What is the impact of the school library on pupils’ personal development? A case study of a secondary school in Northern Ireland

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What is the perceived impact of the school library on pupils’ personal development? This paper reports on a case study of a secondary school (all girls, 11-18 years) in a disadvantaged area in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The study explores the impact of the school library in terms of personal development, and seeks to answer the question of how best to evaluate impact in this regard. Interviews and postal questionnaires are used to collect data from both school staff and parents. Data collected from the interviews with school staff show that staff regarded the school library as having a positive impact on pupils’ motivation to learn, and on their self-esteem and personal confidence during both formal learning activities in the library and periods of free access. The results of the survey of parents show that parents perceived that the activities of the school library contributed positively to pupils’ attitudes towards reading and the development of literacy skills. This paper makes a valuable contribution to how we demonstrate the impact of the school library and data is collected from a geographic area that is significantly under-represented in the research.

Introduction

The aim of this research was to investigate and measure the perceived impact, if any, that the school library may have on the personal development of pupils coming from a disadvantaged socio-economic background.

The school that was selected for this case study is a secondary school (all girls, aged 11-18 years) in a disadvantaged area in Belfast, Northern Ireland. It is situated in an area that has suffered from “social and civil unrest for a period of some 30 years” (Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), 2003, p. 3). At the time of the study (late Spring 2010), 420 pupils were on the role, 42% of whom were in receipt of free school meals (FSMs)\(^1\) and came from areas described by the Department for Social Development, Northern Ireland (DfSDNI, 2003, p. 41) as among those districts suffering the highest level of deprivation in the province. The ETI (2003, p. 3) report also noted that “approximately 52% of the pupils are deemed by the school to have special educational needs”.

Results of MidYIS\(^2\) internal tests on cultural capital (specifically, what support for learning there was in students’ lives, in terms of access to books in the home, and library and museum visits) showed that the pupils ranked significantly below the national average in some areas (e.g. only 36% had access to more than 50 books in the home against a national average of 79%; 33% used public libraries (compared to a national average of 76%) and surprisingly high in other strands (e.g. 96% used the school library, where the national average is 77%; 71% read for pleasure compared to the national average of 74%). So this data shows that the school library is well used,
and that there is a fairly high level of reading for pleasure. By providing access to reading materials and cultural capital (in the form of cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1986)) and encouraging opportunities for independent learning and reading for pleasure, is the school library making any difference to the learning and personal experience of pupils? An evaluation of the school library’s possible impact will give the service a chance to explore and evidence a “multidimensional perspective on its value” (Todd, 2007) as well as informing practice and contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field of evidence-based school librarianship (Todd, 2001).

**Review of Literature**

Ritchie (2009) highlights the multidisciplinary nature of school libraries research. For the study reported here, evidence and existing research from school librarianship; socio-cultural and constructivist theories on learning outcomes from the field of educational research; and aspects of social research such as policies and studies on social inclusion/exclusion and cultural capital, had to be examined. A full literature review, as well as further details of the study (including copies of the data collection instruments), can be found in Fodale (2010).

**Research on school librarianship**

The positive impact of school libraries on students’ achievement has been confirmed by the evidence of a substantial body of research and consultations carried out in USA, Canada and Australia over the past thirty years (Lonsdale, 2003; Scholastic, 2008; Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009; Hay & Todd, 2010). Despite methodological differences between quantitative (Lance, Welborn & Hamilton-Pennell, 1993; Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000) and qualitative approaches (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2004; Small, Shanahan & Stasak, 2010), the findings of large scale studies have demonstrated how, given the adequate levels of staffing, funding and integration within all schools’ programs, school libraries can significantly contribute to improve students’ educational achievement in standardized tests (Lance et al., 1993; Lance et al., 2000); develop and sustain their enthusiasm for reading; support the acquisition of life long skills; and increase their motivation and sense of personal satisfaction within the school (Small et al., 2010).

Regrettably, the large scale studies conducted abroad have not found wide applicability in the UK because of the disparity in the standards of school library provision across the country (Starrs, 2002; Ofsted, 2006). This has caused UK research in school librarianship to suffer from a “chronically low profile” (Ritchie, 2009, p. 32), with a large number of small scale ‘cameo’ studies (Johnson et al., 2004) conducted by practitioners mainly committed to the improvement of their services.

by Williams and Wavell (2001) conducted a significant study was in Scotland aimed at developing a systematic approach for the evaluation of school libraries’ impact on broader aspects of learning such as motivation, progression, independence and interaction. Their multi-phased study reflects a shift in the policy discourse from the evaluation of school libraries’ impact on academic achievement towards more intangible ‘non-cognitive’ skills such as autonomy, confidence and self-esteem for “the crucial role they play in individual life chances” (Vignoles & Meschi, 2010, p. 1).

The UK debate on the role and value of school libraries has been recently revitalised by the appointment of the School Libraries Commission (SLC) and the publication in 2010 of a report that stresses the need for a well functioning school library for the impact it could have on pupils’ “literacy levels; enjoyment of reading... self-esteem, confidence, sense of safety and well being in the school community” (School Library Commission, 2010, p.5). However, the SLC goes on to lament the difficulty school library staff have in identifying the learning outcomes they are delivering. Staff are urged to produce evidence relating to the use and impact of their services using the Generic Learning Outcomes currently available from the Inspiring Learning framework, from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, UK (MLA, 2008).

**School libraries and Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs)**

In 2002, the Learning Impact Research Project (LIRP) drafted a conceptual framework of Generic Learning Outcomes adopting a “socio-cultural and constructivist view of learning” (Hooper-
Learning was thus defined as the construction of individual and collective meaning in which cognitive and affective knowledge converge to produce learning experiences that may be unpredictable (due to the informal setting in which they take place) and influenced by individuals’ interaction with the physical context (Hooper-Greenhill, 2002). The resulting five categories of Generic Learning Outcomes – Knowledge and Understanding; Skills; Attitudes and Values; Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity; Activity, Behaviour and Progression – can be adopted by informal learning settings to assess how/if they are contributing to local and national priorities and to assist practitioners in gathering measurable evidence of these outcomes.

Crucially, the five GLOs have been designed to adhere and overlap with a wide range of UK policy domains (“Every Child Matters”, 2003; “Inspiring Learning for All”, 2008; “Northern Ireland Curriculum”, 2007a, b) as they share the same definition of learning. The theoretical consistency between the Inspiring Learning For All framework and different policy programs thus allows for the adoption of personal development (defined by the NI Revised Curriculum Guidelines for Key Stage 4 (Northern Ireland Curriculum, 2007b) as a “learning climate” in which pupils’ “sense of identity, of life-purpose and autonomy” are nurtured) as a strand for the evaluation of school library’s impact and the use of the five Generic Learning Outcomes as a framework to be used in that evaluation.

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, UK provides more detail on each of the five component General Learning Objectives. For example, under skills, it lists the following: knowing how to do something, being able to do new things, intellectual skills, information management skills, social skills, communication skills, and physical skills.

School libraries and social inclusion

According to Odasso (2007), school libraries play a crucial role in the social inclusion agenda as they contribute to the formation of ‘human capital’ by adhering to the strategic aims of the educational organizations to which they belong. For this to be possible, processes of ‘personalization’ (SLC, 2010) need to be put in place so that service provision is responsive to the diverse needs of pupils coming from different socio-economic backgrounds. As improvements in disadvantaged areas will be reached only by policies that are sensitive to the peculiarities of specific contexts (Lupton, 2004), school libraries operating in low-income districts will have to take into account the specific needs of their users and the communities they are coming from.

Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to benefit from access to “cognitive stimulating material” (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002, p. 381) within their household; their personal attributes (capabilities: e.g. self-esteem, motivation) are influenced by parents’ resources (identity, human and social capitals) (Feinstein & Bynner, cited in Bird & Akerman, 2005, p. 24) and their “reading attainment, enjoyment, attitudes and behaviour” are affected by the level of parental support and interactions about reading (Clark and Hawkins, 2010, p. 4).
If we are to agree with Sullivan (2001) that recreational reading is a cultural activity that might represent a means of ‘intellectual self-development’ as well as being one of “the most effective ways to leverage social change” (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2002, p. 3), then following from this, school libraries operating in socio-economic disadvantaged areas will have to assess their impact in terms of how they compensate for contextual deficiencies (Cederberg, Hartsmar & Lingärde, 2009) by providing “equitable and stable access” to stimulating materials (Hay & Todd, 2010, p. 7), by encouraging children’s confidence in reading (De Groot & Branch, 2009) and finally by promoting positive attitudes towards reading through meaningful interactions with peers and adults (Clark & Akerman, 2006).

By adhering to the wider literacy agenda, school libraries can contribute to the empowerment of individuals (Dugdale & Clark, 2008) and represent a gateway to “personal development and to social, economic and civic life” (Clark & Rumbold, 2006, p.5). By recognizing that reading is a “creative activity oriented towards finding personal meaning and purpose” (Cremin, 2007, p.6), it is then legitimate to question and evaluate the broader range of outcomes that school libraries deliver on a day to day basis by making available resources, environments, opportunities and reading models.

**Methodology**

The findings reported in this paper are from a case study of a single school. The case study research strategy, as is reported in the literature, typically involves multiple methods of data collection (e.g. Yin, 1994): “Case studies...are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoints of the participants by using multiple sources of data...Case studies are multi-perspectival analyses” (Tellis, 1997).

There were four strands to this study:

- Monitoring the level of provision and use of the school library using data produced by the library management system (Alice);
- Interviews with key stakeholders within the school (teaching staff and senior management) on the perceived impact that the library might have on pupils both during formal learning activities and independent use;
- A survey of parents concerning their perceptions of the possible impact that the school library’s reading development strategies might have on pupils’ personal development; and
- Use of the Inspiring Learning for All Framework (MLA website) to analyse data and present quantifiable evidence of the school library’s perceived impact.

The study was concerned with the investigation of the perceived impact of the school library in its social context, and was located within the research paradigm of ‘empirical interpretivism’. It was perceived that, given the social nature of libraries as places ‘rich in meaning’ resulting from the interactions between “subjective factors [such] as motivations and behaviour” (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p. 16) and the context in which these interactions take place, an element of qualitative research was important as it aims at uncovering “multiple constructed realities” (Pickard, 2007, p. 7) and it “imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 6).

Gorman and Clayton’s (2005) definition of learning matches the socio-cultural and constructivist theories upon which the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) are articulated (Hooper-Greenhill, 2002), thus confirming that a “shared philosophy of learning underpins a shared vision for the learning outcomes” (Kuhlthau, cited in Todd, 2001) in the field of librarianship and education. In this study the framework of GLOs were used to examine experiences of cognitive and affective learning within their originating situations and physical context (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

The research method applied was of an instrumental case study, which enabled an empirical enquiry of the nature of the school library’s impact as a social phenomenon (Pickard, 2007), and contextualized the research aim within the real-life context (Yin, cited in Pickard, 2007) of a school library serving a population coming from socio-economic disadvantaged background. It also enabled verification of the validity of the research questions against the perceptions of
different sources (school staff and parents) through the use of multiple data collection instruments (qualitative and quantitative). Finally, conclusions were drawn as data emerged so that the negotiated outcomes took into account both the findings and the processes from which they were generated (Pickard, 2007).

The attempt to measure the effectiveness of the school library in terms of outcomes responded to the current imperative for library services to “provide a rationale for policies” (Menou, cited in Johnson et al., 2004, p. 33) and to gather sound quantifiable evidence of the impact they might have on human behaviour so as to increase services’ accountability and inform decision making (Markless & Streatfield, 2006).

The research involved the consultation of two different groups of participants. The selection of members from the School senior management and teaching staff involved purposive sampling based on subjects’ holding “theoretical qualifications” relevant to the enquiry (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p. 85), and as a result four members of staff were interviewed. Data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Initially, the interview schedule was piloted with a member of staff who had familiarity with school library activities and usage. Eight open-ended questions were drafted on the framework of GLOs to gather measurable evidence of impact and critical incident questions were included to ensure that all possible areas had been covered (Pickard, 2007).

Pupils’ being in receipt of free school meals (FSMs) was adopted as a crude indicator of socio-economic status as widely established in educational and social research (Lupton, 2004; Clark, 2006, 2010). In terms of the survey of parents, a quota sample in which each main category (FSMs and Non FSMs) and subcategories (Year Groups) had the same percentile representation was adopted (and duplications (siblings) were avoided). Postal questionnaires were sent to a total of 236 participants (56% of total pupils’ parents) with a pre-stamped addressed envelope to return completed questionnaires. The anonymous aspect of the consultation did not allow for follow-ups of unreturned questionnaires and a system of color-coding was adopted to establish main and sub-categories of responses without compromising anonymity.

This postal questionnaire consisted of:

- Five multiple choice questions on frequency of borrowing from school and other libraries, quality rating of stock and frequency of use of school library;
- Likert questions (five-scale response system) to “gauge intensity of attitudes” (Pickard, 2007, p. 188) towards the school library’s perceived impact; and
- Two final open-ended questions, which allowed participants to raise other possible aspects related to reading for pleasure.

The questionnaire had been piloted on a member of school ancillary staff and minor adjustments were made following this.

**Findings**

**Library usage**

The first phase of the study involved gathering and examining data from the school library and library management system on borrowing and official stock counts.

The examination of borrowing figures against stock additions per year (from 2007 to 2010) found that an average increase of 6.7% of stock resulted in an average 9.1% increase of loans. Significantly, in the same period the school population decreased, with an average 14% reduction of first year intake, while the quality of the stock improved (currently 53% of resources available have been published after 2000).
Table 1: Relationship between stock figures, additions and loan statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stock at 1st September</th>
<th>Resources added to stock</th>
<th>Total loans &amp; renewals</th>
<th>% Increase in loans &amp; renewals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/2007</td>
<td>7705</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>3538</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>8279</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>3956</td>
<td>+ 11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/2009</td>
<td>7977</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>4290</td>
<td>+ 8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009/2010</td>
<td>7502</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>4588</td>
<td>+ 6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If borrowing rates are assumed as an indicator of reading, the dataset seems to confirm evidence from other studies (Clark & Akerman, 2006; Clark, 2010), which indicate young people’s attitudes and appreciation of reading for pleasure are influenced by the quantity and quality of printed material that they might have at their disposal.

Staff Interviews

The transcripts from staff interviews were coded using the GLO checklist (MLA, 2008). The thematic coding aimed at organizing the qualitative data under the following five categories of learning outcomes: Knowledge and Understanding (GLO1); Skills (GLO2); Attitudes and Values (GLO3); Creativity, Inspirations and Enjoyment (GLO4); and Activity, Behaviour and Progressions (GLO5).

GLO1: Knowledge and Understanding.

All four staff consulted recognized that the school library provided material and opportunities for pupils to develop new knowledge either subject specific or related to their personal interests, thus contributing to “the development of a more complex view of self, family and personal world” (Hooper-Greenhill et al., 2003, p. 13). Participant A stressed how the acquisition of new knowledge in the library could happen “in a way that does not appear like formal learning: more like a process of learning by osmosis”.

Improved understanding of particular library aspects and information literacy skills (e.g. different types of resources and their arrangement, the Dewey Decimal System, research strategies) were also listed among the areas of impact of the school library on pupils’ knowledge, with Participant D stating that the availability of the school library “will increase pupils’ familiarity with a place for reflective, independent study, something they might not experience within their homes”.

Autonomy and independence in learning were also listed among areas of impact with one participant pointing out how “the library gives pupils the possibility to learn at their own pace and recap if necessary”.

GLO2: Skills.

Participant C, who had used the library for a pilot research project, commented that “ICT, communication, thinking skills, self-management and personal decision making were all assessed as improved areas of learning for pupils involved in the project”, hence confirming the potential impact of the library on key skills required by the Revised Curriculum at Key Stage 3, Northern Ireland.

Social skills, such as negotiation and behaviour management, were appraised as significantly improved for pupils who used the school library independently during lunchtime, with one participant underlining how children from “more deprived backgrounds can learn social graces from peers” (Participant A). Two members of staff also referred to pupil Z as an example of a “girl coming from an extremely difficult background and who flourished as a pupil librarian” (Participant A).

The library was perceived by all interviewees as contributing to pupils’ subconscious language acquisition through the promotion of reading for pleasure, while one member of staff emphasized how, for shy pupils, “reading fiction is a way of learning how to conduct themselves in the world” (Participant B). By providing relevant and interesting material (De Groot & Branch,
2009) the school library was regarded by all interviewees as promoting pupils’ personal and emotional development.

**GLO3: Attitudes and Values.**
All participants believed that the school library could have a “civilising effect on pupils” who “identify themselves with the environment because of its attractiveness and variety of materials” (Participant A). The library was seen by the same participant as “promoting ownership of learning and pride of pupils in their reading” as well as leading to positive parental perceptions as “they can derive a great satisfaction from seeing their children getting on and reading, or simply having at their disposal facilities and opportunities that they did not have”. The library was also considered crucial as it provided “peers and adults’ reading role models to pupils who may lack them at home” (Participant D). This confirmed the relationship between the provision of a school library and the socio-economic context in which it operates, and the impact that availability of a welcoming environment and appealing resources could have on pupils’ human and cultural capital (Bird & Akerman, 2005).

Increased self-confidence, motivation and personal satisfaction were also mentioned by Participant D who offered two examples: pupil G, who was encouraged in the library to pursue her personal interests and “felt so proud about herself that it improved her attitudes towards reading”; and pupil N who showed increased self-confidence in class after she had joined the Book Club. The school library was therefore perceived as positively affecting pupils’ feelings, perceptions and opinions about themselves (Hooper-Greenhill, 2002).

**GLO4: Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity.**
Participant C stressed how the variety of resources had enhanced the creative outcomes of learning taking place in the library, an aspect perceived as critical for “lower ability pupils whose enthusiasm and motivation are key elements for future achievement and progress”. The same participant also observed that pupils “look and feel more relaxed when working in the library as they are allowed to experiment with their learning. As a result they show more confidence in using their own creativity”.

The library was described by all subjects as a stimulating environment, for example Participant A regarded it as a “thriving hive of activities, an environment pupils perceive as welcoming, stimulating and safe, a place where they want to be, as opposed to they are forced to”.

Significantly, all participants stressed how safety represented an important quality of the library environment. Participant B stated that “levels of acceptable behaviour […] based on self-management and mutual respect allow shy pupils some quiet time from more dominant children”. This confirms findings from recent studies and consultations (Small et al., 2010; Hay & Todd, 2010), which maintain that the library setting can represent a safe haven for children “with a more nervous disposition or who struggle to fit in” (Participant A).

**GLO5: Activity, Behaviour and Progression.**
As an example of the library’s impact on activity and progression, the participant who ran the pilot library project stated that “for the past two years we did not have a GCSE Group, while this year we have 17 girls from the year group involved in the library project who have chosen the subject for GCSE”, thus concluding that the learning experience taking place in the school library had stimulated pupils’ interest and appreciation for the subject.

The strategies adopted by the school library to promote reading were also considered for the long-term effect they might have against the socio-economic background of pupils: “children switched on to reading… [they] may become better readers as parents, thus breaking the cycle of deprivation, poor reading and consequent low self-esteem that many of them experience daily” (Participant D).

**Survey of parents**
A total of 236 questionnaires were posted to parents of pupils from Year 8 to Year 12 (age 11 to 16), with a 50% quota representing free school meals (FSMs) and non-free school meals groups. The response rate was 25% (58 questionnaires returned), 53% of which belonged to FSMs (31) and 47%...
to Non FSMs (27). All returned questionnaires were considered valid and 46 of the respondents (73%) also answered the two final open-ended questions.

The fact that FSMs’ participation was higher than Non FSMs represented in itself an encouraging result as it showed an active involvement of carers/parents in children’s reading habits, in contrast with evidence from other studies (Clark & Akerman, 2006; Dugdale & Clark, 2008; Clark & Hawkins, 2010) that has suggested a relationship between low socio-economic status and low levels of parental support for children’s reading.

**Frequency of pupils’ borrowing from school library.**
The findings showed high levels of borrowing from the school library, as already attested by school internal tests on cultural capital (MidYIS Tests). Fifty-five percent of respondents stated that their children borrow one or more books per week, 36% one or more per month, 9% less than one per month. Significantly, no answers fell in the option ‘no books borrowed’. The borrowing frequency was higher in the Junior School (age 11 to 14), thus corroborating findings of studies that suggest a decline in reading for pupils at Key Stage 4 (age 16-18) (Ofsted, 2006). No significant differences among FSMs and Non FSMs categories were noted.

**Frequency of pupils’ borrowing from public libraries.**
The above-mentioned MidYIS tests had already highlighted low use of public libraries among pupils. This was confirmed by findings of the parents’ survey, with 72% of respondents stating that their children did not borrow books from public libraries. Negative peaks (100% not borrowing from public libraries) were reached by Year 11 pupils (Key Stage 4/age 16-18) but no significant differences were noted among the FSMs and non-FSMSs groups.

**Frequency of pupils’ borrowing from their former primary school library**
The survey included a question about previous use/non-use of their primary school library and the results showed that most pupils had previously used their primary school library. Sixty-one percent of parents stated that their children had borrowed regularly (33% once a week; 28% once a month) from their primary school library. Crucially, 22% of respondents declared that their children had not borrowed from the primary school library. If this dataset is compared to the negative value (0%) scored by the same option (no books borrowed) in the question relating to use of the secondary school library, it is legitimate to infer that 22% of pupils whose parents returned the questionnaires had not used a school library until they had reached secondary school. Furthermore, as low levels of public library usage have been identified, it is very possible that 22% of pupils (just over one in five) would not have used any library if it had not been for the presence of one within the school.

**Quality rating of school library stock.**
Research has shown how the quality of the stock is paramount to encourage children to foster a love of reading (Clark & Akerman, 2006; Hay & Todd, 2010; Clark, 2010). Parent were asked about their views of the quality of school library stock and rated Fiction (88%) and Non Fiction stock (76%) as being either excellent or good.

**Why pupils visit the school library.**
Survey respondents were asked to indicate pupils’ reasons for visiting the school library. Noticeably 77% of respondents declared that their children visit the school library to read and borrow books; 64% to study and research independently; 41% to socialise at lunchtime; 43% for special library events; and 20% as members of book clubs.

**Use of the library and general learning outcomes.**
The Likert type questions adopted a five-scale response system to measure intensity of agreement with eleven items drafted in conjunction with the MLA Generic Learning Outcomes. The eleven statements were:

1. My daughter enjoys reading (GLO4 - Enjoyment)
2. My daughter is happy to be seen reading (GLO3 - Values)
3. In the school library my daughter is encouraged to talk about her favourite books with friends and school staff (GLO5 - Activity)
4. As she grows up she reads more difficult books (GLO5 - Progression)
5. The school library encourages my daughter to see herself as a reader (GLO3 - Values)
6. My daughter is confident in talking about the books she reads (GLO2 – Skills)
7. My daughter’s use of language is improving and increasing (GLO2 - Skills)
8. My daughter’s self-confidence has increased as a result of her reading (GLO3 - Attitudes)
9. My daughter is more thoughtful and creative as a result of her reading (GLO4 - Creativity)
10. Through reading and reading related activities my daughter has developed new interests (GLO1 - Knowledge)
11. Through reading and reading related activities my daughter has made new friends and contacts (GLO5 - Behaviour)

The numerical values of parents’ answers were used to calculate mean levels of agreement with the different statements (see Figure 2 below). The statistical analysis showed higher values from FSMs respondents, with peak level of agreement (M 4.32) registered with statement four: “as she grows up she reads more difficult books” (GLO5: Activity, Behaviour, Progressions). In the Non FSMs’ range the positive peak (M 4.06) was reached with statement one “she enjoys reading” (GLO4: Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity).

![Mean levels of agreement with Likert statements](image)

**Figure 2: Mean levels of agreement with Likert statements**

Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that the school library was encouraging literacy interactions among pupils and with members of staff (statement 3; GLO5: Activity), while 82% agreed that the library was promoting their positive self-image as readers (statement 5, GLO3: Values), thus confirming that the school library was regarded as having a positive impact on pupils’ attitudes towards reading.

Since each statement of the scale was linked to a GLO, it was legitimate to “make a basic assumption that the people who agree/strongly agree with a statement will show some evidence of that learning outcome” (MLA, 2008).

The calculation of the frequency of responses falling within the values of agree/strongly agree (to which were respectively assigned the values of four and five) was then used to measure the percentile distribution of GLOs among respondents.
Table 2: Numerical and percentile distribution of responses falling into the agree / strongly agree areas, total mode and percentage of impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Items/ GLOs</th>
<th>FSMs</th>
<th>Non FSMs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Numerical Value of Agree/Str Agree</td>
<td>Percentile of Agree/Str Agree</td>
<td>Numerical Value of Agree/Str Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy reading (GLO4: Enjoyment)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy to be seen reading (GLO3: Values)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged to talk about reading in/by school library  (GLO5: Activity)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read increasingly difficult material (GLO5: Progression)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged by school library to see themselves readers (GLO3: Values)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident in talking about books (GLO2: Skills)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved use of language because of reading (GLO2: Skills)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-confidence because of reading (GLO3: Attitudes)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased creativity because of reading (GLO4: Creativity)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed new interests and knowledge (GLO1: Knowledge)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed new friends in library environment (GLO5: Behaviour)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 shows the total percentages of Generic Learning Outcomes that parents perceive the school library might be delivering through the promotion of reading for pleasure and the provision of reading materials and reading oriented activities.
Reason why pupils do/do not enjoy reading for pleasure.
The majority of parents who stated that their children liked reading commented that they did it to learn new things and be informed (GLO1), and to relax and “become immersed in new worlds” (GLO4). Among the factors influencing children to become engrossed readers, several participants noted that “they were read to as small children”, thus confirming the importance of literacy interactions within the home (Clark & Hawkins, 2010). Crucially, one parent stated that her daughter “had started getting more interested in reading as she started secondary school”, thus confirming the assumption that the school library may play a crucial role in the promotion of reading for pleasure.

The respondents who stated that their children did not like reading mentioned as causes learning difficulties that transformed the activity into a daunting task.

Why/if parents perceived reading for pleasure as being important.
The survey found that parents believe reading for pleasure can have an impact on language skills, with improved vocabulary and grammar (GLO2) being associated with academic success. Increased knowledge about the wider world and understanding of other people’s lives and circumstances (GLO1) were also highly regarded as benefits of reading for pleasure. Skills for life such as communication and social skills were also stressed and one parents noted how reading in the school library at lunchtime had helped his/her daughter to make new friends (GLO5). Finally, reading was perceived as an activity that improves children’s self-esteem (GLO3), and “broadens their horizons and stimulates creative thoughts” (GLO4).

Conclusions
This research was concerned with gathering evidence of the perceived impact of the school library on the personal development of pupils coming from a socio-economic disadvantaged background. Instruments of data collection and analysis were developed using the checklist of Generic Learning Outcomes provided by the framework Inspiring Learning for All (MLA, 2008).

Data collected from the interviews with school staff showed that the library was perceived as providing a variety of resources and opportunities for both formal and informal learning (GLO1) that stimulated pupils’ desire to learn, to read and to spend their free time in the library.
setting. The independent use of the school library during lunchtime was considered by staff as offering pupils meaningful chances of interactions with peers and staff, thus improving their communication and social skills (GLO2). Free association of pupils with similar interests and dispositions was described as a way to encourage acceptable levels of behaviour being transmitted among peers through emulation rather than coercion (GLO5).

The school library’s impact was also detected in improved attitudes towards reading with examples of pupils who had developed a positive self-image as readers and had shown increased sense of pride and personal satisfaction as a result of interactions and activities taking place in the library (GLO3). Providing pupils with positive reading role models was regarded as extremely beneficial especially for those children who may lack them within the household, thus putting the school library’s impact in context with the specific socio-economic conditions.

Identification with a welcoming and stimulating environment was described by respondents as increasing pupils’ enjoyment and creativity as well as developing their sense of ownership of the library (Small et al., 2010) and subconsciously improving their behaviour and self-management (GLO4).

Staff also perceived the library as supporting autonomy (Deci & Ryan, cited in Small et al., 2009) both in terms of cognitive skills, that is, providing pupils with materials suitable for diverse learning styles and strategies (GLO1), and non-cognitive skills, such as increasing their motivation, self-esteem and personal confidence (GLO3). The school library was also described as being a safe haven for shy pupils, thus improving their general well-being and sense of belonging within the school community.

The school library’s reading development strategies were put in perspective with the development of literacy skills and the life effects that literacy has on individuals. Staff believed that pupils who felt familiar with printed material and a library environment could in the future decide to further their education or simply transmit these positive values in turn to their own families (GLO5).

The results of the parents’ survey showed no significant differences between the two main categories of FSMs and Non FSMs recipients, although it is necessary to notice that the fairly low response rate (25%) might have affected this result. Low levels of participation may be attributable to the timing of the consultation, which corresponded to the beginning of the summer holidays. Consideration had been given to alternative ways of administering the questionnaires but they were not feasible because of the research timetable and the pressure of the school calendar.

Data on the frequency of use of the school, public and primary school library confirmed evidence available from school’s internal tests (MidYIS) and the results corroborate the assumption that for many pupils the school library under investigation had represented the only way to acquire material for leisure reading or independent research. This scenario may depend on the low socio-economic background of families as well as on aspects of social segregation relevant to the specific geographical area, but it clearly confirms that the context crucially requires a school library provision that is responsive to the needs of the community it serves.

All respondents showed appreciation of the school library stock by rating it as either excellent or good, a factor that might play a crucial role in the possible impact of the school library in enthusing children with a love of reading as proved by other studies (Clark & Akerman, 2006; Clark, 2010, Clark & Douglas, 2011).

Evidence from the Likert-scale statements and the incidence of Generic Learning Outcomes across the scale items showed consistency with the findings of staff consultation. Parents perceived the activity of the school library as developing pupils’ knowledge of subject related issues and increasing their understanding of other peoples’ lives (GLO1); literacy and communication skills were thought to be delivered by the school library through the promotion of leisure reading (GLO2); reading oriented activities were regarded as positively affecting pupils’ attitudes towards reading (GLO3) and enhancing their self-esteem, motivation and creativity (GLO4); some respondents also believed that the atmosphere and ethos of the school library setting had played a significant role in helping their children to socialize with peers (GLO5).

Finally, although the scope of this research proved to be ambitious within the timescale in which it had to be concluded, it is argued that its main value resides in the evidence-base it has produced and because it took into account socio-economic factors of a geographic area that has been significantly under-represented in the field of research in school librarianship.

Furthermore, originality resides in the use of the framework of GLOs to evaluate the perceived impact of a school library. From the evidence collected and analyzed in this study, the GLO framework is one that works well in a school library context.
In terms of future study, it would be worthwhile to broaden the research by analyzing school library use, and perceptions of the school library, in a greater number of schools (in both working and middle-class areas), and to conduct a deeper analysis in each school by including the views and experiences of pupils themselves. Finally, the data collected here provides an opportunity for future longitudinal study.

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Notes

1 In Northern Ireland, there is a statutory responsibility for schools to provide free school means to pupils who come from families with low-income or in receipt of Income Support. For details of the criteria applied see: http://www.deni.gov.uk/elb_milk_and_meals_arrangements_-_march_2011.pdf

2 MidYIS (Middle Years Information System) is a system of baseline and attitudinal tests used in the UK, and elsewhere for pupils and parents, for more information see: http://www.cemcentre.org/midyis/.

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