationship.

8.4   When parents prefer to start book-sharing

Among the respondents, there was a broad consensus that shared reading should begin early. Just over half (54.5%, *n* = 2,601) of parents thought it should commence when babies were newborn – in their first three months of life, with a further fifth of parents (19.2%, *n* = 918) suggesting starting while pregnant. Overall, 88.1% (*n* = 4,205) of parents thought that shared reading should start before 6 months of age, with 96.3% (*n* = 4,598) agreeing that reading should start somewhere between pregnancy and 12 months of age. Considering whether all parent groups had similar responses, looking at a breakdown of answers by age of the youngest child, respondents whose youngest child was 0-3m, 4-6m and 7-12 months

old were, in percentage terms, slightly more likely to choose these ages as appropriate start times than the other groups. However, the adjusted standardised residuals did not bear this out as a statistical trend.

When comparing parental education levels and reading start age (Table 11 p197), I considered parents who had completed up to Level 3 education and those with Level 4 and above as two groups. This distinction was made as participation in up to Level 3 education is statutory and Level 4 education and beyond is non-statutory. 69% (n = 607) of parents who completed education at or before Level 3 thought that reading should start during pregnancy or the first three months of life, with 75.2% (n = 2,870) of parents with Level 4 or higher educational qualifications choosing this time period. An analysis of the adjusted standardised residuals (b) showed that parents with higher educational qualifications were less likely to suggest starting shared reading after 6 months of age than might otherwise be expected, and parents educated to Level 3 or below were more likely than expected to suggest beginning at 6 months or older, and less likely than expected to suggest starting reading within the first three months of life (p < 0.05, χ^2 = 30.457 df = 10, p = 0.0007).

Table 11 Crosstabulation of parental educational level and age to start reading

Parental education level	No view		Pregnancy		0-3 months		3 months +		6 months +		12 months +		Total
	%	b	%	b	%	b	%	b	%	b	%	b	n
≤ Level 3	2.1	2.4	20.2	0.8	49.0	-3.7	12.1	-2.2	11.6	4.0	5.1	6.0	878
≥ Level 4	1.0	-2.7	19.0	-0.8	56.2	4.5	14.9	1.9	7.3	-4.7	1.6	-6.6	3,818
Prefer not to say	2.7	1.2	20.5	0.3	37.0	-3.0	16.4	0.5	16.4	2.6	6.8	2.6	73
Total	1.2		19.2		54.5		14.4		8.2		2.3		4,769

Looking at parents who were answering about a first or a subsequent child, first-time parents were more likely to report that reading should start in the first three months of life (58.4%, n = 1,343) compared with fewer parents who had more than one child (50.9%, n = 1258). When taken together with pregnancy, 79.4% (n = 1,825) first time parents felt that starting reading at a time between pregnancy and 3 months of age was optimal, compared with 68.6% (n = 1,694) of parents who had more than one child. Parents of more than one

child were more likely to suggest starting reading between 3 and 12 months (27% n = 667) compared to 17.9% (n =442) first-time parents. Possible interpretations of this finding include parents being more focused on the development of their first child, parents having less time so making different choices with their second or subsequent child or even parents not seeing a clear value in having started reading early (during pregnancy or the first three months of life).

In the Phase 1 survey, Question 9 used free-text to explore parents' reasons for their answers about the age at which it was optimal to start reading. Woven through answers across all start ages was the concept of bonding, particularly those where parents had chosen pregnancy or newborn as their preferred time to start shared reading.

 Parents who had chosen to start reading during pregnancy often felt that "in the womb it is a way of them hearing your voice and of giving time to communicating with your child" (Respondent 1/4809). Some parents reported responsiveness in their unborn children "We read to both ours during the last trimester and they would kick and move and let us know they were listening" (Respondent 1/2054). Parents also noted the positivity of early habit forming "Because it can help build a habit while life isn't so hectic!!!" (Respondent 1/4081). However, many parents who chose this option noted that they did not consider it detrimental to wait to introduce books either, "having said that waiting till birth won't hurt!" (Respondent 1/4081). Parents who commented on why they didn't choose pregnancy as the optimal time to start reading often mentioned the value of "talking to you child whilst in the womb… as they can hear your voice and listen to the patterns and rhythm of spoken language" (Respondent 1/1795) and noted that this aim could be achieved without reading, "during pregnancy I would talk to her, sing and rub my belly instead" (Respondent 4029). Other parents who preferred to wait till after birth mentioned feeling "odd" or "silly" reading to their bump.

> I know people are encouraged to read from inside the womb but I don't think it's as important as after they're born. If you are speaking / singing to baby then I think that will be a similar affect to reading when inside the womb. Once they're born, actually having a book out in front of a baby helps them to look at shapes and colours - such as the black and white books made especially for babies from birth to help their

development and then they can progress to using it for tummy time and playing with their hands, pointing and 'reading' as they grow older. So I think from birth is probably what I'd conclude as 'the best' age to start. (Respondent 1/4054)

The majority of parents within the survey felt that reading from the newborn phase (defined in the survey as 0-3 months, commonly known as the 'fourth trimester') was optimal and reasoning focused around early development, it's good for children to hear how words are put together in lots of different ways", (Respondent 1/380) and forming connections, "I think it's critical for brain development" (Respondent 1/4862), "because their little brains are developing and making connections all the time" (Respondent 1/3091). Several parents commented that they chose this age because "the earlier they learn the better" (Respondent 1/2150). Parents also noted the value of habit-forming from this age, for the parent, "because it encourages adults to speak to babies frequently" (Respondent 1/808), "the early you start reading to them the more likely you are to do it," (Respondent 1/3545), and for the child, "it also starts a habit of reading to the child which hopefully will stick" (Respondent 1/484). Some parents found that reading was an 'easy' way to talk with their baby, "plus for me, I wasn't really sure what to do with the baby all day - so nice activity for parents even if the baby isn't getting a huge amount when they're v.v.young" Respondent (1/4153).

Among respondents who chose ages over 3 months to start reading, some key themes emerged. Firstly, the concept of pressure for parents during the fourth trimester and the conflicting activities which parents had to engage in, primarily centred around infant feeding and sleeping, "I didn't select from new birth just because I think there is a lot of pressure on mums (in particular) to 'do things' with their babies - but I feel the first 3 months it's important to establish feeding and allow the mother to recover fully" (Respondent 1/5019). This concept of pressure recurred in many answers from respondents who chose a later start age, "under 3 months life is too overwhelming to think about reading to a baby who just wants to eat and sleep (in my experience!)" (Respondent 1/3606). Second, the developmental changes that occur as babies mature (respondents answering this varied in their perception of when children would benefit, with the majority selecting 3 or 6 months plus). These responses were divided into parents who noted a perceived lack of responsiveness in their younger babies "before 3 months but I don't think they would notice the difference between being read to and being talked to" (Respondent 1/357), "before that

they don't show too much interest and after than you may risk them never showing interest" (Respondent 1/1777), and parents who talked about noticing their baby's developing responsiveness and used that as a prompt to start reading, "they are more aware and interested around 3 months" (Respondent 1/3815). These respondents could be analogous to the Bookstart research category of "unconverted", where parents were described as feeling that it was too soon for their child (Figure 6 p78). Within these responses, the idea that talking to your baby was equivalent to reading with them was prevalent, "I felt that listening to sounds and words was enough before that - talking to them constantly" (Respondent 1/4839) or that reading was not necessary developmentally before the child could show active engagement, "there's plenty of time to read when the child is old enough to look at the book and engage with the story" (Respondent 1/1031). Third, many parents linked the introduction of book-sharing with the introduction or formalisation of a bedtime routine, "a bedtime story as part of their bedtime routine is a good habit to get into. Before this age, the bedtime routine is a bit haphazard" (Respondent 1/1862). "We start a bedtime routine around three months after the fourth trimester, so it fits in with that" (Respondent 1/3815).

Parental views of the value of reading from birth were often linked to developmental concepts such as the perceived benefit of language acquisition, whereas parents who chose to introduce books later were often influenced by their lived experience of their own child's interactions. Many parents related positive episodes at different ages which they related to book-sharing, "one of the first things my son laughed at was a monkey in a lift-the-flap book when he was about 3 months old" (Respondent 1/4957 – introduced books from birth), "my son was able to recognize some of the things around him and pointing to what he was interested in from the book round about that age, from one book he would notice a bird and would touch it as his favourite part of the book" (Respondent 1/3172 – introduced books from 6 to 12 months), which perhaps indicates that there may be an element of confirmation bias around parental justification of their personal choices to introduce regular book-sharing.

The evidence base for developmental benefits in relation to literacy skills linked to an early (0-3 month) start to book-sharing is currently weak, (Niklas et al., 2016; Niklas & Schneider,

2015), with the parental views on habit formation in the parent being better explored in the literature (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005; Niklas et al., 2016; O'Farrelly et al., 2018; Tomopoulos et al., 2006). However, limited literature is available on outcomes which are not measured by literacy assessments such as early speech, comprehension or neurological attunement between the parent and the baby. While parents have identified the concept of book-sharing primarily as a bonding activity, often specifically with reference to the newborn phase, there is a paucity of research on the relationship between an early start to book-sharing and the emotional impact on the reading dyad, particularly within the first year of life. In the absence of unequivocal data, supporting parents to take a family-focused decision on when to start reading with their child, taking into account the potential for book-sharing to be seen as an additional pressure within the first three months of life, would seem to be the most supportive approach to introducing early book-sharing with families.

8.5   Summary of what is important to parents about reading or book-sharing with their child aged 0-5

Parents shared many benefits of reading with their child, for both the adult and the child, covering relationship development, cognitive development, specific reading skills and many more. The most common responses for benefits for children were around bonding and language development and for adults it was bonding, each with broadly half of all respondents' answers coded with these subcodes. When invited to select the most important broad purpose of shared reading for their child, between enjoyment and learning, three-quarters of parents valued each equally, with a further quarter opting for enjoyment as the primary benefit. Parents were equally able to identify benefits for themselves as for their children with a 93% completion rate for each question. Both of the questions on benefits were non-compulsory questions, so the high response rate may demonstrate the high level of engagement respondents had with the topic. The balance of responses was towards non-literacy-specific benefits and creating and developing connections between children and parents was the primary benefit described by the respondents. When taking all aspects of connections into account across both survey questions (benefit to child and benefit to adults), 90% of respondents' answers were in

some aspect coded as 'connections'. This was compared to 67% of all responses in the category of 'CLL' and 85% under the general and more miscellaneous code of 'other benefits'. Parents' answers were consistent across the 0-5-year age range, with no significant changes to distribution when looking at the adjusted standardised residual scores across the age ranges. When thinking about themselves as parents, respondents were more likely to talk about the enjoyment of seeing and helping their child take pleasure in books and developing than to talk about reading time as a chore. When thinking about their preschool children and babies, parents saw reading time as a pleasurable activity which contributed to family harmony and helped them feel good about themselves as parents and to enjoy that time with their child. Most (88.1%) felt that introducing books by 6 months of age was suitable, with the majority of parents (54.5%) wanting to do so within the period of 0-3 months of life. Parents related their decisions on the timing of book introduction both to generalised ideas of supporting development and book-sharing as an opportunity to bond and be close to their child. Parents often talked about book-sharing in the context of a suite of potential positive home learning environment activities they could choose from such as talking with or singing to their child.

8.6   Considerations for book-gifting schemes

When communicating with parents, a focus on bonding and the shared time spent with their child is likely to correlate with parents' own beliefs about the benefits of book-sharing and is found equally across the child's age spectrum and across parental education levels. Positioning book-sharing as a time to sit and cuddle and to focus on their child may help embed the habit of reading for pleasure.

In very early parenthood, parents face additional pressures particularly around establishing infant feeding and coping with fragmented sleep, so balancing the promotion of book-sharing and empathy with the feelings of pressure many parents in the survey reported feeling is key to book-sharing retaining a status as a pleasurable activity rather than a chore or an opportunity for parents to feel like early failures for not book-sharing with their newborn.

As reading frequency starts to decline with the introduction of compulsory school, retaining the focus on enjoyment and bonding rather than on skill progression may help retain parental engagement in daily reading with their child. Helping parents to identify where reading can fit into their day by supporting family routines, particularly around bedtime, may help time-poor families to 'kill two birds with one stone'.

9.0 Exploration of Research Question 2i) : To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect the quantity of daily book-sharing experiences?

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the impact of the Imagination Library on the frequency of book-sharing between parents and their children. This research question was investigated primarily by analysing the reading frequency of respondents in the Phase 1 questionnaire, but also by considering the reading frequency reported in the Phase 3 survey and respondent free-text comments. I first examined the demographic variables gathered and considered their impact on reading frequency. I then compared the reading frequencies for subset of respondents within different demographic groups, comparing for each group of Imagination Library participants with those not in the programme. This supported the construction of a model which was tested through logistic regression to see if participation in the Imagination Library had a statistically significant relationship with reading frequency when demographic variables were considered. Finally, I considered free-text answers from respondents in the programme to listen to their views on whether the scheme had impacted reading frequency within their households.

9.2 Hypotheses

My broad hypotheses to be tested were:

H1$0$: There is no significant relationship between reading frequency (less than daily or daily) and demographics.

H1A: There is a significant relationship between reading frequency (less than daily or daily) and demographics.

9.3 Variables

The dependent variables I considered in the analysis were:

Gender of the parent

Educational level of the parent

Ethnicity of the parent

Number of children living in the house

Age of youngest child

Participation in the Imagination Library programme

In selecting the dependent variables I considered the literature on aspects that were known to correlate with or to affect reading frequency (see Section 3.3), particularly considering the variables found to influence book-sharing within reviews and meta-analyses of early reading outcomes (Bus et al., 1995; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). In the literature, a number of different measures of socioeconomic status (SES) are used and a discussion of the selection of the parents' educational level as a proxy can be found in Section 6.3.2.

The independent variable was the reading frequency. I conflated the reading frequencies into two categories: i) daily and several times a day and ii) all lower frequencies. People who were pregnant with no current children were excluded from further analysis, therefore, the sample only included reading to children from birth. People with their youngest child over 60 months old (the time at which Imagination Library involvement ceases) were excluded as they fell above the sample age group. For each group, those who chose not to give an answer were excluded from that question only ('prefer not to say').

9.4 Reading frequency across groups

I examined reading frequency across various demographic groups compared to the average reading frequency (Figure 12 p207, Table 19 p305). Although Section 2.2 explains why this thesis uses the term 'book-sharing' instead of 'reading', the thinking about this terminology developed as part of the research process so the surveys were written with the term 'reading with your child'. As respondents may have answered differently to a question about sharing books than they did to the questions about how frequently they read with their child, I have kept the original terminology in this section. This was so that the respondent answers could be reported accurately. Daily reading took place in the majority of all groups with the exclusion of those who were reading to their unborn child and was

seen across almost all groups at around or over three-quarters of the respondents. Frequent reading, defined as reading at least a few times a week, was nearly universal, with up to 90% being the norm and several groups achieving over 95% by this measure. The outliers were again parents of unborn babies, alongside parents of newborns (0-3 months), parents who chose not to give an ethnicity, and parents of children who had passed their fifth birthday.

Within the respondent group as a whole, therefore, daily or frequent reading was the norm which means that a ceiling effect was in place in terms of the difference that could be seen through Imagination Library participation.

I compared the prevalence of daily reading in each group by Imagination Library participation (Figure 13 p208) and found that for each group, Imagination Library participants appeared more likely to read daily with the exception of Asian families and families where the youngest child was 4- to 5-years-old.

Figure 12 Reading frequency by demographic group

Reading Frequency by Demographic Group

Demographic Group	Daily reading	Reads a few times a week	Reads once a week or less
Gender: Female	85.5	11.2	3.3
Gender: Male	81.5	12.5	6.0
Qualifications: Up to Level 3	81.7	13.9	4.4
Qualifications: Level 4 -8	86.3	10.5	3.2
Ethnicity: Asian	80.1	14.0	5.8
Ethnicity: Black	68.6	25.6	5.8
Ethnicity: Mixed/Multiple	87.3	8.7	4.0
Ethnicity: Other	65.0	22.5	12.5
Ethnicity: White	86.0	10.8	3.2
No. of Children: 0 (pregnant)	33.8	9.2	56.9
No. of Children: 1	90.1	7.8	2.1
No. of Children: 2	82.1	13.5	4.3
No. of Children: 3+	76.7	17.6	5.7
Age of youngest child: 0-12 m	72.3	20.2	7.5
Age of youngest child: 13-24 m	88.9	9.1	2.0
Age of youngest child: 25-36 m	91.7	6.6	1.7
Age of youngest child: 37-48 m	92.3	5.7	2.0
Age of youngest child: 49-72 m	89.6	9.3	1.2
Receives Imagination Library books: yes	87.5	10.4	2.2
Receives Imagination Library books: no	84.3	11.7	4.0

- Daily reading
- Reads a few times a week
- Reads once a week or less

Figure 13 Reading frequency by variable and Imagination Library participation

Variable	Imagination Library	Not Imagination Library
All	87.5	84.3
Gender: Female caregiver	87.8	84.4
Gender: Male caregiver	83.2	80.1
Age: 0-12 months	77.2	71
Age: 13-24 months	89.2	88.8
Age: 25-36 months	88.9	84.2
Age: 37-48 months	86.3	85.2
Age: 49-60 months	87.6	90.9
Ethnicity: Asian	77.9	82.1
Ethnicity: Mixed/Multiple	87.2	87.3
Ethnicity: White	89.5	84.6
Education: Level 3 or below	84.5	79.5
Education: Level 4 or below	88.8	85.3
Education: Level 6 or below	89.3	85.2
No. of children: 1	90.6	89.8
No. of children: 2+	84.8	78.8
No. of children: 3+	79.6	75.3

Legend: Imagination Library — Not Imagination Library — Linear (Imagination Library)

*Ethnicity groups n = > 100 include

9.5 Analysis

9.5.1 Bivariate analysis of reading frequency by demographics

I conducted bivariate analysis using a Pearson chi-square test on the variables of interest to establish whether significant relationships existed between the demographic and family composition variables and the individual variable of reading frequency, alongside an initial test of the significance of the relationship between the variable of most interest – Imagination Library participation and reading frequency (see Table 12 p210). Univariate demographic information is presented in Table 4 p181. Where respondents chose not to provide demographic information, these responses were excluded from the analysis.

Bivariate analysis also enabled exploration of the nominal variables to identify potential points of interest, for example, to explore whether the data followed linear or normal distribution patterns. It also informed where data could appropriately be grouped for the later linear regressions by identifying whether there were clear changes in the categorical data which could then be used to create binary categories for the regression analysis. As expected from the literature, I found that the variables of family size (two or more children), the age of child (0-12 months), ethnicity and parental educational level all had a statistically significant effect on reading frequency (see Table 20 p306). As the statistical effect was greater for parental education at Level 4 and above (post-A Level), compared to Level 6 (degree level) and above, this was used as the key variable for parental education in later analyses. A graphical demonstration of the frequency of daily reading across groups, broken down into Imagination Library and non-Imagination Library participants shows a broad picture of daily reading being more frequent in Imagination Library participants (see Figure 13 p208).

Table 12 Bivariate analysis of reading frequency by demographics

Characteristic	Total		Non-Imagination Library		Imagination Library		*p*	χ^2	National comparator
	n	%	n	%	n	%			%
Gender of the carer									
Female	4,522	94.8	3,106	95.7	1,416	93.0	0.0001**	15.143	
Male	216	4.5	134	4.1	82	5.4			
Non-Binary	4	< 0.1	3	< 0.1	1	< 0.1			
Not given	28	0.6	12	0.6	16	1.9			
Highest Educational Level									
No qualifications	37	0.8	18	0.6	19	1.2	0.0110**	6.472	
Level 1 or 2	323	6.8	164	5.1	159	10.4	0.0000**	47.694	
Level 3	518	10.9	328	10.1	190	12.5	0.0140*	6.035	
Level 4	208	4.4	136	4.2	72	4.7	0.3954	0.722	
Level 5	290	6.1	178	5.5	112	7.4	0.0117*	6.362	
Level 6	1,592	33.4	1,161	35.8	431	28.3	0.0000**	26.130	
Level 7 or 8	1,729	36.2	1,233	38.0	496	32.6	0.0003**	12.966	
Not given	73	1.5	29	0.9	44	2.9	0.0000**	26.395	
None – Level 3	878	18.4	510	15.7	368	24.2	0.0000**	70.952	36
Level 4 - 8	3,819	80.1	2,708	83.4	1,111	72.9			41
Level 6 - 8	3,321	69.6	2,394	73.7	927	60.9	0.0000**	81.04	
Ethnicity									
Asian	171	3.6	95	2.9	76	5.0	0.0003**	12.783	8.9
Black	86	1.8	18	0.6	68	4.5	0.0000**	89.547	4.8
Mixed/Multiple	126	2.6	79	2.4	47	3.1	0.1898	1.719	1.6
Other	40	0.8	25	0.8	15	1.0	0.4479	0.576	1.2
White	4,301	90.2	3,008	92.6	1,293	84.9	0.0000**	70.076	83.5
Not given	46	1.0	22	0.7	24	1.6	0.0169*	5.708	0.0
Number of Children									
1	2,299	48.2	1,596	49.2	703	46.2	0.15	2.057	43.7
2	1,870	39.2	1,255	38.7	615	40.4			41.2
3	449	9.4	296	9.1	153	10.0			
4, 5 or 6	152	3.1	100	3.2	52	3.4			
2+	2,471	51.8	1,651	50.8	820	53.8	0.0537	3.723	
Age of youngest child									
0-12 m	1,365	28.6	1,071	33.0	294	19.3			
0-3 m	332	7.0	276	8.5	56	3.7			
4-6 m	377	7.9	301	9.3	76	5.0			
7-12 m	656	13.8	494	15.2	162	10.6			
13-24 m	1,144	24.0	792	24.4	352	23.1			
25-36 m	972	20.4	635	19.6	337	22.1			
37-48 m	685	14.4	396	12.2	289	19.0			
49-72m	604	12.7	353	10.9	251	16.5	0.000 **	78.271	
36m-71m	1,289	27.1	749	23.1	540	35.0			
Total	4,770	100	3,247		1,523				

9.5.2 Gender

For gender, the null hypothesis was accepted ($p > 0.05$, $\chi^2 = 3.054$ $df = 1$, $p = 0.0805$) that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and reading frequency. Men and women read as frequently with their children. This finding was at odds with other studies, where fathers' reading frequency is consistently shown to be lower than mothers' reading frequency (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014). This may be explained by the self-selected nature of the respondent cohort, where only parents who had an interest in reading with their children were motivated to answer the survey questions.

9.5.3 Parental educational level

For educational level, the null hypothesis was rejected ($p \leq 0.05$, $\chi^2 = 15.118$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.0001$), showing that there is a statistically significant relationship between educational level (Level 4+) and reading frequency within the sample. There was an increasing trend between educational level and likelihood of reading several times a day from GCSEs to postgraduate degrees, although those with no qualifications were slightly more likely than those with GCSEs or A levels to read daily with their child. However, in all groups, over 80% of parents reported reading at least daily with their child, with the exception of those who chose not to give a level of qualification where the percentage was a little lower at 76.7%. Respondents with educational attainment at A level or equivalent or below were less likely to read daily with their children than respondents with higher educational levels ($\chi^2 = 15.118$ $p = 0.0001$), and this association was stronger than when considering those with education at degree level (Level 6) or above ($\chi^2 = 10.640$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.0011$). This finding confirms the positive correlation between parental education level and reading frequency found by Yarosz and Barnett (2001).

9.5.4 Ethnicity

For ethnicity, the null hypothesis was rejected ($p \leq 0.05$, $\chi^2 = 20.468$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$), showing that there is a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and reading frequency within the sample. White respondents and those with mixed or multiple

ethnicities were more likely to read daily than Black respondents or those stating an 'other' response. Ethnicity was not found to be significant in the small recent evaluation of the Imagination Library in Nottingham (Tura et al., 2021), however, differences in reading frequency by ethnicity which have rarely been investigated in the United Kingdom, have been well documented, particularly in the United States. Indeed, one study found that "our most striking finding is the strong differences by ethnicity controlling for education, income, and family size" (Yarosz & Barnett, 2001, p. 75). There are wider concerns about the applicability of family literacy interventions to all ethnicities equally (Goodall, 2019; Manz et al., 2010).

The unexpected discrepancy could not be explained by education level, as there was no significant difference in the education level of respondents by ethnicity, and Black and White respondents were equally represented in the up to Level 3 (A level) and beyond Level 3 groups, a finding that held true at each separate educational level when disaggregated. However, Black respondents were significantly more likely to have three or more children than any other ethnic group, which was correlated with reading frequency. This could explain the apparent ethnic differences in the reading frequency and demonstrates the importance of using binary logistic regression to consider reading frequency which is able to hold other variables constant.

An important point to note was the numerical discrepancy between the ethnicity groups, with White respondents representing 90.2% of the entire cohort. The small (n = < 100) numeric size of some of the ethnic groups meant that comparisons were inequitable, even when utilising statistical adjustments, as the subset sample size could not be said to robustly reflect the wider population. The impact of ethnicity on reading frequency deserves further research, as there are complex interactions between ethnicity and socioeconomic status, family size and access to education amongst other variables. It is also important to consider cultural understandings of family home literacy practices and how the home literacy practices of different groups may or may not align with a White western school-centric model of idealised reading frequency. These considerations all contribute to forming a much more complex picture of the impact of ethnicity on reading frequency than is gained from identifying this characteristic in isolation.

9.5.5 Number of children in the family

The null hypothesis was rejected for the number of children ($p \leq 0.05$, $\chi^2 = 81.562$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$), because there was a statistically significant relationship between the number of children and reading frequency. Nearly a quarter (23%) of parents/carers with three or more children read less than daily with their youngest child compared with 17.9% of families with two children and 9.9% of families with one child. This relationship remained when the cohort was divided into binary groups of one child or more than one child, with families who had more than one child being approximately twice as likely (19.5%) to read less frequently with their youngest child than those with a single child (10.5%). Although excluded from the analysis due to not yet being eligible for Imagination Library books, it is interesting to note that 43.9% of people who were currently pregnant read to their unborn baby frequently, of which 34.8% read daily to them. This finding confirms other research showing that families with more children are less likely to read with their children daily (Downey, 1995; Yarosz & Barnett, 2001).

9.5.6 Age of youngest child

For the age of the youngest child, the null hypothesis was rejected ($p \leq 0.05$, $\chi^2 = 256.895$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$), because there was a statistically significant relationship between the age of the child and reading frequency. Parents read more as their children got older, both within the first year of life and continuing upward until a peak at age 4 with a slight drop at 49-60 months of age. The most significant difference was found between children aged 0-12 months and those aged 13 months and older. Parents were approximately three times more likely to read less than daily with children under 13 months of age (27.7%) than with those over 13 months of age (9.5%). Daily reading seems to become more significantly embedded in the second year of life and beyond, rising from just under three quarters of parents to over 90% of those surveyed. These findings concur with those of other large-scale reading surveys conducted in the United Kingdom (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Knowland & Formby, 2016; Venn, 2014).

9.5.7 Imagination Library participation

For Imagination Library programme involvement, the null hypothesis was rejected ($p \leq 0.05$, $\chi^2 = 8.463$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.00036$), as there was a statistically significant relationship between receiving Imagination Library books and reading frequency. Parents receiving Imagination Library books showed a percentage 3.2% increase in daily reading with their children compared to those who did not receive the books. Looking at infrequent reading, families were more than twice as likely to report reading once a week or less if they were not in receipt of Imagination Library books (5.2% compared to 2.3% of families receiving Imagination Library books) ($\chi^2 = 20.981$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). These findings were consistent with the most recent English study of the Imagination Library where a positive correlation between programme involvement and reading frequency was also found (Tura et al., 2021).

9.5.8 Chi Square analysis of families who read daily by Imagination Library participation

Following the initial bivariate analysis, the reading frequencies of the different cohorts were compared using Imagination Library participation (see Table 21 p307).

There was a broad pattern of percentage increase in daily reading for families receiving Imagination Library books across a range of subsets, including at all parental education levels. Some were at a statistically meaningful level (0-3 months, 0-12 months, 25-36 months), but most did not reach this threshold (see Figure 12 p207 and Table 21 p307).

Looking at the whole respondent group and taking into account that this was a population self-selected by their interest in reading with their child, **receiving Imagination Library books was associated with a relative increase of 3.2% in likelihood of daily reading ($\chi^2 = 8.463$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.0036$).** The effect size was weak (Cramer's V = 0.042); however, weak effect sizes were a feature of all analyses of daily reading by variable, due to the ceiling effect of high percentages of daily reading across the respondent group as a whole. The subsets where this association was most pronounced included, as could be expected, those where the subset was in numerical terms the vast majority of the respondent base (higher levels of education, White and female). It is interesting that looking at the age of the

youngest child, the largest correlation was found with the youngest children, a group that in itself was less likely to read daily with their parents. This may indicate that the Imagination Library programme has greater efficacy in the youngest age groups, cementing patterns of daily reading earlier than might otherwise be anticipated. Another group in which there was a distinct difference in daily reading patterns was the number of children in a household. **Imagination Library families with two or more children were 5% more likely to read daily than those not in the programme**, and a strong association was found (χ^2 = 12.697, *df* = 1, *p* = 0.0004). This association did not persist when families with three or more children were considered, and the increasing percentage of reading (+4.3%) did not reach statistically significant levels (χ^2 = 1.443, *df* = 1, *p* = 0.2297).

9.5.9 Binary Logistic Regression analysis of variables affecting reading frequency

A logistic regression analysis was carried out to investigate whether there was a relationship between receiving Imagination Library books and daily book-sharing. The predictor variable, receiving Imagination Library books, was tested a priori to verify that there was no violation of the assumption of linearity of the logit. Logistic regression analysis assumes that a linear, rather than a curvilinear relationship exists between the variables concerned and a pre-test was conducted to establish whether such a relationship existed between the receiving of books and reading frequency. The test was completed visually on the data.

The analysis was required to explore how the dependent variables may interact with and influence each other. Considering RQ 2i, the reading frequency was considered as an independent variable. Having explored the descriptive statistics for reading frequency alongside the bivariate analyses, it was clear that daily reading was the majority behaviour across all demographic groups, so it appeared appropriate to conflate daily and several times a day into one category called 'daily reading frequency' with these responses coded as 1, and with the other responses which comprised 'a few times a week', 'once a week', 'less frequently', and 'not at all/not yet', conflated into a second category which was coded as 0.

Initially, a forced entry model was used (see Table 22 p308) to provide a broad overview of the variables that were likely to be significant in the model, limiting the variables to those where the groups were > 100 respondents in total.

This showed an initial indication that Imagination Library participation was likely to be significant when considering factors linked to daily reading.

The initial model (Table 22 p308) was then refined manually using a backward stepwise methodology to achieve a parsimonious model. At this point, I also considered the impact of ethnicity on the findings. Although a significant relationship was found between ethnicity and reading frequency, the numbers in some minoritised ethnic groups were too small to be included in the initial regression (< 100 or less than 2% of the total sample). In the ethnic groups where the respondent group was larger than 100, the high floor level of daily reading meant that the set of respondents from any given ethnicity apart from White, who were not reading daily, was < 50 respondents or < 1% of the dataset. Therefore, I felt that including ethnicity in the parsimonious regression analysis would have the potential to skew and distort the results. One solution that was considered was to recode the variable into 'White/ non-White', as was done in the Nottingham study (Tura et al., 2021). However, there are intrinsic ethical differences in categorising people as non-White, not least from a post-colonial consideration, but also from a statistical standpoint, as recategorizing ethnicity in this binary way would disguise the differences between respondents from each minoritised ethnicity. Therefore, ethnicity was excluded from the regression analysis. The research should be repeated in the future, with a larger sample of respondents from ethnicities other than those who identify as White, in order to see how membership of a minoritized ethnicity influences reading frequency. Considering why my data showed a statistically significant relationship between reading frequency and ethnicity where Tura et al. did not, the very inequitable cohort sizes for ethnicities may have meant that some ethnic groups were less well represented across other socioeconomic variables such as income and occupation. The lack of wider socioeconomic detail gathered meant that any inequities may have been exacerbated by the small sample size of respondents from ethnicities other than the White majority. While this is not the focus of this particular study, differences in reading frequency according to ethnicity form a much-needed direction for further research.

Looking at reading frequency and Imagination Library participation against the demographic variables, adult gender, having three or more children in the household and university level education were not statistically significant when other variables were also taken into account, so these were removed in the stepwise analysis (Table 13 p217).

Table 13 Parsimonious binary logistic regression of reading frequency: daily/more than daily

Variable	B	Wald	p	Exp (B)	95% CI for Exp (B)	
					Lower	Upper
2 or more children in the household	-480	33.654	< .001**	.619	.526	.728
Child's age < 13 months	-.976	165.394	< .001**	.377	.325	.437
Post 18 education	.356	13.202	.005**	1.427	1.178	1.730
DPIL recipient	.261	7.869	< .001**	1.298	1.082	1.558

When considering family, I expected that the number of children in the family would impact reading frequency (Downey, 1995; Price & Kalil, 2019; Yarosz & Barnett, 2001) and this was indeed found (*Exp (B)* = .619, 95% CI = [.526, .728], *p* < .001) with **the youngest child in smaller families with one or two children being 62% more likely to be read with than those in larger families with three or more children.**

The age of the youngest child was the most significant indicator of reading frequency, with **children over 12 months of age being significantly more likely to be read with than those aged less than 13 months (*Exp (B)* = .377, 95% CI = [.325, .437], *p* < .001).** This trend was noted in the Nottingham study on Imagination Library participation (Tura et al., 2021) where they used an age cut-off of 36 months. I explored this within my initial regression and, while I also found that being over 36 months was associated with more frequent reading, the divide at 12 months was more significant (Wald = 119.798 compared to Wald = 4.508), therefore, this variable was chosen for the parsimonious model.

Parental educational level has been closely correlated with reading frequency (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004) and I expected both university level and post-18 education to be positively correlated with reading frequency. My model suggested that participation in post-18

education versus completing education at age 18 had a stronger correlation than participation in university education versus all others and no education (Wald = 6.843 versus Wald = 6.843), so this was the measure I took forward into the parsimonious model. My data showed a clear correlation between post-18 education and increased reading frequency, where **having post-18 education increased the likelihood of parental frequency of reading with children by 43% (*Exp (B)* = 1.427, 95% CI = [1.178, 1.730], *p* < .001).** Considering the predictor variable of Imagination Library participation, when holding the other variables in the model constant, **Imagination Library participation was found to correlate with daily reading (*Exp (B)* = 1.298, 95% CI = [1.082, 1.558], *p* < .001).** Participation in the Imagination Library, compared to non-participation increased the likelihood of daily reading by 30%.

9.6 Is the impact of the Imagination Library on reading frequency higher in less educated families?

I considered the interaction between parental education level, which I used as a proxy for socioeconomic status, and reading frequency in the context of receiving Imagination Library books. The evidence on whether family literacy interventions produce higher gains for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is mixed. Sénéchal & Young (2008) found little difference in the impact of family literacy interventions on different socioeconomic groups whereas Mol et al. (2008) and Manz et al. (2010) found smaller gains in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. I hypothesised that families with lower parental education levels might benefit more from the intervention due to the ceiling effect on reading frequency which might give more latitude for the frequency of more socioeconomically disadvantaged families to increase, as shown by disproportionally higher increases in their daily reading when receiving Imagination Library books (Table 21 p307).

I calculated the adjusted standardised residuals rather than standardised residuals due to the discrepancy in sample size between the populations within and outside the programme, and all of these results gave *z* scores of > 1.96 when looking at the respondents who were part of the Imagination Library programme. Together with the frequency data, this suggests that even though the overall reading frequencies of all groups were high with more than

three-quarters of all respondents reading daily with their child, participating in the Imagination Library consistently led to even higher daily engagement across all educational groups. This represents approximately a 4% increase in daily reading for families in the programme, regardless of their underlying education levels. My hypothesis that within the respondent group families with lower parental educational levels would benefit from larger increases in daily reading was not proven, although all educational level groups benefited from the Imagination Library intervention.

9.7 Summary of whether receiving Imagination Library books increases reading frequency

Considering RQ 2i 'To what extent does receiving Imagination Library books change the quantity of daily reading?', I found that when taking both parental and family demographics together, participation in the Imagination Library still had a correlation with reading frequency, and this effect remained after factoring in parental education level, family size, age of youngest child, ethnicity and gender in the initial model and with family size, age of youngest child and post-18 education in the parsimonious model.

The predictor variable, receiving Imagination Library books, in the binary logistic regression analysis, was found to contribute to the model. I found that there was a relatively weak but still clear correlation between receiving the books and reading daily (*Exp (B)* = 1.298, 95% CI = [1.082, 1.558]), where Wald was 7.869. **This means that parents whose children were in receipt of Imagination Library books were around 30% more likely to read daily (3.2% absolute increase) with their child than parents whose children did not receive the books, when controlling for socio-demographic characteristics.** The unstandardized beta weight for the constant was *B* = (.1.962), *SE* = .108, Wald = 327.334, *p* < .001. The unstandardized beta weight for the predictor variable was *B* = (.261), *SE* = .093, Wald = 7.869, *p* = .005. The estimated odds ratio favoured an increase of 30% (*Exp (B)* = 1.298, 95% CI = [1.082, 1.558], *p* ≤ 0.05) in the likelihood of reading daily for families receiving Imagination Library books.

This finding was triangulated within the questionnaire through parental responses, as respondents noted that the book deliveries were a reminder or a prompt to embed reading

as a routine, "Being gifted the books monthly reminds me to read to my baby" (Respondent 1/2568). "If we didn't get the books through the post I don't think I would read to them half as much as I do, it's now part of our routine" (Respondent 1/2646). These families could be classified as "reminded" on the model of giftee states shared in Figure 6 (p78) (Apps et al., 2016a). For some families it gave them the resources they needed to read frequently with their child, "It has meant reading more when we cannot afford to buy books" (Respondent 1/1891). Some parents referred directly to daily reading being encouraged through participation in the scheme, "It has definitely encouraged regular reading (we read to my oldest child at least twice a day) and has encouraged my partner to be more engaged in reading with my children, something he had expressed reluctance to do pre having children" (Respondent 1/1442).

This finding regarding receiving Imagination Library books related to increased reading quantity is also borne out by the Phase 3 questionnaire responses, where 88.4% of families surveyed felt that they read more often as a result of participation in the scheme.

An insight into why the effect size may be linked to the ceiling effect of initially high daily reading percentages can be found within the free-text survey responses, with 67 parents noting that they were already inclined to read frequently or daily with their child so the programme, although welcomed, was unable to have an impact on this particular measure. "I put no change as we always loved reading together" (Respondent 21/335). "I would read to my baby anyways but it's nice to be prompted with a new book each month" (Respondent 1/2088). These parents might be categorised as "dedicated" (Apps et al., 2016a, p. 48) on the model of giftee states shared in Figure 6 (p78).

9.8   Comparison with other large -scale surveys

I compared my data with those gathered in three other recent national surveys of parental reporting on reading frequency (Figure 25 p306) (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Knowland & Formby, 2016; Venn, 2014). My raw data on reading frequency (without adjusting for sociodemographic differences between surveys) are significantly higher than those from the other surveys, averaging around 30% higher at each age band. A further comparison can be

made with the Millennium Cohort Study, which drew data from nearly 20,000 families. Although considerably older than the other data considered, it is worth noting that 62% of mothers and 23% of fathers reported reading daily to their 3-year-old (Hansen & Joshi, 2007). Even with these daily reading figures which are lower than those found than in later studies, 92% of mothers and 83% of fathers reported reading to their 3-year-old at least once a week. There was no overall consensus on the frequency of daily reading even within organisations surveying the same age group within the same year. The rise in reading frequency after 12 months of age and a reduction in reading frequency after statutory school age can be found both in my data, the National Literacy Trust data (Knowland & Formby, 2016) and the Millennium Cohort Third Survey (Hansen & Joshi, 2008). I could postulate that parents responding to an Internet questionnaire of their own volition might be more likely to engage in daily or frequent reading than those approached by a surveying organisation such as Ipsos Mori following randomised selection from the general population (Knowland & Formby, 2016). This view is supported by considering evidence from a RCT of the Bookstart intervention, where respondents to their opt-in survey reported daily reading frequencies of 70-73% (Demack & Stevens, 2013), and an additional survey of families receiving Bookstart books where 72% of families who participated in the survey reported daily reading (Venn, 2014). These are both higher than the reading frequency rate found in randomised selection sampling of United Kingdom families by Bookstart conducted the following year (Eliot & Venning, 2014). In addition, the survey was conducted during a United Kingdom lockdown period, which meant that many parents were spending more time at home than would usually be the case, which may have positively impacted the quantity of reading taking place. Nevertheless, the size of my sample means that it can be considered to have strong internal validity, that is, within-group comparisons can be made while acknowledging the overall bias of the respondents towards a propensity for frequent reading.

9.9   Considerations for book-gifting schemes

The impact of receiving the Imagination Library appears to be consistent regardless of the underlying parental education level of the parent, which is an important justification for universal roll-out within recipient areas rather than targeting families purely by personal

indicators of deprivation, as the scheme has the capacity to raise reading frequency for families in varying socioeconomic circumstances. What is less established is a positive impact within families who are not White, so care and consideration should be taken with both book selection, ensuring that different ethnicities see themselves within the books that are gifted, and in any accompanying support that is offered by affiliates. It may be prudent to consider support offered in community languages, both around book activities and parental coaching around quality book-sharing and with the availability of translations to accompany gifted English language books. This could be achieved using digital links to translations or support videos in community languages and featuring parents and practitioners of colour.

Considering the age of children benefiting from the Imagination Library, gifting within the first three months postpartum gave the strongest statistical correlation with daily reading within all the age groups considered. Ensuring that affiliates are aware of this key time period in which to connect with families is important as early connections which start to embed a habit of daily or frequent reading may be made during this time. The data seems to suggest that the impact of the Imagination Library may be highest with these early ages, correlating with greater reading frequency than is otherwise found between parents and their very young babies.

In the next chapter, I look at the impact of the Imagination Library on early literacy development, an area where frequent early book-sharing has been correlated with later attainment. I will analyse whether these small but early gains in reading frequency noted within this chapter have a demonstrable effect on reading attainment once children start school and leave the Imagination Library following their fifth birthday.

10.0 Exploration of Research Question 2ii) : To what extent does receiving books from the Imagination Library affect children's early literacy development?

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter, having analysed the impact of the Imagination Library on reading frequency, I consider whether participation in the programme can be linked to early literacy development as measured within the English school system at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, better known as the EYFS profile assessment.

The lives of children form a complex system (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) in which education forms its own complex system (Jacobson et al., 2016), with a wide variety of developmental inputs. Thus, attributing causation for learning gains to a single variable is an often-unattainable goal in educational research (Morrison & van der Werf, 2016). In seeking to correlate receiving Imagination Library books with later literacy development, many challenges could be found in the reliability of any results found. First, comparisons of groups who participated and did not participate in the Imagination Library programme needed to acknowledge any underlying differences in those cohorts as barriers to participation in the programme might also indicate barriers to educational attainment. Second, the data gathered were unlikely to include all the possible variables, in terms of the children's demographic differences, the parents' socioeconomic factors, demographic differences and household variables such as family size which were all potential influencers of academic attainment. Third, home-level experiences such as which children had suffered a bereavement or family trauma, parental attitudes toward reading or their available time and interest alongside parent and child temperaments were not going to be part of an available dataset, despite having the potential to influence attainment. Therefore, it will be important when interpreting the results, to acknowledge that the impact of these home-level experiences, other aspects of the child's 'microsystem' (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) have not been captured or considered.

Another key consideration was deciding what to use as a measure of children's early literacy development. As the Imagination Library's own logic model indicated 'kindergarten/school literacy readiness' as the final proposed outcome, I decided to look at the end of reception year assessment which is a measure schools use as a baseline attainment indicator prior to the start of statutory schooling in Year 1, from the term after a child turns 5 years old. Areas for further research should include within programme measures (e.g., for preschoolers), but due to the limited capacity of a doctoral study, I decided to focus on this one outcome measure, while acknowledging its limitations and focusing on aspects of literacy which can be measured within a school setting.

10.2 The North Lincolnshire dataset

I received a wide-ranging dataset from North Lincolnshire Council, which comprised academic attainment data for students over a 4-year period, alongside demographic data on gender, term of birth, locality, ethnicity, first language and disadvantage indicators such as free school meals status. The dataset also included participation in and the length of participation in the Imagination Library programme (Table 18 p304).

Although I received data from three academic assessments – the end of reception year Early Learning Goals (ELGs), phonics data from Year 1 and Key Stage assessment data from Year 2, I decided to concentrate on the end of reception year data as this was closest in time to the cessation of receiving Imagination Library books and thus had the potential to be the most closely linked to the programme. Within each year of assessment, just under 2,000 children were part of each cohort, and the data comprised 4 years of cohorts for ELGs, 3 years for phonics data and 1 year for Key Stage 1 data, so concentrating on the ELGs also meant that I had the largest dataset to work with to support more robust conclusions, numbering 7,815 children in total.

Using the reception year data, I chose to concentrate on two measures: the ELG for reading, and the Good Level of Development (GLD) scores. During the period of data collection, reaching the 'expected level of development' in reading required meeting the following standard:

Children read and understand simple sentences. They use phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately. They also read some common irregular words. They demonstrate an understanding when talking with others about what they have read. (Standards & Testing Authority, 2014, p. 29)

In addition, I utilised the GLD marker which comprises assessment across a range of 17 prime and specific areas of learning to provide an overall assessment of the child's achievements within the Early Years Profile. For both the reading ELG and the GLD scores, I conflated children achieving the expected level and above the expected level, so that there were binary met/not-met data for each child.

10.3 Hypotheses

My broad hypotheses to be tested were:

H2$0$: There is no significant relationship between Imagination library participation (> 12 months, > 24 months) and the Reading ELG score (expected or above expected attainment).

H2A: There is no significant relationship between Imagination library participation (> 12 months, > 24 months) and attainment of a Good Level of Development.

10.4 Variables

Considering the similarities and differences of the cohorts within North Lincolnshire who had signed up to the Imagination Library and those who had not, it was important to note the overall number of children involved (Table 18 p304). Due to a successful campaign promoting participation, the number of children not signed up to the Imagination Library decreased sharply over the 4 years where data were gathered, decreasing from 25.5% of the overall cohort in 2016 to just 10% of children in 2019. Children who were not British and children who had English as an additional language were the least likely to be signed up to the programme.

The most common difference in the cohorts appeared to be where children had English as an additional language, alongside some term of birth discrepancies in particular year groups. Other data gathered by the council included nationality or ethnicity, special needs status and locality data. As Lincolnshire has a large White non-British group, comprising

predominantly Polish and Lithuanian communities, and as ethnicity data had not been recorded in the same way each year (some years had ethnicities, in others nationality data had been recorded as British/not British) I decided to use English as a first language data as a variable rather than nationality or ethnicity data for consistency. Differing disadvantaged groups were identified across the different years of the data, according to the funding mechanisms for disadvantage in place at the time. Disadvantaged pupils include those who have been recorded as ever having free school meals within the last 6 years and those who are or who have been within the care of the local authority. Therefore, it was a wider indicator than choosing those who were currently eligible for free school meals. In 2016, prior to the introduction of the disadvantaged category, the deprivation pupil premium covered a similar group of children, so this indicator was used for this year.

Data analysed by North Lincolnshire Council (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) showed that the children who were least likely to attain a Good Level of Development at the end of their reception year (under 70%) were boys, Summer-born children, non-British children, those speaking English as an additional language, those with special educational needs, those residing in the 30% most deprived areas and those eligible for deprivation, those who received funding as 'vulnerable twos' (children from families identified as in receipt of particular benefits or in local authority care) or pupil premium funding, or for free school meals. These are the variables which I chose to use within the logistic binary regressions, with the disadvantaged marker representing overall deprivation as it includes and conflates the other deprivation categories within it. North Lincolnshire also found that children for whom information had not been recorded (particularly nationality and first language) did not attain as well as other groups. I have discounted these children from my analysis as the reasons for the missing data are unclear. Potential reasons for the lack of data may include the child moving recently to the county or being new arrivals within the United Kingdom, all of whom may face multiple challenges within the assessments.

Considering involvement in the Imagination Library, North Lincolnshire Council (2019) the council noted that children registered in the programme for less than 12 months achieved less well than children who were not registered at all for the initiative. The achievement values for those registered for 13-60 months were broadly similar. Again, registration data

at age 5 for fewer than 12 months could indicate new arrivals to the county or the country. In consideration of this finding, I took two measurement points for involvement in the Imagination Library as variables to consider: over 12 months of involvement and over 24 months of involvement. With these data, I hoped to be able to differentiate whether little to no involvement in the programme was different to some involvement and whether longer involvement in the programme was correlated with higher achievement at the end of the reception year.

10.5 Analysis

10.5.1 Bivariate analysis of end of EYFS attainment by Imagination Library participation

I conducted bivariate analysis (Table 14 p227) using the same process as completed in Section 9.5.1, to establish whether significant relationships existed between both measures of EYFS attainment (reading ELG and overall GLD) and Imagination Library participation. The North Lincolnshire raw data indicated that Imagination Library participants were more likely to achieve these attainment levels than non-participants, so this was a confirmatory exercise to establish whether there was a significance level to these results.

Table 14 Crosstabulations of EYFS attainment and Imagination Library participation

Variable 1	Variable 2	*df*	χ^2	*p*
Reading ELG	DPIL > 12 months	1	58.848	0.0000**
Reading ELG	DPIL > 24 months	1	24.352	0.0000**
Good Level of Development	DPIL > 12 months	1	38.211	0.0000**
Good Level of Development	DPIL > 24months	1	12.411	0.0004**

This exercise established that the gains seen for Imagination Library participants were at a statistically significant level, with the strongest relationships within the greater than 12 months participation cohort, and a stronger relationship with the reading ELG than with the GLD attainment measure.

Having met the initial tests for statistical significance against the hypotheses, I then, as I had for reading frequency, considered the relationship when other variables of interest were included, to test the importance of the significance within the complex system of education.

10.5.2 Binary logistic regression analysis of variables affecting EYFS attainment

A binary logistic regression analysis was conducted to clarify whether the apparent impact of the Imagination Library programme on EYFS attainment could be better explained by other socioeconomic or demographic factors. The outcomes of interest were 1) reading ELG and 2) GLD scores. The possible predictor variables were term of birth, gender, location (lowest 30% SOA), disadvantage, and English as a first language, along with Imagination Library participation at either > 12 or > 24 months length of time. The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test was not significant (p > 0.05), indicating that the model was correctly specified (Field, 2018). Additionally, the Cox and Snell R Square = .129 and Nagelkerke R Square = .199. A priori testing of standardised predicted values versus standardised residuals verified that the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity (with VIF coefficients between 1.002 and 1.068) and the residuals were broadly normally distributed.

A forced entry model was used because all the variables were known to have an impact on attainment, and without a variable related to Imagination Library participation, the models correctly predicted 80.0% of Reading ELG passes and 76.9% of GLD passes from bases of 78.4% and 72.8% respectively. As Gorad notes, "the percentage of cases predicted correctly does not rise much above the base value whenever a binary logistic regression starts from a base value very far from 50%" (Gorard, 2021 p.243).

When considering the age-related data to include, initial testing on > 12 or > 24 month inclusion in the Imagination Library programme as a variable showed that the > 12 month inclusion in the Imagination Library was found to be a better predictor of both reading ELG and GLD (see Table 15 p229). The difference was small, however, favouring the > 12 month variable increased the prediction accuracy by 0.3% for the reading ELG and by GLD by 0.2%, whereas the > 24 month inclusion variable enhanced the model by only 0.2% for the reading

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ELG and 0.1% for GLD. Thus, > 12 months participation was included in the models as the only variable considering the length of participation, aiming for a parsimonious model.

Table 15 Comparison of variable inclusion for length of participation in the Imagination Library

	Reading pass (percentage correct)	Improvement to the model	GLD Pass (percentage correct)	Improvement to the model
Beginning block	78.4		72.8	
> 12 m	80.3	+1.9	77.1	+4.3
> 24 m	80.2	+1.8	77.0	+4.2

Commensurate with what is already known about variables which impact academic attainment (Andrews et al., 2017; Department for Education, 2019b), all of the demographic and socioeconomic predictor variables were found to be significant with regard to both outcomes of interest (reading ELG, GLD) (see Table 16 p230 and Table 17 p230). Children who were Summer born, boys, those with English as an additional language, those who were disadvantaged or had special educational needs or who lived in the lowest 30% of areas for deprivation were all less likely to achieve than other pupils. Controlling for the independent variables, the predictor variable (Imagination Library participation for more than 12 months) in the logistic regression analysis was found to contribute to the model.

When holding the other variables in the model constant, compared to not taking part in the Imagination Library or participating for fewer than 12 months, Imagination Library participation for more than 12 months increased the likelihood of achieving a pass at Good Level of Development by 40% (*Exp (B)* = 1.396, 95% CI [1.221, 1.596]) **and in the reading ELG by 54% (** *Exp (B)* = 1.544, 95% CI [1.341, 1.777]).

Table 16 Binary Logistic regression of reading ELG attainment

Variable	*Reference category*	*B*	Wald	*p*	*Exp (B)*	95% CI for *Exp (B)*	
						Lower	Upper
Gender	Female	.562	82.711	< .001**	1.754	1.554	1.979
Term of birth	Autumn or Spring	.843	184.681	< .001**	2.324	2.058	2.624
First language	English	.713	83.837	< .001**	2.040	1.751	2.376
Disadvantage	Non-disadvantaged	-.723	95.295	< .001**	.485	.420	.561
Locality	> 30% SOA	-.406	41.075	< .001**	.667	.589	.755
SEN	No SEN	-1.855	444.692	< .001**	.156	.132	.186
Imagination Library participation	DPIL > 12 months	.434	36.673	< .001**	1.544	1.341	1.777
Constant		.134	1.791	.181	1.144		

Table 17 Binary Logistic regression of Good Level of Development attainment

Variable	Reference category	B	Wald	*p*	*Exp (B)*	95% CI for *Exp (B)*	
						Lower	Upper
Gender	Female	.649	127.856	.000**	1.913	1.710	2.141
Term of birth	Autumn or Spring	.908	243.488	.000**	2.479	2.212	2.779
First language	English	.620	68.513	.000**	1.859	1.605	2.154
Disadvantage	Non-disadvantaged	-.638	79.400	.000**	.528	.459	.608
Locality	> 30% SOA	-.271	20.555	.000**	.763	.679	.858
SEN	No SEN	-2.094	517.937	.000**	.123	.103	.148
Imagination Library participation	DPIL > 12 months	.333	23.827	.000**	1.396	1.221	1.596
Constant		.286	8.998	.003**	1.331		

10.5.3 Marginal effects analysis of variables affecting EYFS attainment

As explained in Section 6.5.5, marginal effects were calculated from the binary logistic regression data to give a 'real world' overview of how Imagination Library participation might affect an average child in the cohort. The percentage pass rates for the reading ELG (Figure 14 p232) and for the overall GLD (Figure 15 p233) showed differences in pass rates for the variables selected when the other variables in the model were held constant.

Within the whole population, children who had received Imagination Library books for more than 12 months were 6.7% more likely to achieve the reading ELG and 5.7% more likely to achieve a Good Level of Development than their unregistered peers, when holding the other variables constant.

Figure 14 Percentage pass rate for reading ELG showing average calculate by marginal effects

Percentage pass rates for EYFS Reading Early Learning Goal

Legend:
- Male
- Female
- Summer born
- Not Summer born
- EAL
- Not EAL
- Disadvantaged
- Not disadvantaged
- IL >12 months
- Not IL
- Lowest 30 SOA
- Not Lowest 30 SOA
- SEN
- Not SEN

Data values:
- Male: 74.4
- Female: 82.5
- Summer born: 69.6
- Not Summer born: 82.6
- EAL: 68.8
- Not EAL: 80.2
- Disadvantaged: 68.9
- Not disadvantaged: 80.4
- IL >12 months: 79.8
- Not IL: 73.1
- Lowest 30 SOA: 74.7
- Not Lowest 30 SOA: 80.7
- SEN: 45.7
- Not SEN: 81.9

Average % pass rate

Figure 15 Percentage pass rate for GLD showing average calculate by marginal effects

Percentage pass rates for EYFS Good Level of Development
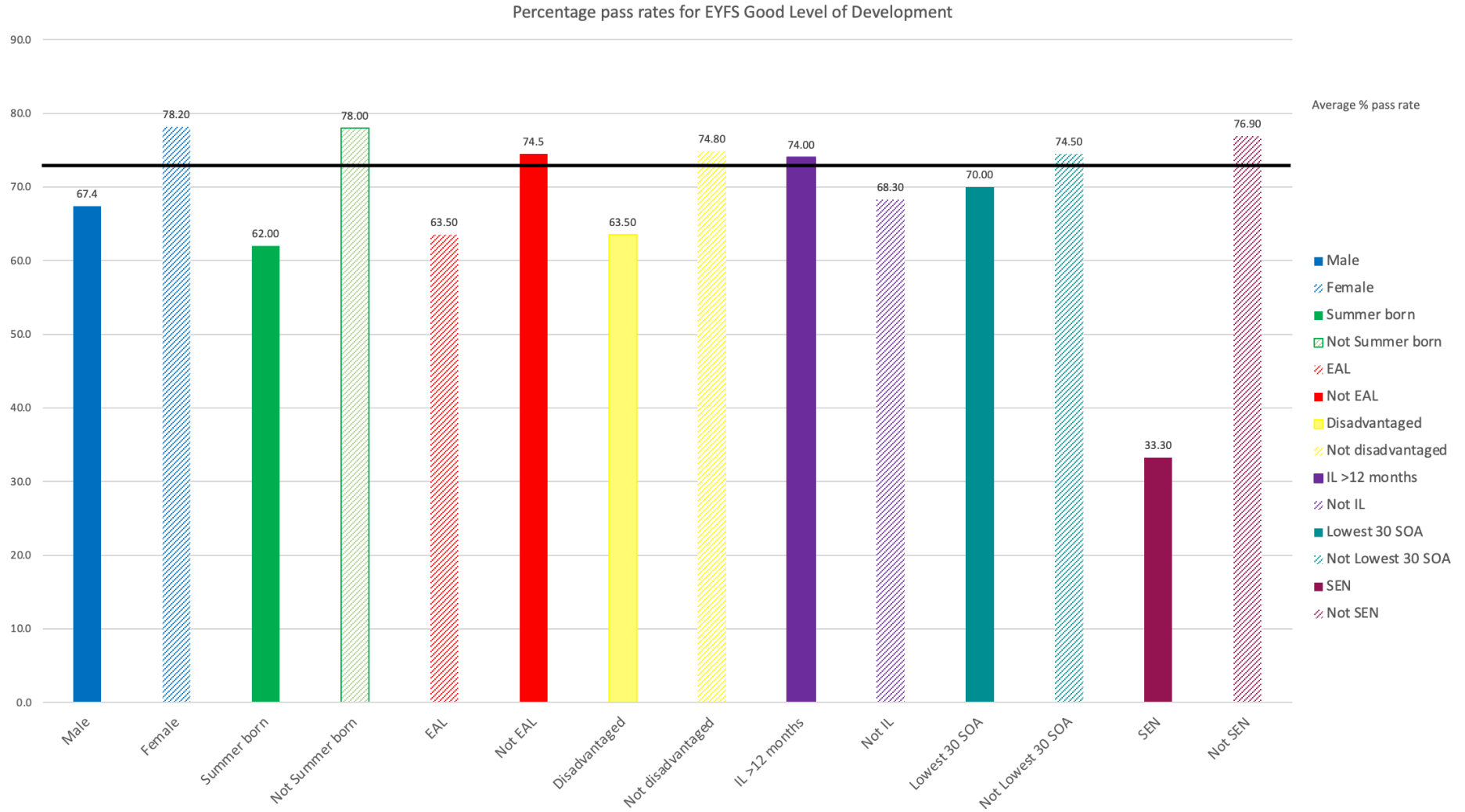
10.6 Summary of whether receiving Imagination Library books affects children's early literacy development

To consider RQ 2ii 'To what extent does receiving Imagination Library books affect children's early literacy development?' I analysed the measures of early literacy development of attainment in reading and overall attainment at the end of the EYFS in relation to Imagination Library participation. Receiving Imagination Library books for more than 12 months was correlated with higher end of EYFS attainment, when other variables known to influence attainment were held constant. Taking the Imagination Library's own logic model, these findings support the model hypothesis that participation in the Imagination Library supports school or kindergarten readiness and early school attainment both specifically in the domain of book reading and more widely across all the ELGs which form the GLD standard. The > 12 months measure produced slightly greater associations than the > 24 months measure, and both associations were of a relatively small nature. However, with around three-quarters of children nationally achieving a Good Level of Development (from 69.3% in 2016 to 71.8% in 2019) (Department for Education, 2019b), there is a ceiling effect in place on the impact of the intervention. When calculating hypothetical percentage increases for children in the Imagination Library programme, a calculation of the marginal effects showed that for an 'average child' their likelihood of passing their reading Early Learning Goal was 6.7% higher and for a Good Level of Development 5.7% higher than a child who had similar characteristics but did not participate in the programme.

The model could be improved by enhancing the data to include further family demographic measures such as educational attainment of the parent and parental competency in English alongside data which provide depth to information about Imagination Library participation such as home reading frequency. Controlling for the school attended could also be useful as a proxy for teaching experience within the reception year.

10.7 Considerations for book-gifting schemes

It will be important for the Local Authority and for book-gifting schemes to further investigate the barriers to participation within the programme, particularly for families who

are non-British or who have English as an additional language. An important line of enquiry would be what 'worked' for those non-British and additional language speakers who did sign up to receive books, and how can that be replicated with families who have not yet been reached. Although a correlation between receiving the books and attainment has been established, there may well be extraneous factors which predispose children whose families are motivated to sign them up to the programme which correlates with other aspects of the home learning environment which are supportive of school achievement. Notwithstanding these reservations, the relationship between parental involvement in the programme and child attainment seems to be a positive one, which can be further explained with reference to the findings of the next Research Question, RQ 3, which considers parental perceptions of the impact of receiving Imagination Library books.

11.0 Exploration of Research Question 3: What is the parental perception of the impact of DPIL on i) parental beliefs and practices about book-sharing and ii) children's experiences of books and book-sharing?

11.1 Introduction

In this chapter I look at what parents and other respondents with caregiving responsibilities felt about the Imagination Library and its effect on aspects of their family reading experience. To answer the research questions about parents' perception of the impact of the Imagination Library on their book-sharing beliefs and practices and on their children's experiences of book-sharing, I used questionnaire data gathered on parental views of both book-sharing in general and of the Imagination Library in particular. I was able for some aspects of the data to compare DPIL and non-DPIL respondents, and for others to look in more depth at the views of parents receiving Imagination Library books. Overall, 66,000 segments of text were coded across four free-text questions in the Phase 1 survey. The questions asked were as follows:

What benefits do babies and children get from reading with their parent/carer?
What benefits do parents/carers get from reading with their baby or child?
Why do you think it's best to start reading at the age you have chosen?
If you would like to say anything about receiving Dolly Parton's Imagination Library books, please tell us here (asked only for recipients).

When comparing the respondents from the Imagination Library and non-Imagination Library cohorts, few differences were found in the pattern of responses to free-text questions. Overall, 97% of non-DPIL respondents and 97% of DPIL respondents gave free-text responses. Both cohorts had a similar frequency of codes within their answers with an average of 13.4 codes for each non-DPIL respondent and 12.3 codes per DPIL respondent. Within this calculation, responses from the free-text question only available to DPIL respondents were discounted so that the comparison was equitable. Overall, this seems to

indicate that despite overall differences in the cohorts (for example lower educational levels within the DPIL group), respondents were just as likely to articulate their thoughts and feelings at similar lengths within their free-text answers.

I also used survey questions to ask parents if or how the Imagination Library had made a change to their family. In the Phase 1 survey a closed choice question was asked to qualifying respondents asking them to rate the level of change they felt the programme had made on themselves and their child. I was the able to build on this response within the Phase 3 survey by asking about perceived change in areas such as reading frequency, impact and enjoyment in relation to receiving Imagination Library books. In this survey I also asked a series of closed-choice questions about parent and child reading behaviours to better understand what the book-sharing experiences looked like within the home.

Although the research question refers to the parent or carer, I was interested in discovering who forms each child's 'reading family'. Considering who reads with the child along with the respondent, 71.8% of children are also read to by their other parent/parent figure, with 37.1% being read to by additional adults or other relatives. 20.6% of respondents said that their child read with their sibling or siblings, "My daughter (older) was disappointed when her books stopped- but is excited when her brothers book arrives and shares them straight away with him" (Respondent 3/152). Only 10% reported that they were the only person reading with their children.

Three families were also interviewed about their experiences of book-sharing and receiving Imagination Library books, and their stories are shared within Section 11.5.

11.2 Changes in parental beliefs and practices

11.2.1 Changes to reading behaviours

Considering the changes parents attributed to participation in the Imagination Library programme (Figure 16 p248) from the Phase 3 survey, **almost every parent (98.8%) had changed their book-sharing behaviours to include books by new authors, which they**

would not have been introduced to unless in the scheme, "it has exposed us to lots of different books that we may not have chosen ourselves" (Respondent 1/1863). Over half (66.5%) reported engaging their child in activities related to the gifted books since joining the programme and just under half (46.3%) reported that they had received specific support to do this from their affiliate, North Lincolnshire Council.

Parents discussed changes to or impacts on their daily routines of receiving gifted books. Book-sharing forms part of the daily routine for many families, both recipients and non-recipients of Imagination Library books, (see Table 19 p305). DPIL recipients often linked the books arriving and the scheme itself to active changes or reminders to their reading routines, "every time I get them, it reminds me to read to my child" (Respondent 1/1480), "it reminds you/gives you that prompt to read with your children when the book comes through every month" (Respondent 3/656). The most common area of change in parental habits or routines related to the book-gifting was this idea of a 'reminder' to read, "being gifted the books monthly reminds me to read to my baby" (Respondent 1/2568) and this links closely with the category of "reminded" parents found in the Bookstart research evaluation (Apps, 2016a, p.48). This change in frequency was linked to receipt of new books for some families who acknowledged that reading with their child wasn't always interesting for them, "it's wonderful to have a new book every month and parents quickly get bored of reading the same few stories, even if the kids don't" (Respondent 1/2625). The monthly 'dose' of a book seems to act as an impetus to read in such a way that a one-off gift might not.

> Receiving a different book every month has helped us keeping up with this practice and our son looks forward to getting a new story through the door! (And then chases us a few times a day for us to read to him, which encourages us as busy parents to actually find the time to sit and read with him). (Respondent 1/2853)

Parents talked about the scheme improving their frequency of reading, "it has definitely encouraged regular reading" (Respondent 1/1442), with 88.4% of respondents linking more frequent reading directly to programme participation. This is borne out by the findings from RQ 2i, where parents receiving Imagination Library books were slightly more likely to read daily than those not in receipt of the books. This group of parents correlates with the "newly

informed" grouping from the Bookstart giftee states model (Figure 6 p78) (Apps, 2016a). The position of the books as gifted items seems to be a potential impetus to the act of book-sharing, "thank you to Dolly as her books give me the motivation to read with my child, as a person who does not like to read, receiving books are gifts and encouragement for us" (Respondent 1/2948). Another impetus mentioned by several parents was that their child's enthusiasm for the new books arriving through the post triggered reading sessions, with 99.5% of parents reporting that their child is enthusiastic to share books with them, "we look forward to these books. My child can't wait to read it with me as soon as it arrives" (Respondent 1/2603). There may also be implicit social pressure through the nature of books as a gift; as Marie, an interview participant said, "it's like there's no excuse not to read". This change in reading frequency was explored statistically in Section 9.6 and the qualitative comments from parents clearly relate the change to the renewed impetus each month that the books arriving from the Imagination Library give.

The changes to parental reading behaviours are not just limited to the recipient child; 92.1% of parents report that they share books with the recipient child's siblings, and the household as a whole benefits from having more books than would otherwise have been bought which was reported in 82.5% of families who responded.

Looking in general at the book-sharing behaviours of parents who receive Imagination Library books (Figure 18 p250), respondents to the Phase 3 survey were very likely to hold their child close when book-sharing (95.7% reporting this always or often) and to read all of the words or point out all of the pictures (93%). Other reading behaviours were less ubiquitous; 74.1% of respondents always or often use different voices when reading aloud and 53.8% report asking their child lots of questions. Extra-textual talk (recorded in the survey as 'talk about other things') always or often occurred in 42.3% of households and only 15.8% of parents would usually tell their own story rather than the one printed.

11.2.2 Changes to feelings about book-sharing

Parents in the Phase 1 survey who received Imagination Library books, were asked how receiving the books had changed their own feelings about reading with their child. Of these,

72.2% recorded a positive or very positive change (with the results split broadly equally between these outcomes), "I enjoy reading to my children and find it helps me have time especially with each of them" (Respondent 1/4364). **Non-graduates were 15.8% more likely to report a very positive change following Imagination Library involvement than graduates** (49% of non-graduates compared with 33.2% of graduates). When asked to scale how they felt when reading with their child, 76.5% of respondents in the Phase 3 questionnaire scaled themselves as 8-10 out of 10 (where 0 represented a very negative feeling about reading and 10 represented a very positive feeling about reading), with 91.1% of respondents rating themselves as six or more out of 10. Only 20 respondents (2.9%) chose a score lower than five on the scale. Within the same survey, 92.7% of parents responded 'yes' when asked if they enjoy reading with their child more since participating in the Imagination Library programme, which triangulates the scaled scores given to within two percent. Shared reading was generally an enjoyable activity for the parents in the survey, and the Phase 1 survey results suggested that receiving Imagination Library books had enhanced or sustained these positive feelings.

Parents' feelings about book-sharing were often linked to the vicarious enjoyment of their children's enjoyment. Often this related to the reading experience, "we enjoyed receiving our monthly book and have enjoyed many of hours reading" but the experience of actually receiving the books was an additional and much commented on vicarious pleasure, "love seeing my children's eyes light up as a new book come through the door" (Respondent 1/2289), "it's so lovely to get that book on our door mat and seeing how excited our daughter gets" (Respondent 1/1725). In addition, parents commented on enjoying seeing their child learn and develop, "it makes us happy to know we're helping our children to develop and progress" (Respondent 1/3743). This pleasure resulted in positive feelings of achievement for the parent, "I can see the benefits they are getting, so I feel pleasure and achievement" (Respondent 1/24).

Considering the 27.8% of parents who recorded 'no change' to their personal attitudes toward sharing books with their child, a potential reason for this could be previously high levels of parental literacy or parental positivity towards book-sharing. These parents were described as "dedicated" and having book-sharing plans already in the Bookstart research

(Apps, 2016a, p. 48). Knowing that parental, particularly maternal, educational levels have a broadly positive correlation with reading frequency, (Hemmerechts et al., 2016; Korupp et al., 2002; Marks, 2008; Yarosz & Barnett, 2001), I considered whether parental educational levels were related to the frequency of a 'no change' finding. Respondents who were graduates were 12% more likely to report no change than those without a degree (31.1% of graduates and 20.7% of parents who were not graduates, χ^2 = 21.837, df = 4, p = 0.0002). which was a significant difference. Within the later free-text comments section, some parents explained clearly that this was indeed the reason for their response, "the reason for my 'No Change' in how I feel about reading is that we value reading very highly anyway and have always found time to read with our children, even if it just a short story. We encourage our children to read their own reading books every day too" (Respondent 1/1782), suggesting that no change was related to already positive attitudes toward book-sharing.

Only one respondent out of 1524 (0.01%) reported a negative change after receiving the books. This is perhaps the area of data collection where respondent bias may be most clearly seen, as parents who did not enjoy reading with their child were unlikely to complete a questionnaire on the subject. A very small number of comments within the whole questionnaire discussed negative feelings, and these were not linked to receipt of Imagination Library books, but to more general feelings about reading, "honestly I find it very boring and so avoid it" (Respondent 1/64) or about the lack of value in reading with a young baby,

> I tried with my eldest from a few months old, I felt it was too much pressure trying to be the perfect parent. She was more interested in eating the book. I think it's more important to socialise your child/talk to them. We now have a more enjoyable time reading to our 2- and 3-year-old as they are interested and taking it in more. (Respondent 1/219)

Other negative responses were scheme-related rather than related to changes in parental attitudes. The most common complaints were about the scheme stopping in the respondent's area, the books not being age appropriate (with the small number of comments divided between too hard and too simple) and wishes for more diversity within the books.

11.2.3 The impact on parents of receiving a curated book selection

Parents talked frequently about the way that receiving the Imagination Library's curated selection of age-appropriate books was helpful to them, "as a new parent you don't know what to buy" (Respondent 1/1906), "I'm not sure I would have known what to get for my child's age" (Respondent 1/2265). Some noted the developmental impact of the book committee's choices, "[The Imagination Library] gives you a range of books we might not have otherwise have bothered with. Lots of lift the flap and sensory books - I probably wouldn't have bought these but really helpful in my sons motor development" (Respondent 1/1758), and felt they benefitted from the guidance of the book selection, "[the] book choices [are] suited to developmental needs in ways I would not manage unaided" (Respondent 1/2581). Others doubted their ability to choose books, "I don't think I'd have bought books as appropriate for his age" (Respondent 1/1775), "they really suited his age… when I shop I don't know what to get" (Respondent 1/2460).

A facet of book selection that many parents commented on was the impact of introducing new books or authors to the family's reading diet. This was mentioned by 14.5% of Phase 1 survey respondents and was acknowledged as true by 98.8% of Phase 3 respondents (Figure 16 p248), "I love that the stories that arrive are almost without exception, books I probably wouldn't have picked" (Respondent 1/1645). For some families, the benefits were around feeling that they previously did not know which books would be enjoyed by their child, "[there are] things I would have never chosen- which is good as sometimes she loves a book that I wouldn't have expected her to like at all!" (Respondent 1/2330). Many parents were clear that receiving the selection changed their view of what books were appropriate or enjoyable for their child, "it has really broadened our horizons for children's books" (Respondent 1/2395) and "I love getting these books largely because they're very different to the books I choose for my child" (Respondent 1/2024). Parents welcomed receiving books chosen by someone else, "myself I wouldn't know which book to choose for [name of child] ... probably it would been same style but thanks to DP Imagination Library the variety and different style of the books is amazing....!" (Respondent 1/2585). This benefit was consistently noted in families who classed themselves as already likely to buy or borrow books for their child, "it means we constantly have new books and books from authors and

about subjects we may not have considered choosing from the library or to buy" (Respondent 1/2126), "[it] has provided many books that we wouldn't have come across otherwise as well as some well-known classics" (Respondent 1/2308). Even the most avid of parent readers saw benefits in receiving books selected by a knowledgeable group of experts,

> The Imagination Library books are great for discovering new authors and titles we may not have otherwise known about. I am a Team Leader with Usborne Books At Home so we are already a family of bookworms. We have a house full of books and we all have a keen interest and enjoyment in reading. My husband and I have often bought our children other books in the series or by the same authors as the Imagination Library books we have received if we've particularly enjoyed them :).
> (Respondent 3/186)

Whether families had less experience choosing books for their child or were confident with this, the variety of the book selections sent changed parents' views of what their own child would like.

> They are usually books that I wouldn't buy, English isn't my first language and also some titles don't appeal to me at first but my kids love them! it's beautiful to see them watching over and over again books that you didn't know they might have liked. I appreciate that sometimes there are titles that you wrongly stereotype towards a gender and they [the child] simply don't care. (Respondent 1/2680)

Even the most literate families found that the Imagination Library introduced new favourites for them and their child, "whilst I am an early years teacher and am aware of many different children's books, some of them [Imagination Library books] were new to me and turned out to be my daughter's favourites for a few years!" (Respondent 1/2448).

11.2.4 Changes to parents' self-image

Family literacy programmes are known to have a positive impact on improved parental self-confidence and self-efficacy (Swain et al., 2009). Respondents to the Phase 3 survey noted an impact on two aspects of their own self-image: themselves as readers and themselves as parents. Considering themselves as readers, some parents were open about the challenges they had or have with reading as a child or an adult themselves, "I was a slow reader

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myself" but often linked this to a desire to make a change for their children, "that's why I'm determined to enjoy reading with my child" (Respondent 1/502). Parents talked about how the arrival of the books each month was an impetus for change, "it encouraged me to read" (Respondent 1/2452) and how receiving the books supported them as adults, "[receiving the books] helps with my confidence of reading aloud" (Respondent 1/4720).

> I was not a big reader as a child, and finding out that in my adulthood, that I was dyslexic, affected my confidence with reading out loud all together. Receiving the Dolly Parton's books, gave me a new reason to practise reading aloud to my kids. We now have a love for books, and regularly going to the library or buying new books. (Respondent 1/3081)

Other parents found that receiving the Imagination Library books reinforced their prior positive self-image of themselves as readers. "Sharing books provides a focus and an element of routine, a feeling that I know what to do next! I enjoy the books myself!" (Respondent 1/1032). The second aspect of self-image that was positively affected by receiving Imagination Library books and reading them with children was an idea of "feeling like a good parent" (Respondent 1/413). When engaging in book-sharing, one respondent described gaining "confidence as a mother" (Respondent 1/2187) and another referred to it as "knowing you are doing the right thing" (Respondent 1/3428). Engaging in book-sharing was an activity which respondents often felt was a marker of 'good' parenting and parents talked of feeling 'proud' when they engaged in book-sharing, "I feel proud I have invested the time to instil a love of reading" (Respondent 1/805). There was a sense that time spent book-sharing was uniformly beneficial, so time spent engaging in this activity boosted respondents' self-image of themselves as an effective parent, giving a "feeling of self-achievement knowing what I am doing is helping my child to grow and learn" (Respondent 1/4459). Shared reading was an activity that allowed parents to feel successful as parents, "[I have] the feeling that if I can't do anything else right for my children (such as when having a bad day), then at least I can read to them" (Respondent 1/334).

11.2.5 The impact of gifted books on parental book buying and borrowing

Although many parents talked about owning books already for their child, **82.5% of respondents felt they had more books than they would have otherwise bought** (Figure 16

p248), "I probably wouldn't buy this many books so it provides a wider library for my daughter" (Respondent 1/2186), "we would struggle to afford the number of books we have received" (Respondent 3/11). Whether the child's personal library would have otherwise been small or large, "it could be argued we don't 'need' the Imagination Library but it really has broadened the range of books we read to our children" (Respondent 1/1811), the gift of Imagination Library books was an impetus to further expand their child's access to books, "receiving the books has encouraged me to buy books when I can and join the local library to borrow books when I cannot buy them outright" (Respondent 1/2544). Of course, for many families, books are not a spending priority and although some recognised the value of library use, they valued the ownership model provided by the Imagination Library, "whereas I wouldn't normally buy books it's giving my child the opportunity to read books and enjoy the books without a time frame to return like a library" (Respondent 1/1400).

Some changes to parental reading practices can be directly attributed to receiving gifted books alleviating financial concerns of parents about buying books, "as a single parent on benefits these books were a luxury item to us" (Respondent 1/2367). Whilst most of the comments reflected the amount of books available to families as a result of involvement in the programme, "books are very expensive, there's no way we would have the collection we have if not for Dolly Parton's Imagination books" (Respondent 1/2508), some comments specifically linked the gifted books to the practice of additional or more frequent reading, "[receiving books] has meant reading more when we cannot afford to buy books" (Respondent 1/1891). This frequency of reading was also linked to families who would have usually utilised library services when these were reduced, "we probably could not afford to buy as many books as we would like (and the library has been closed over lockdown) - so we are very grateful to get your books every month" (Respondent 1/2333). The idea that buying, or at least having books for your child is linked to positive parenting perceptions, and the Imagination Library helps to fulfil this societal expectation for lower income families, "[it] helped in year 1 when finances and stress of parenting- gave highlight to have new book to read with baby" (Respondent 1/2672).

> I never grew up with books at home (it was too expensive for my parents, but we had frequent trips to the library!) so it's so lovely that she has her selection of her own books. (Respondent 1/2888)

An impact of having the books owned by the child permanently at home was in how this gave additional opportunities for reading, "I don't feel entirely comfortable going to a library with a 7-month-old especially if she's not in the best moods so I get to read and enjoy with her at home when she's ready and also at any time if the day" (Respondent 1/1879). Although several parents mentioned library visits as additions to their book-sharing routines, the ability to have books arriving at their doorstep was clearly appreciated. Specific to the time of lockdown, where libraries remained closed for months at a time, 97% of Phase 3 survey parents felt that books arriving in the post were of benefit to them specifically during the pandemic. "It has been a huge help receiving these books through the post. Due to the COVID-19 isolation I always worried I don't be able to provide rich learning opportunities in terms of language development, but the books have" (Respondent 3/236).

Another impact of book ownership occurred in families with more than one child, "[the Imagination Library] gave my third child books that were his not just hand me downs from his sisters" (Respondent 1/1729). Again, the impact of personal ownership from new is being recognised here and was also noted by families who had twins as each child could have their own copy of a book. "My twin girls absolutely adore receiving their books. They have one each so it means they can look at their own whilst we all read together" (Respondent 3/98).

Overall, parent respondents recorded a positive change in the number of books their child would otherwise have owned, whether that increase was from none or a few books, or whether the books diversified an already numerous home library. "You have helped me build a library for my little one with the books I receive" (Respondent 1/2824). This indicates that involvement in the Imagination Library is supplementing rather than replacing parental agency in relation to choosing or sharing books. Parents often used Imagination Library books to grow their child's library and also utilised the book choices received to support their own future decision making in book choices (as explored in section 11.2.3) However, the specific impact of receiving books for families who could not otherwise prioritise spending of a limited family income on new books should not be underestimated as it meets a core intention of the project. "I'm a lone parent and can't always afford books. A new book every month is amazing" (Respondent 1/2161).

11.3 Children's experiences of books and book-sharing

Although this data was mediated through parent response, there was rich data to be found within the free-text answers to questions across both surveys, with parents recording vividly how they perceived their child's reactions to receiving books. Therefore, I considered the quantitative data gathered in response to specific questions about their child's feelings and behaviours alongside this rich text data to gather a view of children's experiences of book-sharing.

11.3.1 Children's feelings and behaviours when book-sharing

In the Phase 1 survey, I asked respondents how they felt receiving Imagination Library books had impacted their children's view of reading with their parents. The results were very similar to those recorded in Section 11.2.2 which looked at the parent's own view of book-sharing, with again three quarters (74.9%) recording a positive or very positive change and one quarter (24.9%) recording no change, and this time three out of 1,524 responses showed a negative change (0.2%). I considered whether the age profile of the child affected the response to this question but found that it did not, with less than 6% variance in the range and no statistical significance was recorded within a Pearson chi square test of feelings by age of child.

Within the Phase 3, survey respondents were asked about their children's experiences of receiving books since joining the scheme. One consideration of using this data as a measure of change is that the respondents surveyed were from an area with a very high take-up of Imagination Library books in the first year of life, frequently within the first 6 months of life (87%) (E. Wilkinson, personal correspondence, 9th September 2021). This means that for some children, parents might find it difficult to attribute change to the commencement of the Imagination Library programme, although some free-text comments indicated that some parents were making comparisons with the experience of siblings, "I have noticed he's more likely to be interested in reading than my older two children who didn't take part in the scheme" (Respondent 3/358).

Figure 16 Changes for families since receiving Imagination Library books

Since receiving Imagination Library books:

Statement	Yes	No
I've received support or ideas about how to read with my child	46.3	53.7
We do activities related to the books	66.5	33.5
We have more books than I would otherwise have bought	82.5	17.5
We read more often	88.4	11.6
We share the books with older and younger siblings in our family	92.1	7.9
I enjoy reading with my child more	92.7	7.3
The books have helped develop my child's speech and language	97.2	2.8
My child looks forward to the books arriving	97.8	2.2
We have been introduced to different authors & new books	98.8	1.2
My child is enthusiastic to share books with me	99.5	0.5

■ Yes ■ No ■ N/A

Figure 17 Child reading behaviours

Since receiving Imagination Library books, my child:

Behaviour	Always/often	Sometimes/occasionally	Never/Does not apply
Talks about things related to the book	32.3	30	37.7
Reads or pretend to read some words	35	26.3	38.6
Concentrates hard/ not distracted	49.8	33.1	17.1
Talks about or points to things in the book	72.2	10.7	17.1
Shows excitement/interest	77.7	13.4	8.8
Snuggle / cuddles you	81.1	15.3	3.6

■ Always/often ■ Sometimes/occasionally ■ Never/Does not apply

Figure 18 Parent reading behaviours

Make up your own words/tell own story: Always/often 15.8, Sometimes/occasionally 66.9, Never 17.3

Talk about other things: Always/often 42.2, Sometimes/occasionally 49.3, Never 8.4

Ask lots of questions: Always/often 53.8, Sometimes/occasionally 39.3, Never 7

Use different voices: Always/often 74.1, Sometimes/occasionally 23.5, Never 2.3

Read all the words on the page/point out all the pictures: Always/often 93, Sometimes/occasionally 7, Never 0

Cuddle/touch/hold child close: Always/often 95.7, Sometimes/occasionally 3.9, Never 0.1

■ Always/often ■ Sometimes/occasionally ■ Never

When looking at parental reports of children's reading behaviours (Figure 17 p249), 97.8% of respondents said that their child looks forward to the books arriving, "it makes my daughter so very happy when it comes through the post she wants it read straight away as soon as it enters through the letterbox" (Respondent 3/2) and 99.5% recorded that their child was enthusiastic to share books with them, "the smile she has when she brings what book she would like is priceless" (Respondent 3/122). This enthusiasm was shown through child-initiated book-sharing interactions, "My child loves reading and often brings a book saying 'read it together'!" (Respondent 3/270). Considering children's reactions when book-sharing, 77.9% of children were said always or very often to show excitement or interest when reading, "I buy books quite regularly, but my son doesn't find it as exciting as when the postman delivers the 'Dolly book'" (Respondent 3/95), and this rose to 91.2% when considering whether the child ever showed this behaviour. Within this question there was an age differential, with nearly half of parents of 0–6-month-olds stating this did not apply, indeed, of the 58 parents to choose this option, 49 had children under 13 months old, suggesting that these parents were not yet expecting an active participation or enjoyment from their child. However, even in this younger age bracket between 35% - 55% of parents reported excitement or interest shown always or very often, "my baby is 4 months and he sits in my lap and listens, and looks at the pictures" (Respondent 3/119). The parents who answered that they felt this question did not apply to their child had almost all answered positively about their child being enthusiastic about receiving the books earlier in the questionnaire, which suggests that there was a certain amount of vicarious enthusiasm being reported, or that when the parent considered showing interest in the context of being asked about other developmentally related behaviours such as talking about the book, they felt that their child was too young to participate in this element. Emergent research in this area such as observing 4-month-old children's responses to BookTrust books (Tsuji, 2013) alongside my planned observations of non-verbal children receiving and reading Imagination Library books might have provided some data about how both children and parents reacted to book arrival and sharing. Unfortunately, COVID-19 restrictions on in-person research meant that this was not possible, so it remains an area for future research.

11.3.2 What do children do when reading Imagination Library books?

Considering other child reading behaviours (Figure 17 249), 'snuggle/cuddle' was the most often reported behaviour, with 96.4 % of respondents saying that their child ever displayed this behaviour and 81.1% doing this always or very often. Again, those with young babies under 6 months were the most likely to report that this behaviour did not apply to their child, and only two out of 686 respondents reported that their child did not show this behaviour (where the parent anticipated that they might or could). Overall, half (47.4%) of the children were reported to always snuggle or cuddle their carers when reading.

With regard to their child's ability to concentrate on the book during book-sharing, 82.8% of all parents and 92.3% of parents with children over 12 months old felt that their child ever exhibited this behaviour. There was a broadly rising trend in concentration levels recorded, and the 'very often' category was most frequently chosen by parents in all the age groups over 12 months old, with 'sometimes' being the most populous category from birth to 12 months.

Around three-quarters (72.2%) of children were reported to talk about or point to things in the book, "our daughter (18 months) would have us reading to her all day long especially if it has 'ammmm' (animals) in it" (Respondent 3/52). This is a behaviour which can only be seen as part of developmental progression and in line with this, the majority of parents with children under 7 months felt that this did not apply to their child, with pointing typically developing in the 9–11-month age bracket and speech in recognisable words from 10 months onwards. Looking only at children over 12 months old, who would be generally expected to be developmentally capable of either pointing or talking about things in the book, 85.5% of children aged 13-60 months were reported to do this, rising to 94.7% showing this behaviour ever. Of the parents of 13-24-month-old children, 11.4% felt that this did not apply to them, the implications of which will be considered in Section 11.7.

When considering talking about things related to the book (extra-textual talk), 62.3% of all children were reported to engage in this behaviour which rose to 74.1% when looking at children aged over 12 months and 91.6% of children over 24 months. Most children were

recorded in the sometimes and very often categories which together accounted for 63.7% of responses about children over 2 years of age, who could be expected to be beginning to form clearer speech about wider topics of conversation than a simple point and name approach. Perhaps the last early literacy skill we might expect to see developing from those in the questionnaire is reading or pretending to read the words in the book. Again, there was a clear age profile to these answers with upward trends in the frequency as children's ages increased and a downward trend in the respondents feeling it did not apply; just over half – 52% of parents of 13-24-month-olds – felt it did not apply compared to just 15.4% of 25-36-month-olds. Over half (53.3%) of respondents with children aged 24 months or older reported that their child always or very often read or pretended to read some of the words in their books, with 87.9% of children ever engaging in this behaviour, "he will open pages and pretend to read" (Respondent 1/90).

11.4 Other impacts

11.4.1 Children in care

A few respondents (n < 5) shared that they were foster carers for children in receipt of Imagination Library books. Their views were unanimously positive about the particular impact on children in care and focused on the ownership for these children alongside the use of books as a tool to create opportunities for loving interactions.

> I think the books are a great service we read them all it also means when a child moves on from me home/adoption etc they usually have a lovely set of books to go with them of stories they are familiar with which can help them settle especially at bedtime. Reading is something we start with the children from the day they are placed with us as most have speech delay and are unhappy a cuddle with a book is easier to accept than a cuddle from a stranger at first (we usually have under 3-year-olds). Some of the children have never been read to so soon like the idea of their own books when I am using my budget to get essentials like clothes shoes etc. In short I think it is a fab and important service. A new book is a great way to remind me to read too. (Respondent 3/125)

11.4.2 The wider community

Parental comments did not always only consider their own family situations and children. Several families noted potential benefits for other families, and one noted the systemic problem of accessing the views of families further outside of the typical reach of research, "I believe many children whose parents do not prioritise reading (or completing surveys) will have benefitted especially from this scheme. I hope your survey accounts for these unheard voices. It is a worthwhile scheme" (Respondent 3/163). Respondents often positioned themselves as 'fortunate' or predisposed to read and reflected on what they perceived to be additional benefits for families without the economic or socio-educational resources they themselves possessed, "Not everyone is privilege to buy books for their children due to financial difficulties" (Respondent 1/2885). "Not every household can afford to get books so by having the Imagination Library they will get a book and can read with their children" (Respondent 1/2136).

Others compared their reading experiences with friends or family in other areas of the country, "I know friends who don't fall into the catchment for this and they really are missing out on such a great resource for children" (Respondent 3/166). Related to this, several families noted the change in their own experiences when moving from or to an area which was within the scheme and all of these comments reflected the view that the scheme was a positive additional experience for their children. "When we moved out of catchment my children missed not having the books sent. It was like a present from someone other than their family, like they were acknowledged and thought about by others" (Respondent 1/4201).

Some respondents noted the impact on the wider community as a result of all children in one area receiving the same books, "because lots of other local children get the books it helps develop a sense of community" (Respondent 1/1927). Parents have previously noted the importance of peer-to-peer support in embedding home learning activities (Barbour et al., 2018) which may form a positive feature of the programme's localised universality. This aspect was seen as 'levelling-up' the experience for the community, "it's egalitarian so all the local children get the same books!" (Respondent 1/2129). Because of the universality of

the programme, the books were sometimes the subject of projects by educational settings, "the preschool… often do projects around them, each child has the same book at home which really includes every child no matter what their home circumstances are" (Respondent 1/1794). This was seen as a positive home-setting link by parents, "her nursery also use the books so there is a link between home and her nursery which helps" (Respondent 1/1921). The universality of the programme within a specific area allows for shared cultural capital to be developed. With 7% of preschool children not learning nursery rhymes at home (Department for Education, 2019a), cultivating this shared cultural capital of stories and rhymes through the gifted books can support early school experiences as children attend with a more level playing field of HLE experience.

A small number of responses discussed how receiving the books as gifts made them more likely to gift the books on to other families, either when duplicates arrived or after children had outgrown them, "all the family love receiving the books, we also share them with cousins and neighbours, which we may not have done if we hadn't received them for free" (Respondent 3/80). "We're now starting to hand on some of the earlier books to her cousins as well" (Respondent 1/2005).

11.4.3 Dolly as a figurehead

The association between receiving gifted books and Dolly Parton herself was a clear thread running through many of the congratulatory comments that the scheme received. Parents appeared to be making the origins of the gift clear to their children, "my son runs to check the post and when a book arrives he asks 'Is this for me from Dolly Parton?!' We've been talking a lot about how they are a gift and how kind it is that she sends him a book she thinks he will like" (Respondent 3/322). Parents referred to Dolly in affectionate and familiar terms, "we loved receiving our books from Aunty Dolly every month" (Respondent 1/4248), "We love Dolly in our house" (Respondent 3/204).

11.4.4 COVID-19

Although not a focus of my research, as the surveying took place primarily during periods of COVID-19 lockdown, some respondents noted the particular impact of the books during the pandemic lockdown experience, "Due to the COVID isolation I always worried I don't be able to provide rich learning opportunities in terms of language development, but the books have been a huge a help" (Respondent 3/117). The lack of availability of books and activities due to local and national closures of early years groups, libraries and children's centres appeared to make the arrival of the monthly book even more impactful on families, "we so appreciate the books. They are the highlight of my child's month when they come through. Especially now we are shielding" (Respondent 1/1751).

In the compilation of the Phase 3 survey, my survey partners, North Lincolnshire Council, were interested in gathering COVID-19-related data for their own analyses. Some questions on this topic were therefore included in my survey although they were not intended to answer my own research questions. However, they did relate to RQ 3i, about parents' views of the impact of the Imagination Library so are briefly included within this section.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were positive about continuing to receive books during the pandemic. 97% of respondents felt that having books arriving was a huge benefit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering whether they and their child looked forward to receiving the books, 98.9% felt that this was so, which is marginally above the 97.8% who considered this to be the case when asked within the same survey about general receipt of the books (although this difference is not statistically significant). "Having my first child in lockdown has been very difficult and the delivery of the books have definitely been something to look forward to" (Respondent 3/312). When asked to think about their memories and experience of lockdown, 97.1% of respondents said that the books helped the families share special moments, "I am high risk of COVID so I haven't been out much for leisure time so, receiving Dolly's Imagination Library books is something me and my daughter do together" (Respondent 3/95). Overall, it is clear that receiving Imagination Library books had a particularly positive impact on parenting experiences during the lockdown, and that parents were very grateful for the scheme's continuation over this time.

11.5 Three families' stories

Three families from the North Lincolnshire cohort were interviewed. They were chosen with the aim of gaining insight into families for whom the demographic indicators suggest that there may be fewer books in the household. The families were either self-selected by providing their contact details in response to the questionnaire or were suggested by North Lincolnshire staff who were already working with the family. Families who had completed university level education were excluded from the interviews, as there is significant research linking higher educational levels to book ownership and the frequency of daily reading. The three families chosen are from, but cannot be said to represent, some socioeconomic groups where children are statistically less likely to achieve well within the school system: those with GCSE level education themselves (Goodman, 2010; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017a), young parents (Cantalini et al., 2020), and those from recently immigrated Eastern European families (Stokes, 2015). Names were kept or pseudonyms were chosen as desired by each family.

11.5.1 Michelle's story

Michelle is an independent parent in her early twenties and is White British. She is the mother of two children, a 10-month-old girl, Lily Grace, and a boy of 2 years and 7 months, Lucas. Her partner comes over three nights per week to stay with them. Michelle finished college at 18, and recalled being read to as a child, "every night, I used to have my supper and a bath then a book" and says the routine "stuck" with her so she does that with both of her children. She describes enjoying reading, but says that she rarely has time to read for herself.

When thinking about her reasons for reading with her children, Michelle described the importance of family relationships, "I think it helps to create the bond between the child and the parents and also the siblings who are sharing the book". She described how she found that reading "relaxes them" and that they read through the day but particularly as "downtime" before bed.

Michelle said that both her children enjoyed books and stories, and throughout the interview her son was bringing books to show, including his favourite 'The Gingerbread Man'. Michelle shared how he brought stories to her to read and will chose this instead of playing with his toys. Michelle specifically shares books with her daughter too, giving her a book alongside toys to choose from. "She sits in a chair and reads, it looks like she's reading it properly." In Michelle's home, reading takes place on the carpet as well as in the bedroom. She describes how her partner is keen to read to the children too, "after baths and pyjamas are on we lay them both in Lucas' bed, we read to them then we do kisses goodnight".

Thinking about receiving the Imagination Library books, Michelle described how Lucas says "book" most days when he hears the postman coming as he knows that he gets a book in the post each month. Her little girl does not yet understand about the postman but Michelle always opens them with the children and they read them straight away.

Michelle noticed that her little boy is particularly drawn to colourful books and Lily Grace likes black and white pictures at the moment. She was very clear about her children's favourites and Lucas in particular was very enthusiastic about the books she held up to show, talking when Michelle showed the 'When I Grow up…Builder' book.

When asked if the Imagination Library had made a difference to her family, Michelle said that "books can be expensive at times," and noted that with two children receiving books "it helps to grow their book collection up a lot faster than what we would have been able to do." She felt that it "helped the family a lot" as well as being a "present for the children".

11.5.2 Maria and Kim's story

Marie and Kim are the mothers of one child who is 20 months old. Sebastian is nonverbal and is currently awaiting an assessment of autism. Both parents are White British with Marie completing a year of college (A Level equivalent) education and Kim completing two years. Both are now in their late twenties. Marie did not recall whether she was read to as a child and did not remember sitting and reading herself, but Kim, who was one of four

children, remembers her big brother reading to them all in the lounge. She said that he was "very creative with reading", "interactive" and would "make funny noises with it" and she directly tries to replicate this experience with her son to try and get him engaged.

Kim described how although "Marie is not one that likes to read for herself", Kim will "happily take a book to the bath and read for a couple of hours". Marie said of herself that she "enjoys reading children's books" and relates it perhaps to them being easy to read. Working with adults with autism, she will happily read similar books to them as part of her support work.

Thinking about their son, the mothers described him as "excited and giddy" when he is reading, "he likes to turn the pages. He likes to take control of the book… if it's a feely-touch book he'll touch it". They named some of his favourites: 'Peepo' and 'Jemima Quack Quack' and said that they have his books out for "at least 80% of the day". They are hoping it will "start to build his vocabulary" as Sebastian is currently non-verbal, and they've noticed "we've been getting a lot of 'baaa' and 'gaaa'" with his speech over the most recent couple of months. They hoped that his enjoyment of books stays with him, "because as you grow up you tend to forget about those things, you want to go out with your friends. But Sebastian is so engaged in these books that I think it is going to help him develop quickly." Kim felt that Sebastian "might be very clever, because he's obsessed with books" and Marie said "he's very clever, if you say 'go and find the Jemima flaps book' he'll go into his book box and bring you that book."

When asked about the role that reading together plays in their family, Kim referred to their journey as a gay couple to have their son:

> Because it's a bit of a different situation, Sebastian isn't a child that you just have…it was very much 'arranged', so for me it's a very content feeling and makes us feel like a real family unit, and it's these little things like reading together and having meals together that make us feel more engaged and it feels like 'the norm' and acceptance. (Kim)

Looking at where in the house they read, the mothers described Sebastian's 'reading corner' where, when there was not a Christmas tree up, "we normally have a pouffe with a blanket on it". They said that "they actually purposely put it there as a reading corner for him", and though sometimes he will go there to nap, "nine times out of ten he's got a book and goes there because he wants us to read it". Marie also described the comfy chair where "I always sit here of a night-time on this corner and snuggle up". Although they described Sebastian as "an active child" Marie said that "when he has a book he does just sit still and cuddle up with it".

When describing what happens when an Imagination Library book arrives, Marie described her own excitement as well as that of her son. "I get very excited [laughs] 'IT'S NEW BOOK DAY!' Sebastian runs on the spot like happy feet". When it is opened, "he sits down with me and we'll read it and then that book seems to be like his favourite until the next one comes." Marie explained how with Sebastian, they need to read exactly the same thing in the same way each time, and he will get upset if they try to describe other aspects, for example, "oh, there's a bird in the tree".

When thinking about how the Imagination library books impact on them as a family, the couple did note that "most of them have mum and dad on the pictures", but they commented, "it's really good to get free books… we're able to go out and buy things but some families can't afford to buy children new books each month." Marie said, "it's like there's no excuse not to read," and Kim recalled hand-me-down books from her own childhood and appreciated Sebastian having new things. Maire mentioned that she can feel a bit sad when he bends the books or ruins them, "and then we think, oh, at least we're getting a new book [next month]."

11.5.3 Joanna's story

Joanna is a White Polish mother with three children and lives with her husband. Wiktoria, her youngest child, is 2 years old. Joanna completed education to A Level equivalent followed by some technical qualifications in her industry. Joanna's interview was conducted via an interpreter, therefore, all contributions were via reported and translated speech.

Joanna remembers reading with her parents as a little girl, going to the library and enjoying reading by herself, which she could do at age 5, prior to the compulsory school age of 7. As an adult, Joanna reads when she has time, which can be difficult with two children. Her daughter loves mum reading to her and now also picks books out herself and will concentrate and tell stories to herself, commenting on events and characters in the books. Joanna thought that the process of book-sharing brings them together and that Wiktoria feels more loved because of it. Because of the closeness of the process, her daughter feels more confident in gaining new vocabulary and can translate what happens in the books into her real-life experiences.

In their household, reading happens during the day but is also specifically part of the bedtime routine, where Joanna reads Disney stories in Polish that were sent over by Wiktoria's grandmother. The children's father plays with the children, but their mother is the main adult who reads with them.

When an Imagination Library book arrives, the children ask which one of them it is for and ask questions about what it is about. They always wanted to read them straight away. The children like the novelty of new books, but Joanna noted that she had a large number of Polish language books in the house. She had some opinions about the Imagination Library books – that sometimes the content is not always related to things that the children can identify with (unrelated to the English language) and that this is noticeable when the children do not want to return to a book. She found some of the content questionable, an example being 'Funnybones', which she felt wasn't suitable subject matter for a children's book. When she chooses books for her children, Joanna looks for books that teach something, particularly those that teach positive social interactions and life skills. She doesn't like 'books about nothing' which do not teach anything, but likes books that, for example teach children about animals and encourage them to make noises. Joanna is also influenced by colourful illustrations, particularly those that encourage children to retell their own stories.

Throughout the interviews, the three older children were excited and picked up and showed books to the camera and their parent(s). It was clear that all the children had a positive relationship with books and throughout the interviews all the children at one time or another showed that they wanted their parent(s) to read a book they had chosen to them.

11.6 Summary of the parental perception of the impact of DPIL on parental beliefs and practices about book-sharing and children's experiences of books and book-sharing

Parents were overwhelmingly positive in their consideration of the impact of receiving Imagination Library books on themselves and their children. Many found that receiving books increased the size of their child's library, introduced them and their child to new texts and authors and had a positive impact on their reading frequency by providing a regular impetus and reminder with each new delivery of a book. These benefits were found by parents regardless of their intrinsic likelihood and/or financial ability to purchase books for their children or to visit a library. Parents who noted that they had a lower income often spoke about the scheme supporting their children to have books of their own to read when they might otherwise not have this access. The closure of local services during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and reinforced the value of the scheme to many families because their usual activities were curtailed by lockdowns. Parental self-report measures about the impact of receiving Imagination Library books on themselves and on their children's attitudes toward books and reading correlated strongly, with the majority of parents reporting positive impacts and with a smaller group sharing that their report of no change was due to a ceiling effect from their already positive attitudes toward reading and books. Parents who were interviewed were very positive about the scheme and its impact on them as a family. The children's excitement about the postal delivery of books and their involvement in initiating reading sessions shone through all three parental descriptions of book-sharing in their homes.

11.7 Considerations for book-gifting schemes

Although the benefits of receiving books were felt universally, from parents who were already likely to own books and read to those for whom the gifted books were the start of a library, families with lower parental education levels were less likely to consider the benefits of book-sharing in terms of language and literacy development than families with university-level education. Messaging around the links between an early start with book-sharing and later literacy development might strengthen these parents' motivations to read with their child, particularly with a focus on ensuring parents that know that they do not need to be 'good at reading' to positively impact their child's reading journey.

Around half of parents of 0–6-month-olds felt that their children would not show excitement/interest around book-sharing and over 10% of parents of 13–24-month-old children did not feel that the child pointing at/talking about the book was developmentally appropriate, which may mean that clearer information about what children can do at each age, stretching expectations might be a useful piece of work. Particularly with the youngest babies, helping parents recognise signs of interest in terms of attention, gaze and early vocalisations may help parents to be motivated to interact with their child (Brazelton & Sparrow, 1992). This has implications for organisations to better communicate developmental expectations and what interactions with or interest in books might look like at different ages.

The modelling and encouragement of extra-textual talk, the use of 'silly voices' and asking of questions may be the area where most growth could be made in terms of expanding and improving the quality of reading interactions in recipient families. For most of the families surveyed these reading behaviours were occasional rather than frequent, so information about the benefits of extra-textual talk could be any area where practitioners can usefully support parents as part of book-gifting.

The most frequent parental requests that emerged from the Phase 1 and 3 surveys were to see more diversity in the books sent - "More books introducing diversity & recognising

language diversity would be amazing" Respondent 1/1988 - and to reinstate the scheme in areas where funding had been withdrawn.

12.0 What is the impact of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library on parental engagement in book-sharing and on child development from 0-5 years old?

12.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I draw together the different research questions to answer the wider thesis question, 'what is the impact of the Imagination Library on parental engagement in book-sharing and on child development from 0-5 years old?' I consider the impact on five different areas: reading frequency, the child's literacy development and attainment, the child's enjoyment of reading, the impact on the parent and the impact on the parent-child bond. I then propose a new model of book-sharing and a revised logic model for the Imagination Library before concluding with considerations for book-gifting schemes.

12.2 The impact on reading frequency

The majority of respondents to the Phase 1 survey read with their children daily to a higher degree than found in studies of the general population, but within the respondent group, Imagination Library participants read more frequently than the non-participants. There was an absolute increase of between 3.5% and 5% in daily reading across demographic groups including gender of parent, parental educational level, number of children in the family and from the first three months of life through to 4 years of age. Parental education levels were not correlated with differences in the impact of the programme; the uplift in reading frequency was found to be broadly similar across the education levels.

To illustrate the impact of Imagination Library participation on reading frequency, Figure 19 (p266) represents the Phase 1 survey respondents as if they were a village of 100 people. Participation in the Imagination Library correlated with an additional three frequent readers per 100 people reading daily, and an additional two none or irregular readers reading a few times a week. Despite the high ceiling effect of the respondent group being more likely than

the general population to read daily or frequently with their baby or child, this illustrates a significant potential impact on reading frequency within households.

Figure 19 The impact of Imagination Library participation on reading frequency
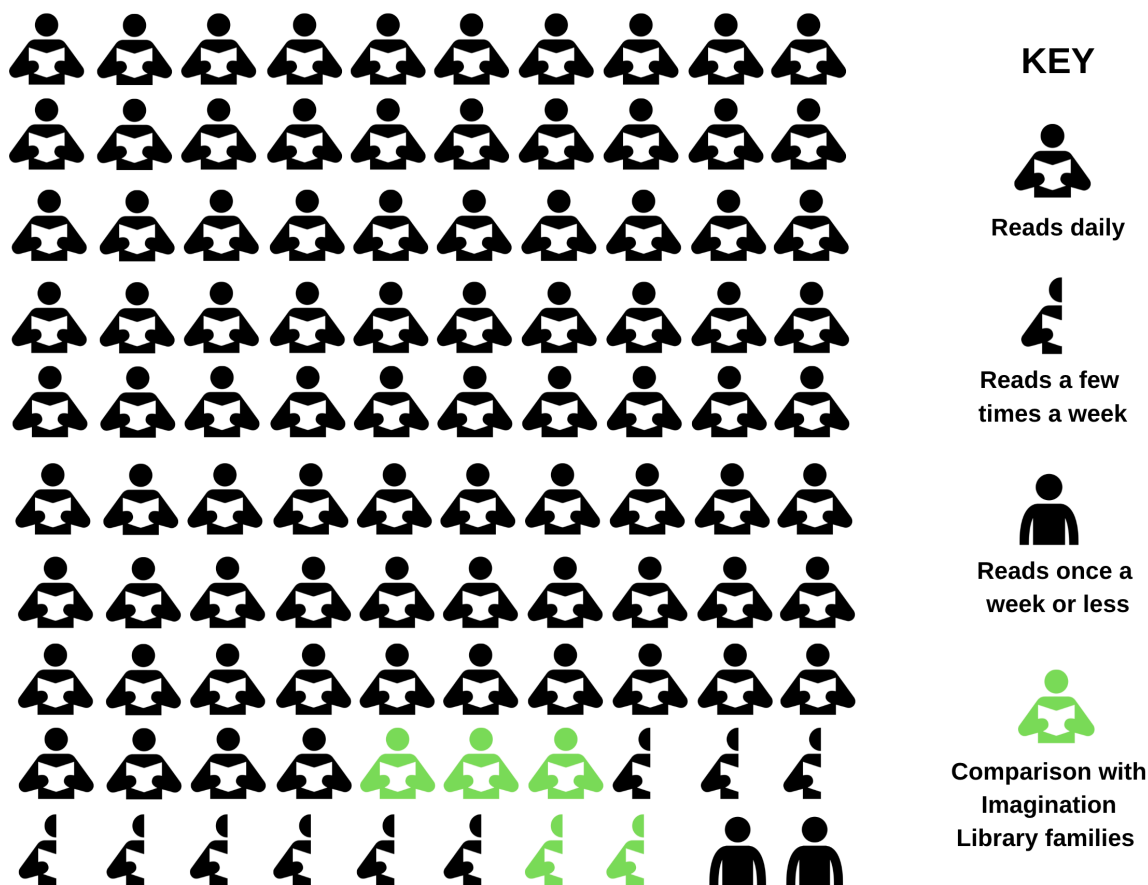
As a thought experiment in extrapolation, if a similar impact was found within the wider United Kingdom population, this could mean that each year around 35,000 children would be read with more frequently if the Imagination Library were a universally available programme (based on a birth rate of 700,000 live births/year).

The findings around reading frequency were considered using binary logistic regression to determine if, when holding sociodemographic variables constant, there was a statistically significant relationship between daily reading frequency and participation in the Imagination Library programme. There was a weak but clear correlation found (see Section 9.5.9) between Imagination Library participation and increased daily reading with an odds ratio of 30% increase in daily reading frequency. Parental responses to the Phase 3

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questionnaire triangulated this, with 88% of the families surveyed attributing higher reading frequencies to the receipt of Imagination Library books.

Through the bivariate and logistic regression analyses, Imagination Library participation was clearly correlated with daily reading frequency, and through consideration of parent-reported views of change, causation was considered by the parents themselves to be attributable to the intervention.

12.3 The impact on children's literacy development and attainment

Participating in the Imagination Library for more than 12 months was correlated with increased reading Early Learning Goal and Good Level of Development scores at age 5 (see Section 10.5), which an age-equivalent point in an English child's school journey as the start of kindergarten in an American child's school life.

The original logic model for the Imagination Library (Figure 7 p87) counts "kindergarten literacy readiness" as a long-term output of Imagination Library involvement (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021a). The appropriateness of the idea of children being 'school-ready' rather than schools and settings being ready to support the child at their developmental stage has been discussed in Section 3.2.4, so I will take here a generous definition of "kindergarten literacy readiness" to mean a set of skills and dispositions which are reflective of those which are valued by the educational establishment. Although this study did not consider children at the point of entry to school in the United Kingdom, but at the end of their first year of schooling (reception year), this is broadly equivalent to the time that American children will start kindergarten (Year 1 in the United Kingdom being equivalent to kindergarten in the United States) and so is congruent with the Imagination Library's logic model. It is important to note that this year, through statutory intervention, is focused on the direct, formal teaching of phonics and reading (Office for Standards in Education Children's Services and Skills, 2017), and this focus is becoming more prevalent in preschool settings where early phonics teaching is becoming commonplace (Boardman, 2019, 2021). The cohort studied were all registered within the school system; however, they

can be assumed to have had broadly equitable access to phonics teaching within their school or setting.

When considering children's literacy attainment, this was measured using the school assessments of the Early Learning Goal for reading, and the Good Level of Development indicator from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (Department for Education, 2017). I found that when considering the child's gender, term of birth, first language, disadvantage indicators, special needs status and area of residence, receiving Imagination Library books for more than 12 months was correlated with increased EYFS scores. For the domain of reading, this resulted in a 54% relative gain, and for GLD there was a 40% relative gain against students not enrolled in the programme or who had been enrolled for less than 12 months. This translated into a hypothetical 'average' child who had received Imagination Library books for more than 12 months being 6.7% more likely to achieve the reading ELG and 5.7% more likely to achieve a Good Level of Development than their unregistered peer, when holding the other variables constant. This percentage difference, as it considers the known variables which significantly impact on academic attainment, is a useful guide to the potential difference to end of reception year assessment outcomes made by receiving Imagination Library books for over 12 months.

The widely documented gains in early literacy skills through frequent book-sharing experiences (Mol & Bus, 2011; Whitehurst et al., 1988), the enhanced achievement linked with the development of reading for pleasure (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Kirsch et al., 2003) together with the importance of starting book-sharing early (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002b) make a solid case for focusing on frequent book-sharing from a young age. My research found that Imagination Library participants in my survey were around 30% more likely to read daily than those who did not receive the programme. This translates as an absolute increase of an average of 3.2% more families in each demographic group that was investigated. This raises the average number of parents reading daily from 84.5% for non-participants reading daily to 87.5% for programme participants. Although the respondent group for the Phase 1 survey read more frequently as a whole group than demonstrated in comparable survey findings (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014) the increase was perhaps somewhat capped by the generally high rate of daily reading. Within the wider population,

it could be that the Imagination Library participation gains seen here within reading frequency would be larger, with the potential to move more families to a position of daily reading. There is also a possibility that parents with less inclination, time, or tools to read with their child would be unaffected by the gift of books as the gift itself might not be enough to overcome intrinsic barriers to daily reading that exist within some families. It is, however, interesting that even within a respondent group who are intrinsically more likely to favour book-sharing as an activity (demonstrated through their engagement with a voluntary survey from an unknown source), where respondents were more socially advantaged than the general population (as measured by parental educational attainment) the families who received Imagination Library books read more frequently than the other families. This held true despite programme participants being overrepresented in the lower parental educational qualifications and underrepresented within university-level education within the total respondent group. This finding was also present within each parental educational level group from no qualifications through to postgraduate level education.

Parents in both Phase 1 and Phase 3 surveys were clear that they felt there was a link between receiving Imagination Library books and their children's literacy development, with 64% of respondents in the Phase 1 survey listing benefits directly related to literacy such as speaking, listening, communicating and learning to read. Almost half of the respondents talked about increasing their children's vocabulary and language, relating this to both gains currently seen and to future expectations.

Parents also reported that involvement in the Imagination Library meant that their child had more books in the home, which is a factor related to later literacy attainment (Clark & Poulton, 2011; Knowland & Formby, 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). This finding was true across parents with higher and lower educational levels and was commented on by both parents who said that they had few resources to buy books and by those who noted that their child already had an extensive home library.

There was a clear positive impact on children's literacy attainment for Imagination Library participants, which seems likely to be linked to the greater reading frequency in these

households. A subsidiary positive factor may be that the curated choice of developmentally appropriate books optimises the chances of learning within book-sharing interactions.

12.4 The impact on children's enjoyment of reading

The importance of enjoyment or reading for pleasure cannot be overstated in terms of literacy outcomes (Cremin et al., 2019). Developing reading for pleasure in the early years is seen as key to later continued enjoyment and attainment with parents who focus on reading as entertainment being more positive about book-sharing than those who focus only on developing literacy skills (Sonnenschein et al., 2000). The programme's drive to get more books into homes is supported by evidence that the presence of books in the home is one of two aspects linked to sustaining reading engagement over time, the other being that reading is valued in the home (Baker & Scher, 2002).

The COVID-19 related changes in the research plans meant that children's enjoyment of reading was not actively gathered through video evidence but was instead reliant on parent-reported data. Parents reported that children showed excitement or interest in book-sharing (77.9% in the Phase 3 survey) with 99.5% of parents saying that their child was enthusiastic about sharing books with them. The free-text comments bore this out, with parents frequently referring to child enjoyment when discussing the scheme, "My child loves reading and often brings a book saying 'read it together'!" (Respondent 3/270). Parents reported increasing levels of enjoyment as their children got older, with many parents feeling that these questions were less applicable (choosing the 'not applicable' option in the survey) in the younger age bands.

Other measures of interest, such as engagement with the book through pointing, talking, or reading/pretending to read the words, were reported by more than half of the parents, with increasing numbers of children said to show these behaviours at each book-sharing session as the age of the child increased. Babies under 6 months were the least likely to be reported to enjoy book-sharing, and it may be that giving parents support to look for developmentally appropriate proxies for enjoyment such as eye gaze and mirroring of behaviours would help parents to identify and capitalise on young babies' indicators of enjoyment of books.

Specific to the postal book-gifting aspect of the Imagination Library, parents reported that their child's enjoyment was often not only around the reading of the book but also its reception, which speaks to the importance of the book's position as a gift alongside the method of delivery being intrinsically exciting to young children. The postal aspect of the scheme may help build and sustain excitement about and engagement in book-sharing. Indeed, several parents reported that their child frequently asks whether their book has arrived in the post or that they would actively seek it out in the family postal delivery.

Parents also discussed the type of book gifted by the Imagination Library, with many positive comments about their child's enjoyment, including texts that the parent would not have usually considered enjoyable for their child. The curation of the content as to be age-appropriate and appealing to each cohort may be a specific mechanism for increasing reading enjoyment, as the books may be more likely to 'land well' with each child than a less knowledgably chosen gift might have done.

The Imagination Library's impact on children's enjoyment of reading can be seen through parent-reported comments detailing how their child reacts to receiving and reading gifted books. The mechanisms of a postal gift, received frequently, and meeting the child's likely developmental stage while enlarging the child's library and facilitating regular, positive interactions around book-sharing all contribute to developing and maintaining supportive and pleasurable reading habits over time.

12.5 The impact on the parent-child bond

Although book-sharing is predominantly related in the literature to early literacy advantages, this was not the only, or indeed the main benefit drawn out by the parent respondents in the surveys. The key benefits described by parents were based on enhancing connections between the adult and the child, with 84% of respondents noting this as a benefit for the parent and 73% as a benefit for the child. Among these responses, over half of the parents talked specifically about bonding and a third discussed the importance of time spent together. Bonding with one's child is an element of developing a secure

attachment, which in itself is linked to later literacy attainment (van IJzendoorn et al., 1995). Parents develop secure attachments with their children through offering care which is "warm, sensitive and consistent" (Moullin et al., 2014, p. 4). Attachment and early language development are interlinked (Thompson, 2008; van IJzendoorn et al., 1995), with what is thought to be a bidirectional reinforcement mechanism where secure parents are better at managing interactions and securely attached children are more receptive to the interactions (Belsky & Fearon, 2002).

Thinking about why book-sharing might be seen as a bonding activity for parents and children, it can provide opportunities for responsive and warm interactions through close physical contact, verbal interaction and joint enjoyment of the activity. It is a predictable activity, where the same thing can happen at each interaction and there are opportunities for attuning sensitivity through the responsiveness of the carer to the child's interactions or verbalisations about the book.

When book-sharing, over 90% of parents always reported cuddling, holding or touching their child during the session, showing almost ubiquitous close physical contact during the book-sharing activity. Physical contact was the most prevalent behaviour among all parent-child dyads from birth up to 5 years old, which may account for the parental consensus on book-sharing as a bonding activity. Uniquely among early literacy activities, book-sharing necessitates close physical contact through both the parent and the child focusing on one item from the same physical direction, as is necessitated by holding and reading a book. In this way the book, as an object of joint attention, is unique, as it is traditionally viewed from the same direction for both parties, compared to a toy, which can be manipulated between two parties who are seated opposite to each other.

Parents also commented on how taking part in book-sharing with their baby or child helped them to know more about their child, which is another way in which stronger bonds can be developed, because the parent can modify their parenting to better meet their child's current needs and interests.

12.6 The impact on the parent

Few studies have focused on the perceived benefits of book-sharing to parents, although as half of the reading dyad, their enjoyment and motivation may be impacted positively or negatively by their experiences. Although parents do many things with and for their child out of necessity, from changing nappies through to standing on a cold football pitch during sports clubs, understanding if and how parents can benefit from a shared activity is important for understanding their intrinsic motivations to read or not to read with their child.

72% of respondents reported that their family involvement with the Imagination Library was a positive or very positive change for themselves as parents, with a further 28% recording no change in attitudes. This lack of change was explained in free-text comments by some parents as relating to their already positive attitudes toward books and book-sharing, which created a perceived ceiling effect on their attitudes. It could be surmised that if these parents were representative of the rest of the respondents recording no change, that parents without a positive attitude toward reading with their child would be very few and far between in the survey. This is triangulated by the very small number of negative comments about book-sharing experiences, and the small number of negative comments about the scheme (which were generally related to administrative matters). It also confirms that the surveys were likely to be biased towards recruiting parents with a pre-existing interest in book-sharing rather than being representative of the wider parenting population in the United Kingdom.

For many parents, the vicarious pleasure of their child's enjoyment of book-sharing played a key role in their own enjoyment. With the Imagination Library experience, this was not only by the sharing of books within book-sharing sessions, but also through the child's excitement upon receiving a book through the post, alongside the anticipatory questions of whether the postal worker had brought a book for them today.

Parents also enjoyed reading with and to their children, enjoying the mechanics of reading aloud (doing the silly voices, sharing the stories) alongside, for some, revisiting their own

childhood experiences by re-reading books from their own childhood or recreating positive childhood reading experiences.

Some parents who had self-acknowledged lower literacy levels commented on how receiving the books helped them to engage in an activity which they would otherwise have felt had barriers to their participation. Likewise, parents who said that their household budget would have been overstretched by frequent book-buying felt a tangible benefit from receipt of the books, by releasing family funds for other items, or by supporting the growth of a book collection as the family budget could or would not have been used for this purpose.

For some parents, book-sharing gave them opportunities to contribute to their self-image as 'good parents', as the activity was seen to be synonymous with positive parenting ideals of spending time with and investing in your child. Parents felt that the activity supported their knowledge of their own child, both in terms of their likes and dislikes, and their current developmental stage.

Considering behaviour changes among parents, 88% of the respondents said that they read more regularly because they received Imagination Library books. Some of the reasons parents gave for this centred around the 'nudge' or reminder that receiving regular books gave, both directly to them and through their child's requests to read a new book. This finding triangulates the statistical findings regarding the reading frequency reviewed in Section 12.3. Receiving gifted books also contributed to the development of household routines, particularly around bedtime, which many parents found were supportive of calm, ordered parenting. Many parents reflected that book-sharing relaxed them, their children or both parties, and this again supported parental well-being and positive parenting more widely.

Being part of the Imagination Library programme supports parents to read regularly with their child, which in turn supports a positive parental self-image, and for the vast majority of survey respondents, it was an enjoyable activity. The gift of books supported family budgets, routine-setting and serves as an ongoing reminder to engage in book-sharing as a frequent

activity. For almost all of the parents surveyed, participating in book-sharing was an enjoyable activity for themselves.

12.7 A new model of book-sharing

In Section 3.3.1, I considered existing models of book-sharing which illustrate factors which affect quality book-sharing (Fletcher & Reese, 2005) and aspects of parental activity supportive of literacy development (Sylva et al., 2018) along with changes in contribution roles within the activity over time (van Kleeck et al., 2003). In this section, I detail my new model of book-sharing, which encompasses factors which impact on book-sharing (Figure 20 p276), the parent and child benefits of book-sharing (Figure 21 p277), and the interplay between the outcomes of early book-sharing (Figure 22 p278).

Considering Fletcher and Reese's (2005) model, there were aspects of demographic and attitudinal factors which occurred in the literature as variables which affected book-sharing, but these were not present in the model. In addition, the model was presented as a Venn diagram yet the overlapping segments were not congruent with this type of model. I re-envisaged this first model (Figure 20 p276) as a continuum, to illustrate the factors which are able to be changed through parental choices and those which are not able to be changed. I felt it was important to recognise that some variables can be influenced, as this can support practitioners and parents alike in recognising the positive changes they can make to support book-sharing experiences. This is particularly important in light of the findings from the EPPE project that "what parents do is more important than who they are" (Sylva et al., 2004, p. 70), that the home learning environment has a greater association with literacy gains than social class or parental education levels. The concept that parents, regardless of their backgrounds, are able to change their child's life opportiunities by creating a supportive HLE is an empowering message, both for parents and for those who work to support them. Thus, the variables on the right-hand side of Figure 20 (p276) can be influenced by both the parent directly and through supportive programmes and initiatives such as the Imagination Library.

Figure 20 Factors that impact on book-sharing - a new model

Outside parental control			Within parental control

Age of child	Home environment	Quality of interaction	Book choice
Gender	Family size	Parental attitude	Length of interaction
Ethnicity	Child attention	Type of interaction	Frequency of interaction
Culture	Parental education	Parent-child attachment	
Language diversity			
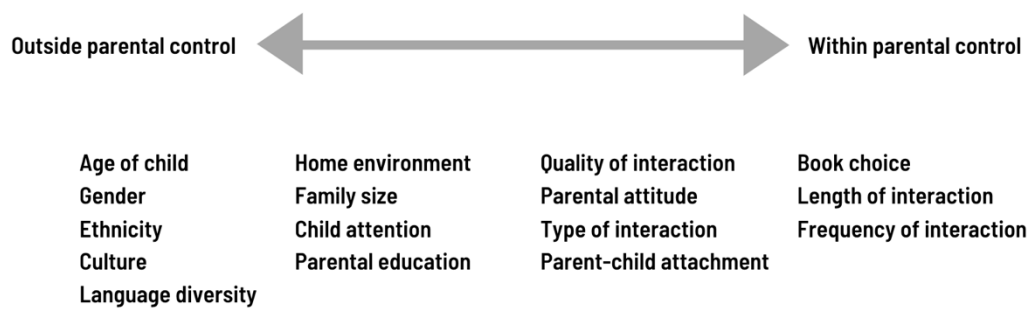
As much of the discourse around the benefits of book-sharing in the early years has focused on tangible literacy skills, I designed a model that outlines the benefits of book-sharing as found both through the literature and by listening to parents' thoughts about the benefits to themselves and their children. The inclusion of socioemotional benefits for children has been covered to some extent in other research, although the literacy skills outcomes dominate in this area, but the inclusion of benefits to parents themselves is an emergent field (Levy et al., 2018; Preece & Levy, 2018) and this large-scale study of parental views contributes important new data to this area of research interest.

In the second model (Figure 21 p277), I summarise the benefits articulated by respondents in the Phase 1 survey alongside known benefits derived from the literature, as discussed in Chapter 3.0. By diversifying the benefits of early book-sharing so that the focus includes equal weight given to socioemotional benefits as to skill-based benefits, those who are involved in supporting parents may be assisted in communicating about the benefits of early book-sharing in a way which speaks to parents' own beliefs; to this end the benefits are listed broadly in order of importance to the parents who responded to the survey. The inclusion of benefits to parents is important to better understand what influences parents to share books with their child, and for those who are designing reading interventions, it is valuable to ensure that the interventions start with the family, rather than the perceived outcome (Levy, 2008; Levy et al., 2018).

Figure 21 The benefits for parents and children of early book-sharing – a new model
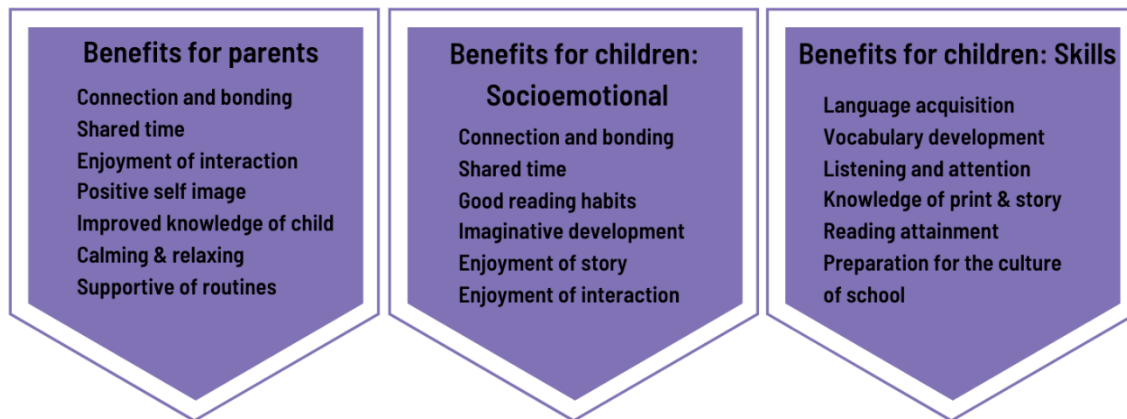
The third model (Figure 22 p278) takes a broader view of outcomes for early book-sharing, using a triangle to demonstrate the interconnected nature of the three proposed pillars of positive impact on children: enjoyment, attachment and attainment. I propose that where high-quality and frequent book-sharing takes place, children's reading attainment and enjoyment and the reinforcement of secure parental attachment work together in a virtuous circle resulting in optimised achievement as understood within the school system (i.e., pre-reading and reading skills and behaviours) and the ongoing development of intrinsic motivations to read for pleasure.

I envisage that this model will be of use to those who need to consider the benefits of book-sharing on child development, particularly those who are working within the education system, to illustrate how early book-sharing experiences rather than early formal literacy teaching can provide a secure base for both current and future literacy development. The focus on developing intrinsic motivations to read is understood as key to creating a longevity of reading attainment (Cremin et al., 2019) and so clearly articulating the pathway to its creation through early book-sharing experiences may help to refocus the discourse from skills-building and formal teaching to a reading for pleasure-based approach.

Figure 22 The impacts of early book-sharing – a new model

ENJOYMENT

HIGH ACHIEVING CHILDREN

SECURELY ATTACHED CHILDREN

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION TO READ FOR PLEASURE

OPTIMISED ACHIEVEMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

ATTAINMENT   WELL SUPPORTED CHILDREN   **ATTACHMENT**
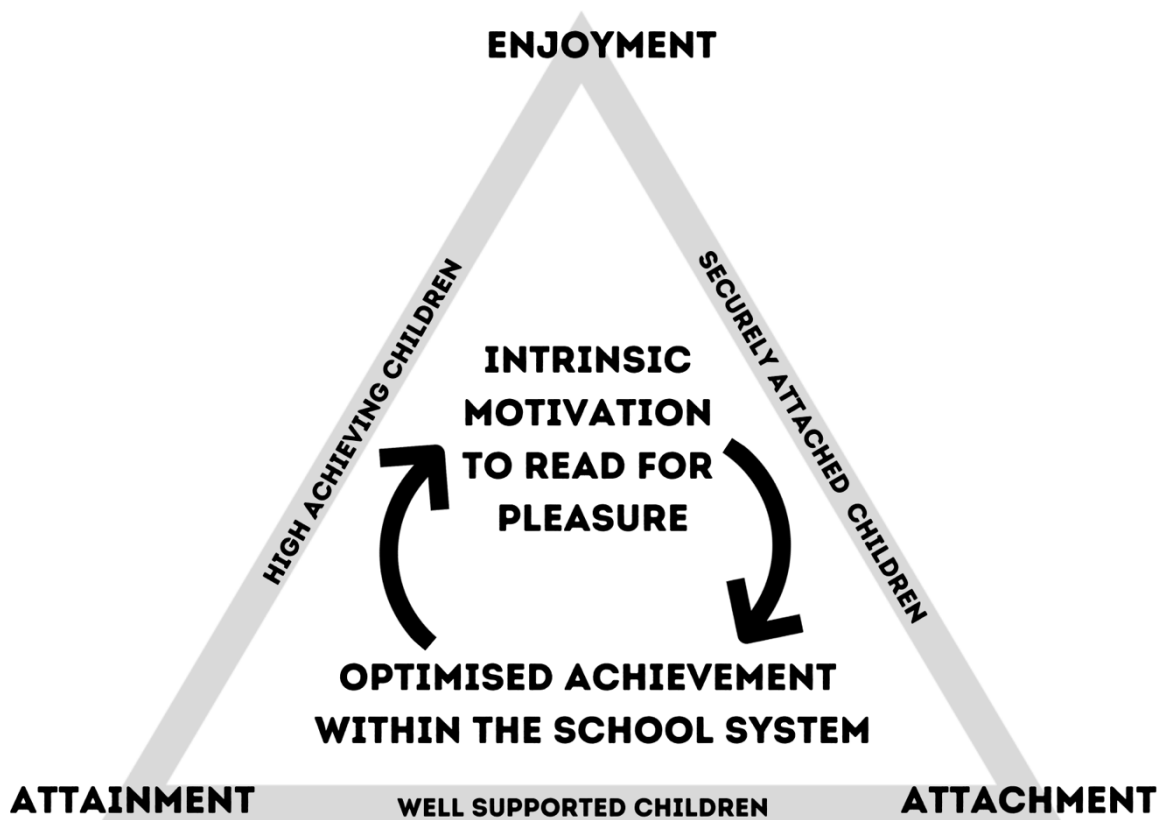
These three models of book-sharing cover different aspects of the activity, from the variables which impact the experience to the outcomes from it. In the following section I will use these concepts to enhance the existing logic model of the Imagination Library programme.

12.8 A revised logic model for the Imagination Library

The original Imagination Library logic model (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021a), was derived from a review of the evidence surrounding the programme from research (Johnson, 2016b). I used the model's original structure, noting where the current study evidences aspects of the previous model (written in bold), and adding new aspects which have been established from the current research (written in black). It is important to note that aspects of the original that remain unchanged or unverified in the current research should not be interpreted as being disputed; rather, that this study did not seek to address or confirm all aspects of the original model.

Figure 23 An enhanced Imagination Library Logic Model

Enhanced Imagination Library Logic Model

OUTCOMES

INPUTS	STRATEGIES	IMMEDIATE	INTERMEDIATE	ULTIMATE

INPUTS

Books mailed to home in child's name

Book sharing guides included with books

STRATEGIES

Target families with children ages birth to five

Caregivers read daily with children

Caregivers read books multiple times with children

Caregivers cuddle and connect with their child

Caregivers ask questions and model literacy practices

Caregivers ask questions about the book and relate it to the child's life

IMMEDIATE

Enhanced home literacy environment
- **Earlier onset of caregiver/child book reading**
- **Increased frequency of caregiver/child book reading**
- Increased duration of caregiver/child book reading sessions
- **Increased number and variety of picture books in the home**

Positive attitudes about reading and motivation to read among caregivers and children
- **Increased frequency of child requests for reading**
- Increased frequency of child book play

Increased interactions between caregivers and children during book reading
- Increased child responses/contributions during book reading
- Increased skill practice
- **Positive affective displays (cuddles, hugs)**

INTERMEDIATE

Increased emerging literacy skills
- Concepts about print
- Alphabet knowledge
- **Receptive and expressive vocabulary**
- Phonological awareness
- Phonological memory

Development of positive reading habits

Development of reading for pleasure

Supportive of developing calm home environment (e.g. bedtime routines)

Improved caregiver knowledge of child's development and interests

Positive caregiver self image

ULTIMATE

ATTAINMENT: School literacy attainment
- **Enhanced word reading**
- **Language acquisition & speaking**
- **Knowledge of print & story**
- **Comprehension & understanding**
- **Vocabulary development**
- **Listening & attention**

Preparation for the culture of school

ENJOYMENT: Intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure

ATTACHMENT: Enhanced caregiver-child connection and bonding

Key:
White = original text
White bold text = thesis findings concur with the previous model
Black = additional elements added to the model

Considering the strategies by which the Imagination Library programme operates, parental daily reading was confirmed as the majority behaviour within the survey cohorts of Phase 1 and 3 respondents. More than half of Phase 3 respondents reported pointing to or naming words and pictures and demonstrating literacy behaviours such as using voices to depict characters in their book-sharing sessions. Other important strategies to include - which respondents confirmed were usual practice - were questioning about the book and inter-related questioning about the child's life (extra-textual talk) which is a key activity in quality book-sharing (Reese et al., 2019) and deserves to be noted separately from the teaching of basic skills. A second strategy worthy of inclusion was the physical closeness and connection between the child and parent during the book-sharing sessions. This was the most frequently recorded behaviour, and its importance in renewing and growing attachment bonds has been explored in this thesis (see Section 8.3.1).

Considering the gains that can be made from involvement within the Imagination Library programme, the original model divided them into three strands: short-term, intermediate and long-term. This thesis did not evidence a categorical distinction between the short-term and intermediate strands and I would suggest instead that the contents of both sections extend over the full life of the programme, from 0-5 years of age. The phrase "short-term" carries implications of a short, finite nature of these benefits, whereas they can be seen to extend throughout the programme duration and beyond. I would, therefore, suggest renaming the first of these strands as "immediate", noting that from receiving the first book the home learning environment could be enhanced, and frequent or daily reading can be prompted.

My research concurred with earlier findings about an early onset of book-sharing and increased frequency of reading. In addition to the programme's contribution to the increased number of books in the home, I found that the variety of books was a key enhancement to the home learning environment of participants. Positive attitudes toward reading among parents and children noted in the research review (Johnson, 2016b), were also found in my research. To this strand, I added an aspect to the benefit "increased interactions" focused on the positive affective displays between parents and children which respondents noted as a significant part of their book-sharing experiences. Although these

interactions are not limited to book-sharing encounters, and much less so to Imagination Library book-sharing sessions, the increase in affective display as a by-product of increased reading frequency should be noted as an outcome of the programme. In the parent resource section of their website, the Imagination Library note that "reading = snuggling" (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021), so making this aspect a clear and prominent mechanism and benefit on the logic model is an important step towards repositioning book-sharing as an affective as well as a developmental activity.

In the intermediate strand, due to parental responses focusing on broad literacy skills such as enhanced vocabulary and language, the "receptive and expressive" vocabulary outcome was the only confirmation. Although the other early literacy skills such as concepts about print and phonological awareness can be extrapolated from the EYFS data from Phase 2 of the research, I did not gather specific data on these outcomes within the timeframe of the intervention and they did not occur as frequent parental responses as vocabulary and language had, so cannot be independently confirmed as part of this study. In addition to this section, the development of positive reading habits, and the impact of these habits as supportive of the home routine, reading as a pleasurable activity, the impact on the parents' self-image and knowledge about their child were all intermediate benefits that grew alongside participation in the programme.

The final outcome strand was labelled 'long-term' in the original logic model, but as the programme itself lasts 5 years and the outcome of kindergarten (school) readiness described did not extend far beyond the programme in terms of longevity of impact, I renamed this section ultimate. By this, I did not mean that these outcomes were more important than those preceding them, but that this spoke instead to the cumulation of the programme's benefits over time. The ethical dilemma of posing the child as school (kindergarten) ready rather than the setting as ready for the child has been discussed in Section 3.2.4, and I was keen to develop this strand of the model to better represent the programme outcomes in terms of benefits to the child and family than to the wider school system. To this end, the original wording of "kindergarten literacy readiness" was replaced by "preparation for the culture of school" and I have added a more thorough exposition of the three pillars (attainment, enjoyment and attachment) as presented in Figure 22 (p278).

Attainment was described in terms of the outcomes measured as part of the end of EYFS assessment, alongside the outcomes described by parents in the Phase 1 survey. Enjoyment refers to the development of ongoing intrinsic motivation to read and attachment as an enhanced carer-child connection and bond. The three key elements now articulated in the final logic model strand may replace the previous content (kindergarten literacy readiness), however, the elements of attainment, enjoyment and attachment reflect the broader stated remit of Dolly Parton's original vision, "to create a lifelong love of reading, prepare children for school and inspire them to dream" (Blake, 1990). The new outcomes acknowledge many of the same ideals considered in the Theory of Change model developed for Bookstart (Apps et al., 2016b), although these focused on parental feelings and the Imagination Library logic model, while including parent-focused change, is weighted towards change for the child themselves.

I anticipate that the creation of an enhanced logic model for the Imagination Library will embed the parental views of the benefits of programme participation alongside the benefits already established in previous research and provide an important refocusing from the academic outcomes to a balance between skill-based and socioemotional benefits, taking into account benefits for the carer as well as benefits for the child.

12.9 Implications and recommendations for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, other book-gifting programmes and for schools

Book-gifting programmes such as the Imagination Library, which partly funded this study, will be interested in learning more about how parents view reading with their child and how book-gifting impacts the child and their family. Implications to be drawn may influence the practice of these organisations and the way in which they communicate with parents, as well as support their endeavours by sharing data on the efficacy of the Imagination Library programme in particular. These recommendations are highlighted at the end of each chapter exploring the research questions (8.0 - 11.0) but are brought together here as a summary overview.

12.9.1 Bonding as a key concept

One of the key findings from this research thesis has been the place of bonding at the heart of the majority of respondents' views on the benefits of book-sharing with their children. Although this is mentioned within the Imagination Library's "tips for parents" (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021b), it has not previously been part of their logic model either as a mechanism for effective book-sharing or as an outcome for children and their parents. It will be important to include a focus on bonding both in understanding how the programme works within the home and also as a greater part of communicating the programme benefits to parents. Parents who see book-sharing as enjoyable are more likely to read frequently with their child than those who are focused on skills-sharing (Baker & Scher, 2002). Therefore, revising parent messaging to draw on the enjoyment parents and their children get from sharing a book together and its positive impact on developing the bonds between them is likely to have a positive impact on parental choices to engage in book-sharing frequently.

It is key to prioritise the focus on bonding and connection in the very early months when babies are being enrolled in the programme, as the Phase 1 and 3 surveys demonstrated that a proportion of parents felt that their young baby was too young to benefit from book-sharing. This feeling was often linked to literacy skills development being felt to be inappropriate in the early months, therefore, re-focusing on the benefits to parents and children in terms of bonding may speak to the parents of younger babies in a way which resonates better with their current priorities with their child.

It will be important to retain a focus on book-sharing as a pleasurable bonding time throughout a child's engagement with the Imagination Library. Parental book-sharing frequency often decreases as children enter school settings (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014), potentially because parents feel that the responsibility for teaching their child to read has been transferred to the school. The Imagination Library website notes "snuggling" as an important activity in the 0-2 years section of its parent resources (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, 2021b), but the older age groups' sections omit this and focus on literacy skills building. As this research has highlighted the importance of bonding, time spent together

and physical contact across all ages of children surveyed, I suggest that retaining this focus on the physical and emotional connection between the child and their carer is important across all the age groups which the Imagination Library serves (and indeed beyond). Helping parents to see how book-sharing can support household routines such as calmer bedtimes may help parents view book-sharing as something that relieves the pressure on them rather than an added extra to their busy schedules.

12.9.2 The benefits of starting early

The first three months following the birth of a child was the age at which there was the biggest difference in daily reading frequency between Imagination Library participants and other families who responded to the survey. Although clear evidence of developmental benefits from an early start to book-sharing compared with other activities is not yet available, this period of connection may be key to habit-forming among parents. Affiliates who are able to connect with families during pregnancy or in the fourth trimester may be successful in supporting families to lay the foundations for regular reading patterns which then sustained throughout the programme.

Balanced with this focus, however, needs to be an awareness of the importance of not overwhelming new parents and showing empathy for the pressures they face in the early weeks and months. Book-sharing should be seen as a choice of activity rather than a pressure to 'fit in', and the focus on bonding rather than skills building may avoid making parents feel like failures if they do not manage to read with their young baby frequently or at all.

12.9.3 How children's book-sharing behaviours develop

One of the key barriers for parents around book-sharing with their 0–6-month-old children was the feeling that their child was not ready or would not or did not show an interest in book-sharing. Affiliates could support parents to learn to recognise early signs of interest such as showing attention, gazing at the book and vocalising when book-sharing

(Brazelton & Sparrow, 1992), and tools such as the Brazleton Newborn Behavioural Observation Scale can support practitioners to support parents in recognising these early signs of engagement.

With older babies, such as those aged 13-24 months old some parents (around 10% of respondents with children in this age group) were unclear about what behaviours were developmentally appropriate, such as pointing to pictures. Guidance for parents about what their child might be doing at each age or stage alongside the existing guidance about what parents can do for their child would help develop further parental knowledge about book-sharing and their child's individual milestones.

12.9.4 Benefits and challenges across different demographics

One significant finding from this research was the consistency of the impact found for the Imagination Library across the various levels of parental education. This universal benefit can be seen as a justification for a universal roll-out of the programme rather than taking a household-demographics-based approach, as even in households which are predisposed to buying and reading books, reading frequency gains were seen which were correlated with Imagination Library participation.

This research contained a disproportionate representation from White families, and the daily reading frequency data of some other ethnic groups, although below the cohort average, were based on a small number of respondents. A positive impact from Imagination Library involvement within Black families in the United Kingdom is less likely to be documented through this study due to small numbers ($n < 100$), although no difference in outcomes was found due to ethnicity in a small-scale recent United Kingdom study of the Imagination Library in the United Kingdom (Tura et al., 2021). The need for further specific research into understanding the impact on families from minoritized ethnicities in the United Kingdom context would help to answer questions about impacts for families other than the White United Kingdom majority. Considering the Phase 2 North Lincolnshire cohort, children who were from non-British families and those speaking English as an additional language were less likely to be signed up as Imagination Library participants.

Across the four years studied, 85% of children who had English as their first language were enrolled in the programme, compared with 64% of children with English as an additional language. Again, this meant that the impact on children for whom English was an additional language could not be be accurately reflected, as they were disproportionally left out of scheme involvement.

In lieu of better data on the impact on Black families, those from other minoritized ethnicities and those who speak English as an additional language, and taking into consideration comments from survey respondents, it is important that the book selection process is not colour-blind and that Black and Brown families see themselves represented in the authorship and in the illustration of books sent as part of the scheme. Another consideration for affiliates should be prioritisation of signing up families for whom English is an additional language and then the provision of support in community languages, both around text translations and for parenting support around book-sharing. Investigating the local barriers to signing up is key to ensuring that all families have equitable access to the programme.

12.9.5 Books as gifts

It is important to reflect on how books as gifts impact families, alongside the benefits of book-sharing as a process itself. Parents shared many ways in which gifted books differed from books which were bought by the family or loaned by a library. Parents commented that the frequency of arrival acted as a 'nudge' to read "every time I get them, it reminds me to read to my child" (Respondent 1/1480). The nature of the books as a gift may also feed into this, as a social obligation may be placed on the parents as recipients of the gift to make best use of it. As gifted books had not been a strain on family finances, children's normal treatment of them, including chewing, drawing on and tearing books, was less of a concern for parents as they were additional to the family collection (where families already had books) and broken books did not represent a waste of family finances or mean worries about a potential library fine. Interviewee Maria noted that she felt sad if her son ruined a book, "and then we think, oh, at least we're getting a new book [next month]."

Gifted books were sometimes gifted on to others very readily, in a spirit of 'pay it forward' with duplicate or age/interest-inappropriate books being given to family, friends or to enhance community resources. "I try to pass them on once my child is too old or stops being interested in a certain book, as I think it's important to pay it forward. I feel it's what Dolly would want!" (Respondent 1/2245) "We will be donating these when he outgrows them to help other children enjoy them too" (Respondent 1/2003). Because the gifted books are received universally within a certain locality, some respondents commented on the connections this built between peers, "[the] Imagination Library connects my son to his peers because everyone has the same book" (Respondent 1/2036), or between the child and their nursery setting "because the school (my son is in preschool) also receive the books they often do projects around them, each child has the same book at home which really includes every child no matter what their home circumstances are" (Respondent 1/1794).

The way the books arrive, through the post, also contributes something unique compared to a library visit or being bought books. The excitement of a postal delivery for children who are old enough to understand the concept seems to bring a particular quality to the experience, with many parents commenting on their child's anticipation and expectations related to something arriving in the post for them. "My son gets very excited checking the post as he hopes there's a book addressed to him and then takes great joy in opening and reading new book" (Respondent 1/2196).

Two-thirds of the respondents to the Phase 1 survey who received Imagination Library books left unsolicited comments of praise and gratitude. Many parents expressed their specific thanks to Dolly Parton, the programme's founder, who was more closely linked with the programme distribution than the local affiliates by many respondents. Children were often reported to link their books with Dolly Parton herself, "Whenever he sees Dolly Parton he says that's the lady who gives me books." (Respondent 1/2899) "She still remembers which books came from Dolly, and often says "thank you Dolly" before we read them" (Respondent 1/217).

12.9.6 Implications for schools

It is important for schools and teachers to both value and understand how book-sharing in the home shapes early literacy experiences. As there is a well-documented reduction in home reading frequency once children start school (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Venn, 2014), understanding the reasons parents choose to book-share with children in the months and years prior to starting school is key in supporting ongoing book-sharing behaviours following the start of school. The primary parental understanding of the benefits of book-sharing was in the domain of connection, with a secondary domain of CLL, particularly with regard to language and vocabulary acquisition being also widely understood as a benefit to children. These aspects are not well-matched to a school-based focus on initial decoding-focused reading experiences (Wyse & Bradbury, 2022) using books with limited vocabulary which may also provide fewer opportunities for extra-textual engagement. Working together with parents to identify and celebrate what worked in terms of preschool book-sharing experiences may be an appropriate way to support the continuation of book-sharing for pleasure following the introduction of formal reading instruction. Placing the formal reading instruction in the context of already successful book-sharing experiences at home, rather than expecting parents to engage in school-led reading expectations (reading diaries, a focus on recording what the child has read to the parent rather than reading as a triadic experience of parent-book-child) may be more successful in mediating against the current documented drop in daily reading frequency which is seen after a child starts school.

12.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have summarised the key impacts of Imagination Library participation on reading frequency, children's literacy development, attainment and enjoyment of reading, the parent-child bond and on parents themselves. I have also put forward a revised logic model conceptualising these impacts within the Imagination Library's own impact model. I have discussed the implications for book-gifting programmes and recommendations for the Imagination Library. In the following chapter I summarise my reflections on the research process as a whole and consider directions for future research.

13.0 Conclusion

13.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the research process as a whole, considering the original aims of the project, personal reflections, potential improvements that could have been made, the key strengths and limitations of the research, and a summary of the key findings along with plans and recommendations for future work in the field.

13.2 Reflections on the research process

The research set out to capture the views, beliefs and practices of parents and carers about book-sharing, and to identify any changes in these as a result of receiving Imagination Library books, alongside consideration of the impacts on the children who receive the gifted books.

I was unprepared for the sheer size of the response to Phase 1 of the research, closing the survey at the point of having received 5,000 responses instead of the anticipated 1,000-2,000. This unexpectedly enlarged dataset, while still only being reflective of those people who had responded, was still of a size which warranted more in-depth statistical analysis than had originally been planned. The mainly qualitative nature of the survey, with several free-text questions gave a rich insight into the views of the responding parents but was challenging on a practical level in terms of the amount of data which required coding as a result. This challenge was better suited to a large research team than a single researcher. The benefits gained from the success of Phase 1 impacted on my capacity as a researcher to conduct the planned number of interviews with parents, but the restrictions placed by the COVID-19 lockdowns would have in themselves have necessitated a change to the planned approach for in-person, informal interviews utilising a walking methodology around participants' homes. Considering improvements, I could have planned my participant-seeking strategies to better target those parents who had lower educational qualifications, which might have included other ways to access the survey rather than reading and answering in a written format. A key disadvantage of the research is that it was answered by parents who were interested in the content – those who might be predisposed to positive

views about reading, and by a disproportionately university- educated, White, female population. Although performing logistic regression analysis allowed me to moderate the demographic skew, finding a way to conduct a randomised sampling strategy would have strengthened my ability to draw wider conclusions from this research. This could have perhaps been achieved by sampling a small but randomised parent group and comparing it with the convenience sample results. This randomised approach has been used in some of the large-scale surveys commissioned by English reading charities (Eliot & Venning, 2014; Knowland & Formby, 2016; Venn, 2014), which is likely to explain the differences in daily reading frequencies found in my own sample group and the others studied. Other ideas could have been utilising a survey which could easily be translated and ensuring mobile phone optimisation. This could have been achieved through use of Qualtrics software, which was not available to me at the time of the data-gathering exercise. A planned strategy – paper copies disseminated through children's centres in more disadvantaged locations – could not be used due to lockdown closures of all such facilities for the duration of the research and university regulations in place at the time restricting the use of paper surveys.

The amount and depth of Phase 2 data supplied by North Lincolnshire council was also in excess of what was expected. Having access to four years of complete year groups in-depth demographic and academic data meant that effective regressions utilising a wide range of variables known to impact academic attainment could be deployed, resulting in a secure and robust conclusion being drawn from the analysis.

In Phase 3, again a high response level meant that the views of some demographic groups less well-represented in the Phase 1 survey were better understood, and an in-depth picture of parental reading behaviours could be drawn from the results. Considering retrospective improvements, I would have better planned my statistical response to take full advantage of the wealth of data at my disposal, as the Key Stage 1 and Year 1 phonics scores have been relegated to a slide in a separate presentation rather than analysed as part of my research.

I feel confident that the weight of the evidence found securely addressed the original research intentions, although the lack of evidence gained directly from the child recipients from cancellation of in-person in-home research is a particular disappointment. Another

area of interest, considering the neurological responses of a reading dyad to note whether valence was found between parents and young babies when book-sharing was also unable to be pursued, due to COVID-19 lab closures. In retrospect, this element is worthy of doctoral study in its own right, and would not have been able to have been completed in as much depth as would be warranted by the complexity of the resulting data. Adding this aspect of research would have overreached my abilities due to a lack of expertise within the field of neuropsychology. This project would be best carried out by a dedicated experimental psychology team.

In terms of personal academic growth and development, I was influenced early on by supervision around the concept of deficit models of baby and young children's development and have since sought to deploy the alternative paradigm of competency-based models throughout my academic and professional work. I also found that during the research process I changed from a concept of 'shared reading', which was heavily influenced by my background as a teacher, to one of 'book-sharing' where the emphasis is placed on the interaction rather than a focus on the process of reading which itself links towards an expectation of the home mirroring in-school practices. This change was important both linguistically and philosophically, and unfortunately the survey questions reflect my former focus on 'shared reading'. This may, through the language of 'shared reading', have unintentionally biased or framed parental responses, particularly with respect to parents thinking about interactions with pre-verbal babies or their pregnancy experiences.

Overall, I feel that I have been able to accurately represent the views, beliefs and practices of parents and carers who responded to my questionnaires or interviews. Although the impact on the child has been represented through the eyes of their parents or through their subsequent academic data rather than directly through the voice of the child, I maintain that these representations are valid and represent a holistic view of the impacts of the Imagination Library programme on the child participants as well as their parents or carers.

13.3 Summary of the key findings

Most survey respondents read very regularly to their children, above the frequencies found in other large-scale national surveys. Within this respondent group of motivated parents, those who received Imagination Library books read more frequently than their peers, both when considered as members of demographic groups and when different demographics were taken into account through the use of logistic regression analysis.

Children who received Imagination Library books for a period of 12 months or more outperformed their peers on the academic GLD and reading ELG measures when assessed at age 5. This finding holds true both when comparing members of specific demographic groups and when holding the other variables constant.

Parents felt that receiving Imagination Library books increased the number and variety of books in their homes and introduced them to new texts and authors. This finding was prevalent across all parental educational levels and across families who identified themselves as having otherwise few books in the home alongside those who considered their households to be book-rich.

Parents reported that they felt that participation in the Imagination Library programme encouraged their children's enjoyment of reading and book-sharing and that sharing books together strengthened the bonds between parents and children. They noted that book-sharing encouraged their children's language and general development and was a relaxing and enjoyable activity for both parties. Imagination Library parents commented that the variety of books sent as part of the curated selection helped them to find out more about their child's likes and dislikes, which was another way to strengthen their bonds.

Considering the impact on parents, the majority reported that involvement in the Imagination Library programme had a positive effect on themselves as parents and their attitudes towards sharing books with their children. It helped those whose incomes would be stretched by regular book-buying but 'nudged' parents in all demographic groups to read more frequently which in turn had a positive effect on their parental self-image. For almost

all of the parents surveyed, reading with their child was considered to be an enjoyable activity, and often one that supported routine-setting, relaxation and bonding alongside the developmental gains for their child.

13.4 Strengths of the research and contribution to the research field

The key strength of this thesis is in the variety and quantity of the data brought to bear on the research questions. Phase 1 of the research is probably the largest study of parental attitudes towards book-sharing and early book-sharing experiences in the United Kingdom to date, and Phase 2 of the research is the largest study of cohort outcomes in relation to the Imagination Library to date, both in the United Kingdom and internationally. A particular feature of the research which contributes to its originality is the consideration of the reading dyad of parent and child together, not just the academic impact on children, which is important as the nature of book-sharing is a joint activity, and the behaviours and attitudes of both the parent and the child have reciprocal consequences. This focus on the impact of book-sharing on parents is unique among large-scale studies of home book-sharing experiences.

Furthermore, the research methods used have enabled the complexity of the outcomes of the Imagination Library programme, both socioemotional and attainment-based, to be understood. This broadening of the discourse from one that is most prominently about literacy skills to one which brings the role of enjoyment (often referred to as reading for pleasure in literature focusing on older children) and attachment is important to better understand motivations and mechanisms for book-sharing in the early years.

The affordance of true parental voice to discuss their engagement with book-sharing, not limited to a researcher-led multiple-choice methodology is another strength of the research and original contribution to the field. Rarely have as many parents have been given space to talk about reading with their baby or child as through this research. The closest research comparator, certainly considering parents in the United Kingdom, used multiple-choice questions to gauge why parents read with their child. My research focused on hearing the parents' authentic voices through free-text responses and it is out of this methodological

choice that the focus on 'bonding' has emerged rather than the previous understanding of 'time spent with your child' as the key driver for parental engagement with book-sharing.

The analysis of the academic outcomes from a large cohort, taking into account key variables known to impact attainment has provided robust evidence that the Imagination Library can influence academic achievement in the early years.

The results have provided an original contribution to the field by sharing a large-scale dataset of parental views on the benefits of reading with their 0-5-year-old child, another relating to the academic outcomes correlated with Imagination Library involvement. It has given parents a voice in sharing their thoughts, views and practices when book-sharing which is a valuable insight into a field dominated by a focus on the contribution of early reading experiences to academic attainment and the problematic concept of 'school-readiness'. The research has also clearly correlated early reading attainment at age 5 with Imagination Library participation of 12 months or more, giving substance to the hypotheses of the Imagination Library's own logic model with regard to children's outcomes. In developing the logic model further, I have given the Dollywood Foundation charity a robust overview of the benefits for the nearly two million children currently registered in the programme.

13.5 Limitations of the research

Within each research question's methods chapter, limitations have been discussed as part of the discussion about reliability and validity (6.3.16, 6.5.6, 6.7.7 and 6.9.4) and in this section, I discuss the limitations of the thesis as a whole.

A key limitation was the use of convenience sampling to gather parent-reported data, a strategy which clearly biased responses from respondents with an initial interest in the topic being researched. Although internal validity could be assumed (with comparisons made between cohorts on the basis that all respondents were parents who were interested in or positive about book-sharing), the findings lack validity when applied to the wider parent population of the United Kingdom. This problem has been acknowledged in other large scale

literacy surveys, "the self-selecting nature of all recruitment channels does imply likely skew towards 'responsive' parents" (Venn, 2014, p. 6).

The demographic skew to parents educated at degree level or above, although accounted for in the statistical analyses of some findings, biases the types of free-text responses which have been gathered to those who have intrinsically benefited from the education system and so were more likely to have both resources to book-share and prior education about the benefits of reading with their child. Comparator surveys were used, drawing from work carried out by the main United Kingdom organisations concerned with literacy in the home, Bookstart and the National Literacy Trust. However, the comparison was limited due to the comparator surveys taking a closed-question approach to surveying and grouping of all children below one year of age together, which meant that direct comparisons were sometimes not possible.

Due to the complex nature of the systems in which the Imagination Library intervention operates, it has not been possible to use all potential variables which could affect findings such as reading frequency or attainment outcome, so the relationships found may have causal relationships with variables not included in the statistical tests, such as the temperament of the child or parent. I also did not gather information on child gender as part of the Phase 1 and 3 surveys. Although there is evidence that child gender affects academic attainment (Manz et al., 2010), this variable is not as widely included in research on family literacy programmes as in other educational research (Carpentieri et al., 2011). I could have added to the field by including this variable in my surveys.

There were significant limitations to the completion of the thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely the restrictions on in-person research which changed the nature of the study. Specifically, this limited the study's planned use of video to capture a child's eye view of the book-gifting process, thus, the voice of the child was severely curtailed within this research by being limited to parental reporting of their feelings and actions.

Gathering data on children's experiences was limited by the nature of the tools chosen, notably parental response questionnaires and the COVID-related limitations on planned in-home visits to observe children receiving and interacting with their gifted books.

Considering these limitations, in the next section, I discuss how future research could address some of the gaps and problems found in this research study and in the wider field.

13.6 Directions for future research

Several aspects of the original thesis plan along with directions from the research findings require further examination.

First, the voices of babies and children themselves need to play a more prominent role in future research. Through the circumstances of the pandemic restrictions, this study was unable to utilise video to capture child interactions in the home and to provide a window into what happens after the book reaches the front door. Research that involves talking to verbal children and observing pre-verbal children as they interact with Imagination Library books alongside their carers would triangulate the extensive parent-reporting found in current Imagination Library research.

It is also important that the Imagination Library in the United Kingdom seeks to better understand the impact of book-gifting on minoritized ethnicity families, whose experiences differ from those of their American counterparts. A better understanding of the barriers for these families to signing up to the programme would also be a useful endeavour for future research.

This research had little involvement from fathers and non-binary parents, and a better understanding of the similarities and differences between maternal, paternal and non-binary parental beliefs and practices in early book-sharing would give a more holistic picture of the views of others who read with their children.

A particularly important direction for future research, and one that is wider than the thesis context of book-gifting, is the impact of book-sharing interactions with babies between 1- and 6-months-old. Utilising video to track gaze alongside neurological mapping of brain areas, it would be possible to construct hypotheses about what might happen inside the infant's brain during book-sharing experiences. This would validate, or otherwise, the focus on reading from birth which is present in book-gifting schemes internationally.

13.7 Dissemination of findings

The interim results from the study were shared with the Imagination Library and formed part of their annual summary update for affiliates and other interested parties, and as well as with North Lincolnshire Council, for whom the data formed part of their annual Imagination Library report. I presented at 'Homecoming 2021', the Imagination Library's own conference as well as at the United Kingdom Literacy Association conference in 2021 and as part of Swansea University's 'Three Minute Thesis' competition. This has allowed the results and findings to be shared in a timely manner with those who had the most professional interest in the data.

A research report for the Imagination Library and its affiliates will be written following the submission of this thesis and will be used by the Imagination Library and its affiliates. The creation of an enhanced logic model enables the Imagination Library to make clear use of the research findings in planning for and understanding programme outcomes within the United Kingdom context. I hope to commission a short animation sharing the key statistical findings for use by the Imagination Library with its affiliates and potential partners.

I am planning two journal articles to share the findings with a wider academic audience along with other interested parties such as other book-gifting associations and charities. The first will concentrate on parental views of the benefits of book-sharing and I am considering submission to the Educational Review. The second paper will discuss the impact of Imagination Library participation on academic outcomes and daily reading frequency and the British Educational Research Journal or the Public Library of Science may be appropriate publications to which to submit.

To communicate with educators about the importance of the home book-sharing experiences, I hope to write a second article on the website teachertoolkit.co.uk, sharing my findings. I also plan to share the results with children who have previously benefited from Imagination Library participation by designing the content for some Imagination Library bookmarks which can be shared with children in North Lincolnshire, whose data were used within Phase 2 of the research, and who may well have friends and family still participating in the programme.

To speak directly to the parent audience, I will provide the Imagination Library with content for information flyers which can be shared with families, highlighting the key research findings. I am also planning a book based on the research findings and my broader knowledge of early book-sharing to support parents in making the most of book-sharing in the home.

13.8 Concluding remarks

The question at the heart of this thesis is 'what is the impact of Dolly Parton's Imagination library on parental engagement in book-sharing and on child development from 0-5 years old?'. The impact of the Imagination Library is to increase the rate of daily or frequent reading across all demographic groups studies, with an absolute increase of between 3.5% and 5% across parental gender and educational level, size of family and from birth to 4 years of age. The impact of this increase in parental engagement with book-sharing can be seen at age 5, when children who have participated in the programme for more than 12 months show that they are 5.7% more likely to achieve a Good Level of Development and 6.7% more likely to achieve their reading Early Learning Goal when assessed at the end of their reception year at school.

This study has considered the views, beliefs and practices of parents and carers with regard to book-sharing with their 0–5-year-old children, alongside their views about the impact of Imagination Library participation. Nearly 5,500 parents and carers across two large surveys shared their beliefs about the impact of book-sharing on them and their children. The

importance of book-sharing as a bonding experience eclipsed more direct educationally focused benefits, and parents saw this focus on connection as a benefit for both themselves and their children.

By better understanding the feelings and motivations of parents to read with their children, book-gifting organisations, educators and others working with families can best support parents to make the most of an activity that is enjoyable and supportive of parent-child relationships and that contributes to their children's wider development.

Appendix A <u>Literature Review Search Structure</u>

In approaching this literature review, I used a three-tiered approach to search the literature. First, I used research papers already gathered by the funder to create a base reading list; then, I developed a search strategy from the base list before seeking out other non-peer reviewed materials via related organisations' websites.

Creation of a base reading list

Initially, I started searching specifically for papers which were directly researching the Imagination Library, using the archive on the charity's own website. I then used papers referenced on those articles' reading lists to create seed texts on Citation Gecko, a programme which searches articles' reference lists to create a visual map of links where common references are visually displayed. This was combined with 'snowball sampling' (searching citations and references of initial papers, then references from these subsequent papers). This yielded some common papers which might be regarded as seminal in the field.

Search term input

I developed a list of potential search terms by analysing the reference lists of seed articles from the first phase (discussed above). The key terminology used to describe programmes similar to the Imagination Library is 'book gifting', but the efficacy of book-gifting was rooted in a wider discussion about the benefits of sharing books, or shared-reading between a parent and a child. The search terms can be found below.

Primary terms   Secondary terms

Set 1)
Book gift*   Infant OR Child
Bookgift*
Book shar*   Parent OR Mother OR Father
Bookshar*

Set 2)
Book distribut*
Shared read*

Parental read*
Parent* child* read*
Early literacy
Early reading
Emergent literacy
Emergent reading
Home library
Home reading
Bookstart or Book Start
Books babies
Book trust or BookTrust
Imagination Library
Reach out and read

It quickly became apparent that although book-gifting was a reasonably large field to search (at around 18,000 articles comprising the words 'book' and 'gifting' and 7,500 articles when the word 'child' was also required), the background literature on the effects of sharing books was much wider, with over a million articles when searching with four required key words (shared+reading+parent+child).

For search terms in Set 1 (terms around book-gifting or sharing), I combined them with an OR search for a combination of the secondary terms (such as 'child') and then skimmed the first 100 (approximate) articles for each to identify by title, year and location those which were most likely to be relevant to my search. I then repeated the searches using ERIC and JSTOR, but quickly found that this led to significant replication of results, thus discontinuing the repository search in favour of the more wide-ranging Google Scholar. For Set 2 search terms (a wider set of reading, book and literacy-related words), I skimmed the first 100 (approximate) articles on Google Scholar for relevancy without adding secondary terms, as these were already more focused terminology. This process resulted in around 2,000 articles skimmed of which approximately 500 were read in more depth. Of these, around 300 were found to be directly relevant to the study and were read fully, including skimming the references for additional trails to follow.

Throughout the continuation of my research, I received updated article lists from academic search engines such as Mendeley, having set key search terms from Sets 1 and 2 for

automatic updates. This ensured that throughout my research, I was alerted to additional published research as it became available.

Grey material

As much of the literature on the efficacy of book-gifting schemes, especially those run at a smaller scale, was not to be found in peer-reviewed journals or books, I conducted a direct search of organization websites to identify their own repositories of research. This included annual reports and research reports compiled directly for the organisations alongside impact reviews gathered by participating organisations and their partners. Umbrella organisations such as EURead required joining schemes to submit a report on their activities in which any research on the intervention was stated, and this was also used as an evidence trail to name and investigate schemes from non-English speaking countries.

From the initial three strands of searches, I found around 300 papers which were directly relevant to my study, either in the generalised field of the efficacy of shared reading or direct studies of book-gifting programmes. The initial search was further enhanced by suggestions of relevant papers or lines of enquiry from colleagues, alongside literature trails from additional reading throughout the period of study to create the body of literature drawn upon in this review.

Appendix B Figures and Tables

Figure 24 Research timescales

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	National lockdown (dark grey) / restrictions (light grey) in England
Jan-20	Confirmation of PhD progression				
Feb-20	Planning				
Mar-20	Planning	Planning			
Apr-20	Piloting the survey instrument	Planning			
May-20	Ethical approval granted	Ethical approval granted			
Jun-20	Survey launched	Liaison with the council			
Jul-20	Survey closed	Liaison with the council	Planning		
Aug-20	Data analysis	Data received	Translation of survey instrument	Planning	
Sep-20	Data analysis		Ethical approval granted	Ethical approval granted	
Oct-20	Data analysis		Survey launched	Interviews arranged	
Nov-20	Data analysis		Survey closed	Interviews completed	
Dec-20	Data analysis		Data analysis	Transcription of interviews	
Jan-21	Data analysis		Data analysis		
Feb-21		Data analysis	Data analysis		
Mar-21		Data analysis	Data analysis		
Apr-21		Data analysis			

Table 18 Cohort analysis of North Lincolnshire reception pupils

Characteristic	2016				2017				2018				2019			
	Imagination Library		Non-Imagination Library		Imagination Library		Non-Imagination Library		Imagination Library		Non-Imagination Library		Imagination Library		Non-Imagination Library	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	723	49.1	236	46.7	808	51.1	225	52.0	881	50.6	116	47.3	836	50.9	109	56.8
Female	751	50.9	269	53.3	773	48.9	208	48.0	860	49.4	129	52.7	808	49.1	83	43.2
Term of birth - Autumn	501	34.0	197	39.0	533	33.7	131	30.3	583	33.5	105	42.9	575	35.0	66	34.4
Term of birth - Spring	472	32.0	164	32.5	502	31.8	161	37.2	577	33.1	82	33.5	538	32.7	71	37.0
Term of birth - Summer	501	34.0	144	28.5	546	34.5	141	32.6	581	33.4	58	23.7	531	32.3	55	28.6
English as first Language	1,210	82.1	353	69.9	1,437	90.9	310	71.6	1,544	88.7	191	78.0	1,453	88.4	134	69.8
First language not English	125	8.5	94	18.6	138	8.7	94	21.7	194	11.1	48	19.6	184	11.2	50	26.0
Disadvantaged	236	16.0	83	16.4	264	16.7	81	18.7	265	15.2	35	14.3	284	17.3	24	12.5
SEN Support	129	8.8	39	7.7	131	8.3	31	7.2	165	9.5	17	6.9	157	9.5	20	10.4
Lowest 30% SOA	573	38.9	192	38.0	545	34.5	186	43.0	654	37.6	86	35.1	603	36.7	64	33.3
Total cohort	1,474	74	505	26	1,581	79	433	21	1,741	88	245	12	1,644	90	192	10
Cohort totals over 4 years			Imagination Library: 6,440 (82.4%) Non Imagination Library: 1,375 (17.6%) Total cohort:7,815													

Note: The disadvantaged indicator was introduced in 2017; for 2016 the proxy of Deprivation Pupil Premium receipt was used. Discrepancies of > 5% between the cohorts in which the cohort numbers are both > 20 children are highlighted in red.

Table 19 Daily and frequent reading across demographic groups

Characteristic	Cohort total		Reading daily		Reading a few times a week	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender of carer						
Female	4,522	94.8	3,865	85.5	4,373	96.7
Male	216	4.5	179	82.9	207	95.8
Non-Binary	4	< 0.1	3	75.0	4	100
Not given	28	0.6	24	85.7	27	96.4
Highest educational level						
None to Level 3	878	18.4	717	81.7	839	95.6
Level 4 to 8	3,819	80.1	3,294	86.3	3,695	96.8
Not given	73	1.5	56	76.7	72	98.6
Ethnicity						
Asian	171	3.6	137	80.1	161	94.2
Black	86	1.8	59	68.6	81	94.2
Mixed/Multiple	126	2.6	110	87.3	121	96.0
Other	40	0.8	26	65.0	35	87.5
White	4,301	90.2	3,700	86.0	4,164	96.8
Not given	46	1.0	35	76.1	44	95.7
Number of children						
1	2,299	48.2	2,071	90.1	2,251	97.9
2	1,870	39.2	1,535	82.1	1,788	95.7
3+	601	12.5	461	76.7	567	94.3
Age of youngest child						
0-12 m	1,365	28.6	968	70.9	1,262	92.5
0-3 m	332	7.0	208	62.7	281	84.6
4-6 m	377	7.9	264	70.0	352	93.4
7-12 m	656	13.8	514	78.5	629	96.0
37-48 m	685	14.4	632	92.3	671	98.0
49-72 m	604	12.7	541	89.6	597	98.8
36-72m	1,289	27.1	1,173	91.0	1,268	98.4
Imagination Library participation						
Yes	1,523	31.9	1,332	87.5	1,490	97.8
No	3,247	68.1	2,735	84.3	3,116	96.0
Total	4,770	100	4,067	85.3	4,604	96.6

Figure 25 Reading frequency compared by survey
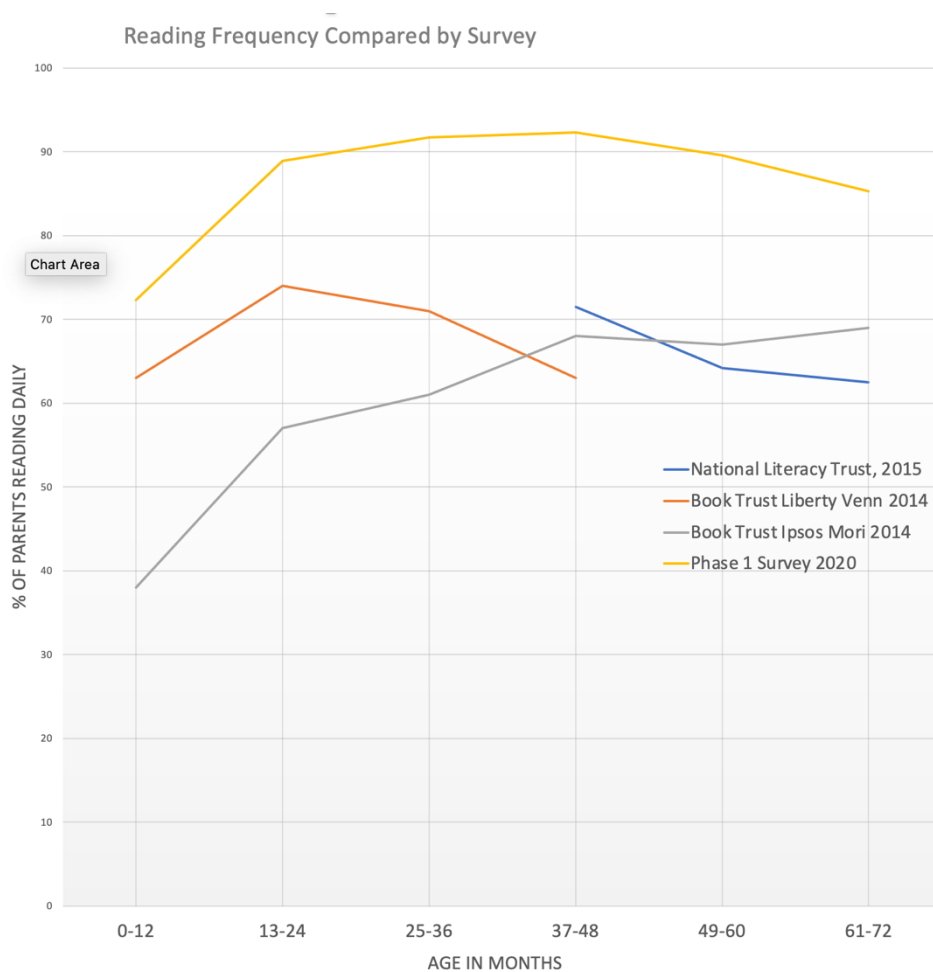
Table 20 Crosstabulation of daily reading frequency across variables

Variable	n	%	df	χ^2	p
2 or more children	1,996	80.8	1	81.562	0.0000**
Age 0-12 months	986	72.3	1	256.895	0.0000**
Education L4+	3,294	86.3	1	15.118	0.0001**
Education L6+	2,868	86.4	1	10.640	0.0011**
Female	3,865	85.5	1	3.054	0.0805
White	3,700	86.0	1	20.468	0.0000**
DPIL	1,332	87.5	1	8.463	0.00036**

Table 21 Daily reading frequency by group and Imagination Library participation

	Not Imagination Library (%)	Imagination Library (%)	Difference (%)	χ^2	p
Gender of carer					
Female	84.4	87.8	+3.4	8.736	0.0031*
Male	80.1	83.2	+3.1	0.371	0.5424
Highest educational level					
Up to Level 3	79.5	84.5	+5.0	2.880	0.0041**
Up to Level 4	85.3	88.8	+3.5	8.556	0.0034*
Up to Level 6	85.2	89.3	+4.1	9.419	0.0021**
Ethnicity					
White	84.6	89.5	+4.9	18.174	0.0000**
Asian	82.1	77.9	-4.2	0.469	0.4933
Mixed/multiple	87.3	87.2	-0.1	0.000	0.9860
Number of children					
1	89.8	90.6	+0.8	0.317	0.5733
2+	78.8	84.8	+5.0	12.697	0.0004**
3+	75.3	79.6	+4.3	1.443	0.2297
Age of youngest child					
0-12 months	71.0	77.2	+6.2	4.499	0.0339*
0-3 months	60.1	75.0	+14.9	4.390	0.0361*
4-6 months	70.2	73.7	+3.5	0.346	0.05564
7-12 months	78.9	79.7	+0.8	0.057	0.8121
13-24 months	88.8	89.2	+0.4	0.048	0.8362
25-36 months	84.2	88.9	+4.7	5.084	0.0241*
37-48 months	85.2	86.3	+1.0	0.284	0.5939
49-60 months	90.9	87.6	-3.3	1.695	0.1930
Total	84.3	87.5	+3.2	8.463	0.0036

Note: only groups n > 100 are included in the table

Table 22 Binary logistic regression of reading frequency

Variable	B	Wald	*p*	*Exp (B)*	95% CI for *Exp (B)*	
					Lower	Upper
2 + children	-0.455	25.900	0.000**	0.635	0.533	0.756
3 + children	-0.194	2.654	0.103	0.823	0.652	1.040
Child's age < 13 months	-0.909	119.798	0.000**	0.403	0.343	0.474
Child's age < 36 months	0.246	4.508	0.034*	1.279	1.019	1.605
Post 18 education	0.401	6.843	0.009*	1.493	1.106	2.016
University education	-0.030	0.048	0.826	0.971	0.744	1.267
Female	0.124	0.491	0.484	1.132	0.800	1.602
Asian ethnicity	0.588	5.037	0.025*	1.801	1.077	3.011
Mixed ethnicity	1.165	13.028	0.000**	3.205	1.703	6.034
White ethnicity	1.070	33.839	0.000**	2.917	2.034	4.183
DPIL Recipient	0.329	11.876	0.001**	1.390	1.153	1.676

Appendix C <u>Survey Instruments</u>

Phase 1 Survey

1.Do you consent to taking part in this research?
Yes
No

2.What is the age of your eldest child?
Select your answer
3.What is the age of your 2nd child?
Select your answer
4.What is the age of your 3rd child?
Select your answer
5.What is the age of your 4th child?
Select your answer
6.What is the age of your 5th child?
Select your answer
7.What is the age of your 6th child?
Select your answer

8.What age do you think is the best time to start reading with children?
During pregnancy
From birth
From 3 months
From 6 months
From 12 months
From 18 months
From 2 years or older
It doesn't matter

9.Why do you think it's best to start reading at the age you've chosen?

10.How often do you read with your youngest (or only) child?
Several times a day
Daily
Few times a week
Once a week
Less frequently
Not at all/not yet

11.Is this amount of reading:
More than you'd like to do
About right
Less than you'd like to do

12. What benefits do babies and children get from reading with their parent/carer?

13. What benefits do parents/carers get from reading with their baby or child?

14. Some organisations gift books to babies and children. Has your child been given:
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library books AND BookTrust (England/Wales/N Ireland) or Bookbug (Scotland) books?
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library books only
BookTrust (England/Wales/N Ireland) or Bookbug (Scotland) books only
None of the above
Don't Know

15. Has receiving Dolly Parton's Imagination Library books changed how you and your baby or child feel about reading?

	Very negative change	Negative change	No change	Positive change	Very positive change
My feelings about reading with my child					
My child's feelings about reading with me					

16. If you'd like to say anything about receiving Dolly Parton's Imagination Library books, please tell us here:

17. What is your gender identity?
Female
Male
Non-binary
Prefer not to say

18. What is your ethnic group?
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British: African, Caribbean, Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
Asian / Asian British: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Any other Asian background
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Any other White background
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White & Asian, Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background
Other ethnic group: Arab, Any other ethnic group
Prefer not to say

19. Where do you live?
East of England
East Midlands
London

North East England
North West England
Northern Ireland
Scotland
South East England
South West England
Wales
West Midlands
Yorks & Humber
Prefer not to say

20.What is the highest level of education you completed?
GCSEs/ O Levels / BTEC or S/NVQ Level 2
A Levels / Highers / BTEC or S/NVQ Level 3
Certificate of Higher Education / HNC / BTEC or S/NVQ Level 4
Diploma of Higher education / HND / Foundation degree / BTEC or S/NVQ Level 5
Undergraduate degree
Postgraduate degree
No formal qualifications
Prefer not to say

21.Thank you very much for completing this survey. Where did you find the survey?
On Facebook or Twitter
On Instagram or other social media
Mumsnet
Shared by a friend or relative
Shared by a professional (teacher, health visitor, librarian or similar)
Sent from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Reading with babies and children - North Lincolnshire (Phase 3 Survey)

1.Do you consent to taking part in this research?
Yes
No

2.How many children under 18 do you have living at home with you?
1
2
3
4
More than 4

3.What is the age of your youngest child?
Select your answer

4.When did your youngest child start receiving Imagination Library books?
From 0-2 months old
From 3-12 months old
From 1-2 years old
From 3-5 years old
Don't know

5.How often do you read with your youngest (or only) child?
Several times a day
Daily
Few times a week
Once a week
Less frequently
Not at all/not yet

6.Is this amount of reading:
More than you'd like to do
About right
Less than you'd like to do

7.Do you mostly read:
In the daytime
At bedtime
Both/all through the day

8.How do you feel when you are reading with your youngest child? 0 is very negative/unhappy and 10 is very positive/happy.

9.When you read with your youngest child, do you:
Always

Very Often
Sometimes
Occasionally
Never
Does not apply (eg too young)

Read all the words on each page/point out all the pictures

Make up your own words or tell your own story

Talk about other things (eg talking about your pet when reading a book about animals)

Use different voices for different characters

Cuddle or touch your child or hold them close

Ask lots of questions

10. Thinking about reading with children before they start school, which is more important?
(choose one option)
Learning through reading
Enjoying the reading
Both are equally important

11. When your youngest child is sharing a book with you, do they:

Snuggle or cuddle you

Talk about or point to things in the book

Talks about things in their lives related to the book

Reads or pretends to read some words

Show excitement/interest

Concentrate hard/are not distracted

12. Who 'takes charge' when you read with your youngest child (deciding which book, when to turn the pages, what to talk about)
Me
My child
Both of us together
It depends/it changes

13. Who else reads with your youngest child at home once a week or more?
My partner/their other parent

Other adult relatives or friends
Their brothers and sisters
No one else, just me.

14.Please answer the following questions, thinking about all your children who receive books. Since receiving Imagination Library books:
True
False
Don't know/not applicable

We read more often

My child looks forward to the books arriving

My child is enthusiastic to share the books with me

The books have helped to develop my child's speech and language

We have more books than we would have otherwise bought

We have been introduced to different authors and new books

We share the books with older and younger siblings in our family

I enjoy reading with my child more

We do activities related to the books (eg go on a bus ride after a book about buses)

I've received support or ideas about how to read with my child (eg from a family worker, health visitor, librarian or preschool teacher)

15.We would like to explore your experience of receiving the imagination library books during the COVID 19 pandemic.

The books arriving through the post during lockdown was of huge benefit

Receiving a book was something to look forward to

The books helped us to share special moments

16.North Lincolnshire creates ideas sheets each month for the books delivered with fun things to do with your child. These are available at http://www.northlincs.gov.United Kingdom/imagination-library
Yes
No
Not sure

Have you seen the Imagination Library Ideas Sheets

Do you use the ideas and links on the sheets?

Do you find the sheets useful?

17.Where have you seen the Imagination Library Ideas Sheets?
Imagination Library North Lincolnshire Council Webpage
Through posts on the council facebook page
Via the children's centre, library, or health visitor
Via my child's childminder, early years setting, school
I have not seen the ideas sheets

18.Please add any comments about the ideas sheets.

19.How much does receiving Imagination Library books make a difference to your family? 0 is no difference and 10 is a huge difference.

20.Is your child a member of the local library?
Yes
No

21.If you'd like to say anything about receiving Dolly Parton's Imagination Library books, please tell us here:

22.What is your gender identity?
Female
Male
Non-binary
Prefer not to say

23.What is your ethnic group?
Black
Asian
White
Mixed
Other
Prefer not to say

24.What is the highest level of education you completed?
16 years
18 years
University degree
Postgraduate degree
No formal qualifications
Prefer not to say

25.If you would like to take part in further research about the Imagination Library, including videoing you and your child reading together, please enter your email address and name here:

26.If you would like to receive regular updates from North Lincolnshire Library services, including the Imagination Library and family events/activities. Please leave your e-mail below or visit https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/United KingdomNOLC/subscriber/new

Phase 4 Interview prompts

1. Welcome, thank you, reminder about consent.

2. Who lives in your household?

3. Can you tell me about your own reading experiences as a child?

4. What about reading as an adult?

5. What do you think your child feels about reading and books?

6. What do you think shared reading does for you and your child – now and thinking about the future?

7. How does reading with your child fit into your day?

8. Where does reading happen? (tour)

9. Tell me about what happens when a Dolly book arrives.

10. What would you look for when choosing books for your child?

11. Do you think the Imagination Library makes a difference to your family? How?

12. Would your child like to read a book with you now?

Pseudonyms

Address for posting voucher

Appendix D <u>Consent Forms</u>

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET & ONLINE CONSENT FORM
(Version 2.1, Date: 13/5/2020)
Parental Engagement in Shared Reading (Phase 1)

Contact Details:
Researcher: Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod ████████████████████████
Supervisors: Dr Janet Goodall ████████████████████ & Amanda Bateman
████████████████████████████

What is the study?
This survey looks at parents/carers feelings about reading with children aged 0-5 years. It is open to anyone who is the parent or carer of a child/children ages 5 years or under, and who lives in the United Kingdom or Northern Ireland.

How will the results be used?
The data will be used by researchers at the University of Swansea who are investigating the value of a book-gifting programme and by the organisation running the book-gifting programme. The results of the study will be published and the data may be shared with other organisations who are interested in supporting reading.

How is the study being carried out?
You will complete a short (3-10 minute) online survey about reading with children. No personal or identifying information will be collected in this survey. Your data will be processed in accordance with the United Kingdom's Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Data collection is taking place through a secure online survey platform and all data will be stored on password-protected devices. Data will only be viewed by the named research team.

Is it voluntary?
This survey is voluntary, and you can leave the survey at any time without finishing it and your answers will not be kept. There are no questions that will identify who you are – this survey is anonymous, so it will not be possible to identify and remove your data at a later date, should you decide to withdraw from the study.

Who is carrying out the survey?
Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod PhD researcher ████████████████████
supervised by Dr Janet Goodall ████████████████████████ & Amanda
Bateman ████████████████████████ from the School of Education, Swansea
University

This data collection and research project has been approved by the College of Arts & Humanities Research Ethics Committee at Swansea University. Please contact us if you have any questions! Thank you for taking the time to take part in this research

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

Parental Engagement in Shared Reading: The Dolly Parton Imagination Library (Phase 2)

Your organisation is being invited to take part in some research. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the research?
The proposed project aims to understand both the impact of shared reading experiences on children who receive books from DPIL and the impact on parental practices and beliefs around shared reading.

Specific research questions are:
Does and, if so, how does involvement in the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library programme: increase the quality and quantity of daily shared reading experiences between parent/carer and child; change the parental perception of reading;
increase the child's enjoyment of books and affect the early literacy development of children by the age of 5.

Your participation in this study will be flexible according to the amount you choose to participate, but as a minimum will include sharing data already collated by your organisation, eg EYFS GLD and demographic breakdowns of this, publicising and supporting participant responses to an online/paper questionnaire to be developed with you, and supporting the recruitment of families for interview.

Who is carrying out the research?
The data are being collected by
Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod PhD researcher
supervised by Dr Janet Goodall   from the School of Education, Swansea University.

The research has been approved by the College Research Ethics Committee
STU_EDUC_143935_240420130047_1 20/5/2020 (Data sharing) and
1/9/2020(questionnaires and interviews).
What happens if I agree to take part?
I will use data held by you in your role as a council with regard to residents' participation in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and educational data on children living in your council area alongside questionnaire data jointly collected by your organisation and myself, to interrogate educational attainment differences between your area and statistical neighbours to see if there are correlations between participation in the Imagination Library and positive outcomes at ages 5-7 years old.

 Are there any risks associated with taking part?
The research has been approved by the College Research Ethics Committee. There are no significant risks associated with participation.

Data Protection and Confidentiality
Your data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will only be viewed by the researcher/research team and may following publication be shared with the Dollywood Foundation.

All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer file on the University servers for up to 10 years. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses to minimise risk in the event of a data breach.

Please note that the data we will collect for our study will be made anonymous at the point of collection, thus it will not be possible to identify and remove individual data at a later date, should you decide to withdraw partial data from the study. However, data sets belonging to your organisation can be withdrawn in full at any time.

Please note that if data is being collected online, once the data has been submitted online you will be unable to withdraw your information.

The lead researcher (or supervisor, if student research) will take responsibility for data destruction and all collected identifiable data will be destroyed on or before January 2030, the 10 year limit being that in which the dataset might be useful for future research by the study authors.

What will happen to the information I provide?
An analysis of the information will form part of our report at the end of the study and may be presented to interested parties and published in scientific journals and related media. Note that all information presented in any reports or publications will be anonymous and unidentifiable unless specific permission is sought at an organisational level for the affiliate's organisation name to be included.

Is participation voluntary and what if I wish to later withdraw?
Your participation is entirely voluntary – you do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, but later wish to withdraw from the study, then you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without penalty.

Data Protection Privacy Notice
The data controller for this project will be Swansea University. The University Data Protection Officer provides oversight of university activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at the Vice Chancellors Office.

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this information sheet.
  Standard ethical procedures will involve you providing your consent to participate in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

The legal basis that we will rely on to process your personal data will be processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. This public interest justification is approved by the College of Human and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Swansea University.

The legal basis that we will rely on to process special categories of data will be processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes.

How long will your information be held?
We will hold any personal data and special categories of data until the research is published.

What are your rights?

You have a right to access your personal information, to object to the processing of your personal information, to rectify, to erase, to restrict and to port your personal information. Please visit the University Data Protection webpages for further information in relation to your rights.

Any requests or objections should be made in writing to the University Data Protection Officer:-

University Compliance Officer (FOI/DP)
Vice-Chancellor's Office
Swansea University
Singleton Park
Swansea
SA2 8PP
Email: dataprotection@swansea.ac.United Kingdom

How to make a complaint

If you are unhappy with the way in which your personal data has been processed you may in the first instance contact the University Data Protection Officer using the contact details above. If you remain dissatisfied then you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: -

Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF
www.ico.org.United Kingdom

What if I have other questions?

If you have further questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact us:

Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod	Dr Janet Goodall
Department of	Department of
Swansea University	Swansea University
███████████	███████████

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET & ONLINE CONSENT FORM
(Version 1.1, Date: 14/7/2020)
Parental Engagement in Shared Reading (Phase 3)

Contact Details:
Researcher: Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod ██████████████████
Supervisor: Dr Janet Goodall ██████████████████

What is the study?

This survey looks at parents/carers feelings about Imagination Library books and how they are used in your home.

How will the results be used?
The data will be used by researchers at the University of Swansea who are investigating the value of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, by the Imagination Library and by North Lincolnshire Council. The results of the study will be published and the data may be shared with other organisations who are interested in supporting reading.

How is the study being carried out?
You will complete a (10-15 minute) survey about reading with children. No personal or identifying information will be collected in this survey apart from if you choose to leave your contact details to be entered into the prize draw or to be contacted for further research. Your data will be processed in accordance with the United Kingdom's Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Data collection is taking place through a secure online survey platform and all data will be stored on password-protected devices. Data collected online will only be viewed by the named research team. If you fill out a written survey, this will be stored securely, electronically transferred to the researcher and then disposed of by North Lincolnshire Council staff.

Is it voluntary?
This survey is voluntary, and you can stop the survey at any time without finishing it and your answers will not be kept. You can choose to identify who you are if you would like to be contacted for further research or to be entered into the prize draw. If you leave your name and contact details these will be stored separately from the survey data which is anonymous, so it will not be possible to identify and remove your data at a later date, should you decide to withdraw from the study.

Who is carrying out the survey?
Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod PhD researcher ████████████████████
supervised by Dr Janet Goodall ████████████████████████████ from the School of Education, Swansea University, supported by North Lincolnshire Council.

This data collection and research project has been approved by the College of Arts & Humanities Research Ethics Committee at Swansea University. Please contact us if you have any questions! Thank you for taking the time to take part in this research

Participant Information Sheet
Parental engagement in children's reading: The Dolly Parton Imagination Library. (Phase 4)

We are inviting you and your child to take part in a video interview for the study named above. Before you decide if you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the study and what the interview will involve. Please take the time to read this information carefully and please do not hesitate to ask me if there is anything that is not clear. Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?
The aim of this study is to investigate what parents/carers and children think of reading together and of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

Why am I being asked to take part?
We want to hear from parents/carers and see what their children think about receiving books from the Imagination Library and about reading together.

Do I have to take part in an interview?
No. It is up to you to decide whether or not you take part. If you decide to take part we will discuss the contents of this information sheet with you further and describe the consent process; you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview.

What happens if I agree to take part?
You will be asked to participate in an interview. At the time of the interview, the researcher will go through this information sheet and ask you to fill in a consent form. You will be asked to talk about how and why you read with your child. Everything you say during the interview will be treated confidentially. If you agree, your interview will be audio-recorded or video-recorded and later transcribed. This allows the researcher to concentrate fully on your conversation during the interview. You will be free to stop and withdraw from the interview at any point during our talk. If you and your child are willing, we will video you both sharing a book together.

If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so up to the point at which data are anonymised. If you choose to withdraw from the study before anonymisation, your data will be removed and will not be included in the study. After anonymization, it will be impossible to remove your data. Anonymisation will occur within approximately a week after the interview.

You can withdraw by informing the interviewer during the interview or by emailing Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod the researcher on ███████████████ ███████ or her supervisor Dr Janet Goodall on ████████████████████████ if you decide at any time after the interview

has been concluded but before anonymisation has taken place.

How long will the interview take?
The times vary for each person we talk with, though we ask you to expect a time commitment of about 60-90 minutes for the interview.

Will my taking part in the project be kept confidential?
Yes. Your data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR). Any information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will only be viewed by the project team.

How will my information be stored?
Original audio or video files will be transferred to University approved computers as soon as possible after the interview and deleted from the recording device. Audio and video files stored on computers will be destroyed after transcription; anonymised electronic copies of transcripts will be stored on approved University computers, which are password protected and virus checked; this data may be retained for up to 10 years after the study. No personally identifiable information will be kept.

What will happen to the information provided for the project?
Findings of the project will be presented in a report for the funder, in the researcher's published thesis and may be published in academic and professional journals, and presented at conferences. It may also be shared with other organisations who support early reading with children and with North Lincolnshire Council.

Who is carrying out the research?
The information is being collected by Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod supervised by Dr Janet Goodall, of Swansea University.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?
Research and evaluation undertaken via the College of Arts and Humanities at Swansea University are looked at by the Research Ethics Committee (REC). The REC consists of an independent group of people with experience and expertise in research who oversee projects to ensure your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity are protected.

This project has been approved by the REC and there are no significant risks associated with participation.

Further information and contact details
If you have any questions about the project or would like to speak to someone about taking part please contact:

Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod,
██████████████████████

Tel: ████████████

Data Protection Privacy Notice
The data controller for this project will be Swansea University. The University Data Protection Officer provides oversight of university activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at the Vice Chancellors Office.

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this information sheet. Standard ethical procedures will involve you providing your consent to participate in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.
The legal basis that we will rely on to process your personal data is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. This public interest justification is approved by the College of Human and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Swansea University.

The legal basis that we will rely on to process special categories of data is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes.

What are my rights?
You have a right to access your personal information, to object to the processing of your personal information, to rectify, to erase, to restrict and to port your personal information. Please visit the University Data Protection webpages for further information in relation to your rights.

Any requests or objections should be made in writing to the University Data Protection Officer:

University Compliance Officer (FOI/DP)
Vice-Chancellor's Office
Swansea University, Singleton Park
Swansea, SA2 8PP
Email: dataprotection@swansea.ac.United Kingdom

How do I make a complaint?
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Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane, Wilmslow,
Cheshire, SK9 5AF
Website: www.ico.org.United Kingdom

Participant Consent Form
Project title: Parental engagement in children's reading: The Dolly Parton Imagination Library. (Phase 4)

Name and contact details of the principal researcher : Caroline Zwierzchowska-Dod
█████████████████████████████ supervised by Dr Janet Goodall,

	Participant initial
1. I (the participant) confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study (October, 2020) which is attached to this form.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reasons.	
3. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
4. I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.	
5. I have been informed that the information I provide will be safeguarded.	
6. I am happy for the information I provide to be used (anonymously) in academic papers and other formal research outputs, and shared with the study partners (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and North Lincolnshire Council).	
7. I am willing for my information to be audio and video recorded.	
8. I have been provided with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet.	
9. I agree to the researchers processing my personal data in accordance with the aims of the study described in the Participant Information Sheet.	
10. I give consent on behalf of my child or children in respect of points 1-9	

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your help is very much appreciated.

Print name of participant	Signature	Date
Print name of child participant Name of parent/carer/guardian Relationship to child	Signature	Date
Print name of researcher	Signature	Date

This study is being conducted by Swansea University, College of Arts and Humanities

Appendix E <u>**Codebook**</u>

Codebook

QUAL_QUANT Final 10 June.mx20

30/11/2021

Code System

1 other pressures (age)	15
2 parental habits (age)	8
3 RED	36
4 Connections	11796
4.1 Bonding	5975
4.2 Hearing parent's voice	1328
4.3 Time spent together / sharing / shared activity	3832
4.4 Physical closeness	741
4.5 Comfort/reassurance	339
5 Parenting	2381
5.1 Doing a positive thing for your child	349
5.2 Adult enjoys it (+)	1278
5.3 Teaching the child	229
5.4 Prompts activity/something to do	249
5.5 Improving parental knowledge of child	319
6 Communication, Language & Literacy	5584
6.1 Speaking & communication	990
6.2 Listening skills	695
6.3 Reading skill development (+)	939
6.4 Vocabulary & language	3204
7 Development (other)	10998
7.1 Calming/relaxing/quiet	2077
7.2 Routines (+)	901
7.3 emotional development	269
7.4 Age related development	1633
7.4.1 support early development in utero (age) (+) (+) (+)	73
7.4.2 Benefits identified later than 0-3m (age)	28
7.5 General development, learning, knowledge (+)	2964
7.6 Good habits & love of reading	1406
7.7 Child enjoys it	846
7.8 Imagination/creativity	1070
8 The books	879
8.1 Increased access to books - choice	221
8.2 Increased access to books - amount	92
8.3 Stories, praise for books	165
8.4 Book ownership	51
8.5 Pictures / colours	259
8.6 Not technology based	71
8.7 Age appropriate	73
9 The scheme	1377
9.1 Positive comments and thanks	966
9.2 Negative/ambivalent comments	46
9.3 Postal aspect	167
9.4 Practicalities of book distribution/service offered	256
9.5 Reading habits unrelated to the scheme	67
9.6 Community & sharing	17
10 WhyAgeStart	4622

11 BenefitsChild	4646
12 BenefitsAdult	4638
13 Benefits Combined	9284
14 DPILComments	1296

1 other pressures (age)

2 parental habits (age)

3 RED

4 Connections

4.1 Bonding

connection
attachment stimulation (Questionnaire responses\4809: 3 - 3)

Bonding
Love
Closeness where it is not specified to be physical closeness
Building relationships

Anything about developing a close parent/child relationship
4.2 Hearing parent's voice

Particularly for pregnancy - parental voice heard in the womb
Includes - baby hearing words/sounds
4.3 Time spent together / sharing / shared activity

Spending time with your child (no other benefit mentioned)
Extending time spent
Making space for time to be together
Reason for spending time together
One on one time
Doing something together (not related only to time - code that as time)
Joint activity
sharing time, sharing booked - joint attention activities
interaction
engaging
INCLUDES parental attention

NOT activity when it relates to filling time - code as 'prompts activity', only code when the focus is on the activity being a shared experience
4.4 Physical closeness

Cuddles
Hugs
Kisses
Sitting close
Touching
4.5 Comfort/reassurance

5 Parenting

5.1 Doing a positive thing for your child

Comments about it being good for the child (generalised, not specifying a developmental point)
Enjoyment of doing something positive/good for the child's benefit
Include future benefits
Include parental positive self image
5.2 Adult enjoys it (+)

adult's interest
adult enjoys reading
adult is having fun

Specifically for Q Whyagestart: because parent felt it was the right time

Enjoyment of child's reaction/development 🟨

Parent being happy because the child shows positive emotions
Vicarious enjoyment
Parent enjoying seeing the child learn
5.3 Teaching the child

Direct references to teaching or educating
5.4 Prompts activity/something to do

Something to do
activity
way to entertain baby
keep busy
entertainment
 Books as prompts for parents to engage/talk
5.5 Improving parental knowledge of child

Knowing or understanding more about the child, their likes, dislikes or interests
6 Communication, Language & Literacy

6.1 Speaking & communication

Improvements to their speech, talking out loud, asking questions

Include communication

NOT where improving vocabulary/word choice is mentioned
6.2 Listening skills

Reference to the child listening or concentrating/paying attention whilst reading. Attention can be focused on the book or on the parent

DOES NOT include parent's attention to the child - this is time spent together

Includes 'focus' when no other context, does not include 'focussed adult attention', that is time spent together

6.3 Reading skill development (+)

Skills of learning to read
Phonics
recognising letters
literacy skills

Understanding (of story) 🟨

Improving their understanding - literacy related eg how books work, how stories are formed
Comprehension

NOT general understanding of the world

6.4 Vocabulary & language

Using increased vocabulary
Developing language
Developing grammar
Any comment focused on the words the child uses
include comments about sounds

7 Development (other)

7.1 Calming/relaxing/quiet

References to either it being a calming or relaxing thing to do
or to books helping to actively calm a busy/upset child
quiet time
down time

7.2 Routines (+)

Being part of the daily routine

NOT habit/good habit, this is to do with helping the day go smoothly or predictably.

Bedtimes 🟨

Any linking to the time of day being bedtime/ nighttime

7.3 emotional development

positive qualities eg empathy, kindness, dealing with own emotions, confidence
Include moral and ethical values and development

7.4 Age related development

any comments about child not being interested that relate to age
comments about child now being interested that are related to age or stage of development

7.4.1 support early development in utero (age) (+) (+) (+)

7.4.2 Benefits identified later than 0-3m (age)

7.5 General development, learning, knowledge (+)

Any unspecified developmental benefits
Stimulation

curiosity
observation skills

Knowledge of the world

Developing their knowledge and understanding of topics from the books eg learning animal names
Generalised leaning
Learning new things

Physical & visual development

eg page turning, fine motor skills,ability to hold a book, sitting still

Include visual development/improving eyesight

NOT listening or paying attention
7.6 Good habits & love of reading

Developing love of books/reading
Planning for future success
Becomes a habit/regular things to do

NOT routines - code that separately, this is to do with practicing reading regularly for the sake of the reading
7.7 Child enjoys it

Generic enjoyment answers
child's interest
Reading because the child has chosen to
Child indicating a choice

Specifically for Q 'why age start': beacuse the child was now interested/engaged
7.8 Imagination/creativity

Developing their imagination or creativity - code when words specifically used by parent
8 The books

Anything to do with the books themselves apart from the specific elements of
being right for the age of the chikd
introducing new authors/illustrators to the family or child
8.1 Increased access to books - choice

more books in the home
wouldn't have bought them
easier than the library
different books to ones parent would have chosen
New authors/illustrators
8.2 Increased access to books - amount

wouldn't usually buy books/as many books
can't afford books usually
wouldn't choose to buy books usually
INCLUDE any reference to books being free, including library use being free

INCLUDE suppositions about other families benefitting

8.3 Stories, praise for books

enjoying stories
developing knowledge of stories
hearing different stories
8.4 Book ownership

not having to return books
owning for self
belonging to child
8.5 Pictures / colours

pictures
illustrations
colours
graphics
visual
8.6 Not technology based

Not looking at screens
Importance of physical books not e books
8.7 Age appropriate

Comments that the books work well for the age of the child
9 The scheme

Geographical availability
9.1 Positive comments and thanks

Anything about how the parent is pleased to be involved in Dolly Parton's Imgaination
Library
Praise for Dolly or the council
Messages of thanks
9.2 Negative/ambivalent comments

Include any ambivilent comments
9.3 Postal aspect

receiving books through the post/mail
book delivery
labelled for child
9.4 Practicalities of book distribution/service offered

About availability of the scheme in areas of the country
Age child stopped/started receiving books
Issues about books not arriving
Issues about duplicates or not age appropriate choices
9.5 Reading habits unrelated to the scheme

Explanations areound already liking reading/having books
9.6 Community & sharing

Sharing books with others, swapping, using as links with other families or settings
10 WhyAgeStart

WhyAgeStart
11 BenefitsChild

BenefitsChild
12 BenefitsAdult

BenefitsAdult

13 Benefits Combined

BenefitsAdult
14 DPILComments

DPILComments

Table 23 Codes, categories and themes

Theme	Category	Code	
Relationships and interaction	Attachment & Nurture	Bonding	
		Hearing parent's voice	
		Time spent together / sharing / shared activity	
		Physical closeness	
	Parenting	Doing a positive thing for your child	
		Adult enjoyment of shared reading	
		Teaching the child	
		Enjoyment of child's reaction/development	
		Prompts activity/something to do	
		Improving parental knowledge of child	
Child development	Communication, Language & Literacy	Speaking & communication	
		Understanding (of story)	
		Listening skills	
		Reading skill development	
		Vocabulary & language	
	Development (other)	Age related development	Supports early development
			Benefits identified later
		General development, learning, knowledge	
		Good habits & love of reading	
		Child enjoyment of shared reading	
		Physical & visual development	
		Imagination/creativity	
	Personal Social & Emotional Development	Comfort/reassurance	
		Emotional development	
		Bedtimes	
		Routines	
		Calming/relaxing/quiet	
	The books	Increased access to books - choice	

The impact of the book-gifting programme		Increased access to books - amount
		Stories, praise for books
		Book ownership
		Pictures / colours
		Not technology based
		Age appropriate
	The scheme	Positive comments and thanks
		Negative/ambivalent comments
		Practicalities of book distribution/service offered
		Postal aspect
		Community & sharing
		Reading habits unrelated to the scheme

Table 24 Intercoder reliability coefficient Kappa

		Coder 1		
		1	**0**	
Coder 2	**1**	a = 270	b = 5	275
	0	c = 8	0	8
		278	5	283

P(observed) = Po = a / (a + b + c) = 0.95

P(chance) = Pc = 1 / Number of codes = 1 / 30 = 0.03

Kappa = (Po - Pc) / (1 - Pc) = 0.95

If there is an unequal number of codes per segment or if only one code is to be evaluated:

P(chance) = Pc = Number of codes / (Number of codes + 1)^2 = 0.03

Kappa = (Po - Pc) / (1 - Pc) = 0.95

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