**Film Club Review**

**2019 – 2021**

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# Introduction

*“Film Club really is a great way to build connection in a school. You wouldn't think students sitting separately in the dark watching something would do this, but it does. A sense of place and belonging. Add to that a discussion after and you have a chance to explore many things. Emotional or creative responses. Review writing. Film techniques and story worlds. A great foundation for further learning”.*

1st year Secondary School Teacher.

Film is an inclusive and accessible medium, which young people instinctively enjoy and appreciate.

To promote a more critical engagement with film, and an understanding of the processes involved in image creation, the IFI provides learning opportunities through an extensive Schools film education programme within the context of the school day and academic year.

The IFI Schools education programme provides access to a huge range of film titles through screenings and events, covering many subject areas for Senior Cycle, Transition Year, Junior Cycle and Primary school students.

As part of its continuing commitment to encouraging a broader, more inclusive experience of film, promoting Irish, European and International film, and eliminating barriers to entry such as the affordability, and, in some cases, the logistics of cinema trips, the IFI has, since 2017, been exploring the feasibility of developing and running film clubs in schools across Ireland. Film clubs could facilitate film education activities outside of school curricula, such as during lunchtime or afterschool, and also involve young people in making choices and sharing their selections with their peers.

In addition to bringing the joy of cinema to young audiences, school film clubs also offer the opportunity to support the development of medial literacy in young people at a time when digital technology is intrinsically linked to their day to day lives.

When considering which approaches to adopt, the Film Club UK model used by INTO FILM in Northern Ireland was of particular interest as both IFI and INTO FILM[[1]](#footnote-1) share a common interest in promoting film culture among young people.

Launched at the beginning of the 2017/18 academic year, Phase One of the Film Clubs programme was delivered in partnership with INTO FILM NI using the INTO FILM model and involved a small number of schools (2 primary and 2 secondary) with the intention of the Film Clubs being run outside of lesson times.

The results of Phase One indicated that the INTO FILM model worked reasonably well for the small-scale pilot and the general consensus from Film Club leaders was that Film Club were beneficial to young people. A key learning from the pilot was that significant commitment was required from Film Club leaders as there was no funding available for supervising Film Clubs outside of lesson times. Phase Two of the IFI Schools Film Club pilot programme took place during the 2018/19 academic year with 22 secondary schools, 8 primary schools and one youth services centre signing up to participate in the Film Club project.

**FiLM CLUB UK**

*Film Club UK (as operated by INTO FILM) is a highly successful network of film clubs delivered through schools.*

*In Northern Ireland INTO FILM provides schools with access to a free library of thousands of films, and supports the teachers with a range of high quality teaching resources available online.*

*The INTO FILM model runs largely out of lesson times, e.g. lunchtimes or afterschool and requires schools to offer screening facilities and some level of supervision in afterschool situations. Licenses to screen the films are provided to the schools by INTO FILM supported by Government funding.*

Of the 31 Clubs that signed up, 25 Film Clubs were successfully established resulting in over 400 young people of both primary and secondary school age are estimated to have participated in Phase Two. During this phase of the pilot films could be accessed via DVDs from the INTO FILM ordering system, or from the NOW TV streaming service.

At the end of Phase Two, over 95% of Film Club leaders felt that Film Clubs were fairly to very beneficial for young people and every one of the Film Club leaders of active Film Clubs said that they would be likely to recommend Film Clubs to other teachers and librarians.

The level of engagement by the Film Club members in the post-screening discussion was also very good, with a broad range of films and genres prompting discussion among young people – during the post-screening discussion, but also afterwards among themselves and with friends or family.

The beneficial impact of Film Clubs on young people was also noted during the observational sessions with extremely high levels of engagement displayed and sophisticated levels of film literacy evident in the post-screening discussions.

Phase Two showed that Film Club leaders wanted access a wide range of relevant content, including titles that Film Club members may not have seen, and to do so quickly and reliably. The feedback from Film Club leaders suggested that neither delivery system used (online ordering and delivery of DVDs via INTO FILM, and online streaming via NOW TV) were able to fully achieve this on their own. As Film Clubs evolved Film Club leaders selected the most appropriate delivery system based on their specific needs and circumstances.

The feedback from Film Club leaders also indicated that establishing and maintaining engagement in Film Clubs is highly dependent on a range of circumstances including the size of the school, the location (urban or rural) and access to facilities.

However, possibly the most important finding was the identifying a link between successful Film Clubs and the personal interest that the Film Club leaders had in film.

It was anticipated that Phase 3, which was planned to run for the 2019 /2020 academic would be the final phase in the pilot programme with the objective of testing the learning from Phase 2 and further refining the approach. However, the Covid-19 pandemic struck in the middle of Phase 3, just as leaders were getting their Film Clubs established and severely impacted Film Club activity and assessment. Home-schooling and the introduction of ‘bubbles’ and ‘pods’ made hosting conventional screenings almost impossible.

To manage this disruption, it was decided that Phases 3.5 would be offered to any Film Club leaders who wished to continue the final stage of the pilot and it was expected to run from autumn 2020 to May 2021. Seventeen schools opted to continue with the project.

However, the reintroduction of home-schooling for one third of the academic year and strict protocols meant that again the running of conventional Film Clubs was severely impacted. Club sizes varied from 2 people to 40 people. By November 2020 only 5 Film Clubs had managed to host any screenings. By January 2021, all Film Clubs had to cease until late spring 2021.

As a result, this report draws on data collected during Phase 3 and Phase 3.5 via 1 X online surveys (10 respondents), 6 X person to person interviews, 2 X in person observations and 2 X remote observations to provide a summary of the main findings of these latter phases of the pilot programme.

A number of recommendations are also made based on the findings of the overall pilot project (Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3, Phase 3.5).

# Findings

*“Film Club is great for improving our film literacy and seeing foreign, independent and classic movies that we might not normally see”*

TY Student

## The benefits of Film Club are wide-ranging and deeply valuable

There is overwhelming support for Film Clubs by Film Club leaders / teachers with feedback clearly illustrating that Film Club is a valuable initiative that supports the curriculum (English, Modern Foreign Languages, SPHE etc), but more importantly supports the social development and critical thinking of the students involved.

**What the leaders/teachers say**

“It a*ppeals to the quieter kids. They talk and come out of themselves a bit”*

*“Film Club opens their eyes to emotions and human motivations. It’s immediate and accessible and engaging. It develops empathy in a way other art doesn’t and the ability to recognise context and pick up on real-world cues”*

*“It was great for students to socialize and practise their communication skills. In our club last year, we had many students who might find social interactions challenging, but with something to do and something to discuss, I found that they spoke up and expressed themselves much more than they would in other circumstances. The students found it really enjoyable and for some it was the first-time they watched films from other countries”.*

*“Next year we will focus on diversity behind the camera. Would love information on access programmes for minorities and vulnerable people”.*

Leaders / teachers noted that the benefits outweigh the challenges of organising Film Club and these benefits include:

* Providing an opportunity to engage young people who are not part of other ‘mainstream’ extracurricular activities such as sports.
* Providing a safe inclusion space for young people who are potentially socially isolated.
* Developing literacy skills that are important life-skills such as critical thinking, analysis, discussion and engagement from different perspective and understanding other times, cultures and viewpoints.
* Film Club also promotes emotional intelligence and emotional literacy and encourages participants to ‘read’ human nature.
* Offering an insight into the film industry and opening up opportunities for students to consider careers in film. All teachers were advised about the IFI Careers programme and events.
* Good way of addressing social issues that there is no space for elsewhere in the curriculum

Under normal circumstance (i.e. non-Covid-19 restrictions) almost all teachers/leaders involved said they wanted to continue with Film Club. DEIS schools in particular seemed to get a lot of value out of Film Clubs.

## Leaders / teachers are key to the success of Film Clubs but they can’t do it on their own

**WHAT THE LEADERS/TEACHERS SAY**

*“Due to losing my own classroom to an enforced base-classroom system, finding a good place to actually watch films has been really hard this year.  I eventually found a solution but this required FIVE different location experiments.”*

*“As a school in Ireland we are unable to use the INTO Film Streaming service. Having access to this would make running Film Club so much easier. We have had difficulty accessing DVDs from INTO Film form the outset.”*

*“I used INTO Film to select and research films but not for accessing the film”.*

*“The cinematic experience. And/or linking in with other schools.**Production – seeing how film is made. Trips to Ardmore studios****”.***

As illustrated in earlier phases, the importance of the Film Club leader/teacher cannot be underestimated. Leaders/teachers know how to reach and engage their particular students. This knowledge combined with a personal passion for film is the magic ingredient for a successful Film Club with the greatest engagement from young people.

Some leaders/teachers reported difficulties maintaining numbers. While some of this can be attributed to Covid-19 restrictions, it echoes findings from Phase 2. Keeping Film Club members engaged can be more or less difficult based on the size and location of the school as well as the activities already available.

One leader noted that in their school there were 42 different extracurricular activities already established in the school and Film Club had to compete with them for student involvement.

When asked what would make the Film Club experience better, a number of key points were raised:

* Having a regular Film Club space that was comfortable, accessible and with appropriate technical provision and support (the equivalent to a gym or sports field). One teacher noted that they had to try 5 different rooms within the school before being able to access the appropriate facilities. JCSP libraries (where available) appeared to be good Film Club venues but Covid-19 restrictions curtailed library-based clubs.
* finding the right time to screen films between other factors, e.g., classes, other extra-curricular activities, room and resource availability.
* Providing training for leaders/teachers on topics such as film making technology and skills.
* It was also suggested that a list of ‘Themed Screenings’ would be helpful for leaders/teachers providing options of age-appropriate films, of varying lengths with supporting information about the content and discussion points.
* The supporting resources provided by INTOFILM were both popular and useful, especially in relation to keeping students engaged – which was a common issue. However, some leaders/teachers noted that having ‘localised’ versions of some of these resources would be very helpful as that UK versions sometimes left students feeling excluded.
* Leaders / teachers noted that the lack of the Cinematic experience (such as a visit to the IFI or one of the IFI touring venues) in Phase 3 and Phase 3.5 (due to Covid-19 restrictions) was a drawback and that the inclusion of cinema trips, visits to film studios or sets even joint screenings with other schools help to make Film Club more attractive to students.

## One size does not fit all. Film Club need to be flexible and adaptable

Factors such as the size and location of the school, access to technology and on-the-ground support for the Film Club and significantly influence how and when Film Club is run. As a result, theFilm Club model needs to be flexible and adaptable by individual schools and teacher/leaders.

**WHAT THE LEADERS/TEACHERS SAY**

*“Would be useful to link the watching of the film to a check box so people can see what others watching and maybe a way to connect schools and teachers.”*

*“What would make it better is if it was standardised with input from other teachers so get recommendations from other teachers – maybe even a Whatsapp group, blog, Facebook group etc. Into Film have this kind of support but for longer films, there’s nothing for shorter films”.*

*“Ideally we would want to screen a film in one sitting. JCT website has short films and a bank of short films more like this would be really helpful.”*

For example, hosting afterschool screenings for rural primary schools is particularly problematic if there is no public transport available to get children home after school, or if they are too young to travel alone. As a result, shorter films that can be screened in their entirety is very important for schools that cannot host afterschool Film Clubs.

Even with afterschool Film Clubs for secondary schools, longer film running times can prohibit their inclusion in the programme.

How Film Clubs are run in primary and secondary schools can be significantly different. For example, the selection process for films varies from Film Club to Film Club with some Teachers/Leaders taking full responsibility and others delegating that duty to Film Club members. Sometimes the films are selected to complement the curriculum, sometimes not.

In primary schools it appeared that 5th and 6th classes gained the most from Film Club with students well placed to fully engage with the content and discussion. It was also felt that film was a useful way of introducing social and cultural topics to 6th class in preparation for them moving onto secondary school.

For secondary school students, the window for engagement appeared to be 1st years, possibly second years and TY students. Leaders / teachers reported that TY students probably had the best mix of maturity and opportunity to fully engage with Film Club. Exam years and exam preparation years were seen as particularly challenging.

## Online access to a diverse range of films is expected, with easy access to supporting resources

During Phase 3.5 most schools streamed films. As well as the NOW TV platform, leaders / teachers also reported using personal accounts of commercial video streaming platforms (Disney +, Netflix) as well as video sharing platforms (YouTube) to access and screen films.

**WHAT THE LEADERS/TEACHERS SAY**

*“INTO FILM was great for researching and selecting film but not for accessing the film”.*

*“Now TV was more accessible but I found it was limited in what was available”.*

*“There have been issues regarding films not arriving with us but showing up on our account as being with us and also issues with DVDs not being supplied. To be fair some of this is likely down to COVID restrictions but it has had a huge impact on the ability to successfully run the club.”*

*“I was excited to see that Into Film have launched an online screening platform however I have struggled to create a screening account, every time I enter our details (as an international school) I am returned to the create account page. I wonder if this service is only available to UK schools?”*

In addition, all teachers were made aware of the newly launched IFI Schools Platform as part of the IFI schools Education programme.

Although very few used the INTO FILM DVD delivery system most teachers/leaders did use the INTO FILM website to get recommendations about films, discussion tips etc. While the offers, support, and resources from Into Film were very well regarded, it was felt some of the content, context and promotional activities were UK based making it less useful and attractive to Irish schools.

The need to download apps (e.g. NOW TV app) is potentially problematic as leaders / teachers don’t always have a dedicated space or technology for Film Club and requiring special apps or downloads is difficult when using different rooms and navigating school IT systems.

## Covid-19 restrictions prompted new use of existing technologies

CASE STUDY:

SELMA AS AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

*A Limerick based national school screened the film ‘Selma’ as a way to explore a range of issues related to discrimination – which had been identified as a need within the community.*

*A significant amount of preparatory work was undertaken by the teacher (and Film Club leader) using the Into Film resources associated with the film. 40 children viewed the film which was screened via Zoom in 6 parts over a two-week period. While the film was a ‘hard watch’, the preparatory work and use of the resources made it very manageable.*

*As a result, the teacher was able to build 2 weeks of literacy learning around the film. In addition, there was significant engagement from the children with post-screening discussions continuing for days and moving into debating and public speaking activities, as well as learning the skills to film and edit two films and learning the song ‘Glory’ and the Bruce Springsteen song ’41 shots’ in response to viewing the film.*

**WHAT THE LEADERS/TEACHERS SAY**

*“Google form at the end of a screening would be better than speaking up, for quieter students”.*

As with so many other aspects of life, the Covid-19 restrictions that people have been operating under since early 2020 has necessitated new ways of working with sometimes unexpectedly positive and innovative results.

For example, some Film Clubs used Microsoft Teams to share information about screenings and to host post-screening discussions with leaders/teachers reporting excellent engagement from the students.

Other leaders/teachers reported that students used the INTO Film app to upload reviews etc.

Students also found other ways of using technology in other interesting ways to creatively express their response to films such as creating word clouds, making their own films, and writing songs.

A blog was also created by a leader/teacher from a school involved in the Creative Schools programme. A google doc of shorts from around the world was created and shared via a blog for other schools in the creative cluster.

Text

Description automatically generatedWord Cloud response to a filmText

Description automatically generated

Review of film submitted by Film Club student

Leader/teacher led blog

Graphical user interface, text, application

Description automatically generated

# **Recommendations**

*“Film Club is normally a great way to bring like-minded students from different year groups together to screen and discuss films. We also like to incorporate a practical and vocational element, demystifying the film and TV industry, with a view to promoting it as a possible career path. It's a creative outlet too, as our students get to experiment with shooting, scripting, sound, etc”*

Transition Year Teacher

The results of this review show that, given the right conditions, Film Club can thrive and deliver huge benefits offering another access point into the world of film - especially as an integrated part of the broader educational activities provided by the IFI such as the Schools Programme, the Schools Platform and the Careers Programme.

Based on these findings, a number of recommendations are made under the headings of Integration; Collaboration and Innovation; and Coordination.

## Integration

Developing a sustainable, long-term Film Club proposition requires significant commitment from the Film Club leader/teacher, as well as access to appropriate support and resources in order to create the conditions that will allow Film Clubs to become established within schools.

To help achieve this, the potential of integrating Film Club (and potentially other aspects of the IFI Schools Programme of which Film Club is a part of) with other existing and established arts and cultural initiatives should be explored.

Embedding Film Club within the @IFI Schools Platform could provide a long-term ‘home’ for Film Club while at the same time offering an ‘added value’ element to @IFI Schools Platform.

Once a school signs up for the @IFI Schools Platform they could be automatically included in the IFI Film Club network with information provided to the schools on how to set-up a Film Club, where to access films, how to run Film Clubs and recommended viewing lists. As part of the recommend viewing lists, there could be a ‘Film Club shelf’ with in the @IFI Schools Platform itself.

Ideally, there would be a Film Club ‘members area’ on the @IFI Schools Platform where Film Club leaders/teachers could connect, engage, and support one another with tips, resources and viewing lists. A blueprint for this is already emerging from some existing Film Club leaders/teachers who are starting to share information informally via a blog for schools involved in the Creative Schools Programme.

While the subscription required for @IFI Schools Platform is not excessive, it may deter some schools from getting involved. A corporate sponsorship programme could be explored to address this in the short-term. Although it should be noted that the offer of free subscriptions offered to schools was, by and large, not taken up by schools. However, given the timing (mid Covid-19 restrictions and home-schooling) it may be worth approaching schools with this offer again when circumstances might be more favourable.

The Film Club proposition could be strengthened by highlighting how Film Club can support existing programmes that support and give a voice to young people, as well as tapping into current social and cultural conversations.

A significant number of leaders/teachers noted how watching Film Club films helped the students explore and make sense of current social issues with one JCSP librarian indicating that they would like to use Film as part of their work with the Yellow Flag Programme. [*https://yellowflag.ie/*](https://yellowflag.ie/)

**WHAT THE LEADERS/TEACHERS SAY**

*“Next year, the school will be part of the Yellow Flag Programme, we are hoping to use Film as a tool to facilitate discussions around culture and diversity”.*

*“I think building a specific TY film programme with IFI would be the way to go and I would love to help do that or get it into schools”.*

Similarly, a number of leaders/teachers have noted that in secondary schools the Film Club model works particularly well with TY students. Therefore, it may be worth exploring how Film Clubs could be ‘marketed’ to schools as a complementary and supportive activity for TY modules especially in relation to modules such as IFI Film Studies programme, IFI TY Module, Digital Media Literacy etc, or indeed developing a specific TY Film Club Module.

Connecting with networks such as JCSP librarians, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and programmes such as the Yellow Flag Programme and the Creative Schools Programme may pay dividends for Film Club.

The JCSP librarians who have been involved in this pilot have reported positive results (until Covid-19 interrupted service) and it may be useful to identify JCSP Champions for Film Club within that network.

Engaging with the Creative Associates linked to the Creative Schools Programme and highlighting the role that Film Clubs have in stimulating young peoples’ interest in the visual arts as well as illustrating how film literacy can empower and give a voice to young people, might create an opportunity to identify Film Club Ambassadors among the team of Creative Associates.

Several leaders/teachers also noted how Film Clubs sparked interest in how films were made and the vocational opportunities that might be open to students. Therefore, it is worth considering establishing a clearer link between Film Club and the IFI careers platform.

## Collaboration and Innovation

Facilitating the development of a network of Film Club leaders/teachers could provide the support and inspiration for leaders/teachers and help them to tap into their passion for film while supporting with skills development and access to resources.

As part of the feedback process, many of the Film Club leaders/teachers noted that the ability to be able to engage with other leaders/teachers would be extremely beneficial.

The importance of Film Club leaders/teachers cannot be underestimated but running Film Clubs can place significant additional work on teachers. Facilitating peer support would help to minimise additional work, and as such may attract more teachers to Film Club leader role.

This network could be predominantly online and could take the form of Whatsapp groups, social media groups, shared blogs and zoom meetups.

In addition to leaders/teachers being able to call on peer support, it was noted in the feedback that closer collaboration with other Film Clubs may help to create a Film Club ‘infrastructure’ that would help students feel like they were part of a bigger community – in the same way that other clubs (such as sports clubs) have a mechanism for engaging with a wider group of participants from multiple schools.

This could lead to joint screenings between schools, exchange visits and discussions as well as joint Film Club excursions to cinemas or other film-related venues.

The collaboration mentioned above should not be exclusively face-to-face. As demonstrated throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, young people are particularly adept at using technology to connect with one another remotely. Suggestions put forward during the feedback process included creating Film Club YouTube or Vimeo channels where students could post their film reviews, creating TikTok hashtag challenges and sharing Insta Stories.

To help engage quieter students in post-screening discussions, it was suggested that online collaborative tools such as Google Forms were used, in addition to in person discussions.

Films Clubs need instant access to a diverse range of films

Instant access to a diverse range of films via streaming and video-on-demand platform is now the preferred (and expected) method of delivery. It was clear from the feedback that accessing films via DVD had sharply declined since the first phase of the pilot. The only DVDs that were used in the final phase of the pilot were personal copies of films not accessible online (e.g. older movies). Many of the leaders/teachers were using personal video-on-demand accounts to access films.

Providing leaders/teachers with a list of low/no cost steaming options (in addition to the @IFI Schools Platform) may be necessary to facilitate access to an appropriate range of films.

This could include services such as the Into Film streaming service or the Kanopy streaming service.

## Coordination

A central point of contact and overall Film Club coordinator is required.

Implementing the recommendations outlined above is likely to require a certain amount of central coordination.

While there is an appetite from existing Film Club leaders/teachers and students to help with aspects of this coordination (especially in relation to information-sharing and peer support), depending entirely on the voluntary support of a diverse set of individuals to coordinate this programme is a high-risk strategy, especially as students may only be involved with Film Club for one or two years.

A safer and more effective option would be to identify a person within, or linked to, the IFI to oversee the planning, management, and rollout of these steps.

However, as part of a Film Club infrastructure, there could be tiers of supporting coordination.

**National Coordinator:** This part-time, but critical, role would involve the overall strategic coordination of the project such as:

* overseeing the development of a Film Club ‘shelf’ and members area on the @IFI Schools Platform
* identifying, recruiting, supporting, and liaising with Film Club Champions and Film Club Ambassadors
* identifying and arranging agreements with key third parties such as Into Film, Kanopy, Arts Council, PDST, JCSP etc.

The National Coordinator would be the driver of this project.

**Film Club Ambassadors:** Film Club Ambassadors could be individuals identified by the National Coordinator as ‘connectors’ between the Film Club programme and other programmes that Film Club could link to e.g. Creative Schools, Yellow Flag Programme, PDST etc.

The Film Club Ambassadors would understand the Film Club model and the added value it could bring to their own programmes. Ambassadors would be supportive of Film Club and seek opportunities to promote Film Club across their networks and spheres of influence.

**Film Club Champions:** The Film Club Champions would be a small group of existing, experienced Film Club leaders/teachers who could provide peer-to-peer support and provide inspiration and encouragement to Film Club Leaders. They would create recommended viewing lists, contribute to blogs and initiate and manage group conversations and the participate in the development of supporting resources and recommendations, in collaboration with the National Coordinator and the Film Club Ambassadors where appropriate.

**Film Club Leaders:** Film Club Leaders could be teachers, librarians, youth workers etc who are in a position to set up and oversee the running of Film Clubs within a school, library or other youth setting. Ideally, they would have an existing interest or passion for Film and be in a position to be a Film Club Leader for a number of years, providing continuity and sustainability, and helping the Film Club become an established part of the school’s activities.

**Film Club coordinators:** To support the Film Club leaders, Film Club coordinators could be students who are part of the Film Club. These coordinators could assist the Film Club Leaders with tasks such as promoting the Film Club with the school setting, organising the practicalities such as selecting the title and arranging the venue and facilitating discussion. The role of the Film Club coordinator would be to ensure that young people are at the heart of the Film Club. Film club coordinators would represent the voice of the young people and liaise not only with the Film club Leaders but with the Film Club Ambassadors too. The Film Club coordinators would work closely with, and be mentored by, the Film Club Leaders. Film Club coordinators would be changed each year (or possibly each term if there is demand).

# Titles viewed by students as part of the Film 2020/2021 Film Club Pilot.

* Spider-man: Into the spider verse
* Wadjda
* Wolfwalkers
* Shrek 2
* The Peanut Butter Falcon
* Coco at helloween
* Saving Santa at Christmas
* Selma
* School of Rock
* The Royal Tenenbaums
* Baby Driver
* Scott Pilgrim vs the world
* Some lit it hot
* Harold and Maud
* Bunny Girl
* Afternoon class
* The Invisible Man
* Mamma Mia
* Kitbull
* Vincent
* BlacKkKlansman

1. INTO FILM is an education charity that puts film at the heart of children and young people’s educational, cultural and personal development. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)