PUPILS AS ASSESSORS IN
QUALITY ASSURANCE OF SCHOOLS
IN MALTA

Thesis submitted for the degree of
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Abstract

Pupils as Assessors in Quality Assurance of Schools in Malta

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The study seeks a new perspective on quality assurance, by engaging pupils as assessors. The data provided by the study could help educational leaders, together with the whole school community to understand how Maltese pupils judge schools. It could provide useful knowledge for more effective appraisal of schools and shed light on proposals for better-quality schools. The study adopted a Mixed Methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions. The main research tool was a questionnaire survey, with 1618 pupils, from two pupil year groups: 8 year olds and 14 year olds. Pupil participation was embedded in all stages of the research design. Pupils were asked to participate in the design of the main research tool and to contribute in the analysis and discussion of the main findings of the questionnaire survey. Qualitative data collected through focus group sessions with pupils, group interviews with Student Councils, and, one-to-one interviews with Heads of Schools and policy-makers, complemented the quantitative data gathered by the questionnaire. Data was gathered from a total of 42 different schools. In addition, the study sought to reveal the perspectives of pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers on pupils’ role as assessors of schools and on the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. The findings show that the top three quality indicators of a good school through the eyes of the Maltese pupil are: ‘Good teachers’, ‘A clean school’ and ‘A good Head of School’. Pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers are all in favour of the concept and the application of the concept of pupils as assessors of schools; however, there are a number of shortcomings which need to be addressed before the full potential of the process can be achieved in Maltese schools.
Dedicated to my children - Kristina, Mattea and Michael - you are my pride and joy
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Statement

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<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This thesis directly asks Maltese pupils what they think about schools because “children and young people have specific perspectives on education derived from their particular experiences as students– they see the school as no adult does or can” (Thomson, 2011:24). Precisely because the eyes of the pupil are different from the eyes of the adult, the researcher feels that Maltese pupils should be asked to take the role of assessors in quality assurance of schools in Malta. Since the researcher is Maltese and plans on continuing to live in Malta, her interest lies in the Maltese pupils’ perspective. Coupled with the fact that this research area has not been previously explored in Malta, the researcher feels that this is an area of research which is worth pursuing. Furthermore, at this particular moment in time, when, notwithstanding the strengths, the Maltese educational system has its fair share of weaknesses: poor performance in international tests, high illiteracy rates, high levels of early school leavers, teacher shortages- the researcher is curious to find out how the Maltese pupil assesses what makes a good school.
1.1 The Context

We are living in a day and age when reviewing services and products, has become fashionable. Before taking a decision on which service to choose, or what to buy, reading reviews has become mandatory for most people. Reviews on mundane things such as services at restaurants or household items, to reviews on Universities and hospitals, are read with diligence. From a non-academic perspective, this research may be considered as following this general fad of reviewing purchases and services, and of consulting reviews; since, basically, this area of research asks Maltese pupils to review schools. On the other hand, from an academic perspective, this area of research conflates two conceptual threads: quality assurance and pupil voice. In the researcher’s opinion, these two conceptual threads are significant to schools, each on their own, but, more so, when merged together under the theme: ‘Pupils as assessors in quality assurance of schools in Malta’. In addition, these two conceptual threads, for different reasons, are topical in the Maltese context.

Over the last few decades, in Malta, the national governance has directed and supported schools to embrace a culture of quality assurance. Various Maltese stakeholders agree that this is a step in the right direction because they equate quality assurance in schools with meeting accountability expectations, raising of pupil performance standards, and improvement in a school’s educational provision (Bezzina, 2009). In recent years, spurred by an aspiration to improve scores in international tests such as PISA\(^1\), TIMMS\(^2\) and PIRLS\(^3\), quality assurance in Maltese schools has continued to develop and be formally structured. In fact, one of the directorates within the Ministry for Education and Employment in Malta, is the

---

\(^1\) The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international survey which evaluates the educational competences of 15-year-old students. Source: [http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/)

\(^2\) The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) assesses students on competences in mathematics and science achievement and provides comparative international data. Source: [https://nces.ed.gov/timss/](https://nces.ed.gov/timss/)

\(^3\) The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international test which evaluates trends in students’ reading and literacy skills. Source: [http://cme.ca/399/Programs-and-Initiatives/Assessment/Progress-in-International-Reading-Literacy-Study-(PIRLS)/Overview/index.html](http://cme.ca/399/Programs-and-Initiatives/Assessment/Progress-in-International-Reading-Literacy-Study-(PIRLS)/Overview/index.html)
Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education which has a Department for Quality Assurance⁴.

The second conceptual thread in this study: pupil voice, has been created by academics and refers to the involvement and participation of pupils in schools. Mitra (2004:251) describes the two extremes of the range within pupil voice; from: “the most basic level of youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions” to “young people collaborating with adults to actually address the problems in their schools” (Mitra, 2004:251). Concurrently, schools, and the wider society are recognising that children and young people are not passive recipients, but they have a voice which should, and which needs, to be heard. In fact, Groundwater-Smith (2007) notes:

*Increasingly, there is an awareness that we cannot continue to debate the nature of schooling without consulting the consequential stakeholders, the students themselves.* (Groundwater-Smith, 2007:112).

Furthermore, in the National (Malta) Children’s Policy (2016:23) one of the policy actions is to:

*Provide all children with a stronger voice in educational matters which affects them both directly and indirectly.*

In the researcher’s opinion, this is what this study purports to achieve: to give Maltese pupils a strong voice on what affects them directly- the quality indicators of a good school.

1.2 The Researcher’s Personal Interest in the Research Area

The researcher’s interest in the theme stems from past experiences, and from her current role as an Assistant Head of School. Based on her practice in schools, the researcher feels that pupils’ views are often silenced and ignored in Maltese schools. At the same, the researcher is also interested in quality assurance in education, and how it can lead to improvement in schools.

In March 2006, the researcher spent two weeks job shadowing a Head of School in an Italian school: Liceo Leonardo da Vinci, in Trento, as part-fulfilment for the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education Administration and Management (University of Malta, 2005-07). There, the researcher had the opportunity to observe how pupil participation in the Italian school, was by far more evident and influential than in Maltese schools. During the visit in Trento, the researcher attended the sixth Evaluative Report on the educational system in Trento, where different schools and stakeholders came together to discuss the data gathered as part of an extensive quality assurance exercise on the schools in the region. This professional and systematic approach contrasted sharply with the Maltese scenario. In 2011, the researcher completed an MPhil with the University of Wales, on one of the processes of quality assurance in schools: school self-evaluation. The research focused on Maltese secondary schools. One of the findings showed that pupils’ input during school self-evaluation was minimal. This provoked in the researcher a curiosity on how pupils can make a more significant contribution in schools, and on how the role of pupils can be integrated into quality assurance.

1.3 Statement of Problem

Academics, practitioners, policy-makers and members of the wider society agree that pupils can make a valid contribution in schools by offering their ideas and by engaging in the decision-making process and that schools should implement practical strategies to elicit and act on this contribution. However, the researcher feels that in the Maltese context, there is a wide disparity between what is being said and what is being done. In fact, this is the agenda taken up in this doctoral research, which explores the potential of pupils to act as assessors in quality assurance of Maltese schools. The researcher wanted to combine two current agendas in Malta: the obligation to satisfy quality assurance criteria in schools, and the rhetoric of national policies which popularise children’s and young people’s active participation in schools and in the community, and their rights.
1.4 The Aims of the Study

The main aim of this study is to discover the qualities of a good school, as defined by the Maltese pupil; with the ultimate aim of using this knowledge to help propose better-quality schools in Malta. The study also seeks to uncover if, and how, different variables might be influencing pupils’ judgement on schools. Pupils are asked to assess schools freely, without any interference or influence from adults, since the researcher wants to capture the untampered pupil voice. The purpose of study is not to offer changes to formal processes of how quality assurance is formally being carried out in Malta; but rather, to provide a fresh perspective to the process, by inviting pupils to act as assessors.

Those who are directly affected by schools, the pupils, are the primary data source in this study. Pupils were asked to help in the designing of the main research tool, and they were asked to offer their perspective on the gathered data from the main questionnaire data. This approach has the advantage of giving value to pupil voice and of providing a new outlook on quality assurance of schools, at least in the Maltese. This study would also like to contextualise pupil voice in the role of assessor in Maltese schools, within the array of other voices who already contribute to the assessment of the school community. To this end, Heads of Schools, and policy-makers are asked to participate in the study. In this way, after pupils’ views of school quality are collected, the way pupil voice was viewed and the potential for the actualisation of the message conveyed by pupil voice as assessor into practical changes, at both school and policy levels, can be explored.

1.5 Short Biography of the Researcher

The researcher has a first degree in education from the University of Malta, with Chemistry and Biology as specialised teaching areas. In 1993, she started her teaching career in state schools; for a short period of time, she also worked part-time as a teacher in an independent school. The researcher has taught Integrated Science and Chemistry, at secondary level; and Biology at both secondary and post-
secondary levels. In 2007 she completed a post-graduate diploma in administration and management in education with the University of Malta, and the following year was appointed as an Assistant Head of School in a boys’ secondary school. In 2010, she was deployed as an Assistant Head of a state sixth form, where she is still currently employed. On joining this school she completed her MPhil, as outlined above.

The researcher is married with three teenage children and lives in a very small village, called Lija, in the central part of the island of Malta. Her late father was a Head of School and her mother was a teacher; so she grew up surrounded by the influence of those who had chosen teaching as a career. The researcher received her primary education in a Catholic Church school and her secondary education in a state school, at that time called a Junior Lyceum, where entry was through an 11+ examination. The researcher was brought up as a Catholic and now considers herself as a liberal Catholic who upholds Christian values but is not tied to Catholic dogma. The researcher supports pro-environmental initiatives both at school and national level.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

The first chapter introduces the study, its aims, and the researcher’s interest in the subject area. In the next chapter, the Maltese context is described. This chapter includes a brief account of the history of the Maltese islands and the current situation, together with a description of the Maltese educational system and the policy developments which influenced this study. The following chapter, Chapter 3, presents a detailed description and critical analysis of the literature on the subject. It offers a wide literature presentation on the main themes of the subject and the main conceptual threads. In the next chapter, the methodological strategy adopted in the research project is described, together with the theoretical and practical research designs. The chapter details the data collection process and discusses the limitations of the methodology. This is followed by Chapter 5, which presents the results and the analysed data gathered by the research tools. Chapter 6 discusses the results of the
study, contextualises the study within the Maltese educational system, and links the results of the study with the wider literature. The final chapter, Chapter 7, draws conclusions from the results of the study and presents reflections on the research project. It also proposes a number of recommendations for schools, and for further research.

1.7 Summary of Intent

Traditionally, students have been overlooked as valuable resources in the restructuring of schools. (SooHoo, 1993:392).

The researcher feels that, at least in Malta, 25 years later, pupils are still “being overlooked”. The aim of this research is to change this.
CHAPTER 2

The Maltese Context

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the study, by providing some general information on Malta and on the Maltese educational system. The history of the islands has shaped and formed the present educational system. Malta was a British colony for over 160 years, and this had a profound effect on all sectors, but most particularly on the health and educational systems. The first part of the chapter gives a description of the geography and history of the islands. This is followed by a review of the Maltese educational system, and includes a discussion on the roles of policy-makers, Heads of Schools and Student Councils since these were important sources of data in this study. The last part of the chapter describes the policy developments which have influenced the main themes of this research.
2.1 General Information on Malta

The Maltese archipelago is made up of three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino, together with a few uninhabited islets. The islands lie in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, 90 kilometres south of Sicily and 350 kilometres north of Libya and have a total surface area of 320 square kilometres (Zammit, 2007).

Fig 2.1 Map of Malta

Sources:

Malta lacks natural resources and only provides for about 20% of its food needs. The language is in great part Semitic, with a strong English and Italian influence. It is written in roman letters. The Catholic tradition is very evident on the islands: in the
large number of Churches; in numerous religious symbols; in the names of people, streets, towns and villages; in the feasts which are celebrated throughout the year; and in the traditions which still form part of everyday life. (Said-Zammit, 2012). In 1964, Malta became an independent state. In 2004, Malta became a full member state in the EU.

*The Population*

According to Worldometers (2016), which bases its data on the United Nations Population Division estimates, since 1980, the Maltese population has increased by 100,000 and has now peaked at just under 420,000. This has reflected itself in student populations; in fact, the student population in state schools, from 2001 to 2016, decreased by over 14,000, whereas the student population in Church and Independent schools, since 2010, has remained unchanged (Times of Malta, 18th January, 2016). Maltese nationals form 96% of the population. Malta has a high population density: nearly 1400 people per square kilometre. In addition, it has a high temporary population, with one and a half million tourists visiting the islands each year (NSO, 2014). Malta’s geographic position between Northern Africa and Italy attracts irregular migration. In 2014, nearly 600 irregular migrants reached the Maltese shores (NSO, 2014).

### 2.2 The Maltese Educational System

*A brief history of the Maltese Educational System*

The Maltese educational system was influenced primarily by the Catholic Church and by the fact that Malta was a British colony. In 1592, the Jesuits opened the first college for higher education in Malta. In 1769, the University of Malta was

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5 Irregular immigrants are third-country nationals who do not fulfil, or no longer fulfil, the conditions of entry as set out in Article 5 of the Schengen Borders Code or other conditions for entry, stay or residence in that Member State. (Source: European Parliament Briefing, Irregular Immigration in the EU: Facts and Figures, April 2015).
established (Calleja, 1994). Towards the end of the 19th century, the British government commissioned Keenan, who was the Resident Commissioner of the Education Board of Ireland, to write a report on the educational system in Malta at that time (Hull, 1993). The Keenan Report heavily criticised the state of the educational system: school attendance was not compulsory, teachers were inadequately trained and schools lacked resources (Saïd-Zammit, 2012). As a consequence of the Keenan Report, English became the official language of instruction, and the teaching of English replaced the teaching of Italian (Calleja, 1994). During the 20th century, the Maltese educational system underwent a number of important reforms which transformed it from one which was in a dismal state to a highly advanced system, at par with other European educational systems. Zammit Ciantar (1993) describes the main highlights in education during the 20th century: in 1919, the Malta Union of Teachers was set up, and soon after, a basic teacher training course was developed; in 1924, school attendance was made legally obligatory and in 1970, school attendance was made mandatory up to the age of 14, extended to the age of 16 in 1974. The Faculty of Education was established in 1978. During the 1980s, Junior Lyceums, which were selective secondary schools, were set up for the more academically able secondary level students. In 1988, the first National Minimum Curriculum was drafted, to guarantee the minimum level of education for all students.

The Present System

The Ministry for Education and Employment is responsible for the provision of education in Malta. Equity and quality are the pillars of the education policy in Malta, translated in practice in an inclusive policy at all levels of education, and the provision of free education up to tertiary level (Eurydice, Overview Malta, 2016). School is compulsory from the ages of 5 to 16. The following chart provides a synopsis of the Maltese educational system:
Fig 2.2  The Educational System in Malta up to Compulsory Schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Y1</td>
<td>Y2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key  Y = Year  
     F = Form


In Malta there are three main providers of compulsory education: state, Catholic Church and independent entities. Nearly 40% of primary and secondary pupils attend Catholic Church and independent schools (Eurydice, Overview Malta 2016). The state subsidises Catholic Church schools. Catholic Church secondary schools and a few Catholic Church primary schools are the only schools which are single-sexed.

The setting up of Colleges

In the early 1980s, Junior Lyceums were set up and admittance was through a selective examination at the end of the final year at primary school. In 2005, the policy document ‘For All Children to Succeed’, published by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, described the reform envisaged for the educational system. It entailed the following two major changes:

- All state primary and secondary schools were grouped into 10 colleges, headed by a College Principal. All small, secondary state schools were phased out and merged into new, larger and better-equipped schools.

- All 11+ examinations were abolished. State and Catholic Church secondary schools became comprehensive.

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6 In January 2017, the eleventh college was formed, composed of three post-secondary schools.
2.2.1 Recent Reforms in the Maltese Educational System

In March 2013, in the wake of a new government, a number of reforms started to be implemented. In September 2013, the first pilot secondary state co-ed school was launched and a year later, co-education was introduced in all secondary state schools (Government of Malta, 2014a). In September 2014, another reform was introduced. The five-year secondary school programme was split into a two-year programme in Middle schools (pupil age range from 11-12), and a three-year programme in Senior schools (pupil age range from 13-15). The Middle and Senior secondary schools were set up in separate schools, distanced physically from each other (Government of Malta, 2015).

Another change introduced in September 2014 was banding, in the final two years of primary schooling, hence affecting pupils aged 9-10 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, Letter Circular: Grouping Students in Primary Schools). Banding is carried out by classifying pupils the merit of their total score in Maltese, Mathematics and English annual examinations and creating ‘bands’ or groups of classes of pupils having similar academic abilities. The three subjects chosen for banding have traditionally always been considered as the core subjects in Malta; in fact, a pass at Ordinary level in these subjects is one of the entry requirements stipulated by the University of Malta (University of Malta, Office of the Registrar, 2016). In 2015, vocational education started being offered in parallel to mainstream education In addition, a new school programme, named Alternative Learning Programme, which focused on vocational subjects, was launched for students in their final year of secondary schooling (aged 15) and who were finding it difficult to engage in the traditional, academic curriculum (Government of Malta, 2014b).

The following chart summarises the reforms which have been introduced since 2013 and the organisation of schools:
**Fig 2.3**  Reforms and the Organisation of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY SCHOOLS</th>
<th>SECONDARY SCHOOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR/FORM</td>
<td>Y1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFORMS</td>
<td>BANDING</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Key**

*ALP*= Alternative Learning Programme, an alternative school programme which focuses on vocational subjects.

Y = Year
F = Form

**Recent reforms and the participants in this study**

In this research, the data was gathered between March 2014 and August 2016. The pupils who participated in the field studies had not experienced the reforms directly. The only exception was one secondary school in which a group interview was carried out with the Student Council; this particular secondary school had a first year co-ed group (Form 1 year group, pupils aged 11); the rest of the year groups in the school (Forms 2-5 year groups, aged 12-15) were single-sexed.

**2.2.2  Challenges in the Maltese Educational System**

In the researcher’s opinion, there are a number of challenges in the Maltese educational system. Despite low levels of unemployment, Malta has the highest percentage of low-skilled workers in the EU (European Commission, Country Report Malta, 2016). The highest educational attainment level for 57.8% of the population aged between 25 and 64, is a lower secondary educational level; a direct
consequence of the high proportion of early school leavers. In the document issued by the Ministry for Education and Employment (2012:77) ‘An Early Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta 2014’, early school leavers are defined as:

*Persons between 18 and 24 years of age who do not have at least the equivalent of Secondary Education (SEC) passes (grades 1 to 7) in five different subjects and who are not in education or training.*

According to ‘Further and Higher Education Statistics 2013/2014’ (National Commission for Further and Higher Education, Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015), in 2013, in Malta, a fifth of 18 to 24-year-olds, were early school leavers. This figure was reduced to 20.5% in 2013.

Meanwhile, the financial commitment to education by the government can be witnessed by the increased investment in the sector. According to Eurydice, National Sheets on Education Budgets in Europe (2015), the budget for education in Malta in 2014 was 393 million, and this was increased to 436 million in 2015 due to an increased investment in improving the infrastructure of schools and the provision of free child care to working parents. In 2014, the government expenditure on education amounted to 5.5% of the total government expenditure; this was above the EU average of 4.9% (Eurostat, Statistics Explained, March 2016). Apart from the financial commitment, in its bid to address the shortcomings in the educational system and to prepare students with the necessary skills for future employability and citizenship, the Ministry for Education and Employment (2014), drew up a framework for the forthcoming decade. The document, entitled ‘Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024: Sustaining Foundations, Creating Alternatives, Increasing Employability’, describes four main aims:

1. To raise educational standards in literacy, numeracy, science and technology, and to reduce the gender gap in academic attainment
2. To support students from low socio-economic backgrounds and to reduce the number of early school leavers
3. To increase participation in lifelong learning
4. To increase the level of student retention and attainment in post-secondary education.
The strategy outlined in the framework document lays out, at least in principle, how educational achievement can be raised in Malta.

The next challenge in the educational system concerns the College reform. As discussed earlier, this reform, which started in 2006, abolished 11+ examinations and grouped all state primary and secondary schools under ten colleges, according to their geographical position. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of how the reform was affecting life in schools, the Malta Union of Teachers commissioned a survey in 2011. The results of the survey were presented in a report entitled ‘Towards a Quality Education for All - The College System: Examining the Situation’ (Borg, M.G., and Giordmania, 2012). A questionnaire survey was conducted with personnel in all teaching grades in schools, Assistant Heads of Schools and Heads of Schools. Interviews were carried out with Directors General and with College Principals.

On a positive note, the questionnaire findings showed that the majority of the respondents were in favour of the reform, and slightly less than half felt that the College system resulted in more collaboration and sharing of resources among schools. On the other hand, the survey also revealed a number of weaknesses: nearly 70% of teachers reported that the reform was negatively affecting their work in the classroom. As a result of the reform, all secondary schools became comprehensive and secondary school teachers started teaching mixed ability classes. The questionnaire survey showed that 66% disagreed with the abolition of streaming in schools. Nearly 90% of the respondents felt that there had been too many reforms taking place at the same time, and 60% admitted that, compared with five years ago, their work was not giving them any satisfaction. The results of the research conducted on the College reform, shows, that the reform is perceived by those within the educational system, to have brought about improvement in some areas but not in others. The way forward for the Maltese educational system needs to address the shortcomings in the College reform. One might argue that the reforms introduced

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7The only exception is in the following subjects: Mathematics, English and Maltese, where 'setting' is carried out i.e. pupils are grouped according to their annual examination results.
since 2013, which were discussed above, might be considered as an attempt to rectify the faults within the college system.

2.3 Policy-makers, Heads of Schools, Student Councils and Pupil Participation in the Maltese Educational System

This section describes the part played by policy-makers, Heads of Schools and Student Councils in the Maltese educational system; these were key sources of data in this research.

2.3.1 Policy-makers

In Malta, policy documents in education are issued by the Ministry for Education, with the Minister assuming the role of a policy-maker. For instance, in the policy document ‘Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020’ issued by the Ministry for Education and Employment (2014:5), in the foreword, the Minister for Education identifies himself as one of the policy-makers when he says “As policy-makers, we have the duty…….” Before a policy is finalised, consultative meetings are usually held with educators, civil society and with representatives from the industrial sector (Eurydice, Overview Malta, 2016).

The main aim of including policy-makers in this study was to disseminate the main findings of the study with people who occupy influential positions in the Maltese educational system. These official policy-makers include the top Ministry and Directorate officials; together with the top members of the Shadow Ministry. Policies in education may determine the direction of the educational system and exert a “considerable impact on shaping what happens on a daily basis in schools” (Bell and Stevenson, 2006:8). Policy-makers are, to some degree or another, gatekeepers of change in schools, and hopefully, their participation in the research process would
help facilitate the transformation of theoretical research outcomes into concrete changes in a school and on a wider, national level.

2.3.2 Heads of Schools

In Malta, as in other countries, the Head of School has an unequivocal position not only in the school but in the whole educational system. In the call for applications issued by the Ministry for Education and Employment (2017): Post of Head of School within the Ministry for Education and Employment to serve in Malta, one of the qualifications which are a prerequisite for the eligibility of a Head of School is a minimum of a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education with specialisation in Leadership, Administration and Management. A Head of School in Malta is expected to have a combination of competences in education and management. Attard (1997), a Maltese educator with a long experience as a Head of School, argues that a successful Head of School in Malta must be both a “leading professional and chief executive” (Attard, 1997:38).

The call for applications for a Head of School in Malta divides the duties of a Head of School into six main areas: Curriculum Development, Student Matters, Teaching Personnel, Home-School-Community Links, Administration, and Finance. The list of duties is quite an exhaustive one and includes: implementing the National Minimum Curriculum, participating in EU projects, promoting a team spirit; creating; ensuring that national policies are adhered to; providing pastoral care for pupils; taking the necessary disciplinary measures; ensuring a safe environment; facilitating the holistic development of each pupil; managing school funds in an effective way; encouraging parental participation; promoting links with the local community; motivating and mentoring staff members; supervising the pedagogical quality of teaching and learning; ensuring the upkeep of school statistics and promoting healthy relationships among pupils, teachers and parents.
It is evident that the role of the Head of School is a complex one, fraught with a wide array of duties. The following axiom succinctly describes the huge responsibility the Head of School has to shoulder:

\textit{As the principal, so the school.} (Plemmons, 1953:246).

In the call for applications for the post of Head of School in Malta, which was referred to previously, one of the functions of the Head of School is listed as: “to promote an effective student participation policy”; whilst another function is: “to implement quality assurance mechanisms that maintain high standards of teaching and learning in the school”. These functions chime closely with the main theme of this study, and this is why the contribution of Heads of Schools is vital to the study. Heads of Schools are in a unique position, not only to contextualise the study and to provide important insights on the main outcomes of the research but to translate the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspectives into tangible changes to bring about improvement within the school.

\textbf{2.3.3 Student Councils in Maltese Schools}

Student Councils have been present in Maltese schools for a number of decades. In Malta, there has been a growing interest in Student Councils. Encapsulated within ‘A National Curriculum Framework for All’ (2012:60), issued by the Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta, was a commitment to the importance of Student Councils and a vision for their function:

\begin{quote}
The school administration needs to give commensurate space to the initiatives taken and co-ordinated by the Student Council and needs to consult the Student Council on matters directly affecting student life in school.
\end{quote}

In practice, even today, although the Education Act stipulates that there should be a Student Council in each school, the practice is not enforced by education authorities. Over the years, most probably as a result of living in a more democratic society, and emulating pupil participation which was more evident in schools in other European countries, Student Councils became more common in Maltese schools. Furthermore, in 2003, the first Commissioner for Children was appointed in Malta (Times of Malta
(20th December, 2003) and this could also have influenced schools to open up to more meaningful pupil participation. ‘A National Curriculum Framework for All’ (2012:60), issued by the Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta, described the Student Council as one of the initiatives which “embraces democratic practices in schools.” The Maltese Education Act (2016, draft document, Ministry for Education and Employment) clearly states that every school in Malta should have a Student Council. Student Councils, at prima facie, appear to be useful and effective channels for conveying pupil voice in schools, they can even be considered as “the main vehicle for student voice” (Fleming, 2015:237); however, as discussed further on, studies carried out in Malta have concluded that Student Councils in Maltese schools are still short of serving their true democratic function in schools and they only served as a quick route to communicating with pupils, without having to refer to the whole pupil population.

The limitations on the function of Student Councils in Maltese schools had no direct bearing on the field studies being conducted in this research. Group interviews were conducted with Student Councils in this study because Student Councils were used as an existing forum for pupil discussion on extracted themes from an earlier questionnaire survey. The members of a Student Council are usually elected and so, it was believed that, to some extent or another, their views were representative of the wider pupil population and so their contribution was sought in the study. In addition, the Student Council set-up provided a practical arrangement for carrying out group interviews in schools.

A number of studies have been carried out on Student Councils in Malta. Cassar, J. (2011) closely observed one council in each of a boys’ and girls’ secondary school. The data was collected via questionnaires with pupils, and interviews with the Student Council members and the school administration. Cassar, J. (2011:45) noted that adults were afraid that “students should have ‘too much’ of a voice.” Instead, Cassar, J. (2011) concluded that schools perceived the Student Council solely as a data-source. The Student Councils were reported to have no role in the decision-making process in either school. Cassar, J. (2011:46) concluded that adults in the
school needed to change their attitude to the Student Council. Cassar, J.’s (2011) research shows that the level of participation in the Student Councils demonstrated a form of tokenism (3rd rung on Hart, R.A.’s ladder of participation). His findings on Student Councils confirmed what other researchers have maintained: that pupil voice in Student Councils lacks influence and power (Hampson et al, 2011; Maitles and Deuchar, 2006; Rudduck et al, 2003; and Whitty and Wisby, 2007).

Three years later Micallef Gatt (2014) carried out a study to find out whether the Student Council was an effective voice for students. Questionnaires were distributed in five state schools to Student Council members, to students who were not Council members and to adults in the school. 71.7% of the pupils said that they agree that the Student Council should be involved more in decision-making in school and 93.6% said that that the Student Council could be improved. 40% of the pupils said that they did not know much about the Student Council in their school. The research showed that the Student Council lacked the means to communicate formally with other pupils, and this restricted the council’s work. In all of the schools, except for one, it was noted that a teacher and not a pupil, chaired the meetings. Micallef Gatt (2014) concluded that, in all the schools in the study, the main function of the Student Council was to organise activities. This confirmed the findings of earlier studies (Cassar, J., 2011 and Grima, M. 2010), which concluded that in Student Councils, the pupils’ level of participation was very low, even though pupils reported wanting a higher level of participation.

From this evidence base, it does not appear that Student Councils are being consulted on “matters directly affecting student life in school” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012:60). Moreover, Cassar, J.’s (2011), Gatt Micallef’s (2014) and Grima, M.’s (2010) findings do not appear to be isolated cases. According to the Student Councils Report 2009/2010 (published by the Curriculum Management & eLearning Department, Malta), the five most popular activities carried out by Student Councils were: promoting healthy eating, working on environmental projects, acting as visitor guides, organising fundraising events and leading school assemblies. However, out of the 55 schools, on which the report was based, only one school reported that its Student Council worked on human rights and one other school
reported that its Student Council participated in an activity to promote democratic processes. In none of the schools was the Student Council involved in the teaching and learning of the school, which Rudduck et al. (2003) assert should be the prime focus of such councils. From the data compiled in the report mentioned above, it appears that Student Councils in Maltese schools are missing out on the opportunity to “build more opportunities for participation and consultation into the fabric of school” (Rudduck et al., 2003:285). In the absence of further evidence, it is difficult to gauge the status of the Maltese pupil in Student Councils, but this is something which this study aimed to contribute to. In practice, it would be expected that there would be marked differences from one school to another, even from one classroom to another. However, in the researcher’s opinion, based on her experience in Maltese schools and on having reviewed the available literature, an educated guess would be that overall, Student Councils only offer a tokenistic level of participation to Maltese pupils.

2.3.4 The Participation of the Maltese Pupil in Maltese Schools

It appears that no major study on pupil voice has ever been conducted in Malta. When the researcher contacted the Chair of Educational Leadership in the Department of Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malta, they confirmed that this area has not been explored in depth yet. However, there are a number of studies which give an indication of pupil voice in Maltese schools which will be covered chronologically. These studies have been interpreted by the researcher as illustrating pupil voice in Malta.

A study carried in the late 1990s, paints a rather dismal picture of what a reader might determine to be the state of pupil voice in Malta. Carbonaro and Darmanin (1998) carried out a study on children’s rights with Year 5 pupils (aged 9), in six different primary schools. The findings showed that: 15% of the teachers said that the United Nations Convention on Children’s Rights had nothing to do with children’s rights in the classroom, 20% of the students said that they were not happy
at school, 32% of the pupils revealed that they had been unfairly punished, and a number of teachers said that pupils should not be allowed to choose their class prefects. The researchers concluded that neither teachers nor pupils were particularly aware of children’s rights. The study described a lack of concern by the school for pupil voice.

In 2007, a school-based study on school self-evaluation, by Privitelli and Bezzina (2007), sheds some light on the adults’ attitude to pupil voice, at least in one school in Malta. The study was carried out in a school was a secondary girls’ Catholic Church school, with a pupil population of 250. The findings of the study revealed that 27.5% of the pupils said that they felt that the school was not interested in their views, with students in higher forms registering more negative responses. The pupils also said that they did not agree with the school’s code of behaviour for pupils. The researchers concluded that cooperation between teachers and pupils needed to be improved. In 2010, in a slightly larger study, Grima, M. (2010) carried out a qualitative investigation on students’ thoughts and feelings on schooling in two secondary state schools in Gozo (Malta’s sister island) by carrying out interviews with four focus groups over a period of two years. A total of 12 boys and 12 girls, aged between 11 and 13 took part in the study. One of the main findings was that, pupils felt that they wanted to participate in the school’s decisions on teaching and learning, but that the school prevented them from doing so.

In a small-scale study carried out by Abela (2012), very young children were asked about their preferences in a childcare centre. The feedback was collected from four preschool children, aged between 3 and 4, who attended a childcare centre in Malta, through interviews, observations, audio and visual recordings, and child-led tours. Abela (2012) described the role of the children as being that of co-researchers; children were able to express their marked preferences clearly and they showed that they had well-structured opinions. In light of her research, Abela (2012) recommended, that, by listening to children, despite their very young age, adults could gain an insight into the child’s world. The findings showed that children felt that the adults in the centre were the sole decision-makers.
In another study, Cefai et al (2012) describe a whole-school project in a girls’ secondary school in Malta, aimed at improving pupil behaviour. The school was an area secondary one, catering for girls who had failed the 11+ examination. The pupil population was 700. The majority of the pupils came from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A three-day seminar was held for the whole school staff, including the non-teaching staff, during which the school invited pupils to participate in the development of five classroom rules to improve classroom behaviour. The pupils also participated in the evaluation of the project. The school registered progress in pupil behaviour, and this was evidenced by the decline in the number of pupil suspensions from school, pre- and post- the behaviour intervention. According to the school, one of the factors which contributed to this success was the involvement of pupil voice.

2.4 The Maltese Policy Context Influencing this Research

The policy developments in Malta that have a direct impact on this research stem from two areas: policy developments on quality assurance and policy developments on pupil participation. In the researcher’s opinion, the former has progressed further than the latter; the following sub-sections focus on these two areas of policy developments, and on how these have influenced this area of research.

2.4.1 Policy Developments on Quality Assurance in the Maltese Educational System

Quality assurance has come a long way in the Maltese educational system. A brief outline of how it developed provides an insight of what influenced current practices. According to Cuttance (1994):

_Most education systems which are derivative of British systems of state-provided education have at one time or another developed inspectorates of schools._ (Cuttance, 1994:105)
Malta is no exception. In the past, formal quality assurance was carried by external, centrally appointed inspectors. Spiteri (2010) in his (then) capacity as a Director for Quality Assurance Department in the Ministry of Education, writes:

“The Inspectress is coming!” There was a time many decades ago when this dreaded message, borne by a scurrying janitor and whispered hurriedly from one classroom door to another, was the bane of schools in Malta. (Spiteri, 2010:1).

As the era of the Inspector passed, a new dawn for quality assurance rose in Malta. In 1997, a number of Assistant Directors shadowed HM Inspectors at the Scottish Office in Edinburgh, and that same year, the Scottish Office organised a short course on school development planning in Malta (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2004). In January 1999, school development planning was introduced in a few pilot schools in Malta (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, Malta, 2004). In 2004, the Ministry of Youth and Employment, issued a document entitled ‘Knowing Our School’. This document explains in detail the process of school development planning, including how to carry out Organisational Health Checks via school audits.

In 2006, the Quality Assurance Department, within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, was established (Ministry for Education and Employment, Annual Report, 2014). The purpose of setting up this Directorate was to raise standards in the Maltese educational system (Bezzina, 2009). At the same time, the School Inspectorate was reintroduced, coordinated by the then, newly set up Quality Assurance Department of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (Spiteri, 2010) and school external reviews started being conducted in all schools in Malta. In 2009, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Malta published the document: ‘School Improvement through Self-Evaluation’, which describes the changes in school development planning and school self-evaluation. Over the years, the Quality Assurance Department within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, in Malta, continued to develop; its objectives include: assessing the operation of all schools and reassuring compliance with all laws and regulations on education (Ministry for Education and Employment, Quality
Assurance Department webpage\(^8\)). Over the past few years, Malta has invested heavily in quality assurance. The importance of quality assurance has been further reinforced by the national New Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011:11), Consultation Document 2 which promotes the key idea of “cycles of quality assurance” in schools. Ultimately, the onus of quality assurance in Maltese schools falls on the Head of School. This is clearly stated in the statement describing the call for applications issued by the Ministry for Education and Employment (2017): Post of Head of School to serve in Malta. Schools in Malta are, in fact, legally bound to carry out quality assurance; the Education Act (Laws of Malta, 2006:28), Part V, article 51, para. F, stipulates that Colleges\(^9\) should:

*Ensure the promotion and dissemination of a culture of evaluation within the schools of the College including the implementation of a process of internal educational auditing and of a full participation in the external quality assurance processes.*

As stated earlier, quality assurance in Malta has followed the U.K. model, a country which is perceived to have a strong tradition of quality assurance. According to Eurydice (2012:43), the U.K. was the first European country to introduce external evaluation in Europe, in the 1980s. In 2004, the (then) Director General for Education (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2004:xi) admitted that when devising the school development planning strategy for Malta, the department relied heavily on documents on school self-evaluation published by the Scottish Office, Education and Industry Department. The Scottish model set the way for quality assurance in Malta, and for a long time its position was unchallenged. In 2013, following a change of government, the new Minister for Education switched course and the Maltese authorities set their eyes on Finland. In May of 2013, the Minister of Education, Bartolo, met with Pasi Sahlberg, a Finnish reformer in education (MaltaToday, 27\(^{th}\) May, 2013) and invited him to become Malta’s critical friend, to help improve the Maltese educational system.

\(^8\) http://education.gov.mt/en/education/quality-assurance/Pages/default.aspx

\(^9\) State schools in Malta are grouped under eleven colleges.
Sahlberg (2011) is against allowing standardised testing to dictate the educational agenda. He refers to the term ‘GERM: Global Education Reform Movement’, which is used to describe the common trends in quality assurance which have been taken up by different countries, in their efforts to improve their educational systems. Amongst the features of GERM, Sahlberg (2011:180) lists: “standardising teaching and learning, renting market-oriented reform ideas, test-based accountability and control”. Sahlberg (2011) argues that some features of GERM have detrimental effects on schools. Murgatroyd and Sahlberg, (2016) propose equity as an alternative to GERM, which they define as: “The relationship between a student’s family background and her measured learning in school”. Sahlberg (2011) argues that Finland’s success lies in the fact that it was capable of finding a different route to address its needs, a Fourth Way of Finland. According to Sahlberg, the central theme in this alternative approach is the role of the teacher:

*In the Fourth Way of Finland, teachers design and pursue high quality learning and shared goals and improve their schools continuously through professional teamwork and networks, from evidence, and from literature in their trade.* (Sahlberg, 2011:183)

Four years after the Maltese Minister for Education’s meeting with Sahlberg, it does not appear that Sahlberg’s ideas had any direct implication for quality assurance in the Maltese educational system. Presently, schools in Malta carry out internal reviews of their own accord and the Quality Assurance Department carries out external reviews on schools, as will be described later on. Newly qualified or recruited teachers undergo an induction programme, which includes monitoring and performance appraisals.
The diagram above summarises the three-pronged quality assurance provision in the Maltese educational system, and which has the ultimate aim of school improvement. Newly qualified teachers undergo a two-year induction programme, which forms part of their probation period, during which they are simultaneously mentored and appraised. Mentoring is usually carried out by middle managers in schools, whilst the Head of School usually appraises newly qualified teachers. On successfully completing the induction programme, newly qualified teachers obtain the Teachers’ Warrant and are confirmed in their teaching posts. At a school level, quality assurance is carried out through the internal and external reviews.

In the Maltese educational system, the internal review process has been directly linked with the school development process (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016, ‘The Internal Review Document Template’). The internal review
template asks schools to carry out a SWOT analysis, to identify the priority developmental targets, the success criteria, the long term vision and strategy for school improvement, and the professional development programme for its staff. The internal review documents are school documents, and are not publically available. The process could have the potential to include a wide range of stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, parents, pupils; the process is variable and depends on the direction given by the school management team. Research carried out by the researcher (Pulis, 2010) shown that pupil only play a minor role in school self-evaluation carried out in secondary schools, and that pupil participation occurs ad hoc. At present, Student Councils do not formally play a part in the school internal review process.

The Quality Assurance Department conducts external reviews in schools, through an examination of school documents, observation visits, and interviews and questionnaires with different members of the school community. The Pre-External Review Self-Evaluation document (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, ‘Standards and Criteria’) describes the standards for use in external reviews and also describes the success criteria for each standard. The standards are:

- Educational leadership and management
- Learning and teaching
- School ethos.

2.4.2 Policy Developments on Children’s Participation in Malta

Policy development on children’s participation in Malta shows a gradual positive movement. This development could have been a reflection of the response of the Maltese government to the European discussion about the United Nation’s resolution about children’s rights. The first draft National Children’s Policy in Malta was launched in 2011 by the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family. A working group had been set up, and after consulting with children, teachers and other
persons who work with children, drew up a draft document which was built on ten principles: best interests of the child, mainstreaming children’s perspectives, well-being, empowering children through participation, inclusion, access to quality services, social protection, strengthening families, accountability, and sustainability. The draft policy document recognised children as “rights-holders” whilst at the same time being “important and equal human beings, who can contribute to the well-being of society” (Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, 2011:16). For the first time in Malta, the draft National Children’s Policy attempted to coordinate a multi-dimensional approach in supporting children’s development and children’s rights. The draft policy was launched for public consultation; however, the government’s term drew to an end before the policy document was finalised.

In 2016, a new National Children’s Policy was launched by the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity. The aim of the policy was to encourage children to voice their opinions and to participate more in society, and to support children by focusing on the physical, psychological and socio-economic dimensions in children’s lives. Besides focusing on children’s rights, the policy also referred to children’s responsibilities towards their primary caregivers and towards their community. The policy targeted four pillars in the lives of children:

- Health and education
- Family and relationships
- Education and development
- Community and state.

For each pillar, the policy document described long-term goals, short-term outcomes and a set of policy actions, to ensure the well-being of children. The policy referred to a number of tools to help implement its targets: social mentors and Family Resource Centres to support families facing difficulties, a Positive Parenting Policy to further help provide the optimum environment for children, a wider government strategy to decrease the digital divide in Maltese society and a stronger government commitment to provide educational and rehabilitation programmes to ensure that children are protected and supported in cases of addictions and vices.
In 2017, a new National Children’s Policy was unveiled by the Ministry for the Family, Children’s Rights and Social Solidarity, which was drafted in consultation with children. The change in the name of the Ministry, to include ‘Children’s Rights’ shows the reinforced commitment towards the cause. The new policy document states:

The Policy aims at placing children’s rights and wellbeing at the forefront of the national agenda through enhanced awareness raising, child-led participation and evidence-based practice, as well as the mainstreaming of child-related issues and increased cooperation with other policy structures. (2017:12).

The new policy builds on the four pillars in children’s lives which were described in the previous policy document, and adds another pillar: Leisure and culture. The Office of the Commissioner for Children was tasked with the monitoring and reporting on the progress of welfare and well-being of children in Malta. The guiding principles in the policy are: protection, provision and participation. The policy explains that children’s participation should be encouraged:

To ensure that children influence decision-making which affects their lives to bring about positive change. (2017:13).

The draft new Education Act (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016) makes provision for pupil participation in schools, by stating that schools should encourage pupil involvement and by stating that each school should have a Student Council. The draft new Education Act also introduces the idea of a Student Impact Assessment (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016:8) before a new educational initiative or policy is unveiled.

2.4.3 Policy Developments and this Research

As the discussion above shows, the policy development on children’s participation has a shorter history than the one on quality assurance in schools. In the researcher’s opinion, the main weakness in the former is that it focuses more on the theoretical framework, but there is little to explain how the policies can be implemented in practice. There is also a lack of monitoring of how these policies are resulting in work practices. One of the problems is that although the onus falls on many
stakeholders, it is not clear who should be held accountable for what, and who will actually be monitoring the implementation of these policies. Although the latest National Children’s Policy states that the Office of the Commissioner for Children shall be evaluating the progress made in children’s lives, it is not clear how this role will be executed and what administrative power this role will have. On the other hand, the policy development on quality assurance in the Maltese educational system ensures that quality assurance measures are not only implemented, but that schools are held accountable and are legally obliged to carry out quality assurance exercises.

In all of the processes and procedures of quality assurance in Maltese schools—School development planning, internal reviews and external reviews—the formal documents do not exclude pupils; but neither do they formally include pupils. It is at the discretion of the school or of the external reviewer to include pupils, and the level of participation is also in the hands of the school or external reviewer. The present role of the Maltese pupil in quality assurance is a passive one and not even a guaranteed one. The researcher feels that the advances in policy development on children participation are not being reflected in schools. This research can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the theoretical provision for pupil participation as outlined in policy documents, and the lack of practical opportunity in schools. The research tries to do this by focusing on how the pupil can be given an active role in quality assurance, not simply by being a data-source, but by becoming an assessor of quality in schools.

2.5 Conclusion

Malta, the smallest EU member state, has its fair share of limitations and opportunities. On a tiny, overpopulated island, which lacks natural resources, education is key. Hopefully, the energy and commitment of all stakeholders will continue to be channeled to consolidate the strengths and overcome the weaknesses in the system. This research invites pupils to assess schools and thus provide a new perspective on quality assurance of schools, with the ultimate aim of providing data which may be used to improve the Maltese schools.
CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

3.0 Introduction

This chapter contextualises the research area within the existing body of literature. The main theme of this research merges two conceptual threads: pupil voice and quality assurance. The first part of this chapter gives an overview of the two main conceptual threads separately. In the final part of the chapter, these two foci are integrated and discussed under the theme ‘pupil voice as assessor’. The chapter also explores the variables, which might be influencing pupil voice in an assessment role: age, gender, socio-economic background and academic ability. The chapter concludes with a rationale for this study.
3.1 Introduction to the First Conceptual Thread

This section explores the first conceptual thread in this study: the quality assurance aspect. It starts with an examination of what quality assurance entails. This is followed by a discussion on quality assurance as a concept contextualised within the educational setting and its link with accountability. The definition of quality in education is explored. The discussion, then, branches into the concept of ‘quality indicators’ within the educational realm. This section describes the development of quality assurance in the Maltese educational system. The final part of this section inquires about the role of the pupil in quality assurance of schools in Malta.

3.1.1 What is Quality Assurance?

The origins of quality assurance could provide an insight on the concept of quality assurance within an educational context. As the name implies, quality assurance was introduced to assure quality; its origins date back to the medieval craftsmen who set up guilds, which had the authority to certify the quality of their goods (Richardson, 2004). Closer to our times, since mass-production absolved the individual from quality control, the onus now fell on the whole system, and tighter quality control mechanisms were introduced to safeguard the quality of the products being manufactured (Sallis, 1993).

The concept of quality assurance in schools is a borrowed concept from managerial discourse; so, before defining quality assurance in education, it might be worthwhile to explore the traditional definition of the term. Eurostat, ESS Quality Glossary (2010:22) offers a comprehensive definition:

Quality assurance is an organisation’s guarantee that the product or service that it offers meets the accepted quality standards. It is achieved by identifying what ‘quality’ means in context; specifying methods by which its presence can be ensured; and specifying ways in which it can be measured to ensure conformance.

A similar definition is provided by ISO: the International Organisation for Standardisation, ISO 9000, Plain English Definitions (2013): “a set of activities intended to establish confidence that quality requirements will be met.” In the
context of business management, Jurgan and Gryna (1993) and Mishra and Sandilya (2009) offer similar definitions, emphasising the need of gathering evidence that the quality of a service or product is being safeguarded.

The definitions for quality assurance pivot on the term ‘quality’. Quality assurance is about safeguarding quality and demonstrating that there are practices in place to ensure that this process is being undertaken. This is achieved by testing the product being offered, to ensure that it meets the expected standards. In the next section, the relevance of these definitions within the educational context is discussed.

### 3.2 Defining Quality Assurance in Education

An overview of the definition of quality assurance from the educational perspective is offered by Eurydice (2015):

> Policies, procedures, and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain or enhance quality in specific areas, and that rely on an evaluation process. (Eurydice, 2015:13).

On comparing the definition for quality assurance, as defined in the educational context by Eurydice, with the business management oriented definitions or with the more generic definitions, it appears that the mechanisms involved are based on the same premise: the guarantee of quality. At the same time, there are a number of differences, due to the inherent nature of the different contexts.

#### 3.2.1 Does the Concept of Quality Assurance Fit within an Educational Context?

The definitions of quality assurance, set within the business organisation context show that there is an emphasis on quality standards and quality requirements. These terms are difficult to translate into the educational context. There is a degree of incompatibility between the managerial discourse used to define quality assurance
and educational discourse. In the researcher’s opinion, there are four main reasons for this:

1. The process of schooling is highly intricate and multi-faceted. As noted by Orzolek (2012:4) “any educational policy or business model cannot take into account the complexities of learning and teaching in our schools.” It involves human relationships, reactions, and growth in its widest sense: intellectual, physical and spiritual. As noted by Sayed (1993):

   *Teachers, students and parents are not inert objects to be fed in as inputs into a particular production process. The use of techniques drawn from the business world are not applicable in education since they fail to capture the dynamic and interactional character of the educative process.* (Sayed, 1993:36).

This view is echoed by Wagner (1989) who questions the idea that there is enough similarity between educational and business endeavours to justify using similar procedures when assessing quality.

2. The products of education are difficult to identify. In education, tangible products do not always exist and the service being provided is not always easily measurable. Sallis (1993) gives a short and generic definition for quality assurance:

   *Put simply, quality assurance is a means of producing defect- and fault-free products.* (Sallis, 1993:17).

The very terminology used in the above definition sounds inappropriate in an educational context. Besides the debatable use of the term “products”, the added “defect- and fault-free” criterion is neither possible nor desirable in education. In addition, the very nature of certain educational outcomes, such as values and attitudes, defies quantification, yet, these outcomes are important achievements of the educational process. Wagner (1989:24) calls these the “indeterminate ends” in education and notes the difficulty when trying to measure them.

3. When adopting quality assurance within the framework of education, there is an inevitable question which needs to be answered: who is the customer? The first and most obvious answer might be the pupil. However, there are other noteworthy customers: parents, employers, other educational institutions and the wider society. Bearing in mind, the multiple dimensions to accountability, it is difficult for a school
to prioritise its customers, since there are “a number of ultimate customers whose requirements may not appear to be compatible” (Greenwood and Gaunt, 1994:29). The fact that the expectations of the different customers may be contradictory complicates matters further for schools.

4. Inherent in the notion of ‘quality assurance’ is the concept of ‘quality’. The crux of the problem with ‘quality’ in education is that, although all educational systems strive to attain and maintain quality, “if anyone asks us to define or describe it, suddenly we are in trouble” (Aspin et al, 1994: 1). Quality in education is subjective and there are different perspectives on how to qualify it. The concept of quality in education is discussed in the next section.

3.2.2 Quality in Education
There are various ways of exploring the concept of quality in education. On one level, the subject could be approached by considering what is being described academically. Barrett et al (2006:13), after analysing international literature on the subject, identify five characteristics which define quality in education. These are: effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability. The UNESCO, EFA (Education for All) Global Monitoring Report for 2005, Education for All: The Quality Imperative (2005:30), which gathered data from over 200 countries, describes three mainstays of quality education: “the need for more relevance, for greater equity of access and outcome and for proper observance of individual rights.”

The above definitions for quality in education refer to generic, noble concepts and echo Barrett et al’s (2006) analysis. However, the difficulty lies in translating these umbrella terms into everyday practices which can be measured in a school. “Effectiveness, efficiency and quality are rather arbitrary terms when applied to schools” (Saiti, 2012:121). Furthermore, Saiti (2012:121) argues that the problem lies in the fact that there is lack of “specific theory” on how to define effectiveness and efficiency in a school. The descriptions for quality in education are unspecific and this renders them theoretical notions, rather than practical definitions. To convert
the overarching ideas on quality in education, into concrete criteria, Scheerens (2004) insists that quality indicators are needed; Scheerens suggests:

*The simplest way would be to refer to the available international indicator systems and conclude that education quality is what these indicator systems describe and measure.* (Scheerens, 2004:115).

This is what the next section attempts to do; the meaning of quality in education is sought through reviewing school quality indicators, as described in different contexts.

### 3.2.3 Quality Indicators

According to Eurostat, ESS Quality Glossary (2010:24):

*Quality indicators are statistical measures that give an indication of output quality. However, some quality indicators can also give an indication of process quality, like e.g. response rates.*

The Education Division, in Malta, defines quality indicators as “yardsticks or benchmarks against which schools will find it easier to measure themselves” (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, Knowing Our School, 2004:8). The function of a quality indicator is to gauge the quality of an output or of a process. In the educational context, a quality indicator could be used to measure the level of the educational outcomes and the way the educational process is being conducted. In this study, the main research question includes the term ‘quality indicator’ to refer to any activity, service, product or resource which signifies quality in a school, and asks: From the pupil’s perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school? In the next subsection, the quality indicators of a good school as described in literature are explored.

### 3.2.4 The Quality Indicators of a Good School from Literary Sources

To scope the nature of agreed quality indicators of a good school five European sources are considered (MacBeath et al, 1996: Sammons et al, 1997; Ofsted, School Inspection Handbook, 2013; School Improvement through Self-evaluation, Ministry

1. MacBeath et al’s (1996:33) ten quality indicators of a good school: the research was commissioned by the National Union of Teachers in the U.K., and the research team included a group of four academics from the University of Strathclyde. The research was conducted in ten schools: six primary schools, three secondary schools and one special school, in England and Wales, in 1995. The indicators were generated from the feedback given by six stakeholders: pupils, teachers, parents, management personnel, support staff and governors.

2. Sammons et al eleven-point (1997) list of key characteristics of effective schools: the work was conducted for the Office for Standards in Education. Sammons et al explored school effectiveness, together with teacher effectiveness by examining research carried out by other researchers.

3. The key judgements made by Ofsted inspectors from England and Wales: these key judgements when judging the quality of education in English and Welsh schools, are described in Ofsted, School Inspection handbook, No. 120101 (Ofsted, 2013:25); although it is noted that this document does not explain how these key judgements were selected.

4. The ten performance indicators described in the document: School Improvement through Self-Evaluation (2009:34-60), issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports (2009), Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Malta. Similarly to the above source, this document does not explain how these quality indicators were generated.

5. The sixteen quality indicators described by the European Report of May 2000, on the Quality of School Education (EUR-Lex, 2000). The aim of this report was to standardise national school evaluation in the Member states. The working committee for this report was made up of specialists from the Education Ministries of the EU Member states.
On comparing the quality indicators from the above five different sources, ten quality indicators featured prominently. The following graph illustrates the number of sources that quoted each particular quality indicator:

Fig 3.1 Bar-graph Showing the Frequency of each Quality Indicator

The priority list of the quality indicators of a good school, extracted from literature, is illustrated in Fig 3.1. Through the main questionnaire survey, this study will seek to extract a pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. As explained in detail in Chapter 4, the above literature-generated quality indicators of a good school were taken into consideration in the design of the questionnaire.

The next section describes quality assurance in schools. The discussion also includes a description of the development of quality assurance in the Maltese educational system.
3.3 Quality Assurance in Schools

Notwithstanding the limitations of adopting the concept of quality assurance with respect to schools which were discussed in Section 3.2.1, way back in 1993, Sallis, a specialist in quality management and organisational development, had said that schools no longer have a choice and they are obliged to engage in quality assurance. Sallis notes:

*We are in an era where parents and politicians are asking tough and uncompromising questions. For education as for industry, quality improvement is no longer an option, it is a necessity.* (Sallis, 1993:5).

Twenty-five years later, parents and politicians are asking even tougher questions, and so, the need for accountability, which is part and parcel of quality assurance, is more acute.

3.3.1 Quality Assurance and Accountability in Schools

Quality assurance is intrinsically linked with accountability; in fact, it may be regarded as the “tool” of accountability (Adelman and Alexander, 1982, and Rogers and Badham, 1992). The general public insists on accountability in schools because “there seems to be general consensus that the purpose of accountability is good and helpful” (Orzolek, 2012:3). Understandably, the general public asks whether schools deliver what they promise; more so, in the case of state schools, where the taxpayer expects his money to be invested carefully. Bottery, writing in a U.K. context, whilst comparing education with state provided health care, insists that accountability is paramount:

*This means that those outside the service should be able to see that the money given is being used wisely and that practice is as efficient and effective as it could be.* (Bottery, 1994:108).

In the Maltese context, accountability in education is particularly important. As described earlier, the tiny island is devoid of natural resources and at 1400 people per square kilometre, is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Politicians repeatedly claim that the island’s success lies in education. The, (then), Prime Minister, Gonzi, in February 2013 was reported as saying that education
helped the country overcome the economic crisis and that “Malta’s competitiveness and success in attracting investment was down to the educational system” (MaltaToday, 11th February, 2013). For the 2012-2013 scholastic year, in Malta, each pupil in state Primary schools cost the state an average of €2,267, and in state Secondary schools, an average of €3,950 (Times of Malta, 14th October, 2014). In Malta, post-compulsory education is free, including all first-degree University courses, and in addition, all post-secondary students receive a stipend to further ease the financial burden of their studies. In 2017, the Maltese Government invested 216 million in education (Ministry for Finance, Budget Speech 2017), which is the equivalent of 5.4% of the total government expenditure. It is thus, justified that the general public expects, or even demands, that quality assurance mechanisms guarantee the best possible outcomes from this investment.

Apart from financial accountability, there are other types of accountability which are equally important in a school set-up. Becher and Erat (1980) describe three types of accountability: moral, professional and contractual accountability; whereas West, Mattei and Roberts (2011) also refer to hierarchical, market, legal, network and participative accountability. In addition, Lustick (2011:249) also considers accountability to be “an effective tool at influencing change behind the closed doors of the classroom.” The different accountability categories and purposes of accountability show the multifaceted aspects of accountability which are particularly relevant in a school context, where there are obligations to a long list of individuals and entities: pupils, parents, school auditors, the education directorate and ministry, other educational institutions, employers, tax payers, society at large.

### 3.4 Introduction to the Second Conceptual Thread

This section focuses on the second conceptual thread: pupil voice. It explores the various levels of pupil participation, the status of pupil voice in the Maltese educational system, justifications for pupil voice, the optimum conditions for pupil voice, its limitations as a concept, and the limitations of its application. The first part
of this section starts with a general description of pupil voice in schools, including the range which exists within the pupil voice spectrum and the significance of pupil voice in schools.

3.4.1 What is Pupil Voice?

Pupil voice is an idea created by academics. In this conceptual territory, there are a number of key players: Rudduck, Flutter, MacBeath, Mitra, Fielding, Thompson and McIntyre. Pupil voice refers to pupils’ participation, contribution and influence in a school context (Macbeath, 2006). There are various definitions for pupil voice. On reviewing a number of definitions, it appears that writing about pupil voice covers the following dimensions:

1. Structures to elicit, facilitate and encourage pupil voice; the agency of pupils from top down: Cheminais (2008:6) describes pupil voice as “every way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to voice their views or preferences.” Similarly, Czerniawski (2012:131) defines pupil voice as: “the formal and informal processes in schools that enable all pupils to be consulted on their education.” Flutter (2007) focuses on the role of the school to facilitate pupil voice:

   A term which embraces strategies that offer pupils opportunities for active involvement in decision-making within their schools. (Flutter, 2007:344).

2. The range within the ways pupil voice is articulated by pupils: Robinson and Taylor (2007) describe pupil voice as:

   The many ways in which pupils choose to express their feelings or views about any aspect of their school or college experience. (Robinson and Taylor, 2007:6).

3. The influence of pupil voice: The U.K. Department of Education, under the list of Education Terms (2013), defines pupil voice as:

   the influence of students in the provision of their own education by ensuring that their views are included when schools make key decisions.
Cheminais (2008:6) also refers to the power and influence in pupils voice, and interprets pupil voice as “pupils having the opportunity to have a say in decisions in school that affect them.” According to (Czerniawski, 2012:131), pupil voice should be received with “trust, integrity and a commitment to transform education for the better.” (Czerniawski, 2012:131).

Pupil voice emanates from different ideologies on education. It intersects with a long list of philosophies and principles: democracy in education, citizenship education, person-centred education (Fielding, 2006), radical education, constructivism, postmodernist formulations of power (Taylor and Robinson, 2009), transformative education and personalised learning (Hargreaves, 2006), policy discourse and, evaluation of schools (Fleming, 2015). In the researcher’s opinion, this is the strength and beauty of pupil voice, its roots infiltrate different aspects of education, and, this fact alone makes it an intriguing area to pursue.

3.4.2 Pupil Voice or Student Voice?

In literature, the terms ‘pupil voice’ and ‘student voice’ are both used. Robinson and Taylor (2007) note that:

*The terms ‘student voice’ and ‘pupil voice’ are often used synonymously. In some cases, the former is used to refer to young people in secondary and tertiary education and the latter to refer to those in primary education.* (Robinson and Taylor, 2007:6).

Since this study included primary school children, the term ‘pupil voice’ was considered to be more appropriate; consequently ‘pupil voice’ was used throughout, for consistency and for easier cross-referencing.

3.4.3 The History of Pupil Voice

The history of pupil voice is not easy to trace (Flutter, 2007) but it is important to consider because it gives an insight on the different facets of the concept. Mitra (2004) traces the origins of pupil voice in the U.S. to the sixties when student power
movements empowered pupils and encouraged them to participate in the decision-making process in schools. According to Mitra (2004) and Fielding (2010), the concept of pupil voice resurfaced in the 1990s when there was a shift from pupil empowerment to school improvement. Fielding (2010:61) calls Jean Rudduck “one of the main drivers of this approach”. Cook-Sather (2006) also traces the origins of the term to the 1990s, as a reaction to the conspicuous absence of pupil involvement in schools. MacBeath et al (2001:78) concur with Cook-Sather (2006) and attribute the rise of pupil voice to “a recognition of how little we have done in the past to value their viewpoint.” However, MacBeath et al also list other reasons for the rise of pupil voice: the social climate which welcomes the participation of young people, the earlier physical maturity of pupils and schools’ initiatives to embrace pupil participation. Facer (2011) refers to young people’s superior digital competence as another factor which has challenged the power in the relationship between adults and children, and which further strengthens children’s right to have a voice in schools.

3.5 Justifications for Pupils having a Voice

Drawing on the wider literature, in the researcher’s opinion, there are four main justifications for pupil voice:

1. Pupils have a right to have a voice
2. Pupil voice is an expression of citizenship
3. Pupils offer a useful perspective
4. Pupil voice is beneficial for pupils, for teachers and for schools.

Each justification is further explored, under a separate subsection.
3.5.1 Pupils Have a Right to Have a Voice

Pupils have a legitimate right to express their views. In fact, Paragraph 1 of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) provides:

*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009:7) further explains this:

*The views expressed by children may add relevant perspectives and experience and should be considered in decision-making, policymaking and preparation of laws and/or measures as well as their evaluation.*

In view of the above, the researcher feels that the provision for pupil voice should not be a charitable gesture made by schools; rather, it an obligation which schools should honour.

3.5.2 Pupil Voice is an Expression of Citizenship

Pupil voice could provide pupils with a hands-on educational experience on citizenship. In their own right, pupils may be considered as ‘citizens’ of the school they attend. Within the confines of their school, pupil voice is a means by which pupils are also fulfilling their rights as citizens who can formulate their own ideas and who are critical of their surroundings. In fact, according to Rudduck et al (2003:284) one of the main gains of pupil voice for schools is that it provides “a commitment to ‘enacting’ and not merely ‘teaching about’ citizenship.” Breslin (2011:57) advocates the development of the school as a “citizenship-rich, human scale and voice-friendly community”; and reminds us that pupil voice is never in isolation, rather, similar to other voices; it has to be expressed in the rightful manner:

*There is a need to go beyond student voice and explore how the multiple voices of the school or college community can find expression, not in a competitive ‘who shouts loudest wins’ argument but in ongoing respectful conversation.* (Breslin, 2011:57).
According to Breslin, such a school would be developing citizens, and not merely concerned with the “qualifying of learners” (Breslin, 2011:60).

Hampson et al (2011) describe an added value of promoting pupil voice: it sets an example of good practice for the future. The experience gained at school could instil active social responsibility, public spirit and commitment to society. Hampson et al note:

*Getting involved in governance at school also helps students to see the benefits of citizenship, and may help young people be more interested and active citizens as adults.* (Hampson et al, 2011:25).

Thus, it seems that the experience gained by pupils, not only generates immediate benefits, but it might also sow the seeds for future gains and encourage the development of “active, informed participation in society” (Wood, 2011:2). Pupil voice might offer a fruitful lesson on citizenship, possibly with long-term advantages not only for the individual pupil but for society at large.

3.5.3 Pupils Offer a Useful Perspective

There are various stakeholders in the educational process and each particular set of stakeholders has its own particular perspective. When exploring the indicators of a good school amongst different stakeholders, MacBeath (1999) asserts:

*The differences in priority remind us that although the school is a school, it is, in some crucial respects, a quite different place for different people.* (MacBeath, 1999:25).

Thus, pupils, by their very nature of forming part of one specific group of participants in the educational process, have their own particular viewpoint. Hopkins (2008:400) agrees that: “children’s perceptions can be invaluable”. When discussing how pupil voice can be used to bring about school improvement, Rudduck and Flutter (2004:152) remind us that pupils have “the capacity to see the familiar from a different angle”.

The notion of attaining a distinctive viewpoint through the eyes of the pupil is also discussed by MacBeath (2006), who makes an interesting comparison between the
teachers’ view in the classroom with that of the students’. Not only are their positions literally different, but their whole outlooks are different. MacBeath (2006:77) refers to the teacher’s perspective as “a bird’s eye” view; whilst, in contrast, he calls the pupils’ perspective “a worm’s eye view”. In addition, he maintains that pupils:

see more of a hidden life of the classroom and above all, they are unique experts in their own feelings, frustrations and triumphs. (MacBeath, 2006:77).

In the zealous attempts to implement educational policies, educators may very easily fail to take into account the pupil’s emotive experience of the teaching and learning process. The pupil’s perspective can provide an invaluable insight into the affective aspect of schooling. Besides exposing the emotional aspect of life as a pupil, pupils can provide an overview of the whole school or educational system, since they have first-hand experience of many different aspects of school-life. Flutter and Rudduck (2004:25) refer to this as a “wide angle approach”. Unlike other stakeholders in the educational system, pupils are in the unique position of simultaneously experiencing various sectors of school-life and more importantly, of experiencing the overall resultant effect.

As part of the researcher’s MPhil study (Pulis, 2010) on school self-evaluation in secondary state schools in Malta, eight pupils, from four different secondary schools were interviewed. When asked about what should be evaluated by schools, most of the pupils mentioned the fact that a school should check whether the pupils are happy or not. Only one other stakeholder (a Head of School) mentioned pupils’ level of happiness as a variable which should be assessed by schools. The rest, a total of 31 other stakeholders which included: teachers, parents, non-teaching personnel working in schools and Directorate officials, did not mention pupil happiness (Pulis, 2010). This finding shows that other stakeholders may think that they know what pupils are thinking and feeling; however if schools want to know about pupils’ perspective, they should ask pupils directly. This finding proved to be the stimulus needed by the researcher to undertake further research to learn more about the pupils’ viewpoint on schools.
Pupils’ perspective on U.K. schools was captured in a competition organised by the Guardian Newspaper in 2001 (Burke and Grosvenor, 2003). Children and young people were asked to write about ‘The School I Would like’. 15,000 pupils participated and Burke and Grosvenor (2003) compiled the responses in ‘The Children’s Manifesto’, listing nine descriptions of the ideal school for pupils:

- A beautiful school
- A comfortable school
- A safe school
- A listening school
- A flexible school
- A relevant school
- A respectful school
- A school without walls
- A school for everybody.

The pupils’ responses gave more importance to the relations within a school, to respect and inclusion, rather than to the physical features of a school. On the other hand, when a somewhat similar study was carried out in Malta, in 1997, it appears that the Maltese pupil gave more value to physical comforts. In 1997, in an open invitation from the Minister of Education, all pupils in state schools were asked to write about ‘The School of My Dreams’. Unfortunately, the only outcome of this exercise was a storybook for pupils: The School of My Dreams- Improvements I Would Like to See (Ministry of Education and National Culture, 1997). There is no available data on the sample size. The short book narrates a story about a genie, and along the storyline, a few snippets of what pupils had written were inserted. The pupils’ ideas which were included were chosen at random, and there is no evidence which indicates that the data which was collected was ever analysed. Nevertheless, it appears that pupils’ responses were focused on the physical resources in school, such as a larger yard, a games room, new doors and no broken windows.

The last two studies which were reviewed above, although not academic studies, shed some light on what pupils expect from schools. In their own way, they express a form of pupil voice, which although is limited in the way it was expressed and in
how it can bring about change in individual schools, it served its purpose in giving
the general public an opportunity to become aware of what pupils feel and think
about schools.

The next subsection reviews the advantages of pupil voice in schools and describes
the advantages of pupil voice to pupils, teachers and schools.

3.5.4 Pupil Voice is Beneficial for Pupils, for Teachers and for Schools

Exponents of pupil voice describe a range of benefits from providing opportunities
for pupils to have a voice. They often cite examples from schools, to illustrate the
advantages of embracing pupil voice. Rudduck et al (2003) refer to one major project
on pupil voice, called ‘Consulting Students about Teaching and Learning’, funded by
the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the U.K. The project consisted
of six school projects; three of which were researcher-led and the other three were
teacher-led. The aims of the project were to explore how pupils can contribute
constructively in schools and, to offer support and guidance to teachers who wanted
to initiate or further develop the consultation process with pupils. Another part of the
project consisted of a meta-study on pupil voice research. On analysing the data from
this project, Rudduck et al (2003:276) ask three important questions on pupil voice:
“What’s in it for pupils? What’s in it for teachers? And What’s in it for schools?”
These same three questions are going to be asked here and are going to be answered
separately, by referring to arguments and examples put forward, not only by
Rudduck et al, but also by other advocates of pupil voice.

What’s in it for Pupils?

On analysing the data obtained from the ‘Consulting Students about Teaching and
Learning’ Project, Rudduck et al (2003:278) concluded that, when schools listen to
pupils, there are a number of benefits for the pupils themselves. These benefits
encompass various aspects:
The organisational dimension: pupils feel a greater sense of ownership with the school

The personal dimension: on a personal level, pupils feel more confident about themselves

The pedagogic dimension: pupils become more responsible for their own learning

The political dimension: pupils are encouraged to participate in school matters.

According to Smyth (2006:283): “an absence of student voice in schools leads to resistance to learning”. There are a number of studies which confirm that pupil voice brings about, or is a form of, increased pupil engagement, which in turn positively impacts the pupils’ learning process. Raymond (2001) (previously discussed under Section 3.5.1) reported that, as pupils contributed at a higher level of participation, they became more actively engaged in school activities. According to Raymond, as a result of this, pupils showed more commitment to their own learning and a sense of ownership to their behaviour in the classroom. In a different study, Wall (2012) examined the relationship between pupil participation and the progress of ‘Learning to Learn in Schools Project’. This project involved 41 schools in four local authorities in the U.K. and involved researchers from Newcastle and Durham universities. Wall concluded that pupil participation increased pupil engagement and pupil understanding of, and ownership for learning. Wall (2012:303) claimed that: “Pupil participation is useful for the development of meta-cognition, especially skilfulness.” According to Wall, when pupils express their views on learning and communicate these views, metacognitive knowledge develops into metacognitive skilfulness, which is then not only applied to learning, but also to the process of pupil participation.

Raymond’s (2001) and Wall’s (2012) observations and conclusions are in accordance with Earl and Sutherland’s (2003); in fact, according to the latter, pupil engagement is a prerequisite for learning:
Student engagement with their schooling and with their school is an important precursor of students’ success in school and beyond. (Earl and Sutherland, 2003:341).

Earl and Sutherland (2003) argue that the benefits of pupil engagement do not stop at the school gates. The skills and confidence gained by students may permeate other aspects of life, and continue to bring positive effects in the future.

What’s in it for Teachers?

In the teaching and learning process, the teacher and the pupil share an intimate relationship. Inevitably, this is built on power imbalances such that any efforts to empower pupils to have more voice in school is likely to have repercussions on teachers. Pupil voice presents a number of potential challenges to teachers: it entails sharing power, changes in work practices, and a change in the mindset. However, overwhelming in the literature, positive effects have been revealed. One positive effect could be that teachers gain “a sharper awareness of young people’s capabilities” (Rudduck et al, 2003:280). Rudduck et al (2003) describe, how, feedback from pupils with disruptive behaviour could help teachers empathise with these pupils. This, in turn, could help find a remedy for the situation. Morgan, B. (2011) also agrees that pupil consultation brings about positive changes in the relationship between teachers and pupils. Morgan, B. carried out a qualitative case study on pupil consultation in a comprehensive school, in a small town in Eastern England. The school had a population of 1300 pupils, aged between 11 and 16. The study involved four teachers, five Senior and middle management team members, and 75 pupils. The study delved into the teachers’, the senior and middle management team members’ and the pupils’ understanding and experience of pupil consultation. Morgan, B. concluded that:

Consultation offers a way for teachers and pupils to engage with each other in dialogue and develop dynamic partnerships which pave the way for effective teaching and learning. (Morgan, B. 2011:464)

As noted by Morgan, B. the benefits for teachers, in turn, become benefits for pupils. Unsurprisingly, increased mutual respect and trust, help foster a healthier climate for effective teaching and learning.
There is evidence that pupil voice initiatives can improve communication channels between pupils and adults in a school. According to Mitra (2001) this is an important advantage. Mitra quotes a teacher, who, whilst referring to pupil voice, said: “I think it makes me a much better teacher”; this same teacher said that pupil voice helps teachers “keep up their energy to continue the hard work of change” (Mitra, 2001:94). This could be another advantage of pupil voice: it might facilitate change for teachers. According to Marsh, C. (1997:24):

*Teachers are not willing to explore innovations because they guard jealously the privacy of their own classroom and their established procedures.* (Marsh, C. 1997:24).

Whether teachers are more resistant to change than other professionals, or not, is debatable; however Rudduck et al (2003) note that, teachers are more likely to be receptive to pupil voice since: “for teachers, tuning in to what students rather than what policy makers say is a professionally re-creative act”. (Rudduck et al, 2003:284).

Pupil voice might provide the impetus that some teachers might need “to unlock the shackles of habit” (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004), and hence, to open up the doors of their classrooms and their mindsets, and thus emerge refreshed and ready to take up new educational challenges. Teachers could choose to improve their teaching skills by consulting pupils on their learning experiences. In this way, the feedback from pupils could serve as a form of self-evaluation for teachers. Flutter (2007:343) notes that pupil voice “can be a powerful tool in helping teachers to investigate and improve their own practice”. When pupils are given the opportunity to reflect on their own learning, they may provide insights on how to remedy shortcomings in the teaching and learning process, (Flutter, 2007). Flutter draws these conclusions from data derived from studies carried out in schools (discussed under Section 3.5.1). In a different study, Rudduck et al (2003:282) briefly outline how a Head of Mathematics department, when listening to one of her 12 to 14-year-old pupils, realised that the pupil herself had comprehended how her own learning process occurs. The pupils’ interpretation of the learning process was, in fact, more accurate than the Head of Mathematics own understanding. These examples demonstrate how pupils’
assessments and recommendations resulted in positive changes to the teaching and learning processes in these settings.

Other studies show that there are other advantages for teachers who welcome pupil voice in their classrooms. Thompson (2009) described a study carried out in four U.K. secondary schools, in East Midlands, three of these schools catered for 11 to 16-year-olds, and one school catered for 11 to 18-year-olds. The research studied how, for one scholastic year, 20 secondary school teachers and their pupils, experienced pupil consultation. A wide range of subjects was included in the study. The study examined how teachers can use pupils’ written feedback in their teaching. Thompson (2009:686) concluded that irrespective of the type of pupil consultation, all teachers “at some point reported feeling pleasantly surprised by pupil feedback and had benefited emotionally from it”. In cases where teachers dared to venture further by inviting pupils to become active partners in the learning process, “it also laid the basis for a more fulfilling sense of classroom humanity and the platform for a more civilised approach to the business of secondary education”. In the researcher’s opinion, since teaching necessitates social interaction between the teacher and the pupil, whatever strengthens the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the pupil, affects positively the teaching and learning experience.

As described earlier, besides helping teachers to become more familiar with their pupils, pupil voice can provide a fresh experience for teachers. Pedder and McIntyre (2006:146) regard it “as a major educational adventure in which both pupils and teachers are challenged to learn with and for each other”. What is encouraging for teachers, is, that studies show that pupils usually want to engage in pupil voice and that they do so in a disciplined way. According to McIntyre et al (2005:166), pupils respond in a way that is “polite, serious, thoughtful and constructive”. Flutter (2007) also confirms that pupils eagerly welcome the concept of pupil consultation and undertake it in a professional way. Whilst researching on pupil voice, McIntyre et al (2005) reported more “comfortable learnings” for teachers: pupils’ and teachers’ viewpoints were in harmony, pupils’ ideas build on teachers’ current practices, pupils did not ask for a drastic change, rather they asked for a repeat performance or for additional practices to be incorporated into existing ones.
What’s in it for Schools?

Any advantage of pupil voice, which is gained by pupils or teachers, will consequentially reflect itself as an advantage to the school. In the researcher’s opinion, pupil voice can unite pupils and adults in a school, in their commitment to bring about improvements in school. In fact, according to Hargreaves (2003), one of the main benefits of pupil voice to schools, is, that it has the potential to increase the ‘social capital’ of a school. The social capital is defined by the trust and network between the members of a school community, by a sense of community and by knowledge-sharing (Hargreaves, 2003). When discussing the benefits of pupil voice to schools, Rudduck et al (2003:284) refer to another positive outcome of pupil voice, which is also related to social capital. They consider “a stronger sense of the school as a learning community” as one of the main gains for schools. This is an important quality because a learning community characterises desirable conditions for a school.

By listening to pupil voice, not only are pupil commitment and engagement increased, but also the commitment of the school towards its pupils is increased. Mitra (2001) notes that, pupil disengagement results in a lack of responsibility, not only for pupils but also for the school. Mitra bases her conclusions on a study carried out in North California, which had consulted with failing pupils in an attempt to address the problem of failing pupils (previously discussed under Section 3.5.1):

*By not involving students, particularly those who are failing subjects or rarely attending school, it is easy to shift the blame of failure to these students rather than looking at problems with the school’s structure and culture.* (Mitra, 2001:92).

However, according to Mitra, when the school invited the failing pupils’ voice, it could no longer point fingers at the pupils. The failing pupils’ voice challenged the school to shoulder its responsibility and, in practice, it helped attain, and sustain, a higher level of school commitment to solving the problem. By listening to each other, pupils and adults at school, could undertake joint ownership for the challenges at school and joint responsibility to address these challenges.
Another advantage of pupil voice is that it could provide schools with the opportunity to conduct a self-evaluation exercise, without being burdened with the diktats of administrative bodies. Urquhart (2001:86) refers to this seldom mentioned advantage of pupil voice: it offers a “practical alternative to the adult-centered bureaucracy that ‘cramps’ much of modern schooling”. Since pupil voice is not burdened by bureaucratic demands, hopefully, it could help schools refocus their efforts and rediscover the original purpose of quality assurance exercises. MacBeath et al (1996) refer to a direct quote by a Year 10 pupil, which captures the dangers of formal and exacting evaluation exercises:

*I used to think that this school cared about how well I was doing. Now I just think the only thing it cares about is how well it’s doing.* (MacBeath et al, 1996:47).

Amidst the strong voice of external auditors, the voice of the pupil might very easily be drowned. It seems inconsistent that evaluative exercises, whose aim is to improve schools for pupils, might shun pupil voice and end up doing a disservice to the very pupils they aim to protect. This particular advantage of pupil voice, is the premise on which this research was built: asking pupils to evaluate what makes a good school in simple and straightforward way which can be readily understood by adults and pupils alike. From this perspective, this research could be considered as a wide scale self-evaluation exercise.

Besides utilising pupil voice in the self-diagnosis of problems in a school, schools could exploit the full potential of pupil voice, by inviting pupil voice to devise solutions to problems encountered by schools. After all, as Mitra (2004:651) points out, schools could always “go straight to the source and ask the students”. Rudduck et al (2003) illustrate this with an example of what happened in a primary school. The Head of School was concerned about the high level of noise in classrooms, which was hindering pupils’ concentration. The pupils were consulted, and they came up with a simple, but effective solution: a system of colour codes, set up around the school, corresponding to the acceptable noise level. The success of the solution was due to the fact that, since the pupils themselves had proposed the idea, they owned the idea and hence the pupils were more compliant once it was implemented. In due course, the school benefitted because through pupil voice, it effectively resolved a school problem and a quieter environment, which is more
conducive to learning, ensued. The above example, in its simplicity, shows, that when schools learn how to harness pupil voice for their advantage, the whole school community gains.

This section has examined the benefits of pupil voice: for pupils, for teachers and for schools. In the following section, the theme of power and pupil voice is explored.
3.6 Power and Pupil Voice

‘Voice’ is inherently concerned with questions of power and knowledge, with how decisions are made, who is included and excluded and who is advantaged and disadvantaged as a result. (Thomson, 2011: 21).

The concept of pupil voice brings with it an awareness that “power relations are unequal and problematic” (Robinson and Taylor, 2007:12). In schools, there are “complex elements of power which operate simultaneously at different levels, and often unequally, within school systems” (Robinson, 2011:449). Inherent in the concept of pupil voice, there is the “binary distinction between adult and child, teacher and pupil” (Cruddas, 2007:480). In this binary distinction, “one term is privileged – in the case of adult and child, it is the adult” (Cruddas, 2007:481). Pupil voice challenges and problematises the power relations in a school.

In this power reshuffle, adults usually have the upper hand, since the status quo is in their favour and, in addition, they are the official gatekeepers of pupil voice in schools. “Recognition that students have a legitimate voice demands that students are respected as people, not merely as units of output by which to measure school performance.” (Bush, 2012:118). This is the paradigm shift which is needed in schools so that pupil voice can become a stronger voice and a more powerful voice. Thomson (2011) notes:

*Weak forms of ‘voice’ generally support the status quo or aim for modest reforms. The strongly democratic use of ‘voice’ equates to a call for a public sphere in which there is dialogue, reciprocity, recognition and respect. (Thomson, 2011: 21).*

A stronger pupil voice in schools is possible through a redistribution of power. This can be achieved through a “dialogic form of engagement” (Fielding, 2001b:108) where through dialogue, different voices could be taken on board. Furthermore, Fielding (2001b:108) advocates the development of “radical collegiality” where: “the accepted roles of student and teacher become less mutually exclusive, more open to extension and reversal, more open to mutual learning”.

When teachers invite pupil voice in their classrooms, there might be fears about the consequences of upsetting the traditional power balance between teacher and pupil,
and that teachers’ authority might be undermined (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004). However, Devine (2000:39) argues to the contrary: “to embrace such change is not to alter the authoritative position of teachers in the classroom, but rather to strengthen it”. Devine (2000), on the basis of her earlier research in three Irish primary schools, argues that pupils are conscious of the need for adult authority in the classroom and understand that boundaries between adults and pupils are needed for teaching and learning to occur. According to Devine (2000), pupils would like such boundaries to be set on the value of mutual respect between teachers and pupils. The researcher agrees that the changing power balances demand a preamble of mutual respect between adults and pupils. After all, “schools are sites in which trust and respect should form the cornerstones of all teacher/student interactions” (Czerniawski, 2012:136). Rudduck and McIntyre (2007:169) describe three prerequisites for “constructive consultation” in the classroom: trust, respect and recognition. Devine’s (2000) research shows that these three prerequisites are also the pupils’ priorities.

This study attempts to contribute to addressing the gap which exists in the power balance between adults and pupils in Maltese schools by giving pupils an opportunity to make an assessment on schools. By doing so, they are effectively passing a judgement on adults and the structures which are in place because of the decisions taken by adults. In this study, the pupils become the judges and, directly or indirectly, adults become the objects of scrutiny. Whether they have power by expressing these views, is not possible to have control over within this study, although the study did aim to explore the appetite for whether this judgement would be entrusted to have the necessary knowledge to assess schools and considered to have something worthy and relevant to say. This research could help redefine the traditional power balance between adults and pupils, if it is accepted by readers in the Maltese context. This study has aspirations to contribute towards the empowerment of pupils and by giving pupils a space to be heard and to be listened to; albeit within the confines of the data measuring tools (focus groups, survey and group interviews) which are the vehicles for pupil voice within the study.
In the next section, the theme of power and pupil voice is discussed within a wider context than the school context, by referring to Hart’s ladder of Participation. In the 1990s, Hart, R.A. published a text for UNICEF, *Children’s Participation: The Theory And Practice Of Involving Young Citizen In Community Development And Development Care*, which contributed to a debate about how to allow children more meaningful ways to contribute to projects aimed at community development. Its relevance to the main theme of this study will be discussed in the following section.

### 3.6.1 Hart’s Ladder of Pupil Participation

As indicated above, pupil voice can be considered as an umbrella term which covers a wide range of ways for pupil voice to be expressed and heard. Although not written in the context of school evaluation and improvement, Hart’s typology of different levels of involvement, constructed as a “Ladder of Participation” (1992:8), describes eight levels of participation, graphically displayed as a set of rungs leading to what might be considered as the fullest expression of children’s participation, or as framed in a school context, pupil voice. Recognising that pupils and adults have different power and knowledge underpins the levels of Hart’s ladder and, although conceptualised with respect to participation in civic projects has significance when applied to situations in schools, especially when it is recognised that schools are sites where pupils are present compulsorily. As a device, Hart, R.A.’s ladder is something which might usefully be discussed with school leaders and teachers; firstly, it depicts a range of ways pupil participation might be considered as part of school development processes and this might serve as an eye-opener for some schools, challenging the dominant role of adults in school evaluation and decision-making. Secondly, it describes a succession of rungs of increasing participation, with which schools might choose to evaluate their current situation, and then choose to climb. These rungs acknowledge the natural power imbalance in school settings between teachers and pupils and offer different alternatives for bridging this power imbalance gap towards the highest level which sees pupils as driving school decision-making.
3.6.2 Limitations in Applying Hart’s Ladder of Pupil Participation

Hart’s Ladder of Participation (1992) has been criticised in a number of ways and these limitations need to be recognised when applying this typology. Firstly, it has been considered too categorical when applied to analysing and classifying particular activities, such that it is difficult to align a single level of participation with any particular activity; as pointed out by Thomson (2011), in reality there is never one
voice, but a multitude of voices. Each level of participation can be considered multifaceted and needing contextual factors to be taken into consideration. Similarly, children will not be acting as homogenous group, and are likely to be showing characteristics of more than one level of participation during any particular activity. Children cannot be expected to all have the same motivations to participate, will be guided by their prior experiences of participation and will have different expectations of what it means to be a school pupil. Adults in the setting will similarly be affected by the culture of the school, the nature of staff-pupil relationships, the background to an agenda for increasing pupil participation and, like the pupils, adults in schools are not a homogenous group and will interact with children in different ways, affording pupils different levels of agency even during a single activity or initiative. Therefore, to apply the categories of the ladder to any one setting requires a rich appreciation of how both pupils and adults in a setting perceive and behave in relation to their roles, how they relate to one another, and how the context for the current activity has influenced current relationships and opportunities for change.

Secondly, the sequential nature of the ladder has been challenged. Tisdall and Liebel (2008) criticise Hart’s ladder for giving the impression that children’s participation can progress from one level to the next, suggesting that all activities can or should aim for the level of participation on the highest rung. Reddy and Ratna (2002) echo the same reservations on the idea that one level of participation can lead to a higher level. At times it is neither possible, nor desirable, to engage pupils at the level of participation on the highest rung; certain activities might have to be adult-driven and the very nature of certain activities might require pupil participation as described by lower rungs. Thirdly, Treseder (1997) points out the fact that Hart’s ladder fails to take into account the different cultural contexts. Different cultures have different social constructions of childhood; there may be different approaches to parenting, children’s role in the family and in society, different views on the relationship and power balance between adults and children. Nevertheless, Hart’s ladder graphically depicts a spectrum of pupil participation, and this can be used as a heuristic device to facilitate a deeper understanding of the potential of pupil participation. In particular, Shier (2001:110) draws attention to the lowest forms of pupil participation, displayed as the first three rungs, and states: “Ironically, the greatest practical benefit of Hart’s
work may be his exposure of these false types of participation.” This device could therefore be used to challenge school leaders to review what they consider to be meaningful pupil participation in school development processes. Through being exposed to discussing pupils’ views of school quality as offered in this study, and holding up these discussions against ideas in Hart’s ladder, it was hoped that school leaders would be able to review their views and perhaps open themselves and their schools to giving pupils more voice.

Realistically, not all activities in a school can operate at the higher levels described by Hart’s ladder. The direction of the educational provision in a school will always remain in the hands of adults, and adults cannot abdicate their role in managing and leading in a school; nevertheless space can be made for a stronger pupil voice in schools.

In the next section, the limitations of pupil voice will be discussed; both from the theoretical and practical perspective.

3.7 Limitations of Pupil Voice

There are limitations of both pupil voice as a concept, and of the practical application of pupil voice. These limitations are discussed separately in the following subsections.

3.7.1 Limitations of Pupil Voice as a Concept

According to some exponents of pupil voice, the term pupil voice in itself may be misleading or contradictory. Thomson (2011:19) criticises the use of the term ‘voice’, arguing that it has been overused by policy-makers, researchers and practitioners, to the extreme that now it can be considered as “an empty jug into which any number of competing meanings can be conveniently poured for any
number of contradictory ends” (Thomson 2011:22) describes six main problems with the concept of pupil voice:

1. **Singularity**- ‘voice’ is a unitary noun; there is one ‘voice’ singular, not ‘voices’ plural: ‘voice’ implies a single and a homogenous voice, which, some argue, is far removed from reality. MacBeath (2006:71) asserts that pupils speak in “many and varied tongues” and Fielding (2007a:306) reminds us of the “presumed homogeneity” in pupil voice. Robinson and Taylor (2007:6) argue that “a monolingual assumption is illusory”; whereas Chadderton (2011:81) refers to the “plurality and shifting nature of voices”.

2. **Purpose**- children are asked, or choose to exercise ‘voice’ for different reasons: Yamashita et al (2010) question the motivation of teachers when listening to pupil voice. They maintain that giving the space for pupil voice, is often seen, by many, as an advantage for the pupils themselves. However, Yamashita et al (2010) argue that pupil voice should be heard, on the grounds that it is a constructive and important voice, in its own right.

3. **Embodiment**- ‘voice’ is disembodied: according to Thomson (2011) in the concept pupil voice, speech is given priority over other forms of bodily expression, which might include non-verbal communication and the projected body image, such as the choice of clothes and bodily ornaments.

4. **Authenticity**- ‘voice’ is understood as consistent and pure: Thomson (2011:23) warns of the dangers of assuming pupil voice as “unwavering truth”. MacBeath (2006) also cautions against the assumed innocence of pupil voice:

   *Celebration of pupil voice as if it were always naïve, authentic and untrammeled by convention may lead to an equivocal place. What is expressed by a child or young adult may be spontaneous or may be a studied choice with an acute grasp of audience.* (MacBeath, 2006:71).

   This possible lack of reliability and credibility in pupil voice might diminish the validity of pupil voice as a concept.

5. **Language**- ‘voice’ is expressed in words: Thomson (2011) argues that since the concept of ‘voice’ is tied with speech, other modes of communication
which children might prefer, such as digital media or performing and visual arts, might be excluded.

6. **Etiquette- ‘voice’ must be exercised in particular ways and at particular times**: Thomson (2011:24) points out that “Political ‘voice’ is not always of the polite kind”, and according to her the voice which is not “polite” will tend to be ignored by adults. In fact, Cremin et al (2010) found out that the official school discourse labels pupils, and this affects the way that pupil voice was being conceived and received in school:

   *Adults respond to pupil voice differently depending on how it is framed – the ‘types’ create discursive practices that determine the things that can be said, by whom, and in what way.* (Cremin et al, 2010:601).

Pupils might consciously choose to censor how they project their own voice. According to MacBeath (2006:70) this happens because pupils are aware of the limitations imposed on them, and so become “adept at testing the limits of what can be said and heard”. In this scenario, the resultant pupil voice, would be a filtered voice which does not convey the real message of the pupil.

After reviewing the limitations of pupil voice as a concept, the limitations of the application of the concept in practice are discussed next.

### 3.7.2 Limitations of Pupil Voice in Practice

There are a number of limitations to the operating of the concept of pupil voice in practice. In real life, since pupil voice is composed of many voices, there is a threat that the louder voices predominate, to the detriment of the softer voices. Flutter (2007) and McIntyre et al (2005) acknowledge that the voices of eloquent and influential pupils may drown the voices of pupils who are not engaging successfully in the learning process.

In addition, pupil voice is not a sterile voice; it is influenced by external forces, in the same way, that other voices are (Cheminais, 2008). In fact, Frost and Holen (2008:85) note that: “young people’s views are delimited by their background and by
their own race, gender and class”. Thompson (2009:672) argues that pupil voice is “co-constructed”, and this co-construction is influenced by the wider society. Another serious limiting factor for pupil voice in practice is that it lies at the mercy of the generosity of other stakeholders. Thompson (2009:672) acknowledges this and notes that “adults will often act as gatekeepers for children’s voices.” This means that the attitude of the “gatekeeper” towards pupil voice will determine whether pupil voice is projected or not, how it is projected in schools, and the importance given to this voice.

A number of pupils might choose to remain silent. These silent voices might very well be the ones that have the most to say to schools (McIntyre et al, 2005). Schools have an arduous task in trying to extract inaudible voices; as Arnot and Reay (2007:323) note: “the elicitation of silent, suppressed, inner and outer voices is conceptually and practically very difficult”. Lewis (2010:20) reminds schools that “listening better includes hearing silence”. McIntyre et al (2005:167) maintain: “those from whom teachers most need to hear are those whom it will be most difficult to consult”. The silence of such pupils speaks volumes; “silence is not neutral or empty” (Lewis, 2010:20). It is not easy for schools to find the time and the energy to elicit the participation of silent pupils; and probably, in most schools, silent voices have little chance of ever becoming audible.

Another limitation of pupil voice, is, that it opens the door to feedback which might cause offence to adults. As noted by Rudduck and Flutter (2004:147) teachers might fear “being on the receiving end of personal criticism”. To avoid such a situation, Flutter (2007) maintains that it is the duty of the school to ensure that pupil voice is introduced in a responsible and insightful manner. Gunter and Thomson (2007:186) caution: “how we tackle issues of inclusion for students has to involve inclusion for teachers”. Marsh, H. (2012:162) describes, how, with “careful framing” pupils’ responses can be expressed in a way that avoids “personal criticism and condemnation of specific teachers”. Schools should work hard in this regard, to help dispel the justified fears that some teachers might harbour on the process.
One of the “uncomfortable learnings” on pupil voice, described by McIntyre et al (2005:167) is that teachers believe that pupil voice might devalue teacher’s work and render it far simpler than it actually is. McIntyre et al state:

\textit{It is as easy as it is legitimate for teachers to claim that pupils’ suggestions rarely take adequate account of the complexity of the teacher’s task. (McIntyre et al, 2005:167).}

This can be addressed by better communication between pupil and teacher, in a setting of mutual trust and respect. On an encouraging note, Bragg (2007:517) reminds us: “Pupil voice undoubtedly troubles existing relationships and identities, but it also fosters new ones.” It is these new relationships which might encourage schools to embrace pupil voice. A school with a healthy attitude to pupil voice is not discouraged by the apprehensions discussed above; rather, it is conscious of them, and rises to the challenge of advocating pupil voice, notwithstanding the constraints that may be encountered.

The next section discusses how schools can facilitate the best conditions for pupil voice in practice.

3.7.3 The Optimum Conditions for Pupil Voice

Schools can go a long way towards providing the optimal conditions for fostering increased power in pupil participation. Pupil voice should be elicited and encouraged, without fear or favour, from the widest possible range of pupils, and received in a welcoming and positive way by adults. According to Breslin (2011:68), pupil voice in schools involves the following challenges:

\textit{Sharing voice:} schools should ensure that all pupils have a fair opportunity to express their voice

\textit{Raising voice:} schools should provide more participation opportunities for pupil voice, and varied forms of participation

\textit{Widening voice:} after working on pupil voice, schools should turn their focus to other voices in the wider school community, so that the school becomes “voice-friendly” to other voices as well.
When these three challenges are met, schools will be providing pupils with an opportunity for “authentic participation” and an opportunity to become “shapers of the vision” (Gunter and Thomson, 2007b:27).

The previous discussion explored various aspects to what has been published about the conceptualisation of, and studies about, the manifestations of pupil voice. The examples cited from studies on pupil voice in the U.K., U.S.A. and Malta, and the perspectives of different academics on the subject, have shown that there are several lessons to be learnt on pupil voice. The discussion now branches from pupil voice to pupils as assessors.

3.8 From Pupil Voice to Pupils as Assessors

This section merges the two conceptual threads: quality assurance and pupil voice; to form the main theme of this study ‘pupil voice as assessor’. As discussed previously, both pupil voice and quality assurance on their own, can bring about improvement in schools. When merged together, in pupils as assessors, their combined forces might generate a stronger thrust to bring about positive change in schools.

3.8.1 Rationale for ‘Pupils as Assessors’

In the researcher’s opinion, the concept of ‘pupils as assessors’ develops from the strong arguments in favour of pupil voice. However, it is not a mere extension of pupil voice. Conceptually there is a leap between ‘pupil voice’ and ‘pupils as assessors’. In the role of assessors, pupils are being given more than an ordinary voice; they are being given the voice of an evaluator. Pupil voice in the role of assessor is an authoritative voice which is passing judgement on schools.
According to the researcher, the rationale for ‘pupils as assessors’ is:

1. Schools are created for pupils
2. Pupil years are irreplaceable
3. Voice is not enough
4. Pupils are unique critics
5. ‘Pupils as assessors’ might bring about school improvement.

Each reason in the rationale will be discussed in turn.

1. **Schools are created for pupils**

   *It is a truism to suggest that schools could not exist without their students, but it is also curious that as the key stakeholders in the education enterprise they are rarely consulted about the conditions under which they learn.* (Groundwater-Smith, 2007:113).

   Stating that schools are for pupils, is rhetoric. By their very nature, schools and pupils are intertwined. What is arguable, is, the type of relationship which exists between the ‘school’ and the ‘pupil’. Osler (2010) asserts that, in the school environment, ironically, pupils’ contributions are minimal. She succinctly remarks:

   *Although schools are designed for children and young people, they are rarely designed in cooperation or in partnership with students.* (Osler, 2010:10).

   This apparent paradox, the distance between the ‘school’ and the ‘pupil’, might arouse one’s curiosity to find out how pupils assess schools. Giving pupils the role of assessors could provide an insight on what pupils think and feel about schools, which in turn could be used to ‘redesign’ better schools.

2. **Pupil years are irreplaceable**

   We are living in a society where we spend an important and significant proportion of our lives as pupils. We tend to speak of our pupil years with emotion. The common perception is that schools make an indelible impact on one’s life. This is the premise on which this research hinges, the major stakeholder – the pupil, has a right to assess
schools because schools, primarily, affect pupils. Greenwood and Gaunt (1994) note:

*Remember above all: Students/pupils only get one chance.* (Greenwood and Gaunt, 1994:xii)

This is what this research seeks to achieve: a better chance for pupils, by asking pupils to assess schools, and thus uncovering the strengths and weaknesses of schools. The ultimate aim of this research is to improve the irreplaceable pupil years.

3. **Voice is not enough**

As discussed earlier, the general consensus is that pupil voice is a beneficial voice for pupils, for teachers, and for schools. However, in the present scenario, pupil voice is a vulnerable voice, fighting for attention. It is a voice which can very easily be hushed by other voices in a school, and it depends on the space offered by other voices in a school. Pupil voice might have a lot of potential, but it has limited power. In fact, Fielding (2007) refers to the inadequacy and shortcomings of pupil voice and notes:

*It is interesting to note that the limitations of “voice” as a metaphor for student engagement have become so numerous and so substantial at the very point when the cumulative impetus of consultation is beginning to acknowledge and aspire to the more complex and more challenging push for participation.* (Fielding, 2007:306).

As noted by Fielding (2007), the very constraints of pupil voice might spur an argument in favour of the involvement of pupils at a higher and more influential level. One possible way of achieving this could be inviting pupils to become assessors, within the wider context of quality assurance in schools.

Lundy (2007) draws on Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; Paragraph 1, clearly states:

*State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.* (The Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations General Assembly: 1989).
“Simply listening” to pupils is not enough to bring about the necessary changes needed for the way forward. Lundy (2007:927) asserts that “voice is not enough”. She proposes four different aspects to facilitate the application of Article 12:

- **Space:** Children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- **Voice:** Children must be facilitated to express their views
- **Audience:** The view must be listened to
- **Influence:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate. (Lundy, 2007:933).

### 4. Pupils are Unique Critics

Pupils are at the receiving end of the whole educational system. At the end of the day, any process or initiative can only be judged by its results, and in the educational context, the final test is the effect on the pupil. The educational experience is as strong as its weakest link. It is the pupil who is experiencing the whole chain of the educational experience, and this puts the pupil in a privileged position to criticise it. Mitra (2006:315) reminds us that pupils “possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate”. Pupils are the main beneficiaries, or victims, of the educational process, and so their role as critics is unmatched.

In addition to being in a unique position to criticise schools, according to MacBeath (1999:20) “pupils have an intuitive grasp of quality”. As noted by Blossing (2005:393), pupils have the opportunity to act as critics: “they possess vast resources of observation and knowledge about school life from which they can monitor and review.” The pupils’ motives are likely to reflect genuinely what they feel is advantageous to pupils; after all it is their present and their future which is at stake. Cardoso et al (2013:98) argue that adults may not always be so innocent in their contributions to quality assurance exercises; they report that adults may show “non-compliance” or may even sabotage quality assurance because they feel that it is imposed on them and that it curbs their professional freedom. Pupils are not burdened with these issues, and so are more likely to feel that they will ultimately benefit from the contribution they are giving in school assessment.
5. ‘Pupils as assessors’ might bring about school improvement

The pupils’ assessment of schools is not an end in itself. It is the means, by which the strengths and weaknesses of schools can be uncovered. However, the end should always be school improvement. In fact, Rudduck et al, assert that:

*Taking our agenda for change from students as the key stakeholders can be a powerful way forward.* (Rudduck et al, 2003:275).

In the researcher’s opinion, the ultimate purpose of choosing pupils as assessors is to be able to offer recommendations for better-quality schools, and possibly, for improvements to the whole educational system in Malta.

After putting forward the arguments in favour of pupil voice as assessor, the next section locates this study within other pupil voice studies. In the last part of the chapter, the rationale for the study is put forward.

3.9 Locating this Study within other Pupil Voice Studies

There is a wide range of research on pupil voice. Different research methodologies and methods have been used to extract pupil voice. Traditionally pupil voice research tends to employ qualitative methodologies; focus group sessions appear to be a popular method in pupil voice research. For example, Mitra (2001) describes a study carried in a high school in California, which engaged pupil voice in an attempt to understand and help failing pupils. The school made use of a form of focus group session, which the school termed a “fishbowl” (Mitra, 2001:91), where pupils sit in an inner student circle and teachers sit in an outer circle. The facilitator asked the leading question: “What works and what doesn’t work that teachers do to help students learn?” The students presented the results to the teachers. Pupil voice was instrumental in the diagnosis and the solution of the problem which the school was facing. The success of the process depended on the climate of the school which not only listened to pupil voice, but valued it and acted upon it. Flutter (2007) refers to a small-scale investigation carried out by a comprehensive school in Bedfordshire, which used focus group sessions to extract form pupils a model of a good lesson. The school had received support and guidance from the Faculty of Education.
research team within the University of Cambridge. This could have been an important contributing factor to the success in the way pupil voice was extracted and in the positive way that teachers reacted to it.

Raymond (2001) describes how the attitude of a comprehensive school in East England towards pupil voice progressed from perceiving pupils as a data source, to pupils as active respondents, to pupils as co-researchers being teacher-led, and finally to pupils as researchers which was pupil-led. The school used group discussions as a method to capture pupil voice. It also used two other methods which are relatively less common: student to student interviews, and students observing and giving feedback on lessons. The pupils’ contributions uncovered weaknesses in the school which were unnoticed by adults. Both teachers and pupils received training on how to manage the new partnership between adults and pupils, and on how to communicate effectively.

Other studies show that quantitative research can also be a valid way of capturing pupil voice. Flutter (2007) cites a study carried out in South West England with Year 11 pupils, where the head of the Science Department conducted a questionnaire with pupils to find out which teaching styles were preferred by pupils. In this way, pupils conveyed their opinions on how to improve teaching in the Science department. Osberg et al (2006) studied the strategies used by three schools in California to engage pupil voice in school reform. In all three schools, a team was set up to plan and implement how the strategy. This team was made up of eight individuals, at least one of which was a pupil. The schools used discussions, focus group sessions and interviews to elicit pupil voice. All three schools also used questionnaire surveys to gather a better understanding of what pupils wanted to communicated. Whilst referring to the questionnaire survey, Osberg et al note:

This strategy demonstrated the school’s commitment to soliciting student voice as well as its recognition that a handful of student stakeholders could not possibly represent the experiences and perspectives of all the students in the community. (Osberg et al, 2006:338,339)

This is precisely where this research is located: it is a study which gives voice to pupils and it does this primarily by asking pupils at scale through a survey questionnaire.
3.10 Rationale for this Study

In the researcher’s view, this study offers a practical way to apply the concept of pupil voice at scale. The pupil voice expressed in the study is a broad voice, albeit limited in depth; nevertheless, as a study it provides pupils with the opportunity to take an assessment role, with the ultimate aim of proposing positive changes in schools and in the whole educational system. Gunter and Thomson (2007a:185) warn us that pupil voice “challenges existing assumptions about what schools are for”. The researcher welcomes this provocation and hopes that it will serve as an impetus to bring about the required changes in Maltese schools.

In the researcher’s opinion, giving pupils the role of assessors should complement the existing assessment processes which are already in place in schools. Educators will always retain their positions as professionals; they are the ones who have the professional expertise on how to best organise the school set-up, and the teaching and learning which occurs in a school. The researcher agrees unreservedly with Flutter and Rudduck:

*We are not proposing that pupils should dictate how schools are run but our research leads us to believe that practitioners and schools can benefit from tuning into pupils’ perspectives.* (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004:3).

On the other hand, to transform the school into a learning community, schools need to tap all the potential in pupil voice. Schools might easily resort to consulting pupils on aspects of school-life which are trivial and pose few difficulties for teachers and administrative staff. However, Hampson et al (2011:25) insist that pupils should be given a voice on all aspects of school life: “We need to recognise that students aren’t just passive recipients in their education, but potential partners in learning.” In the researcher’s opinion, as “potential partners in learning” pupils should be included, at an assessor level, in quality assurance of schools.

Pupils as assessors is not likely to be a panacea for all the ills in Maltese schools; but as Crane reminds us:

*Schools cannot learn how to become better places for learning without asking the students.* (Crane, 2001:54).
This is what this research purports to find out - how to make Maltese schools better places for learning, by asking Maltese pupils.

This chapter presented a study of the wider literature on the main themes in this study: quality in education, quality assurance, quality indicators, pupil voice, pupil voice in the role of assessor, and the variables which might influence pupils’ assessment on what makes a good school. Having set the study within the existing literature, the next chapter gives a detailed account of the methodology used in the research.
CHAPTER 4

The Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology adopted in this research and details the theoretical and practical research designs. It discusses different dimensions to the research process: the overall design, the research methods, the sampling framework, the ethics of the study, the analysis techniques and the limitations of the methodology. The results of the pre-study are included in this chapter since they were used to inform the design of the main phase research instrument: the questionnaire.

4.1 An Overview of the Research

According to Anderson (1990:5), research “seeks to answer the questions and address the problems posed by inquiring minds”. In this research, the main inquiry was: in the Maltese pupils’ opinion, what makes a good school? The launching platform for this research was this curiosity, this impulse to find out about the pupils’ perspective on the qualities of a good school in Malta. Subsequently, from this main
line of inquiry, the framework for the research started evolving, which was influenced by a growing appreciation of the need to understand how pupil voice, as was being stimulated in this study, might be perceived and hence potentially how it might be acted upon beyond this study.

The main research question centred on what pupils value as being good in a school; pupils were asked to pass value judgements. The overarching conceptual framework for this study was axiology: “the philosophical study of goodness or value, in the widest sense of these terms” (Encyclopaedia Brittanica Online, 2016). To answer the question of what is good in a school, alone, without an understanding of how pupils’ views would be received, was perceived to be insufficient. A subsidiary interest developed to explore how giving pupils a voice, through consulting them as assessors of school quality, was likely to be received and responded to, in the Maltese context. To translate the research inquiry into a practical research process, a Mixed Methods Research methodology was employed, in a sequential design which made use of the following research methods: focus groups, questionnaires and interviews.

4.2 The Research Questions

1. The Main Research Question: From the pupils’ perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school in Malta?

The main research question explicitly asked what pupils consider as a requisite for a good school. Bearing in mind that the pupil is the ultimate beneficiary or victim of the educational process, and that, in addition, the pupil can provide a unique perspective, it was envisaged that the list of quality indicators from the pupils’ perspective would provide a fresh insight into what makes a good school. Hopefully, this perspective would be given its due weight by schools and by policy-makers; and hence, bring about positive changes on an individual school level, and also on a wider national level. However, this is not something which can be assumed and so some thought in the design needed to be given as to how this perspective could be ‘heard’.
2. How does the pupils’ judgement on what constitutes a good school vary with:
   - Age
   - Gender
   - Socio-economic background
   - Academic attainment level?

It is accepted that pupil perspectives are likely to be diverse and should not be considered as a homogenous ‘voice’. The second research question therefore sought to differentiated between pupils according to four selected characteristics which might be considered to affect their experiences and views of school. This accepted that an amalgamated list of quality indicators of a good school has its limitations and, by segregating the data, a more in-depth analysis of the findings could be carried out to better appreciate the diversity of views expressed by different types of students.

The aim of this research question was to comprehend first and foremost, whether there was a relationship between pupils’ perspective on schools and the selected characteristics: age, gender, socio-economic background, and academic success, identified in relation to previously published studies. If the findings were to show that such a relationship exists, for the Maltese pupils surveyed, the utilitarian relevance of the results could help schools understand better how different types of pupils perceive and judge schools; it might also shed light on how schools can cater for the different needs of different types of pupils. It is accepted that there are limitations both in the measurement of the characteristics collected in the survey as well as in the range of possible aspects of diversity which is likely to affect pupils’ opinion.

There could be other underlying variables affecting the way pupils judge schools, for instance: views of how important school is in their lives, previous experience of how pupils had been approached to be asked for their views, whether pupils had changed schools, events in the recent past which affected how they viewed school but were temporary or ephemeral, such as friendship fall outs, bullying, difficulties with a teacher or other family members.
3. What are the perspectives of pupils, Heads of schools, and policy-makers, on:
   o pupils’ role as assessors?
   o the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school?

At a basic level, the answer to the main research question: From the pupils’ perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school in Malta? is a list of quality indicators of what characterises a good school from the pupils’ perspective. However, this list is not an end in itself. Just collecting such a list does not in itself give ‘voice’ to the pupils. It is the interpretation of this list which the researcher judged would be meaningful and which could lead to educationally significant outcomes. This interpretation would best be carried out by those who could be involved in these outcomes i.e. pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers- those the researcher deemed were stakeholders in giving voice in Malta by giving them the role of assessors. The first part of this research question probed into the attitudes of these different stakeholders on pupils’ roles as assessors, to help contextualise the study. The second part of the research question inquired directly about the stakeholders’ opinions on the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a good school. In this way, a multi-faceted interpretation of the main findings was built into the study by effectively giving the different the opportunity to critically engage with the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school from their particular perspectives. This was felt important, to appreciate how the pupils’ views of school quality, as collected in this study, would be received and, hence, help appreciate, the actual ‘voice’ pupils appeared to have in the current Maltese context.

To this end, the different stakeholders were asked to offer suggestions on how the outcomes of the study could be transformed into practical measures to be implemented in schools, to hear whether they were interested in or likely to do so. Pupil voice acting in the role of assessors can only be given an executive function if Heads of Schools and policy-makers listen to it, and act on it. At a school level, Heads of Schools were identified as the prime movers and agents of change. Policy-makers have the authority and power to implement changes at a national level; hence, their direct involvement in the study would ensure that, firstly, they were aware of pupils’ assessment of schools. Secondly, their contribution could help to
bring to fruition the main purpose of the study: that of bringing about positive change to ensure better-quality schools in Malta.

4.2.1 Justifications for the Choice of Variables Studied

The main line of inquiry of this research was to find out what Maltese pupils judge to be the quality indicators of a good school. As noted above it is accepted that the school population across Malta will be formed of great diversity in the characteristics they bring to having views on school quality. This needed to be accounted for in some practical way. The research wanted to examine whether there are indications that certain characteristics appear to influence the pupils’ assessments. In this way, a more thorough understanding of how and why pupils were judging schools in the way they were, could be achieved. The survey tool was designed such that the ‘pupil’ responding to the questionnaire, could have a (partial) identity according to:

a) age- as a young pupil/ an older pupil
b) gender- as a male/ a female
c) as coming from a particular socio-economic background- as from a more, or less, wealthy and socially connected family setting
d) the academic attainment level- as a pupil who is attaining by school measures, more or less highly.

Therefore, the 1618 anonymous pupils who participated in the questionnaire survey were not treated as a homogenous group, and some personal data was collected according to these four variables, which when mapped against their responses, might indicate differences in response related to one of these variables. It was hoped that this would facilitate a better understanding of the complexity of the multitude of the individual pupil-generated lists which ultimately produced ‘the’ pupil-generated list. From a practical perspective, it was hoped that by understanding how variables were influencing pupils’ judgement on schools, schools could be in a better position to channel their resources to address the different needs of different types of pupils.
The preamble to the research was, that if literature provides evidence that there are variables which affect pupils’ experience of schooling, then these variables might also be affecting pupils’ judgement of schools. In the researcher’s opinion, and from her twenty-three’s experience in schools, these four variables are usually present in all school, and in all classrooms. Practitioners in schools encounter these variables within the pupil population on a daily basis, and so the link between these variables and pupils’ assessment of what makes a good school, was deemed, by the researcher, to be of utilitarian value for schools.

4.2.1.1 The Influence of Age

It is not practically possible to collect data from every age group, given that the study was undertaken by a single researcher, and geographical coverage had been prioritised i.e. to cover schools representing all 10 colleges across Malta. For practical reasons two pupil cohorts were considered feasible to sample, one from each phase of compulsory schooling. As the study aimed to be relevant to both primary and secondary sectors in Malta, an age group within each was selected.

As it was desirable to survey children directly at scale, advice was taken on board about how to design and use questionnaires with children. Whilst this was thought to be more straightforward with the more mature adolescents, collecting the views of younger, primary age children needed particular consideration. It is possible to collect views from the youngest school age children, or even earlier (Wall, 2017), although visual methodologies are considered more appropriate and trustworthy. Different approaches to methodology with young children were considered; such as ‘Drawing-mediated research technique’ (Wall, 2017:319) and observations or audio and visual recordings (Abela, 2012). However, it was important to this study’s aims to gather views at scale and using such time-intensive, context and relationship-bound methods were not possible. Clark (2005) notes that questionnaires are usually used with older (secondary) children although she acknowledges that this research tool can be adapted to gather data from younger children. A decision needed to be
made about the youngest age-groups who might reliably and meaningfully be expected to engage with a questionnaire; in fact, this was one of the main purposes of the pilot questionnaire. Following the pilot those aged eight (Primary school group) and 14 (Secondary school group) were chosen as those for which a questionnaire tool could be designed which both age groups of children could understand and respond to in meaningful ways.

The physical, sexual, psychological and sociological development from the ages of 8 through to the end of adolescence could influence the pupils’ judgement on schools as well as their differing length of time in, and hence experience of, schools. As expected, pupils’ interests in school, and outside school, also change as they become older (Bee and Boyd, 2004). Yurgelun-Todd (2007) notes:

*Adolescence is a critical period for maturation of neurobiological processes that underlie higher cognitive functions and social and emotional behaviour.*

(Yurgelun-Todd, 2007).

As pupils mature, their way of reasoning also matures. The changes in thought processes brought about by the onset of adolescence could influence the way pupils assess schools. To reiterate, this is not to say that children of all ages cannot be asked to express their views, but it must be accepted that they would be expected to express their views and need to be asked for their views in age-appropriate ways. Lapsley (1990:186) notes that: “the shift in adolescence to formal operational thought brings with it a shift toward sceptical doubt”. Two age-groups were therefore included to allow for any differences related to development as well as length of experience of schooling to be captured.

Clark argues that the questionnaire can be “tokenistic” (Clark, 2005:493) if it is used as the sole method to collect data from young children. This is something this study wanted to avoid in terms of how it offered an opportunity for pupil voice and, as will be explained later, led to the mixed methods design and, in particular the group interviews with Student Councils (Sections 4.3.4 and 4.4), to complement the data collected from the questionnaire survey, in addition to the focus group sessions which were conducted prior to, and contributed to the design of the questionnaire.
survey. Both age groups contributed to all three methods: the focus groups, the questionnaire and the group interviews with Student Councils.

4.2.1.2 The Influence of Gender

Gender might influence the way a pupil experiences school. There is much international research exploring the gendered nature of schooling (Jackson, 2003; Orr, 2011; Paule, 2015).

Our area of attention is around performance in terms of the schooling experience. For instance, various authors refer to the fact that boys typically underperform compared to girls at school (Borg,E., 2015; Epstein et al, 1998; Reay, 2010 and Ringrose, 2007). Without going into the merits of how and why girls might be more successful at school, the fact that gender influences school performance, might indicate that there is a possibility that gender influences how a pupil judges a school. Orr (2011) studied the relationship between gender stereotypical behaviour and academic grades in 6394 Kindergarten students across U.S.A. She found out that boys were more likely to have negative attitudes towards school than girls and to obtain lower academic grades than girls. PISA\textsuperscript{10} results also show that there are gender differences in performance in academic subjects. In 2000, PISA results show that girls in all countries, outperformed boys in reading; in 2003, boys moderately outperformed girls in Mathematics (OECD, 2009). In Malta, there is the largest gender gap in reading across all 74 PISA 2009 and PISA 2009+ participants, with girls outperforming boys (PISA 2009+ Malta Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013). PISA results show that internationally, there are also gender differences in preferences, 75% of girls read for enjoyment, whereas only 50% of boys do so; 20% of boys play online collaborative games every day, whereas only 2% of the girls do so; for every girl considering a career in engineering and computing, there are four boys (OECD, 2015). In students having similar print

\textsuperscript{10} The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international survey which evaluates the educational competences of 15-year-old students. Source: http://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/
reading skills, boys score higher in digital reading skills because they have higher navigational skills (OECD, PISA in Focus, 2012).

In addition, there are important perceptions to consider. For example, the view that a boy can be innately clever without having to put in any effort (Jackson, 2003; Paule, 2015) and that “boys will boys” (Epstein et al, 1998:9). These ideas, which Paule refers to as “dinosaur discourses” (Paule, 2015:744), might be creating stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies, which in turn might directly or indirectly affect the pupils’ perspective on schools. Boys’ and girls’ attitudes to school and to learning might be influenced by gender learned models where boys for example might associate academic success with femininity and report feeling less comfortable than girls in being a school student (eg. Huyge et al, 2015; Brown et al, 2003). A recent study carried out by Huyge et al (2015) examined the sense of school belonging in first-year, 12-year-old, Flemish secondary students 6380 students by a questionnaire. The study concluded that at the beginning of the scholastic year, boys had a lower sense of belonging to the school than girls. Another study, in two high schools in an urban school district in the south of the U.S.A. with 200 students (Brown et al, 2003) reported that male students experienced more ‘student alienation’ than female students.

Various academics argue that schools are essentially feminine, in the way they are set-up and in the way they reward stereotypical female behaviour in students (Heyder and Kessels, 2013). Heyder and Kessels (2013) studied the relationship between the degree to which a student felt that a school is feminine, and academic achievement in two subjects: German, which is considered as a traditional feminine subject and Mathematics, which is considered as a traditional masculine subject. The study was carried out with 123, 14-year-old students in a West Germany school. The study found out that in German, the higher the boys’ association of school with femininity, the lower was their academic achievement. This effect was not noted in Mathematics, nor for female students studying German.
The above gendered differences in academic performance and attitudes to different aspects of schooling could be influential variables in pupils’ assessment of what makes a good school.

4.2.1.3 The Influence of the Socio-Economic Background

A third factor identified as a likely determining factor in student progress and hence experience of schooling, has long been identified as socio-economic background (Coleman, 1969). Closer to our times, Cusworth (2009) notes:

*Parental employment patterns have an influence on children in various ways, through the effect on family income, the time parents spend with their children, and the provision of a role-model image.* (Cusworth, 2009:1).

Bourdieu (1987) offers a further explanation for the effect of social class and children’s academic success. He refers to the concept of ‘cultural capital’ which refers to the dominant culture in society. This includes the ability to communicate in a way which is compatible with the accepted and prevailing language in schools. According to Bourdieu (1987), students with a higher cultural capital have a higher chance of being successful. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1987) also introduces the concept of ‘habitus’ which refers to values and attitudes. The dominant class in society possesses the dominant habitus, and this includes values and attitudes to education. According to Bourdieu (1987), the habitus of the class to which a pupil belongs is a determining factor in a pupil’s educational attainment level.

International tests show that there is a link between socio-economic background and pupil performance. According to PISA 2009 Results (OECD, 2010)\(^a\), students from higher socio-economic backgrounds, performed better in PISA and conversely, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds performed more poorly. Results in TIMSS\(^{11}\) (Mullis et al, 2012) show a strong positive relationship between attainment in Mathematics and the socio-economic background, particularly the parents’ level of education. In Malta, attainment in reading was found to be positively and

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\(^a\) The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) assesses students on competences in mathematics and science achievement and provides comparative international data. Source: https://nces.ed.gov/timss/

Studies carried out in Malta confirm that the socio-economic background affects pupils’ success in school. Cassar, D. (2012) carried out a study on the effect of poverty on pupils’ experience of schooling, by interviewing 20 teachers in four Primary state schools. She concluded that pupils’ experience of schooling is influenced by the economic background of the pupils’ family and that pupils from poor families had a number of main obstacles to their education, these included: malnutrition, low value given by parents to education, lack of care at home, lack of concentration in class, lack of resources at home which in turn also caused problems for pupils when trying to use computers at school, pupils’ future career aspirations being modelled on parents’ low ranking jobs, and not being considered as equals by their peers. Cassar, D. (2012) reported how pupils from low-income families would not attend school activities, or ask to be excused from them if they involved a payment. Mallia (2013), studied the relationship between pupil’s socio-economic background and science subject choice by means of a questionnaire to 481 Form 4 students (aged 14). One of the main findings was that children of parents having a high level of education were more likely to choose science subjects.

As described above, studies show that the socio-economic class influences pupils’ success at school and mindset towards schooling. This indicates that socio-economic class is a potential determining factor in pupils’ perspective on the quality indicators of a good school.

4.2.1.4 The Influence of Academic Attainment Level

The influence of academic attainment level on pupils’ attitude to schools has already been identified as a characteristic which might be relevant to pupils’ views of school quality and was noted as interacting with gendered experiences. In the case of Maltese studies, Cachia (1997) observed pupils in the lowest streamed class in Year 5 over a period of two consecutive scholastic years: in Year 5 (aged 9) and Year 6
(aged 10). Cachia spent 18 hours observation in the Year 5 class and 52 hours in the Year 6 class. The researcher interviewed 27 pupils, two teachers and the Head of School. Cachia drew up a profile of lower streamed pupils. According to Cachia, these pupils considered themselves as ‘stupid’ and as ‘failures’, and reported that they were fed up of school. One of the pupils told the researcher that he wished the school would “explode to smithereens”; whilst another pupil said: “we keep learning loads of rubbish” (Cachia, 1997:173). The findings showed that pupils felt that the school was treating them as inferior to more academically able pupils.

A U.K. study by Ireson and Hallam (2005) examined the relationship between pupils’ liking for school and their experience during lessons, setting and pupils’ self-concept, including the pupil’s academic self-concept. The research was conducted through a questionnaire with 6013 Year 9 (aged 13-14) pupils, in 45 mixed, comprehensive schools situated in three U.K. regions. The findings indicated that pupils’ liking for school increased as the academic self-concept of the pupil increased, which implies the academic level of the pupil was influencing the pupils’ perspective on school.

In a further Maltese study, Ghirxi (2012) explored the social and educational experiences of eight Maltese students with high academic ability. Through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and lunch break observations, she found out that these students were highly motivated, very inquisitive, had high expectations for themselves and showed high perseverance in tasks. The pupils’ attitudes described by these two Maltese studies profile the attitudes of the low achievers and the high achievers. Although any generalisations to the wider Maltese pupil population have to be made whilst accepting the very small scale and isolated nature of these studies, any such attainment-related attitudes towards school could indicate that academic attainment level could affect pupils’ judgement on schools in this study.
4.3 The Philosophy of the Study

The philosophy of the study is explained through the overarching conceptual theory, the ontology and epistemology of the research, together with a discussion about the research paradigm embraced in the study.

4.3.1 The Overarching Conceptual Theory

In the main research question: From the pupils’ perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school in Malta? the word ‘good’ is key. The main line of inquiry seeks to uncover the pupils’ interpretation and understanding of what is good in a school. The aims of the study therefore aligned with axiological endeavours if, according, to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2008):

*Axiology can be thought of as primarily concerned with classifying what things are good, and how good they are.*

The main focus of the study was on what pupils assess as being good in a school. The term good was intentionally not defined in the research question so that the pupils themselves would define it, as they described the attributes of a good school. The element of subjectivity in the definition of a good school did not mitigate the validity of the research question; rather it was the axiological inquiry of what is good for the pupil, which drew out the quality indicators of a good school according to the pupils’ perspective. An alternative option would have been to include a definition of a good school in the research question through a systematic review and analysis of published viewpoints. However, this would have defied the purpose of the research question since pupils would have been responding to pre-defined quality indicators of a good school drawing from the perspective of others, predominantly adults, as there is a paucity of pupil views of school quality in this literature. Instead, an inductive approach to gathering pupils’ views was chosen to capture what they thought, allowing for the possibility that their list of quality indicators of a school might be far removed from previously published views.
Hart, S.L. (1971:29) explains that axiology is composed of two Greek words: “axios or worth, and logos or reason, theory”. Hart, S.L. explains the human interest in value judgements by referring to basic human conduct:

*By his very nature man has been primarily interested in how things and events administer to his basic and derivative needs, how they satisfy or frustrate him, how to preserve and promote the good things of life and curtail and erase objects which stifle his zest for living.* (Hart, S. L. 1971:29).

Similarly, in this study, pupils were judging whether a quality indicator is good or not, according to how much, in their opinion, it would contribute to a better school life. Furthermore, Bahm (1993:4) refers to axiology as “the science inquiring into values”. This is what this study purported to achieve; it inquired directly into the value judgements of pupils by asking them to judge what makes a good school.

### 4.3.2 The Ontology of the Research

Ontology is the study of “what exists in the social world” (Thomas, 2009:87). Ontologically this research has a dual nature. On one hand, the main focus of the inquiry: What are the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective? may be answered by producing an actual, concrete list. The research sought what might be considered an objective reality which exists in the social world, whilst acknowledging that numerous variables would affect the list of quality indicators which would emerge from the study. As was outlined in Chapter 3, the researcher accepted that this view was counter to much of the literature about pupil voice, which argues for a more subjective, less objective view of the world to accommodate the uniqueness and partiality of individual perspectives which make up the social world. To recognise the need to contextualise this study within the wider Maltese school framework, and to explore the potential for the pupils’ perspective on what makes a good school to bring about improvement in schools, the researcher sought to understand a socially constructed reality which exists in the social world. This would require enquiring into the way different stakeholders in schools interpreted the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a good school.
4.3.3 The Epistemology of the Research

Epistemology is “the study of our knowledge of the world” (Thomas, 2009:87). In this research, two different types of knowledge were being sought. The line of inquiry which was after the list of quality indicators from the pupils’ perspective, required knowledge which might be considered of a more objective nature. This type of knowledge was considered to be quantifiable and therefore obtained through research tools which collected quantitative data. On the other hand, the other line of inquiry, which sought to uncover the different stakeholders’ viewpoints on the pupils’ listed quality indicators, required knowledge which was of a subjective nature. This type of knowledge was qualitative and was obtained through research tools which collect qualitative data.

The ontological and epistemological reflections on the research laid down the underlying principles which shaped the methodology adopted in this research. This will be further explained through the discussion on the research paradigm and research approach.

4.3.4 The Research Paradigm

To bring together both objective and subjective worldviews the research paradigm underpinning this study was Mixed Methods. As will be discussed further on, the status of this paradigm is still in dispute by some scholars (Bergman, 2011; Feilzer, 2010; and Symonds and Gorard, 2008). Nevertheless, other scholars are convinced of its strength as a separate paradigm (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell, 2003; Howe, 2012; Mason, 2006; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003 and Thomas, 2009). After examining contemporary philosophy of science, Niaz (2008) builds a rationale for Mixed Methods Research and concludes that, in education, “it can facilitate the construction of robust strategies” (Niaz, 2008:302).

Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:17) call Mixed Methods Research the “third wave”. They picture Mixed Methods Research as sitting in the middle of a spectrum, which has qualitative research at one end and quantitative research at the opposite
end, with Mixed Methods as a compromise. This claim has its critics, with Symonds and Gorard (2008:9) going as far as to call claims for a third paradigm, a “fallacy”. They argue Mixed Methods research is “simply a perspective on how research can be done, and not on what research actually is” (Symonds and Gorard, 2008:5) and that the “mixing” required is no different than that required for multiple method studies. The “lack of an accepted conceptual infrastructure for mixed methods” (Newby, 2010:127), is a serious failing, which, according to Newby, cannot be overlooked. Notwithstanding this theoretical debate, if it is accepted that “phenomena have different layers” (Feilzer, 2010:7), then:

*Mixed methods research offers to plug this gap by using quantitative methods to measure some aspects of the phenomenon in question and qualitative methods for others.* (Feilzer, 2010:7).

In this study, the accordance with this paradigm comes, primarily, from a non-extremist position as a researcher, at the onset of the research. In the researcher’s opinion, since research is all about answering questions, the priority should be to select the research method or methods, which best address the research questions, pragmatically. The researcher agrees with Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007), who remind us:

*The choice of the method should always be dictated by the nature of the problem.* (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007:7).

Some researchers consider Mixed Methods Research to be based on such pragmatism (Burke Johnson and Onwuebugzie, 2004; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Mixed Methods Research “allows researchers to mix and match design components that offer the best chance of answering their specific research questions”. (Burke Johnson and Onwuebugzie, 2004:15).

The purpose of adopting a Mixed Methods Research approach in this study, was to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, so that the two approaches complement each other (Wellington and Szczerbinski: 2007) and the advantages of each method could be exploited (Burke Johnson and Onwuebugzie, 2004 and Wiersma and Jurs, 2009). Aware that there also exists a potentially worst case scenario when combining two different research methods creates “double trouble” by
combining the weaknesses of two methods (Newby, 2010:130), in this research, the rationale underpinning the methodology was to:

build on the synergy and strength that exists between quantitative and qualitative research methods to understand a phenomenon more fully than is possible using either quantitative or qualitative methods alone. (Gay et al, 2009:462).

In addition, Gorard and Taylor (2004) argue that from a practical perspective the data which emerges from Mixed Methods Research is more likely to be powerful and influential:

Figures can be very persuasive to policy-makers whereas stories are more easily remembered and repeated for them for illustrative purposes. (Gorard and Taylor, 2004:2).

In the researcher’s opinion, research inquiry should not conform to a rigid dichotomy of qualitative or quantitative aspects. In 1989, Gage had speculated on what the future holds, and forewarned:

What you do in the years ahead will determine whether the wars continue, until one paradigm grinds the other into the dust. Or, on the other hand, whether pragmatic philosophical analysis shows us the foolishness of these paradigm wars and the way to an honest and productive rapprochement between the paradigms. (Gage, 1989:10).

The researcher supports the argument that the Mixed Methods Research paradigm could be a testimony of how this “foolishness” could be overcome, even though certain theoretical and practical aspects of the approach are still being contested.

In the next section, the practical application of the Mixed Methods paradigm within this research is explored through the Mixed Methods Research approach.
4.4 Mixed Methods Research Approach

The Mixed Methods Research approach adopted in this study accommodated firstly a positivist position: in search of the list of quality indicators, gathering sufficient evidence from a large population to feel confident that this is representative of the whole population. Whilst at the same time, accommodating an interpretivist approach, acknowledging that knowledge is “socially constructed” (Thomas, 2009:73) by the different stakeholders. It was envisaged that the different voices in the study could “give a better sense of the whole” (Mason, 2006:6). “Mixed methods provides different sight lines” (Wiersma and Jurs, 2009:309) and, in the researcher’s opinion this is exactly what was needed in this study since “intersecting questions” (Mason, 2006:9) were being asked. Being a multi-dimensional study, the research questions asked for both quantitative and qualitative data. As noted by Gorard and Taylor (2004):

*Simple quantitative work can supply the ‘what’ and the ‘how many’, while basic qualitative work can illustrate ‘how’ and ‘why’.* (Gorard and Taylor, 2004: 41).

The following table summarises the type of data needed to answer each research question, and the type of tool used to gather such data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Type of Tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. From the pupils’ perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school in Malta? | Mainly Quantitative  
Minor Qualitative component (open-ended questions) | Questionnaire |
| 2. How does the pupils’ judgement on what constitutes a good school vary with:  
○ Age  
○ Gender  
○ Socio-economic background  
○ Academic attainment level? | Quantitative | Questionnaire |
| 3. What are the perspectives of pupils, Heads of schools, and policy-makers, on:  
○ pupils’ role as assessors?  
○ the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a good school? | Qualitative | Group interviews  
One-to-one interviews |
4.4.1 Integration

The choice of different research methods and types of data set alone, do not qualify a research design as Mixed Methods Research (Feilzer, 2010 and Symonds and Gorard, 2008). One of the features which distinguish Mixed Methods Research from other approaches is the way the data is integrated, in fact, this concept is crucial in Mixed Methods Research (Bazeley, 2012; Fetters et al, 2013 and Fielding, 2012). In this study, integration occurred at all of the three levels described by Fetters et al (2013): the study design level, the methods level, and at the interpretation and reporting level.

According to Guest (2012), when describing a Mixed Method Research design, one should indicate the points, along the research process, when integration of data occurs. Guest (2012:147) proposes that the research design should specify the “timing of integration” and the “purpose of integration”. The following design chart represents this study within Guest’s framework:

Fig 4.1 The Research Design Chart within Guest’s Framework
The following integrative Mixed Methods strategies (Bazeley, 2012), were implemented in this research:

1. Integrating results from analyses of separate data components: data from the focus group activities was integrated with the data from literature, to design the questionnaire. In addition, the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended question in the questionnaire was used to supplement the quantitative data obtained.

2. Integrating the data which informs another set of data: data collected from the focus group activity sessions was used to design the questionnaire. Data collected from one set of interviews was used to inform another set of interviews with another set of stakeholders.

3. Integrating more than one strategy for analysis: data analysed in one form is converted into another form. This may take the form of “qualitizing” numeric data. In this research, the quantitative data collected from the questionnaires was described in a qualitative way; or by “quantitizing” qualitative data (Bazeley, 2012:816). In this research, the qualitative data collected from the focus group activity sessions, and the qualitative data collected from the open-ended question in the questionnaire were also analysed quantitatively. In addition, the codes and themes which emerged during from the coding process on the interview data were analysed quantitatively.

Fetters et al (2013) explore another facet of integration, they explore the idea of “fit”, which they define as:

*The “fit” of data integration refers to coherence of the quantitative and qualitative findings.* (Fetters et al, 2013:2143).

At the analysis stage, Fetters et al (2013) describe three possible outcomes.

1. Confirmation: the data from the quantitative and qualitative findings confirm each other. In this study, the qualitative interview data was analysed to
determine whether it confirmed or not the quantitative questionnaire data, in particular, the pupils’ top ranking quality indicators of a good school.

2. Expansion: the data from one source sheds further light on the data from another source. In this study, the main “fit” occurred when the qualitative data collected during the interviews expanded the quantitative data collected via the questionnaire survey. In fact, this was the main purpose of collecting the interview data: to interpret the main findings of the questionnaire survey from the pupils’, Heads of Schools’ and policy-makers’ perspectives.

3. Discordance: the data from one source disputes the data from another source. The qualitative data collected in this research was analysed to find out whether they rebuke or not the quantitative data.

4.5 The Research Design

The research design of the study was formed from the theoretical research design, which was discussed in Section 4.3, and the practical research design. In this chapter, from this point onwards, the practical research design is referred to as the ‘research design’.

As typical of many Mixed Methods Research designs, this research adopted a sequential design, where one stage leads and influences another stage (Greene et al, 1989 and Howe, 2012). The main advantage of a sequential approach is that it allows the research design to develop progressively, in a way which is best suited for the research being undertaken (Feilzer, 2010). In this research, the data gathered from the focus group activities and the literature were used to design the main research tool: the questionnaire. In addition, the findings from the questionnaire were discussed during the group interviews with pupils, and during one-to-one interviews with Heads of Schools and with policy-makers. The interview data from one stakeholder group was used to feed the next set of interviews with another
stakeholder group. The data collected from the group interviews with Student Councils informed the one-to-one interviews with Heads of Schools. In turn, the data collected from the interviews with the Student Councils and the interviews with the Heads of Schools, informed the interviews with the policy-makers. The input from different participants was present at different levels of the research design to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the researched theme (Mason, 2006).

The study was conducted in three phases:

- Pre-Phase: Focus group activity sessions were conducted with pupils to inform the design of the questionnaire, and pilot interviews were conducted with Heads of Schools to inform the design of the interview schedule post-survey
- Phase 1: The questionnaire survey conducted with Year 4 pupils (aged 8) and Form 4 pupils (aged 14)
- Phase 2: Interviews were conducted with pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers.

In the next page, Fig 4.2 summarises the research design:
Fig 4.2 Flow Diagram for the Research Design

STAGE 1 (PRE-PHASE)
Spring 2014
Ethical approval to conduct Focus group activity sessions
Focus group activity sessions to generate potential Quality Indicators of a good school
Interviews with Heads of Schools to pilot the interviews as a research tool

STAGE 2 (PHASE 1)
Summer 2014
Ethical approval to carry out Questionnaire survey
Inductive analysis of data gathered in Stage 1
Design of the Questionnaire

STAGE 3
Autumn 2014
Piloting the Questionnaire

STAGE 4
Winter/Spring 2015
Main Questionnaire Survey to find out the Quality Indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective

STAGE 5
Summer 2015
Analysis of the Questionnaire

STAGE 6 (PHASE 2)
Autumn 2015/Winter 2016
Ethical approval to conduct interviews
Group interviews with pupils

STAGE 7
Spring/Summer 2016
One-to-one interviews with Heads of Schools and policy-makers

STAGE 8
Autumn 2016/Winter 2017
Analysis of interviews
Conclusions from the study

STAGE 9
Spring/Summer 2017
Final writing stages
4.5.1 The Extent to Which the Pupils’ Perspective Featured at Different Stages in the Research Process

One of the aims of the researcher was for pupil voice to be embedded in all stages of the research design, because the researcher believes:

*If children’s voice is being sought, then children have to be positioned as participating subjects, knowers and social actors, rather than objects of the researcher’s gaze.* (Smith, 2011:14).

The researcher wanted to collect data at scale, whilst at the same time wanting to extract and record pupil voice at all stages of the research design. In practice, this meant that a compromise had to be reached between choosing research methods which give pupils an individual voice in the data-collection stage but which are only feasible with smaller numbers, and research methods which allow data to be collected at scale, but which only gives pupil voice limited space.

Stage 1- Pre-Phase: Focus group activity sessions were carried out with pupils to gather their ideas on what makes a good school in authentic groupwork classroom activities approved by their teachers. As explained in detail in Section 4.9.3.2, the pupils’ ideas were used to articulate the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective in a way which could inform questionnaire item design.

Stage 2- The design of the questionnaire: The quality indicators extracted from the information gathered during the focus group activity sessions with pupils were listed in the main research tool, the questionnaire.

Stage 3- Piloting the questionnaire: Pupils were asked to suggest how the questionnaire could be improved. Form 4 pupils (aged 14) were also asked to suggest how the researcher could ask for personal information in a sensitive way which would encourage respondents to reply truthfully. The implications of the pilot questionnaire for the final draft are described in Section 4.9.3.2.

Stage 4- The Main questionnaire survey: 1618 pupils, from 31 different schools, across the ten colleges in Malta participated (Details are given in Sections 4.9.3.4 and 4.9.3.5). As a research tool, the questionnaire made it possible for a relatively large sample size (representing respectively 27.9% and 46.9% of the total Year 4 and Form 4 state school pupil population during the 2014/2015 scholastic year) to participate in the survey. The pupils contributed by rating the quality indicators of a
good school. Qualitative data on what makes a good school, from the pupils’ perspective, was gathered through the open-ended question. The ensuing pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school summarises the Maltese pupils’ assessment.

Stage 6- Group interviews with pupils: Group interviews were carried out with Student Councils. Pupils were asked to give their viewpoints on the main findings which emerged from the questionnaire data and on pupils’ role as assessors. Details are described in Section 4.9.3.10.

Although restricted by practical limitations and by the nature of the research tools, pupils’ feedback and contribution was sought throughout the research process. From the design of the questionnaire, to the analysis of the questionnaire survey, to the way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, the pupils’ perspective influenced, and shaped, the development of the research process. This study attempted to give pupils a ‘voice’ by listening to their views, and by conveying these views to adults which have the power to bring about change: Heads of Schools and policy-makers. The ‘voice’ of the pupil in this study was, a restricted one, because the process was not pupil initiated and the depth of the voice was limited. Nevertheless, a study on pupil participation to quality assurance in an educational context focused on answering ‘What makes a good school?’ from the pupils’ perspective, gives some form of voice, status and power to pupils. The pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school articulates the pupils’ judgement, standards and expectations of what makes a good school.

4.6 Triangulation

*Triangulation seeks to validate a claim, a process or an outcome through at least two independent sources.* (Newby, 2010:122).

The main purpose of triangulation is to “enhance credibility” (Robson, 1993:404). Four different types of triangulation are described by Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007:35), all of which were present in this research.
1. Data triangulation: the input from different stakeholders (pupils, Heads of schools and policy-makers) was sought, to analyse the feedback of the pupils on the quality indicators of a good school.

2. Investigator triangulation: this was achieved through peer reviewing by an Education Officer at the Directorate for Standards and Quality in Education in Malta, who holds a PhD in social sciences and who is experienced in analysing interviews.

3. Theory triangulation: as explained in Section 4.3.4, the research approach adopted in this study: Mixed Methods Research, draws on different theories to address the research inquiry, on qualitative research theory, quantitative research theory and pragmatism.

4. Methodological triangulation: this occurred at different points in the research design, as was illustrated earlier in Fig 4.1:
   - The focus group activity and literary sources were used to design the questionnaire
   - The findings from the questionnaire and the interviews with pupils were used to provide a different perspective on the quality indicators of a good school and to explore ideas for translating the research outcomes into practical changes in schools
   - The findings from the questionnaire and the interviews with various stakeholders were used to provide data on how the pupils’ responses could be translated into practical recommendations for positive changes in schools.

4.7 Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

Reliability, validity and generalisability are important concepts in a research project. The reliability and validity determine the “credibility of research” (Wiersma and Jurs, 2009:10). ‘Generalisability’ may also be considered as a form of validity, and this will be discussed in this section.
4.7.1 Reliability

Thomas (2009) defines reliability:

Reliability refers to the extent to which a research instrument such as a test will give the same result on different occasions. (Thomas, 2009:105).

In this research, instrument reliability was the easiest to ensure when conducting the questionnaires. The same set of questions and the same format was presented to all respondents. In the case of the other two research tools: focus group activity sessions and interviews, reliability was more difficult to guarantee, since the researcher or the external environment, inevitably, might have introduced variables which influenced the data being gathered. The schedules for focus group activity sessions and for the interviews (Appendices 2 and 3 respectively) helped decrease inconsistencies between one data-collecting session and another. The researcher carried out all the focus group activity sessions and interviews herself, and this removed one potential source of unreliability: lack of reliability between one interviewer and another.

4.7.2 Validity

There are various definitions of the term ‘validity’ and there are different forms of validity. In essence:

Validity is concerned with whether the findings are ‘really’ about what they appear to be about. (Robson, 1993:66).

Thomas (2009) distinguishes between “instrument-based validity” and “experimental validity”, which will be referred to in turn. Thomas defines the former as:

the degree to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to be measuring. (Thomas, 2009:107).

This means that for the research to be valid, the right instrument must be used for the task. In this study, the real difficulty was not in the choice of the actual instrument, rather it was in the design of the research instrument. As discussed in Section 4.9, the pilot studies were able to shed light on how to best fine-tune the research instruments and render them more valid. A disadvantage of instrument validity is that it is dependent on the truthfulness of the respondents; this aspect is discussed in Section 4.12.
“Experimental validity” is the ability to construct an experiment which removes threats to the conclusions being taken seriously (Thomas, 2009:108). It is reflected in the “internal” validity of the experiment, which is:

the extent to which the results of a research study can be interpreted accurately with no plausible alternative explanations. (Wiersma and Jurs, 2009:7).

The internal validity of this research will eventually be open to judgement by others. To facilitate this, the researcher ensured that all the steps in the interpretation stage of data analysis were clearly described and linked to the conceptual framework. In addition, the researcher was cognisant of researcher bias when interpreting data. The limitations of the researcher as an instrument are discussed under Section 4.12.4.

4.7.3 Generalisability

“External validity” focuses on the generalisability of the research (Cohen et al, 2000 and Wiersma and Jurs, 2009). In effect, the external validity of this study was limited by the chosen sample; not only by the size but also by the type. Suter (2006) notes that:

Research findings can be applied (generalized) to a larger population only if the sample is an accurate ‘mirror’ (or representation) of that population. (Suter, 2006:220).

To determine an appropriate sample size for the questionnaire, the sampling frame was considered carefully and cluster sampling was used. This is discussed in detail in Section 4.8. The generalisability of a research project is also related to the notion of “transferability” (Morgan, D.L. 2007). According to Morgan, D.L. (2007) the researcher needs to examine whether the knowledge gained can be transferred to different contexts. He argues that “transferability” is conceived from the premise of “what people can do with the knowledge they produce” (Morgan, D.L. 2007:72). In this research, the aim was to be in a position to transfer the knowledge gained from a sample of the pupils’ feedback on the quality indicators of a good school, to the wider school population in Malta. To increase the transferability of the research carried out, the main research tool was developed in cooperation with the pupils and
so was designed within the actual settings of Maltese schools. In this way, the outcomes from the study would be based on the real situation in Maltese schools and hence more likely to be relevant to the wider Maltese educational context. Sampling, (which is discussed in detail in Section 4.8) was considered carefully to maximise the relevance and generalisability of the findings, for example by choosing differently aged pupils and covering Malta geographically.

Given the fact that this research was educational research, generalisations could only be made within the parameters of the nature of the study. There are intrinsic differences between the type of generalisations which can be made in physical sciences and those which can be made in educational research (Bassey, 2001). He argues that in education, researchers cannot make scientific generalisations because like other social sciences, educational research deals with human beings and there are various variables at play. However, Bassey proposes the idea of a “fuzzy generalisation” which is “a class of statements which are imprecisely probable” (Bassey, 2001:20). The researcher concurs with Bassey, and is aware that generalisations made in this study would be “fuzzy generalisations”.

4.8 Sampling and Recruitment

The data was gathered from a total of 42 different schools and the total number of participants in the research was 1835; out of which 1822 were pupils, eight were Heads of Schools and five were policy-makers. The following table displays the total number of participants for each data set:
Table 4.2 Number of Participants for each Research Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research tool</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group activity sessions</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot questionnaire</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main questionnaire</td>
<td>1618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews with pupils</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot interviews with Heads of Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with Heads of Schools</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with policy-makers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following subsections discuss the sampling frame for each research tool. This is followed by a discussion on the recruitment of participants.

4.8.1 Justifications for Selecting Only State Schools

The study focused exclusively on state schools because it was the researcher’s intention to find out the pupils’ perspective on the quality indicators of a good school within state education. In Malta, besides state schools, there are Catholic Church schools, one Moslem school and independent schools. According to the Ministry for Education and Employment, Country Report Malta (2014:18), in 2013 there were 101 state schools, 55 Church schools and 24 Independent schools in Malta. Catholic Church schools ask parents for donations, whilst independent schools charge high tuition fees. Nearly 40% of primary and secondary Maltese pupils attend Church and independent schools (Eurydice, Overview Malta 2016). Non-state schools tend to cater for pupils coming from a socio-economically advantaged background. There are also marked differences in the way the schools are governed. Church and independent schools are more autonomous and do not fall directly under the jurisdiction of the Maltese Education Directorates.
One of the aims of this research was to contextualise the pupils’ perspective within the wider parameters of the Education Directorate, which is the governing body for state schools. An important stage in the research design was the sharing of the data collected from the questionnaires, and from the interviews with Heads of schools and pupils, with policy-makers at the Directorate level, with the intention of translating the theoretical outcomes into practical ones. Had Church schools and independent schools been included in the study, the data collected would have contributed a highly partial input, which would not be directly relevant to the data collected at the Directorate level. Hence, the researcher felt that it would be best to exclude non-state schools from the study.

4.8.2. The Sampling Frame for the Focus Group Activity Sessions

As introduced earlier in Section 4.4, the focus group activity session was conducted with one class of pupils in each of the following schools:

Two Primary schools
Two Secondary schools
A Sixth form

A post-secondary school for pupils who lack Ordinary level qualifications.

Each selected school formed part of a different College, in an attempt to obtain a cross-section of the different schools in Malta. Two post-secondary groups of pupils participated in the focus group activity sessions, one group of ‘academically successful’ pupils (having a minimum of four Ordinary level passes) and another group of ‘less academically successful’ pupils (having no Ordinary level qualifications). The former consisted of first-year Sixth form pupils; whereas the latter group consisted of pupils who were following a post-secondary programme on non-academic subjects. These latter two groups were included as they were originally part of the plan for Phase 2 and 3 data collection, until it was deemed too

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12 State schools in Malta are divided into colleges. The schools forming part of a college lie in close geographical proximity. The primary schools within a college are feeder schools to the secondary schools in the college. A College Principal is in charge of each college. Heads of Schools within the college report directly to the College Principal. At the time when the data was collected, there were ten colleges in Malta; in January 2017, the eleventh college, formed from post-secondary schools, was set up.
ambitious and ethically problematic. A total of 86 pupils participated in the focus group activity sessions, which was considered an important contribution of pupil voice to the design of the questionnaire. Details on the participants in the focus group activity sessions are given under Section 4.9.2.3.

4.8.3 The Sampling Frame for the Questionnaire

In the original plans for the study, the following year groups were planned for the questionnaire survey:

- Year 4
- Year 6
- Form 2
- Form 4
- Post-secondary (16-19 years of age).

However, the decision to include all of the five-year groups was revoked, since the researcher’s Probation Review recommended investigating more variables affecting the pupils’ judgement of the quality indicators of a good school. Originally only two variables were going to be studied: age and gender, and the sample size for each year group was planned for about 400; after the researcher’s Probation Review, socio-economic background and academic attainment level were added as variables to be investigated in the study as deemed significant enough from the literature to be considered. In addition, the researcher’s Probation reviewers recommended a larger sample, and so the sample size was increased to approximately 1000 pupils per year group.

To accommodate the above changes, it was decided that the main study should focus on two age groups only: one at Primary level and another at Secondary level. At Secondary level, the Form 4 age group (14 year olds) were chosen over the Form 2 pupils (12 year olds) since, in the researcher’s opinion, as these pupils are approaching the end of obligatory schooling, their long experience in schools could help provide an overview of Primary and Secondary schools. There was a dilemma
on which Primary year group: Year 4 (average age 8) or Year 6 (average age 14), should form part of the study. The main disadvantage envisaged with Year 4 pupils, was, that pupils at this level might find the questionnaire more difficult to comprehend. On the other hand, at Year 6, pupils have nearly completed their Primary school-life and so their feedback could depict a more complete picture of the Primary school-life experience. However, with the age difference between Year 6 and Form 4 being less than that between Year 4 and Form 4, the opportunity to analyse how the pupil’s perspective varies from one end of the pupil’s journey in obligatory school-life to the other, would be somewhat limited.

Hence, it was decided that the Primary age group for the questionnaire survey would be decided by the pilot studies. During the pilot questionnaire, the Year 4 group showed no particular difficulties in understanding the instructions or the language used in the questionnaire. From the pilot study, it was concluded that either year group could be used in the main study. In view of this, the researcher decided in favour of the Year 4 group since she felt that a study which captures the younger pupil voice, which presumably is more difficult to extract in everyday school-life, could make a more valuable contribution to research in education in Malta.

4.8.3.1 Cluster Sampling for the Questionnaire Survey

The sampling frame was chosen with the following criteria in mind:

- a large sample to record a wide spectrum of pupil voice
- a cross-section of state schools in Malta
- representation from each of the 10 colleges\(^\text{13}\).

Taking into consideration the above three criteria, ‘cluster sampling’ was chosen as the optimum sampling frame for this study. In cluster sampling, the population is divided into a number of ‘clusters’ or units, and then a sample is chosen from each cluster (Robson, 1993). In this study, the clusters were already in existence, since all

\(^{13}\text{All state primary and secondary schools are grouped under ten colleges. The schools within a college lie in close geographical proximity. Each college falls under the remit of the College Principal. The eleventh college, formed from post-secondary schools, was set up in January 2017.}\)
state Primary and Secondary schools in Malta are grouped under ten colleges. The following map shows the distribution of the ten Colleges in Malta.

![Regional State Colleges in Malta](image)


When planning the sampling frame for the questionnaire survey, advice was sought from the Department of Statistics and Operations Research at the University of Malta. The Department recommended that each year group sample in the study should include schools from each and every college. The questionnaire data was collected during the 2014/2015 scholastic year. The decisions on sample size had to be taken in September 2014, when the 2014/2015 pupil population data was not yet available. Hence, the approximate Year 4 and Form 4 pupil populations were calculated from the Year 3 and Form 3 pupil populations of the previous scholastic year (2013/2014), since it was assumed that the vast majority of pupils would progress to the consecutive scholastic year. Table 4.3 shows the pupil populations in
Primary state schools during the 2013/2014 scholastic year, in each college. For each year group: Column F shows the total number of girls in each college, Column M shows the total number of boys in each college.

Table 4.3 Primary School Pupil Population during the 2013/2014 Scholastic Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Y1 F</th>
<th>Y1 M</th>
<th>Y2 F</th>
<th>Y2 M</th>
<th>Y3 F</th>
<th>Y3 M</th>
<th>Y4 F</th>
<th>Y4 M</th>
<th>Y5 F</th>
<th>Y5 M</th>
<th>Y6 F</th>
<th>Y6 M</th>
<th>Total F</th>
<th>Total M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gozo</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Regina</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Benedict</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clare</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Gorg Preca</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Ignatius</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Margaret</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>111</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Nicholas</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Theresa</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Thomas More</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>1268</td>
<td>2407</td>
<td>1028</td>
<td>1244</td>
<td>2272</td>
<td>1009</td>
<td>1163</td>
<td>2172</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>2158</td>
<td>1034</td>
<td>1155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
Y = Year

Table 4.4 shows the pupil populations in Secondary state schools during the 2013/2014 scholastic year, in each college. For each year group: Column F shows the total number of girls in each college, Column M shows the total number of boys in each college.

---

Table 4.4  Secondary School Pupil Population during the 2013/2014 Scholastic Year\textsuperscript{15}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F4</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F5</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gozo</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Regina</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Benedict</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Clare</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Gorg Preca</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Ignatius</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Margaret</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Nicholas</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Theresa</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Thomas More</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>1017</td>
<td>1014</td>
<td>2031</td>
<td>1031</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>2101</td>
<td>1262</td>
<td>1145</td>
<td>2407</td>
<td>1343</td>
<td>1201</td>
<td>2504</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:  
F = Form

Table 4.5 shows the total Year 3 and Form 3, 2013/4 scholastic year pupil populations (data obtained from Tables 4.3 and 4.4) and the total Year 4 and Form 4, 2014/2015 scholastic year pupil population (data obtained from SIS\textsuperscript{16}).

Table 4.5  Pupil Population for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 Scholastic Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group 2013/2014</th>
<th>Pupil population</th>
<th>Year Group 2014/2015</th>
<th>Pupil population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>2172</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>2119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form 3</td>
<td>2407</td>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>2186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A target sample of 100 pupils from each college, for each year group, was recommended by the Department of Statistics and Operations Research at the University of Malta. Since all state Primary and Secondary schools are grouped under ten colleges in Malta, a target total sample size of 1000 for Year 4 pupils and a

\textsuperscript{15} and \textsuperscript{16} SIS (School Information System) Directorate for Education Services  
target total sample size of 1000 for Form 4 pupils were planned. To ensure that a wide range of pupil voice is recorded, it was decided that whole year groups in schools, would be asked to participate. In this way, selection of classes and/or pupils was avoided. Due to school logistics, the actual target sample size differed somewhat from the planned sample size of 100 per year group, per college. The following table shows the target sample size as a percentage of the Year 4 and Form 4 pupil population, as on October 2014:

Table 4.6 Target Sample Size of the Questionnaire Survey as a Percentage of Total Pupil Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Pupil population in October 2014</th>
<th>Target Sample size</th>
<th>Target Sample Size as a percentage of the total year group pupil population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>2119</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>2186</td>
<td>1362</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More details on the participants in the questionnaire survey are given in Section 4.9.3.5.

4.8.3.2 Cluster Sampling for Interviews

After the data from the questionnaire survey was analysed, a set of group interviews was conducted with five Student Councils. This was followed by a set of interviews with five Heads of Schools. To obtain a heterogeneous sample as possible, each interview was carried out in a different college. In this way, between the group interviews with Student Councils and the one-to-one interviews with the Heads of Schools, all the ten colleges were included. For easier reference and to protect the anonymity of the participants, the ten colleges were arbitrarily assigned a number and referred to by this number throughout the whole study. The following table shows the type of interview which was carried out in each college:
Table 4.7 Interviews and College Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group interviews with Student Councils</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one interviews with Heads of Schools</td>
<td>1, 5, 6, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.8.4 Recruitment of Participants

_Focus group activity sessions, Questionnaire survey and Group interviews_

Pupils were recruited from state schools after obtaining permission from the Maltese Educational Directorate, and the consent of the Head of School, the parents/guardians and the pupils themselves. Details on how permission for the research was obtained are described in Section 4.11.2. The ethical implications which were taken into consideration during the recruitment of participants are described in Section 4.11.1.

_Interviews with Heads of Schools and Policy-makers_

Heads of Schools and policy-makers were approached personally and asked whether they would be ready to give an interview. All of the Heads of Schools agreed to give an interview. Cluster sampling, as explained above, was also used in the selection of Heads of Schools; with the exception of the pilot interviews, where the choice of the Head of School was determined by the fact that the focus group activity sessions had been conducted in that particular school. The policy-makers were chosen because of their position; they were selected from the top posts in the Directorate for Education, the Ministry and the Shadow Ministry. One of the policy-makers who was approached by the researcher declined to give an interview and referred the researcher to one of his subordinates, who is also a policy-maker and whose remit is directly related to quality assurance of schools.
The researcher did not encounter any problems with recruiting policy-makers for interviews. One advantage of doing research in Malta is that its small size means that policy-makers are easily accessible. This resonates with the situation described by Grek (2011:233) in Scotland, where she argued that the close proximity facilitates access to the “policy community”. Furthermore, Walford (2012) argues that being a female makes it easier to elicit a positive reply to a request for an interview. Whilst the truth of this assertion can be contested, nonetheless, in this study, it was relatively easy for the researcher to recruit interviewees.

4.9  Research Methods and Data Collection

In the following discussion, justifications for choosing each research tool are put forward, together with details on how each research instrument was adapted to fit the purpose of this research. The data was collected in three phases:

- Pre-Phase: Focus group activity sessions with pupils, and pilot interviews with Heads of Schools
- Phase 1: Questionnaire survey with pupils
- Phase 2: Group interviews with pupils, one-to-one interviews with Heads of Schools and policy-makers.

The data was collected over a period of two and a half years, spanning from March 2014 to August 2016. Table 4.8 outlines the timeline of the data collection:
### Data Gathering Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month 2014</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mar 2014</td>
<td>Focus group activity sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 2014</td>
<td>Pilot Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2014</td>
<td>Pilot Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 2015</td>
<td>Main Survey Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2015</td>
<td>Group Interviews with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 2016</td>
<td>One-to-one Interviews with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heads of Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 2016</td>
<td>One-to-one Interviews with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy-makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.9.1 The Research Methods

In this research, three research methods, or research tools, were used:

- Focus group activity sessions
- Interviews
- Questionnaires.

The following table gives an overview of how the research tools were used in this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research tool</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus group activity sessions</strong></td>
<td>Year 4 (aged 8), Year 6 (aged 10), Form 2 (aged 12), Form 4 (aged 14) and</td>
<td>To gather feedback to be used in the design of the questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>post-secondary (aged 17) pupils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pilot Interviews</strong></td>
<td>Heads of Schools</td>
<td>To pilot the interview as a research tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questionnaire</strong></td>
<td>Year 4 and Form 4 pupils</td>
<td>To find out the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group interviews</strong></td>
<td>Student Councils in Primary and Secondary schools</td>
<td>To gather feedback on the different stakeholders’ viewpoint on pupils’ role as assessors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One-to-one interviews</strong></td>
<td>Primary and Secondary Heads of Schools</td>
<td>To critically analyse the main outcomes from the questionnaire survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policy-makers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4.9.2 The Focus Group Activity Sessions

The purpose of the focus group activity sessions was:

- to generate quality indicators of a good school from pupils’ perspective
- to use the feedback from pupils to help in the design of the main questionnaire.

4.9.2.1 Justifications for Choosing Focus Groups as a Pre-Phase Research Tool

According to Newby (2010:285), group sessions, as a data collection method, are well suited for “preliminary research”. In fact, in this study, this was the purpose for choosing a focus group activity as a research tool during the first stages of the research: as a “preliminary research” about pupil perspectives on the quality indicators of a good school. This was important to help design the survey instrument from an authentic Maltese pupil basis. To provide added understanding about the indicators, the focus group activity sessions were conducted “to elicit people’s understandings, opinions and views” (Parker and Titter, 2006:187), rather than just asking for lists.

The setting up of a group discussion as part of this preliminary phase was designed to allow pupils to contribute a perspective to the design of the main survey instrument. Although the researcher had completed a literature review about possible school quality indicators which might form possible items to include in the planned survey instrument, it had been concluded that these were largely derived from adults and those studies which had consulted pupil were not from the Maltese context. Therefore an important part of the pupil consultation process which underpins this mixed methods research design was an opportunity to explore with Maltese pupils thoughts on what they viewed as quality in a school, as well as offer a response to the outcomes of the literature review analysis of indicators of a good school. It was appreciated that pupils would be able to think more deeply about the theme being discussed than would be possible when individuals were surveyed as part of Phase 1 of the study when the main task would be to generate a list of school quality
indicators. It was considered important to base the questionnaire on a consultation of pupils who might make up the target populations to try to anticipate some relevant indicators as a starting point for the survey, as well as explore which target ages might be the most appropriate to sample (as discussed above).

Kitzinger (1995) describes three advantages of focus groups, assuming that they are carried out orally or including visual methods as part of their design. Firstly, they do not exclude participants who cannot read or write. Secondly, they facilitate feedback from participants who may not feel as comfortable being interviewed on their own. Thirdly, they potentially give confidence to participants who feel that their contribution individually might not be worthy, assuming that they are run in ways which facilitate all participants to contribute and the group not to be dominated by particular strong voices. The advantages described by Kitzinger help justify why this approach was an appropriate one for collecting ideas which could contribute to the design of the questionnaire from both the younger, Primary school participants (only eight years old), and so, more likely to be less articulate as well as the older pupils.

4.9.2.2 The Design of the Focus Group Activity Sessions as a Research Tool

The schedule for the focus group activity sessions was planned in a way to create the optimum conditions for pupils to express themselves freely. It was felt important in view of the short time available and for exploration rather than imposition of the content of the session to keep the activity simple. The schedule of the focus group activity sessions is presented in Appendix 2. Pupils were asked to work in small groups of 3-4 pupils, and to come up with five qualities of a good school. Pupils were asked to write their replies on paper. Discussion was encouraged to agree what to write down, what words to use or whether or not to include certain ideas. This space was therefore designed to provide a feasible way of encouraging and of recording the collective contribution of participants, accommodating their likely diverse language skills. Aware of the crucial role that a researcher plays in setting up and facilitating a focus group session, the researcher made some effort to “assess the
children’s cognitive, linguistic, social, and psychological competencies and tendencies” (Gibson, 2012:151). Prior to the session, the researcher discussed the pupils’ abilities with the class teacher and consulted with the class teacher about the suitability of the proposed focus group activity schedule, which allowed some adaptation of how the researcher communicated in each situation. At the end of the session, pupils were asked to reflect on indicators which the researcher had gleaned from literature and to decide whether they felt that these indicators should be included in the questionnaire.

There were a number of ethical and methodological decisions built into the design of this schedule. Firstly, in response to calls for a researcher to review the role of the adult in supporting a child’s response and recognising that there are power dynamics which impact on the findings (Wall, 2017), the researcher purposely planned to adopt “a marginal rather than a pivotal role” (Thomas, 2009:170) by acting as a “moderator” (Parker and Titter, 2006:25), so as to minimise influencing pupils’ participation. As the children would view the researcher as an outsider, which might mediate their willingness and openness in responding (both positively and negatively), the contact with the children was mediated by their usual teacher. The group activity, carried out in pupils’ usual contexts of classroom groups with their usual class teacher present. Newby (2010:351) note that: “the setting should be one where everyone feels comfortable”. Their usual classroom was considered to support participants in an opportunity to debate their ideas and clarify thinking within an environment known to them and therefore assumed to be a comfortable and safe one for them to express and even develop their views). The group activity gave the participants the opportunity to debate their ideas and clarify thinking. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note:

*Group participants can stimulate each other to articulate their views or even to realize what their views are.* (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007:109).

Secondly, the design of the focus group activity session also took into consideration the welfare of the participants aiming to show them respect. This was an ethical consideration. Following the principles of informed consent embedded in the BERA (2011) guidance, the researcher appreciated that not every child might wish to be
consulted in this apparently one-off activity and that this view should be respected. As detailed in Appendix 2 participation in the focus group work which generated data for this study was therefore voluntary and, following prior consent from parents, this was re-explained to the children verbally on the day of the researcher’s visit. The participants were asked whether they would like to participate and it was explained that they were free to withdraw their feedback at any state, without having to give a reason for such action. The researcher clarified that pupils who chose to do so, would remain physically in the classroom, but they could refrain from contributing during the session or they might choose to move a group which is participating in the activity but from which no data was collected.

Thirdly, was the decision as to whether the sessions should be recorded or not. Recording the sessions provides the best evidence of how the sessions were conducted and can be consulted repeatedly to refer back to the direct evidence gathering activity. On the other hand, pupils were likely to feel far less comfortable to express themselves freely if they knew that they are being recorded. This was important ethically to the researcher, as outlined above, and connected with wanting to reduce the power imbalance between adults and children to create a safe space for providing their views. Practically, since the activity was conducted in groups, it also would have been difficult to record multiple groups which were working simultaneously without multiple microphones. To ask for recording equipment to be used in multiple classrooms and schools, would also have been a significant request to negotiate with the schools approached for involvement in the pre-phase; in addition to the reassurance and explanation which would have had to be given to parents. It was envisaged that less parents would have been willing to give their consent for the activity. Thus, it was decided that in order to create a space for authentic pupil voice, despite the loss of depth of qualitative data which could be collected from recording the discussions associated with the focus group activities, the sessions would not be recorded. The final outcome of every group in each session was a list, complied as a group activity during a discussion on what makes a good school. It is accepted that this was a partial representation of their views but was considered sufficient to inform compiling the questionnaire.
Focus groups also had an anticipated benefit for the pupils. They were considered a positive way of engaging pupils in terms of helping them feel part of the process of data collection about pupils’ views in an authentic way. This was important to the researcher in trying to make practical her commitment to giving pupil voice and in response to learning from the experiences of others studying pupil voice empirically.

Breen (2006) reflects on the significance of the focus group, not only as a research tool but as a productive experience for the participants. She maintains:

*Through the activity of generating and sharing ideas, your participants are establishing the relevance to them of your new policy, idea or issue.* (Breen, 2006:473).

The researcher concurs with Breen (2006) and through the design of the focus group activity sessions, wanted to ensure that the process of data collection would be a pleasant experience, whilst at the same time providing a learning opportunity for pupils. The extent to which this was achieved or not, is discussed in the next section which describes the data collection stage.

### 4.9.2.3 Data Collection: Focus Group Activity Sessions

The focus group activity sessions were carried out between March and June 2014. A total of 86 pupils participated in a total of 28 focus group activity sessions, which took place in six different schools. The following table gives statistical data on the focus group activity sessions which took place:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Average age of pupils</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
<th>Number of boys</th>
<th>Number of girls</th>
<th>Number of groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Form 2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary</td>
<td>Sixth form 1st year</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialised programme</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10 Age and Gender of Participants in Focus Group Activity Sessions
The schedule for the focus group activity session presented in Appendix 2 was followed in each of the above settings. During the whole activity, each class teacher remained in class, and this might have helped to give pupils, especially the younger ones, a sense of security. Pupils were receptive to what the researcher was saying, they seemed very interested in the research and were enthusiastic to participate in the activity. The researcher encouraged pupils to ask questions about the research, since the researcher saw this type of interaction as likely to inform this early data-gathering (Te One, 2011). The questions that pupils asked were to reconfirm that they had understood what they should write as the outcome of the group activity. The activity was accepted by all pupils in all schools. The pupils appeared to be enjoying themselves and were absorbed in the task assigned to them. Younger participants asked whether they could ‘decorate’ their written replies using multi-coloured pens, lines and small drawings. As can be seen from Fig 4.4, this could be taken as an indication of the high level of pupil commitment and interest in the task assigned to them. The sessions were conducted in a satisfactory manner and the relevant data was successfully collected.
Fig 4.4 Sample of Pupils’ Work Completed during Focus Group Activity Sessions
The focus groups sessions were never intended for visual participatory research, nevertheless, the incidental visual feedback provided by the pupils shed light on how they were visualising a good school and it was an indication that they were reacting positively to the task assigned to them during the focus group activity sessions. The visual data offered voluntarily and arbitrarily by the younger pupils was not analysed, since it fell outside the remit of the research design of this study.

The following three factors could have contributed to the success of the Focus group activity sessions:

- The theme being discussed was relevant to pupils’ lives and so they appeared to be intrinsically motivated.

- In response to discussions with the class teachers prior to each session, the researcher could adapt her choice of language to address the pupils in the most effective way. In practice, this meant that the researcher sometimes used simpler words in the explanation, and repeatedly asked the pupils whether they understood what was being asked of them. This helped the researcher feel confident that the task was being understood and therefore access to participation was being enabled.

- The pupils were in a familiar environment, their own classroom, which reduced the variables of intervention which might have affected the way they responded negatively, to only the researcher and the activity being unusual. This environment was also the one which related to the activity- their school- which might have offered a useful reference point and context for their thoughts, compared to if they had been beyond the school when completing.

The results of the focus group activity sessions are presented in Appendix 10. The outcomes of the focus group sessions were used to design the main survey questionnaire. This is discussed in the next section.
4.9.3 The Questionnaire

The main research tool was the questionnaire. The following section explores the justifications for using the questionnaire as a research instrument and it discusses in detail the design of the questionnaire used in this study.

4.9.3.1 Justifications for Choosing Questionnaires as a Research Tool

The questionnaire was chosen as the main research tool in this study to collect quantitative data to answer the main research question: From the pupils’ perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school in Malta? The researcher planned to present this question, to a target pupil population of 2000, to gain a broad view of pupil voice across Maltese state schools. With such a relatively large sample, the questionnaire was chosen as a research tool because it is “very efficient in terms of researcher time and effort” (Robson, 1993:243). The fact that it is relatively easy and inexpensive to conduct, whilst giving the researcher the possibility of accessing a large number of respondents (Bell, 1987 and Newby, 2010) further consolidated the researcher’s decision to use the questionnaire as the main research tool. However, it is accepted that this method is unusual within the body of pupil voice internationally, given its limitations in ways pupils can express themselves. These limitations are accepted, given the set format of the questionnaire tool, but justified in terms of the scale of views able to be collected, determined by the number of pupils having a voice and the breadth of opportunity they have both to offer and respond to possible criteria of quality of schools. The limitation are in part offset by the way Maltese pupils covering a range of ages and schools were involved in the items which made up the design of the questionnaire and the inclusion of Maltese student councils as spaces to discuss the meaning and significance of the findings of the questionnaire.
4.9.3.2 The Design of the Questionnaire as a Research Tool

The design of the questionnaire was given utmost importance in this study since the whole research pivoted on the data gathered from the questionnaire. Robson (1993) cautions:

the questionnaire must be painstakingly constructed, with very clear and unambiguous instructions, and careful wording of questions. (Robson, 1993: 243).

A pilot questionnaire was conducted to help shape the final questionnaire. Details on the pilot questionnaire are given in Section 4.9.3.3. The different aspects of the design and format of the questionnaire are discussed below.

The layout of the questionnaire

Care was taken to design a questionnaire which would appeal to pupils since the format of a questionnaire is an important determining factor in its effectiveness as a research tool (Anderson, 1990; Cohen et al, 2000 and Newby, 2010). A few illustrations were added to attract pupils. Attention was given to ensure that each page was “not overly cluttered” (Weisberg et al, 1996:99). The instructions were clear and straightforward; pupils simply had to tick their answers for all of the questions except for the last one, which was an opportunity for open-ended comment. This was important so that the researcher could have confidence in the data generated. Following the recommendation by Gay et al (2009) and Newby (2010), the questionnaire was kept as short as possible to minimise the likelihood that a respondent would lose interest in providing thoughtful answers. Even so, the questionnaire was four pages long and the researcher was concerned that the questionnaire might have exceeded what is expected from the participants. However, during the class discussions which took place after the pupils had completed the pilot questionnaire, the pupils said that they had found the questionnaire to be of reasonable satisfactory length. The questionnaire included a covering letter for pupils (Refer to Appendix 1). This was done to introduce the study and to contextualise the questionnaire within the wider purposes of the research being undertaken by the researcher. Newby (2010) advises in favour of doing this, since, in his opinion, it could be a way of motivating participants. However, even though pupils were invited
to participate in the questionnaire voluntarily it is still not possible for a researcher to be confident that they would complete it thoughtfully and respond to each item with their most valued thoughts. Other threats to the validity of the data are associated with how well considered any pupils’ response might be given that they might not have thought about these kinds of requests of them before. It has already been noted how student consultation is not a culture within the Maltese educational system, especially in terms of school quality. Being asked to present their opinions as assessors was likely to be the first occasion. How they thought about the use of their voice is also likely to affect how they responded: how thoughtfully and honestly. If pupils had been previously consulted but the opinions not acted upon, pupils might be less likely to engage in future consultations in as considered a way. The researcher could not know about these previous experiences and therefore the motivations of the respondents as they completed the questionnaires.

The language

Newby’s maxim: “Match the vocabulary and ideas to the respondent” (2010:309) directed the choice of language for the questionnaire. The same questionnaire was used for Primary and for Secondary school pupils, so as not to compromise the reliability of the main research tool. This meant that the language had to be suitable for 8-year-olds and 14-year-olds alike. To facilitate easier understanding, examples were added to explain certain quality indicators; for instance:

- A green school (eg. separating waste, reducing water and energy loss)
- More modern resources (eg. Computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards).

The fact that most of the quality indicators listed in the questionnaire were originally generated by the pupils themselves during the focus group activity sessions, helped ensure that the language used was pupil-friendly and pupil appropriate. As a result of the pilot studies a few alterations were made to the first draft of the questionnaire (Refer to Appendices 1.1 and 1.2 for a copy of the Final questionnaire for Primary and Secondary school pupils respectively). Acting on the pupils’ feedback from the pilot studies, a number of quality indicators were reworded. The quality ‘school
organisation’ which featured in the pilot questionnaire, was omitted in the final questionnaire because, during the pilot study, pupils said that they found it too confusing. The final questionnaire had a total of 32 quality indicators.

The questionnaire was provided in two language versions: Maltese and English, and pupils were free to choose their preferred version. During the pilot studies, the pupils expressed the wish that certain words in Maltese would also be written in English, in cases where pupils are more familiar with the English terms. The Maltese version of the final questionnaire includes a number of English words written in brackets, for example: school hall, school locker, fire drills, setting and streaming. In the open-ended question, pupils were free to write in whichever language they felt more comfortable, regardless of the language version they had opted for.

In the first questionnaire which was drafted, pupils were asked to gauge their responses according to a rating scale which used the word ‘needed’ to show the accordance of the respondent with that particular quality indicator. The options were: very much needed, quite needed, not particularly needed and not needed at all. During the pilot studies, the pupils asked for the word ‘needed’ to be substituted with the word ‘important’. They argued that it would be easier for them to indicate their preference. The researcher also suspected that another reason might be that the word ‘needed’, which is a relatively easy and commonly used word in English, does not have the exact counterpart in Maltese. The Maltese word ‘mehtiega’ is closest to ‘needed’ and in Maltese, this is a word which is not commonly used by young people. Since during the pilot studies, in all of the five classes piloted, the pupils asked for the original Maltese word ‘mehtiega’ to be changed, in the final version of the questionnaire, the word ‘importanti’ (which means ‘important’) was used.

Type of questions

Questions 1 to 32 were all closed-ended questions. Each question described a different quality indicator and pupils were asked to rate their response. This type of question was chosen since “it provides the same frame of reference for all
respondents to use in determining their answers.” (Weisberg et al, 1996:84). In addition, closed-ended questions are “easy and relatively quick to answer” (Newby, 2010:298). Since the youngest participants were only 8 years old, a questionnaire which was easy to answer was a priority. Another advantage was that closed-ended questions are easier to analyse (Weisberg et al, 1996).

The last question in the questionnaire was an open-ended one. It asked pupils to describe any other quality indicator not mentioned in the questionnaire. The question had “no response framework” (Newby, 2010:298) and pupils were free to answer in whichever manner they felt like. The open-ended question was included to paint a wider picture of the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective. Weisberg et al (1996:298) describe an important reason why researchers opt for open-ended questions: “we want to be sure that the structured questions we have asked have not omitted a significant response”. The 32 quality indicators listed in the questionnaire were not an exhaustive list, and so the open-ended question gave pupils the opportunity to list further quality indicators. On the other hand, open-ended questions have certain disadvantages. Two disadvantages described by Oppenheim (2001) were particularly felt during the administration of the questionnaire in this study: open-ended questions are time-consuming, and they require more effort from participants.

The order of the questions

The order of the questions may affect how participants respond (Weisberg et al, 1996:97). According to Anderson (1990:215) the questionnaire “should begin with easy, non-threatening questions” and so, in the questionnaire used in this study, the first indicators were straightforward ones; describing the physical environment of the school, for example: ‘a clean school, a school hall, school lockers’. On the other hand, Newby (2010) suggests that questions which require higher-order thinking should be placed towards the end. In this questionnaire, in the researcher’s opinion, the following indicators required a higher level of thinking:
• The school has high expectations for pupils. (The school has high standards)
• Having a secondary school for Forms 1 and 2 pupils, and a separate school for Forms 3, 4 and 5 pupils
• Having boys and girls in the same class.

These indicators were placed at number 20, number 21 and number 29 respectively, which is relatively towards the end of the questionnaire. The open-ended question was placed as the very last question in the questionnaire, as recommended by Anderson (1990) and Thomas (2009). Since respondents were being asked to list any other indicator not mentioned in the questionnaire, they first had to go through the whole list in the questionnaire; and so the right place for this question was at the very end of the questionnaire.

Another factor which might influence the participant’s response is the ‘consistency bias’ (Weisberg et al, 1996); this is the respondent’s wish to answer related questions in a similar way. To reduce consistency bias in the questionnaire, questions with a similar theme were not placed in consecutive order. For example: ‘A good Head of School’ was placed at number 5, whereas ‘Good assistant heads of school’ was placed at number 19. ‘Cooperation between teachers and pupils’ was placed at number 7, whereas ‘Respect between pupils and teachers’ was placed at number 18.

*The Rating Scale*

According to Weisberg et al (1996:82) there are three important decisions which must be taken when constructing a questionnaire which uses a rating scale. The justifications for each decision will be discussed in turn.

1. The number of points in the scale: in the first draft of the questionnaire, there were four points in the scale; the final version had a five-point scale, as explained below.
2. Whether to include a middle point or not: in the original questionnaire, the impartial mid-point was not offered as an option, since the researcher did not want respondents to hide behind an impartial answer. Furthermore, respondents tend to “over-choose the middle option” (Thomas, 2009:178).
However, in the pilot studies the pupils insisted that the mid-point option is a valid response in its own right, and so, the final questionnaire had a middle option.

3. How to describe the point with words: in the original questionnaire, the points were described as: *very much needed, quite needed, not particularly needed* and *not needed at all*. However, as discussed earlier, the pilot studies showed that the pupils preferred the word ‘important’ to ‘needed’. Each point was also described visually with a symbol. Cohen et al (2000:258) are in favour of this, not only because it makes the questionnaire more appealing, but because it “is a matter of *accessibility* of the questionnaire to the respondents, i.e. a matter of reliability and validity.” The pilot studies confirmed the positive value of the visual symbols and the final questionnaire included a visual symbol next to each rating point.

*The quality indicators in the questionnaire*

The questionnaire asks pupils to gauge 32 different quality indicators. The quality indicators came from four different sources:

- Preliminary fieldwork: the focus group activity sessions
- Literature
- Changes in the Maltese educational system
- The researcher’s preference.

*Preliminary fieldwork: the focus group activity sessions*

The responses of the pupils were grouped under 39 codes, labelled as F1 to F39. These codes articulated the specific quality indicators. The data collected from the focus group activities is presented in Appendix 10. A total of 22 quality indicators, obtained from the focus group activity data, were included in the questionnaire.
**Literature**

Data on the quality indicators of a good school was compiled from five sources:

1. MacBeath et al’s (1996:33) list of ten indicators of a ‘good school’
2. Sammons et al eleven-point (1997) list of key characteristics of effective schools.
3. The key judgements made by Ofsted inspectors when judging the quality of education in a school, as described in Ofsted, School Inspection handbook, No. 120101 (April 2013:25).
5. The sixteen quality indicators described by the European Report of May 2000, (Europa: Summaries of EU legislation) on the Quality of School Education.

More details on the literary sources on the quality indicators of a good school are described in Section 3.2.4.

On comparing the list of quality indicators derived from the focus group activity sessions and the list compiled from literature, the following indicators were not mentioned by pupils:

L1. Parental participation
L2. Achievement and pupils
L3. Leadership
L4. Climate
L5. Professional development of teachers
L6. School organisation
L7. Expectations for pupils

The above quality indicators are labelled L1, L2 etc, to indicate that the quality indicator was derived from literature. With the exception of L6: School Organisation,
which, during the pilot studies was deemed as being too vague; all the quality indicators derived from literature were listed in the final questionnaire. During the focus group activity sessions, the participants agreed that they had no objection to the quality indicators L1-L7, being included in the final questionnaire.

Changes in the Maltese educational system

The College reform in Malta brought with it a major overhaul and all state schools are now comprehensive. (Refer to Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 for more details on the Maltese educational system and recent reforms). At the same time, state school pupils also experience setting in various subjects. In September 2014, banding was introduced in Years 5 and 6 in Primary state schools (more details in Section 2.2.3). Another reform which was introduced in September 2014 was the splitting of secondary schools, which used to follow a five-year programme, into a two-year programme in Middle schools, and a three-year programme in Senior schools. Co-ed education in secondary state schools was introduced in September 2014. The researcher felt that quality indicators describing recent changes in the Maltese educational system should be included in the questionnaire so that the pupils’ perspective on these reforms could be appreciated.

The researcher’s preference

The researcher had always taken a keen interest in pro-environmental issues and had always been actively involved in green initiatives in schools, and so was biased in favour of including a quality indicator on the green credentials of a school. In addition, in Malta there is an ongoing national interest in sustainability being integrated into all aspects of life, as can be testified by the public consultation document ‘NSES;: Nurturing a Sustainable Society: A National Strategy for Sustainable Development for Malta’ which was launched in March 2016 (Ministry for Education and Employment and the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change, 2016). To increase reliability, in the questionnaire, the quality indicator ‘A green school’ was exemplified by writing in brackets: ‘separating waste, reducing water and energy loss’.

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Table 4.11 lists the indicators in the order they appeared in the questionnaire together with the justification for their inclusion in the questionnaire:

Table 4.11   List of Quality Indicators and Justifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A clean school</td>
<td>F1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A school hall</td>
<td>F22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. School lockers</td>
<td>F16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Activities at school</td>
<td>F2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A good Head of School</td>
<td>L3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discipline at school</td>
<td>L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>F17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Parents participating in school</td>
<td>L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Having regular tests and examinations</td>
<td>L8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Good teachers</td>
<td>F5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. A green school (eg. separating waste, reducing water and energy loss)</td>
<td>Researcher’s preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. School outings</td>
<td>F13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. A safe environment for pupils; a school which is aware of health and safety</td>
<td>F15, F20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>issues (eg. Fire drills, CCTV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Pupils are grouped into classes according to exam marks (setting/streaming)</td>
<td>Changes in the Maltese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>educational system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Good behaviour from pupils</td>
<td>F10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Lots of sports activities</td>
<td>F3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Pupils respect teachers</td>
<td>F18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Good assistant heads of school</td>
<td>L3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. More learning opportunities</td>
<td>F12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. The school has high expectations for pupils. (The school has high standards)</td>
<td>L7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Having a secondary school for Forms 1 and 2 pupils, and a separate school for</td>
<td>Changes in the Maltese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms 3, 4 and 5 pupils</td>
<td>educational system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Respect between pupils</td>
<td>L19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Having teachers who continue studying</td>
<td>L5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Better quality books</td>
<td>F9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. More modern resources (eg. Computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards)</td>
<td>F6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school</td>
<td>F11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
<td>L4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Having boys and girls in the same class</td>
<td>F14, Changes in the Maltese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>educational system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Pupils obtain high marks in examinations and tests</td>
<td>L2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms</td>
<td>F7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. More time for lessons</td>
<td>F22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Having animals in school (eg. An aquarium)</td>
<td>F8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY:  L= Literature  
       F= Focus group activity session
The personal data requested in the questionnaire

In the first draft of the questionnaire which was presented during the researcher’s Probation Review, the only personal information which was asked for was the participants’ age and gender. However, during the researcher’s Probation Review, it was suggested that information on the socio-economic status of the pupil and on the academic attainment level, should also be gathered, since these variables might be influencing pupils’ choice of the quality indicators of a good school. The researcher agreed that not asking for additional personal data, would have been a missed opportunity for a more comprehensive analysis of the data gathered. However, on a practical level, one had to be sensitive when collecting such data. Parents might feel uncomfortable revealing their socio-economic status. Maybe the fact that the island is such a tiny one, contributes to the lack of trust that Maltese parents experience when being asked for personal data. After a thorough consideration and local informal consultation, it was decided to ask for the parents’/carers’ main jobs since the occupation is usually linked to the socio-economic background (Oppenheim, 2001). To classify the parents’/carers’ occupations, ISCO-08 (International Labour Organization, 2012) skill levels were used as guidelines. The following classification was adopted:

Table 4.12 ISCO-08 Skill Levels and Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISCO Skill level</th>
<th>Main Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Elementary occupations which usually only require a primary education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Occupations which usually require a secondary level of education: clerks, service workers, sales workers, machine operators, agricultural and fishery workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Occupations which usually require a tertiary education, but not a university degree: technicians and associate professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Occupations which usually require a university degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To find an unobtrusive way of asking about the participants’ academic attainment level, during the pilot questionnaire, the researcher asked for pupils’ suggestions. The pupils came up with the idea of asking for the ‘track level’ in the core subjects: Maltese, English and Mathematics. In these subjects, pupils are streamed according to their annual examination results and placed into different track levels. The ‘track level’ group reflects the attainment level of the pupil, the higher the ‘track’, the higher the academic attainment level. This question could only be asked to secondary school pupils since Year 4 primary pupils are not segregated according to academic ability, and hence, in the final questionnaire, there were two versions: one for Primary school pupils, and one for secondary school pupils (Refer to Appendices 1.1 and 1.2).

4.9.3.3 Data Collection: The Pilot Questionnaire

The purpose of the pilot questionnaire

The pilot questionnaire was conducted with the overall aim of exposing any weaknesses in the questionnaire so that the final questionnaire would be a more reliable and valid tool. The aims of the pilot questionnaire study were:

- to find out whether the language used in the questionnaire is age-appropriate
- to find out how the design and format of the questionnaire may be improved
- to determine whether the primary year group in the main study should be Year 4 or Year 6 pupils
- to find out how to ask for personal information in a sensitive and pupil-friendly way.

The field studies

The pilot questionnaire was conducted in December 2014. After the pupils completed the questionnaire, a class discussion followed, on how the questionnaire could be improved. A total of 71 pupils participated in the pilot questionnaire. The
The following table shows the age and gender of the pupils who participated in the pilot questionnaire:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Average age of pupils</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
<th>Number of boys</th>
<th>Number of girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys’ Secondary</td>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls’ Secondary</td>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pilot questionnaire was conducted in four schools: two Primary and two Secondary schools. “Respondents in pilot studies should be as similar as possible to those in the main enquiry” (Oppenheim, 2001:62). In fact, the year groups chosen in the pilot questionnaire, with the exception of the Year 6 group which was eventually eliminated from the study, were the same ones as the year groups forming the population in the main questionnaire study. The implications of the pilot questionnaire study for the main study are discussed in Section 4.9.3.2.

4.9.3.4 Data Collection: The Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective.

The field studies

The questionnaire survey was conducted between January and June 2015. (Refer to Appendices 1.1 and 1.2 for a copy of the questionnaires distributed to Primary school pupils and Secondary school pupils respectively). 31 schools participated in the
questionnaire survey; 20 were Primary schools and 11 were Secondary schools. Most Primary schools in Malta have a low pupil population, and so more Primary schools than Secondary schools needed to be included in the study to attain the target sample size. A total of 1618 pupils participated in the questionnaire; 592 were Primary school pupils and 1026 were Secondary school pupils. The following table shows the sample size as a percentage of the total year group population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Group</th>
<th>Pupil population in October 2014</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Sample size as a percentage of total year group pupil population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>2119</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>2186</td>
<td>1026</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.9.3.5 Data on Questionnaire Survey Participants and Response Rates

*College distribution and response rate*

Table 4.15 summarises the target population in each college, and in each school. It also shows the number of responses which were actually collected.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLEGE</th>
<th>OVERALL RESPONSE RATE FOR COLLEGE</th>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Secondary schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CODE FOR SCHOOL</td>
<td>Target Population</td>
<td>No of responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of pupils</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The overall questionnaire response rate was 70.2%. The response rate varied from one college to another; in fact, it ranged from 53.9% to 86.0%. The following pie-chart illustrates pupil participation from each college, as a percentage of the total pupil population participating in the questionnaire survey.

Fig 4.5 Pupil Participation per College as a Percentage of Total Pupil Population Participating in the Questionnaire Survey

Response rates for Primary and Secondary school pupils

592 Primary school pupils and 1026 Secondary school pupils participated in the questionnaire survey. The response rate for Primary school pupils was 62.8% and the response rate for Secondary school pupils was 75.3%. Teachers in participating schools suggested the following reasons for the lower Primary schools’ response rate:
- Parents of pupils in Primary schools tend to be more wary of research being carried out and so might be more reluctant to give their consent
- Primary school pupils are more likely to misplace the consent form or to forget to give it to their parents.

The following bar-graph shows the number of Primary school pupils and Secondary school pupils, together with the total number of pupils who participated in the Questionnaire Survey, in each College.

![Bar Graph](image)

**Fig 4.6 Number of Boys and Girls who Participated in the Questionnaire Survey per College**

The next pie-chart, Fig 4.7, shows the percentage of primary and secondary school pupils who participated in the questionnaire survey:
Fig 4.7  Percentage of Primary School Pupils and Secondary School Pupils in the Questionnaire Survey

Gender

Overall, 723 boys and 895 girls participated in the questionnaire survey. Fig 4.8 displays these values as percentages:

Fig 4.8  Percentage of Boys and Girls in the Questionnaire Survey
The Primary school questionnaire population consisted of 326 boys and 266 girls. Fig 4.9 shows the percentage of boys and girls in the Primary school questionnaire population:

![Pie chart showing 55.1% boys and 44.9% girls.]

The Secondary school questionnaire population consisted of 397 boys and 629 girls. Fig 4.10 shows the percentage of boys and girls in the Secondary school questionnaire population:

![Pie chart showing 61.3% girls and 38.7% boys.]

**Age**

The survey consisted of two age groups: the Year 4 pupils and the Form 4 pupils. The average age of the Year 4 pupils was 8.30 years and the average age of the Form 4 pupils was 14.4 years.

**Language**

There were two versions of the questionnaire: Maltese and English. Nearly all the pupils chose to answer the questionnaire in Maltese. 98.5% of Primary school pupils and 98.9% of Secondary school pupils answered in Maltese.

**Socio-economic Background**

As described earlier, the parents'/guardians’ skill level was taken as an indication of the socio-economic background of the pupil. The following table shows the parents'/guardians’ skill level, the corresponding level of education, and the frequency of pupils at each level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents'/Guardians' Skill Level</th>
<th>Parents'/Guardians’ Level of education</th>
<th>No of pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; level</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; level</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; level</td>
<td>Post-secondary below university level</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; level</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No info (did not answer question)</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.16  Frequency table for Parents'/Guardians' Skill Level
Fig 4.11 displays the percentage distribution of the skill level of the participants’ parents/guardians:

Fig 4.11 Percentage Distribution of the Skill Level of Participants’ Parents/Guardians

Fig 4.12 presents a stacked bar-graph which compares the skill level of Primary and Secondary school pupils’ parents/guardians:
As Fig 4.12 illustrates, there were very little differences between Primary and Secondary pupils in the distribution of parents’/guardians’ skill levels.

*Academic attainment level of Secondary School Pupils*

Pupils in secondary schools were asked to give their ‘track level’ in each of the core subjects: Mathematics, English and Maltese. As described earlier, in Secondary schools, pupils follow different ‘track’ programmes in these subjects, according to their academic results. The higher the ‘track level’, the higher the academic attainment level. In this study, the total ‘track level’, expressed as a numeric value, was used to obtain an indication of the academic attainment level of each Secondary school pupil.
As Table 4.17 demonstrates, five different academic attainment levels were derived from the total track levels. Only multiples of 0.5 values were possible for the total track level value since that is how they are distributed in schools. Arbitrary values were assigned to the academic attainment level, the higher the value, the higher the academic attainment level. Out of a total of 1026 secondary school pupils who took part in the questionnaire, eight pupils refrained from giving information on their ‘track’ level.

Table 4.17  Track Levels and Academic Attainment Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total track level Range/Value</th>
<th>Academic attainment level (arbitrary values)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5 and less</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0 – 5.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 – 7.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0 – 8.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following bar-graph shows the frequency of pupils at each academic attainment level:

Fig 4.13  Distribution of Academic Attainment levels for Participant Secondary School Pupils
The gender distribution within the different academic attainment levels for Secondary school respondents is shown in Fig 4.14. The percentage of boys was calculated out of the total boys’ population; the percentage of girls was calculated out of the total girls’ population.

Fig 4.14 Gender Distribution of Academic Attainment Levels for Participant Secondary School Pupils

4.9.3.6 The Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three sets of stakeholders: pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers. Two different types of interviews were conducted: group interviews with pupils and one-to-one interviews with Heads of Schools and policy-makers.
4.9.3.7 Justifications for Choosing Interviews as a Research Tool

Interviews were used in this research to study the “feelings, intentions, meanings, subcontexts or thoughts” (Lichtman, 2006:117) of the interviewees. Interviews were used primarily to address the third research question: What are the perspectives of pupils, Heads of schools, and policy-makers, on:

- pupils’ role as assessors?
- the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school?

As discussed earlier, the main research tool in this study was the questionnaire and it was used primarily to collect quantitative data. However, it was appreciated that the main disadvantage of this research tool was that it “cannot reveal deep meanings” (Jones, 2000:160). Since the researcher wanted to “put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses” (Bell, 1987:135), the interview was deemed as an appropriate research tool to provide this type of data. Given that the main advantage of interviews is their “flexibility” (Newby, 2010:285), in her role as an interviewer, the researcher could gather important data from the interviewees by amending questions or by asking further questions. There was also the opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings, and hence ensure that the relevant data was being collected.

One of the main disadvantages of interviews is that they are time-consuming (Newby, 2010 and Robson, 1993). Time is needed to prepare the interview schedule, to work out the logistics to be able to conduct the interviews, to ask for permission and consent to carry out the interviews, to conduct the interview sessions, to transcribe the recorded interview sessions and to analyse the interview data. Despite these disadvantages, in the researcher’s opinion, the data gathered from the interviews was fundamental to addressing the research aims for the study and so it warranted the time and effort spent on its collection and processing.
4.9.3.8 Interviews as a Research Tool in this Study

Interviews were used as a research tool to offer a further method to give Maltese pupils voice, and this was considered a way of garnering meaningful pupil voice. In addition, interviews were used as a research tool to gain an understanding from those adults in positions of power about how they considered their role in facilitating, and acting upon, pupil voice.

The type of interviews used

All the interviews carried out were semi-structured interviews. Two different types of semi-structured interviews were conducted: group interviews and one-to-one interviews. These were conducted after Phase 1 of the study had been completed, this means that the questionnaire survey had been completed and the data had been analysed.

Semi-structured interviews

The degree of flexibility in the interview structure may be used to classify interviews (Robson, 1993). At one extreme, the structured interview may be considered to be a “spoken questionnaire” (Newby, 2010:339), whilst at the other extreme, the direction in an unstructured interview is not predetermined. The semi-structured interview may be considered as a “compromise” (Wellington, 2000:74) between the structured interview and the unstructured interview, or “the best of both worlds” (Thomas, 2009:164). In this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen because the researcher needed to ask the predetermined questions which were essential for the research, whilst at the same time, wanting the flexibility to explore avenues of inquiry which arose from the questionnaire analysis as well as in real time during an interview.

Group Interviews

Group interviews were conducted with pupils, to gather feedback on data generated from the questionnaires. Through the group interviews, pupils were given a voice to articulate their position on the researched theme. This voice was limited by the
agenda set for the interviews, by the way the invitation to participate in the group interviews was received, by the sample size and by other logistical constraints. Group interviews were chosen as a research method because the researcher wanted the pupils to feel comfortable during the interviews. As noted by Lewis (1992):

*Children may be less intimidated by talking in a group than when talking individually to an adult, particularly if the interviewer is not well known to the children* (Lewis, 1992:416).

The researcher became aware that the intimate environment during a one-to-one interview can seem daunting to young pupils. The group set-up was considered as a bonus since it meant that “non-responses from one child do not curtail or stop the interview” (Lewis, 1992:417). In addition, group interviews facilitate access to a large number of interviewees (Cohen et al, 2000; Frey and Fontana, 1991; Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). Group interviews have the potential of generating richer data (Lewis, 1992). Frey and Fontana (1991:178) argue that group interviews facilitate “indefinite triangulation” as ideas are floated around during the discussion; and hence further developed or challenged by other participants. There is safety in numbers, and the group effect may encourage interviewees to be bolder and more explicit in their arguments (Lewis, 1992). In addition, Frey and Fontana (1991:180) argue in favour of group interviews, with one of the reasons being that the data obtained is “polyphonic”, in the sense that different voices are being recorded. This advantage was particularly important and relevant for this study since during the group interviews the participants were co-analysing the data generated by a previous stage in the data collection. The diverse voices allowed a wider examination of the data and a broader analysis. Moreover, an added advantage is that group interviews minimise researcher bias (Frey and Fontana, 1991) since the more participants there are, the more likely it is to gather varied responses.

Group size is an important factor for the success of a group interview; if the size is too small, it might create stress on the participants; if the size is too large, the group might separate into smaller sub-groups and it becomes difficult to sustain attention (Cohen et al, 2000). Lewis (1992) draws on research on group interviews and quotes six to seven pupils as being the ideal size. In this research, the researcher did not have a choice on group size, since group interviews were conducted with a group
which was already in existence: the Student Council. During the field studies, the group size ranged between six to twelve pupils, further details are shown in Table 4.18.

Advantages and disadvantages of conducting interviews with Student Councils

The Council members were used to working together and so, the initial shyness and cautious behaviour which occurs when a new group comes together was not present. During the field studies, pupils were enthusiastic to participate, most probably due to the fact that the theme being discussed was relevant to them, and this facilitated a productive data collection session. At the same time, there were some reservations on conducting group interviews with Student Councils. The researcher was aware that the Student Council might be projecting a biased pupil voice (Cremin et al, 2010 and Osler, 2010) since pupils who opt to form part of the Student Council are more likely to be assertive, articulate and popular than the average pupil. On the other hand, since members of Student Councils are usually elected by other pupils, presumably, the Student Council conveys, to some degree or another, the official pupil voice. After considering the advantages and disadvantages discussed above, the researcher chose to conduct group interviews with Student Councils mainly because of the practicality of working with a preconceived group.

One-to-one Interviews

One-to-one interviews were conducted with Heads of Schools and with policy-makers. One set of interviews was carried out with Heads of Schools in schools where the initial focus group activity sessions had been conducted; this set of interviews served as the pilot study for the interview as a method. Another set of interviews was carried out with five Heads of Schools and a final set of interviews was carried out with five policy-makers to discuss the main findings from the previously collected data and to explore attitudes to the role of pupils as assessors.
Elite Interviews

The policy-makers, and to a lesser extent the Heads of Schools, may be considered as the ‘elite’ in education since they have “significant decision-making influence” (Harvey, 2011:433). This type of research is sometimes referred to as ‘studying up’ (Walford, 2012). In elite interviews, the interviewee might have a greater tendency to try to control the interview and to question the research being carried out (Harvey, 2011). Under normal circumstances, the power balance between researcher and the researched is usually shifted towards the researcher, but in elite research, the power balance is reversed (Walford, 2012). To decrease this power imbalance and increase the success of the interviews, Mikecz (2012) suggests that before an elite interview, the researcher should increase his/her knowledge on the interviewee. In this study, before interviewing policymakers, the researcher read what was publically available on the prospective interviewees and also considered personal accounts of people who were acquainted with the policy-makers. In this way the researcher felt well prepared and better able to communicate with the interviewees, lessening the tension which might have accompanied the prospect of interviewing influential people.

The interview schedule

The interview schedule provided guidance for the researcher, to ensure a certain degree of homogeneity in the collected data, whilst at the same time facilitating a healthy balance between rigidity and adaptability. By curbing superfluous communication between interviewer and interviewee, the interview schedule also helped overcome one inherent disadvantage of interviews: that of producing a large quantity of data which might not all be useful (Newby, 2010:340). The questions which were asked were nearly all open-ended questions, in an attempt to delve into the perspectives of the interviewees. Probing questions, which were neutral, were included to encourage further feedback from the participants (Wellington, 2007). (Refer to Appendices 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 for the interview schedules).
The role of the researcher

The researcher was aware that she would be playing a crucial role during interviews. She was aware that first and foremost, she “should not play a leading role” (Wellington, 2000:72). Lichtman (2006) points out the importance of establishing rapport with the interviewee. At the same time, Oppenheim (2001) warns on the importance of striking the right balance: if there is too little rapport, the interviewee might be reluctant to contribute and, if there is too much rapport, the excess familiarity might change the role of the interviewer into one of a social worker or a personal friend. Hence, Oppenheim (2001) recommends:

The interviewer must at all times remain detached and professional in her attitude yet be relaxed and friendly............ (Openheim, 2001:90).

In the planning stages of the interview, the researcher carefully considered what could help establish a positive rapport with the interviewee: the preferred physical positioning, the best way to introduce herself and her research, the physical image she wanted to project, the tone of voice to use, the choice of language and non-verbal cues during the interview, and most importantly, the questioning technique to be used during the interview. Her training from many years back, for carrying out interviews in the tourism industry for research purposes; her experience when carrying out interviews as part of the field studies in her MPhil, and the experience gained from the pilot interviews in this study (as described in the next section, Section 4.9.3.9) all contributed to the way she conducted herself during the interviews. As recommended by Newby (2010:342) she strived hard to “empathise” with the respondents, by taking into consideration the interviewee’s position and perspective in her interactions with each interviewee, and by actively listening to what the interviewee was saying.

During group interviews, the role of the interviewer is that of “establishing and facilitating a discussion and not ‘interviewing’ the group” (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). There are two styles which can be adopted by the interviewer during group interviews: a “passive, non-directive approach” (Frey and Fontana, 1991:180) or a “directive or active” role (Frey and Fontana, 1991:180). In this study, she adopted the second role, since, for the research, it was important that the ensuing discussion addresses the specific questions which had been planned. She made sure that the
discussion remained focused on co-analysing the data gathered from the questionnaires, by adhering to a pre-planned interview schedule. This also helped ensure consistency between one interview and the next, whilst at the same time, allowing me to be flexible enough to probe further if the need arose.

4.9.3.9 Data Collection: The Pilot Interviews

Pilot interviews were conducted with Heads of Schools where focus group activity sessions had been conducted.

*The purpose of the Pilot Interviews:*

- to pilot the interview as a research tool.

*The field studies*

The field studies were conducted between June and July 2014. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three Heads of Schools: one Head of a Primary School and two Heads of Secondary Schools. Refer to Appendix 3.1 for the Interview schedule.

*Implications for the main study*

During the pilot interviews, the following observations were made:

- The real challenge lies in the design of the research tool: the questions forming part of the interview schedule and the impromptu ones during the actual interview.

- The interviewer has to be very alert during the interview, making sure that no opportunity for revealing data significant for the research is missed. Powney and Watts (1987) warn that after a number of interviews, interviewers might
suffer from burn out and become desensitised to interviewees’ responses. To avoid this, the researcher planned to space out the interviews, and where possible, to allow an adequate rest period between one interview and the next.

- Ideally, during an interview, there should be a quiet environment, free from any interruptions. The break in the flow of the interview might mean that potential data ends up being lost because the interviewee or interviewer has her/his train of thought disrupted.

- During one of the pilot interviews with a Head of School, the researcher forgot to ask one of the questions. This incident highlighted the importance for the researcher not to lose sight of the interview questions in the schedule, and of having a clear and easy-to-follow schedule.

- There was a tendency for Heads of Schools to refer to their own particular school and to adopt a defensive stance. In the main study, at the start of each interview, it was explained clearly to interviewees that replies should not focus on their particular school.

### 4.9.3.10 Data Collection: The Group Interviews

*The purpose of the group interviews with Student Councils*

- to co-analyse the questionnaire data
- to find out about pupils’ perspectives on the role of pupils as assessors in quality assurance of schools.

*The field studies*

Group interviews with Student Councils were conducted between November and December 2015. A total of 47 pupils participated in the group interviews. The following table summarises the data on the participants.
Table 4.18  Data on Group Interviews Carried Out with Student Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>No of Pupils</th>
<th>No of boys</th>
<th>No of girls</th>
<th>Average age of pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the start of each session, the researcher conducted a quick ‘pilot’ group interview by asking the pupils to discuss a topic of their own choice for a few minutes. The interviewees and the researcher then listened to the recorded feedback, with the aim of improving the actual group interview. One very common problem of group interviews, which was also encountered in this study, was that “people ‘talk over’ each other” (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987:30). The informal, brief ‘pilot’ preliminary session helped reduce this difficulty and also helped the researcher adapt her style to suit the dynamics of the group.

The pupils contributed very enthusiastically during the group interviews. In the researcher’s opinion there were three reasons for this:

- The theme being discussed was relevant to pupils
- The pupils were discussing the feedback gathered from their peers, so most probably they felt more at ease about what they were being asked
- Student Council members tend to be pupils who are interested in their school life. The very nature of the work of a Student Council attracts members who enjoy participating in discussions and who tend to be eloquent and vocal.

4.9.3.11 Data Collection: The One-to-One Interviews

One-to-one interviews were carried out with five Heads of Schools and five policy-makers.
The purpose of the one-to-one interviews

- to co-analyse the main outcomes from the questionnaire survey
- to find out about the Heads of Schools’ and policy-makers’ perspectives on pupils’ role as assessors
- to discuss the way forward.

The field studies

Interviews with Heads of Schools were conducted between February and April 2016; whereas the interviews with policy-makers were conducted between June and August 2016. The participants readily contributed and expanded on the questions being addressed to them. The non-verbal cues from the participants were consistent with a positive rapport between interviewee and interviewer, and an interest in what was being verbally communicated. These cues included facial gestures to emphasise what the participant was saying and bodily movements to communicate with the researcher. The researcher attributed the success of this set of interviews to the following:

- The interviewees were people who are highly motivated in their careers, they have strong leadership skills and highly developed communication skills.
- The policy-makers did not feel threatened by the researcher; her gender and the fact that she is not in a senior position within the Directorate or Ministry for Education could have contributed in creating a non-threatening atmosphere (Walford, 2012).
- The main theme of the interviews and the way it was being explored during the interviews offered a safe space for the interviewees, free from fears of self-indictment. The respondents were offering their ideas, their interpretations and recommendations on a theme which has value in their line of work or political interest.

One disadvantage which the researcher encountered with policy-makers during interviews was that they had a tendency to keep on talking on a particular issue that they felt strongly about. During the data gathering sessions with policy-makers, the
researcher experienced what Walford wrote about researching the powerful in education:

_Their familiarity with being listened to means that some may 'just talk' and not answer the questions asked._ (Walford, 2012: 113).

The researcher had to gently coax policymakers back to the original question which had been presented to them.

### 4.10 Data Analysis

This section describes how the data collected in the study was analysed. The first part of this section distinguishes between inductive and deductive analyses, and describes how different data sets in the study were analysed. During the field studies, data was collected through three research tools: the focus group activity sessions, the questionnaire and the interviews. The mode of analysis for each research tool is discussed in turn.

#### 4.10.1 Inductive and Deductive Analysis

Inductive analysis and deductive analysis were carried out on the gathered data. In inductive analysis, specific cases are observed and on observing a pattern, a theory or a generalisation is drawn up; whereas in deductive analysis theories or generalisations are tested by observing specific cases (Thomas, 2009). The following table summarises the type of analysis carried out on different data sets:
Table 4.19  Inductive and Deductive Analysis, Data Sets and Purpose for Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Analysis</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inductive</td>
<td>Focus group activity sessions</td>
<td>To extract concepts on quality indicators from the pupils’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with Student Councils</td>
<td>To find out about their perspectives on pupils’ role as assessors, and on the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews with Heads of Schools and policy-makers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>To extract the quality indicators of a good school from literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Questionnaire questions</td>
<td>To extract the categories from the quality indicators listed in the questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>To test whether there is a relationship between the way pupils judge a school and the following variables: age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.10.2  Mode of Analysis for the Focus Group Activity Data

During the focus group activity sessions, each group was asked to list five quality indicators of a good school. The data was analysed inductively. A process of axial coding: “picking out themes and assigning each one a reference” (Breen, 2006:472) was carried out. These themes constituted the codes, which articulated the specific quality indicators. The codes obtained from the data gathered during the focus group activity sessions are listed in Appendix 10. These codes were used to inform the design of the questionnaire. Out of a total of 39 quality indicators which were extracted from the codes, 22 were mentioned more than once by focus groups. These 22 quality indicators were included in the questionnaire. Section 4.9.3.2 describes in detail the contribution of the focus group data in the design of the questionnaire.
4.10.3 Mode of Analysis for the Questionnaire Data

Advice was sought from the Department of Statistics and Operations Research at the University of Malta, on the mode of analysis to be employed. The data was first inputted into SPSS. The graded answers were given a numerical value, which represented a positive accordance with the response. ‘Very important’ was inputted as 5, ‘Important’ was inputted as 4, ‘Moderately important’ was inputted as 3, ‘Not very important’ was inputted as 2, and ‘Not important’ was inputted as 1. The data was checked and cleaned. 17 questionnaires were found to be incomplete and these were discarded.

Simple statistics on the questionnaire data

The data was analysed using SPSS and different forms of simple statistics were extracted to collate the results of the questionnaire, and to understand the numerical data obtained. These simple statistics included: mean value, frequency, percentages, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. The mean value was needed to extract the list of quality indicators in order of preference. The frequency and percentages were needed to be able to represent the data from the questionnaire graphically, in bar charts and pie-charts. The standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis all gave information on the distribution of responses: the standard deviation is a measure of the variation in responses; skewness is a measure of the asymmetry of the distribution and kurtosis is a measure of the distribution’s tail.

The descriptive analysis could not provide a complete understanding of the data which was gathered. Factor analysis needed to be carried out on the numerical data obtained from the questionnaire responses, so that the relationship between different variables could be revealed and the second research question could be answered- ‘How does the pupils’ judgement on what constitutes a good school vary with:

- Age
- Gender
- Socio-economic background
- Academic attainment level?’
Factor analysis

Factor analysis was used to determine whether the pupils’ age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment levels were influencing the pupils’ responses, hence helping to address the second research question. (Refer to Appendix 11 for an overview of how factor analysis was carried out). The first step was to determine whether factor analysis could be carried out on the data. Next, the number of factors which could be extracted was determined. A factor is a set of quality indicators having a similar response pattern. After the factors were extracted, the reliability of the factors obtained was tested. Three factors were extracted and a label for each factor was derived inductively from the list of the quality indicators making up each factor. (Refer to Appendices 11.1 and 11.2 for more details). Table 4.20 lists the quality indicators under each factor:

Table 4.20 Quality Indicators under each Factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1 Moving and School Climate</th>
<th>Factor 2 Achieving</th>
<th>Factor 3 Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clean school</td>
<td>Parents participating in school</td>
<td>Activities at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good Head of School</td>
<td>Having regular tests and examinations</td>
<td>School outings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
<td>High expectations for pupils</td>
<td>Lots of sports activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school(^{17})</td>
<td>Modern resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers</td>
<td>Pupils obtain high grades in examinations and tests</td>
<td>Having animals in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A green school</td>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms(^{18})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe environment</td>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good behaviour from pupils
Pupils respect teachers
Good assistant heads of schools
More learning opportunities
Respect between pupils
Better quality books
A pleasant atmosphere at school

\(^{17}\) reverse coded
\(^{18}\) reverse coded. During the initial testing stages for factor analysis a negative correlation was obtained for these two quality indicators and so they had to be reverse coded so that factor analysis could be carried out on the data. (More details are given in Appendix 18).
Once the factors were extracted, reliability analysis was conducted to measure the reliability of the groupings (the factors) which emerged through factor analysis. Reliability analysis was carried out on the polychoric correlations for each factor using Cronbach Alpha, Split half reliability and Guttman reliability values. In all cases, the values obtained were all above 0.7 (Refer to Appendix 11.2). This means that the three factors which were extracted were all reliable.

To determine if the three factors were influenced by pupils’ age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment levels, factor scores were obtained through a regression approach. A factor score is a numerical value to show the relative standing of a response to a factor. The factor scores were obtained for each participant’s response to each factor. The factor scores were then tested to check if they are affected by the variables investigated in the study. The variables: age, gender, socio-economic backgrounds are categorical or ordinal data, and so for these variables, the responses were first tested for normality using Shapiro-Wilk test. In cases of non-normal distribution, Mann Whitney test was then carried out to find out if the factor scores were influenced by the variable; whereas in cases of a normal distribution, independent sample t-test was carried out. The relationship between the fourth variable: academic attainment level and the factor scores had to be tested using a different technique since academic attainment level was a continuous variable in this study. Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient was used to test how the factor score variable was affected by the academic attainment variable. The full details of the calculations carried out are described in Appendix 11.3. The influence of pupil variables on the factor scores was calculated by comparing the mean score values (Refer to Appendix 11.4).

*Categoryising*

To facilitate an understanding of the data set from a different perspective, categories were extracted. Categories also made it easier to analyse the relatively large number of quality indicators in this study. One set of categories was obtained deductively from the quality indicators listed in the questionnaire. Another set of categories was obtained inductively from the quality indicators listed by the respondents in the open-ended question.
4.10.4 Analysis of Interview Data

Transcription

In this study, transcription proved to be a laborious and time-consuming task. Cohen et al (2000:281) describe the transcription stage as a “crucial” one because there is the possible danger of valuable data being lost or simplified in an erroneous manner. Furthermore, Cohen et al (2000:282) describe transcriptions as “frozen” since they fail to capture the context of the interview, the interpersonal setting and hence the full meaning of the words exchanged during an interview. However, in this study, when the researcher was reading the transcripts, the memory came back and the words were not “frozen” (Cohen et al, 2000:281), rather, the interviewee’s voice, the tone of the voice, the inflection of the voice, and the non-verbal events taking place came back to life. In the researcher’s case, the very act of transcribing, which entails listening very carefully to very short sections of interview recordings, often repeatedly, helped the researcher grasp a better understanding of what was being communicated during the interviews and subconsciously initiated the analysis of the interview data.

Mode of analysis for the Interview Data

The researcher decided against using a software package for analysing the interview data. The interviews were conducted in Maltese and software packages in the language are very limited. The interviews were analysed, primarily, through coding. The purpose of coding is to “name units of data” (Newby, 2010:462). In this research, the coding structure was drawn out from the data itself. The researcher followed Lichtman’s coding technique (2006), which is described as the three Cs of analysis: “from Coding to Categorizing to Concepts”. (Lichtman, 2006:167). First, the responses were reviewed so that the researcher could obtain a general picture of the data, and the first codes were established. The codes were then revised and gradually a list of categories was compiled. In turn, the categories were revised and finally, a list of concepts was drawn from the categories.
Inductive Analysis

In this study, the interview data was analysed inductively. In an inductive approach, the data is analysed in a way so that general ideas may be drawn from the specifics (Lichtman, 2006). In this study, the codes and categories were extracted inductively from the interview data. An alternative to coding from data is to analyse the interview data deductively by developing a predetermined code structure and then fit the collected data into this structure. However, this model was not used in this research because the researcher believed that it would limit the way the collected data was processed (Newby, 2006), and the researcher wanted to record and analyse the unrestricted interviewee voice. The interviews had been strategically added into the research design to complement and expand upon the questionnaire-derived findings.

Mode of analysis for group interview data

The same method of coding and categorising, which was used to analyse the data from the other interviews conducted in this research, was used to analyse the group interview data. The question arose on how to treat the input from different individuals in the group. The researcher implemented the solution offered by Watts and Ebbutt (1987:30) to “treat the group not as a collection of individuals, but as an entity in itself”. At the same time, when analysing the data, the researcher tried to capture the nuances of variation around the ‘average’ response.

Completion of analysis of interview data

One of the difficulties a researcher encounters when analysing qualitative data is knowing when to stop. There is no clear-cut end to the analysis process. According to Lichtman (2006:165) “a logical saturation point” signifies the end of the analysis process. Furthermore, Lichtman (2006:165) describes this point as, when “you find that you are not learning anything new”. In this study, after carrying out the coding process, and revisiting the data a number of times, a point was reached when the researcher felt that no additional knowledge was being gained by reanalysing the data.
4.10.5 Peer Reviewing of the Coding Structure

To check whether the process of coding was a valid one, the coding exercise was peer reviewed. In this way, one could determine whether there was validity based on consensus (Ary et al, 2006). Five interview transcripts were reviewed by an Education Officer at the Directorate for Standards and Quality in Education in Malta, Dr Robert Cassar. Dr Cassar holds a PhD in social sciences and is experienced in analysing interview data. His main concern was that the interview questions were not identical in the different interviews; however, this was not a weakness in the way the interviews were conducted. The researcher had conducted semi-structured interviews precisely to have the flexibility of not being tied to a strict interview schedule, but rather to have the possibility of adapting the questions, and the sequence of the questions according to the way the interview would be developing. After reviewing the coding exercise carried out by the researcher, Dr Cassar validated the exercise.

This part of the chapter has described in detail the way the data was analysed. Before moving on to the next section, which describes the ethical considerations which were taken into account in this study, a summary of the mode of analysis for the data collected by each tool is provided by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research tool</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Mode of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group activity sessions</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-ended questions</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Statistical analysis and Factor analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.11 Ethics

Since the data in this research was gathered from people, ethical considerations were given their due importance at all stages of the research (BERA, 2011).

4.11.1 Ethical Considerations

In this research, most of the participants were minors and this means that a more sensitive approach was adopted when considering the ethical implications of the research involved. The power dynamics between adults and children, and their implications when carrying out research with children (Wall, 2017) were important influential factors in the ethical reflection at the very start of the research. The ethical considerations in this research were set by the preamble that the pupil is “the most knowledgeable agent in her/his own experience” (Jadue Roa, 2017:332); this meant that at all times, the ethical parameters were set according to this preamble.

The researcher completed an ethical appraisal of the study, using an ethical framework (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009) and formulated a Personal Code of Conduct, underpinned by the principle of respect towards the participants. This is the researcher’s Personal Code of Conduct:

1. The participant comes first. His/her needs, wishes and welfare are paramount.
2. The researcher binds herself to act ethically and morally at all times.
3. The researcher binds herself to be truthful at all times and to give full information on how, and why, the data is being collected and processed.
4. At the start of every data collecting session, the researcher commits to explaining the nature and the purpose of the study. The researcher will ask explicitly whether the participant wants to take part in the research and it will also be explained clearly that each participant is free to withdraw at any point, and that no reason has to be given for doing so.
5. All data will remain confidential and anonymous. The names of the participants, the identity of the classes, the names of the schools, and the names of the colleges will not be revealed. The researcher will guarantee that the data will be kept securely and no personal information will be divulged to third parties.
A code of conduct provides the researcher with an opportunity of reviewing the ethical considerations of the research to be undertaken (Leeson, 2007). In fact, the ethical framework by Stutchbury and Fox (2009) provided further ethical reflection on the research, and revealed the following key considerations:

* A consideration of any possible harm to participants, from this research

As the participants were being asked to comment on the quality of schools and were mainly commenting on the basis of their experiences of their current schools, it was acknowledged that schools might find this a sensitive subject. In the questionnaire survey, pupils were not asked to assess individual schools, but they were asked to make a general assessment of schools. Opportunities to raise queries in advance of the study were given to all schools and participants; however, none did so. Moreover, since all the data collected during the research remained confidential and anonymous, the data collected could never be traced back to any particular individual, school or college. During focus group sessions and the group interviews, the issue of confidentiality was discussed at the start of each session.

In a small island such as Malta, with a population of 400,000, when conducting research, the issues of anonymity and confidentiality are particularly important. It is very easy for researchers, to unwittingly divulge information which might, at face value, appear harmless, but which could give away the identity of participants. As mentioned earlier, cluster sampling was used as the sampling framework for the main questionnaire survey. The researcher was cautious not to disclose any information which could uncover the identity of the college; even vague descriptors on the socio-economic status of a college or on its geographical location, such as stating that a college is in the Northern part of the island, would easily reveal the identity of the college. To prevent possible harm to participants resulting from lack of anonymity, comparative analysis between colleges was not carried out.

* Honesty whilst conducting the research

The purpose of the research was communicated clearly in the Request form for research in state schools sent to the Educational Directorate when applying for
permission to carry out the research. (Refer to Appendix 7). The purpose of the research was described in detail in the letters to Heads of Schools, to class teachers and to parents distributed before the data was collected focus group activity sessions were conducted (Refer to Appendices 4, 5 and 6 respectively). Another set of letters was distributed to Heads of Schools, class teachers and parents before the questionnaire survey was conducted. A final set of letters was distributed to Heads of Schools, parents and pupils before the group interviews were carried out.

_Gaining Pupils’ Consent_

In this research, most of the participants were minors. This means that as potentially vulnerable participants, a particularly sensitive approach should be adopted when considering the ethical implications of the research involved. Gibson (2012) notes that:

*Children must be allowed to make their own decision about participation, regardless of parental consent..........* (Gibson, 2012:154).

This view is echoed by Leeson (2007) and Smith (2011). Moreover, Leeson (2007:137) calls the child “the principal consent-giver”. The paradox is that in reality, children cannot “make their own decision about participation” because if parents or legal guardians refuse participation, the child has no voice at all. The researcher is not contesting the fact that legally, parental consent is a must, to protect minors; rather, the focus is to draw attention to the fact that pupil voice in research is at the mercy of the adult gate-keepers, which not only includes parents, but adults in schools. Te One (2011) and Harcourt and Conroy (2011) insist that it is the duty of the researcher to explain to young participants that they are free to withdraw their initial consent to take part in research. In view of the above observations, in this research, the pupils’ consent was asked for twice, before the data-gathering process and during the actual data-gathering process:

1. As can be read from the letters to Parents/guardians (Refer to Appendix 6, ) parents/guardians were asked to proceed with filling in the consent form, only if the pupil wanted to participate in the research.

2. At the start of each session, after explaining what the data-gathering session entails, the researcher asked the pupils whether they would like to participate. The researcher explained that during the actual data-gathering session, if the
participant chooses to withdraw his/her feedback, he/she would be free to do so; and he/she would be under no obligation to give a reason for such action. The researcher made it clear that in such a case, the pupil would remain in the classroom but he/she could choose not to participate in the session or he/she might participate in the activity and the data would not be collected. During the field studies, pupils who did not take part in the research remained in the classroom during the data-gathering session and were free to engage in any other activity of their choice.

To help pupils understand what they would be consenting for, before the questionnaire was distributed, an information letter was given to pupils (Refer to Appendices 1.1 and 1.2). Likewise, before the group interviews, an information letter was distributed to pupils and pupils were asked to give their written consent before the group interviews were conducted.

4.11.2 Permission to Carry Out the Research

The researcher applied for, and was granted, ethical approval for the research from the University of Leicester (Refer to Appendices 8 and 9) to carry out the focus group activity sessions (Ethical Application Ref: ap469-db1f), the questionnaire (Ethical Application Ref ap469-38ed) and the interviews (Ethical Application Ref 3211-ap469-education). Permission was asked for, and obtained from the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Malta (Refer to Appendix 7 for the research application template; only the template is being included since the actual application lists the schools where the research was to be carried out). The first request for research in state schools was made on 23rd December 2013, for focus group activity sessions. The second request was made on 15th October, 2014, for the pilot questionnaire. The third request was made on 19th December 2015, for the survey questionnaire. The fourth and final request was made on 21st September 2015, where permission was asked for group interviews with Student Councils.
This section detailed the ethical considerations of this study. The next section, which forms the final part of the chapter, discusses the limitations of the study.

4.12 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study stemmed from two main sources. Firstly, from the limitations of the research tools: focus group activity sessions, questionnaires, interviews, and the researcher herself as a tool. Secondly, there were limitations originating from the overall methodology of the study.

4.12.1 Limitations of the Focus Group Activity Sessions

The success of a focus group session relies heavily on the conduct of the researcher (Gibson, 2012; Newby, 2010; Wilson, 1997). In the researcher’s opinion, the sessions were conducted in an efficient and effective way, and this success was due to the planning which had taken place before the focus group activity sessions, as described in Section 4.9.2. A disadvantage of focus group sessions is that amidst the more vociferous voices, the weaker voices might very easily be silenced or disheartened (Acocella, 2012). On the other hand, there might be individuals in the group who are too talkative and this could affect the quality of the data being collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Whilst going round the focus groups, the researcher encouraged all pupils to participate, and from what the researcher could observe, the pupils seemed to be happily engaged during the sessions.

4.12.2 Limitations of the Questionnaire

The main limitation experienced when conducting the questionnaire survey was the inherent drawback of the questionnaire as a tool: the “lack of interpretive opportunity” (Walker, 1985:91), both for the respondent when filling in the questionnaire, and for the researcher when analysing the data. The researcher had no means of differentiating between a genuine and a false response. When inputting the data from the questionnaire, the researcher got the impression that pupils took the
exercise seriously. The researcher did not encounter any responses which made outrageous claims or which tried to mock the data gathering exercise. On the other hand, one might, rightly, argue that this is the researcher’s subjective opinion. Another limitation was that the questionnaire was administered by different people. Although an information letter was distributed to teachers administering the questionnaire, there could easily be a lack of consistency in the different administrators’ approach to respondents. The effect of these limitations on the data, and hence on the validity and the reliability of the questionnaire as a research tool cannot be quantified, since there is no feasible way of calculating how many of the responses were false or the result of an erroneous interpretation on the part of the respondent, or what effect the questionnaire administrator had on the participants.

4.12.3 Limitations of the Interviews

General limitations of Interviews

Lack of honesty from the interviewees is a major concern whenever interviews are used as a research tool. Since interviewees are in direct contact with their interviewers, they have a tendency “to put themselves in a better light than respondents of anonymous self-completion or postal questionnaires” (Oppenheim, 2001:139). In a small island like Malta, where most people are acquainted with one another, this disadvantage might be more acute. In fact, the researcher knew nearly all the adults she interviewed. When conducting the interviews with policy-makers, the researcher was aware that the respondents could have had “vested interests that they wish to protect” (Walford, 2012: 113). The very identity of the researcher could have influenced the interviewee, who consciously or subconsciously, was viewing and hence addressing the researcher as an Assistant Head in a sixth form, a PhD student, a middle aged female, and possibly other typecasts which the researcher might have been projected as, in the eyes of the interviewee. In the case of policy-makers who had an official political role, the assumed or projected political alliance of the researcher could also have influenced the interviewee’s responses. In addition, the pilot interviews had demonstrated the importance of a quiet environment during an interview. Unfortunately, a few interviews with Heads of Schools were momentarily interrupted because of urgent needs which arose in schools. This might
have affected the data which was being gathered, although the extent to how it did so cannot be quantified. One might counter argue that Heads of Schools are used to working in an environment where interruptions are the norm and that the interview setting was the normal setting for Heads of Schools.

Another limitation of interviews is that the coding process, which forms part of the analysis of interviews, is a subjective process; “coding is all a matter of interpretation” (Newby, 2010:469). The researcher tried to minimise this limitation by carrying out peer reviewing of the coding process. Another limitation of analysing interview data is that it is easy to lose non-verbals, such as facial gestures, the tone of voice or pauses whilst answering (Oppenheim, 2001:116). This could have a limitation in this study since it was not practically possible to record the non-verbals of the interviewees during the interview. However, as mentioned earlier, when reading the interview scripts, the voices and the non-verbals which accompanied the interviewee’s voice, came back to life in the researcher’s mind’s ear and eye.

Limitations of Group Interviews

The main limitation of group interviews is that “they require skilful and sensitive guidance by the interviewer” (Lewis, 1992:414) and (Cohen et al, 2000:287). The researcher did her utmost to prepare herself well for her role as an interviewer. To her advantage, the researcher had a long and wide experience teaching in schools and interacting with children, and young people. A major drawback of group interviews is that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987) and (Lewis, 1992). At the start of each group interview, this issue was discussed with the group members (Refer to Appendix 3.2) and all participants agreed to maintain confidentiality; however, in reality, the researcher had no control over the actions of others.

The group interviews were carried out with Student Councils. The main drawback was that, as part of the Student Council, members might have settled into their accustomed roles and adopted their usual roles. Individual participants might be reluctant to venture outside their expected role during the discussion. This was
something the researcher would have been unaware of and unable to control but the researcher needed to be alert. As noted by Frey and Fontana (1991:185) in a group interview, there is the danger that "individuals might be stifled rather than stimulated by the group". The pilot interview phase of each group interview was a chance for the researcher to look out for the signs of such dynamics in the group and try to accommodate, in the way the researcher facilitated the group. In practice, where the researcher noticed withdrawn pupils, she made a mental note to try to include them more in the discussion; but in reality, the group dynamics was a force over which the researcher's control was very restricted.

4.12.4 Limitations of the Researcher as an Instrument

The researcher, as "the key instrument" (Wellington, 2000:41) might have introduced an element of error during data collection. During the focus group activity sessions and interviews, the researcher's behaviour might have influenced the data being collected (compared to if it had been conducted by someone else). In addition, during data analysis, the researcher's bias is inevitable. As Lichtman reminds us:

All information is filtered through the researcher's eyes and ears. It is influenced by his or her experience, knowledge, skill and background. (Lichtman, 2006:12).

In Section 1.5, the researcher provided a short biography of herself, which could provide a glimpse into how the researcher's "eyes and ears" might be biased. Aware of the inherent personal bias, the researcher tried to find ways how to maintain her position as a "disinterested" researcher (Thomas, 2009:75). A disinterested researcher is in search of the truth and conducts her/his research in an objective way (Thomas, 2009). One way of achieving an objective perspective is by being reflexive: "reflecting on the self, the researcher, the person who did it, the me or the I". (Wellington, 2000:42). Throughout the various stages of the research, the researcher sought to be reflexive by continually self-reflecting on the research process. This is further discussed in Section 4.13.
4.12.5 Limitations in the Overall Methodology of the Study

There could have been alternative ways of answering the main research question: From the pupils’ perspective, what are the qualities of a good school? which were overlooked in the research design of this study. During the planning stages, the research design options were narrowed down to two: a Contextualised Case Study Project or a Mixed Method Study on Pupils’ Perspectives.

A Contextualised Case Study Project would have involved a detailed inquiry on how pupil voice is being projected in a school by observing pupil voice in a school’s normal setting or by introducing new ways on how to elicit pupil voice in an effective manner. The Contextualised Case Study research design had a number of strengths: it facilitated an in-depth study on the perspectives of different stakeholders at school, it provided ample opportunity for two-way communication between researcher and participant which potentially could have helped minimise interpretation errors and researcher bias. In addition, the recommendations resulting from the study would have been set within a practical setting and hence more likely to be relevant to schools. However, this research design was rejected for two main reasons. Firstly, because of its limited scope. Secondly, it does not explicitly answer the main research question: From the pupils’ perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school? In light of the body of knowledge which already exists on pupil voice, it is doubtful whether a case study in one school in Malta would be able to add anything significant. Hence, a Contextualised Case Study Project, was rejected in favour of a Mixed Method Study on pupils’ perspectives.

By choosing a Mixed Method study, the depth of the study had to be compromised for a wider scope; the Mixed Method study was able to give voice to a relatively large number of pupils (over 1600 pupils). Aware of the restrictions of using a predominantly quantitative tool as the main research instrument, in the research design for the Mixed Method study, qualitative tools were also used: focus group activity sessions and interviews, in an attempt to obtain a fuller picture of the phenomena being studied.
The research undertaken included only state schools because it purposely wanted to focus on pupil voice in state schools. Further justifications for the researcher’s choice are discussed in Section 4.8.1. However, since in Malta, nearly 40% of primary and secondary pupils attend Catholic Church and independent schools (Eurydice, Overview Malta 2016) this may be considered as a limitation of the study. In addition, in the main questionnaire survey, the data was collected from two year groups: Year 4 and Form 4; only 27.9% of the Year 4 pupil population, and 46.9% of the Form 4 pupil population, participated in the questionnaire survey. This means that the sample was restricted both by size and year group. Similarly, the sample size could be considered as a limiting factor in all the other research tools used. (Refer to Table 4.2 for the sample size of each research tool).

4.12.6 Limitations of the Methodological Approach to Studying the Effect of Different Variables on Pupils’ Assessment of What Makes a Good School

The study focused on the effect of a number of variables which could be influencing the way pupils judge schools. The variables were: age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level. As explained in Section 4.10 factor analysis was used to determine whether the pupils’ age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment levels were influencing the pupils’ responses. The main limitation of this methodological approach is that by focusing only on one variable, it disembodies the ‘pupil’ and the pupil becomes ‘the younger pupil’ or ‘the female pupil’ or ‘the pupil from the lower/higher socio-economic background/academic attainment level’.

This methodological approach, whist highlighting only the differences within one variable, ignores that the pupils’ judgement is actually the sum of all the other variables. In theory, the effect of one variable was being studied; however, in practice, this variable was never in operation in the absence of other variables, and so in practice, it was the net effect of all variables which were influencing the pupils’ judgement. Another criticism is that there could be other variables, not included in
the study, which are influencing pupils’ judgement of schools, and which this study does not examine.

4.13 The Journey of the Researcher

The researcher started this journey as a strict positivist in search of the list of the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective. However, along the journey, although the curiosity and interest to find out about the pupils’ perspective never subsided, the position changed. The meetings with the researcher’s supervisors and the literature review challenged the researcher’s original position. The researcher came to understand that the theme of this research, was, in fact, multifaceted and may be approached from different angles. Whilst maintaining her interest in gathering a list of the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective, as the key outcome of this study, the researcher gradually realised that a list on its own has very limited use. Does the list exist? Or is it a compiled list, composed of many lists? Would a compiled list do justice to pupil voice?

In the meantime, the researcher became interested in finding out how the potential of such a list could be fully exploited. From a strict positivist, the researcher’s position shifted to that of a Mixed Methods researcher, interested in gathering quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions in a way which would allow multiple perspectives to be considered. Furthermore, one of the main challenges of this study, and hence for the researcher was gathering and conveying the pupils’ perspective without losing sight of a pupil’s perspective. It was envisaged that the data from the interviews would give the individual pupil voice the space it deserves in this study and this further strengthened the researcher’s conviction that a Mixed Methods approach was the best choice to address the research questions rather than a mono-method approach.
4.14 Conclusion

This chapter gave a detailed account of the research methodology used in this study, the research methods employed and justifications for the choices made. The results of the pre-study and their implications for the main study were discussed. The chapter also gave an extensive view on how the data was collected and analysed. The final part of the chapter explored the limitations of the research undertaken.

In the next chapter, the results and the analysis of the results, are presented and described in detail.
CHAPTER 5

Results and Analysis of Results

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the data collected, together with an analysis of this data. The data was gathered in three Phases:

1. Pre-Phase: focus group activity sessions and pilot interviews with Heads of Schools
2. Phase 1: the main questionnaire survey
3. Phase 2: interviews with pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers.

The main purpose of the research carried out in the Pre-Phase was to inform the next phases in the research. The data collected from the focus group activity sessions was used to design the main research tool: the questionnaire. The interviews with the Heads of Schools conducted during the Pre-Phase were used to pilot the interview as a research tool. The results of the Pre-Study were presented and discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter presents the findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the research. The data collected in Phases 1 and 2 was used to address the three research questions.
The results in this chapter are organised according to the research question they address. The chapter starts with the main findings of the study. The subsequent sections present a detailed analysis of the data, in relation to each research question in turn.

5.1 The Main Findings

The study set out to uncover the quality indicators of a good school from the Maltese pupils’ perspective- the pupil-generated list of the most highly valued quality indicators was derived from the main questionnaire survey. Interviews were carried out with pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers, so that the pupil-generated list could be discussed from the perspectives of samples of pupils, Heads of Schools and policymakers, so that the utilitarian potential of such a list could be explored since it was hoped that pupil voice in the role of an assessor would not be a one-off opportunity for Maltese pupils, it was felt important to explore the attitudes of those in the Maltese educational context to such a concept during the interviews.

The main findings of the study are presented in Fig 5.1
Fig 5.1 Diagrammatic Representation of the Main Findings

Top Three Quality Indicators of a Good School according to Pupils

1. Good teachers
2. A clean school
3. A good Head of School

All stakeholders agree with the concept of Pupil Voice in the Role of Assessor

However: Some adults expressed a concern about losing power in the process. Pupils and schools need to learn how to use this voice effectively and respectfully of one another.

Way forward for the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a good school:

Implemented in schools through the SDP (School Development Plan)

At Ministerial level: through policy-makers
At Directorate level: through the Quality Assurance Department
5.1.1 Participants’ Voices Illustrating Salient Points on the Main Theme of the Study

In this introductory section, a small sample of verbatim quotations from the interviews with different stakeholders is being presented, to give a glimpse into the tone which stakeholders adopted during the interviews. The quotations demonstrate the participants’ voices and illustrate the key points they raised about pupils in the role of assessors in Maltese schools. A pupil’s, a Head of School’s and a policy-maker’s comment are being cited as exemplars.

One of the pupils described his perspective on the concept of pupils as assessors, and his approval for the study:

In Malta, school is obligatory up to sixteen years, one has to take into consideration that since people spend sixteen years of their lives at school, they need to feel that they have some sort of control. That they have a voice and that there is someone ready to listen to them. Questionnaires such as these and the possibility, and the opportunity for pupils to evaluate schools, I agree very much with it. (S2 12/11/2015).

A Head of School justified pupils’ role as assessors by referring to their position in school:

I think that pupils are a great source of information and they’re a correct source of information. They are a great source of information because they are the people who are living the life of the school. So once they are living the life of the school, and they are on the receiving end or they are on the doing end, whatever they are, they are participating. Once they are participating, they are able to participate and even so evaluate. So I think that it is very advantageous that pupils are asked to assess and evaluate a school. (H3 15/3/2016).

One of the policy-leaders described the main hurdles to the implementation of the concept of pupils as assessors in schools:

Asking students to assess us helps us attain a better relationship together. The only hindrance is our preparation to this process, the preparation of students and the preparation amongst the community. How many leaders do we have, who are capable of cultivating that type of climate? How much are we teaching children to learn how to give constructive feedback? (PM3 8/7/2016).

The above excerpts from interviews with different stakeholders provide a snapshot of the participants’ voices. The interview data is presented and analysed further on the
chapter, in Section 5.5. The subsequent sections in this chapter present the data which was collected in the study. The analysed data is used to address each research question in turn.

5.2 The Main Research Question: From the Pupils’ Perspective, What are the Quality Indicators of a Good School in Malta?

The main research question was addressed through a questionnaire survey. 32 quality indicators of a good school were listed in the questionnaire, and pupils were asked to gauge the importance of each quality indicator. The final question was an open-ended one, and participants could add any other quality indicator which had not been listed in the questionnaire. Slightly more than half of the respondents chose to answer the open-ended question. Over two-thirds of the quality indicators listed in the questionnaire was derived from focus group activity sessions conducted with pupils; most of the rest were obtained from literature, two were related to recent reforms in the Maltese educational system, and one quality indicator on the importance of a green school was a personal preference of the researcher.

A total of 1618 pupils participated in the questionnaire. The data was collected from 31 different schools: 20 Primary schools and 11 Secondary schools. More Primary schools than Secondary schools had to be included in the study, since most of the Primary schools had a small pupil population to ensure a balance of Primary school pupils’ with Secondary school pupils’ representation in the data set. The overall response rate was 70.2%; 62.8% for Primary school pupils and 75.3% for Secondary school pupils. The response rate for this study was a relatively high rate; in fact, Baruch (1999) had analysed 141 academic papers, which included 175 different studies, and found that the average response rate for questionnaires was 55.6%. In the researcher’s opinion, the high response rate in the study was due to the theme, which appeals directly to pupils; the pupils could have seen the questionnaire as an opportunity to voice their opinion on what matters to them. In addition, since the
theme of the questionnaire was unlikely to be considered particularly sensitive or controversial, it might have made it easier to gain parents’/carers’ consent.

5.2.1 The Pupil-Generated List of the Quality Indicators of a Good School

Pupils were asked to rate the level of importance of 32 quality indicators whose origin has been outlined in the introduction to this section. The following bar chart shows how pupils completing the questionnaire ranked the quality indicators of a good school. The rating scale ranged from a minimum of 1 (lowest importance) to a maximum of 5 (highest importance).
Fig 5.2  Pupil-Generated List for the Quality Indicators of a Good School
The general statistics for the complete pupil-generated list of the 32 ranked Quality Indicators of a good school is displayed in the following table:

Table 5.1  General Statistics on Questionnaire Results: Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td>-3.915</td>
<td>21.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A clean school</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>.479</td>
<td>-3.463</td>
<td>17.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A good Head of School</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>.609</td>
<td>-3.403</td>
<td>14.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>A safe environment</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>.698</td>
<td>-2.585</td>
<td>7.941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.666</td>
<td>-2.394</td>
<td>7.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Respect between pupils</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.657</td>
<td>-2.412</td>
<td>8.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>.627</td>
<td>-2.002</td>
<td>6.338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Good Assistant heads of schools</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>.681</td>
<td>-2.234</td>
<td>6.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>-2.179</td>
<td>7.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Modern resources</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>-2.165</td>
<td>4.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.781</td>
<td>-2.104</td>
<td>5.398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>More learning opportunities</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td>-1.725</td>
<td>3.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Activities at school</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.765</td>
<td>-1.514</td>
<td>2.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>School outings</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>-1.314</td>
<td>1.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Pupils obtain high grades in examinations and tests</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.922</td>
<td>-1.456</td>
<td>2.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Lots of sports activities</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.922</td>
<td>-1.277</td>
<td>1.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>School lockers</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.985</td>
<td>-1.288</td>
<td>1.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Teachers continue studying</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.968</td>
<td>-1.109</td>
<td>1.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>A school hall</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>.843</td>
<td>-1.050</td>
<td>1.602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Setting or streaming</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.126</td>
<td>-1.203</td>
<td>.796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Having regular tests and examinations</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.114</td>
<td>-.980</td>
<td>.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>High expectations for pupils</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.067</td>
<td>-.820</td>
<td>.281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Boys and girls in the same class</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.315</td>
<td>-.647</td>
<td>-.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Parents participating in school</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.162</td>
<td>-.424</td>
<td>-.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobiles at school</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.621</td>
<td>-.406</td>
<td>-1.444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.540</td>
<td>-.179</td>
<td>-1.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.418</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>+1.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Having animals in school</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.511</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td>-1.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.391</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>-1.181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The rank order in the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators was obtained from the mean values of the quality indicators. In Fig 5.1 and in Table 5.1, the quality indicators are listed in descending order. The mean value of all the quality indicators was relatively high. The minimum rating was 1, and the maximum 5. For the first 23 quality indicators, the mean value was above 4.0; the lowest mean value was 2.9. The high mean values indicate pupils’ evaluation of what they consider positive attributes for a school.

The fourth column in the Table 5.1 lists the Standard Deviation for each quality indicator as an indication of how widely distributed the responses are. Quality indicators which had the least widely distributed responses (0.40 – 0.67) were also high ranking ones. This shows that there was strong agreement on the importance of these particular quality indicators. The least widely distributed responses were for the following quality indicators, starting with the least widely distributed:

- Good teachers (Rank order 1)
- A clean school (Rank order 2)
- A good Head of School (Rank order 3)
- A pleasant atmosphere at school (Rank order 8)
- Respect between pupils (Rank order 6).

Conversely, widely distributed responses tended to have low rank orders. The most widely distributed responses (standard deviation 1.35 – 1.60) were for the following quality indicators, starting with the most widely distributed:

- Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school (Rank order 28)
- Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms (Rank order 27)
- Having animals in school (Rank order 31)
- Secondary schools divided into Middle and Senior schools (Rank order 30)
- More time for lessons (Rank order 32).

This means that the pupils’ opinion was the most divided on the above five quality indicators.

The penultimate column in Table 5.1 shows the skewness for the responses for each quality indicator. In a normal distribution, if the values are plotted, a symmetrical
‘bell shaped curve’ is obtained. The skewness is a measure of the extent to which a distribution differs from a normal distribution. The skewness for a normal distribution is zero. If the skewness value is negative, it means that if the values are plotted, the tail on the curve’s left hand side is longer than the tail on the right-hand side. If the skewness value is positive, it means that the tail on the curve’s right-hand side is longer than the tail on the left-hand side (Von Hippel, 2011). As can be seen from Table 5.1, the skewness values are negative for all quality indicators, except for the last one. This means that for all of the quality indicators except for the last one, the higher values in the rating scale were favoured by the pupils. This fact is confirmed by the relatively high mean values obtained. In fact, the highest negative values for skewness, are for the top three ranking quality indicators:

- Good teachers (Rank order 1; skewness value -3.915)
- A clean school (Rank order 2; skewness value -3.463)
- A good Head of School (Rank order 3; skewness value -3.403).

The only quality indicator which does not show negative skewness is ‘More time for lessons’. This means that for this quality indicator, the responses were close to a symmetric distribution.

The last column in Table 5.1 displays the kurtosis values. Kurtosis is a measure of the size of a distribution’s tails. Positive kurtosis means heavy tails and heavy peakedness; and is indicative of many scores falling in the tail values. On the other hand, negative kurtosis means light tails and flatness; and is indicative of fewer score in the tails (DeCarlo, 1997). For the first 25 quality indicators in the ranking list, the kurtosis values are positive. This means that for the first 25 quality indicators, the tails in the distribution of response are heavier than a normal distribution and were closer to the mean; on the other hand, the quality indicators ranking 26 to 32 have a negative kurtosis value. This means that for these quality indicators, the tails are lighter than for a normal distribution indicating that a relatively higher proportion of pupils chose values which are further away from the mean. This indicates that the pupils’ responses were the most widely distributed on the quality indicators which were ranked 26 to 32. There was less divergence of opinion on the quality indicators which were ranked in the first 25 positions. This means that the pupils were agreeing
more on how to rate the quality indicators which were ranked in the first 25 positions, than the rest of the quality indicators. As can be seen from Table 5.1, this means that for the quality indicators which were ranked in the first 25 positions, there was convergence of pupils’ opinion on the relatively high importance of these quality indicators.

5.2.2 Results of the Open-ended Question in Questionnaire

The last question in the questionnaire was an open-ended question, and asked pupils ‘Is there something else which you think is important for a good’ school? What is it?’ 55.7% of the pupils chose to answer this question; 57.9% of primary school pupils and 54.5% of secondary school pupils replied. A total of 194 different suggestions were offered by pupils. The most popular suggestions are shown in the following bar chart:

Fig 5.3 Frequency of Most Popular Suggestions for the Open-ended Question
On comparing the 14 most popular suggestions listed in the above table, there are some obvious similarities with some of those quality indicators listed in the questionnaire notably ‘Better/more technological devices’ (Modern resources), ‘A cleaner school’ (A clean school), and ‘Controlled use of mobiles’ (Allowing pupils to use mobile phones), about which pupils would have already have responded with a ranking earlier in the questionnaire. Pupils might have included seemingly repeated indicators to: emphasise the issues they felt most important, to offer a particular opinion about these indicators beyond the way they had been worded, for example, by offering adjectives/adverbs, but may even have not registered fully that this issue had already been covered (which is always possible when relying on a remotely completed data collection tool in which the researcher cannot guarantee a respondents’ concentration on the task). There were also some additional suggestions which it was assumed were those which were highly important to the individual but they did not see as represented adequately in the 32 criteria. These might be specific issues, example, an absence of such a criteria or a recent issue related to a particular criteria but it was not possible to collect such contextual school or individual specific information, which limits the inference which can be made of their significance and generalisablity, Table 5.2 compares the pupils’ suggestions with the quality indicators in the questionnaire:
Table 5.2  Degree of Similarity between Pupils’ Suggestions and Quality Indicators in the Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Frequency (n=901)</th>
<th>Similarity to quality indicator in questionnaire</th>
<th>Quality indicator in questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better/ more technological devices</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Very similar/ identical</td>
<td>More modern resources (eg. Computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cleaner school</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td>A clean school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More sports</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lots of sports activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual wear/ comfortable uniform</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More rules/ Discipline</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Shows some similarity</td>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled use of mobiles</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better teaching</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner bathrooms</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>A clean school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More interesting or hand on activities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Shows no similarity</td>
<td>Activities at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer break</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuck shop sells better/ healthier/ cheaper food</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A shorter school day</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No bullying/ help for victims of bullying</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaters/ fans/ air conditioners</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Categories of suggestions**

The 194 suggestions put forward by pupils were grouped under 26 different categories. To reduce the data collected from the open-ended question, make it more manageable and reveal patterns and trends in the expressed views of pupils. The researcher derived the names of these categories inductively. For example, the most frequent the quality indicators grouped under the category ‘Activities’ were:

- More interesting outings
- School trips abroad
- Hands-on activities
• Activities in Malta (proposed by a Gozitan\textsuperscript{19} pupil).

The most frequent quality indicators grouped under the category ‘Physical resources’ were:

• Ramp for easier access
• Comfortable chairs
• Larger school yard
• New furniture

The following table shows the number of suggestions under each category and the total frequency of suggestions under each category. The categories are listed in descending order, according to the total frequency.

\textsuperscript{19} The questionnaire survey included schools in Gozo, which is a small island forming part of the Maltese archipelago.
Fig 5.4 Total Frequency under Each Category of Open-ended Responses
As can be seen from Fig 5.4, the category ‘Physical resources’ garnered the largest number of responses. The most frequent suggestion in this category was ‘A cleaner school’, which resonated with the highly ranked quality indicator in the main body of the survey. Other popular suggestions were: ‘A clean bathroom’ which also linked, although more specifically, with the importance of cleanliness. ‘Renovation in bathrooms’, ‘Heaters, fans and air conditioners’ were also offered, which relate to pupils’ views about schools needing to be comfortable. ‘A gymnasium’ was also offered which might relate to the criteria of there being ‘Activities at school’ and ‘Lots of sports activities’. This suggestion might be very school specific, depending on whether a gymnasium was present or not, but this information had not been collected and so no inference can be made.

The next most popular category was entitled ‘Perks’, and under this category the most popular suggestion concerned the use of mobile phones at school. 41 pupils out of 901 who chose to answer the open-ended question, suggested that mobile phones should be allowed during break-time and for emergencies. The next most popular suggestion under this category was about school uniforms, with 26 pupils proposing a more comfortable school uniform or casual wear for school. This is evidently an important issue for school children. The third most popular category was ‘Resources for Learning’. Under this category, 52 pupils, which represents the majority of the pupils in this category, suggested better and more technological devices. Other suggestions were: ‘A well maintained library’ and ‘Wifi at school’. The next most popular category was ‘Pupil behaviour’. Under this category, the most common suggestion focused on bullying. Other popular suggestions were: ‘More obedient pupils’ and ‘No fighting’. The fifth most popular category was ‘Curriculum’, with ‘More Physical Education and Sports lessons’ being the most frequent suggestion. Other popular suggestions under this category were ‘More drama lessons’ and ‘Wider subject choice’.
5.3 Research Question no 2: How Does the Pupils’ Judgement on what Constitutes a Good School Vary with:
  o Age
  o Gender
  o Socio-economic background
  o Academic attainment level?

To be able to answer the second research question, the questionnaire data was analysed in two ways:
  o Descriptive statistics
  o Factor analysis.

Descriptive statistics were used to obtain different perspectives on the pupil-generated lists of the quality indicators of a good school when questionnaire data which was segregated according to the four variables which were being identified as of value to examine. Additionally, factor analysis was used to analyse the variance in the questionnaire data, and analyse the effect of each variable on each factor. Supplementary data was provided in terms of the qualitative data collected from pupil interviews, to help in contextualising this survey-generated data.

5.3.1 Simple Statistics to Compare Differences in Pupils’ Responses according to the Four Variables being Studied

Comparing Differences due to Age

The study gathered feedback from two age groups: Year 4 pupils, aged 8; and Form 4 pupils, aged 14. The following table shows the different pupil-generated lists for the top ten quality indicators of a good school according to age. The quality indicators are colour coded for ease of reference. Quality indicators which do not feature on the list are shown in black.
### Table 5.3  Pupil-Generated Lists of the Top Ten Quality Indicators: Comparing Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>A clean school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 yrs</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form 4</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 yrs</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 5.3, 8 year olds and 14 year olds responded very similarly. Only the following differences can be noted:

- ‘Cooperation between teachers and pupils’ is not in the list of the top ten quality indicators generated by Year 4 pupils; instead they chose ‘A green school’. As will be discussed in the following chapter, in Maltese Primary schools there is a popular national green programme which is coordinated by a national NGO. The popularity of this green programme could have influenced Primary school pupils in their assessment.

- ‘Good behaviour from pupils’ is not in the list generated by Form 4 pupils; instead, they chose ‘Modern resources’ as a quality indicator. This change in pupils’ preference could mean that older pupils are more technologically engaged than younger ones since social media forms an important part of teenagers’ lives. One could also interpret the difference in priority as reflecting the reaction of younger and older pupils to ‘good behaviour’. Older pupils tend to be more ready to defy authority and challenge rules on behaviour; consequently they might consider ‘Good behaviour from pupils’ as less of a qualifier of a good school, than younger pupils would.
Comparing Differences due to Gender

The data gathered in the questionnaire survey was gathered from 20 Primary schools which were all co-ed schools, and 11 Secondary schools, which were all single-sexed schools. The following table shows the different pupil-generated lists for the top ten quality indicators of a good school, on comparing boys and girls. Similar to the previous table, quality indicators are colour coded and quality indicators which do not feature on the list with which they are being compared with, are shown in black.

Table 5.4 Pupil-Generated Lists of the Top Ten Quality Indicators: Comparing Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 5.4 shows, the boys’ and girls’ top ten quality indicators were very similar. The main difference is:

- Only boys chose ‘Modern resources’ as one of the top ten quality indicators; instead, girls chose ‘Good Assistant Heads of schools’. The difference in priority might be reflecting the male stereotypical preference for technological devices and female stereotypical tendency to value interpersonal relationships. The study did not collect data to explain conclusively the differences which were observed between girls’ and boys’ responses, and so only interpretations of data are possible.
Comparing Differences due to Socio-economic Background

The pupil population was segregated according to the selected indicators of socio-economic background. As discussed in Chapter 4, the parents’/carers’ skills level was taken as an indication of the socio-economic background of the pupil. Pupils were asked about their parents’/carers’ occupation and from this, the skill level was determined, according to ISCO-08 Skill level (International Organisation, 2012). The different socio-economic backgrounds were grouped into five levels\textsuperscript{20}, to include unemployed parents/ carers. The following table shows the different lists obtained for the top ten quality indicators of a good school when comparing the different socio-economic backgrounds. Similar to previous tables, quality indicators are colour coded and quality indicators which do not feature on the list with which they are being compared with, are shown in black.

\textsuperscript{20} 0= unemployed parents/guardians  
1= parents/ carers have a primary school level of education (1\textsuperscript{st} skill level)  
2= parents/ carers have a secondary school level of education (2\textsuperscript{nd} skill level)  
3= parents/ carers have a post-secondary level of education, below university level (3\textsuperscript{rd} skill level)  
4= parents/ carers have a university level of education (4\textsuperscript{th} skill level).
Table 5.5  Pupil-Generated Lists of the Top Ten Quality Indicators: Comparing Socio-Economic Backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic Background</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 0 Unemployed</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Skills level Primary level of education</td>
<td>A safe environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Skills level Secondary level of education</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Skills level Secondary level of education</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Skills Level University level of education</td>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 5.5, on comparing groups of pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds, very similar results are obtained. The group of pupils which deviated the most from the rest, was that having parents/carers who are unemployed. Unlike other groups, this group did not choose the quality indicators: ‘Pupils respect teachers’ and ‘Good Assistant heads of school’; instead, this group chose the quality indicators: ‘Modern resources’ and ‘Activities at school’ amongst the top ten quality indicators. This group of pupils demoted the quality indicator ‘A good Head of School’ to the 10th place; whereas it was ranked at 3rd place by pupils from other socio-economic backgrounds. Another difference was in the list generated by pupils having parents/carers who have a Primary level of education (1st skill level), this group of pupils included the quality indicators: ‘More learning opportunities’ and ‘Discipline in schools’ amongst the top ten quality indicators of a good school.
The main inference that can be made from the above data is that pupils of unemployed parents and of parents having only a primary level of education, tend to assess the qualities of a good school somewhat differently from pupils coming from other socio-economic backgrounds. The former’s priority to ‘Modern resources’ and ‘Activities at school’ could be interpreted as the pupils’ preference for activities and opportunities which might be lacking at home. This group’s relative low ranking to the quality indicator ‘A good Head of School’ could be interpreted in many ways. The data collected in the study is not rich enough to explain this difference; possibly this group of pupils feels more detached from the authoritative and probably socio-economically alien (for such a group of pupils) figure of the ‘Head of School’. The priority of pupils having parents having only a Primary school level of education to the quality indicators: ‘More learning opportunities’ and ‘Discipline in schools’ could be a reflection of the influence of adults at home, who might be viewing education as the key to a better life for their children.

Comparing Differences due to Academic Attainment Levels

Pupils were grouped according to their academic attainment level\textsuperscript{21}; this data was only available for Secondary school pupils. and, The following table represents the different lists obtained for the top ten quality indicators of a good school when comparing different academic attainment levels. Similar to previous tables, quality indicators are colour coded.

\textsuperscript{21} Secondary school pupils follow different ‘track’ programmes in the core subjects: Maltese, English and Mathematics, according to their academic ability. The total track level in the core subjects was used as a measure of academic attainment level. Pupils were grouped under five academic attainment levels: 1 to 5, with level 5 being the highest academic attainment level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-economic Background</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(lowest level)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(highest level)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 5.6, the main difference that can be noted is in the pupil-generated list by pupils having an academic attainment level of 1 (lowest academic level); only this list included the following quality indicators:

- Lots of sports activities
- Activities at school
- Boys and girls in the same class.

This research did not collect data which could offer explanations for the differences noted above. One possible interpretation could be that non-academic activities (as articulated in the quality indicators: ‘Lots of sports activities’ and ‘Activities at school’) give a greater sense of satisfaction, and hence are more important to pupils who have a relatively low academic attainment level. The quality indicator ‘Boys and
girls in the same class’ might be perceived to be detached from pupils’ academic attainment ability, and maybe this fact encouraged pupils having the lowest academic attainment level to choose this quality indicator.

**Analysis of Categories of Quality Indicators**

To be able to a synthesis of the data from the 32 quality indicators listed in the questionnaire, the quality indicators were grouped by the researcher, under ten categories; as shown in Table 5.7.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A good Head of School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Assistant Heads of Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clean school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A school hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School lockers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents participating in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A green school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting or streaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils respect teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations for pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect between pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School outings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of sports activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and the Quality of Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers continue studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having regular tests and examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils obtain high grades in examinations and tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having animals in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys and girls in the same class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school divided into a Middle school and a Senior school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To be able to compare how segregated pupil populations rated the different categories of quality indicators, the mean value for each category was calculated. This was first carried out on the total pupil population (overall result). Then the mean value for each category was calculated for segregated groups within the sample. The following groups and sub-groups are listed in the table:

*Age* - grouped into Primary and Secondary school pupils

*Gender* - grouped into boys and girls

*Socio-economic background* - grouped into 5 sub-groups\(^{22}\)

*Academic attainment level* - grouped into 5 sub-groups\(^{23}\).

Table 5.8 shows the mean values for the overall result for each category in descending order, and the mean values for each category in the segregated groups.

\(^{22}\) 0= unemployed parents/guardians

1= parents/ carers have a primary school level of education (1\(^{st}\) skill level)

2= parents/ carers have a secondary school level of education (2\(^{nd}\) skill level)

3= parents/ carers have a post-secondary level of education, below university level (3\(^{rd}\) skill level)

4= parents/ carers have a university level of education (4\(^{th}\) skill level).

\(^{23}\) Secondary school pupils follow different 'track' programmes in the core subjects: Maltese, English and Mathematics, according to their academic ability. The total track level in the core subjects was used as a measure of academic attainment level. Pupils were grouped under five academic attainment levels: 1 to 5, with level 5 being the highest academic attainment level.
Table 5.8  Categories and Overall Mean Values for Segregated Pupil Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Overall Mean Value</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Socio – Economic Background</th>
<th>Academic Attainment Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prim</td>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Activities</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and the Quality of learning</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perks</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing Age and Gender

As can be seen from Table 5.7, the mean score values of Primary and Secondary school pupils for the category ‘Physical resources’ were identical. For the rest of the categories, except for ‘Perks’, Primary school pupils gave a higher score than Secondary school pupils. The largest difference between boys’ and girls’ responses was for the category ‘School organisation’. There were relatively smaller differences for the other categories.

Comparing Socio-economic backgrounds

On comparing the mean score values of each category with the different socio-economic backgrounds, no particular trend became evident although an observation can be made from Table 5.7 that, for pupils from Socio-economic background 0 (i.e. parents/carers are unemployed), there was a tendency for pupils to score lower mean values for a number of categories. In fact, on comparison with the overall mean score value, pupils from Socio-economic background 0, scored lower values for seven out of ten categories; the categories were:

- School leadership
- Discipline
- Physical resources
- School climate
- Teachers and the Quality of learning
- Perks
- School organisation.

The difference between the overall mean score value and the mean score value for pupils from Socio-economic background 0, was particularly high for the ‘Perks’ category. In fact, whereas the overall mean value was 3.21, for pupils from Socio-economic background 0, the mean value was 2.99. The ‘Perks’ category included: ‘Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school’, ‘Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms’ and ‘Having animals in school’. One possible interpretation could be that pupils from the lowest socio-economic background might not welcome initiatives
which further highlight their economic disadvantage, such as mobile phones and casual wear.

Comparing Academic Attainment Level

On comparing the pupils’ academic attainment level and the mean scores for the different categories, a number of patterns become evident. For seven categories, the mean score value tends to increase as the academic attainment level increases. For three categories, the reverse is true. Fig 5.5 and Fig 5.6 display the trends in pupils’ responses.

Fig 5.5  Trends in Academic Attainment Levels and Seven Categories of Quality Indicators
As can be seen from Fig 5.5 and Fig 5.6, there is a clear tendency for the mean score value to increase as the academic attainment level increases, in the following categories:

- School leadership
- Discipline
- Resources for learning
- Physical resources
- School climate
- Assessment
- Teachers and the Quality of teaching.
On the other hand, another tendency is evident; in the following categories, the mean score value decreases as the academic attainment level increases:

- School activities
- ‘Perks’
- School organisation.

The trends illustrated in Figs 5.5 and 5.6 reinforce the traditional idea that pupils having a relatively high academic attainment level tend to embrace the traditional school culture (which is depicted in the categories shown in Fig 5.5). On the other hand, pupils having a relatively high academic attainment level attach less importance to school qualities which do not directly fall under the academic remit (as depicted in the categories shown in Fig 5.6).

5.4 Factor Analysis

Since the data set was large, factor analysis was used as a statistical method to analyse the variance in the data. Through factor analysis, three factors were extracted. The researcher derived the names of the factors inductively, from the common features of the quality indicators under each group. (Refer to Appendix 11 for details on factor analysis). The following tables list the quality indicators under each factor:
### Table 5.9  Factor 1: Learning and School Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1: Learning and School Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clean school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good Head of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A green school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils respect teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Assistant heads of schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect between pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5.10  Factor 2: Achieving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 2: Achieving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents participating in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having regular tests and examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations for pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school(^{24})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils obtain high grades in examinations and tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms(^{25})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{24}\) and \(^{25}\) As explained in Section 4.10.3, the Quality Indicators: 'Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school' and 'Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms' had shown a negative correlation in factor analysis and subsequently, they were reversed coded.
Table 5.11  Factor 3: Doing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 3: Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School outings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of sports activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having animals in school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three factors describe different facets of school life. The extraction of the factors in itself shows that there was a pattern in pupils’ responses; pupils tended to assess the individual quality indicators comprising each factor in a similar manner. Through further factor analysis, the effect of each pupil variable could be studied in relation with each individual factor.

_The effect of the pupil variables on the factor scores_

Calculations were carried out to determine the influence, if any, of the pupil variables: age, gender and socio-economic background, on the factor scores. Comparative analysis of mean score values was used to work out the type of influence. (Refer to Appendix 11.4 for details). Table 5.12 summarises the results:
Table 5.12  The Influence of Pupil Variables on the Factor Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil variable</th>
<th>Factor 1 Learning and School Climate</th>
<th>Factor 2 Achieving</th>
<th>Factor 3 Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Boys &lt; Girls</td>
<td>Boys &gt; Girls</td>
<td>Boys &gt; Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic background</td>
<td>Pupils having unemployed parents gave this factor the lowest score</td>
<td>No influence</td>
<td>No influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic attainment level</td>
<td>Positive correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>Negative correlation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: > scored higher overall mean score value i.e. rated the factor as being more important  
< scored lower overall mean score value i.e. rated the factor as being less important

On amalgamating the outcomes of the simple statistics and the factor analysis, the main effects of the four pupil variables on pupils’ assessment are obtained. Fig 5.7 summarises the main effects of the four variables on pupils’ assessment:
The above concludes the presentation of the data collected from the questionnaire survey and draws to an end the data collected in Phase 1 of the research. As explained earlier, this research followed a sequential design, within a Mixed Methods Research design, and the data was gathered in three Phases:
1. Pre-Phase: focus group activity sessions and pilot interviews with Heads of Schools
2. Phase 1: the main questionnaire survey
3. Phase 2: interviews with pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers.

Each phase led and informed the consecutive phase. The next section presents the findings from Phase 2 of the research: the data collected from the interviews. This data was used to answer the third research question.

5.5 Research Question no 3: What are the Perspectives of Pupils, Heads of Schools, and Policy-makers, on:
   o Pupils’ role as assessors?
   o The pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school?

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three sets of stakeholders: pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers, to find out the different stakeholders’ reactions to the main findings of the questionnaire survey, and their attitudes to the concept of pupils in the role of assessors. Five group interviews were carried out with pupils. One-to-one interviews were carried out with five Heads of Schools, three of which were Heads in Primary schools and two of which were Heads in Secondary schools. A final set of one-to-one interviews were carried out with policy-makers. The interviews were sequential, with one set of interviews informing the next. (Refer to Appendices 3.2, 3.3 and 4.4 for interview schedules). During the interviews, interviewees were asked whether they agree with the rank order of the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, their opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of pupils acting as assessors of schools, and their ideas for the way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. Fig 5.8 presents a flow chart summarising the sequence of interview data collection:
5.5.1 Results of Group Interviews with Pupils

Group interviews were carried out with five Student Councils: two in Primary schools and three in Secondary schools. A total of 47 pupils participated: 31 boys and 16 girls. The recorded interviews were first transcribed. The interview data were analysed through coding. As explained in detail in Section 4.10.4, through coding, units of interview data were named and systematically listed (Newby, 2010). To analyse the interview data, Lichtman’s (2006:167) three Cs of coding technique was used: “from Coding to Categorizing to Concepts” The following chart lists the main codes under the main categories:
Fig 5.9  Main Categories and Main Codes Extracted from Pupils’ Interview Data

Agreement with the concept of pupils as assessors
- Pupils are the ones experiencing what is happening in schools
- For school improvement
- Could help motivate pupils
- So that adults would know what we think

Limitations of pupils as assessors
- There is a possibility that the suggestions are not taken up and nothing happens
- Pupils might suggest things which cannot be implemented
- There might be lack of agreement on ideas

Priority of Quality Indicators
- Agreement with ranking of first three quality indicators
- Low ranking for splitting of secondary schools because pupils do not want to be separated from their friends
- ‘More time for lessons’ should have a higher ranking because a lot of studying is a must

Power and Pupil Voice as Assessor
- Pupils feel they have some form of control over their school
- Adults should choose the best ideas (from the pupil-generated list) and see what can be improved in schools
- Pupil voice as assessor could become an end in itself

Gender issues
- Boys are more interested in technology
- Boys enjoy digital games more

Differences between Primary and Secondary schools
- Younger pupils are more interested in environmental issues
- In Secondary schools, technological games replace the hands-on games of Primary schools
- Content is more difficult at Secondary level and technology could help pupils understand the content

Importance of modern resources
- Technology helps pupils to understand lessons
- Older pupils use technology for research
- Technology helps Secondary pupils engage during lessons

Way forward for pupil-generated list
- The list should be changed according to the needs of the individual school
- The Head of School should implement it
- Most popular ideas should be implemented
- List should be shown to Education Department/Minister of Education
A number of themes emerged from the pupils’ interview data; these are discussed in further depth below.

*The role of pupils as assessors*

All the participants agreed with the concept of pupils as assessors in schools. They argued that pupils have inside knowledge of schools and that they are the ones to benefit from changes in schools. Pupils cited various reasons to justify the role of pupils as assessors of schools: they said that parents and teachers could get to know what and how pupils think. They said that it would make pupils feel that someone is ready to listen to them. They said that they would feel that they have some control over their school. On the other hand, according to the participants in the group interviews, the main disadvantage of pupils as assessors, is that there is no obligation to implement the ideas proposed by the pupils. They also said that some of the ideas might be impossible to implement in practice. Another disadvantage which was cited was that there might be lack of agreement between pupils’ ideas.

The verbatim quotations cited in Fig 5.10 illustrate the feelings of pupils and their justifications for pupil voice as assessor. The following key was used to code the quotations:

P1-P2 = Primary school pupil in Primary School 1-2
S1-S3 = Secondary school pupil in Secondary School 1-3.

The date when the interview was carried out is shown after the code.
The pupils’ comments show that they feel that as pupils they have a right to assess schools. According to the perspective of P2 (1st quote), some pupils are aware that they have a right which stems from the fact that, ultimately, pupils have knowledge which is exclusive- because they are experiencing everything that is happening at school. In addition, they also appreciate that they are at the receiving end of initiatives taken in schools (S3), and, according to the pupils’ opinion, this also gives them the right to pass judgement on what is happening at school. One of the pupils (P2, 3rd quote) refers to the fact that, by being able to contribute more to the school, pupils will be able to engage more substantially and to feel a sense of ownership. One of the pupils (P2, 2nd quote) expressed the idea that as a result of placing pupils in the role of assessors, schools provide themselves with evidence of how to improve which will have benefits for pupils in terms of their motivation and academic outcomes. Unanimously, pupils showed a very positive reaction to the concept of pupils as assessors, and the quotations cited above illustrate this.
The top three Quality Indicators

Pupils were in agreement with the top three quality indicators of a good school, which had emerged from the questionnaire survey, namely:

- Good teachers
- A clean school
- A good Head of School.

One of the participants argued that ‘A good Head of School’ should rank higher than ‘A clean school’ since the latter automatically follows from the first. Pupils were asked to elaborate and offer justifications for the top ranking quality indicators. The following verbatim quotations describe some of the explanations offered by pupils:

Fig 5.11 Quotations from Group Interviews with Pupils: Justifications for the Top Three Quality Indicators

- **Without good teachers, you won’t have a good education.**
  
  S2 12/11/2015

- **I agree that you should have good teachers because when it is time for lessons, you feel more comfortable to learn.**
  
  S1 10/12/2015 (1st quote)

- **A school should be clean because students want their school to be the best.**
  
  P1 4/12/2015

- **I agree because if you have a good Head of School, teachers will be led in a good way.**
  
  S1 10/12/2015 (2nd quote)
The pupils’ comments in Fig 5.11 expand further on the top three quality indicators. The key role of the teacher in the educational experience is expressed by S2 who succinctly said “Without good teachers, you won’t have a good education.” This comment shows an appreciation for the role that a ‘good’ teacher has in setting an effective tone for their learning. Pupil P1 commented on the quality indicator which was ranked in the second position: ‘A clean school’, offering some insight into why this might be important. In this quote they refer to a sense of pride they wish to feel about their school, although there may be alternative interpretations which could be revealed from further research. Pupil S1 commented on the importance of a good Head of School which shows that, even though pupils might not have direct contact with school leaders, they appreciate their role in the wider school and on their teachers. This offers an insight into the wide-ranging, and potentially untapped, perspective of pupils.

The ranking position of the Quality Indicators

Although there was total agreement with the ranking of the top three quality indicators, there was less agreement with the ranking of the last three quality indicators. There was a general consensus on the low ranking of ‘Having animals at school’, with allergies being quoted as the main reason for its low rating. Opinions were mixed on ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools’; some pupils argued that pupils would not want to be separated from their friends in other year groups and that they would not like to be reallocated to a new school after only two years of secondary schooling. On the other hand, other pupils argued that it might help decrease bullying and it could help protect younger and more vulnerable pupils from older ones who might be rougher physically. Another reason cited in favour of the division of secondary schooling, was, that it might help the higher forms focus more on their academic studies and their Ordinary Level examinations. There was lack of agreement on the rank order of ‘More time for lessons’. Some pupils said that it did not warrant such a low ranking; they argued that a lot of studying is needed to be successful.
Pupils were asked to offer ideas to explain why Secondary school pupils rated ‘Modern resources’ more highly than Primary school pupils. Pupils said that older pupils use technology for research. One of the participants said that in Primary schools, teachers include practical games during lessons, in Secondary schools these are replaced by technological games. Pupils said that modern resources help older pupils engage more during lessons, they help Secondary school pupils understand the relatively more difficult lesson content, and that they help older pupils use their brains more. Pupils praised ‘Modern resources’ as a quality indicator in schools and listed a number of advantages of modern resources: modern resources increase efficiency, they reduce the physical load, some pupils prefer reading a book on a Kindle than as a hard copy, they can help disabled pupils and that modern resources are needed for a school to be modern.

Pupils were asked to offer ideas to explain why Primary school pupils rated ‘A green school’ more highly than Secondary school pupils. One of the pupils attributed this to the fact that Primary schools prepare pupils for life whereas Secondary schools are more focused on academic performance. Another reason which was suggested was that in Primary schools there is more emphasis on Ekoskola26. Pupils offered various ideas on the rank order of a number of the quality indicators. One of the pupils said that ‘Setting or streaming’ was ranked in a low position because no one wants to be in the worst class. Some pupils argued that this quality indicator should have a higher rank order because low achieving pupils hold other pupils back during a lesson. One of the pupils suggested that ‘Good assistant heads of schools’ ranked relatively low because when pupils have a problem they go directly to the Head of school. Another pupil argued that ‘Modern resources’ are more important than ‘Good assistant heads of schools’ because assistant heads are in charge of the managerial and not the educational aspect of schools. One of the pupils said that ‘Co-ed classes’ have no influence on whether a school is good or not since being co-ed in a class will not change the way a pupil thinks during a lesson. Another pupil argued that ‘Good behaviour from pupils’ and ‘Cooperation between teachers and pupils’ should be given a higher ranking since they are a prerequisite for learning.

26 Ekoskola is a national programme promoting, monitoring and supporting green initiatives in schools  Source: http://www.ekoskola.org.mt/
Power and Pupil Voice as Assessor

In the pupils’ responses, the theme of power in pupil voice, was a recurrent theme, at times implicitly, at other times more explicitly. When giving justifications for pupil voice as assessors, pupils were quick to cite the intrinsic authority in such a voice, because, according to them, pupils are the ones experiencing school-life. On the other hand, some pupils were less sure of the authority of such a voice when asked about the way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. The following verbatim quotations show the diverse opinions on the power in pupil voice:
Fig 5.12 Quotations from Group Interviews with Pupils: Power and Pupil Voice as Assessor

Opinions are gathered and nothing is done about it.
S3 16/11/2015

You are more adult than us, it means you are more mature. So you should choose what is best.
P1 4/12/2015

The Head, or who is in charge of schools, sees what is best and implements it.
S1 10/12/2015

They are implementing small things but they are not implementing things which bring real change for us. For example, they say it costs a lot of money, so they try, but they cannot implement most things. So they say they are listening to us instead.
S2 12/11/2015

Pupils’ comments in Fig 5.12 show that pupils are aware of the limitations of power in their pupil voice. The comment of Pupil S3 above, voices an accusation towards school, which can be interpreted that this pupil is considering pupil’s contribution as a form of tokenistic participation, decoration, or even manipulation (as depicted on the lower rungs of Hart’s ladder of participation). Further discussions with pupils would have been needed to have explored their experiences and aspirations further. Even when schools might consider they are valuing pupil voice, this implies that pupils are not easily fooled; as Pupil S3 has shown, pupils able to report that they are not satisfied with the mere expression of voice. This study has provided evidence that Maltese pupils want a voice which has power. It is not enough for adults in a school to listen; this has to be followed by concrete action. Pupil S2 also refers to tokenistic forms of participation in schools; however, the pupil does not blame the
school for not bringing about change. Pupil S2 refers to the limited funds which the
school has, and in his comments says that the school tries to placate pupils by
listening. The listening act is the end of the pupil voice process. Pupil S2, similar to
Pupil S3 wants more. These pupils illustrate how Maltese pupils, at least those in
Student Councils, report that they want their voices to carry more weight; they want
a higher level of participation and influence. S1 and S3 are Secondary school pupils,
and so their age might make them expect more from schools; they are expecting to be
treated as more mature, and as having more significant voices.

However, the comments of Pupils P1 and S1 might be interpreted as a more
submissive approach. They express that they want to have a say in schools, would
appreciate the chance to assess schools, but then they expect adults will make the
final decisions. Pupil P1 appears to express full trust in adults at school, which might
be explained by the fact that this pupil is a Primary school pupil, whereas Pupil S1, a
Secondary school pupil, more cautiously concedes the power to decide what to
implement from the pupil-generated list, to the Head of School or to some other
person who is in charge of the school. The comments made by pupils P1 and S1
indicate that, although they want pupils to have a voice as assessors, they are
proposing that power is shared between adults and pupils.

The way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good
school

During the group interviews, pupils said that the list should be implemented at a
school level. In addition, the majority said that the list should be adjusted before
being implemented. Some participants suggested that the list should be adjusted by
adults, or by the Education department, or by other pupils. Other suggestions on the
way forward included showing the list to the Minister of Education, to the Head of
school, to teachers, or to pupils. There seemed to be a consensus that the better, or
the more popular, ideas should be implemented. One of the participants suggested
that the ideas in the list should first be implemented in a number of pilot schools,
then after a trial period, the quality of teaching in those schools should be evaluated.
The following verbatim quotations exemplify the responses which were given:
The pupils’ comments represented in Fig 5.13 propose different ways how the pupil-generated list could be implemented in schools. One of the pupils, S3 (2nd quote) shows an awareness of the hierarchy in the Maltese educational system in terms of identifying the Minister of Education as the ultimate holder of influence in the quality of schools. This statement expresses a desire for their voice, as part of the pupil-generated list, to be seen by the Minister to actualise the necessary changes. This pupil is effectively advocating the highest power to the pupil voice as conveyed through the list- from the pupils to the Minister. Pupil S3 (1st quote) suggests using the current pupils’ voice in informing future school development in new schools. A new school presumably brings with it the promise of a new beginning, a new style of school setting and school ethos, hence this pupil can be interpreted as equating the
list with a welcome, fresh approach in schools. Another pupil, S2, proposes that pupils’ views should trigger in the system an opportunity for evidence-informed research and an element of re-evaluation. This raises the question as to how effective might the pupil-generated list be in bringing about positive changes in schools. This pupil suggests a sort of pilot test for the list. This would see pupils’ evaluation of schools (such as in the pupil-generated list) as being implemented in a number of schools, and then these schools are re-evaluated, so that the effect of the list on the schools can be measured. This pupil is cautious in his approach, implying that measurable criteria on the value that the quality indicators in the pupil-generated list, would be useful to develop for use in schools. This implies that pupils are thinking critically and analytically. The pupils’ suggestions illustrated in Fig 5.13 offer food for thought for adults. The suggestions are specific and practical, and could feasibly be implemented in schools.

The present status of Pupil Voice as perceived by pupils

Pupils were asked to gauge, how they perceive the status of pupil voice in schools, from 0 (lowest rating) to 10 (highest rating). Table 5.13 summarises the results:

Table 5.13 Present Status of Pupil Voice, as Perceived by Pupils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Code for school</th>
<th>No of pupils</th>
<th>Average age of pupils</th>
<th>Average Score for Pupil Voice</th>
<th>Overall average Score for Pupil Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>P2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>S3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 5.13, the average score for pupil voice, awarded by Secondary school pupils, was lower than the average value awarded by Primary
school pupils. The secondary school S3, may be considered as an outlier, since its average score for pupil voice, was relatively very low. It is appreciated that understanding the context of the Secondary school S3 would have been helpful for the reader, however since the number of secondary schools in each college is very small, providing any contextual information about the school would be tantamount to revealing its identity.

The values shown in Table 5.13, on the status of pupil voice in Maltese schools as perceived by pupils, have to be interpreted within the limitations of the study: for practical reasons, this data was collected from a small number of schools, and the group interviews were conducted with Student Councils. This means that, effectively, the perception of a selected group of pupils is being summarised in Table 5.13.

5.5.2 Results of Interviews with Heads of Schools

One-to-one interviews were carried out with five Heads of Schools to gather an insight into the views of pupils as assessors: three were Heads of Primary schools and two were Heads of Secondary schools. Besides being asked on the rank order on the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, and on their attitudes to asking pupils to assess schools, Heads of Schools were asked on the variables which influenced pupils’ assessment. The pupils’ ideas which emerged from the group interviews with Student Councils, on the way forward for the pupil-generated list of quality indicators, were discussed with Heads of Schools. (Refer to Appendix 3.3 for the Interview Schedule). Fig 5.14 lists the main codes under each main category:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Agreement with the concept of pupils as assessors | • The school should listen to pupil voice  
• Pupils offer a unique perspective  
• Pupils are our customers  
• Pupil voice should be one out of many voices |
| Limitations of pupils as assessors            | • Pupils need to be guided on how to express pupil voice  
• Pupils may not be as critical as we would like them to be  
• Pupils may be overly influenced by their personal experience and biases |
| Priority of Quality Indicators                | • Agreement with top three quality indicators  
• Pupils have different types of intelligences and so rank quality indicators differently  
• Modern resources are overrated |
| Power and Pupil Voice as Assessor             | • Pupil voice has no influence on the decisions taken by adults  
• Adults are afraid of losing power  
• Student Councils are only involved in fund-raising activities but not in decision-making |
| Gender issues                                 | • Boys are more interested in technology  
• Boys learn more by doing  
• Girls are more focused on learning  
• Boys are more ambitious and so more focused on achieving |
| Differences between Primary and Secondary schools | • The Primary school set up makes it easier to participate in green activities  
• Older pupils might be more rebellious and so less inclined towards Learning factor scores |
| Effect of socio-economic background           | • The value parents give to education is not necessarily tied to socio-economic background  
• Unemployed parents cannot afford modern resources and so, at school, their children appreciate them more |
| Effect of academic attainment level           | • High academic achievers prefer traditional lessons and believe that non-academic activities are a waste of time  
• High academic achievers value learning more and hence gave higher scores to the Learning factor |
| Way forward for pupil-generated list          | • The list should be discussed and implemented through the SDP (school development plan)  
• The list should be shown to the SMT (Senior Management Team), Minister of Education, teachers, parents and children |
| Criticism on the study                        | • Positive: The study is a great way to assess schools through pupils/ Interesting study/ Useful study/ Gives voice to pupils  
• Negative: The study ignores the individual realities of schools/ relies on perceptions, which are not necessarily true/ the size of a school/ and 'vocational training' were not listed as quality indicators in the questionnaire |
The following subsections discuss the main themes which were explored during the interviews with the Heads of Schools.

*The role of pupils as assessors*

All the Heads of Schools agreed with the concept of pupils as assessors. They offered various justifications for this:

- Pupils are an accurate/valid source of information
- Schools are for pupils and so their views should be considered
- Pupils are a great tool for assessing learning
- The feedback from pupils can lead to changes which promote better performance from pupils.

Two of the Heads of Schools which were interviewed pointed out that pupils need to be guided on how to express pupil voice; one of these Heads explained that pupils need to know exactly why the school is asking them questions and that it should be communicated clearly to them that the main purpose of the exercise is to improve the school. One of the Heads of Schools (H2) said that, for him, pupils always come first, and teachers come second. He said that teachers in his school understood this. He called pupils “the most important asset the school has”. He referred to the physical building of his school, which is very old and has become inadequate to the needs of a school at this day and age, and said that the school building was irrelevant because the pupils make the school and not the building. The Head of School’s comment could be interpreted as a reminder that the focus on pupils’ participation in school could be at the core of school life, independent from all other factors, and that weaknesses in other aspects of school-life should not impinge on the school’s commitment to actively involve pupils in the decision-making process at school.

One of the Heads of Schools said that one should listen to what the pupil is saying, but decisions have to be taken in a mature manner. He referred to the idea of pupils asking for a swimming pool, as an example of an extravagant request which pupils could make, but would need to be censored by adults. Ironically, two months later, when interviewing another Head of School, it transpired that the Student Council in the second school, had, in fact, asked for a swimming pool. The Student Council in
the second school had been asked to contribute ideas to the building of a new school. The pupils had requested a swimming pool, but they did not stop there. They substantiated the feasibility of their request by referring to another school in the vicinity which had a swimming pool, and they also offered ideas on how the swimming pool could be used by the wider community after school hours. The pupils’ request for a swimming pool was accepted, and the building plans for the new school now include a swimming pool.

The verbatim quotations shown in Fig 5.15 capture the different justifications for pupil voice as assessor, put forward by Heads of Schools. The following key was used to code the quotations:

H1 – H3 = Head of School in a Primary school
H4 - H5 = Head of School in a Secondary school

The date when the interview was carried out is shown after the code.
Fig 5.15 Quotations from Interviews with Heads of Schools: Agreement with the Concept of Pupils as Assessors

*Children have a lot to offer. Maybe we call them young adults. They are persons, they are human beings, with their feelings. They have a lot to give. They have a lot to give. In school visits and in Student Council, I am flabbergasted with the ideas. Wow, what ideas! How come I did not think about it!*

H2 13/4/2016 (1st quote)

*Pupils are a great source of information and they’re a correct source of information....they are the people who are living the life of the school.*

H3 15/3/2016

*Listening, not hearing. Listening to what the children have to say, is the way forward.*

H2 13/4/2016 (2nd quote)

*They are our direct clients, education is affecting them, and they can evaluate the service.*

H5 16/3/2016

*For everything which is being planned, or to indicate whether a school is on the right track or not, I think pupil voice ought to be taken into consideration.... It should be one out of many voices.*

H4 15/2/2016

*The eyes of the children see things, which we are seeing but we are not aware that we are seeing them.*

H2 13/4/2016 (4th quote)

*It is futile to make policies and then we ignore the student.....What you do in school, if you do not take into consideration what the students are saying, everything will fail.*

H2 13/4/2016 (3rd quote)
As can be seen from Fig 5.15, Heads of Schools justified their agreement in general with the concept of pupils as assessors, by referring to the intrinsic value they placed on pupil voice. Heads of Schools H2 and H3, recognised pupils’ unique perspective, which might not otherwise be accessible to adults. They considered that pupils were potentially a source of knowledge about a school because of their lived experience and personal perspective. Head of School, H2 (1st quote) refers to pupils’ insightfulness and creativity, and to how their contribution can be a positive one and in some ways, superior to the adult’s contribution. Furthermore, Head of School, H2 (2nd quote) distinguishes between ‘listening’ and ‘hearing’ pupil voice. His comments resonate with what pupils S3 and S2 had said (as shown in Fig 5.12): “Opinions are gathered and nothing is done about it” (S3) and: “They are implementing small things but they are not implementing things which bring real change for us ..........So they say they are listening to us instead” (S2). Head of School, H2 recognises that it easier for schools to ‘hear’ rather than to ‘listen’; he is justifying the criticism made by pupils S2 and S3. The Head of School, H2 is reminding us that for things to change, schools must ‘listen’ to pupils.

In different ways, the key position of the pupil in school is used as a justification for the concept of pupils in the role of assessors. Head of School, H2, places the pupil potentially at the hub of all the school’s efforts because they report recognising that the pupil intrinsically merits this position. On the other hand, Head of School H5, recognises the pupil’s rights to assess schools, because according to him they are the school’s “clients”. This notion of a client-provider relationship between the pupil and the school is further discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. According to Head of School H5, the pupil, as a client, has a right to assess the service being provided by the provider: the school. In a more balanced view, Head of School H4, refers to the notion that pupil voice as an assessor, should not be ‘the’ voice but one out of a multitude of voices which had a valid role. This reference to pupil voice not being an exclusive voice was also referred to by pupils P1 and S1 (Fig 5.12) who had included adults in the practical application of the pupil-generated list. It appears that Head of School H4, and pupils P1 and S1 are agreeing that pupil voice is a significant voice which should be contextualised within the reality of other voices in a school.
There was general agreement on the ranking of the top three quality indicators, except for the quality indicator ‘A clean school’. Two Heads of Schools said that, personally, they would not have ranked it so highly, but they could understand why the pupils did. Another two Heads of Schools explained that they could appreciate why pupils ranked ‘Good teachers’ as the top quality indicator of a good school as pupils are in contact mostly with teachers. They described different attributes of a good teacher: respects pupils, cares for pupils, maintains good discipline, has a good rapport with pupils, interlinks and integrates subjects together. The following verbatim quotations exemplify the Heads of Schools’ ideas on the top three quality indicators:

Fig 5.16 Quotations from interviews with Heads of Schools: The Top Three Quality Indicators

1st Quality Indicator: Good teachers

*Because the student is in contact, mostly, with teachers.*

H4 15/2/2016 (1st quote)

2nd Quality Indicator: A clean school

*It (a clean school) is a sign of respect towards pupils.*

H5 16/3/2016

3rd Quality Indicator: A good Head of School

*A Head can build a school, or he can ruin a school.*

H4 15/2/2016 (2nd quote)
Each quotation cited in Fig 5.16 refers to one of the top three quality indicators in the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. Head of School H4 justifies the top position of the quality indicator ‘Good teachers’ by reminding us that in a school, pupils have most contact with teachers. The quotation cited by Head of School H5 refers to the quality indicator which was ranked in the second top position: ‘A clean school’ which links cleanliness in a school with showing respect towards the pupil. During the group interviews with pupils there was unanimous agreement with the ranking of this quality indicator. One of the pupils had said: “And a clean school is very important for me because since you have to attend (school) every day, you must like the environment”. (S1 10/12/2015). Another pupil had linked cleanliness in a school with the good reputation of a school (S2 12/11/2015). The Head of School, H15 confirmed that they appreciated that pupils’ reasoning that cleanliness in a school is not simply desirable because of a direct link to hygiene, but that it contributes to the overall well-being and sense of pupil satisfaction in a school. The comment of the Head of School, H4 (2nd quote): “A Head can build a school, or he can ruin a school” captures the position of other Heads of Schools, and the general message which was conveyed by pupils and policy-makers during interviews. The quotations cited in Fig 5.16 show the accordance of the Heads of Schools with the pupils’ assessment of schools. By and large, the Heads of Schools confirmed the pupils’ judgement on the top ranking qualities which are needed for a good school.

The indicators which pupils consider to be least important

Heads of Schools had mixed feelings about the quality indicator in the 30th position: ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle and Senior schools’. Three Heads of Schools agreed that another transition after the second year of secondary schooling, is undesirable for pupils and one of the Heads of Schools said that the splitting of the secondary five-year programme has no effect on the quality of a school. Another Head of School said that the two-year programme of Middle schools is too short and that the outcomes of the school’s or the pupils’ initiatives can never be appreciated in such a short time. One of the Heads of Schools said that she suspected that the real
reason for splitting Secondary schools was to reduce student populations in secondary schools.

Heads of Schools were in agreement with the pupils’ ranking of the quality indicator in the 31st position: ‘Animals in school’. About the quality indicator in the very last position, the 32nd position: ‘More time for lessons’, there were mixed reactions. Two Heads of Schools said they were surprised by its low ranking as some teachers complain that there is not enough time for lessons. One of these Heads of Schools said that the cause of teachers’ complaint is the fact that syllabi are overloaded. These Heads of Schools’ reactions seem to indicate that they are trying to explain the pupils’ perspective by referring to the teachers’ perspective, Other Heads of Schools empathised with the pupils and said that the school day should be shorter, that pupils are perceiving lessons as more of the same, with the ‘same’ being the traditional mode of teaching. The following verbatim quotations describe the Heads of Schools’ feedback on the three lowest ranking quality indicators.
The Heads of Schools’ comments cited in Fig 5.17 show agreement with the pupils’ ranking of quality indicators. Heads of Schools interviewed report agreeing with pupils that recent reform changes in terms of Middle and Senior schools, and animals in schools, are not important qualifiers of a good school. The comment made by Head of School, H2 shows that the Head of School is trying to infer the reasons behind the low ranking of the quality indicator “More time for lessons”. The Head of School is acknowledging that pupils do not want more of the same, and is aware that traditional modes of teaching do not appeal to pupils. This divergence in opinion on the quality indicator “More time for lessons” is further discussed in Chapter 6.
Power and Pupil Voice as Assessor

The Heads of Schools’ position on the theme of power in pupil voice encompassed different perspectives. Although all Heads of Schools agree with the concept of giving pupils the role of assessors, when discussing the theme of power and pupil voice, a few qualifiers emerged. One of the Heads of Schools said that the decisions which need to be taken by schools, call for more maturity than the decisions which can be taken by pupils. Another Head of School said that pupil voice has to be limited, arguing that the authority in pupil voice depends on the age of the pupils and that unconsciously, pupil voice is influenced by adult voice. On the other hand, another Head of School argued in favour of more power in pupil voice. One of the Heads of Schools said that they are concerned that adults limit pupil voice because they are afraid of losing their own power. One of the Heads of School commented on the limitations of Student Councils and said that in reality they are not involved in significant decision-making. There was a further Head of School who more fundamentally expressed a belief in the views of pupils so much that, if it were possible, he would ask pupils to run the school (Fig 5.18, H2 13/4/2016).

One of the Head of Schools said that adults are not motivated to act on what pupil voice conveys, he said that adults in school do not have time to spare on pupil voice. Another Head of School went so far as to compare the adult voice to that of a dictator, which alienates pupil voice. The verbatim quotations in Fig 5.18 illustrate the Heads of Schools’ opinions on the theme of power and pupil voice:
Fig 5.18 Quotations from interviews with Heads of Schools: Power and Pupil Voice

You listen to children, and you give them attention, but at the end of the day, adults decide.

H1 11/2/2016

He (the student) should be given the right to have a voice, but in a reasoned manner.

H4 15/2/2016

Power and Pupil Voice as Assessor

If it were possible, I would ask them to lead the school. Because children are capable.

H2 13/4/2016

We are telling our children what they ought to do all the time because we think that we know it best. We dictate, we do not converse......The older the child gets, the more the child becomes aware that this is the voice of a dictator, the voice of someone who is threatening. So we get a power struggle, and the student says – just let her be.

H3 5/3/20161
The quotations cited in Fig 5.18 show that Heads of Schools in the study were willing to give power to pupils, although Heads of Schools H1 and H4 qualified the amount of power that should be enjoyed by pupil voice. Head of School, H4, asserts that the right to have a voice should be “in a reasoned manner”. In the researcher’s opinion, this Head of School, as a practitioner did not agree with an idealistic notion of pupil voice which has limitless power. Head of School H1, is even more limiting, and gives adults the ultimate privilege in decision-making. H1 is a Head of School in a Primary school, and this could be influencing the Head of School’s opinion. It might be more difficult for adults to have confidence in pupils’ decisions when pupils are younger. On the other hand, Head of School, H2 appeared to have a lot of faith in pupils and he believed in their abilities. This Head of School wanted to give pupils more power than he could practically give them in the present circumstances. The power he was ready to give pupils did not appear to be qualified or capped. Head of School H3 offers more insights on the consequences of a weak or neglected pupil voice. She argues against the authoritarian adult voice which coerces children and alienates them. She further argues that the resulting power struggle might silence young people’s voices, but this would be far from a victory for adults. Head of School H3, offers more insights as to the consequences of a weak or neglected pupil voice. Their views expressed in Fig 5.18 argued against an authoritarian adult voice which coerced children and alienated them. They further argued that the resulting power struggle might silence young people’s voices, but this would be far from a victory for adults. Head of School H3, is offering a wider justification for power in pupil voice, not only as an assessor, but in the broader context of young people’s voices competing and struggling with adult voices.

The influence of pupil variables on the pupils’ assessment

Age

One of the Heads of Schools said that the higher Learning score for primary school pupils could be due to the fact that the Primary school set up makes it more conducive to learning. The same Head of school said that schools themselves might
be discouraging pupils from choosing the Learning scores because Secondary schools are too heavily subject-centred and exam-centred. Two Heads of Schools said that Primary school pupils gave a higher rating to the quality indicator ‘A green school’ than Secondary school pupils because it is easier for Primary schools to engage in green activities. Another Head of School suggested that Secondary school pupils gave a higher rating to the quality indicator ‘Modern resources’ because they still regard them as a novelty, whereas Primary school pupils, being younger, are more used to modern resources. On asking to comment on the fact that for all the factors, namely: ‘Learning and School Climate’, ‘Achieving’ and ‘Doing’, Secondary school pupils gave a lower score than Primary school pupils, one of the Heads of School said:

So yes, there is the eagerness in Year 4, and instead of kindling it and making it stronger, we’re killing it. (H3 15/3/2016).

Gender

Four Heads of Schools said that, from their experience, boys learn by doing, and this explains their higher rating for the Doing factor score. One of the Head of Schools argued that boys are more adventurous and more ambitious than girls, and that this explains their relatively higher factor scores for Achieving and Doing. Two Heads of Schools said that boys are more interested in technology and that this is evidenced in the higher rating they gave to the quality indicator ‘Modern resources’. To explain the higher score which girls gave to the Learning factor, one of the Heads of Schools said that girls are more focused on studying.

Socio-economic background

Two Heads of Schools argued that the value that parents give to education is not necessarily related to the socio-economic background. One of the Heads of Schools said that the lower Learning factor score by pupils of low academic ability was due to the fact that such pupils perceive themselves as failures. Heads of Schools argued that pupils from families where parents/carers are unemployed tend to have less modern resources at home and fewer opportunities to engage in activities, and so
such pupils gave a high ranking to the quality indicators ‘Modern resources’ and ‘Activities at school’. Compared with other socio-economic background sets, this same set of pupils also gave the Learning factor the lowest score; in the opinion of one of the Heads of Schools, this is due to the fact that when parents are unemployed, there is a tendency for more problems at home and so pupils would be less focused on learning.

**Academic attainment level**

The questionnaire data showed that there was a negative correlation between academic attainment level and the ‘Doing’ factor scores. Three Heads of Schools explained this result by saying that pupils who are academically inclined prefer traditional lessons and believe that taking part in non-academic activities is a waste of time; one of these Heads of School suggested that there should be more ‘doing’ in academic subjects. Another Head of School said that the positive correlation between academic attainment level and the Learning factor is due to the fact that high achievers value learning more.

During the interviews with Heads of Schools, there were a number of emergent themes; these themes are presented below.
Modern resources

In the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, the quality indicator ‘Modern resources’ was ranked in the 11th position; boys ranked it more highly than girls, and Secondary school pupils ranked it more highly than Primary school pupils. As mentioned earlier, the Heads of Schools’ responses included that boys prefer technology more than girls and that for Secondary school pupils, modern technology is still a novelty and so they value it more. Another Head of School said that modern resources are needed for research purposes. Two Heads of Schools said that modern resources are sometimes an ‘unwanted gift’ in schools.

One of the Heads of Schools said that far too much money is being spent on modern resources in schools, she said that the Directorate imposes where and how computers and interactive whiteboard have to be installed when they could be put to better use if schools are allowed to make these decisions. The same Head of School said, that given the present workload of Primary school teachers, interactive whiteboards in classrooms and tablets for pupils, are an added burden for teachers. Another Head of School said that modern resources are overrated, she argued that the teacher is by far more important than any modern technological resource and that schools are focusing too much on modern resources whilst neglecting the education of people’s skills. The same Head of School said that because of interactive whiteboards, classrooms are being left in the dark; in addition, she said that she was concerned that this could pose a health hazard to pupils since, she argued, that light is needed for good mental health.

Attitudes to co-ed

One of the Heads of Schools said that adults have a negative attitude to co-ed secondary schools, and this influences the pupils. Another Head of School said that co-ed does not affect pupils and that a co-ed school is not a better school than a single-sexed school.
The way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school

Three Heads of Schools said that the list should be discussed and implemented through the SDP (School Development Plan); one of these Heads of Schools said that the list should be discussed amongst the Senior Management Team members in schools. Another Head of School suggested that on a school based level, the ratings for the individual quality indicators could be measured from one year to another. This same Head of School suggested that the Student Council could focus on a few quality indicators and develop them within the school context. One of the Heads of Schools said that the list should also be shown to the Minister of Education, teachers, parents and children; whilst another Head of School also included College Principals and policy-makers.

Criticism of the study

Two Heads of Schools criticised the study because it makes generalisations, and they said it ignores the individual realities and particular needs of each school. According to these Heads of Schools, every school has its own particular priority list. These same two Heads of Schools said that the study relies on perceptions and that perceptions are not necessarily true. One of these Heads said that she would have preferred a quality indicator list of her own school, the other Head said that the Senior Management Team in each school knows what is best for its school. One of the Heads of Schools remarked that the quality indicator relating to vocational training in a school was not mentioned in the study. Another Head of School noted that the size of the school was not mentioned as a quality indicator. One of the Heads of Schools praised the study as an effective way of assessing schools through pupils. According to one of the Heads of School:

*The research is beautiful, but not just beautiful. Useful, interesting because it is the way forward.* (H2, 13/4/2016).
The present status of Pupil Voice as perceived by Heads of Schools

The perceived status of pupil voice in schools, by Heads of Schools, could give an indication of how different stakeholders are interpreting pupils’ participation in school, and it could also indicate the potential for future commitments for a stronger pupil voice in schools. Heads of Schools were asked to rate the present status of pupil voice in Maltese schools, from 0 (lowest rating) to 10 (highest rating). Heads of Schools gave an average rating of 4.8. The following table shows the results obtained.

Table 5.14  Present Status of Pupil Voice, as Perceived by Heads of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Code for Head of School</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Overall Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>H1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>H2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>H3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>H4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>H5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.3 Results of Interviews with Policy-makers

Interviews were carried out with five policy-makers. These policy-makers included top officials within the Ministry for Education, the Directorates for Education and the shadow Ministry for Education. The pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school was discussed with policy-makers, and they were asked about their attitude on asking pupils to act as assessor of schools. Policy-makers were also asked how their role could ensure the provision of the top quality indicators of a good school, which emerged from the questionnaire survey. They were asked to give their perspective on pupils’ and Heads of Schools’ ideas on the way forward for the pupil-generated list and on pupils’ and Heads of Schools’ perceived status of pupil voice in Maltese schools. (Refer to Appendix 3.4 for the Interview Schedule).

The chart shown in Fig 5.19 lists the main codes under each main category:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement with the concept of pupils as assessors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pupils are in the best position to assess the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pupils are the primary actors in school evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The pupil is our customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Culture of assessing services and products has been introduced by global markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pupils speak the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pupil voice as assessor fosters a democratic environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitations of pupils as assessors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Articulating the needs is not enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From the pupils' perspective it might be impossible to obtain the full picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can be limiting if we only listen to pupil voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority of Quality Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Agreement with top three quality indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parent participation was ranked too low by pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Modern resources are not being used effectively in schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power and Pupil Voice as Assessor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The new Education Act gives more power to Pupil Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pupil Voice is an afterthought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adults are afraid of losing power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adults act as gatekeepers of Pupil Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pupils show compliancy to present status of Pupil Voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Boys need more hands-on experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Boys have lost role models in schools because most of the staff is female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Boys have a more competitive nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences between Primary and Secondary schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Primary school pupils have a natural creativity and energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Secondary school pupils are disengaged from schools because the scholastic experience kills pupils' enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Ekoskola programme (a national programme promoting green initiatives) is more popular in Primary schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect of socio-economic background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Pupils having parents who are unemployed do not see relevance of learning at school to improve the quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pupils having parents who are unemployed value activities at school since they have a lack of them in their lives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect of academic attainment level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Academically able pupils might be deriving less pleasure from 'doing' activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is lack of understanding that learning is possible through doing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way forward for pupil-generated list</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The list should be implemented through the SDP (school development plan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The list should be shared with Heads of Schools and schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Policy-makers can learn from the list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• When study is completed it should be forwarded to the Quality Assurance Department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the interviews with policy-makers, the following themes were discussed:

*The top three Quality Indicators*

All the policy-makers agreed with the pupils’ choice of the top three quality indicators of a good school and that the choice reflects the good judgement of pupils. Three policy-makers said that the top three quality indicators are linked together. Two of the policy-makers remarked that the top three quality indicators are very similar to the new framework issued by the Quality Assurance Department within the Ministry for Education in Malta, for internal and external reviews. Policy-makers listed a number of ways how they could ensure that the top three quality indicators are present in schools: they said they could make sure that the best people are employed in schools; they should do their utmost to promote respect towards teachers, and motivate and support teachers; they could push for more space for professional development; and that they should manage resources to make sure that cleanliness is a top priority in schools.

One of the policy-makers remarked on his limited power. He said he could not legislate for good teachers or good Heads of Schools. He also remarked on teachers’ and Head of Schools’ relatively low salaries and said this was not easy to remedy because as a policy-maker he would need the approval of the Minister for Finance. Another policy-maker remarked that the highest paying job in education pays half what a director of a small company is entitled to. This policy-maker suggested that to attract the best people for the job of a teacher of Head of School, the moral dimension of the work should be promoted, and that schools should be happy workplaces. Another policy-maker said that the present system disengages the teacher because as soon as a problem in the learning process of a pupil emerges, the teacher is no longer required; instead, she said, a system has been created which immediately alerts the Support learning unit, or Complementary teaching, or the Learning Support Assistant, or the Alternative Learning Programme or the Core Curriculum Programme. According to this policy-maker, this system disenfranchises teachers. The same policy-maker drew attention to the fact that the longitudinal study by Hattie, in 2003, showed that the major factor which affects achievement in students is the teacher. The following verbatim quotations show the policy-makers’
ideas on the top three quality indicators. To protect the identity of the policy-makers, they are referred to as PM1 – PM5. The date when the interview was carried out is shown after the code for the policy-maker.

Fig 5.20 Quotations from Interviews with Policy-makers: The Top Three Quality Indicators

About the top three Quality Indicators

They are holistically embracing the school experience, completely.

Yes, I can understand how students chose these priorities and it reinforces the fact how much we are going to listen to students. What the students have extracted are the key areas we focus on in the external and internal review.

PM 5 10/8/2016

You can clean a school but you cannot make a bad Head good.

PM 2 10/6/2016

A clean school- given the resources and how we organise and manage resources- that, we can do. With regards to Head of School and teachers, there we are dealing with things that are more complicated because there are human factors, and you cannot simply legislate for a good Head of School or a good teacher…….. What do you do with bad teachers? That is one of the biggest problems everywhere in the world.

PM 1 27/6/2016
The quotations cited in Fig 5.20 show that the policy-makers interviewed, in general, agreed with the pupils’ ranking of the top three quality indicators and were sensitive to the pupils’ perspective. Fig 5.20 shows how policy-makers, such as PM 3, gave value to the pupils’ assessment in the way they experienced recognition of the way pupils had made a comprehensive consideration in their judgements, which the policy-makers recognised as credible. Policy-maker PM 5 also draws attention to the fact that the top ranking quality indicators are in fact, the key areas during internal and external reviews. Policy-maker PM 1 offered a provider’s point of view, as could be expected from a policy-maker who is seeing the bigger picture of how to implement what the pupil-generated list is conveying, distinguishing between those indicators which are easier and those harder to actualise, stating that quality human resources are more difficult to guarantee than physical resources. Their perspective, whilst demonstrating they are prepared to listen to and accept pupil-generated expressions of school quality, also offer a defence relating to the challenges in actualising these in schools.

*The Lowest ranking Quality Indicators*

Policy-makers had divided opinions on the quality indicator ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle and Senior schools’ which was ranked in position number 32. Two policy-makers were in favour of splitting the five-year secondary school programme because they said it reduces the incidence of bullying. Two policy-makers said that although they understand that pupils would not like another transition, learning to deal with change is a healthy experience. On the other hand, another two policy-makers felt that the splitting up of the five-year secondary programme was unnecessary.

Policy-makers empathised with pupils on the low ranking (the very last position, rank order number 32) given to the Quality Indicator: ‘More time for lessons’. They argued that it is the type of lessons which accounts for this low ranking. They said that pupils would prefer more hands-on activities. One of the policy-makers said that at present lessons amount to the depositing of information without interaction, and pupils find this boring.
The role of pupils as assessors

All the policy-makers were strongly in favour of the role of pupils as assessors in schools. Their reasons were varied and included:

- It provides an opportunity for growth for pupils
- It fosters a climate of respect, responsibility, democracy, ownership, participation
- Pupils are our clients
- It builds a better relationship with pupils
- Pupils are in the best position to assess the system
- Pupil voice should be one out of many voices.

One of the policy-makers said that adults need to guide pupils on how to take into consideration the wider picture in their role as assessors, however he added that adults must be careful not to act as gatekeepers of pupil voice. He said that adults are obliged to create the right environment for the assessment by pupils to take place. The same policy-maker recognised that adults need to prepare themselves for this process. Another policy-maker said that a disadvantage of pupil voice as assessor, from his position, was, that once a problem is exposed, it has to be addressed. Another policy-maker argued that exposing the vulnerabilities of a school makes the school stronger.

The verbatim quotations shown in Fig 5.21 describe the policy-makers’ justifications for pupil as assessors:
Fig 5.21 Quotations from Interviews with Policy-makers: Agreement with the Concept of Pupils as Assessors

It is shocking that pupils are not already being asked to evaluate schools.
PM 2  10/6/2016

We are here to see to their needs and to serve them the best that we can. And who is in the best position to tell you how the experience should be, if not those whom we are serving?
PM 3  8/7/2016 (1st quote)

Let me tell you, to whom do schools belong? To you and me? Schools belong to pupils.
PM 4  7/7/2016 (1st quote)

Agreement with the concept of pupils as assessors

Asking students to assess us helps us attain a better relationship together. The only hindrance is our preparation for this process….How many school leaders do we have that are able to create this type of environment? How much are we teaching children how to give constructive feedback?
PM 3  8/7/2016 (2nd quote)

Why is it that in the educational service it seems we have the impression that those whom we serve have no right to have a say in things?
PM 3  8/7/2016 (3rd quote)

Those who have commercial products and sell things, isn’t that what they need to do- listen to their clients? And who are our clients? Not the children?
PM 4  7/7/2016 (2nd quote)
The quotations cited in Fig 5.21 show that policy-makers, unanimously agree with the concept of pupils as assessors. As the quotations show, policy-makers referred to the fact that schools belong to pupils, and this gives pupils the right to assess schools. One of the policy-makers cited in Fig 5.21, goes further to remark that the fact that pupils are not already being asked to assess schools is “shocking” (PM 2). On one hand, this captures the strong positive feeling that this policy-maker has towards this concept; on the other hand one could also infer a sense of detachment from what is happening in schools or a sense of helplessness on the part of the policy-maker— who can be viewed as having a weak voice when trying to give pupils a stronger voice.

Policy-maker PM 3 refers to the positive side-effects of pupils as assessor: a better relationship between adults and pupils, and the opportunity for pupils to practice how to be critical and how to formulate and articulate one’s opinions. This same policy-maker asks whether adults, as school leaders are able to create the right climate for this to occur and to flourish.

The notion of the pupil being the ‘client’ was mentioned by policy-maker PM 4 who likened the pupil to clients of commercial services and consumers of products. The idea of the pupil as a client was also referred to by Head of School H5 (Fig 5.19) who called pupils “our direct clients”. These stakeholders used the position of the pupil as a consumer of a service being provided by the school to justify the right of the pupil to assess schools. Furthermore, policy-maker PM 4 asserts that since providers have to “listen to their clients”, likewise, schools have to listen to their pupils. A similar position is adopted by policy-maker PM3 who argues that the educational service “serves” pupils, and this gives pupils the right to participate in the process and to assess the service being provided.

*Outside school influences which justify pupil voice as assessor*

One of the policy-makers argued that young people are used to giving ratings to products and services which they use. He said that young people give ratings to applications which they download, they watch their parents checking the ratings of restaurants before they go out to eat. He said that nowadays, the culture of
evaluating and measuring the quality that a person receives has become accepted and expected. In addition, this same policy-maker brought forward another argument: according to him the world has become ‘flat’, in the sense that the hierarchies of power and chains of command, have flattened out and every level in the hierarchy has a voice and has the right to communicate with and challenge any level in the hierarchy. The verbatim quotations shown in Fig 5.22 describe the thoughts of this policy-maker:
Fig 5.22 Quotations from an Interview with a Policy-maker: Outside School Influences which Justify Pupil Voice as Assessor

Are we delivering a product or are we delivering a service? Is it a mix of both? I tend to believe that it is more the delivery of a service. That’s how I see it. There are elements of a product because there is the acquisition of outcomes.

PM 3 8/7/2016 (1st quote)

Outside school influences which justify pupil voice as assessor

Today, everybody gives ratings. Do you like this app? Children have become accustomed to doing this. They are passing judgement from a very early age...... So gradually this culture is being introduced, of evaluating, of measuring, of understanding the quality that I am receiving.

PM 3 8/7/2016 (2nd quote)

The world has changed. In the past, the world used to function in a vertical manner. There were the hierarchies which were very well explained, and everyone functioned within them. Nowadays the world is flat. Completely flat. Today, anyone, wherever, has direct contact, all the time, with all levels of the hierarchies.

PM 3 8/7/2016 (3rd quote)
Fig 5.22 shows a number of quotations from policy-maker PM 3 who discussed what he considered as outside school factors which justify pupil voice as an assessor. This policy-maker likened the pupil to a customer or client of the product or service provided by the school, and used this premise to argue in favour of pupil voice as an assessor. In addition, this policy-maker argued that the traditional hierarchical systems, nowadays have flattened and that individuals at different levels in the traditional hierarchy now communicate directly. This model was used to strengthen the argument in favour of pupil voice being considered on the same level as adult voice. This policy-maker referred to the modern trend of rating and evaluating services and products in everyday life. According to this policy-maker, children are growing up in a culture where it is the norm to evaluate the quality of a service or a product; this mentality and culture affects pupils and schools, and further strengthens the argument in favour of pupils being given the role of assessors,

*Power and Pupil Voice*

One of the policy-makers said that at present, we are only paying lip service to pupils. He further argued that in schools, teacher voice is the most powerful, followed by parent voice, and finally pupil voice, which he described as being an ‘afterthought’. One of the policy-makers referred to the fear of adults that pupil voice might lead to an imbalance of power; in his opinion this fear is unfounded because the power balance has already changed. One of the policy-makers said that the child is an individual in his own right and so entitled to his opinion. The verbatim quotations shown in Fig 5.23 describe the policy-makers’ opinions on the theme of power and pupil voice.
These many fears that we are shifting the power balances that are supposed to be in existence - I don't see that any longer because in reality, they no longer stand.

The students, for whom the educational experience should be designed for, many times are an afterthought in the system, and they are not really at the centre.

PM 1 27/6/2016

To me children are not attachments but they are individuals in their own rights, with their responsibilities, and when we come out and say - you know we’re introducing co-ed in schools, we’re introducing Middle schools, we’re giving them I don’t know what in schools - do we really know how children feel about it?

PM 2 10/6/216
The quotations in Fig 5.23 show that policy-makers agree that pupil voice should have more power. Policy-makers PM 1 and PM 2 argue that pupils have an essential right to have a voice because the educational experience should have the pupil at the hub. Whilst referring to educational reforms, PM 2 asks: “Do we really know how children feel about it?” As the quotations in Fig 5.23 show, the lack of pupil voice in the planning and implementation of educational initiatives was criticised by the policy-makers. Policy-maker PM 3 acknowledges that power shifts bring about fear because adults might feel that they are losing their power. However, this policy-maker argues that in the wider context of relationships, the traditional power balances are being challenged and they are no longer relevant or applicable. This further strengthens the argument in favour of a stronger pupil voice in schools.

The influence of pupil variables on pupils’ assessment

Age

One of the policy-makers argued that it is natural for Primary school pupils, because of their young age, to have more natural creativity and energy, and this affects the way they judge schools. Another policy-maker said that a normal and expected consequence of children’s physical development, Secondary school pupils become detached from school. However, other policy-makers brought forward the argument that it is the school which is demotivating the students, and this ill-effect of schooling is felt stronger by Secondary school pupils, since they have been exposed to it for longer. When asked to comment on the fact that when compared with Form 4 pupils, Year 4 pupil scored higher factor scores for all the factors, one of the policy-makers said:

I think that it could be more of age, related to age, because they are more creative, they still retain their natural creativity and energy, which we would have possibly killed by Form 4. If we haven’t killed it by Form 4, then that Form 4 student deserves a prize, because the way we teach kills all creativity. (PM 2 10/6/2016).

Most of the policy-makers argued that the quality indicator: ‘A green school’ is more important for Primary school pupils because the national programme ‘Ekoskola’ which promotes green education and green activities, is more popular in Primary schools. They argued that this could be due to the fact that young children are more
interested in green initiatives and the set-up of a Primary school makes participation in a programme such as Ekoskola, easier.

*Gender*

Two of the policy-makers argued that the higher factor scores for the factor: ‘Doing’ is due to the fact that boys prefer more hands-on activities. Another policy-maker argued that boys are by nature more competitive than girls and so they scored higher factor scores for the factor ‘Achievement’. Another policy-maker said that the factor scores differences are due to social stereotypes. One of the policy-makers said that the fact that boys have lost male role models in schools since nearly all the staff members are female, also affects the way boys judge a school. The policy-maker added that this situation is difficult to reverse, since nowadays there are many career options which attract males more than a teaching career.

*Socio-economic effect*

Two policy-makers said that pupils having parent that are unemployed, gave low factor scores to the Learning factor, because, given the example they are living at home, they do not see the relevance of learning at school to improve the quality of life. Another policy-maker said that parents having unemployed parents ranked the quality indicator ‘Activities at school’ highly because given the financial situation at home, such pupils do not have the opportunity to participate in activities, and so need activities at school to make up for their deprivation.

*Academic attainment level*

One of the policy-makers put forward the argument that academically inclined pupil might be deriving less pleasure from doing activities, and so that is why they scored lower scores for the factor ‘Doing’. Another policy-maker argued that there is still a lack of understanding on how ‘doing’ leads to learning. One of the policy-makers noted: *We are too content focused. And not process driven.* (PM 5 10/8/2016).

This same policy-maker said that she found it worrying that teaching in schools depended too much on writing skills, to the detriment of other skills.
Modern resources

One of the policy-makers said that in Primary schools, interactive whiteboards are simply being used as a blackboard. She said that Primary school pupils gave a lower score to the quality indicator ‘Modern resources’ because of the boring way in which they are being used in Primary schools. The same policy-maker said that teachers need training on modern resources and that pupils need teachers who are not afraid of modern resources. Another policy-maker agreed that in schools there is not enough effective use of modern resources.

Co-ed in secondary schools

For policy-makers, co-ed is natural for pupils. They argued that since Primary schools are co-ed, moving on to co-ed Secondary schools is not an issue for pupils.

The way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school

One of the policy-makers said that nationally, resources could be provided, according to the priorities in the pupil-generated list of quality indicators. This same policy-maker said that, as a policy-maker, he could learn from the list. Two policy-makers said that the list should be implemented through the SDP (School Development Plan). Another policy-maker said that the quality indicators should be taken into consideration during internal and external reviews. The same policy-maker suggested that when the study is complete, a national event could be organised, during which information on the pupil-generated list would be disseminated with Heads of Schools. Another policy-maker said that when the study is complete, it should be forwarded to the Quality Assurance Department.

Three policy-makers said that the new Education Act (which is still a draft) will give more voice to pupils. One of these policy-makers said that there should be an SIA, Student Impact Assessment, before any new policy or reform is implemented. Another policy-maker said that everyone wants ‘good teachers, a good Head of
School and a clean school’; she described these as ‘back to basics’ but she said that she was not convinced that the nation has a vision in education. She further explained that although everybody seems to be committed to achieving these quality indicators, the fact that governments are at the mercy of votes prevents policy-makers from taking the right decisions in education. She argued that education should be a state business, not government business.

The verbatim quotations shown in Fig5.24 illustrate the policy-makers’ ideas on the way forward:
This is a result, which, in my opinion, shows the high level of maturity of pupils. And, not to hear them at this point, would be a great disservice to them.

PM 4  7/7/2016

I can push the idea forward, so that when we say democracy and participation, and respect for all, we address these things as well, which is substantial in the educational experience. And I can help to push so that it is on the agenda. But I believe that the best intervention, whilst on a national level would be to offer resources and offer the framework, it has to go into schools, as the culture of the school.

I guess we are all genuinely committed to arriving there (referring to the top three quality indicators), so the next question would be how quickly can we afford to arrive there, and the answer is 'Sorry we depend on votes, so we can’t do this quickly'.

PM 2  10/6/2016
Building on their positive view of pupils being in the role of assessors, the policy-makers’ quotations in Fig 5.24 depict a positive attitude towards the actualisation of pupil voice in schools. Policy-maker PM 4 refers to contribution of pupils in the research and describes it as a demonstration of “the high level of maturity of pupils”. As the way forward, policy-maker PM 1 proposes a change in the culture of school, such change should be directed to optimise the conditions needed for pupil voice to flourish. The same policy-maker also proposed that schools need to be supported by resources, and a national framework in the direction of a stronger and a maintained pupil voice in schools.

Policy-maker PM 2, whilst recognising that everyone is in favour of the top three quality indicators, raised the issue of the restrictions brought about by the national political agenda. According to this policy-maker, since political parties depend on votes, the national commitment towards ensuring the best top quality indicators, as conveyed by the pupil-generated is slowed down. PM 2 succinctly remarked: “Sorry we depend on votes, so we can’t do this quickly”. This perspective depicts the limitations, which are apparent from the point of view of a policy-maker who is viewing the broad, national agenda. Policy-maker’s PM 2 comments imply that this agenda is contextualised and controlled within the political and populist programme of political parties.

The ‘real’ policy-makers

Policy-makers referred to the fact that they themselves have limited powers. When asked who the real policy-makers are in education, one of the policy-makers said that the top officials in the Directorates within the Ministry for Education in Malta play a part, whilst the people involved with the party in government are the most influential in policy-making. There was general agreement amongst policy-makers that pupils have the least influence. One of the policy-makers said that some policies are set or at least influenced by the E.U. One of the policy-makers said that everyone is a policy-maker. Another policy-maker said that her impression is that it is people who sit behind desks that are policy-makers.
Present status of Pupil Voice in schools, as perceived by Policy-makers

Policy-makers were asked to rank, from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest), the status of pupil-voice in schools. The following table shows the results:

Table 5.15  Present Status of Pupil Voice, as Perceived by Policy-makers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy-maker</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When one of the policy-makers was told that the Student Councils in Primary Schools which participated in the group interviews had rated the status of their own voice as 7.4, he said that he thought that pupils had given a relatively high value to their own voice, which did not reflect the real picture in schools, and that he found this worrying:

*I see a degree of compliancy. It bothers me more because I feel that we have convinced them that they should not feel more empowered.* (PM 3 8/7/2016).

Another policy-maker said that the scores awarded by pupils to the status of pupil voice in schools (average score of 7.4 for Primary school pupils; average score of 4.9 for Secondary school pupils) and by Heads of Schools (average score of 4.8) were too high. Another policy-maker said that the score given by Heads of Schools shows that they are admitting that the status of pupil voice is too low, yet they do not do anything about it.
5.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of Phase 1 (the Questionnaire survey) and Phase 2 (the Interviews) of the research. The analysed data was used to answer the research questions. In the next chapter, the main findings are discussed in light of the research questions and the literature review, and are contextualised within the Maltese educational system.
CHAPTER 6

Discussion

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the research. In this chapter, the main findings are discussed and reviewed. The implications and practical relevance of the message conveyed by pupil voice in the role of assessor are drawn out and discussed, in relation to the Maltese educational system and within wider literature. The perspectives of different stakeholders to pupil voice in the role of assessors in this study, and within the Maltese educational context, are examined and discussed.

The main outcomes of the study formulate the themes which are discussed in this chapter; these themes can be summarised as follows:

1. Through the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, pupils have depicted their preference for a Prosocial School.
2. Pupils have judged ‘Good teachers’ to be the most important indicator of a good school.
3. Physical resources are less important for pupils; nevertheless, a few physical resources have been given priority.

4. Different pupil variables influenced pupils’ judgement on schools.

5. Pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers had a positive response to pupil voice in the role of assessor.

The discussion in this chapter starts by referring to the research questions so that the results of the study can be traced back to the original inquiry focus for the study. The chapter discusses the Maltese pupils’ priorities as conveyed through a pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, and the pupils’ list is contextualised within the wider literature. Quality in schools, through the eyes of the Maltese pupil, is extracted and interpreted. The emerging concept of a Prosocial School is proposed to encapsulate pupils’ preference for human resources, and then those physical resources which were regarded as indicators of a good school are discussed. The effect of the variables influencing pupils’ assessment of a good school: age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level, are discussed and examined. The last part of the chapter discusses the response to pupil voice in the role of assessor, in the Maltese school context.

6.1 The Research Problem

The main aim of this study was to find out the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective. The main research tool was a questionnaire, which had been informed by the outcomes from focus group activity sessions with pupils. The effect of a number of variables on pupils’ assessment of schools was studied: age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level. Through interviews, the study explored the perspectives of pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers, on the concept of pupil voice in the role of assessor, and to the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school.

The research questions in this study were:
1. From the pupils’ perspective, what are the quality indicators of a good school in Malta?

2. How does the pupils’ judgement on what constitutes a good school vary with:
   - Age
   - Gender
   - Socio-economic background
   - Academic attainment level.

3. What are the perspectives of pupils, Heads of schools, and policy-makers, on:
   - pupils’ role as assessors?
   - the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school?

The first part of the chapter discusses the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school in a comprehensive way and reviews the pupils’ preferences within the context of the wider literature. This is followed by a discussion which focuses on individual high-ranking quality indicators.

### 6.2 General Reflections on Pupil Priorities on What Makes a Good School

According to Maltese pupils, quality in a school is defined, primarily, by the human resources. In fact, pupils ranked the top ten quality indicators of a good school as:

1. Good teachers
2. A clean school
3. A good Head of School
4. A safe environment
5. Cooperation between teachers and pupils
6. Respect between pupils
7. Pupils respect teachers
8. A pleasant atmosphere at school

9. Good assistant heads of schools

10. Good behaviour from pupils.

As can be seen from the above list, pupils have sent a strong message - it is the people in a school who count - as can be evidenced by the order of the quality indicators of a good school in the pupil-generated list. Pupils are placing the onus of a good school, on the people they are mostly in contact with: teachers and the Head of School, and to a lesser extent, but still relatively important, on the Assistant heads of school; their immediate environment is also important - pupils want a clean and a school. By highlighting these criteria, from the way that they are worded, pupils can also be considered to be calling for standards of behaviour and action from these groups of people. Pupils are sending the message that teachers should teach well and show respect to pupils, the school should be well led, this leadership should ensure pupil safety and the pupils themselves should show respect to teachers, to one another to create a co-operative and pleasant atmosphere. In addition, the pupils’ immediate environment is also important - pupils want a clean and a safe\textsuperscript{27} school. In the questionnaire, ‘safe’ referred to physical safety; ‘A safe environment for pupils’ was described as a school which is aware of health and safety issues (eg. fire drills, CCTV) as noted above, pupils might also interpret this as related to the actions of a school’s leadership. It should be noted that the adjectives ‘good’ and ‘pleasant’ also leave room for a diverse interpretation. The meaning attributed to these by pupil respondents was not possible to capture in the questionnaire survey. Although additional insights were obtained from the interviews, this is as area of additional research, as explained in Chapter 7.

The top ten quality indicators of a good school, through the eyes of the Maltese pupil, are represented graphically in the Fig 6.1:

\textsuperscript{27} In the questionnaire, ‘safe’ referred to physical safety; ‘A safe environment for pupils’ was described as a school which is aware of health and safety issues (eg. Fire drills, CCTV).
During the interviews, pupils confirmed the high ranking of the top three quality indicators. Additionally, adult participants’ reaction to the pupils’ rank order of the quality indicators of a good school was one of general accordance. The coding results show that all stakeholders are in agreement with the pupils’ assessment on what qualifies as the key criteria for a good school. One of the policy-makers called the top three quality indicators as “back to basics” (PM 2 10/6/2016) and said: “We all want good teachers, a good Head of School and a clean school”. Two policy-makers also remarked on how the top three quality indicators rated by pupils were similar to the key areas outlined in the new policy document on internal and external reviews in Malta. In fact, the External Review Documentation: Standards and Criteria (Ministry for Education and Employment, Directorate for Quality and
Standards in Education, Quality Assurance Department, 2016) lists the following three criteria in school external reviews:

- Educational leadership and management
- Learning and Teaching
- School ethos.

This is an encouraging indication that, between different stakeholders, there appears to be common ground on the attributes of a good school. The Mixed Methods methodology made it possible to obtain a greater understanding of what pupils value and why. The data has shown that, in the Maltese schools’ context, on the top quality indicators of a good school, adults are in tune with pupils’ views.

6.3 The Main Message of the Maltese Pupil in this Study: A Good School is a Prosocial School

The pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school emphasised the importance of human resources and of interpersonal relationships in a school. In this study, the pupils’ assessment of what makes a good school highlights the social imperative in the learning process. “Our brains are social” (Neville, 2013:17) and the pupils’ assessment confirms this. Through their judgement, pupils are describing how important people and relationships are to them in creating their optimum environment in a school, confirming that emotion and cognition are interlinked and interdependent (Neville, 2013:22). “Building strong, healthy relationships with students is foundational to effective teaching” (Freiberg et al, 2013:218), pupil voice in the role of assessor in this study, is echoing the same message.

In the researcher’s opinion, the pupils’ priority to human resources, a pleasant environment, good behaviour, cooperation and respect, indicates that for the Maltese pupil who participated in this study, a good school is basically a ‘Prosocial School’.
The term ‘Prosocial School’ is borrowed from Jennings’ and Greenberg’s (2009:492) ‘Prosocial Classroom Model’. The top ten quality indicators of a good school, as ranked by the Maltese pupil in this study, shows that pupils expect a good school to address the affective needs of its pupils, they expect a good school to care about, and for, its pupils. This vision of a good school chimes closely with the conceptualisation of better performing schools as reported by OECD (2010) and Noddings’ (2012:777) description of the optimal school climate for learning.

Furthermore, when describing the attributes of a good teacher, during interviews with Student Councils, pupils reiterated the importance of the affective attributes, arguing that:

*When you want to learn, you need cooperation between teacher and student.* (S3 16/11/2015).

*A teacher is not there just to teach you, but to help you as well.* (S1 10/12/2015).

The pupils’ emphasis, in this study, on the affective perspective of schooling as an indicator of a good school, could be contextualised within the wider literature. In fact, there are a number of studies which link a positive affective school, or classroom climate, with beneficial effects for pupils (Freiberg et al, 2013; Sakiz et al, 2012; Teven, 2007; Wilson, 2006).

Goldstein (1999) explains the effect played by the affective component in the learning process. Goldstein (1999:649), refers to “the zone of proximal development”, which she explains as being the distance between “the child’s level of independent performance and the child’s level of assisted performance”. Goldstein (1999) further explains:

*The affective qualities of the relationship between teacher and student – what I have labelled the interrelational dimension- are what allows the zone of proximal development to take shape in any given situation.* (Goldstein, 1999:654).

According to Goldstein (1999), the affective element in the student-teacher relationship could bridge the point between what a student could learn on his or her
own and what the student could learn with the help of the teacher. “The teacher and the student must connect with each other in order to work together productively and successfully.” (Goldstein, 1999:650). Through their judgement on what makes a good school, in this study, Maltese pupils are confirming Goldstein’s assertion. In this study, pupils qualified a good school with quality indicators which literature shows are conducive to an optimum learning environment.

The next section contextualises the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school within the wider literature.

6.4 The Pupil-Generated List within the Wider Literature

In Section 3.2.4, five different literary sources were used to summarise what had been previously researched about the qualities of a good school:

- MacBeath et al’s study (1999)
- Sammons et al eleven-point list of effective schools (1997)
- The key judgements made by Ofsted inspectors (Ofsted, School Inspection handbook, 2013)
- The ten performance indicators described in the document ‘School Improvement through Self-evaluation’ (Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, Malta, 2009)
- The sixteen quality indicators described by the European Report on the Quality of School Education (Europa: Summaries of EU legislation, 2000).

On comparing the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school with reports in literature, it becomes evident that comparisons are limited by the fact that existing research differs in important aspects from this study. Despite these limitations, Table 6.2 compares the ten indicators which were most frequently mentioned in the above five literary sources indicators with the indicators in the pupil-generated list in this study. Only 15 out of the 32 quality indicators which were
listed in the questionnaire match the description of the indicators found in the literary sources quoted in Section 3.2.4.

Table 6.1 Comparing Indicators from Literary Sources with the Pupil-Generated List of the Quality Indicators of a Good School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator derived from literary sources</th>
<th>Maltese Pupil-generated list</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rank order</strong> (based on frequency)</td>
<td><strong>Indicator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Parental participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement and pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional development of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School organisation(^{28})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations for pupils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 6.1, the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, resulting from this study, confirm the importance of ‘Teaching and Learning’, ‘Leadership’, ‘Resources’ and ‘Climate’; whereas there seems to be less agreement on the importance of ‘Achievement’. On the other hand, in this study, Maltese pupils rebuke the high position awarded by literary sources to ‘Parental participation’, ‘Professional development of teachers’ and ‘Expectations for pupils’.

\(^{28}\)In the first draft of the questionnaire, ‘School organisation’ was listed as one of the quality indicators, as a result of a review of indicators from published literature; however, during the pilot questionnaire, pupils asked for this quality indicator to be omitted, citing that it was too vague.
On reflection, these three quality indicators would seem to be ones that would most likely be important from an adult’s perspective but not from a pupil’s perspective. The literary sources tend to describe an adult’s perspective, since adults were its main contributors. As MacBeath (1999) reminds us, the differences in weight given to the same indicator by different stakeholders shows that “although the school is a school, it is, in some crucial respects, a quite different place for different people.” (MacBeath, 1999:25). The differences between the pupil-generated list and the literary sources demonstrate how a school is perceived differently through the eyes of the pupil; this is precisely what this (my) study wanted to capture - the quality indicators of a good school through the eyes of the Maltese pupil. As discussed earlier, the study has shown that there were instances where there was remarkable coherence between the views of pupils and adults who participated in the study, such as the accordance on the top three quality indicators of a good school. On the other hand, as discussed above, on comparing quality as perceived by pupils with quality as described by the literacy sources, differences emerge. In the researcher’s opinion this further strengthens the argument in favour of adults seeking the pupils’ perspective; adults cannot second-guess pupils’ opinions.

In 2001, as described in Section 3.5.3, the Guardian newspaper launched a competition, asking young people in the U.K. to write about their ideal school. Although this theme is not identical to the theme in this (my) study- ‘the school I would like’ is not necessarily synonymous with ‘a good school’- some comparisons can be drawn. 15,000 pupils responded to the Guardian’s appeal. Burke and Grosvenor (2003) collated and displayed some of the pupils’ responses in one collection. The single word which was most frequently mentioned in the pupils’ feedback was ‘respect’. Similarly, in this (my) study the quality indicators ‘Respect between pupils’ and ‘Pupils respect teachers’ were ranked at high positions: at positions 6 and 7 respectively. The feedback which was gathered by the Guardian showed that pupils very frequently complained about the lack of hygiene in toilets; this was also a frequently mentioned indicator in the open-ended responses in this (my) study and it also falls under the remit of the second highest ranking quality indicator ‘A clean school’. The quality indicator ‘A clean school’ is discussed in detail in Section 6.5.4.
The responses gathered by the Guardian newspaper were summarised in ‘The Children’s Manifesto’ (Burke and Grosvenor, 2003:17) which described nine different ideals for a school. The following table displays the U.K. children’s manifesto as collated by the Guardian, and the Maltese pupils’ top ten quality indicators in the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school which emerged from this study.

Table 6.2 Comparing the U.K. Children’s Manifesto with the Maltese Pupil-Generated List of the Quality Indicators of a Good School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The U.K. Children’s Manifesto collated from the Guardian’s competition in 2001 (Burke and Grosvenor, 2003:17)</th>
<th>Similar/related quality indicator in this study and rank order given by Maltese pupils (Out of 32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A beautiful school</td>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school (Rank order 8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A comfortable school</td>
<td>A clean school (Rank order 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe school</td>
<td>A safe school (Rank order 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A listening school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A flexible school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A relevant school</td>
<td>More learning opportunities (Rank order 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good teachers (Rank order 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A good Head of School (Rank order 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A respectful school</td>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils (Rank order 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect between pupils (Rank order 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils respect teachers (Rank order 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils (Rank order 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A school without walls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A school for everybody</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On comparing the two lists, a number of similarities are apparent. The matching Maltese quality indicators, equivalent or related to, the U.K. descriptor, were all relatively high ranking quality indicators (from rank order 13 upwards). U.K. children and Maltese children both want a safe school and a respectful school. The main difference between the two lists is that the U.K. children’s manifesto includes
‘A flexible school’, ‘A listening school’ ‘A school without walls’ and ‘A school for everybody’; these descriptors do not feature in the Maltese pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. By and large, the two lists are quite similar although, given the nature of the study, the Maltese list describes more specific indicators. The U.K. children’s manifesto was the result of categories drawn by adults, from pupils’ responses, and so refers to more generic descriptions of the ideal school.

In the next section, the discussion focuses on individual quality indicators which were given priority by pupils.

6.5 Important Quality Indicators for the Maltese Pupil in this Study

The ranking of the 32 quality indicators of a good school revealed the relative importance of each indicator for pupils. This section first discusses the top human resources for the Maltese pupil: ‘Good teachers’ and ‘A Good Head of School’, which were ranked at positions 1 and 3 respectively. The high rank of these two quality indicators in the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school further consolidates the Prosocial School theme which has emerged from the pupils’ assessment. Next, this section discusses physical resources which the pupils judged as being important for a good school.

6.5.1 ‘Good teachers’ as the Most Important Quality Indicator for a Good School according to the Maltese Pupil in this Study

In this study, the message of the Maltese pupil is loud and clear: good teachers make good schools. It appears that the Maltese pupil is echoing Day (1992:2) that teachers are “the school’s greatest asset”. During interviews, pupils described the attributes of a good teacher, and the pupils’ focus was on the affective attributes of a teacher. According to the pupils, a good teacher respects pupils, knows pupils well, makes pupils feel comfortable, and understands pupils. This confirms the findings of other studies on the attributes of a good teacher (Bakx et al, 2015; Beishuizen et al, 2001;
Kutnick and Jules, 1993); on the other hand, unlike the findings in these three international studies, instructive attributes were not mentioned as being important in the making of a good teacher for the Maltese pupil. The heavy emphasis by the pupils on the affective attribute could, and should, inform adults recruiting teachers.

During interviews, different sets of stakeholders unanimously agreed with the pupils’ judgement that good teachers make a good school. One of the policy-makers, referred to Hattie’s (2003) work, to further validate the top quality indicator in the pupil-generated list. Through a widespread review of literature and meta-analyses of over half a million studies, Hattie (2003) studied the effects of different influences on student achievement. He attributed the variance in student achievement to six major sources: students, home, schools, principals, peer effects and teachers. According to Hattie (2003) the variance which potentially could influence student achievement the most, is the teacher; more specifically Hattie refers to “excellence in teaching” (2003:4) as the most determining factor in student achievement. In this (my) study, the Maltese pupil, similar to Hattie’s (2003) findings, has confirmed the importance of good teachers.

In this study, the Maltese pupil’s accent on the affective attributes of a good teacher further substantiates the ‘Prosocial School’ model to capture the valuation of a good school by the Maltese pupil. When asked on how the Maltese pupil could be guaranteed that schools will have good teachers, policy-makers referred to teachers’ working conditions as influencing the provision of good teachers in Maltese schools. Presently the Maltese government is under fire for neglecting teachers’ working conditions. In January 2017, the MUT, Malta Union of Teachers, issued a press release, warning that the teaching profession was “in crisis” and that teacher shortages were already being felt in schools (Malta Union of Teachers, 2017). According to the union, this is mainly due to the low wages, too many reforms in a short period of time, the inflexibility of a rigid curriculum and the failure of the inclusion policy. Over the last seven years preceding 2015, the minimum statutory salary of teachers in all EU countries increased or was unchanged, except in seven countries, one of which was Malta (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016). According to the Eurydice report, in Malta, in real terms, the 2016 minimum
statutory salary of a teacher in Malta fell to below that of 2009. One of the policy-makers, whilst admitting that teachers’ salaries need to be improved, pointed out that his hands are tied and that he depends on the Minister for Finance. Another policy-maker suggested that competent people could be attracted to the profession if more emphasis is placed on the moral dimension of the career and not on the financial aspect.

Without undermining the importance of the moral perspective in teaching; the salary reflects the value that society places on teachers (Tremosa and Crosier, 2016). Dolton et al (2011) examined whether there was a link between teachers’ salaries and pupil performance over 15 years in TIMSS and PISA in 39 different countries. The study concluded that a 10% increase in teachers’ salaries was associated with a 5% to 10% improvement in pupil performance. Dolton et al (2011) explained the result by arguing that a better salary attracts better qualified people to teaching, and that a higher salary improves the status of teaching as a profession, which in turn leads to more competition for entry into the profession. Furthermore, the association between teachers’ salaries and the positive effect on teaching and learning, is given from the analysis of PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? (OECD, 2016), which concluded that priority should be given to teachers’ salaries over class size.

As discussed above, the provision of the most important quality indicator of a good school for the Maltese pupil: good teachers, is a complex one, and there are many contributing and influencing factors. In the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, the next most important human resource is ‘a good Head of School’. This is discussed in the next section.

6.5.2 The Importance of a Good Head of School for Maltese Pupils Participating in this Study

In this study, the Maltese pupil placed ‘A good Head of School’ at the third place, in the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. On the role of a Head of School, Cubberley (1923), wrote:
No other person in the school system can do so much good at first hand (Cubberley, 1923:352).

It seems that nearly 100 years later, pupils are in agreement with Cubberley’s perspective on the role of a Head of School. Besides ranking the quality indicator ‘A good Head of School’ at the third position, pupils ranked ‘Good Assistant Heads of Schools’ in the ninth position. The pupils’ priority for the leadership roles in a school further demonstrates the prosocial imperative for the Maltese pupil.

During the interviews, all the stakeholders agreed that a good Head of School is needed for a good school. Different stakeholders described the qualities of a good Head of School, and these included: someone who leads, manages, communicates, listens, is a driving force, has a sense of discipline and order, sets teachers in the right direction, is accessible to parents and pupils, respects pupils, accepts pupils as they are, does not impose, and makes sure that all teachers are on board. This long list of skills needed by a Head of School is similar to the description of the role described by Fullan (2014). One of the pupils summed up a good Head of School as:

She leads. She even leads teachers (S2 12/11/2015).

One of the Heads of Schools admitted that there is no definite description of a good Head of School:

Unfortunately, the role of a Head of School is very vague and wide......Unfortunately, you are expected to be knowledgeable about everything under the sun......But I think that the idea of a good Head of School, of many pupils and parents, is that there is a sense of discipline, order and that you are accessible. And capable of reasoning out things with, and being respectful to, students. (H5 16/3/2016).

In fact, this Head of School captured the feelings of other stakeholders on what makes a good Head of School. In this study, a number of interviewees remarked that if in a school there is a ‘good’ Head of School, then, as a natural consequence, the top quality indicators ‘Good teachers’ and ‘A clean school’ will also be present in the school.

One of the policy-makers remarked, how, similar to ‘Good teachers’, one cannot mandate for ‘A good Head of School’, and a policy-maker can only try to create the right environment to attract the right people to the post, and to foster a climate where
the Head of School is respected. The lack of financial incentive in the post of a Head of School in Malta was also mentioned by both Heads of Schools and policy-makers, as a disincentive to attracting talented people to the job. The same policy-maker who had argued in favour of the moral imperative of the teaching profession to attract competent teachers extended the argument to the post of a Head of School.

As discussed earlier, in this (my) study, the human resources in a school, and the interpersonal relationships, were given priority by the Maltese pupil. However, a number of physical resources were also assessed by pupils to be important for a good school. Physical resources are discussed in the next section.

6.5.3 The Relevance of the Physical School Environment to the Maltese Pupil Participating in this Study

Despite the fact that pupils ranked prosocial school criteria highly, the results showed that for the Maltese pupil, the physical school environment also qualifies a good school. In the open-ended question of the questionnaire, pupils were asked to suggest other quality indicators of a good school. As can be seen from Fig 5.5, the category having the most frequent responses was Physical Resources. Pupils suggested a whole range of physical resources which included better physical spaces, better wall plastering, heaters, fans, air conditioners, and a better-equipped gymnasium. One could infer that the pupils felt that the physical resources were less well represented in the questionnaire, or that pupils felt that in the open-ended response, they could describe the physical resources they wanted to specifically refer to. The suggestions show the importance of the immediate physical environment to pupils. In the top ten quality indicators of a good school, resulting from this study, the importance attached to a clean and safe environment (rank order 2 and 4 respectively) shows agreement with the outcomes of a study carried out by Jones Bosh (2003) which had ranked the child’s perceived safety in the top position, and perceived cleanliness at the 14th position.
The pupils in this (my) study, ranked the quality indicator ‘A clean school’ in second position, and this high ranking position warrants further discussion. This is followed by a discussion on ‘Modern resources’, not only because of its rank position (11th) but also because of the divergent stakeholders’ views on the relevance of this quality indicator for a good school.

6.5.4 The Importance of a Clean School

‘Cleanliness is next to godliness’ the saying goes, and the results of this study have shown that cleanliness in a school is of paramount importance to pupils. It seems that the Maltese pupil voice is joining pupil voices in other countries when prioritising the importance of cleanliness in a school (Doan and Jablnski, 2012; Heppell, 2016; Osler, 2010 and Duke, 1998).

Duke (1998) argues that a positive environment stimulates positive behaviour and attitudes. This could help explain the high ranking position, given by pupils in this (my) study, to the quality indicator ‘A clean school’ (2nd position in the pupil-generated list). Considering the fact that pupils spend a large proportion of the day at school, it is understandable that they regard the physical environment in which they function, as an essential characteristic of a good school. In fact, in this (my) study, one of the pupils referred to the effect a clean school has on the ethos of the school:

_A clean school because there would be a pleasant environment in school and then the school, whichever one it is, would have a good name._ (S2 12/11/2015).

Another pupil (P1 4/12/2015) argued that if a school is not kept clean, there would be a sense of carelessness in the school. The pupils argued that as a consequence, this sense of carelessness could instil a sense of carelessness in other areas of school life, and affect pupils negatively.
6.5.5 The Importance of Modern Resources

In this study, pupils ranked the quality indicator ‘Modern resources’ at position 11 (out of a total of 32). In the open responses, the most frequent response was related to more, or to better, technological devices. The findings in this (my) study showed that there was also a certain degree of tension between the position of pupils and policy-makers, who are in favour of modern resources in schools; and the position of Heads of Schools, who have more reservations on the usefulness of modern resources, in particular of interactive whiteboards. During the interviews, pupils could find no fault with the use of modern resources in schools; whereas Heads of Schools had some reservations; even calling them, “overrated”, “an unwanted gift” in schools and “a burden on teachers”. Policy-makers were critical of the fact that modern resources, especially interactive whiteboards, were not being used effectively in schools.

The policy-makers’ comments were broadly consistent with the U.K. literature (Glover and Miller, 2001; Moss et al, 2007; Wood and Ashfield, 2007) which found out that modern resources were not being fully exploited in schools. One of the Heads of Schools voiced her concern on the possible health hazard for pupils, arising from dark classrooms because of the use of interactive whiteboards. In fact, a study on the physical classroom features and their effect on the academic progress of pupils (Barrett et al, 2015) showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the quantity of electrical lighting and pupils’ learning progress. This indicates that the Maltese Head of School’s concern that classrooms have been turned to ‘darkrooms’ could be a justified one.

The contrast in views on the use of modern resources in schools, between adults and pupils is confirmed in a study by Li (2007). Li (2007) compared teachers’ and students’ views on the use of modern technology. Interviews were conducted with 15 secondary Mathematics and Science teachers in two urban and two rural schools in Canada. 575 students took part in a survey questionnaire. The study concluded that there was a wide and a worrying disparity between teachers and students on the purpose of modern technology; teachers felt that technology had little educational
value and felt that it would lead to an extra workload. These views are similar to the views expressed by Heads of Schools in this (my) study.

The affinity of pupil participants in this study with modern resources does not come as a surprise. Pupils who participated in this study form part of what sociologists refer to as the Generation Z, or the Silent Generation, because of the time spent online. Generation Z is formed from individuals born between 1995 and 2012; all the participants in this (my) study were born between these years. Gross (2008:8) calls this generation “digital natives” because they are the first generation to be born in a world which was already digital. Generation Z is ethnically diverse and less likely to have experienced a traditional family structure (Wellner, 2000). The characteristics of Generation Z children include: physically inactivity, obesity as a major health problem, never having known a time when internet did not exist, communicating in real-time, multi-tasking, being more imaginative, more eco-conscious and being better educated than any other generation in history (Matthews, 2008). The identity of a Generation Z individual is tied to the online identity (Matthews, 2008). All these characteristics of the Generation Z could have influenced the outcomes of this (my) study. Bearing in mind the crucial role that modern technology has for Generation Z, the difference in position between that of pupils and Heads of Schools can be understood as a ‘generation gap’ difference in perspectives. The difference in opinion between policy-makers and Heads of Schools is discussed next.

One of the Heads of Schools remarked that far too much money is being spent on interactive whiteboards and tablets in Maltese schools. This view is similar to Kelley’s (2007) who claimed that the expense of installing and the upkeep of an interactive whiteboard in every U.K. classroom was “unjustified” (Kelley, 2007:334). To ensure more effective use of modern resources in schools, Manny-Ikan et al (2011) recommend more emphasis on instructional teacher training. On the other hand, Glover and Miller (2001) concluded that effective use of interactive whiteboards can only occur when teachers understand that the use of modern technological resources in the classroom necessitates a new approach to teaching and
learning. This could be the vision, in the long term, for better use of modern resources in schools in Malta. For such a vision to become a reality, a concerted effort involving changes in teacher training and retraining, on-going teacher support, whole-school initiatives and changes on an all-encompassing educational system level, are needed.

In the researcher’s opinion, part of the reason why policy-makers, especially those who are politicians, favour modern technology in schools might be because it is a popular vote catcher with the general public. The complex educational agenda is simplified to a technological resource which promises to solve the problems in the educational system. Modern resources have the added benefit of being popular with pupils, and adults can actually see something tangible being delivered (at times literally) by the policy-maker/ politician. In Malta, in 2013, during the electoral campaign, the two major political parties made a common promise for a better educational system: a tablet for each and every pupil (Times of Malta, 24th January, 2013; Times of Malta 25th January, 2013). Billboards mushroomed all over the island showing smiling pupils holding tablets, and doting parents smiling back, safe that their children will have a better education because they now have a tablet. In the Maltese context, there might be another motive for policy-makers insisting on installing interactive whiteboards in all classrooms in all state schools: Malta receives 85% funding from the E.U., benefitting from the European Regional Development Fund (Malta Information Technology Agency, 2011) for this initiative. This assisted funding makes the installing of interactive whiteboards a feasible option in Maltese schools.

After the discussion on quality as perceived by the Maltese pupil in this study, through the human and physical resources in a school, the next section discusses the pupils’ reactions to two quality indicators in the questionnaire. These quality indicators referred to two recent reforms in the Maltese educational system.
6.6 Reflections on Recent Reforms in the Maltese Educational System

The quality indicators ‘Boys and girls in the same class’ and ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools’ refer to two recent reforms in Maltese schools. Section 2.2.2 describes these reforms in detail. In the questionnaire survey, pupils ranked the two indicators ‘Boys and girls in the same class’ and ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools’ at relatively poor positions: 26 and 30 respectively. None of the pupils who participated in the questionnaire had firsthand experience on the quality indicator: ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools’ and only Primary school participants were in co-ed schools. Considering that these quality indicators refer to recent reforms in the Maltese educational system, the question of how educational reforms are communicated with pupils arises; together with the question of what sort, if any, pupil consultation is being carried out before major reforms are implemented. This theme is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

6.6.1 Co-ed Classes in Secondary Schools

Up to 2014, state secondary schools in Malta were all single-sexed schools. Co-ed classes were introduced gradually, with Form 1 co-ed classes (pupils aged 11) being introduced for the first time in September 2014. The questionnaire survey was conducted during the 2014/2015 scholastic year. The secondary school year group (Form 4, pupils aged 14) which participated in the questionnaire survey was still a single-sexed group. The quality indicator ‘Boys and girls in the same class’ was ranked at position 26 (out of a total of 32 quality indicators). The Secondary school pupils who participated in the research had never experienced co-ed classes, and so this might have skewed the data. During interviews with adults, it appeared that most of the interviewees were surprised that pupils had ranked it so lowly. As a lone voice, one of the Heads of School showed her concern that girls might be disadvantaged in co-ed schools. This Head of School’s comment is consistent with the observation made by Sadker and Sadker (1994), who, when writing about the American educational system, said that in co-ed classes, boys take up more time and attention from teachers, to the detriment of girls. Furthermore, a study by Picho and Stephens
(2012) on stereotype threat on 89 Ugandan girls, found out that stereotype threat did not affect the performance of girls in single-sexed schools, however it affected negatively the performance of girls in co-ed schools. During the interviews in this (my) study, one of the boys remarked that having girls in class ‘will not make you learn any better’. There are various studies which concur with this pupil’s observation and which show that attending a co-ed or single-sexed school, has no effect on learning outcomes (Chouinard et al, 2008; Garcia-Gracia and Vazquez, 2016; Harker, 2000; Robinson and Smithers 1999).

6.6.2 The Splitting of Secondary Schools into Middle and Senior Schools

In Malta, up to 2014, the secondary state school programme was a five-year programme: from Form 1 (pupils aged 11) to Form 5 (pupils aged 15). In September 2014, this five-year programme was split into a two-year programme in Middle Schools (Forms 1-2); and a three-year programme in Senior Schools (Forms 3-5). As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire survey was conducted during the scholastic year 2014/2015. The secondary school pupils, who participated in the survey, were still following the traditional five-year secondary school programme. This second educational reform was described in the quality indicator ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools’. Pupils ranked it at position 30 (out of a total of 32 quality indicators).

During interviews, adults had mixed feelings on the splitting of the five-year secondary school programme, with some adult interviewees agreeing with pupils that the splitting of secondary schools was unnecessary and that it did not contribute to a better school. A study by Holas and Huston (2011) confirms that Middle schools do not have any particular advantage over other school organisations. Achievement, school engagement and perceived competence of pupils in Middle schools were compared with same-grade pupils in other schools, in a longitudinal study by Holas and Huston (2011). 855 pupils participated in the research, from ten US cities. The study found that the school organisation type had no influence on the three factors which were studied.
During the interviews, pupils said that their main objection to the splitting of the Secondary school programme into a Middle and a Senior school, is the fact that another transition after only two years of secondary schooling is undesirable. This confirms an earlier finding in a separate study, in which secondary school Maltese pupils had also claimed that the transition from one school to another evokes feelings of anxiousness and dread in them (Grima, M. 2010). Heads of Schools and policymakers said they could empathise with pupils’ reluctance to undergo another transition. In addition to pupils’ lack of enthusiasm for moving from one school to another because, as cited during interviews, one loses friends and one has to start all over again, the transition from one school to another could have a more far reaching harmful effect on pupils, as shown by West and Schwerdt (2012) who found that when pupils move to Middle schools, their test scores drop substantially, equivalent to 3.5 and 7 months of expected learning. One of the findings suggested that school transitions lower pupil achievement. These findings validate the low ranking given by Maltese pupils to the quality indicator ‘Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools’.

After discussing the pupil priorities in detail, the discussion will now focus on the factors which could have affected the pupils’ judgement on what makes a good school. The data gathered by the main tool in this study, was collected from 1618 pupils. This collective group of pupils was a varied group, composed of different sub-groups. The pupil voice in the role of assessor in the different sub-groups was made audible by segregating pupils according to four different variables. The influence of these variables on the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school will be discussed in the next section.

6.7 The Variables Influencing Pupils’ Assessment of the Quality Indicators of a Good School

The influence of the following variables, on pupils’ assessment, was studied:

- Age
- Gender
- Socio-economic background
Fig 5.7 summarises the effect of each variable on pupils’ assessment of the quality indicators of a good school. The following discussion explores the effect of each variable in turn and attempts to shed light on the influence of each variable by referring to the wider literature and to the Maltese context. As explained Section 4.10.3, factor analysis was used to find out whether the variables investigated in the research were influencing pupils’ assessment. The analysis of the questionnaire data extracted three factors; each factor was made up of a number of quality indicators which showed a similar response pattern. As explained in Section 5.3.1, the 32 quality indicators were grouped under ten categories, and the questionnaire data was analysed according to these categories. The names of the categories were derived inductively from the list of the quality indicators. Table 5.7 lists the quality indicators under each category. The relationship between each variable and factors and categories is discussed in the following subsections.

6.7.1 The Influence of Age

The sample was made up of two year groups: Year 4 pupils (aged 8), and Form 4 pupils (aged 14). Year 4 pupils gave a higher rating to ‘A green school’ than Form 4 pupils. As discussed during interviews, a Primary school set-up makes it easier for green programmes to be successful, the fact that there is one class teacher makes it more likely for the teacher to take ownership of green initiatives in a class and to offer a cross-curricular approach to green education. In addition, in Malta, a national green programme entitled Ekoskola ²⁹ is very popular in Primary schools. Furthermore, secondary school pupils tend to have more varied interests than younger pupils (Bee and Boyd, 2004), and so might be less interested in green initiatives at school.

Form 4 pupils gave a higher rating to the quality indicators ‘Modern resources’ and ‘Cooperation between teachers and pupils’. During the interviews, one of the pupils

²⁹ Ekoskola is a national programme promoting, monitoring and supporting green initiatives in schools Source: http://www.ekoskola.org.mt
said that at secondary level, the hands-on games which teachers used to prepare when they were in Primary school, were replaced with digital games, and hence the increased importance attached to ‘Modern resources’ by pupils. Given their age, most secondary school pupils tend to spend a considerable amount of time using technological devices and engaging in social media. In fact, a study on how youths in Malta spend their leisure time, had revealed that computer games are the most popular means of leisure for 13 to 16-year-olds (Office of the Commissioner for Children and Youth Agency, 2013).

Year 4 pupils gave a higher score to all three factors: ‘Learning and School Climate’, ‘Achieving’ and ‘Doing’. During the interviews, two policy-makers said that the schooling process itself kills pupils’ enthusiasm for learning and this accounted for the lower scores given by Form 4 pupils to the three factors. Other interviewees referred to the fact that older pupils tend to disengage with schools because they are going through strong biological, psychological and social changes, which are all normal and expected of a 14 year old, and which might distract pupils from school. Quality indicators under the ‘Perks’ category, garnered a higher ranking from Form 4 pupils. Under the ‘Perks’ category, amongst other quality indicators, there were: ‘Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school’ and ‘Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms’. Again, this can be attributed to the fact that these two quality indicators are more appealing to 14 year old pupils, who are at a stage in life when they are more interested than younger pupils, in their projected body image (Bee and Boyd, 2004); in communicating with their friends (Newman and Newman, 2009) and in being connected online.

According to Lapsley (1990), children and pre-adolescents believe that an objective knowledge exists and that given unbiased information, people will reach the same conclusion; however adolescents “subjectivize reality” (Lapsley, 1990:186) and they start becoming more sceptical. This change in thought processes might have influenced the responses given by Year 4 pupils (aged 8) and Form 4 pupils (aged 14). This might account for the relatively higher scores given by Year 4 pupils to all the three factors (Refer to Table 5.12), and for eight out of the ten categories of
quality indicators (Refer to Table 5.8). Drawing from Lapsley’s thesis, one might argue that older pupils were more reluctant to give high scores to the quality indicators because they were more doubtful on how the quality indicators could contribute to a good school.

6.7.2 The Influence of Gender

In this study, girls gave higher scores to the ‘Learning and School Climate’ factor. This may be explained by the fact that the learning process which occurs in schools, rewards girls more, since they perform better academically than boys. Various studies show that boys underachieve in schools (Borg, E. 2015; Epstein et al, 1998; OECD, 2009; Orr 2011; PISA 2009+ Malta Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, 2013; Reay, 2010; Ringrose, 2007). In addition, reading, which is a very frequent activity in schools, and which is a very important means of communication in all subjects, appears to be less popular with boys. There are studies which show that Maltese girls enjoy reading more than boys (Vella, E. 2005). The PISA 2009+ Malta Report (ibid) showed that in Malta, there is the largest gender gap in reading across all 74 PISA 2009 and PISA 2009+ participants. In addition, Vella, E. (2005) found out that boys, more than girls, feel they are forced by parents and by teachers to read. Boys’ lack of enjoyment from reading could be affecting their ranking of the ‘Learning and School Climate’ factor since this includes quality indicators such as ‘Better quality books’.

The findings showed that girls gave higher scores for the ‘School Climate’ category; this confirms a study by Orr (2011) which found that girls are more likely than boys to have positive attitudes about school; it also supports a study on Maltese pupils (Grima, M. 2010) which claimed that girls are more involved in school than boys. On the other hand, boys scored higher for the ‘Doing’ factor, which includes the quality indicator ‘Lots of sports activities’. The boys’ assessment might partially be the result of the influence of ideas set by society which associate masculinity with doing well in sports (Anselmi, 1998). Stereotypical gender roles are assimilated very early in a child’s development (Williams and Best, 1994); the pupils’ perspective in this
(my) study could have been influenced by traditional stereotypical gender roles and could account for girls’ lower scores for ‘Doing’ and ‘Achieving’ factors.

These findings could also be reflecting the differences in competitiveness between boys and girls. A study by Buser et al (2012), examined what determines the choice in study profiles, which are pre-university tracks, in pupils. The study was carried out on 397, 15-year-old pupils in 16 classes in four schools in Amsterdam. The researchers found that there were significant gender differences in competitiveness between boys and girls, with boys being more competitive. The results showed that girls having the same ability in Mathematics as boys, or even having a higher ability than boys, were significantly less likely to choose a prestigious study profile. One of the main findings of the research was that 23% of gender differences in profile choices were caused by gender differences in competitiveness. The gendered differences in scores for the ‘Achieving’ factor in this (my) study could be related to gendered differences in competitiveness, and hence be broadly supporting the findings by Buser et al (2012).

The reactions of Heads of Schools and policy-makers to differences in the pupils’ preferences according to gender, echoed gender stereotypical ideas: they said boys are more inclined to learn by doing, boys enjoy hands-on activities more than girls, boys are more ambitious, more dominant and more adventurous than girls, girls are more focused than boys, girls are neater than boys. The Heads of Schools’ and policy-makers’ discourse is the type of discourse which Paule (2015) describes as “dinosaur discourses”; as described in Section 3.10.2, these stereotypical ideas are also referred to in the works of Epstein et al (2003) and Jackson (2003). One of the Head of Schools said, that despite the equality discourse, males are more dominant and that this could be an underlying influence in gendered differences in the results of this study. Within the Maltese society, there are a number of indicators which indicate that the society is male-dominated and that progress towards gender equality is slower than in other countries. According to The Global Gender Gap Report 2016 (World Economic Forum) the overall ranking for females in Malta, when compared with other states, is 108 out of 144. On comparison with 2013, this overall ranking is
a regression of 24 places when compared with 2013. This ranking was partly due to regression in the following areas:

- Education – a regression of 53 places
- Participation in society - a regression of 29 places
- Decision-making positions – a regression of 80 places.

In Malta, with only 10% of Members of Parliament being female, females are heavily underrepresented in the constitutional legislative body in the country. In the researcher’s opinion, the messages being sent by the power balance between males and females in the wider Maltese society, could be indirectly contributing to gendered differences in the way the pupils assessed schools in this (my) study.

A study by Gatt and Mula (1997) provides an insight on how gendered parental attitudes affect different aspects of the education of girls in Malta. The researchers carried out open-ended, unstructured interviews with 60 girls, who all had at least one brother, and who were all in the fourth year of secondary schooling (average age 14). The results showed that parents encouraged girls to opt for Arts, Languages and Domestic Sciences whilst encouraging boys to opt for Sciences. Parents encouraged girls to choose careers which do not interfere with the responsibility of motherhood, whilst encouraging boys to choose high status careers. In addition, parents encouraged boys to take over the family business; and expected girls to help out in domestic chores but exempted boys. The study was carried out 20 years ago, and attitudes might have changed since then. Nevertheless, the gendered attitudes of Maltese parents, which were revealed by Gatt and Mula’s (1997) research, could be moulding girls’ attitudes to school-life and indirectly could be causal factors in the girls’ perception of what makes a good school in this (my) study and could account for girls’ lower scores for the ‘Achieving’ factor.

According to one of the policy-makers, boys have lost role models in schools, since most teachers are female. The Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014 Annual Report shows that 72% of teachers in Malta are female. This heavy female presence

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could be affecting gendered attitudes in pupils and could be an underlying contributing influence in the gendered results in this (my) study. According to Huyge et al (2015), schools are fundamentally female, and that boys associate academic success with femininity (Huyge et al, 2015). As described in Section 3.10.2, Brown et al (2003) had found that boys experience more alienation from schools than girls. This could help further explain the reasons behind boys’ lower score for ‘Learning and School Climate’ factor in this (my) study.

‘Modern resources’ as a quality indicator of a good school, was more popular with boys than with girls. During interviews with Heads of Schools and policy-makers, some of them tried to explain this by saying that boys enjoy digital games and technological devices more than girls. In fact, a study on Maltese pupils had confirmed that boys spend more time than girls playing video games per week (Vella, E. 2005). The higher importance attached to ‘Modern resources’ by boys, further substantiates Vella, E.’s (2005) findings, and similar findings from studies across different countries (OECD, 2015). A study on how youths in Malta spend their leisure time had revealed that computer games were enjoyed by twice as many males than females (Office of the Commissioner for Children and Youth Agency, 2013). In addition, boys’ stronger preference to ‘Modern resources’ supports research on pupils’ career inclinations, such as the finding that, as an overall average emerging from the 35 OECD countries, for every girl considering a career in engineering and computing, there were four boys (OECD, 2015) doing so.

6.7.3 The Influence of Socio-Economic Background

In this study, the socio-economic background which distinguished itself from the rest of the socio-economic backgrounds, was the group of pupils having unemployed parents or carers. When compared with other socio-economic groups, this group of pupils gave the highest ratings to the quality indicators ‘Modern resources’ and ‘Activities at school’. Adult interviewees contributed this to the lack of financial
means at home; it seems that these pupils appreciate at school what they cannot have
at home. As described in Section 3.10.3, Cassar, D. (2012) had reported how Maltese
pupils from poor families ask to be excused from school activities which entail a
charge, or do not attend school on the day of the activity. This group of pupils also
scored the highest ratings for the category ‘School activities’ which includes the
quality indicators: ‘School outings’ and ‘Lots of sports activities’, besides ‘Activities
at school’. One possibility is that, for pupils having unemployed parents, school
activities such as school outings are not taken for granted, and may be considered as
a treat. This same group of pupils scored the lowest scores to the category ‘School
perks’ which might be a reflection on the fact that this group of pupils is the least
likely to look forward to a school where mobile phones and casual wear are the
norms, since these might further highlight their financial disadvantage.

The group of pupils having unemployed parents or carers rated ‘Learning and School
Climate’ factor the lowest. Numerous studies link the socio-economic background
with student academic progress and achievement (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990;
Coleman, 1969; Mullis et al, 2012; PISA 2009+ Malta Report, Ministry for
Education and Employment, 2013). Cusworth (2009) had reported how parents’
unemployment is linked with a negative attitude to school. In addition, Cassar, D.
(2012) described how Maltese teachers claimed that parents from economically
disadvantaged families valued education less than those from economically
advantaged backgrounds. The low rating given to the ‘Learning and School Climate’
factor by pupils having unemployed parents could be a reflection of this link between
the socio-economic background and academic progress. When compared with other
socio-economic backgrounds, this same group of pupils also scored the lowest
ratings in the categories: ‘School leadership’, ‘Teachers and Quality of Learning’ and
‘School Organisation’. In view of the literature on the effect of socio-economic
background and academic success which was described above, one possible
explanation is that these pupils lack the attitudes and values, the ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu,
1987), which makes them comfortable in a school setting. This could lead to their
feeling more disengaged than other groups of pupils with the schooling process, and
so they might attach less value to the traditional descriptors of school-life.
The findings showed that pupils having parents with a primary level of education gave higher scores to the quality indicators: ‘More learning opportunities’ and ‘Discipline in schools’ than other socio-economic backgrounds. There could be a connection between the higher score for ‘More learning opportunities’ and Cassar, D.’s research (2012), which had reported that Maltese teachers claimed that pupils from poor families either viewed the school as a place where someone cares for them or as the key to a better future. It is possible that pupils who have parents having a primary level of education, presumably are observing their parents doing manual and hard work, maybe with little financial compensation, and realise that school could offer them an opportunity for a better job than their parents’. One might also presume that parents doing low-level jobs might themselves encourage their children to use learning opportunities at school as a means to better prospects in life.

The other socio-economic groups did not distinguish themselves in any particular way. During the interviews with Heads of Schools and with policy-makers, it was pointed out that in Malta, the social background, which also includes the value attached to education, is not the same as the economic background; high income does not mean a high social background and vice versa. This could explain why, apart from having unemployed parents, socio-economic background had a minimal effect on pupils’ assessment of what makes a good school. A study by Grima, C. (1997) could help shed further light on the Head of School’s comment. Grima, C. (1997) carried out a study to explore what successful working class pupils attributed their success at school to. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 academically successful pupils from working class families in two Junior Lyceums in Malta. Junior Lyceums were selective secondary schools where pupils could gain entry after passing an end-of-primary national examination; since Grima, C.’s (1997) study, these types of schools have been phased out. Grima, C. chose pupils who had exceeded an average mark of 70% in their half-yearly examination results. The findings showed that pupils did not consider their socio-economic background as negatively affecting their success at school. In Grima, C.’s study pupils unanimously attributed their success at school to parental interest and encouragement. Grima, C. (1997) cited how pupils described how even though their parents had a limited level of schooling, they were interested in reading books and newspapers. The research
showed that pupils were particularly grateful to the positive home environment which provided the optimum conditions for studying, and to their parents’ aspirations for their success in school. Grima, C.’s (1997) findings seem to be giving some weight to the Head’s of School’s opinion that in Malta the value given to education is not linked to the family’s income; Grima, C.’s (1997) findings could also help explain why the socio-economic background, except for unemployment in parents, did not influence the way pupils assessed schools in this (my) study.

6.7.4 The Influence of Academic Attainment Level

This study examined the effect of academic attainment level in secondary school pupils only, since data on academic attainment levels could only be obtained from secondary schools. The results showed that there was a positive correlation between academic attainment level and ‘Learning and School Climate’ factor. Pupils having a high academic attainment level gave a higher score to the quality indicators making up the ‘Learning and School Climate’ factor. As described in Section 3.10.4, Ghirxi (2012) had shown that Maltese students who were high achievers were highly motivated, had high expectations and exhibited high perseverance in school tasks; this could explain the high rankings given to ‘Learning’ quality indicators. This (my) study showed that pupils with low academic attainment level gave low ratings to the ‘Learning and School Climate’ factor, and this confirms the findings of a study by Cachia (1997), who drew up a profile of the Maltese primary school pupil in the lowest academic stream. Cachia observed 22 pupils in one such class, for two consecutive scholastic years: when they were in Year 5 and in Year 6 (aged 9 and 10 respectively) and carried out interviews with pupils and teachers. In 1997, classes in primary schools in Malta were streamed according to the total mark obtained in annual school examinations. She found that the pupils in the lowest academic stream felt that, compared with more able pupils, the school was treating them as second-rate pupils. These pupils also said that they were fed up of school and of the school environment. The findings of Cachia (1997) are confirmed in this study by the very composition of the ‘Learning and School Climate’ factor. Each factor was made up of a group of quality indicators depending on the pattern in the pupils’ responses.
Where pupils were ranking a group of quality indicators in a similar way, a factor was extracted. The fact that pupils were ranking the learning-related quality indicators and the school climate-related quality indicators in a similar way, further validates Cachia’s (1997) findings on the connection between low academic ability and low regard for the school environment.

The results of this (my) study showed that there was a negative correlation between academic attainment level and the ‘Doing’ factor (Refer to Tables 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11 for a list of the quality indicators under each factor). Some of the adult interviewees interpreted this as the result of the erroneous way in which academically inclined pupils, and sometimes schools themselves, perceive activities which are not strictly academic, as a waste of time. Adult interviewees commented on the fact that, in their opinion, schools in Malta place too much emphasis on reading and writing. In their opinion, this discriminates against pupils who find it difficult to read or write, but who nevertheless, given the opportunity, could express themselves in different ways. Adult interviewees also complained that the Maltese educational system seems to give credit only to traditional academic subjects whilst ignoring completely non-academic subjects. They referred to the introduction of vocational subjects (More details on vocational subjects are given in Section 2.2.3), as a move in the right direction to address the different needs and skills of pupils, and also to prepare pupils for future employment according to the nation’s needs.

One of the policy-makers put forward a different reason for the negative correlation between academic attainment level and the ‘Doing’ factor. He referred to the link between the level of enjoyment and personal preferences towards different types of activities. He said that, speaking from his personal experience as an academically inclined pupil, he performed well in academic activities and so he enjoyed academic activities. On the other hand, he did not enjoy sports and hands-on activities because he his performance was poor in such activities. Echoing similar reasoning, a Head of School said that the difference in priority for the quality indicators by different pupils is a reflection of the different types of intelligences that pupils possess. This was a direct reference to Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1995). Pupils
might be assessing the good qualities of a school on the degree to which the school is addressing their need to feel satisfied and this, in turn, depends on the particular type or types of intelligence/s that the pupil might possess.

The results showed that there was a strong tendency for accordance with the following seven categories of quality indicators to increase, as the academic attainment level increases:

- School leadership
- Discipline
- Resources for learning
- Physical resources
- School climate
- Assessment
- Teachers and the quality of learning.

The above seven categories basically describe learning indicators, facilitating learning indicators and the school environment indicators. As described above, the positive connection between these categories and increasing academic attainment levels is in agreement with Cachia’s (1997) and Ghirxi’s (2012) findings, which were mentioned earlier. The results also showed that there was negative accordance between the following categories of quality indicators and increasing academic attainment levels:

- School activities
- Perks
- School organisation.

The negative correlation between academic attainment level and the categories above might indicate that an academically inclined pupil tends not to consider the indicators under the above three categories as important for a good school since they do not address the academic imperative of a school. The indicators under each category are listed below.
School activities:

- Activities at school
- School outings
- Lots of sports activities.

Perks:

- Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school
- Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms
- Having animals at school.

School organisation:

- Boys and girls in the same class
- Secondary school divided into a Middle school and a Senior school.

As mentioned earlier, Ghirxi (2012) had drawn a profile of the Maltese gifted pupil: a highly motivated and hard-working pupil. The quality indicators under the above three categories, do not fall under the academic realm and so it is understandable that the more academically able the pupils are, the less it would be likely for them to rank these quality indicators as the mark of a good school. This might be especially true for the categories; ‘Perks’ and ‘School Activities’. Another observation on the results on the categories of quality indicators was that the findings on the categories, which were extracted inductively from the list of 32 quality indicators listed in the questionnaire, confirmed and expanded the results obtained from factor analysis. As described above, both the analysis of the results on the categories and the results of factor analysis showed that there was a positive accordance between learning and school climate, and academic attainment level; whereas they showed negative accordance between activities and perks, and academic attainment level.

As discussed above, the variables ages, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment affect the way pupils perceive what is important for a good
school. The utilitarian relevance of this finding is that schools could thus gain an insight on how to address the difference in priorities for different groups of pupils (as summarised in Fig 5.23) and thus help create the optimum environment so that schools can remain relevant to all pupils, as discussed in Section 7.1.1 and in the proposed recommendations in Section 7.5. The next section of the chapter focuses on the second theme which emerged from the research questions: the concept of pupil voice in the role of pupil as assessor. The rest of the chapter discusses this theme and emergent subsections.

6.8 The Response to Pupil Participation in this Study

This study pivots on the role of the pupil as an assessor. Pupil participation was embedded in all stages of the study: from the design of the main research tool to being the main data source, and later, to participating in the analysis of the data. Through their participation, and through the expression of their assessment and perspective, in this study, pupils were given a voice. In fact, this study attempted to give some prestige and power to pupil voice by promoting it to the role of an assessor of the quality indicators of a good school. By asking pupils to assess the quality indicators of a good school and offering them the chance to do this holistically, a 360 degree review of what occurs in schools, in this (my) study intended to give pupil voice in Maltese schools a potentially radical role. This contrasts with the present role of pupil voice in Maltese schools. As described in Section 2.3.4, in Maltese schools, pupil voice is lacking in power. Presently pupil voice is being expressed primarily through the Student Council, where the level of pupil participation is mainly tokenistic (Cassar, J., 2011 and Micallef Gatt, 2014).

In this study pupils’ perspectives were not asked on mundane areas of school-life, pupils were asked to define quality in schools. In the researcher’s opinion, the improvement of quality in schools should be a priority for all stakeholders, and it should direct the efforts of policy-makers and all school practitioners, to ensure the best possible school experience for pupils. However, the researcher accepts that collecting pupil voice data and generating a list of their views, is insufficient in itself
to be as radical as intended. The next section discusses the concept of pupil voice in
the role of assessor from different angles. The discussion reflects on justifications
for the role of pupil voice as assessor, the way pupil voice as assessor is perceived by
other stakeholders, the theme of power within pupil voice and recognising the
limitations of pupil voice as assessor within the Maltese educational context.

6.8.1 Participants’ Approval of Pupil Voice as Assessor of Maltese School
Quality

Amongst all sets of participant stakeholders, there was unanimous agreement, on the
concept of pupil voice in the role of assessor, both on a theoretical level and on the
practical application of it in this study. Pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers
offered various justifications for pupil voice as assessor. These justifications echo
with justifications found in literature on pupil voice. The participants’ views on the
concept of pupil voice in the role of an assessor are illustrated in Figs 5.10, 5.15 and
5.21. The following diagram summarises the main justifications for pupil voice as
assessor put forward by the different stakeholders in this study, connected with ideas
reported within the wider literature. The words in italics refer to stakeholders’
quotations.
As can be seen in Fig 6.2, stakeholders offered various justifications for pupil voice in the role of assessors in schools. Their justifications encompassed the main justifications found in literature. As discussed in Section 3.5, four main justifications for pupil voice were drawn from literature; these were:

1. Pupils have a right to have a voice
2. Pupil voice is an expression of citizenship
3. Pupils offer a unique perspective

4. Pupil voice is beneficial for pupils, for teachers and for schools.

Fig 6.2 shows how stakeholders’ perspectives illustrated each of the above justifications. Although in this study stakeholders did not use the term ‘citizenship’ in their responses, they referred to the democratic function of pupil voice, which includes the ‘citizenship’ purpose.

In Section 3.8.1, five main justifications for pupil voice in the role of assessor were put forward. These justifications were put forward by the researcher, with justifications supported from the wider literature:

1. Schools are created for pupils
2. Pupil years are irreplaceable
3. Voice is not enough
4. Pupils are unique critics
5. ‘Pupils as assessors’ might bring about school improvement.

The evidence gathered in this (my) research matches the claims made in Chapter 3. In fact, the quotations cited in Fig 6.2 are broadly consistent with the justifications which were put forward in Chapter 3: The Literature Review, as justifications for pupil voice in the role of assessor, except for the justification ‘Pupil years are irreplaceable’ which was not directly mentioned by stakeholders.

One of the Heads of Schools had justified pupil voice by saying that it is “a correct source of information” (H3 15/3/2016). However, MacBeath (2006) warns against the presumed innocence of pupil voice by adults:

*Celebration of pupil voice as if it were always naïve, authentic and untrammeled by convention may lead to an equivocal place. What is expressed by a child or young adult may be spontaneous or may be a studied choice with an acute grasp of audience.* (MacBeath, 2006:72).

Just like adults, pupils may also have their hidden agendas, and as pointed out by MacBeath (2006), pupil voice may also be dishonest or calculating. Nevertheless, there is a general perception by adults that children are more truthful than adults, and adults who participated in this study were not an exception. As far as the researcher
could observe and interpret, in this study, there were no instances when lack of truth was suspected in pupil voice; and none of the Heads of Schools or policy-makers referred to this possibility. Whether this was due to adults’ presumed innocence of pupil voice or not, falls beyond the remit of this study. It was also not possible to explore the agendas informing particular pupil and the way they responded to either the questionnaire or in the group interviews. It can be expected that there may well have been recent incidents or events which might have affected their opinions in a temporary way which, although not dishonest, adds a partiality to the data collection a researcher should be mindful of.

6.8.2 Pupil Voice as the Voice of a ‘Customer’ or ‘Client’

Heads of Schools and policy-makers referred to the concept of the pupil as a ‘customer’ or a ‘client’ as a justification for pupil voice as assessor. This might be a way of perceiving how the obligations imposed by quality assurance can be fulfilled. Fielding (2001b:107) describes such a perception of pupil voice as a “conformist” voice, which depicts pupils as the receivers of products such as skills and examination results; and the teacher as “pedagogic technicians”. On the other hand, all sets of stakeholders referred to pupil voice as a way of empowering pupils; one of the Heads of Schools was more vociferous about this and even said that he would be ready to allow pupils to run the school. This type of pupil voice forms part of “prerogative practice”, which has the ability “not only to inspire, but to sustain developments” (Fielding, 2001b:107). These two facets of pupil voice also echo with what Czerniawski (2012:131) describes as the “two competing narratives” on pupil voice: the transformative and democratic potential in pupil voice and the potential to be a tool for auditing and increasing organisational efficiency.

An important underlying theme influencing how pupil voice is perceived by other stakeholders, is the theme of power. In the next sections the themes of power and pupil voice, and the limitations in pupil voice as assessor are explored.
6.8.3 Power and Pupil Voice

The very concept of pupil voice as assessor incites questions about the distribution of power in the school, an institution which is “a ‘container’, generating disciplinary power” (Giddens, 1984:135). The concept redefines the power relation between the pupil and the adult; however, this is to be expected because pupil voice work challenges the “structures and processes of power” (Robinson and Taylor, 2007:12). The pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school is the result of the pupil assessing, mainly, what adults have done or have facilitated, in schools. The traditional power relation has been inverted so that it is now the adult who is the assessee and the pupil who is the assessor. In fact, one of the concerns of Heads of Schools and policy-makers was that adults in a school might be afraid of pupil voice as an assessor, because they might feel threatened. This fear of losing or reducing the adult’s power is a common concern (Bragg, 2007; Cassar, J., 2011; Flutter, 2007); however, one of the policy-makers argued that schools should not be afraid that the traditional power balances in schools are changing, since power balances are also changing in other sectors of society. The study showed that there was a wide range in the amount of power which Heads of School were ready to give to pupil voice: from limited power to involving pupils in the highest ranks of decision-making in a school.

The study showed that pupils are aware of the limited power in pupil voice. For instance, one of the pupils said:

Opinions are gathered and nothing is done about it. (S3 16/11/2015).

This statement shows that the pupil could distinguish between the lip service paid to pupil voice by the school, and the influence that pupil voice carries in that particular school. Another pupil further commented:

They are implementing small things but they are not implementing things which bring real change for us. (S2 12/11/2015).

Statements, such as the one above could be an eye-opener for schools. Pupils can, and do, see through the efforts of schools. The comment of this pupil shows that pupils can distinguish between tokenistic participation and higher levels of participation.
Policy-makers referred to the lack of presence, and hence, of power in pupil voice, when reforms are introduced. They argued that adults do not know what pupils are feeling and thinking; nevertheless, decisions are taken in the name of pupils (Fielding, 2004). This is therefore a contribution this study can make by engaging policy-makers with its findings and a call to continue to collect meaningful pupil voice data will be one of the main recommendations of this study for policy-makers. One of the policy-makers (PM 3) mentioned how adults act as gatekeepers of pupil voice in schools: “In the educational service, we have the impression that those whom we serve, have no right to have a say”, and how it was accepted that adults tended therefore to assume an overbearing role (Nelson, 2015; Thompson, 2009).

When asked to rate pupil voice in schools from a scale of 1 to 10, pupils gave it a rating of 5.9, Heads of Schools gave it a rating of 4.8, and policy-makers gave it a rating of 4.2. Although these ratings were subjective and there can be no reliability claimed between one respondent’s views and another, at face value, the higher rating from pupils than adults does imply that pupils perceive that their voice has more power than adults seem to think. Any generalisations from this result have to be contextualised within the parameters of the sample size which was five for each set of stakeholders: Student Councils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers.

The fact that pupils graded the status of pupil voice higher than the adults did, worried one of the policy-makers (PM 3), who said that this shows compliancy on the part of the pupils and an element of deviousness on the part of adults into leading pupils to think that their status is higher than it actually is:

This is more damaging for me because, my goodness, because I can say that I have managed to convince them that they shouldn’t be feeling more empowered. (PM 3 8/7/2016).

This policy-maker was depicting pupil voice in Maltese schools as having elements of what one finds on the lowest rungs of Hart, R.A.’s ladder: manipulation and decoration, where adults exploit pupil voice to satisfy their own needs, when the real status of pupil voice is lower than the pupil is led to believe.
During one of the group interviews, it was suggested that adults should choose the best ideas in the pupil-generated list and see how these can be used to improve schools:

_The Head, or whoever is in charge of schools, sees what is best and implements it._ (S1 10/12/2015).

This could be an indication that pupils are not completely sure of the authority in their own voice. On the other hand, it could be a sign that they are ready to ‘share’ the power in pupil voice with adults and that they would be more satisfied with the resultant combined pupil-adult voice; this idea affirms the concept of “engaged voices” (Crunddas, 2007) which does away with the binary division between pupil voice and adult voice. One of the pupils remarked how in his school, through pupil voice, only things that are trivial are implemented. The pupil complained that the school was not implementing pupils’ ideas that bring about real change. According to this pupil, instead, the school listens to pupils under the pretext that something is being done. This pupil was interpreting the school’s efforts as being a form of tokenism, a common occurrence where pupil voice is involved (Hampson et al, 201; Rudduck et al, 2003). The pupil who was describing such a scenario did not put all the blame on the school, he said that at times, the school is restricted by lack of funds; nevertheless, he felt that pupil voice was not bringing about the desired improvement in schools. In this case, there is a danger, that the lesson being taught to this pupil might be that “democracy is tokenistic and a sham” (Whitty and Wisby, 2007:314).

One of the Heads of School insisted that pupils should have clear knowledge about the motivation behind the school’s interest when asking for their opinion or evaluation; this point is also raised by Yamashita et al (2010), who questions the motivation of teachers when listening to pupil voice. Before there can be harmonisation in power balances between pupil voice as assessor and other voices, the true motive for inviting pupil voice has to be clearly explained to the pupil. In this study, it was communicated clearly to the pupil participants that the aim of the research was to find out the quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective, with the ultimate purpose of the research being school improvement.
In the researcher’s opinion, the real power in pupil voice might lie in its intrinsic properties: it is the voice of a pupil, not shackled by protocol, oblivious to bureaucracy and not afraid to dream; pupils are still “unspoiled, not burdened with tradition” (Blossing, 2010). The researcher believes that the following story (described in Section 5.5.2), which she calls ‘The Swimming Pool Story’, shows, on one hand, how limiting adult voice can be and, on the other hand, how liberating pupil voice can be. During the interviews with Heads of Schools, one of them (H1, 11/2/2016 HOS) had remarked on the immaturity in pupil voice and referred to the idea of pupils asking for a swimming pool as an example of an extravagant request which pupils could make, but which would not be acceded to by adults. As luck would have it, two months later, during an interview with another Head of School (H2, 13/4/2016), it was revealed that the Student Council (in the school of H2), had been asked to contribute ideas to the planning of a new school building for the pupils. Amongst the pupils’ ideas, there was a request for a swimming pool; and the request had been accepted. To demonstrate the practical viability of their request, the members of the Student Council had referred to a swimming pool in a neighbouring non-state school and had offered ideas on how the swimming pool could be used by the wider community after school hours. The Head of School proudly reported that the building plans for the new school now include a swimming pool. This case is an example of Hart, R.A.’s (1992) 7th level of participation: child-initiated decisions. Pupils not only came up with the idea but substantiated the validity of their request. The role of the adults was a secondary one and concerned with the practical implementation of the idea put forward by the pupils.

6.8.4 Limitations of Pupil Voice as Assessor within the Maltese School Context

The findings of this study indicate that the limitations of pupil voice as assessor in Maltese schools stem from two main sources: the preconceived ideas on the concept of pupil voice in the role of assessor, and the limitations of the practical application of pupil voice in the role of assessor.
One of the limitations when considering pupils as assessors of quality is the preconceived negative ideas about this role, which some adults might harbour. Before starting the study, the researcher had encountered many people who showed an interest in the main theme of the research, who were curious about pupils’ judgement on schools and who felt that the research could make a valid contribution to the educational system in Malta. However, there were also a few individuals who demeaned the value of pupil voice in the role of assessor, and who predicted that pupils would trivialise the qualities of a good school and prioritise perks such as mobile phones at school and not wearing a uniform. The results of the research, challenges the views of such sceptics. In the researcher’s opinion, the pupil-generated list showed that pupil voice is a voice which can appraise quality in schools, and that it confirmed McIntyre et al’s (2005:166) view that pupil voice is “serious, thoughtful and constructive”; and that pupil voice is insightful and capable of higher order thinking skills (McCallum et al, 2000). Incidentally, the indicators ‘Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school’ and ‘Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms’ were ranked at relatively low positions: 28 and 29 (out of 32 indicators). During the interviews, all of the Heads of Schools and policy-makers commended the high level of maturity shown by the pupils when assessing schools. In the opinion of one of the policy-makers, this should further reinforce the obligation that adults have to listen, and to act upon, pupil voice.

Different stakeholders described different limitations of pupil voice as assessor. One of the policy-makers described how the pupils’ perspective can be a limited one, because pupils cannot fully understand that the teacher is restricted by curricular demands or that certain decisions are not in the teachers’ hand even though the teacher is at the frontline; this failure or perceived failure by pupils not to understand the complexity of teachers’ work is mentioned by McIntyre et al (2005). Heads of Schools and policy-makers commented on the fact that pupil voice as assessor should only be one of the voices which are listened to in a school. They argued that pupil voice can be limiting if it is allowed to be a voice above other voices. This interpretation of pupil voice is in agreement with the position of a number of academics (Cheminais, 2008; Flutter, 2007; MacBeath, 2006, Osler, 2010). Another
limitation which was mentioned by all stakeholders in this research was, that when pupils are used as assessors, their voice could be devoid of power and influence; and hence would be simply empty noise, carrying no weight at all. As one participant pupil said: “Opinions are gathered and nothing is done about it.” (S3 16/11/2015).

One of the pupils was worried that there might be lack of agreement on ideas amongst pupils. This is the reality of pupil voice; it is not a single homogenous voice (Fielding, 2007; MacBeath, 2006; Robinson and Taylor, 2007; Thompson, 2009). However, this does not have to be a limitation. The disparity in pupil voice could be an example for pupils to see how democratic procedures function and could provide to them an example of democracy in action (Osler, 2010). This study has shown that amongst different stakeholders who participated in the study, the mental terrain for pupil voice in the role of assessor is a positive one and that all stakeholders believe that it is a relevant and useful role for pupil voice. During data collection, one of the pupils, who was very interested in the study, asked succinctly whether, after all, the pupils’ assessment would lead to changes being implemented in schools. The question took the researcher by surprise, and at that point, the researcher could only promise her that she would do her very best for that to happen. The pupil’s question drove home the fact that articulating the priorities of pupils is not enough. The way forward for the pupil-generated list is discussed in the next chapter.

6.8.5 Reflections on Participants’ Reactions to Pupil Voice in the Role of an Assessor

In the researcher’s opinion, the participants’ positive reactions to the concept of pupil voice in the role of an assessor is a very optimistic position which might auger well for the future strengthening and fruitful application of pupil voice in Maltese schools. One of the pupils asserted:

*I think it would be futile for everybody, for example, the Ministry and the government to try to improve things on their own because, at the end of the day, it is the students who go to school.* (S3 16/11/2015).
Another pupil from the same group interview as pupil S3 accused schools that: “Opinions are gathered and nothing is done about it”. The data shows that there are dissenting voices within the range of pupils’ perspective on the current pupil voice in schools. This is to be expected since pupils constitute a very varied group. As discussed earlier, pupils ranked their own voice in schools higher than adults did. This could indicate that adults are more aware of the untapped opportunities for pupil voice in schools. Notwithstanding the divergence in opinion on the present status of pupil voice in Maltese schools, the research showed that pupils are in favour of their being given the right to assess schools.

Adult participants unanimously agreed with the concept that pupils should be given the opportunity, or even the right, to assess schools. That is a very good start. However, the data does also raise doubts about adults’ commitment to implementing initiatives in favour of pupil voice in practice in schools. One of the policy-makers commented:

*It is shocking that pupils are not already being asked to evaluate schools.* (PM2 10/6/2016).

Although evocative, it could be asked as to why policy-makers could, and should, have done something in practice to promote pupil voice already. The researcher’s main fear is that it is very easy for adults to be in favour of pupil voice, to be on the record listing justifications for pupil voice and to provide all the ‘right’ answers during an interview; however, in practice these very same adults do very little to actualise pupil voice in schools. Heads of Schools, who are in direct contact with pupils, also professed to be in favour of pupil voice:

*It is futile to make policies and then we ignore the student…..What you do in school, if you do not take into consideration what the students are saying, everything will fail.* (H2 13/4/2016)

However, Heads of Schools failed to provide any evidence that in their schools pupils were being given the opportunity to share in decision-making or that pupil voice was one of the prominent voices in school. Although Heads of Schools were not asked directly about pupil voice in their schools, during the interviews the emphasis was always on the accordance, in theory, with the concept of pupil voice.
The practical application of pupil voice in schools was never referred to. In the researcher’s opinion, this is the main hurdle—how to translate the theoretical impetus in favour of pupil voice into its practical application. This study has shown that what pupils have to say is relevant to schools, and is in harmony with adult voices. This could encourage schools to provide more space for pupil voice, in particular to pupil voice in the role of an assessor, and hopefully schools could tap the full potential in such a voice.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the main findings of the study and the implications of the main outcomes of this study. The next chapter, which is the final chapter, presents overall reflections on the study including a critical evaluation of the study, conclusions drawn from the research, and recommendations for Maltese schools and for the Maltese educational system.
CHAPTER 7

Conclusions, Reflections and Recommendations

7.0 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to find out about the Maltese pupils’ perspective on what makes a good school; with the ultimate aim of using this knowledge to bring about improvement in schools and in the educational system in Malta. Besides providing knowledge on the Maltese pupils’ perspective, this research has also provided knowledge on pupil voice in the role of an assessor of schools, as a concept in itself. This study has thrown a new light on what Osler (2010:27) calls the ‘invisible minority’ in schools: the pupils themselves. In addition, the research design itself helped pave the way forward for a new voice in Maltese schools: pupil voice in the role of assessor.

This chapter outlines the conclusions, reflections, and recommendations on the study. The chapter starts with the main conclusions drawn from the study. This is followed
by a critical evaluation of the study and a personal reflection. In the subsequent section, a number of recommendations are put forward. In the final section, the overall conclusions from the study are presented.

7.1 Main Conclusions Drawn from the Study

Further to the discussion in Chapter 6, there are three main themes in the conclusions which can be drawn from the study:

1. The Maltese pupils’ assessment on the quality of a good school
2. The potential of pupil voice in the role of assessor in the Maltese educational system.
3. The way forward for pupil voice as assessor in Malta.

In this section, these three main themes will be discussed.

7.1.1 The Maltese Pupils’ Assessment of the Quality of a Good School

In the eyes of the Maltese pupil, a Prosocial school is a good school, where the focus is on human resources and on interpersonal relationships. The Maltese pupil is stating that the strength of a school is in the people who work there. Overall, physical resources were assessed as being less important than human resources, with the exception of cleanliness and safety, which were ranked relatively highly in the pupil-generated list of the qualities of a good school. For Maltese pupils, the quality indicator which is most important for a good school is ‘Good teachers’. It seems that pupils have identified, what according to Hattie (2003), is the single most important influence which can make a positive difference in schools:

We have poured more money into school buildings, school structures, we hear so much about reduced class sizes and new examinations and curricula, we ask parents to help manage schools ....... (it) is like searching for your wallet which you lost in the bushes, under the lamppost because that is where there is light. The answer lies elsewhere – it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act –the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these
policies, and who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling. (Hattie, 2003: 2,3)

Similarly, Day et al (2007) note:

No school has improved without the commitment of teachers; and although some students learn despite their teachers, most learn because of them.......So the rhetoric is clear. Teachers matter. (Day et al, 2007:1).

The pupils in this study have shown that they know that “teachers matter.” This is a significant outcome of this study: for pupils, teachers are the most important quality indicator of a good school. Effectively, the Maltese pupil has echoed Sahlberg’s Fourth Way of Finland (2011). As described in Section 3.3.2, Sahlberg (2011) is against what has been termed as GERM: Global Education Reform Movement, which, he argues, emphasises standardisation in teaching, market-rich ideas, and standardised testing. He argues that the central theme in the success of Finnish schools lies in the agentic role of Finnish teachers (Sahlberg, 2011:180). In addition, when advocating equity as an alternative to GERM, Murgatroyd and Sahlberg (2016:13) also refer to the central position of the teacher, “enabled and empowered as a designer of learning”. The Maltese pupil has unwittingly repeated Murgatroyd’s and Sahlberg’s (2016) message: good teachers are needed for good schools.

Further insights from this study were that pupils’ assessment of a good school was influenced by age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level. The more salient outcomes were:

- Younger pupils tended to give higher scores to indicators of quality; this could be due to the fact that they are less critical than older pupils, or that younger pupils are engaging more at school.

- Girls gave higher scores to quality indicators describing school climate and learning; whereas boys gave higher scores to quality indicators describing practical activities and modern resources. This outcome confirmed traditional gender stereotypes; this raises a red flag for schools. Firstly, schools should ensure that they do not perpetuate gender stereotypes, and secondly, they could try to compensate for gender stereotypes messages which pupils might be exposed to in their families or in the wider Maltese society.
The socio-economic background which varied the most from the rest, was the group of pupils having unemployed parents. This group of pupils gave the highest scores to quality indicators describing practical activities and modern resources, but the lowest scores to quality indicators related to school leadership, teachers and the quality of learning, and school organisation. This finding could help schools understand more this group of pupils, and seek new ways of reaching out to this group of pupils not only through the quality indicators which are important for this group of pupils, but also by asking why the inner core workings of the school: leadership, teaching, school organisation, are considered as being relatively less important for a good school by this group of pupils.

There was a positive correlation between academic attainment level and quality indicators describing school leadership, discipline, resources, school climate, assessment, teachers and the quality of learning; and a negative correlation with quality indicators describing practical school activities (which are not directly focused on academic subjects), perks for pupils (such as mobile phone use at school and no school uniforms) and school organisation. This finding confirms the idea that academically successful pupils tend to give more importance to academic activities and the traditional school climate and less to the non-academic aspect of schooling; whereas the opposite also seems evident. Schools could use this finding to explore how to provide a more holistic educational experience for all pupils, ensuring it appeals to all its pupils, on all levels of the academic spectrum.

7.1.2 The Potential of Pupil Voice in the Role of Assessor in the Maltese Educational System

The research in itself has given pupils a voice; a voice to carry out an overall assessment on schools, based on their experiences of Maltese schools. The pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school embodies the voice of the pupil as an assessor. But the list is not an end in itself; to be of value it needed to be actualised within the Maltese scenario. It is not enough to “listen” to what pupils
have told us through the list, we also need to “act” (Czerniawski and Kidd, 201:xxvii). Osler (2010) argues in the same vein, and Lundy (2007:927) reminds us, “voice is not enough”; she proposes four provisions to tap the full potential in voice. Pupils were given voice in this research, in the four ways described by Lundy (2007), as the research sought to collect and express pupil voice on a wide scale.

1. Space: in this research pupils were given the opportunity to express themselves through the focus group sessions, the questionnaire, and the group interviews. The research design engaged pupil voice at all levels: from co-designing the questionnaire to co-analysing the results of the study.

2. Voice: the pupils’ voice was mainly expressed through the pupils’ assessment of the quality indicators of a good school.

3. Audience: the wider the audience, the more likely for the list to make an impact on the educational system. Through the sequential design of the research itself, the list was shown to pupils, Heads of Schools and policy-makers. The audience could be further extended to include parents, teachers, academics and as far as possible, the wider society, with a particular emphasis on influential people such as Members of Parliament in Malta and Maltese Members of the European Parliament. It was hoped that if influential individuals were included in the audience, there might be a ripple effect, and as more powerful people appear to be paying attention to the pupil-generated list, other sectors of the wider audience might also be encouraged to listen. To reach as wide an audience as possible, the research findings will also be communicated via academic papers, articles on newspapers, participation in programmes on national television and radio stations. The researcher has appeared twice on a local television station, Net TV, on a programme “Life & Style” to present and discuss her research. An academic paper on the methodological aspects of this study in giving pupils’ voice, is to be published in a special edition of the UK British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration journal Management in Education, due to be published in 2018. One of the policy-makers has offered to organise a national event to which Heads of Schools will be invited and the researcher can present her research. One of the Heads of Schools asked the researcher to
conduct a professional development session at his school, during which the research and the implications of it for teachers and pupils in his particular school could be explored in detail. The researcher will take up these opportunities, as well as other future opportunities which might yet transpire, to continue to support the process of giving pupils a voice in the Maltese context.

4. Influence: the level of influence of the study depends on the current level of power in pupil voice in Malta, and on the level of interest that the study might garner. The different aspects of the level of influence of the study will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

7.1.3 The Level of Influence of this Study

*The current level of power in pupil voice in Malta*

In Section 3.5.2, when examining the status of the Maltese Pupil on Hart, R.A.’s Ladder of Participation, the researcher overviewed a number of Maltese studies which directly, or indirectly focused on pupil voice (Abela, 2012; Carbonaro and Darmanin, 1998; Cassar, J., 2011; Cefai et al, 2012; Grima, M. 2010; Privitelli and Bezzina, 2007) and the Student Councils Report 2009/2010 (Curriculum Management & eLearning Department within the Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family, Malta, 2010). The researcher came to the conclusion that the status of pupil voice in Malta is currently between the 3rd and 4th rung\(^{31}\) on Hart, R.A.’s Ladder of Participation (1992). When stakeholders were asked to gauge the status of pupil voice in Malta (on a scale from 0 to 10), pupils rated it at 5.9; Heads of Schools, 4.8; and policy-makers, 4.2. Although it cannot be concluded that these three groups rated on the same basis as one another, the relative ranking positions, by adults rating pupil voice as lower than pupils, could be interpreted to indicate that pupil voice in Malta is still in a relatively poor influential position.

The level of interest that the study might garner

One of the policy-makers remarked:

My initial reaction is, it is shocking that pupils are not already being asked to evaluate schools. So it is a disappointment that we are not doing it. (PM 2, 10/6/2016).

This policy-maker’s attitude augers well for a receptive audience for this study. Ultimately, the influence will depend not only on the size of the audience that the research will manage to garner but also on the level of influence that such an audience has. In part it seems that this will depend on how much the researcher pushes for recognition of pupil voice in the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a good school, and in part on how the audience receives the list. That a Maltese audience was exposed to the study as part of its design, was planned to engender such an interest.

Different Spheres of Influence

One of the reasons for the inclusion of policy-makers in the study was to provide a fast route for the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a good school to influence at policy-making level. The interviews with policy-makers showed that this was not a homogenous group, and there was some frustration amongst the policy-makers about the level of influence that individual policy-makers have. For ethical reasons it is not possible to expand further without divulging the identity of the individual policy-makers. The interviews showed that the ‘official’ policy-makers were aware that the unofficial and anonymous policy-makers, who, according to them, are close to the party in government, play an important and influential role. This confirms the partisan political influence in decision-making at policy level and, that “crucial decision makers have obtained their positions as members of a particular government party, and their policies must be consistent with those of the present government” (Levin, 1991:72). Nevertheless, the louder the voice of this study, the more likely that all policy-makers (official and unofficial ones) will hear it, and act on it.

Apart, or in conjunction with, the policy-makers’ input, the pupil-generated list can make use of other available vehicles to transform itself from an inert list to changes
in schools and in the educational system. Heads of Schools and policy-makers suggested that the School Development Plan would be the best way to set into motion the changes which need to be implemented. The School Development Plan, as an agent to actualise the list, could have the advantage of contextualising the list according to the needs of each individual school. This is something which the researcher will be advocating when she offers the invited professional development session. One of the Heads of Schools suggested that the Student Council could also be the voice and the agent to promote and put into action the pupil-generated list in schools. However, in reality, before this can happen, the status of Student Councils needs to be upgraded. It seems that presently, the level of participation of Maltese pupils in Student Councils is tokenistic. During the interviews, it was mentioned that in Student Councils, pupils are limited to fund-raising activities rather than decision-making on important school matters. As mentioned in previous chapters, this finding is similar to results of earlier studies carried out in Maltese schools (Cassar, J., 2011; Grima, M. 2010; Micallef Gatt, 2014) and of other studies carried out in other countries (Hampson et al, 2011; Rudduck et al, 2003; Maitles and Deuchar, 2006; Whitty and Wisby, 2007). The way forward for the pupil voice as assessor in schools, entails empowering Student Councils so that from data banks and organisers of mundane activities in schools, they become partners in decision-making on matters which are of significance in a school.

Through a concerted effort, which must be initiated by the researcher - since she is the one who has worked on the project and who should publicise the research - but which would involve all stakeholders in the inner and outer school community, the pupil-generated list could offer the “seeds of transformation” (Fielding, 2001b:107) to improve schools in Malta. The effect could be two-pronged: it could lead to better-quality schools to address the pupils’ priorities and the list in itself could serve as a showpiece for pupil voice, which in turn could instigate a stronger drive and commitment for offering pupil voice in schools.
7.2 The Way Forward for Pupil Voice as Assessor in Malta

Whilst Heads of Schools reported that pupils need to learn how to express their voice, policy-makers also said that adults need to learn how to invite pupil voice and how to react to it (as evidenced in Fig 5.12 and Fig 5.19 respectively). It seems that the way forward is for better preparation for offering pupils a meaningful voice as assessor, for both pupils and adults. Each whole school community needs to learn more about the optimum conditions for pupil voice to flourish (Bragg, 2007; Fielding, 2001; Devine, 2000; Gunter and Thomson, 2007; Morgan, B., 2011; Osberg et al, 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). Pupils need the “right ‘literacy’” (Schartz, 2005:381) to feel comfortable to contribute; this means that schools need to move away from existing managerial discourse, find ways of communicating in pupil-friendly ways (Schartz, 2005) and “do more than merely invite student voice” but “insist upon, enquire into, try to understand, interrogate, and generate student voice as best as they can” (Angus 2006:378). Schools also need to find ways to sustain pupil voice in the role of an assessor (Flutter, 2007; Mitra 2001; Pedder and McIntyre, 2006) since there is a danger that ‘the interest may burn out before its transformative potential has been fully understood” (Rudduck et al, 2003:285). This study is based on the warrant, evidenced in the review of relevant published work (as described in Chapter 3) that ‘pupil voice as assessor’, has been reported not only to lead to immediate benefits such as the improvement of specific issues in a school but also can be an investment in the social capital of a school (Hargreaves, 2003a). This could have wider ramifications, such as the school evolving into a learning community for all its members (Rudduck et al, 2003). Once these benefits are recognised they could act as a stronger incentive for schools to engage more fully with giving pupils voice.

Changes at school level need to be consolidated by initiatives and direction at a national level. There was unanimous agreement amongst policy-makers on the importance of taking pupil voice as assessor on board. To translate words into actions “policy makers at all levels need to make spaces for the active engagement of students in policy processes” (Oerlemans and Vidovich, 2005). One of the policy-makers suggested an ‘SIA’ a Student Impact Assessment for each new educational policy and referred to the draft new Education Act which was about to be published.
As described in Chapter 2: The Maltese Context, in the draft new Education Act (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016:8), the following duties of schools are listed:

- To encourage student involvement and participation
- To conduct a student impact assessment before introducing new policies or educational initiatives.

Introducing a Student Impact Assessment could be a powerful way forward for pupil voice as assessor in Malta; the pupil would be given the opportunity to assess new policies before they are implemented in schools and to influence changes in new policies, making them more pupil friendly and pupil relevant. In this way, pupil voice would be informing educational reforms. Adults would be giving pupils a voice at the highest levels of decision-making. At this point in time, one can only hope that the initiatives outlined in the draft new Education Act will eventually be effectively implemented in schools.

7.3 Critical Evaluation of the Study

In this section, a critical evaluation of the study is discussed: firstly by reflecting on how much the study was a study on pupil voice. The subsequent sections critically evaluate the study in a threefold manner: a critical reflection on the research as a quality assurance exercise, an evaluation of the research approach adopted in the study, and a critical evaluation of a number of aspects of the study.

7.3.1 Critical Reflection on the Extent to which the Study can be Classified as a Pupil Voice Study

The pre-study and mid-study intention of the researcher was to conduct a study both about and to provide an opportunity for pupil voice. On post-study reflection, the researcher is much more critical as to the extent to which the study met the latter aim, of giving pupils a voice. The researcher came to appreciate pupil voice collected through a remotely carried out survey is a limited voice. The main research tool was
a questionnaire, and although the pupils helped design the questionnaire during the focus group sessions, the main research tool could only collect a very restricted ‘voice’ from pupils. In the first place, the pupils were limited to grading the importance of a list of quality indicators. The questionnaire pre-set the agenda of the theme to be explored, what could be expressed by pupils, and how it could be expressed. This means that the ‘voice’ which was collected was in some ways a censored voice, and the ultimate control and power were in the hands of the adult: the researcher. The intention of the researcher was never to deceive or misguide pupils; however to address the main research question, and to gather data at scale, the researcher unwittingly hampered pupil voice. The last question in the questionnaire was an open-ended one, and was intended to provide space for pupils to contribute in a less restricted way but even this was a limited opportunity.

The group interviews with Student Councils gave more space than the questionnaire, for pupils to express their voice. The aim of the group interviews with pupils was to provide a way of giving pupils a richer voice and to help the researcher reflect on the meaning and significance of the survey data from the pupils’ perspective. The main drawback was that the group of pupils within a Student Council might not be representing a realistic cross-section of all the possible pupil voices in a school; the researcher presumed that the pupils in a Student Council might be more articulate than other children gathered randomly in a school and that this would allow for richer and more fruitful discussion of the pupil-generated data. In retrospect these pupils might also have been more able and possibly more advantaged than the average pupil- due to having garnered popular support from peer pupils and possibly from adults as well and they therefore offered a biased voice compared to their peer cohort on the whole.

Further, on reflection, it might be that during group interviews with pupils, the authentic pupil voice was not captured. The group interviews were conducted in schools and by an adult (the researcher). This very setting might have predisposed pupil participants to contribute in a way which they might perceive as being expected from them from school authorities and from adults. The researcher was not known to
the pupils and would therefore have been viewed as a visitor and outsider. The very fact that the pupils were all Student Council members also have contributed to the perception that the participants were expected to answer as official school representatives, and so the individual, unhampered pupil voice might have been repressed. Pupils might have felt coerced into participating because their gatekeepers (the Head of School and the parents/guardians) had already given their consent for the pupils to participate and, in reality, they might not have felt they could therefore not offer their own consent. They could also have felt pressure from other peers who had already agreed to participate. These potential feelings of coercion to participate might also have been experienced by the questionnaire survey participants; and could have influenced pupils’ contribution and hence the type of pupil voice which the study captured. Pupils’ past experience in data collection might also have influenced the way they engaged during this study’s data collection.

With hindsight, the researcher felt that she could have communicated better the intention of the study to give pupils voice, and could have explained how this voice would be heard in a clearer way. The informed consent letters could have explained in more detail, the data collection phases and the pupil participation along different phases of the research. On reflection, the researcher felt that she could have revisited the participating pupils at different phases of the research; so that they understand better how their contribution was informing other phases of the research and how their contribution was formulating pupil voice in its capacity of an assessor on the quality indicators of a good school. The researcher came to realise that the study was not, intrinsically, a study on pupil voice, but rather a study on pupils’ perspective, which could be considered as a stepping stone to pave the way to a stronger pupil voice in Maltese schools. The pupil voice expressed in this study was a restricted voice, confined by parameters set by an adult and by an agenda which was solely in the hands of an adult. Nevertheless, within the wider contribution of the study to schools, particularly to Maltese schools, this study could provide an illustration of the potential and relevance of pupil voice to ensure better-quality schools.
7.3.2 Reflections on the Research as a Quality Assurance Exercise

The purpose of this research was to invite pupil voice in the role of assessor of schools, within the wider scope of quality assurance in schools. When inviting pupil voice it might be received in, what Fielding (2001b:107) describes as a “conformist” manner, where the pupil voice is that of a customer. In this setting, pupil voice is flat and satisfies preconceived notions. On the other hand, it is possible for pupil voice to form part of “prefigurative practice”, which has the ability “not only to inspire, but also to sustain developments” (Fielding 2001b:107). It was in such a scenario that pupil voice was invited in this study. It was not limited by predetermined agendas, and the aim was for such a voice to be empowered to bring about educational transformation.

The overarching question which pupils were being asked in the questionnaire survey was: What are the quality indicators of a good school? In the researcher’s opinion, the simplicity of this question, is what made the exercise successful. As discussed in Section 3.2.1, one of the main problems with the concept of quality assurance in education, is that there are some areas where the concept does not seem to be completely compatible with an educational setting. One of the principal reasons for this lack of fit of quality assurance as a useful concept for assessing educational settings is that the concept of quality assurance was originally borrowed from business management, and the educational realm is by nature, very different from business management. The outcomes and the processes which occur in schools are very complex and so, difficult to measure and assess (Orzolek, 2012 and Sayed, 1993). In addition, some of the outcomes of education cannot be quantified, as is usual in the application of quality assurance in business context, these are the “indeterminate ends” (Wagner, 1989:24) in education. By asking pupils to assess schools, some of these limitations inherent in quality assurance in schools were eliminated or lessened. In the researcher’s opinion, the pupil was holistically judging all the different aspects of schooling simultaneously and the criteria being used was not a predetermined scale, which can never capture the intricacy of what happens in a school, but the pupil’s heart and mind which can factor in all that the pupil experiences, feels and assimilates.
Heads of Schools criticised the fact that the pupil-generated list is a generic list. Since the data was collected from a large number of schools, they criticised the fact that the study ignores the particular realities and contexts of individual schools. In the researcher’s opinion, this is a fair criticism of the study, but the very nature of the study, and the obligation to protect the identity of the school and of the pupils could not produce individual lists for individual schools. It was a conscious, ethical decision not to ask pupils to judge particular schools. In the researcher’s opinion, this was a principle worth sticking to. In addition, it was this very variation between one school and another which captured the overall reality of state schools in Malta.

7.3.3 Critical Reflection on the Research Approach Adopted in the Study

The research approach in this study was a Mixed Methods research approach. The main advantage of this approach was that it facilitated data which could answer the research questions from different perspectives (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004:21). Within the Mixed Methods research approach, a sequential design was followed, and this meant that pupil voice could penetrate and influence all levels of the research design, from the design of the main research tool, to co-analysis of the research findings, to suggestions on the way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school.

On the other hand, there were a number of disadvantages in using Mixed Methods research in this study. The process was time-consuming (Bergman, 2011; and Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). There were different reasons for this. Firstly, since the research design made use of different research tools, each tool had to be designed separately. Secondly, the sequential design which was part and parcel of the Mixed Methods research design in this study, meant that the pace of the research process was determined by the progress or otherwise of the previous stage. The data from one phase of collection, not only had to be gathered but also analysed, before the next phase could be started. This meant that it was not possible to collect different sets of data simultaneously. The Mixed Methods research design made considerable demands on the researcher (Bergman, 2011; and Burke Johnson and
Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The researcher had the challenge of interpreting, integrating and articulating the different forms of data. Compared with the monomethod researcher, the Mixed Methods researcher has more to learn. In this study, the researcher had to gain knowledge on how to use both qualitative and quantitative data gathering research tools, and on how to analyse and then integrate both types of data. In the researcher’s case considerable support in gaining the necessary statistical understanding and skills was gained from the Mathematics Department of the local University. Furthermore, if one takes into consideration the cost of providing different research tools, the cost of fuel spent to facilitate the different elements of the Mixed Methods Research, and the cost of training of the researcher on different forms of analyses, the total cost of this research was, most probably, higher than that for other forms of research (Mason, 2006). One could be tempted to ask: was it value for money? Was it worth it? The answer can only be a subjective one since the researcher only conducted one type of research and so cannot compare objectively the costs and worth of two different research approaches. However, in the researcher’s opinion, the Mixed Methods Research facilitated rich, multi-faceted integrated data, collected by a variety of methods, which could best answer the research questions.

The fact that there were different sources of data, made the analysis and the presentation of the data more complex. Feilzer (2010:13) warns that Mixed Methods research can produce “heterogenous results that need to be interpreted carefully”. Contrastingly, a monomethod would more likely provide data which is more straightforward to analyse, and presumably easier and neater to represent. In this study, being a Mixed Methods research design, the findings provided a more complicated picture. This was, in fact, its strength, providing a wider and deeper understanding of the themes being studied and their likely applicability to the educational setting into which the findings were finally disseminated. Furthermore, it allowed the dissemination of the study to be initiated during the study itself, building in different perspectives in both hearing and responding to the emergent data. The research design also had the advantage in assuring the quality of the basis for these findings, by allowing one set of data to “cross-validate or complement individual findings” (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) from another set of
data; in this research, this happened between the questionnaire data and the interview data.

Another disadvantage of using Mixed Methods research was, that each new research tool, also introduced the limitations of that particular research tool. While it is hoped that the limitations of one research approach compensated for the limitations of another research approach (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007), there is also the possibility that on combining the approaches, the limitations of both approaches were combined together (Newby, 2010; Symonds and Gorard, 2008). Hopefully, in this study, the inflexibility and the lack of opportunity to convey meaning and feelings in the questionnaire was compensated for by the flexibility and the personalised, interactive exchange between interviewer and participant during interviews and focus group sessions. Furthermore, the subjective analysis of the interview data was, conceivably, compensated for by the objective analysis of the questionnaire data. Hopefully, the limitations of one method were offset by the strengths of another method, so that the overall data which was collected and later analysed, could convey a deeper and wider understanding of the research inquiry.

In the researcher’s opinion, the most challenging, and at the same time, the most rewarding phase of Mixed Methods Research was the integration of qualitative and quantitative data during the analysis phase. In fact, it appears that the Achille’s heel of Mixed Methods is the lack of clarity from previously published work on how the qualitative and quantitative aspects of one study can be successfully and effectively integrated together (Bergman, 2011; Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Feilzer, 2010; and, Symonds and Gorard, 2008). Likewise, in this study, there was no pre-published design which the research could follow; rather, the researcher had to devise the strategy to integrate the different data in the analysis stage. At the same time, the main challenge proved to be the main strength of the research, since the “conceptual and methodological integration led to synergistic understandings” (Day et al, 2008:331) which would have never been possible through a monomethod research design. The researcher had to devise her own strategy to integrate the different data sets; at times raw data was integrated, at other stages, different data sets were analysed separately and then the analysed data was integrated. The
researcher also had to work out how to integrate fully the pupils’ perspective into the
design, without this being modelled in previously published studies. As described
earlier, in this study, pupils’ perspective and contribution permeated different stages
in the research design, from the design of the main research tool to the discussion on
the main outcomes of the questionnaire survey, and on the way forward for the pupil-
generated list of the quality indicators of a good school.

7.3.4 Critical Reflection on Specific Aspects of the Study

After reflecting on the research project, a number of specific aspects emerge, which
have shaped the study, affected the way the research developed and contributed to
the strengths and to the weaknesses of the study. These aspects encompass the
research tools as tools to capture pupil voice, the range in pupil voice captured in the
study, pupils’ perceptions and participants’ interest in the study.

The research tools as tools to capture pupil voice

The main research tool in this study was the questionnaire; the questionnaire data
answered the main research question, and it supplemented the subsidiary questions.
As a tool, the questionnaire allowed the collection of data at scale, in a way which
aimed to represent the pupil population in state schools, aged 8 (Year 4) and aged 14
(Form 4). Cluster sampling was used as the sampling frame for this study, to ensure
that all ten colleges\textsuperscript{32} in Malta were represented in the sample. 1618 pupils, from
31 different schools, participated in the questionnaire survey; representing 27.9% of
the total Year 4 (aged 8) pupil state school population and 46.9% of the total Form 4
(aged 14) pupil state school population during the 2014/2015 scholastic year.

One of the advantages of the main tool in this study is that it gave pupil voice the
opportunity to express itself without some of the disadvantages which are usually
associated with pupil voice. The simple format of the questionnaire meant that there
never was a case of adults translating “student speak into adult words” (Mitra,

\textsuperscript{32} All state primary and secondary schools are grouped under ten colleges. The schools within a
college lie in close geographical proximity. Each college falls under the remit of the College
Principal. The eleventh college, formed from post-secondary schools, was set up in January
2017.
2001:92). “The risk of doing student voice to students by conceptualising student voice predominantly from an adult perspective” (Nelson, 2015:9) was practically eliminated, or at least greatly reduced because the questionnaire had been designed in conjunction with pupils. The initial focus group sessions informed and formulated the design of the questionnaire. This helped ensure that the wording and the layout was pupil friendly.

Pupil voice operates within a context, which sets conditions for pupil voice, such as: “‘Who’ is allowed to speak? ‘What’ are they allowed to speak about? What ‘language’ is encouraged/ allowed?” (Fielding, 2001b). These conditions were automatically set by the format of the questionnaire and were equal for all pupils. The way the research was conducted ensured that there was never the issue of trying to elicit silent voices (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Lewis, 2010; McIntyre et al, 2005). In practice, not all pupils could be represented in the questionnaire survey. Although at 70.2%, the response rate was relatively high, the sample only represented 27.9% of Year 4 pupils (aged 8) and 46.9% of Form 4 pupils (aged 14) of the total year group state school population during the 2014/2015 scholastic year (the year when the survey was carried out).

The design of the questionnaire helped give equal opportunities to pupils. For all the questions in the questionnaire, save the last one, pupils only had to mark their responses on a scale from 1 to 5. This ensured that even the least eloquent pupils could have an equal chance of voicing their opinion; unlike what might happen in everyday life in schools, where the most eloquent pupils have an advantage over others (Flutter, 2007). By and large, the questionnaire secured a sense of equity amongst pupils: one questionnaire for one pupil and hence the influence of each pupil on the result was consistent. The questionnaire, in itself, provided a space for pupil voice; there is always a danger that whenever new space is given to pupil voice, the extra space is not distributed equally, and those who are usually heard, are heard more (Breslin, 2011). Another disadvantage of pupil voice in practice is that adults’ responses depend on how pupil voice is being projected (Cremin et al, 2010); however, this disadvantage was eliminated in the questionnaire survey since all voices were projected in the same manner.
The group interviews with pupils were carried out with Student Councils. As discussed in Chapter 4, this group was chosen mainly because of the practical advantages of working with a group which is already in existence. In addition, the members of the Student Council are usually elected, so to some degree or another, the group interviews were being conducted with pupils who are presumably representing the wider pupil population. The voice of such pupils might carry more influence than other voices in a school. Evidence about the role and significance of Student Councils, especially those in Malta, had been explored in the review of literature. It was noted that pupil voice in Student Councils might only be representing the more articulate voices in the school (Cremin et al, 2010 and Osler, 2010). This is the major weakness of choosing to carry out group interviews with Student Councils. One might argue that the Student Council is a case of giving more voice to those who already have a voice in a school (Breslin, 2011). As discussed in previous chapters and in this chapter, in Section 7.3, some scholars question the real power in Student Council voice and argue that it is only tokenistic. This (my) research could be considered as having given an opportunity to give real power to the Student Council and of unleashing some of the potential in pupil voice in Student Councils.

*The range in pupil voice in the study*

As mentioned earlier, pupil voice is accepted as not being one voice; a “monolingual assumption is illusory” (Robinson and Taylor, 2007:6). This study tried not to lose the voice of the individual pupil within the many voices of the pupils in three ways:

1. **By using a range of channels to communicate with pupils and to reach out to different pupils: focus group activity sessions, questionnaires, and group interviews.**

2. **By asking pupils to co-analyse the findings of the questionnaire survey in group interviews so that they have a chance to reflect on the wider views expressed; in this way their views can be heard clearly.**
3. By segregating the analysis of pupil data into different groups so that different voices may be heard better; pupils were segregated according to age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level.

Typical of research on pupil voice, this study is limited by the “plurality and shifting nature of voices” and this renders the researcher “an unreliable narrator” (Chadderton, 2011:81). Although this might be considered to be a disadvantage, it is in actual fact, a realistic understanding of the complexity of pupil voice work (Chadderton, 2011), and in the context of this study, could help forge the way forward for the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school in Malta.

The study relies on perceptions and subjective judgements

One of the Heads of Schools criticised the fact that the study relies on pupils’ perceptions, and that perceptions are not always true. This might be considered a valid argument, depending on the one’s ontological position (Thomas, 2009). However, this research stated clearly from the start that it is measuring the pupils’ perspective. The pupils’ perceptions shape the pupils’ perspective and the research was in fact, measuring these perceptions. This research never made any claims to be measuring the absolute truth (if such a thing exists); the research can only claim to truthfully measure, record and analyse the data collected from the participants, as they choose to articulate their views at the time of data collection. The researcher is also aware that the pupils’ judgement was not a reflection on the ideal school, but the judgement was based on pupils’ school experience. Furthermore, the researcher is also conscious of the fact that the quality indicators ratings which were given by pupils, could not be considered, at least in positivist terms, as an objective scale by which one score could be compared with another directly. The pupils’ subjective judgement is an intrinsic aspect of this research.

Participants’ interest in the study

The participants’ interest in the study was a strong one, and this was evident in the keen way participants responded: from the colourfully decorated answers of the focus group sessions to the enthusiastic discussions during group interviews with
Student Councils, to the productive interviews with Heads of Schools and policy-makers. The theme of the research directly involves pupils and so they might have been intrinsically motivated to contribute to the research. The purpose of the study was clearly communicated with pupils: using pupil voice to bring about positive changes in schools, and this could have further helped increase their active participation during data gathering sessions. There was unanimous agreement amongst Heads of Schools and policy-makers with the main theme of the research—pupil voice in the role of assessor—and this accordance might have fuelled the adults’ interest and participation. In addition, policy-makers might have felt comfortable during the interviews since the findings pointed to changes which are “within the political constraints faced by the policy-maker” and so are acceptable to a policy-maker (Levin, 1999:3).

7.4 Personal Reflections

For the researcher, the study has been a personal journey. The research project has helped the researcher to change her worldview. The researcher started the research journey as a strict positivist, searching for ‘the list’ of quality indicators of a good school from the pupils’ perspective. Most probably, this initial position was the result of the researcher’s natural tendency to gravitate towards quantifiable data, given her background as a Biology and Chemistry teacher. As the researcher progressed in her research, the meetings with her supervisors and the literature review, brought about a shift in the researcher’s position. The researcher came to understand that, although the list of the quality-indicators of a good school remains an important outcome of the research, a Mixed Methods Research approach would address the research questions in a more holistic, multi-levelled and realistic manner. This view of addressing the research questions has helped the researcher appreciate that phenomena in life are often multi-faceted and can be addressed in a multi-method manner.
During the course of the research project, the researcher learned how to become more critical, more analytical and more focused. The researcher developed her intellectual skills and academic writing skills. As a part-time doctoral student, coping with a full-time job and family commitments, time-management skills and stress management skills were continuously being put to the test. The researcher increased her knowledge base on research methods techniques, in particular interviewing skills and mathematical data analysis skills. To be able to conduct the field studies, the researcher had to interact with a large number of people, in the process, she refined her interpersonal skill. During the research project, the researcher had to reconcile the tension between her position as an insider in the Maltese educational system (as an Assistant head of school) and an outsider (as a researcher). The different positions helped the researcher widen her perspective, gave her an insight into the Maltese educational system which made her more sensitive to the research context and helped her tailor the research design to suit the participants.

Another key learning point was about the ethical responsibilities of a practitioner-researcher in the Maltese context researching the pupil community within which she was embedded. The participants in the main questionnaire were all minors. This made the researcher more aware of the ethical implications of the research. The researcher became aware that a cautious approach had to be adopted when collecting data from participants - particularly from young children. The researcher formulated a Personal Code of Conduct (Section 4.11.1), modelled on an ethical framework (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009) which guided the researcher during the data collection, not only with minors but also with adults. After a period of reflection and in keeping with a study about pupil voice, the researcher felt that consent for research with pupils should not only be granted from parents or carers but should be obtained from the pupils themselves. Effectively, pupils were asked twice whether they would like to participate in the study, and they were given the option to withdraw their participation at any stage during data collection, without having to give a reason for doing so. The researcher feels that the research with minors helped her understand minors’ position with regards to consent-giving during data collection. Adults will always be important gate-keepers in research with minors; however, once adults’ consent is granted, the minors’ consent cannot be taken for granted, and it should be
actively sought. This study has helped the researcher appreciate and respect minors’ position more. It encouraged a growing and practical appreciation of what it means to give pupils a voice in its fullest sense. Consequently, the theme of the study instilled a keener interest in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and on how these rights can and should be applied in everyday circumstances.

7.5 Recommendations

From the outcomes of the study, a number of recommendations may be put forward. The following lists describe recommendations at a policy or national level, recommendations for schools, and recommendations for further research.

7.5.1 Recommendations at a Policy or National Level in Malta

- The top three indicators in the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school should be addressed at a policy level. A national concerted effort, which includes better working conditions for teachers and for Heads of Schools, is needed to ensure that these professions attract the best talented people. The pupils’ emphasis on the affective attributes of a ‘good’ teacher should inform teacher recruiting exercises and teacher training and retraining courses.

- To ensure that schools are clean, at a Ministerial level, more cleaning staff could be employed, in addition to personnel to manage and supervise the cleaning of schools. Independent cleaning companies could be employed to help share the burden in the management of the cleaning services in schools.

- The role of pupils as assessors should be formally recognised in policy documents describing quality assurance measures in the educational system.
• A Pupil Impact Assessment exercise should be carried out before new national policies and initiatives are launched.

• National policies should resist ‘quick fix’ and gimmicks to appease pupils. This study has shown that pupils do not consider these to be important for a good school, instead, pupils have ranked ‘Good teachers’, ‘A clean school’ and ‘A good Head of School’ as the top three requisites for a good school.

• Teacher and school leaders’ initial and on-going training could include training on how to elicit and act on pupil voice in schools.

• Initial and on-going training could be provided to teachers and school leaders on how to maximise the potential of pupil voice in Student Councils. Teacher initial and on-going training, and school leaders’ training could focus more on the development and improvement of a ‘Prosocial school’ where the emphasis is on the interpersonal relationship between teacher and pupil.

7.5.2 Recommendations for Schools

• Schools could examine how the high ranking indicators in the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school fare in their own school. Schools might choose to focus their school improvement measures on these high ranking indicators.

• This research has shown that different groups of pupils judge schools differently; schools might take these differences into consideration to increase pupil engagement and pupil performance; for example the findings showed that practical activities are valued more by boys than girls; girls attach more importance to school climate than boys; older pupils value modern resources more than younger pupils; pupils having lower academic attainment levels value more hands-on activities; pupils having unemployed parents value learning and school climate less than pupils from other socio-economic backgrounds. By being sensitive to these differences, schools could create the right environment which provides equal opportunities for all pupils.
• Schools could carry out similar studies to this research, as part of their internal auditing process. Each individual school could carry out research (possibly through a questionnaire survey or focus group sessions) to establish its own pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. In this way, the individual realities of schools would be taken into consideration, and each school would have a personalised list which could be used to direct the school’s vision.

• Schools might choose to carry out a comparative analysis by teaming up with other schools. In the college\textsuperscript{33} set-up of Maltese state schools, this could be easily facilitated, since schools within the same college already work together.

• In schools, the School Development Plan could be the vehicle to transform pupil voice in the role of assessor into practical outcomes for the benefit of the whole school community.

• Schools could try out modern means to capture pupil voice, which could be more ‘pupil friendly’ such as: Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs, and emails.

• Visual imagery could be used to elicit pupil voice in schools. Initial and on-going training on how to encourage pupils to use visual imagery and on how to interpret visual imagery could be provided to teachers and school leaders. Research carried out by Cremin et al (2010) and Wall (2017) could offer schools a fresh approach to using visual imagery as a vehicle for pupil voice.

• School self-evaluation could also focus on the space and influence of pupil voice in schools.

• Schools could provide specialised training programmes for pupils on how to articulate and express pupil voice.

• Schools need to take into consideration the fact that pupil voice is not one voice, and so they need to seek ways to make the different voices audible.

\textsuperscript{33} All state primary and secondary schools are grouped under ten colleges. The schools within a college lie in close geographical proximity. Each college falls under the remit of the College Principal.
The minority groups in pupil voice also have a right to express themselves and to be listened to.

- Schools should formally recognise the role of pupils as assessors in quality assurance measures undertaken at a school level. Besides viewing pupils as data sources, schools should involve pupils as assessors of quality in quality assurance exercises. Thus pupil voice in the role of assessor could be an active and direct voice when testing accountability in a school, in school development planning and, could consequently directly influence the course of school improvement.

### 7.5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

- In this study, a Mixed Methods Research approach facilitated a multidimensional perspective to the theme being studied and provided a more comprehensive answer to the research questions. The researcher recommends a Mixed Methods Research approach to similar research projects, where integrated data, obtained from different methods, can be used to obtain a holistic answer to complex research questions.

- Research could be carried out on the qualities of a good teacher from the pupils’ perspective. In this way, a fuller understanding of the most important quality indicator of a good school, through the eyes of the pupil, would be explored and articulated. This could be used to inform everyday practices in schools, teacher training, and teacher selection. Similar further research could be carried out on the top important quality indicators of a good school in the pupil-generated list.

- The main research question: ‘What are the quality indicators of a good school?’ could be asked to other stakeholders: parents, teachers, Heads of Schools, external reviewers, employers, lecturers at higher institutions. In this way, more voices could be taken on board and a complete picture of the different stakeholders’ perspectives could be depicted. The differences and similarities in different stakeholders’ perspectives could help construct a
more holistic understanding of what makes a good school, and provide a wealth of knowledge for school leaders and for policy-makers. The different voices could be invited to listen to one another during organised events, such as conferences and seminars.

- Additional research needs to be carried out to explore what pupils want to convey by the term ‘good’ when describing quality indicators; for example: ‘Good’ teachers; A ‘good’ Head of School

- Different variables which could influence the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school, beyond those included in this study could be explored to see if they were related to differences in view, such as: pupil nationality and different age groups, besides the ones studied in this research.

- This study was carried out exclusively in state schools; this was the researcher’s choice since she wanted to capture the perspective of the Maltese pupil in state schools. 60% of Maltese pupils attend state schools; the rest attend religious schools and independent schools (Eurydice, Overview Malta 2016). Similar studies could be carried out in non-state schools.

- Research could be carried out on how to integrate pupil voice with other voices in a school. A case study could be carried out to observe how different voices are projected in a school, and to examine the power struggles present in the array of different voices. The research could study the status of pupil voice when compared with other voices, and explore practical and effective strategies of positioning pupil voice at a level of influence and power which is at par with other voices. This could be done by observing the different voices in the normal setting in a school, and also by observing the different voices and their influence during a particular initiative or event in a school.
7.6 Overall Conclusion

Pupil voice in the role of an assessor has expressed itself through the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a good school. The top three quality indicators, as judged by pupils: ‘Good teachers’, ‘A clean school’ and ‘A good Head of School’ send an important message to adults who work in schools: the teaching staff, the cleaning staff, and the Head of School- in the pupils’ eyes these are the people who can make or break a school. The fact that the main findings show strong similarity with the criteria used for External Reviews by the Quality Assurance Department, within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta, 2016) means that different stakeholders are agreeing on what makes a good school. This could be seen as a positive outcome since it means that schools do not need to reconcile any wide differences between different stakeholders’ judgements; rather they can focus on how to improve their teaching, their level of cleanliness and their headship, safe that this focus will be judged favourably not only by pupils, but by adults as well, at least those at the Quality Assurance Department, within the Educational Directorate in Malta.

The results of this research have shown, that, from the pupils’ perspective, a good school is a Prosocial school, which is clean and safe. Schools should listen to pupils since “in listening to students, the school becomes a more accountable and more effective learning organisation and thus, better at meeting its core responsibilities”. (Fielding and Moss, 2011:153). Moreover, by embracing and acting on pupil voice in the role of assessor, schools could resist the temptation of becoming echo chambers, where adult voices are sounded and resounded. This might also mean that “we also must prepare to hear things that we do not like” (Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011: xxxvii). The study has shown that age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level affect pupils’ assessment of what makes a good school. This implies that when listening and acting on pupil voice, schools need to be aware of the variation in pupil voice, and find ways of making all voices audible.

As mentioned in Section 6.5.5, in 2013, during the electoral campaign preceding the general election in Malta, the two major parties promised a tablet for every pupil as
their main pledge in the educational sector. In this research, the pupils’ judgment on what makes a good school has shown that there are no easy answers; pupils ranked ‘Modern resources’ at position 11, whereas ‘Good teachers’ was ranked as the top quality indicator of a good school. It is by far easier to provide a tablet to pupils, than to provide good teachers to pupils. One of the policy-makers summed up the attitude which needs to be adopted if policy-makers really want the top quality indicators of a good school, as prescribed by pupils in this research, and on which there was general agreement from all stakeholders, to become a reality in Malta:

*I think education is one thing in which the Minister or the government has to say: ‘I’m sorry this is not a government business, this is a state business’. And state business is done, not over five years for votes. State business is done over twenty years, whoever gets the vote.* (PM 2 10/6/2016).

This study does not have the intention of silencing any present voices acting as assessors of schools; rather it wants to add on or give more priority, to pupil voice in the role of assessor. In addition, pupil voice as assessor should not be above other voices; in fact, the researcher agrees with Osler (2010) who asserts:

*Students’ understandings of schooling need to be complemented by other standpoints, including the views of the various professionals involved.* (Osler, 2010:29).

However, in the researcher’s opinion, the Maltese pupil voice as assessor had never been given an opportunity to express itself, and this was a missed opportunity not only for pupils, but for also schools and for the whole educational system. The researcher concurs with MacBeath (2006):

*Pupils are not simply consumers of what schools and teachers put in front of them but share a responsibility in constructing their own learning and that of their peers, and can play a significant role in making their schools better places not just for themselves and their classmates but for their teachers too.* (MacBeath, 2006:79).

By embracing pupil voice as an assessor, schools could develop into a “dialogic learning community” (Fielding, 2001b:108) where different voices listen to one another and learn from one another. This can develop a “radical collegiality” (Fielding, 2001b:108) sharing a common goal: improvement in schools at all levels, for all members of the school community.
The study in itself challenges the status of pupil voice in Malta. It is unrealistic to expect pupil voice status in Maltese schools to increase, if children’s and young people’s voices still lag behind in the wider society. As noted by Devine (2000):

*The according of increased rights to children cannot occur in isolation however, but must be part of a changing discourse generally in relation to children within society.* (Devine, 2000:39).

The study in itself could serve as a wake-up call for Maltese society to implement in practice what, theoretically, has already been agreed upon in the National Children’s Policy (2016:28), that as a society we should “promote empowerment, inclusion and activism of children in all aspects and levels of society”.

Pupil voice in the role of assessor challenges the ultimate aims of education and it goes beyond the four walls of the school. For pupils, it could, or rather it should be an important lesson for life. Breslin (2011:57) calls giving voice the “ultimate purpose of education”. He argues that “the educated individual is not simply literate and numerate- although those skills are, of course, vital”. According to Breslin, when pupils have been given the opportunity to express their voice, they become:

*confident in their ability to speak up and speak out, concerned about the impact of their actions on others, engaged as problem solvers and team players who are willing to listen, reflect and learn at every opportunity, balancing assertiveness and empathy for the common good in the process.* (Breslin, 2011:57).

Besides providing a fresh perspective on pupil voice and on quality assurance in Maltese schools, and the implications this has for improvement in the Maltese educational system; this study could also be a means of fulfilling an essential educational objective with far-reaching positive effects for pupils- giving pupils a voice which they can confidently and effectively express in all stages of their life.

By inviting pupils to act as assessors for Maltese schools, schools in Malta can continue to improve and remain relevant to their prime raison d’être: the pupil. Maltese pupils themselves stand to benefit since any improvement in schools directly affects them. In addition, the exercise in itself is an educational lesson for pupils, promoting the development of communicative, analytical and critical skills. Eventually, Maltese society will stand to benefit, because pupils having a voice
which can bring about positive change in schools, will eventually develop into adults having a voice which can bring about positive change in Maltese society.
Postscript

I started this doctoral journey with a certain amount of fear and trepidation. Although the enthusiasm for the subject area was strong, I had serious doubts whether I would be able to manage the workload that such a project entails and I also had doubts about my abilities to meet the standards expected of me. After five long years, I am very grateful that I had taken the decision to embark on this journey; which I have not travelled alone, but was continually guided and supported by my supervisor; together with a long list of people who helped me through their professional capacity, and my family and friends who were constant companions. In different ways, they provided the emotional and psychological fuel for the journey. This doctoral study has proved to be an important personal endeavour for me. A project of such magnitude has provided many lessons in self-motivation, self-efficacy, perseverance, and commitment. The five-year journey has been a learning curve. It has made me more inquisitive, more sceptical, more tolerant of opposing views and more intellectually mature.

This study has provided me with an opportunity for personal and professional growth. The experience gained from this study has helped me to reflect critically on
what is happening in the educational sphere; it has helped me understand and value pupil voice in the role of assessor. The data was gathered from 42 different schools, and over 1800 participants took part in the study. This research has given me the opportunity to visit a large number of Maltese schools and to observe them in their natural setting, and to interact with a large number of people of different ages, having different roles in the Maltese educational system. This research journey has increased my knowledge base on statistical analysis, presentation of data, writing skills, time management skills and stress management skills. The research has widened my perspective on the Maltese educational system, on the practical realities within Maltese schools and within the Maltese society. The end of this doctoral journey coincided my being appointed a Head of a Primary School. The new role has given me the opportunity to implement pupil voice in practice and it has helped me become more sensitive to the practical context which challenges the expression and the potential influence of pupil voice. My new role has made me aware of the difficulties when trying to capture pupil voice in very young children. In my school pupils are aged from 2 years 10 months to eight years. It is only now, that I am witnessing, every day, the educational journey of these young pupils that I can appreciate the practical realities of pupil voice application with these pupils. Pupil voice in very young pupils is an area I would like to research in the future, particularly from a practitioner’s perspective.

I feel that the experience of undertaking a doctoral study, and the skills it has helped me develop, will make me better qualified to carry out my present role as a Head of School, and any future roles I might have in my career. It has also proved to be a test of character, and this will undoubtedly also be of benefit to me in both my professional and personal life.
Appendices

Appendix 1.1  The Questionnaire (Primary school pupils)

Dear Pupil

I am Angele Pulis and I am an Assistant Head of school. At the same time, like you, I am also a student. In fact, I am studying with a University in the U.K. I am studying what pupils think about schools. To be able to do this, I have designed the following questionnaire, which tries to find out what pupils think is needed for a ‘good’ school.

The information from the questionnaire will help me understand how pupils judge schools. I am hoping to carry out the questionnaire with over 2000 pupils in Malta. I will use this information to make suggestions for improvements in schools.

When you are filling in the questionnaire, please do not write your name anywhere. In this way, nobody will ever know the identity of the person who filled in the questionnaire.

You are free to choose to take part in the questionnaire or not to take part. Even though you have the filled-in consent form from your parents/guardians, you are still free not to take part and you are not expected to give a reason for this

I would like to thank you for your contribution, and good luck with your studies.
The first few questions are about you.

1. Are you a
   
   Boy ☐   Girl ☐   ?

2. How old are you?

   __________________________

3. What does your mother/carer do as her main job? (eg. a cleaner, a housewife, a beautician)

   __________________________

4. What does your father/carer do as his main job? (eg. a driver, an electrician, does not work)

   __________________________
In your opinion, how important are the following for a ‘good’ school? Kindly mark your answer with a tick under the appropriate column.

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<td>2. A school hall</td>
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<td>Pupils are grouped into classes according to exam marks (setting/streaming)</td>
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<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
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<td>The school has high expectations for pupils. (The school has high standards)</td>
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<td>Having a secondary school for Forms 1 and 2 pupils, and a separate school for Forms 3, 4 and 5 pupils</td>
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<td>Respect between pupils</td>
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<td>Having teachers who continue studying</td>
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<td>More modern resources (eg. Computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards)</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Having boys and girls in the same class</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Pupils obtain high marks in examinations and tests</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>Having animals in school (eg. An aquarium)</td>
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Is there something else which you think is important for a ‘good’ school? What is it?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Thank you 😊

349
Appendix 1.2  The Questionnaire (Secondary school pupils)

Dear Pupil

I am Angele Pulis and I am an Assistant Head of school. At the same time, like you, I am also a student. In fact, I am studying with a University in the U.K. I am studying what pupils think about schools. To be able to do this, I have designed the following questionnaire, which tries to find out what pupils think is needed for a ‘good’ school.

The information from the questionnaire will help me understand how pupils judge schools. I am hoping to carry out the questionnaire with over 2000 pupils in Malta. I will use this information to make suggestions for improvements in schools.

When you are filling in the questionnaire, please do not write your name anywhere. In this way, nobody will ever know the identity of the person who filled in the questionnaire.

You are free to choose to take part in the questionnaire or not to take part. Even though you have the filled-in consent form from your parents/guardians, you are still free not to take part and you are not expected to give a reason for this.

I would like to thank you for your contribution, and good luck with your studies.
The first few questions are about you.

1. Are you a  
   Boy ☐  Girl ☐  ?

2. How old are you?

   _______________________

3. What does your mother/carer do as her main job? (eg. a cleaner, a housewife, a beautician)

   _______________________

4. What does your father/carer do as his main job? (eg. a driver, an electrician, does not work)

   _______________________

5. In the following subjects, in which ‘Track’ are you?

   Mathematics  ____________________

   English  ____________________

   Maltese  ____________________
In your opinion, how important are the following for a ‘good’ school? Kindly mark your answer with a tick under the appropriate column.

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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Having boys and girls in the same class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Pupils obtain high marks in examinations and tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Having animals in school (eg. An aquarium)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is there something else which you think is important for a ‘good’ school? What is it?


Thank you 😊
Appendix 2  Focus Group Activity Session Schedule

1. At the start of each Focus Group Activity Session, the researcher introduces herself. The researcher tries to create a calm and relaxed environment, which is conducive to eliciting ideas from participants.

2. Next the researcher explains the nature and purpose of the study.

3. Then she explains how the Focus Group Session will be conducted.

4. The participants are asked whether they would like to participate and explains that they are free to withdraw their feedback at any stage, without having to give a reason for such action. The researcher will also clarify that pupils who choose to do so, will remain physically in the classroom, but they can refrain from contributing during the session or they might choose to move to a group which is participating in the activity but from which, no data is collected.

5. The class is divided in groups of three to five pupils, depending on the size of the class. Each group is asked to answer the following question: *Which five things/factors do you think are needed for a ‘good’ school?*’ When the group activity is completed, the pupils are asked whether, as a group, they would like to read out the list of quality indicators.

6. The pupils are asked what they think of quality indicators which have been described in literature (but not mentioned by the pupils); and whether in their opinion, these quality indicators should be included in the questionnaire.

7. The researcher asks the participants whether they would like to ask anything else.
Appendix 3  The Interviews Schedules

Appendix 3.1 Interview Schedule for Interviews with Heads of Schools (where Focus Group Activity sessions had been held)

The researcher briefly introduces the research being carried out in this study, its aims and its purpose. The researcher gives a description of the research conducted so far. Then the following questions are asked:

1. From the data gathered during the Focus Group sessions, ten quality indicators of a ‘good school’ from the pupils’ perspective have been extracted. If you had to try to guess, which quality indicator was given the top priority by the pupils?

2. How can you account for the similarity/difference between your answer and the pupils’ responses?

3. The ten quality indicators of a ‘good school’ from the pupils’ perspective (listed in order of decreasing priority) are shown in the following bar-chart which shows the frequency for each generic quality indicator described by the pupils:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More interesting activities,...</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment (General)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment (Specifics)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better discipline</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More lenient rules for pupils</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better resources</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better teaching staff</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More academic focus</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect and Cooperation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the data from the focus groups shows that the ten most popular quality indicators for a ‘good’ school are:
1. More interesting activities, including sports activities and outings
2. The general physical environment: a cleaner and better environment
3. Specific details on how to improve the physical environment: a canteen, school hall, gymnasium, lockers, animals at school, a tent to offer protection from rain, heater for winter and air conditioners for summer
4. Better discipline
5. More lenient rules for pupils: casual attire and hairstyles for pupils, allowing the use of mobiles
6. Better teaching staff, including better LSAs
7. Better resources: interactive whiteboards, more and better books
8. More academic focus: more knowledge, a good education, more examinations
9. Respect and Cooperation: respect between teachers and pupils, respect amongst pupils, cooperation between teachers and pupils, student voice without adult interference
10. Security: more CCTV cameras, more fire drills.

What can you comment about this list?

4. What is your viewpoint on the idea of asking pupils to assess schools?
Appendix 3.2  Group Interview Schedule with Student Councils

Trial Group Interview

1. At the start of each Group Interview Session, the researcher introduces herself. The researcher tries to create an informal and relaxed environment, which is conducive to eliciting ideas from participants.

2. Next the researcher explains briefly the nature and purpose of the study; and the type of data which has been gathered so far.

3. The participants are asked whether they would like to participate. The researcher explains that they are free to withdraw their feedback at any stage, without having to give a reason for such action.

4. The researcher explains that the data gathered will remain anonymous and confidential. She reminds pupils that they are obliged to ensure that what is discussed during the Group Interview remains confidential. She tells pupils that the name of the school, and the name of the College, will not be revealed.

5. Next, the researcher explains that a brief ‘trial’ Group Interview session will be carried out, with the main purpose of understanding how to best conduct a group interview. The researcher tells pupils that after the ‘trial’ Group Interview, they are free not to participate in the next Group Interview, should they wish to do so.

6. The pupils are asked to choose a topic of their choice. Then, the researcher asks them a generic question – such as to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the main theme chosen. A Group Interview will be conducted for 5 minutes. The ‘trial’ Group Interview will be recorded. The recording will be reviewed together with the following two main aims:

   o How to conduct a Group Interview in the best way so that all participants have an equal chance of contributing
   o How to conduct a Group Interview in a way which guarantees the best possible recording quality.

A brief discussion on how to improve on the trial Group Interview will be conducted. The participants will be encouraged to draw up a set of rules for the next Group Interview.
The Group Interview

The researcher will give out a printed copy of the following Interview Schedule to each participant. The researcher will also give the pupils a copy of the questionnaire which was used to gather data from pupils in the main survey and the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school.

The participants are asked whether they would like to participate in the Group Interview. The researcher reminds pupils that they are free to withdraw their feedback at any stage, without having to give a reason for such action.

Questions:

1. What do you think about asking pupils to assess schools? How does it make you feel being asked to assess the qualities of a ‘good’ school?

2. The pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a ‘good’ school has been obtained from the questionnaire data. The top 10 quality indicators (in descending order) are:
   1. Good teachers
   2. A clean school
   3. A good Head of School
   4. A safe environment
   5. Cooperation between teachers and pupils
   6. Respect between pupils
   7. Pupils respect teachers
   8. A pleasant atmosphere at school
   9. Good assistant heads of schools
   10. Good behaviour from pupils

   What are your comments on this list? Why do you think that pupils have judged schools in this way? Are there any items that surprise you? Is there anything about the order that surprises you? Do you think other school community members such as teachers, school leaders or parents would not rate any of these as priorities? (ie to what extent do you think this list is particular to pupils’ views?)

3. When the data (top 10 quality indicators) was segregated according to boys’ and girls’ responses, and primary school pupils and secondary
school pupils, very similar lists were obtained. The only differences were the following:

- Boys listed ‘Modern Resources’ (left out ‘Good assistant heads of schools’)
- Primary school pupils listed ‘A Green School’ (left out ‘Cooperation between teachers and pupils’)
- Secondary school pupils listed ‘Modern Resources’ (left out Good behaviour from pupils).

Why do you think that different groups of pupils (groups were segregated by gender and by age) responded very similarly? What are your comments on the differences noted?

4. In the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a ‘good’ school, the following were given the lowest scores (in descending order):

23. Setting or streaming
24. Having regular tests and examinations
25. High expectations for pupils
26. Boys and girls in the same class
27. Parents participating in school
28. Allowing pupils to use mobiles at school
29. Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms
30. Secondary schools divided into Middle schools and Senior schools
31. Having animals in school
32. More time for lessons

What are your comments on this list? Why do you think that pupils have judged schools in this way? Are there any items that surprise you? Is there anything about the order that surprises you? Do you think other school community members such as teachers, school leaders or parents would not rate any of these as priorities? (ie to what extent do you think this list is particular to pupil’ views?)

Now that this list of pupil-generated quality indicators of a ‘good’ school is available, what do you think should be done with it?

*The full rank order of the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school will be given to each participant.*

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having pupils as assessors?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix 3.3 Interview Schedule for Interviews with Heads of Schools

1. What is your viewpoint on the idea of asking pupils to evaluate schools? What are the advantages and disadvantages of asking pupils to evaluate schools?

2. A pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a ‘good’ school has been obtained from the questionnaire data. *(The full list will be presented to the interviewee).* The top 3 quality indicators (in descending order) are:
   1. Good teachers
   2. A clean school
   3. A good Head of School

   What are your comments on this list? Why do you think that pupils have judged schools in this way? Are there any items that surprise you? Is there anything about the order that surprises you? Do you think other school community members such as teachers, school leaders or parents would not rate any of these as priorities? (ie to what extent do you think this list is particular to pupils’ views?)

3. In the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a ‘good’ school, the following were given the lowest scores (in descending order):
   30. Secondary schools divided into Middle and Senior schools
   31. Having animals in school
   32. More time for lessons

   What are your comments on this list? Why do you think that pupils have judged schools in this way? Are there any indicators that surprise you? Is there anything about the order that surprises you? To what extent do you think this list is particular to pupils’ views?)

4. The findings showed that:
   ‘A green school’ is more important for Primary school pupils
   ‘Modern resources’ is more important for Secondary school pupils and it is more important for boys than for girls. Pupils whose parents are unemployed ranked ‘Modern resources’ and ‘Activities at school’ highly.

   What can you comment about these findings?

5. When factor analysis was carried out on the data, three factors were extracted *(the list of quality indicators making up each factor will be presented to the interviewee)*
   - Learning/facilitating learning
   - Achieving
   - Doing
Could you comment on the following results:

**First factor: Learning/facilitating learning** is influenced by age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level (for secondary school pupils) in the following ways

- Year 4 pupils scored higher than Form 4
- Boys scored lower than girls
- Pupils from the lowest socio-economic background (unemployed parents) scored the lowest
- There was a positive correlation between the academic attainment level and the score for the first factor i.e. the higher the academic attainment level, the higher the score.

**Second factor: Achieving** is influenced by age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level (for secondary school pupils) in the following ways

- Year 4 pupils scored higher than Form 4
- Boys scored higher than girls
- Socio-economic background did not influence scores for the second factor
- There was no correlation between academic attainment level and the score for the second factor.

**Third factor: Doing** is influenced by age, gender, socio-economic background and academic attainment level (for secondary school pupils) in the following ways

- Year 4 pupils scored higher than Form 4
- Boys scored higher than girls
- Socio-economic background did not influence scores for the second factor
- There was a negative correlation between academic attainment level and the score for the third factor i.e. the higher the academic attainment level, the lower the score.

The results of the factor analysis are summarised by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Achieving</th>
<th>Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 4 – Form 4</strong></td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys – Girls</strong></td>
<td>Boys &lt; Girls</td>
<td>Boys &gt; Girls</td>
<td>Boys &gt; Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-economic background</strong></td>
<td>Lowest score – pupils having unemployed parents</td>
<td>No influence</td>
<td>No influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic attainment level</strong></td>
<td>Positive correlation</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>Negative correlation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. One fact that emerged from the survey was that ‘Co-ed classes’ and the ‘Splitting of secondary education into Middle and Senior schools’ ranked 26 and 30 respectively (out of a list of 32 quality indicators). (Primary ranking= 27 and 29 respectively; Secondary ranking= 25 and 31 respectively). How can you account for this ranking?

7. How much do you think that pupil voice is given space, is listened to and acted upon in schools? How would you rank it from 0 to 10?

8. When pupils were asked the same question, the average score obtained was 5.9. (Primary school pupils= 7.4; Secondary school pupils= 4.9) What is your opinion on this?

9. Now that we have the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school, what do you think should be done with it?

_During the interviews with pupils, most of the pupils said that the list should then be implemented at school level. In addition, the majority said that the list should be adjusted somewhat before being implemented. Some participants suggested that the list should be adjusted by adults, or by the Education department, or by other pupils. Other pupils suggested that the way forward would be to show the list to the Minister of Education, to the Head of school, to teachers, or to pupils by year groups. One of the participants suggested that the ideas in the list should first be implemented in a number of pilot schools, then after a trial period, the quality of teaching in those schools should be evaluated. Another suggestion was that action should be taken according to what the majority of pupils said._

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you
Appendix 3.4 Interview Schedule for Interviews with Policy-makers

1. What is your viewpoint on the idea of asking pupils to evaluate schools? What are the advantages and disadvantages of asking pupils to evaluate schools?

2. A pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a ‘good’ school has been obtained from the questionnaire data. (The full list is on p8).
   The top 3 quality indicators (in descending order) are:
   1. Good teachers
   2. A clean school
   3. A good Head of School
   What are your comments on this list? Why do you think that pupils have judged schools in this way? To what extent do you think this list is particular to pupils’ views?
   How can a policy-maker ensure that these 3 quality indicators are, in fact, priorities in schools?

3. In the pupil-generated list of quality indicators of a ‘good’ school, the following were given the lowest scores (in descending order):
   30. Secondary schools divided into Middle and Senior schools
   31. Having animals in school
   32. More time for lessons
   What are your comments on this list?

4. The findings showed that:
   - ‘A green school’ is more important for Primary school pupils
   - ‘Modern resources’ is more important for Secondary school pupils and it is more important for boys than for girls.
   - Pupils whose parents are unemployed ranked ‘Modern resources’ and ‘Activities at school’ highly.
   What can you comment about these findings?

5. When factor analysis was carried out on the data, three factors were extracted:
   - Learning/facilitating learning
   - Achieving
   - Doing
The quality indicators under each factor score is shown on p 9 and 10.

The influence of the following variables, on pupils’ judgement on what constitutes a ‘good’ school was examined:

- Age
- Gender
- Socio-economic background
- Academic attainment level.

First factor: Learning/facilitating learning

- Year 4 pupils scored higher than Form 4
- Boys scored lower than girls
- Pupils from the lowest socio-economic background (unemployed parents) scored the lowest
- There was a positive correlation between the academic attainment level and the score for the first factor i.e. the higher the academic attainment level, the higher the score.

Second factor: Achieving

- Year 4 pupils scored higher than Form 4
- Boys scored higher than girls
- Socio-economic background did not influence scores for the second factor
- There was no correlation between academic attainment level and the score for the second factor.

Third factor: Doing

- Year 4 pupils scored higher than Form 4
- Boys scored higher than girls
- Socio-economic background did not influence scores for the third factor
- There was a negative correlation between academic attainment level and the score for the third factor i.e. the higher the academic attainment level, the lower the score.

The results of the factor analysis are summarised by the following table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>Achieving</th>
<th>Doing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year 4 – Form 4</strong></td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
<td>Year 4 &gt; Form 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys – Girls</strong></td>
<td>Boys &lt; Girls</td>
<td>Boys &gt; Girls</td>
<td>Boys &gt; Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-economic</strong></td>
<td>Lowest score –</td>
<td>No influence</td>
<td>No influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>background</strong></td>
<td>pupils having</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic attainment</strong></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No correlation</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>level</strong></td>
<td>correlation</td>
<td></td>
<td>correlation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:  > = scored higher
      <= scored lower

What are your comments on the above results?

6. One fact that emerged from the questionnaire survey was that the recently introduced reforms: ‘Co-ed classes’ and the ‘Splitting of secondary education into Middle and Senior schools’ ranked low: 26 and 30 respectively (out of a list of 32 quality indicators). (Primary ranking = 27 and 29 respectively; Secondary ranking = 25 and 31 respectively). How can you account for this ranking?

7. How much do you think that pupil voice is given space, is listened to and acted upon in schools? How would you rank it from 0 to 10?

8. When pupils were asked the same question, the average score obtained was 5.9. (Primary school pupils= 7.4; Secondary school pupils= 4.9)

When Heads of Schools were asked the same question, the average score was 4.8

What is your opinion on this?

9. Now that we have the pupil-generated list of the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school, what do you think should be done with it?

*Pupils suggested*- it should be implemented at school level, adjusted by adults/ Education dept/ other pupils, shown to the Minister.
One of the participants suggested that the ideas in the list should first be implemented in a number of pilot schools, then after a trial period, the quality of teaching in those schools should be evaluated.

*Heads of schools suggested*- list should be given to schools, list should be given to Heads/Principals and Policy-makers, list should be given to whoever is in contact with students, implemented through SDP, list adjusted according to the needs of each particular school, add other stakeholders’ views and then implement through SDP.

One of the Heads would prefer a specific list for his school; a general list has its limitations

One of the Heads of school was confident that the Minister would agree with the pupil-generated list.

10. Who are the policy-makers in our educational system?
Appendix 4  Letter to Heads of Schools (Focus Group Activity Sessions)

Dear Head of School

I am currently reading for a PhD in Education, with the University of Leicester in the U.K. My supervisors are Dr Alison Fox and Prof. David Pedder. My area of research is Pupils as Assessors in Quality Assurance of Schools in Malta. As part of my studies, I have conducted a literature review on pupil voice and am interested in studying the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school from the pupils’ perspective. The ultimate aim of my study is to use the data gathered to make recommendations for school improvement.

The main study will be a questionnaire on the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school, which will be conducted with pupils of different ages. The first part of the research involves a number of Focus Groups, which will generate different quality indicators. The data gathered from these Focus Groups, together with data from published literature, will be used to design the main questionnaire.

I am hereby asking for your kind permission to carry out the Focus Group Sessions in your school. I need to have access to one class of pupils for approximately 30-40 minutes. Logistically, I leave it in your hands to ensure that the least amount of lesson time is lost.

During these sessions, I plan to introduce myself to the pupils and briefly describe the purpose of my research. Then I would like to ask the pupils to think about this question: Which five things/factors do you think are needed for a ‘good’ school? Next, I shall divide the class in groups of four or five, and give each group a cardboard on which they should write five things/factors needed for a ‘good’ school. I shall also ask the pupils to rank their responses. When this group activity has been completed, pupils will be asked what they think of a number of quality indicators I have identified from an analysis of literature and documents, and whether, in their opinion, these quality indicators should be included in the questionnaire.

All the data gathered will remain confidential and anonymous; only group views will be recorded and taken forward into the study, with individual privacy protected at all times. In addition, the name of the school will not be revealed.
In anticipation, I would like to thank you for your kind help in facilitating my research. I hope that I may contact you again later on and ask you for an interview, during which we can discuss the initial findings and hear your thoughts about consulting pupils for their views about what makes a ‘good’ school in the Maltese context. In any case, I will be making my findings available to all those schools who have contributed to the study. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries or would like further information about my requests. Alternatively, should you wish to contact my supervisor, Dr Alison Fox, you may do so on her email address: afl73@leicester.ac.uk.

Yours truly

__________________________
Angele Pulis
(mobile no 79702630)
Appendix 5  Letter to Class Teachers (Focus Groups)

Dear Teacher

I am currently reading for a PhD in Education, with the University of Leicester in the U.K. My supervisors are Dr Alison Fox and Prof’ David Pedder. My area of research is *Pupils as Assessors in Quality Assurance of Schools in Malta*. As part of my studies, I have conducted a literature review on pupil voice and I am interested in studying the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school from the pupils’ perspective. At a later stage, I shall also be asking for the Heads’ of School perspective. The ultimate aim of my study is to use the data gathered to make recommendations for school improvement.

The main study will be a questionnaire on the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school, which will be conducted with pupils of different ages. The first part of the research involves a number of Focus Groups, which will generate different quality indicators. The data gathered from these Focus Groups, together with data from published literature, will be used to design the main questionnaire.

Each Focus Group Session will be conducted with one class of pupils, and lasts between 30-40 minutes. During these sessions I plan to introduce myself and briefly describe the purpose of my research. Then I would like to ask the pupils to think about this question: *Which five things/factors do you think are needed for a ‘good’ school?* Next, I shall divide the class in groups of four or five, and give each group a cardboard on which they should write five things/factors needed for a ‘good school’. I shall also ask the pupils to rank their responses. When this group activity has been completed, pupils will be asked what they think of a number of quality indicators I have identified from an analysis of literature and documents, and whether, in their opinion, these quality indicators should be included in the questionnaire.

All the data gathered will remain confidential and anonymous; only group views will be recorded – on paper- and taken forward into the study, with individual privacy will be protected at all times. In addition, the name of the school will not be revealed.

In anticipation, I would like to thank you for your kind help in facilitating my research. I will be making my findings available to all those school who have contributed to the study. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries or would like further information about my request. Alternatively, should you wish to contact my supervisor, Dr Alison Fox, you may do so on her email address: afl73@leicester.ac.uk.

Yours truly

_____________________

Angele Pulis
(mobile no 79702630)
Appendix 6   Letter to Parents (Focus Groups)

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am studying for a PhD in Education, with the University of Leicester, in the U.K.. I am interested in finding out what pupils think about what makes a ‘good’ school. The ultimate aim of my study is to be able to make recommendations for school improvement.

I would like to carry out a lesson with your daughter’s/son’s class. During this lesson I am first going to introduce myself and briefly describe the purpose of my research. I am going to ask the pupils to think about this question: *Which five things/factors do you think are needed for a ‘good’ school?* I shall next divide the class in groups of four or five pupils, and give each group a cardboard on which they should write five things/factors needed for a ‘good’ school. The data collected will be used to help me design a questionnaire about the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school from the pupils’ perspective. This questionnaire will form part of the main survey in my research. When this group activity has been completed, pupils will be asked what they think of quality indicators which have been described in literature and documents, and whether, in their opinion, these quality indicators should be included in the questionnaire.

All the data gathered will be confidential and anonymous. The pupils’ names will not be revealed and the lesson will not be recorded. Only group views will be taken forward to the study and the name of the school will not be revealed. The lesson should take between 30-40 minutes. If, at any time, the pupil feels that s/he would like his feedback to be withdrawn from the lesson, s/he would be completely free to do so and s/he would be under no obligation to give a reason for her/his actions.

If your daughter/son is willing to participate in this lesson, I would like to ask your kind consent for your daughter/son to do so and would encourage you to speak to your child about this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need further information about my research or, alternatively, should you wish to contact my supervisor, Dr Alison Fox, you may do so on her email address: afl73@leicester.ac.uk.

In anticipation, I would like to thank you for your kind help in facilitating my research. I will be making my findings available to all those schools who have contributed to the study.

Yours truly

________________

Angele Pulis  (mobile no 79702630)
Appendix 7  Request for Research in State Schools in Malta

Request for Research in State Schools

A. (Please use BLOCK LETTERS)
Surname: ________________   Name: ____________________________

I.D. Card Number: ___________

Telephone No: ______________ * Mobile No: ____________________ *

Address:

______________________________________________________________

Locality: ________________   Post Code: _________________________

E-mail Address:

______________________________________________________________

Faculty: ________________   Course: ________________

Year Ending: ________________

Title of Research:

______________________________________________________________

Aims of research

☐ Long Essay    ☐ Dissertation    ☐ Thesis    ☐ Publication

Time Frame: ________________   Language Used: ________________

Description of methodology:

______________________________________________________________
School/s where research is to be carried out:

Years / Forms: ____________________  Age range of students: ________________

* Telephone and mobile numbers will only be used in strict confidence and will not be divulged to third parties.

I accept to abide by the rules and regulations re Research in State Schools and to comply with the Data Protection Act 2001.

**Warning to applicants** - Any false statement, misrepresentation of concealment of material fact on this form or any document presented in support of this application may be grounds for criminal prosecution.

Signature of applicant: ____________________  Date: ________________

B.  Tutor's Approval (where applicable)

The above research work is being carried out under my supervision.

Tutor's Name: ________________  Signature: ____________________

Faculty: ________________  Faculty Stamp: ____________________

C.  Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education - Official Approval

The above request for permission to carry out research in State Schools is hereby approved according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the University of Malta Ethics Committee.

__________________________  Date: ___/___/_______  Official Stamp

Director
(Research and Development Department)
Conditions for the approval of a request by a student to carry out research work in State Schools

Permission for research in State Schools is subject to the following conditions:

1. The official request form is to be accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and / or any relevant material intended for use in schools during research work.

2. The original request form, showing the relevant signatures and approval, must be presented to the Head of School.

3. All research work is carried out at the discretion of the relative Head of School and subject to their conditions.

4. Researchers are to observe strict confidentiality at all times.

5. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to withdraw permission to carry out research in State Schools at any time and without prior notice.

6. Students are expected to restrict their research to a minimum of students / teachers / administrators / schools, and to avoid any waste of time during their visits to schools.

7. As soon as the research in question is completed, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education assumes the right to a full copy (in print/on C.D.) of the research work carried out in State Schools.

Researchers are to forward the copies to the Assistant Director, International Research, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

8. Researchers are to hand a copy of their Research in print or on C.D. to the relative School/s.

9. In the case of video recordings, researchers have to obtain prior permission from the Head of School and the teacher of the class concerned. Any adults recognisable in the video are to give their explicit consent. Parents of students recognisable in the video are also to be requested to approve that their siblings may be video-recorded. Two copies of the consent forms are necessary, one copy is to be deposited with the Head of School, and the other copy is to accompany the Request Form for Research in State Schools. Once the video recording is completed, one copy of the videotape is to be forwarded to the Head of School. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to request another copy.

10. The video recording’s use is to be limited to this sole research and may not be used for other research without the full consent of interested parties including the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.
Appendix 8  University of Leicester  Research Ethics Review

Three separate applications for approval for research from the University of Leicester were made, corresponding with the different stages in the research process. The first application is shown in full as Appendix 12.1. The following table summarises the research applications and their references.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research stage</th>
<th>Date when research was carried out</th>
<th>Research application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Pre-Study - Focus group activity and Pilot questionnaire</td>
<td>March – June 2014</td>
<td>Prj Ref ap469-4db1f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Questionnaire survey</td>
<td>November 2014 - June 2015</td>
<td>Prj Ref ap469-b38ed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 9  Pre-Study: Focus Group Activity Sessions and Pilot Interviews

**RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW**

### Section I: Project Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Project title:</th>
<th>Pupils as Assessors in Quality Assurance of Schools in Malta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Research Purpose</td>
<td>The Quality Indicators of a ‘Good’ School from the Pupils’ Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Aims/ Research questions:</td>
<td>To generate quality indicators which will be used in the design of the main questionnaire To share the initial findings with the Heads of schools participating in the Focus Group sessions, and to gather data about the Heads of Schools’ responses to pupil generated views of school quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed methods:</td>
<td>This is the pilot phase of this doctoral study so this ethical approval applies only to the Focus Group sessions and to the interviews with the Heads of Schools. The design of the Focus Group Session: During the session I plan to introduce myself and briefly describe the purpose of my research. I would then like to ask pupils to think about this question: Which five things/factors do you think are needed for a ‘good’ school? I shall next divide the class in groups of four or five pupils, and give each group a cardboard on which they should write five things/factors needed for a ‘good’ school. When this group activity is completed, pupils will be asked what they think of quality indicators which have been described in literature and documents; and whether, in their opinion, these quality indicators should be included in the questionnaire. The data collected will be used to help me design a questionnaire on the quality indicators of a ‘good’ school from the pupils’ perspective. This questionnaire will form part of the main survey in my research. After the data from the Focus Group sessions has been gathered and analysed, interviews will be conducted with the Heads of schools participating in the Focus Group Sessions. During these interviews, the initial findings from the Focus Group Sessions will be discussed with the Heads of Schools. The Heads of Schools will be asked to give their perspective on the findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of recruiting research participants</td>
<td>Participants (pupils) are recruited from schools after obtaining the Educational Directorate’s permission, the Head of Schools’ consent and the parents’ consent. The choice of the class with which the Focus Group session will take place in each school, will be in the hands of the Head of school. The pupils will in effect be asked twice,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as their parents will have been consulted prior to them being asked directly at the focus groups, as to - whether they would like to participate. Participants (adults) volunteer to participate.

Criteria for selecting research participants

The schools were chosen from different colleges. In Malta, state schools (primary and secondary) are grouped under ten colleges. Each of the two primary and two secondary schools chosen for the Focus Group Sessions, belong to a different college. The colleges were chosen at random. In Malta there is only one state sixth form (which does not form part of a college) and one of the Focus Group Sessions will be conducted there.

Estimated number of Participants

At this stage, I do not know which classes will be participating in the Focus Groups Sessions, and so the exact number of pupil participants cannot be quoted. Since a total of five Focus Group Sessions will be carried out, approximately 90 pupils will be involved.

Interviews will be carried out with four Heads of Schools.

Estimated start date
01/02/2014

Estimated end date
30/06/2014

Will the study involve recruitment of participants from outside the UK?

If yes, please indicate from which country(s).
Yes. Malta.

Section II: Applicant Details

2. Name of researchers (applicant): ANGELA PULIS

2b. Department: School of Education

3. Status: Postgraduate Research

4. Email addresses: ap469@le.ac.uk

5a. Contact addresses: 29, The Mulberries, Triq il-Mithna, Lija LJA 1807

5b. Telephone numbers a)356 21434757

Section III: For Students Only

6. Module name and number or MA/MPhil/PhD course and department: Education Research

7. Module leader/s/Supervisor/s name:
8. Email address: af173@le.ac.uk
9. Contact address:

Section IV: All Research Applicants
Please outline below whether or not your research raises any particular ethical issues and how you plan to address these issues.

Most of the participants are minors. This means that a more sensitive approach should be adopted when considering the ethical implications of the research involved. As a result, parents are also to be contacted, in addition to direct invitations to the participants. As the participants are also being asked to comment on the quality of schools, of which they will be mainly commenting on the basis of their experiences of their current schools, it is acknowledged that the schools might find this a sensitive subject. The Heads of Schools and class teachers are being included in the invitations to consent to the study. Opportunities to raise queries in advance of the study are being given and the Heads of School will be given an opportunity to discuss the collective findings for their opinion of consulting pupils about their opinions on the quality of schooling in Malta, before the findings are more widely disseminated.

As a researcher, I have completed an ethical appraisal of my study, using an ethical framework (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009) and generated a Personal Code of Conduct which I can articulate and vouch to abide by. The underlying rationale for my Personal Code of Ethics is respect. Although I acknowledge that respect might be due to various dimensions of my study (BERA, 2011), in cases of tensions between these dimensions I aspire to prioritise respect to the participants.

This is my Code of Conduct:

1. The participant comes first. His/her needs, wishes and welfare are paramount.
2. The researcher binds herself to act ethically and morally at all times.
3. The researcher binds herself to be truthful at all times and to give full information on how and why the data is being collected and processed.
4. At the start of every data collecting session, the researcher will explain clearly the nature and the purpose of the study. The researcher will ask explicitly whether the participant wants to take part in the research and it will also be explained clearly that each participant is free to withdraw at any point, and that no reason has to be given for doing so.
5. All data will remain confidential and anonymous. The names of the participants, the identity of the classes and the names of the schools will not be revealed. The researcher will guarantee that the data will be kept securely and no personal information will be divulged to third parties.


Gaining Heads’ of Schools Consent:

The Heads of School were first approached informally by the researcher, to find out whether they would be interested in allowing their school to participate in the Focus Group sessions. This was
necessary because in the Request Form for research in state schools, required by the Ministry of Education in Malta, the names of the schools have to be listed. I have developed a letter to invite the Heads of School to the study (attached in Section 7).

Gaining Parental Consent:

Once the official permission to conduct the research is obtained from the Educational Directorate (Malta), the Head of Schools will be contacted again. The Head of School will identify the class with which the Focus Group session will be conducted. A letter of information, together with the consent form will be sent to parents/guardians (attached in Section 7).

Gaining Pupils’ Consent:

In practice, the minors consent will be asked for twice:

1. As can be read from the attached letter to Parents/guardians, the Parents/guardians should proceed with filling in the consent form, only if the pupil wants to participate in the Focus Group session. This means that the Parents/guardians are very likely to have first asked the pupil whether he/she would like to participate in the Focus Group session: this is encouraged in the letter to parents/guardians.

2. At the start of each session, the researcher, after explaining what the Focus Group session entails, will ask the pupils whether they would like to participate. During the actual Focus Group session, if the participant chooses to withdraw his/her feedback, he/she is free to do so; and he/she is under no obligation to give a reason for such action. In such a case, the pupil will remain in the classroom but he/she can choose not to participate in the session or he/she might participate in the activity and the data would not be collected.

Letters of information

A letter of information will be given to gatekeepers: the Head of School, the class teacher and the parent/guardian, explaining the purpose and design of each Focus Group session. At the beginning of each Focus Group Session, I will be explaining clearly what the session entails and the purpose of my research. At the start of each Focus Group Session, I shall:

1. Introduce myself. Try to create a calm and relaxed environment, which is conducive to eliciting ideas from participants.

2. Explain the nature and purpose of the study.

3. Explain how the Focus Group Session will be conducted.

4. Ask participants whether they would like to participate. Explain that they are free to withdraw their feedback at any stage, and they do not have to give a reason for such action. Pupils who choose to do so will remain physically in the classroom but they can refrain from contributing during the session or they might choose to move to a group which is participating in the activity but from which, no data is collected.

5. The class will be divided in groups of four and five pupils. Each group will be asked to answer the following question on a cardboard: Which five things/factors do you think are needed for a
'good' school? When this group activity is completed, pupils will be asked what they think of quality indicators which have been described in literature and documents; and whether in their opinion, these quality indicators should be included in the questionnaire. (These will not have been introduced to the pupils in advance of their own views being collected).

6. Ask participants whether there is anything which is not clear to them.

Safety measures to protect participants who are minors:

Permission has to be obtained from the Education Directorate (Malta). Consent has to be obtained from the Heads of schools. Consent has to be obtained from the parents/guardians. A copy of each parent's/guardian's consent form will be sent to the Education Directorate (Malta). (This is one of the conditions laid down by the Education Directorate, Malta). The classroom teacher will remain in class during the Focus Group sessions. (This is another condition laid down by the Education Directorate, Malta). Minor participants will be asked twice whether they would like to participate. It will be explained clearly to minor participants that they can withdraw their feedback at any times. Letters of information will be sent to the Head of school, the class teacher and the parents/guardians. All the data gathered will remain confidential and anonymous; only group views will be shared and individual privacy will be protected at all times. In addition, the name of the school will not be revealed. Heads of School, teachers and parents will have been invited to raise any questions/concerns in advance either directly with me as a researcher or indirectly to my supervisor.

Are you using a Participant Information and Informed Consent Form?

If YES, please paste copy form at the end of this application.  YES

Have you considered the risks associate with this project?  YES

Now proceed to the Research Ethics Checklist.................. Section V

Section V: Research Ethics Checklist

Please answer each question by ticking the appropriate box: YES  NO

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children, people with learning disabilities, your own students).</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. students at school, members of self-help group, residents of nursing home).</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places).</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? | NO  
6. Will blood or tissue samples be obtained from participants? | NO  
7. Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study? | NO  
8. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life? | NO  
9. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing? | NO  
10. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? | NO  
11. Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS? | NO  
12. Does this research entail beyond minimal risk of disturbance to the environment? If yes, please explain how you will minimize this risk under section IV above). | NO  
13. Have you gained the appropriate permissions to carry out this research (to obtain data, access to sites etc)? | YES  
14. Measures have been taken to ensure confidentiality, privacy and data protection where appropriate. | YES  

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions 1-12 or 'no' to questions 13-14, please return to section IV. All Research Applicants' and ensure that you have described in detail how you plan to deal with the ethical issues raised by your research. This does not mean that you cannot do the research only that your proposal raises significant ethical issues which will need careful consideration and formal approval by the Department's Research Ethics Officer prior to you commencing your research. If you answered 'yes' to question 11, you will also have to submit an application to the appropriate external health authority ethics committee. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the Module Tutor and may require a new application for ethics approval.

Declaration
Please note any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the Departmental Ethics Officer and may require a new application for ethics approval.

I have read the University of Leicester Code of Research Ethics. - YES
The information in the form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it. - YES

I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the study, and it is my responsibility to ensure they abide by them. - YES
Appendix 10  The Results of the Focus Group Activity Sessions

The responses of the pupils were grouped under 39 codes. The following table lists the codes obtained from the focus groups data, and the frequency of each code. The second column in the table shows the total number of responses under each code; the subsequent columns give the number of responses per year group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Total number of responses</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
<th>Form 2</th>
<th>Form 4</th>
<th>Sixth form</th>
<th>Post-Sec Prog¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A cleaner and better physical environment</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A tent for protection against rain</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaters and air conditioners in classrooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect towards teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good LSAs²</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual attire and hairstyles for pupils</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More computers and interactive whiteboards</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School outings</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better subject options</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>More sports activities</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>No more bullying</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Post-Sec Prog refers to the programme for post-secondary pupils who lack academic qualifications.

² An LSA is a learning support assistant. S/he helps students with learning difficulties by providing support during mainstream lessons or by adapting lessons according to the student’s ability.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect towards other pupils</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making pupils more intelligent</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No heavy books to carry</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having fun with others</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>More interesting activities and lessons</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better and more discipline</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aquarium and animals at school</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better and more books</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Use of mobiles by pupils</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A co-ed school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools not starting early</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>School lockers</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A school hall</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gymnasium</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student voice independent of school authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Group work</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>More safety at school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More knowledge/ a good education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 11  Factor Analysis

The data derived from the ranking of the quality indicators was ordinal data, hence, to carry out factor analysis, Principal Axis factoring was used as a model and the technique used was Exploratory Factor Analysis (Fabrigar et al, 1999). Software R Studio version 4.8.3 was used for exploratory factor analysis, using polychoric correlations. In this way, the correlation between the pupils' ranking of the quality indicators and different variables could be determined. The data was first tested for bivariate normality. Bivariate normality refers to the joint probability of two variables. This testing is a prerequisite since polychoric correlations are based on bivariate normality. The majority of the p-values showed that the assumption of bivariate normality was violated. However, polychoric correlations are very robust to violations of the underlying bivariate normality assumption (Joreskog and Moustaki, 2001). A negative correlation was obtained for Variable 26 (i.e. the data on Quality Indicator number 26\(^3\) in the questionnaire) and Variable 30 (Quality Indicator number 30\(^4\) in the questionnaire) with other variables. Hence, the two variables 26 and 30 were reverse coded and renamed Variable 34 and Variable 33 respectively, so that factor analysis could be carried out on the data.

Before factor analysis was carried out, the data was checked for factor adequacy. This means that the data was tested to find out whether it would be likely to factor well. Two tests were carried out for this purpose: Bartlett’s test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) (More details in Appendix 18.1). Bartlett’s test of Sphericity showed that it was appropriate to proceed with factor analysis on the data since groupings in the responses to the quality indicators were present. In fact, from the matrix of polychoric correlations there was an indication that responses given to Questions 1,5,6,7 and 13 were being influenced by a common factor, since the correlations of responses given to Questions 1,5,6,7 with the responses to Question 13 are respectively 0.45, 0.39, 0.45 and 0.39. These values stood out in comparison

\(^3\) Quality Indicator No 26: Allowing pupils to use mobile phones at school

\(^4\) Quality Indicator No 30: Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms
with correlation values 0.18, 0.14 and 0.15 which resulted from correlating the responses to Questions 2, 3 and 4 with responses to Question 1. In addition, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), which is a statistic that checks for factor adequacy, confirmed that it would be appropriate to proceed with factor analysis (More details in Appendix 18.1).

The next step was to determine the number of factors to be extracted. Exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the number of factors which should be retained (Gordon and Courtney, 2013). It is important that the correct number of factors is retained since this affects the type of results which will be obtained and the ensuing conclusions (Gordon and Courtney, 2013) which will be drawn from the results. Two techniques were used to determine the number of factors which should be extracted: Very Simple Structure Criterion and Velicer’s Minimum Average Partial (MAP). It transpired that three factors could be extracted. Varimax was used to rotate data loadings. In this way, the variables loading highly on a factor would be made clearer. (Refer to Appendix 18- Subsection 18.2 for the pattern matrix based upon the correlation matrix). The following variables were eliminated from the analysis, due to very small loadings resulting on all three factors: V2, V3, V14, V21, V23, V28. Factor analysis was repeated and the final three factors were extracted.
Appendix 11.1  Testing for Factor Adequacy- Bartlett’s test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)

Bartlett’s test of Sphericity

The chi-square value obtained is 20140.48, p-value = 0.

So there is enough evidence to show that the correlation matrix is far from being equal to the identity matrix, meaning that it makes sense to proceed with performing factor analysis on the data since groupings in the variables (quality indicators) are present.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)

KMO is a statistic that checks for factor adequacy

MSA stands for Measure of Sampling Adequacy. The overall measure should be greater than 0.5.

MSA for each variable (V26 and V30 are recoded as V34 and V33 respectively):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V1</th>
<th>0.94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V2</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V8</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V9</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V11</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V12</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V13</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V14</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V15</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V16</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V17</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V18</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V19</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V20</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V21</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V22</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V23</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V24</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V25</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V27</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V28</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V29</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V31</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V32</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V33</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V34</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measure of Sampling Adequacy for the variables in the questionnaire data

The overall MSA is 0.91. Since this is higher than 0.5, it means that is possible to proceed with factor analysis.
Appendix 11.2  Standardised loadings (pattern matrix) based upon correlation matrix

Original Standardised loadings (pattern matrix) based upon correlation matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PA1</th>
<th>PA3</th>
<th>PA2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V8</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V9</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V11</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V12</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V13</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V14</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V15</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V16</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V17</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V18</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V19</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V20</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V21</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V22</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V23</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V24</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V25</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V26</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V28</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V29</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V31</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V32</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V33</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V34</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Loadings that are greater or equal to 0.4 were considered

1st factor:  Variables  1,5,6,7,8, 9,10,11,13,15,17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 27
2nd factor: Variables  9,20,34 (originally 26), 29, 30 (originally 33), 31
3rd factor: Variables  4, 12, 16, 25, 32
(Note that V26 and V30 have been removed from the data, they have been replaced with V34 and V33. V33 and V34 are Variables 30 and 26 recoded respectively).

The following variables were eliminated from the analysis, due to very small loadings resulting on all three factors: V2, V3, V14, V21, V23, V28. Factor analysis was repeated.

Very Simple Structure Criterion and Velicer's Minimum Average Partial were repeated on the shortened list of variables, and the same results were obtained. Very Simple Structure Criterion Criterion showed that two factors may be extracted, and Velicer's Minimum Average Partial showed that three factors may be extracted.

Very Simple Structure

Call: vss(x = pol2$correlations, rotate = "varimax", n.obs = 1618)

VSS complexity 1 achieves a maximum of 0.79 with 2 factors
VSS complexity 2 achieves a maximum of 0.86 with 2 factors

The Velicer MAP achieves a minimum of 0.01 with 3 factors

fa2<-
fa(r=pol2$correlations,nfactors=3,n.obs=nrow(newdata),rotate="varimax",fm="pa")

> fa2

Factor Analysis using method = pa

Call: fa(r = polychoric correlations, nfactors = 3, n.obs = nrow(newdata),
    rotate = "varimax", fm = "pa")
Second and final, standardized loadings (pattern matrix) based upon correlation matrix:

Final Standardised loadings (pattern matrix) based upon correlation matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PA1</th>
<th>PA2</th>
<th>PA3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V8</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V9</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V11</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V12</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V13</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V15</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V16</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V17</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V18</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V19</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V20</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V22</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V24</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V25</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V27</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V29</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V31</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V32</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V33</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V34</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PA1  PA3  PA2
SS loadings  5.82  2.99  2.44
Proportion Var  0.22  0.12  0.09
Cumulative Var  0.22  0.34  0.43

Factor1

Reliability analysis  Call: alpha (x = polforf1)
raw_alpha std.alpha G6(smc) average_r S/N
0.91  0.91  0.91  0.41  9.8
Reliability if an item is dropped: raw_alpha std.alpha G6(smc) average_r S/N

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V11</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V13</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V15</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V17</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V18</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V19</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V22</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V24</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V27</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maximum split half reliability (lambda 4) = 0.93
Guttman lambda 6 = 0.91
Average split half reliability = 0.91
Guttman lambda 3 (alpha this is the same Cronbach alpha as above) = 0.91
Minimum split half reliability (beta) = 0.86

Factor2

> polforf2 <- pol2Scorrelations(c(6, 7, 17, 22, 23, 25, 26), c(6, 7, 17, 22, 23, 25, 26))
> alpha(polforf2)

Reliability analysis

Call: alpha(x = polforf2)

raw_alpha std.alpha G6(smc) average_r S/N

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reliability if an item is dropped:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>raw_alpha std.alpha G6(smc) average_r S/N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V8  0.78  0.78  0.78  0.37  3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V9  0.74  0.74  0.74  0.32  2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V20 0.76  0.76  0.75  0.34  3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V29 0.77  0.77  0.77  0.36  3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V31 0.76  0.76  0.76  0.34  3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V33 0.78  0.78  0.76  0.37  3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V34 0.75  0.75  0.73  0.33  2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

>`splitHalf(polforf2)`

Split half reliabilities

Call: `splitHalf(r = polforf2)`

Maximum split half reliability (lambda 4) = 0.84

Guttman lambda 6 = 0.79

Average split half reliability = 0.75

Guttman lambda 3 (alpha this is the same Cronbach alpha as above) = 0.79

Minimum split half reliability (beta) = 0.65
Appendix 11.3  Factor Scores

Through a regression approach the factor scores were obtained on each factor for each participant.

For variables with two categories eg. Gender

First the data is checked for normality

$H_0$: data may be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

$H_1$: data may not be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

If value obtained is less than 0.05, $H_0$ is rejected and Mann Whitney test is used.

If when testing for normality, p-value is larger than 0.05, then the data is normally distributed.

If both categories are normal, Independent sample t-test is used.

Checking if the differences in factor scores are due to a categorical variable:

1. Gender

2. Age

1. Gender

Factor score 1

$H_0$: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to gender

$H_1$: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to gender

Gender= 2 independent samples

Testing normality for males using Shapiro-Wilk test:

Normality test for Factor Score 1 for Males
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clean school</td>
<td>.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good Head of School</td>
<td>.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
<td>.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Teachers</td>
<td>.419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A green school</td>
<td>.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe environment</td>
<td>.576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
<td>.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils respect teachers</td>
<td>.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Assistant heads of schools</td>
<td>.641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learning opportunities</td>
<td>.708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect between pupils</td>
<td>.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality Books</td>
<td>.708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
<td>.628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov⁸</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS1</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H₀. This means that Factor Scores 1 for males are not normally distributed. Hence, Mann-Whitney test will be used to test

H₀: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to gender

H₁: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to gender

Mann-Whitney test:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistics</th>
<th>Grouping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable:Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>281282.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>523008.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-6.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Asymp sig = 0 (p-value=0) Therefore gender is influencing FS1

Since p-values for Mann Whitney test = 0 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H₀. This means that for Factor Scores 1 there is a significant difference in mean scores due to gender.

Normality test for Factor Score 2 for Males using Shapiro-Wilk test

H₀: data may be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

H₁: data may not be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests of Normality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.002 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H₀. This means that Factor Scores 2 for males are not normally distributed. Hence, Mann-Whitney test will be used to test

H₀: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to gender

H₁: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to gender

Test Statistics Grouping Variable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>FS2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>291743.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>692703.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-3.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since p-values for Mann Whitney test = 0.001 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H₀. This means that for Factor Scores 2 there is a significant difference in mean scores due to gender.

Normality test for Factor Score 3 for Males

Shapiro-Wilk test for Factor Score 3

H₀: data may be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

H₁: data may not be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve
Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th></th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS3</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject $H_0$. This means that Factor Scores 3 for males are not normally distributed. Hence, Mann-Whitney test will be used to test

$H_0$: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to gender

$H_1$: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to gender

Test Statistics Grouping Variable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>FS3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>276794.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>677754.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since p-values for Mann Whitney test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject $H_0$. This means that for Factor Scores 3 there is a significant difference in mean scores due to gender.

2. Age

Factor Score 1

Testing for normality using Shapiro-Wilk test

$H_0$: data may be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

$H_1$: data may not be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th></th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS1</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction
Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H_0. This means that Factor Scores 1 for primary school pupils (average age=8.3 years) are not normally distributed. Hence, Mann-Whitney test will be used to test

H_0: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to age

H_1: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistics Grouping Variable:</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>FS1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>226617.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>753468.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-8.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since p-values for Mann Whitney test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H_0. This means that for Factor Scores 1 there is a significant difference in mean scores due to age.

Factor Score 2

Testing for normality using Shapiro-Wilk test

H_0: data may be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

H_1: data may not be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests of Normality</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS2</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H_0. This means that Factor Scores 2 for primary school pupils (average age=8.3 years) are not normally distributed. Hence, Mann-Whitney test will be used to test

H_0: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to age

H_1: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to age
Test Statistics Grouping Variable: Primary_Secondary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FS2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>72648.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>599499.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-25.523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since p-values for Mann Whitney test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject $H_0$. This means that for Factor Scores 2 there is a significant difference in mean scores due to age.

Factor Score 3

Testing for normality using Shapiro-Wilk test

$H_0$: data may be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

$H_1$: data may not be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject $H_0$. This means that Factor Scores 3 for primary school pupils (average age=8.3 years) are not normally distributed. Hence, Mann-Whitney test will be used to test

$H_0$: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to age

$H_1$: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to age

Test Statistics Grouping Variable: Primary_Secondary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FS3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>270586.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
<td>797437.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-3.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since p-values for Mann Whitney test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H₀. This means that for Factor Scores 3 there is a significant difference in mean scores due to age.

3. Socio-economic Background

For variables having more than two categories, such as Socio-economic background, data is first checked using Shapiro-Wilk test

H₀: data may be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

H₁: data may not be reasonably approximated by the normal distribution curve

Factor Score 1

Highest skills level= 0 (unemployed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests of Normality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.00 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H₀. This means that Factor Scores 1 for highest skills level 0 (socio-economic background = unemployed parents/guardians) are not normally distributed.

Factor Score 2

Highest skills level= 0 (unemployed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests of Normality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kolmogorov-Smirnov*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction
Since $p$-values for Shapiro-Wilk test $= 0.105$ (more than 0.05), there is enough evidence to accept $H_0$. This means that Factor Scores 2 for highest skills level=0 (socio-economic background = unemployed parents/guardians) are normally distributed.

Highest skills level= 1 (primary level)

Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistic</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS2</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since $p$-values for Shapiro-Wilk test $= 0.662$ (more than 0.05), there is enough evidence to accept $H_0$. This means that Factor Scores 2 for highest skills level=1 (Socio-economic background= parents/guardians have a primary school skills level are normally distributed).

Highest skill level= 2 (secondary level)

Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistic</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS2</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since $p$-values for Shapiro-Wilk test $= 0.00$ (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject $H_0$. This means that Factor Scores 2 for highest skills level 2 (socio-economic background = parents/guardians have a secondary school skills level) are not normally distributed.
Factor Score 3

Highest skills level = 0 (unemployed)

Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistic</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic  df  Sig.</td>
<td>Statistic  df  Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS3</td>
<td>.105    79    .031</td>
<td>.950    79     .004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Lilliefors Significance Correction

Since p-values for Shapiro-Wilk test = 0.004 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H<sub>0</sub>. This means that Factor Scores 3 for highest skills level 0 (socio-economic background = unemployed parents/guardians) are not normally distributed.

Since for all three factors, at least one sub-group in the socio-economic backgrounds is non-normal; Kruskal-Wallis test will be conducted to test

H<sub>0</sub>: there is no significant difference in mean scores due to socio-economic background

H<sub>1</sub>: there is a significant difference in mean scores due to socio-economic background

Factor Score 1

Test Statistics<sup>a,b</sup>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistic</th>
<th>FS1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>11.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Kruskal Wallis Test
<sup>b</sup> Grouping Variable: Highest_Skills_Level

Since p-values for test = 0.025 (less than 0.05), there is enough evidence to reject H<sub>0</sub>. This means that for Factor Scores 1 there is a significant difference in mean scores due to socio-economic background.
Factor Score 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistics&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>FS2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>2.916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>.572</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Highest_Skills_Level

Since p-values for test = 0.572 (more than 0.05), there is enough evidence to accept $H_0$. This means that for Factor Scores 2 there is no significant difference in mean scores due to socio-economic background.

Factor Score 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistics&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>FS3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>1.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
b. Grouping Variable: Highest_Skills_Level

Since p-values for test = 0.774 (more than 0.05), there is enough evidence to accept $H_0$. This means that for Factor Scores 3 there is no significant difference in mean scores due to socio-economic background.

4. Academic attainment

Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to test the relationship between the factor score variable and academic attainment variable, since the academic attainment variable is continuous.

$H_0$: there is no linear relationship between the factor score variable and academic attainment variable

$H_1$: there is a linear relationship between the factor score variable and academic attainment variable

If correlation = -1 there is a perfect linear relationship which is negative (as one increases, the other decreases)
If correlation = 0 there is no linear relationship, there is no correlation

If correlation = 1 there is a perfect linear relationship (as one increases, the other increases)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic attainment level</th>
<th>FS1</th>
<th>FS2</th>
<th>FS3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.205**</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>-.129**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>1018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.205**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.222**</td>
<td>.071**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>1618</td>
<td>1618</td>
<td>1618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.222**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-.078**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>1618</td>
<td>1618</td>
<td>1618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.129**</td>
<td>.071**</td>
<td>-.078**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>1618</td>
<td>1618</td>
<td>1618</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a positive correlation between FS1 and academic attainment (Pearson’s coefficient 0.205). There is no correlation between FS2 and academic attainment (Pearson’s coefficient 0.046).

There is a weakly negative correlation between FS3 and academic attainment (Pearson’s coefficient -0.129).
Appendix 11.4  Factor scores and Pupil variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1: Learning and School Climate</th>
<th>Year 4 Mean score</th>
<th>Form 4 Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clean school</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good Head of school</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A green school</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe environment</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils respect teachers</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Assistant heads of schools</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learning opportunities</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect between pupils</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality books</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>63.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1: Learning and School Climate</th>
<th>Boys Mean score</th>
<th>Girls Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A clean school</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good Head of school</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A green school</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe environment</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils respect teachers</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Assistant heads of schools</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learning opportunities</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect between pupils</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality books</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>63.82</td>
<td>65.16</td>
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</table>
### Factor 1: Learning and School Climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level 0 Unemployed</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; skill level</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; skill level</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; skill level</th>
<th>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; skill level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>Mean score</td>
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<tr>
<td>A clean school</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good Head of school</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline at school</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers and pupils</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A green school</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe environment</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good behaviour from pupils</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils respect teachers</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Assistant heads of schools</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More learning opportunities</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect between pupils</td>
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<td>4.85</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better quality books</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pleasant atmosphere at school</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>63.45</strong></td>
<td><strong>65.72</strong></td>
<td><strong>64.52</strong></td>
<td><strong>65.12</strong></td>
<td><strong>64.08</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Factor 2: Achieving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 4 Mean score</th>
<th>Form 4 Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents participating in school</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having regular tests and examinations</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations for pupils</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobiles at school*</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils obtain high grades in examinations and tests</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms*</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>19.2</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* these were reversed coded and this was factored in the calculation
### Factor 2: Achieving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Boys Mean score</th>
<th>Girls Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents participating in school</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having regular tests and examinations</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations for pupils</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing pupils to use mobiles at school*</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils obtain high grades in examinations and tests</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual wear for pupils instead of uniforms*</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time for lessons</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.81</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* these were reversed coded and this was factored in the calculation

### Factor 3: Doing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Year 4 Mean score</th>
<th>Form 4 Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities at school</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School outings</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of sports activities</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern resources</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having animals in school</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.01</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.48</strong></td>
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</table>

### Factor 3: Doing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Boys Mean score</th>
<th>Girls Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities at school</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School outings</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of sports activities</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern resources</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having animals in school</td>
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<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.07</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.36</strong></td>
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