



**“What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants  
employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver  
area?”**

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A Thesis Presented for the  
Masters of Science International Business

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# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

## National College of Ireland Research Students Declaration Form (Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

**Name:** Daragh Coleman

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**Degree for which thesis is submitted:** M.Sc. International Business

**Title of Thesis:** "What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?"

**Date:** 14<sup>th</sup> August 2021

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**BC** – British Columbia

**CISVA** – Catholic Independent Schools of Vancouver Archdiocese

**EA** – Educational assistant

**IEC** – International Experience Canada

**PR** – Permanent Residency

**SEA** – Special Educational assistant

**US** – United States

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## **Abstract**

There has been a long tradition of Irish immigration, with many youth seeking better opportunities abroad in various fields of work. Canada in particular has increased in popularity as a destination for young Irish teachers, with Vancouver becoming increasingly popular with young Irish educators due to the demand for teachers in the area. This research reviewed existing research on Irish immigrant's experiences in Canada, and the research conducted focuses on answering the question, "What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?" Six interviews were conducted with members of the Irish community in the Greater Vancouver area, all of whom are employed in the education sector. It was hypothesized that there would be a number of cultural challenges facing Irish educators in the Greater Vancouver area, with some challenges unique to the education sector. The results reflected the main challenges were adjusting to the cost of living in Vancouver, experiencing loneliness and isolation in Vancouver and struggling to cope to the levels of Catholicism in Catholic schools. The study also collected data on advice for any Irish educators seeking to move to Vancouver and what challenges they should consider prior to moving to the West Coast.



## Introduction

This study will explore the topic of Irish emigration to Canada. The aim of this research is to explore and identify the primary cultural challenges faced by Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area. This study will provide insights into the experiences of Irish immigrants in Vancouver, British Columbia. Canada historically has been a country that continually welcomes international immigrants to its shores every year, with one-fifth of its population consisting of immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2017). In 2020, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that each year between 2021-2023, Canada hopes to welcome over 400,000 immigrants to its country (Immigration, 2020). This announcement is a clear indicator that Canada shows no sign of changing its tradition of encouraging immigrants to settle in Canada. It is important to get the perspectives and opinions of Irish educators as it has become more common for young Irish educators to take a career break and teach abroad for a period, with Canada being one of those destinations (O'Rourke, 2017). This research project may provide possible reasons as to why Canada has drawn Irish immigrants to its towns and cities and what issues they face after arriving.

There is a long-standing tradition of Canada welcoming Irish immigrants to its shores (Glynn, 2018). Research shows that Canada was the destination for many Irish who fled their poverty-stricken nation as a result of the famine in 1844, which was when the first major influx of Irish emigrated to Canada. Irish settlers began to integrate into the communities in eastern provinces such as Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec (Rockne Corrigan, 2019). The numbers of Irish moving to Canada continued following the famine, although it varied through the years. The number of Irish immigrants rose and fell throughout the 20th century in correlation with the performance of the Irish economy (Delaney, 2002). However, following the 2008 financial crash which decimated much of Ireland's economy, Canada once again became a popular destination of choice for many Irish who were seeking better opportunities. Many Irish who were formerly employed in the construction sector moved to Canada or Australia, as the construction sector in Ireland was crippled by the financial crash and brought to a standstill (Glynn, 2018). Since then, the trend of young Irish people emigrating to Canada has continued, which may have recently been encouraged by the introduction of a two-year

working holiday visa to Canada for €250 in 2010. The popularity of this visa grew since its inception, which became evident in 2019, when over 14,000 young Irish applied for the International Experience Canada (IEC) working holiday visa for Canada, further emphasising the draw that Canada has for young Irish citizens (Irish Central, 2019). There was a fall in the number of working holidays issued in 2020 and 2021, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, Canada temporarily halted visa applications to reduce travel. However, they have since reinstated their IEC visa with certain conditions, but are expected to resume as normal once the pandemic is under control (Stewart, 2021).

This study is relevant and necessary due to the increasing influx of Irish seeking to emigrate to Canada. Although there is an abundance of material on Irish emigration to Canada, there is an expansive gap in recent literature recording Irish immigrant experiences in Canada and in particular, Irish immigrants in Vancouver. This may be due to many Irish immigrants in Canada settling along Canada's East Coast historically, as it was closer to Ireland, and Irish diaspora and heritage can be seen throughout towns and cities in the east (Lane, 2018). In more recent years, Canada's West Coast has grown in popularity among many Irish emigrants. Unlike the East Coast, the West Coast offers a milder climate, which could be a potential factor for its growth in popularity. The province of British Columbia, and specifically the area of Greater Vancouver, has seen a growth in the number of Irish immigrating into the area, yet not much has been documented on their experiences (Lindsay, 2018). Furthermore, this study will focus on the Irish employed within the education sector specifically, as many who immigrate are teachers and may face specific challenges in this occupation. Greater Vancouver in particular has a lack of teachers and favourably hires Irish educators, who are known for their high quality of teaching.

This study will clearly outline the experiences and challenges faced by Irish educators when emigrating to Canada. The information detailed in the research may provide the Irish government with useful data on possible reasons why many young Irish educators choose to leave Ireland and why some return. The Irish government is keen on strategizing incentives and offering opportunities to Irish youth in order to avoid a 'brain-drain' similar to the one following the 2008 financial crash (Glynn, 2018). Additionally, the Canadian government may

also value the information contained in the research, as it will give a clear indication of many of the challenges faced by newcomers to Canada. Using this knowledge, Canada can become more enticing to immigrants by combating these issues and encourage more immigrants to move to the country to meet Canada's immigration targets. However, the findings of this research project will likely be the most useful for Irish educators who are researching and considering immigrating to Vancouver, or even those who have already immigrated and are struggling to adapt.

Additionally, this piece of research provides value by clearly identifying the challenges that Irish immigrants face after emigrating to Vancouver. New immigrants face challenges that would not typically arise in their homeland, and research suggests that one such challenge many face is loneliness after moving to Vancouver (Cooney, 2020). There are a number of possible causes for loneliness to be a common emotion among new immigrants to Vancouver, however this research will discuss the various emotions experienced by Irish immigrants to the area. This study will help provide information to Irish people considering the move to Vancouver and will give details of the benefits of living in Vancouver, the challenges they might face, and how to overcome or avoid these challenges. Research suggests that many new immigrants in Vancouver struggle to adapt to live in their new home for the first six months, with many struggling to find work experience (Zuberi and Ptashnick, 2011). This research will help immigrants to Vancouver be aware of some of the challenges they may encounter and how to overcome them.

In summation, this research project will effectively answer the research question "What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?" and will satisfy the project objectives detailed above. This research topic is worthy of study due to the long history of Irish emigration to Canada with Vancouver emerging as a North American hub for many young Irish people in recent years (Cooney, 2020), paired with the lack of data currently available on the subject. The trend of Irish people emigrating to Vancouver and Canada is likely to continue for many years to come, which warrants this study as necessary and relevant (Lindsay, 2018). Undertaking this research project and successfully completing it will provide new, accurate data that may be useful to

stakeholders both in Canada and in Ireland. Providing recent, valid data on this topic area will contribute to the existing data, by giving a more accurate, recent representation of the Irish in Canada.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review will examine material associated with Irish emigration to Canada, the experiences of immigrants in Canada and the experiences of immigrant teachers in Canada, in order to effectively answer the research question. Canada has been a destination of choice for many Irish seeking a fresh start in a new country (Wilson, 1989). Since 2010, there has been a steady figure between two thousand to seven thousand Irish emigrating to Canada from Ireland (Dept. of Foreign affairs, 2017). Research on the overall topic was widely available, however material that was more specific to the research question was limited. In particular, literature associated with Irish immigrants and Canada's West Coast was less prevalent than Canada's East Coast. This is likely due to the longer history of Irish emigrating to and settling on Canada's East Coast (Wilson, 1989). This literature review helped develop an in-depth understanding of the literature that will enable the researcher to effectively answer the research question and provide background to understanding the cultural challenges Irish educators face after moving to the Greater Vancouver area. To organize the information gathered, common themes prevalent in the literature were grouped accordingly to facilitate in answering the research question. The themes identified were then used to create the questions for the interviews.

This literature review will discuss the four main themes and the associated literature: history of Irish immigration to Canada, experiences of Irish immigrants in Canada, immigrant teachers in Canada, and challenges facing immigrants in Canada.

### **History of Irish Immigration to Canada**

Within North America, a strong presence of Irish history and culture can be seen in many areas throughout the continent. Cities such as New York and Boston are synonymous with Irish immigrants arriving in the US in search of a better life (Rodgers, 2008). Similarly, in Canada, areas such as Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have a long tradition and deep-rooted connection with Irish immigrants arriving on their shores. (Murphy, 2019). Irish immigrants began to settle and lay down roots in their new towns and cities and provinces throughout Canada saw a major influx in Irish, and Irish communities within these areas began to grow.

The first piece of literature reviewed associated with this theme was 'A Land of Dreams: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Irish in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Maine, 1880–1923' by (Mannion, 2018). This piece documents the experiences of Irish immigrants arriving and settling at three different port cities along the East coast of North America, in Canada and the US. Mannion provided an insight into the lives of the new immigrants, detailing the difficulties they faced and the growth of the Irish community in these areas. The piece explores the concept of Irish identity and traditions within the cities as they emerged, grew and evolved throughout that time period.

Many of the Irish emigrants to North America romanticised their former home even though they were residing in 'the land of dreams'. Memories and traditions of Ireland were passed down from generation to generation throughout communities along the East Coast to ensure the Irish identity did not weaken. Like in many cities worldwide, the Irish began to strengthen their Irish identity in their new homes.

This piece of literature provided an abundance of information associated with the history of Irish emigration to Canada, and provided some context. It portrayed what life was like for Irish settlers to North America and gave an insight into their struggles, along with how they managed to grow their communities and maintain their Irish identity while being so far from home.

The strengths of this literature were that it provided accurate information from a period in time which saw a significant number of Irish immigrate to North America. Unfortunately, some of the material within the piece was not relevant as it focused on Irish immigrants in the United States rather than in Canada.

The second piece of literature on this topic that was reviewed was 'Remembering Canada: The place of Canada in the memorializing of the Great Irish Famine' by (McGowan, 2014). This literature mainly focused on two different areas. Firstly, it focuses on the years 1844-1852, when Ireland experienced the Great Famine and droves of Irish left their homes for Canada and America in search of a better life. It also focuses on how the famine and the history of Irish seeking refuge in Canada was documented in both Ireland and Canada.

The article explores how the news of the famine in Ireland and the arrival of many Irish on Canadian shores was received by the Canadian locals. Many Irish arrived and experienced great success, which led to the growth of Irish communities in Canada and this piece explores the opinions of the locals at the time. Interestingly, it also delves into the area of commemorating the famine and how it should be remembered. It gives details and accounts of how Irish diaspora within Canada grew, along with accounts of how many Irish struggled to adapt to their new home.

This piece was beneficial as it provided quantitative data regarding Irish emigration to Canada. The information contained was factual and very relevant with the theme of the history of Irish emigration to Canada. However, this source lacked useful qualitative data relevant to the research question and additionally it did not provide modern information and data that relevant to the question.

The third piece of literature that was reviewed that was associated with the first theme was 'The Irish in Canada' by David A. Wilson, which was published in 1989 in the Canadian Historical Society Journal. This piece was more recent of the three, and provided more data that was relevant to the research question and provided numerous other useful sources relevant to the research question. This source discussed the immigration trends to Canada from Ireland. It was extremely useful as it provided exact figures and dates to support the literature. The information in the source was more recent than the two previous sources making it the most useful for this theme. This literature presented more information specific to Canada compared to the other sources. Wilson provided numerous breakdowns of Irish living in each province, which helped identify settlement and immigration patterns. Information related to Irish immigrants arriving in the province of British Columbia was useful for gathering data and figures on the history of Irish people in the province and was extremely relevant to the research question.

Wilson also provided an in-depth insight into the religions of the Irish immigrants and how moving to a new country affected their religion. He details how in the majority of cases, people of the same religion tended to associate exclusively with other people of the same religion. The mixing of people from different religious backgrounds was not common practice.

This was practised in Ireland and evidently was continued by the immigrants upon their arrival to Canada.

Overall, the sources reviewed on this theme did provide information that was useful. Information within these sources was plentiful, however finding information that will provide data to enable the researcher to answer the research question effectively was a more difficult task.

### **Experiences of Irish Immigrants in Canada**

Due to a long history of Irish people emigrating to Canada, the next theme prominent within the literature was the experiences of the Irish immigrants in Canada. Many Irish people experienced success and prospered after moving to Canada, but many also struggled and fell on hard times after their move (Smith, 2004).

The first source on this theme that was reviewed was a report by National Youth Council of Ireland (2013). It was a recent report that detailed evidence of emigration from Ireland in recent years. It provided primary sources of information, including interviews with many people who had emigrated from Ireland for various different reasons. The report gave comparisons and experiences from Irish people all throughout the world and gave useful statistics. It provided first-hand evidence Irish experiences of living in Canada by interviewing various immigrants from different cities throughout Canada.

The report provided an insight into the lives of Irish immigrants living in the Vancouver area, which was extremely relevant to the research question. The report also lists a number of the reasons why many young Irish people emigrated abroad, such as lack of jobs at home and seeing better opportunities overseas. It was interesting to see the various different reasons for emigration and compare what is being done to stop this. The report was clear and concise with information being easy to find within the report.

This source was one of the most valuable sources for the research project as it provided accurate, recent qualitative and quantitative information. Unlike some of the sources



mentioned in the first theme, this source did not have any weaknesses and was incredibly valuable to the researcher. It enabled the researcher to create a clear understanding of what life was like for young Irish immigrants to the cities of Canada. By giving information on experiences of Irish in other countries such as Australia, it also allowed the researcher to understand the draw of Canada for young Irish. Reviewing this source assisted the researcher in gaining a broader perspective of the experiences of Irish immigrants abroad and not just in Canada.

The second source reviewed was an article titled 'Experiences of Irish people living in Canada' (Perry, 2014) which was published by RTE in September 2014. The report features a number of different interviews from Irish immigrants living throughout Canada. Immigrants from the major cities and towns gave accounts about their lives in Canada. Each interviewee mentions the pros and cons of where they lived, along with some of their experiences and their plans for the future. The article provided first-hand information and details about the daily life of an Irish person in Canada. It also features a prominent sub-theme in many of the interviewees' answers, the cost of living, which is discussed by many of the Irish immigrants to Canada in this piece and in other relevant literature on the topic.

This source was integral to gaining an understanding Irish immigrants' experiences in Canada. It provided useful, first-hand information on Irish immigrants living in Vancouver as well as other areas around Canada. The Irish experiences in Vancouver were helpful in allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of the experiences of Irish immigrants in the area. The comparison with other cities in Canada is extremely beneficial in potentially giving examples of reasons why many Irish choose Vancouver over other Canadian cities.

The only downside to this source was that it did not provide as much quantitative data as one would have hoped for. Although the qualitative data that is provided is useful, statistics and data to support the interviewees opinions would have made the source even more of an asset.

The final source that was reviewed and that was associated with this theme was from the Irish Times, titled 'Irish in Vancouver divided amid claims of violence and rowdiness' by

(Monahan, 2018). This article delved into the less glamorous side of Irish immigration. The article focused on the emergence of trouble and tension created as a result of young Irish immigrants in the city of Vancouver. The report interviewed some of the Irish in Vancouver, providing their opinions on the matter and their experiences in Vancouver. The article highlights the differences in objectives for many of the Irish arriving in Vancouver. One interviewee outlines the fact that many who arrive in Vancouver only intend on staying for summer while they are off from college, and in many cases these Irish prioritise 'fun' and cause much of the trouble.

The article was extremely helpful in gaining an overall perspective of life in Vancouver for an Irish person. It was realistic and gave an accurate account of the downsides as well as the benefits. The strength of this article was that it was very relevant to the research question, and it gave opinions from Canadian locals as well as immigrant locals.

The source was integral in developing a sense of the experiences of Irish in Vancouver and also an understanding of how the Vancouver locals viewed the Irish immigrants in the city. Understanding the perspective of both the locals and immigrants was important as it would help maintain an unbiased view of the Irish experience in Vancouver.

### **Immigrant Teachers in Canada**

Third-level educated Irish emigrating to Canada to work in Canada is a trend that is becoming more popular year on year. Professions such as teachers are an example of some of the newcomers to Canada. Particularly in the province of British Columbia, there is a demand for Irish teachers as they have an excellent reputation (Ruck, 2018). The third theme that was prominent in the literature that was relevant to the research question was 'Immigrant teachers in Canada'. Although this theme is not solely related to Irish teachers, it provided information that may be relevant to Irish teachers. Two pieces of literature were reviewed that provided useful information to effectively answer the research question.

The first source that was reviewed was 'Immigrant teachers in Saskatchewan schools: A human resource perspective' published by (Oloo, 2012). This journal article examines

immigrant teachers of a Canadian province from a human resource perspective. It was a qualitative study which provided detailed information on the experiences of immigrant teachers in Canada. The journal contained various interviews with immigrant teachers in Saskatchewan who detailed their own experiences of how they came to teach in Canada, as well as their experiences of teaching in the Canadian school system, discussing its advantages and disadvantages. The interviewees disclosed the reasons they came to teach in Canada, providing a list of potential reasons for the upsurge in popularity of Irish teachers moving to Canada.

Within this text, four key themes emerged from the research conducted: teacher credentialing, motivation for immigration, experiences of immigrant teachers, and teacher induction. Highlighting these key themes were advantageous when designing the interview questions to use when conducting the interviews with Irish educators in Vancouver. Although focused mainly on another Canadian province, this source provided relevant statistics and information related to British Columbia.

The disadvantage of this source was that it did not provide any material that was relevant strictly to Irish educators. The information in the source was somewhat relevant to the research question as it was based on immigrants of different nationalities. However, it will be interesting to see if the experiences of immigrant teachers in Saskatchewan compare similarly with the experiences of Irish teachers in Vancouver.

The second source that was reviewed was 'Immigrant teachers in Canada: learning the language and culture of a new professional community' (Deters, 2006). This research paper studied how immigrant teachers transitioned to life and teaching in Canada. This piece focuses on immigrant teachers in Ontario who are employed in the public school sector, though it does provide some information on the BC school system.

Although not completely relevant to the research question, the information provided in this source was helpful when drawing comparisons with the school systems in BC as well as the experiences of immigrant teachers in Canada. The research paper provided primary information from immigrant teachers in Ontario, and helped develop a sense of perspective.

Much like some of the other literature reviewed, this paper is not focused on the specific geographical area in which the research question is set. However, information from all sources together helped obtaining a perspective and understanding of the overall experiences of immigrant teachers in Canada.

### **Challenges facing Canadian Immigrants**

The final prominent theme that was identified from the literature associated with the research topic was 'challenges facing Canadian immigrants'. As seen in the experiences of Irish immigrants to Canada, many immigrants can experience different fortunes when settling in a new country. Facing and overcoming new challenges is something that many new immigrants have to deal with.

The first source reviewed was an article from the Toronto star newspaper. It was a recent article that was released in April 2020, titled 'New immigrants face special challenges adjusting to life in B.C. amid COVID-19' (Gray, 2020). The journalist, Sophie Gray, gives readers an insight into the existing challenges that immigrants face in adjusting to life in BC such as the cost of living, difficulty obtaining employment and learning a new language. She also highlights the fresh challenges that were brought to light as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This article was very useful as it was extremely relevant in many ways. Firstly, it was recent and discussed the consequences of the pandemic on the communities of BC. Secondly, due to this article focusing on BC, it was closely related to the research question. The information contained within the source was relevant to the research question as it discusses the barriers faced by new immigrants to the BC area.

The minor issue with this source was that it was potentially too recent given that it was published only a short time after the pandemic began to grip North America. Perhaps had it been published a couple of months after, more information on the effects of the pandemic and challenges facing immigrants in BC may have been apparent. As a result of this article being published early in the pandemic, it lacks quantitative data and figures. More statistics

and numerical data would have been useful when reviewing the article and attempting to gain useful information.

The second source that was reviewed was a research paper, 'Transitioning into the Canadian Workplace: Challenges of Immigrants and its Effect on Mental Health' by (Fang and Goldner, 2011). It contained valuable information of the cultural challenges faced by immigrants, which many of the other sources that were reviewed did not mention. It gathered information and data related to immigrants of various different nationalities, which is useful for comparing their challenges to those faced by Irish immigrants.

The drawback of reviewing and utilizing this research paper was that many of the interviews within it were based on language barrier challenges being a major issue. This challenge is not exactly relevant to the research question as Irish immigrants do not face the hurdle of a language barrier. However, the majority of the information contained was relevant as it contained challenges that Irish immigrants may have faced and had to overcome.

The third and final source that was reviewed was a report published by the City of Vancouver titled 'Immigration matters Vancouver' (2015) and details the effects of immigration on the city of Vancouver and more importantly outlines the plans for future immigration to the city. The report was useful as it contained recent figures and data related to immigration in the city. The report goes into great depth discussing the challenges faced by its new immigrants, but also discusses how Vancouver as a city can help its new locals overcome these challenges. It outlines a plan detailing the strategic planning and overall objectives for the city of Vancouver with regards to the number of immigrants they hope to welcome in the coming years.

This report contains an abundance of factual statistical data that can be utilised for this study. By discussing a brief history of the immigration to Vancouver, it allows a better understanding of the city and its people.

A strength of this report is that it is evidence based and due to the fact it is a government published report, it is likely that the information contained is credible. This was a valuable

source for gaining not just a perspective of immigration in Vancouver, but also gaining various different useful statistics and data that may help to effectively answer the research question.

This literature review primarily examined literature associated with the overall topic of this research project which 'Irish emigration to Canada'. Literature associated with the experiences of immigrants in Canada and immigrant teachers in Canada was also examined as it helped provide useful insights and perspective that enabled the researcher to effectively answer the research question. The literature helped provide information for the researcher to identify a gap in the existing research as well as enabling the researcher to draw on existing methods and theories to formulate a methodological framework for the research project. Four main themes were identified and investigated within the reviewed literature and each theme provided more insight into the research topic, assisting in answering the research question.

## Research Question

“What are the cultural challenges faced by Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?”

An exploratory study into Irish immigration to Canada.

This research question will search for answers detailing the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area. The answers will be provided by gathering research using qualitative research methods as well as reviewing and examining existing data on the overall topic area of ‘Irish emigration to Canada’ and existing literature more specific to the research question. It is important to gather research that is specific to the research question on the overall topic and will provide relevant data but may not answer the exact research question. Once sufficient background knowledge is gathered, a view of the existing data can be reviewed to determine what areas are still lacking and can help focus the primary research to be conducted.

Upon completion of a literature review on the overall area of ‘Irish emigration to Canada’, it became clear that conducting a research project on the overall area of Irish emigration to Canada was extremely relevant and necessary. While some literature on the topic was available, there was a lack of recent, up-to-date material. With the number of Irish citizens emigrating to Canada growing decade-on-decade (Irishinbc.ca, 2021) and Vancouver growing as a hub for Irish people on North America’s West Coast (Wilson, 2019), conducting a piece of research on the area seemed fitting. The secondary data was extremely limited in regard to the Irish immigrant experience in the West Coast in particular, and nothing recent has been published.

The decision to zone in on the education sector was made after conducting the literature review. Young Irish educators emigrating abroad has been a common trend over recent years (O’Rourke, 2017) and evidence suggests that it is no different in Vancouver. In particular, Catholic schools throughout the Vancouver area highly favour Irish teachers and education assistants for their reputation of quality instruction (Ruck, 2018). The researcher also has a

personal interest and background relating to the topic, having immigrated to Vancouver previously, and suspected there might be some common challenges unique to Irish educators working in the West Coast. Understanding the reasons why many young educators left from Ireland to work in Vancouver and hearing their stories about adapting to life in Canada will assist in filling an existing gap in literature. Furthermore, the research will help numerous Irish educators considering making the move to Canada in the future by providing a realistic view of the challenges they may face and advice to facilitate adjusting to life in Canada.

In order to answer a research question effectively, an overall understanding of the topic of the question is required (McGregor, 2018). The researcher must know the answers to a number of sub-questions that will help assist in answering the overall research question. These questions included:

- Are many young Irish educators seeking a move to Vancouver?
- What are the job prospects for an Irish educator in Vancouver?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working and living in Vancouver as an Irish educator?
- Are Irish educators moving to Vancouver permanently or temporarily?
- Is it difficult to move to Vancouver as an Irish person?
- Is the emigration of Irish teachers abroad a problem?
- What differences to Irish immigrants have to adapt to in Vancouver?
- Do Irish educators in Vancouver notice cultural differences?

The objectives of this research project focus primarily around answering the overall research question effectively, by giving a detailed answer of cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area. This answer will be justified by gathering sufficient data and research that supports the answer. The objectives include:

- Gather and analyse existing relevant data and literature on research topics.
- Create appropriate interview questions based on background research that allows for a semi-structured interview with flexibility to understand people's stories.



- Test interview questions with people familiar with the research question to ensure questions are valid and reliable.
- Conduct a number of semi-structured interviews with Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area.
- Analyse interviews and generate themes from topics discovered.
- Compare findings from existing literature with primary research to see if similarities exist.
- Synthesise data and form conclusions based on research findings to answer the research question.

Once the secondary literature review was complete, a thorough set of interview questions was devised. These questions were then piloted with two people that were in the target sample to ensure the questions were phrased correctly and that the answers would be what the project required. Then the official interviews could be conducted, providing a well-rounded view of Irish educators' experiences in Vancouver. The information gathered will help to fill the gap in existing literature in Irish experiences in Canada, as well as guide Irish educators considering making the move to Vancouver, giving them an idea of what to expect, and how to prepare for the challenges of adapting to life over on the West Coast.

## **Methodologies**

This chapter will examine the chosen methodologies and the different research methods employed to complete this research project. The section outlines how the methods used were selected in order to meet the aims and objectives of this piece of study. In addition, the barriers, difficulties and ethical issues experienced by the researcher when conducting this research with the chosen methodologies will be examined.

## **Research Philosophy**

An exploratory methodological approach was used for this research project. The research question is “What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants in employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?”. The objective of this study is to understand the unique experiences of several Irish immigrants and understand their specific challenges. The data gathered from these interviews can be analysed to see if any similarities or differences appear when compared with the secondary data. This study will be conducted with a subjectivist and interpretivist view, as the researcher believes objective facts are not sufficient as an answer to this question, since the topic focuses on individual experience. The way the individuals felt about their time in Vancouver affects what they perceived to be their main challenges when immigrating.

The interpretivist side also comes into the equation as it requires the researcher’s own perspective to be integrated into the study so the results can be interpreted by the researcher. There are some weaknesses with using an interpretivist philosophy, with the main issue involving bias from using the researcher’s perspective. However, since the data collected is so varied as it involves various personal stories, the findings and conclusions would be unclear without some personal input from the researcher. Therefore, both an interpretivist and subjectivist view is required for this question, as the researcher must carefully listen to the views of the subjects interviewed, and then interpret the findings to draw a conclusion.

## Research Design

To achieve the overall aims and objectives of the research, primary information had to be gathered on the topic area. The research design involved collecting qualitative data about Irish immigrants' experiences. It is a cross sectional study, as it involves examining one set of participants who are similar in key control areas including being an Irish immigrant living in Vancouver while employed in the education sector, and explores their different experiences. This research question was also exploratory, as a comprehensive list of challenges are not yet known before conducting the research. Various other methodical approaches were considered, however an exploratory approach allowed for the research question to be answered the most effectively (Cresswell, 2014). Using a mixture of methodological approaches was not chosen as it would have made the research project more complex and challenging to complete (Cresswell, 2014). Using a qualitative approach would best provide information about what cultural challenges Irish immigrants who are employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area face.

Two types of data were gathered: primary and secondary research. Primary research for the project was gathered by conducting interviews with various participants all who had an acute understanding and knowledge of the topic area through direct experience. It was crucial to conduct interviews with participants who could provide valuable first-hand information to assist answering the research question effectively (Silverman, 2011). Secondary research was compiled from various different sources such as books, online resources and journals, all of which provided valuable background information on the topic area. When gathering secondary research, it was important to gather it from a wide range of sources in order to gain an overall understanding of the topic (Kornegay & B Segal, 2013). Gathering data from both primary and secondary sources would help provide information that would enable the research question to be answered (Kornegay & B Segal, 2013).

Applying a qualitative methods approach enabled the researcher to successfully answer the research question. Qualitative methods were beneficial to this project as they can be flexible and allow for data to be gathered using various different methods in comparison to quantitative research methods (Silverman, 2011).

## **Secondary Research Methodology**

Reviewing existing data was an integral element and first step when gathering data for this research project. Existing research and literature on the area was able to provide a broad scope of useful information. Literature was gathered from various different sources such as books, online sources and academic journals, with the majority accessed through the NCI library database. By searching keywords related to the topic area, it narrowed down useful literature on the topic. There was an abundance of material on the topic of Irish immigration to Canada, however finding relevant material was more of a challenge, as many focused on other areas in Canada or discussed a different time frame. This issue was overcome by skimming through many different texts and reviewing the abstracts of journals to ensure the material contained within was relevant. This method helped save time and was integral to maintaining the time schedule for submitting the project (Silverman, 2011), as time management is crucial for any researcher understanding a study on a set topic (Easter Institute of Technology, 2017). When information from a text or piece of literature was deemed important, the researcher noted the material for future reference. Highlighting information so that it can be analysed at a later date assisted in conducting the research timely and thoroughly (Silverman, 2011). Then, when all the secondary research was gathered, four themes were identified, which would help in the later steps of designing the study.

## **Research Instruments**

For the primary research, interviews were conducted with subjects with first-hand experience on the research topic. Each interview was semi-structured, consisting of twelve questions that were devised by the researcher. As there was not much existing data on the specific research topic, there was no source to base the interview questions on. These questions were created after carefully analysing the secondary research, and once some common themes were found, the researcher wanted to see if these common challenges affected Irish educators in Vancouver in particular, and if there were any other unique challenges. As the researcher personally knew some Irish educators in Vancouver, these questions were asked to two educators known to the researcher to ensure the questions were valid and reliable, and that

the questions were interpreted in the way they were intended. These twelve questions allowed for participants to give both short precise answers and open ended, long detailed answers for different questions, and allowed flexibility for follow up questions. The interview questions and the explanation for the questions asked can be seen in Appendix A.

Interviews were extremely successful in gathering qualitative data for the researcher to answer the research question. The success of these methods further shows that it was the correct decision to utilise a qualitative research approach.

### **Procedure**

Gaining each participant's experiences of immigrating to Vancouver was invaluable, as each person offered unique qualitative insights and information not easily quantifiable by numbers. This information was useful in gaining an understanding of the topic area and answering the research question. The process of finding and selecting participants was complex and had its own challenges. The main issue was due to the geographical location of the topic area in question was Vancouver, Canada, while the researcher was residing in Dublin, Ireland. Due to the geographical difference, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not feasible, so it was necessary for the researcher to gather the data using alternative methods. It was crucial to gain a number of participants who had first hand experience of the overall topic area so they could provide data that could help effectively answer the research question. Participants were acquired using social media, as it was the best means available for gathering participants from abroad. The researcher created a post in a Facebook group called "Irish Teachers and Educators in Vancouver", a group which focused on the target demographic for the study. The Facebook post consisted of a brief explanation regarding the topic of research and asked members of the group to participate in a virtual twelve question interview on the research topic. Each member who wished to partake in an interview was asked to message the researcher directly or simply express their interest by commenting on the post.

Prior to participating, all interviewees were made aware that their identities would remain anonymous upon publication of the paper and any ethical issues such as confidentiality and informed consent were resolved. Details of the interview format and how it would be

conducted were shared with the participants to help them feel more at ease. Each participant was asked if they would like to conduct the interview through a video call or without video, and also if they would allow the interview to be recorded for transcription purposes. Six individuals were interviewed by the researcher and five were interviewed using a video interview. All interviewees allowed for the interview to be recorded for the purpose of transcribing. These recordings were extremely useful for analysing and transcribing the interviews, and allowed more time to delve into each of the answers to see if there were any emergent themes or patterns in the participant's answers.

After expressing interest on Facebook, each participant was contacted initially on Facebook and then by email to arrange a suitable time to conduct the interview. Managing to select a time that suited both the interviewer and interviewee was more complicated due to the vast time difference between Dublin and Vancouver. Once a suitable time was decided, a virtual Zoom meeting link was sent to each participant. Six individuals were interviewed by the researcher, all of whom were Irish, living in Vancouver and employed in the education sector. They each could provide first hand and individual information to help answer the research question.

Participants had the freedom to disclose as much or as little information as they wished. It allowed for the interview to be free-flowing and natural which helps the interviewee remain comfortable, therefore enabling them to share useful and unique information that will assist in answering the research question. The interviewer was an active participant in the interview, while making sure to allow the interviewee to speak as much or as little as they wished. Setting the right atmosphere and allowing the participant to feel comfortable and not under pressure was crucial for gaining valuable information (B. & Karner, 2010). The interviews lasted between ten and twenty minutes in length, and all followed the same structure to maintain reliability and control. The length of the interview was dependent on the detail and duration of the answers that each interviewee gave. Upon concluding the interview, each participant was thanked for their time and contribution.

## **Sample**

The people partaking in the study were asked to participate if they had a specific knowledge and personal experience of being an Irish immigrant employed in the education sector in Vancouver, Canada. The participants had to be originally from Ireland and currently living in the Greater Vancouver area. The age of the participant and length of time they were in Canada could vary and was noted as a variable. Whether their position in the education sector was a teacher or a special education assistant (SEA), both were accepted. Ideally, the sample would have included an even mix of male and female, but given the general percentage of more females in the industry, this was difficult to achieve and as a result, only females participated. The goal was to gather as many participants as possible, and they were recruited through social media due to the geographical distance.

## **Data Analysis Method**

The data analysis method chosen was a thematic analysis. The benefits of conducting a thematic analysis was that it enabled the researcher to analyse all the finished interviews and develop patterns and correlations in the data into themes (Boyatzis, 2009).

The downside of using thematic analysis as a data analysis method is that the interviewer may potentially overlook specific pieces of information that do not match with the themes, and this information may help in answering the research question (Boyatzis, 2009). It can also be subjective and it is extremely researcher dependent as it relies on the researcher's individual judgment. Another disadvantage of using this method is that it is affected by researcher's bias and opinions. It is important for a researcher to attempt to remain as unbiased as they can during the course of the research project (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010).

An inductive and semantic approach was used by the researcher during the thematic analysis. An inductive approach was used as it allowed for the interviewees' answers and details given in the interviews to decide the themes. This gave an accurate representation of the information gathered from the interviews. A semantic approach was used that enabled the researcher to gather and analyse the interviewees' personal opinions and feelings on the

subject in question. Using these types of analyses was beneficial in answering the research question effectively (Nowell et al., 2017).

The Braun and Clarke 5 step process (2006) was used when conducting the thematic analysis, which included the following steps:

*1. Familiarisation:*

The first of the five steps involved in this process was for the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data they had accumulated during the interviews. The interviews were recorded so it was a simple process to transcribe the findings from the interviews. Understanding and being aware of all the information contained within the information is essential for the researcher to effectively compile a number of emergent themes (Boyatzis, 2009).

*2. Coding:*

After transcribing the interviews, the next step is to analyse the data and highlight common findings from each of the interviews. This enables the researcher to draw comparisons from the interviews and also see if any patterns or correlations arise (Nowell et al., 2017). A coding example between interviews is shown below:

Interview 1: “groceries overpriced”

Interview 3: “price of food far more expensive”

Interview 4: “cost of food shopping in general was higher”

*3. Generating themes:*

Once the transcripts have been coded and patterns within the data collected have been identified, themes must be established. To create themes, the researcher found a variety of codes that were similar in meaning and combined them to form a theme. This method can save time and effort for researchers and also enable them to cover a large quantity of findings (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Below is an example of codes that were turned into a single theme:

Interviewee 1 when discussing cost of living:



“a big jump for me”

“things are more expensive”

“took me quite a while to adjust”

Interviewee 2 when discussing cost of living:

“big step up in comparison to Ireland”

“groceries and other necessities, they were a lot more expensive”

“It just takes time to get used to saving money”

Interviewee 3 when discussing cost of living:

“Oh god haha, it was absolutely brutal to be honest with you. It was a massive jump for me and my husband.”

“a lot more expensive”

These codes combined enabled the researcher to form the theme of ‘Adjusting to the cost of living’ as the codes and patterns found within the interviews were related to the topic of the cost of living of life in Vancouver and how the interviewed Irish immigrants adjusted to it.

#### 4. *Reviewing themes:*

This step is sometimes forgotten by many researchers but it is an important aspect (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Reviewing the newly created themes allows the researcher to ensure if the themes are relevant and accurate (Boyatzis, 2009). This is an important step in deciding the final themes. The researcher must recheck the coding and transcripts at this stage to ensure that no important codes or data was missed and left out from any of the themes.

#### 5. *Writing Up:*

The final process to complete in the thematic analysis is to gather the information from the previous steps, synthesize them and write up the findings of the thematic analysis. Skipping any of the steps in this process could lead to potentially excluding valuable information from the project (Nowell et al., 2017).

Conducting a thematic analysis was the most beneficial data analysis method to employ for this research project. A number of themes emerged from analysing the six interviews that were conducted. Using alternative methods of data collection may not have enabled the researcher to gather and organize this information as effectively. It was integral that the researcher remained unbiased throughout the course of the thematic analysis and allowed the research gathered to produce the themes.

### **Ethics**

Prior to commencing interviews, ethical approval for the interview questions was sought from an NCI supervisor. After gaining approval, the researcher had to acquire voluntary participants to partake in the study. Participants were informed through a Facebook group that the study was completely optional and would be completely confidential, no names or identifying details would be used for publication of the study. In the week before each interview, the participant was told some background about the study so they could gain an understanding and know what to expect from the interview. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any point throughout the course of the study. The main ethical issue that arose was regarding recording for transcribing purposes. Each participant was asked if they would allow for the interviews to be recorded, all agreed to have it recorded however one requested that it would be conducted with an audio call without video. The recordings were crucial for successfully analysing the interviews to interpret the findings, and made transcribing the content of each interview possible.

### **Limitations**

Limitations to research can impact it in various different ways, and as with all research, this study faced a few. Limitations can have an effect on the validity and reliability of data, depending on the type of limitations (Smith & Zajda, 2018). The limitations of this research project on the topic of Irish emigration to Vancouver were sample size and outside influence.

### ***Sample Size***

The sample size of participants that were interviewed was six. It was a small sample size that provided detailed, useful information to answer the research question. Perhaps had more interviewees been gathered, a more well rounded and comprehensive list of the challenges facing Irish immigrants could have been created. However, due to time constraints and difficulty gaining more participants, the study was limited to six participants. For future research, more participants would be recommended.

### ***Outside influence***

Participants may be influenced by factors outside of the project scope and control. Differing exterior factors and personal opinion can influence the viewpoints of the participants. To best eliminate this factor, it is suggested to keep all interview questions the same so that the interview questions remain a control, which was done when conducting the interviews (Knapik, 2006). Using different questions for each of the interviewees could render the data collected as unreliable (Knapik, 2006), and so the researcher kept the base questions the same. However, at times the research asked some questions to clarify and expand the interviewee's answers, and this may have had some effect on the interviewee.

This chapter examined the methodological approaches taken to answer the research question "What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?". Through examining the various types of methodological approaches, an exploratory methodological approach was employed to best answer the research question. First, secondary research was gathered and condensed to establish a basis of knowledge on the general topic area of Irish immigration to Canada. Subsequently, qualitative research data was collected by conducting interviews with people who provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by Irish immigrants in Vancouver employed in the education sector. Participants had to be acquired for the interview through online means, and a virtual interview was subsequently arranged. There were several issues that arose as a result of the chosen research methods for the project, and the researcher mitigated as many

of these issues as possible, examining the ethical issues and barriers that needed to be addressed. This chapter concludes by listing the various limitations that were faced by employing this methodological approach, some of which was unavoidable, and also explores what may be done to address these issues. Using this mix of primary and secondary qualitative research, the researcher was able to gain a broad understanding of Irish educators' experiences in Vancouver, and synthesize findings from both types of sources to successfully answer the research question.

## Analysis and Findings

This research project explored the perspectives of six Irish immigrants living in the Greater Vancouver area who were employed in the education sector. In particular, the study focused on the topic of the cultural challenges they faced after emigrating to Vancouver. Once the interviews were all conducted and transcribed, they were reviewed with thematic analysis. This chapter contains the results, as well as discusses the prominent themes that emerged during the course of the study conducted using an exploratory methodological approach to answer the research question: “What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?”

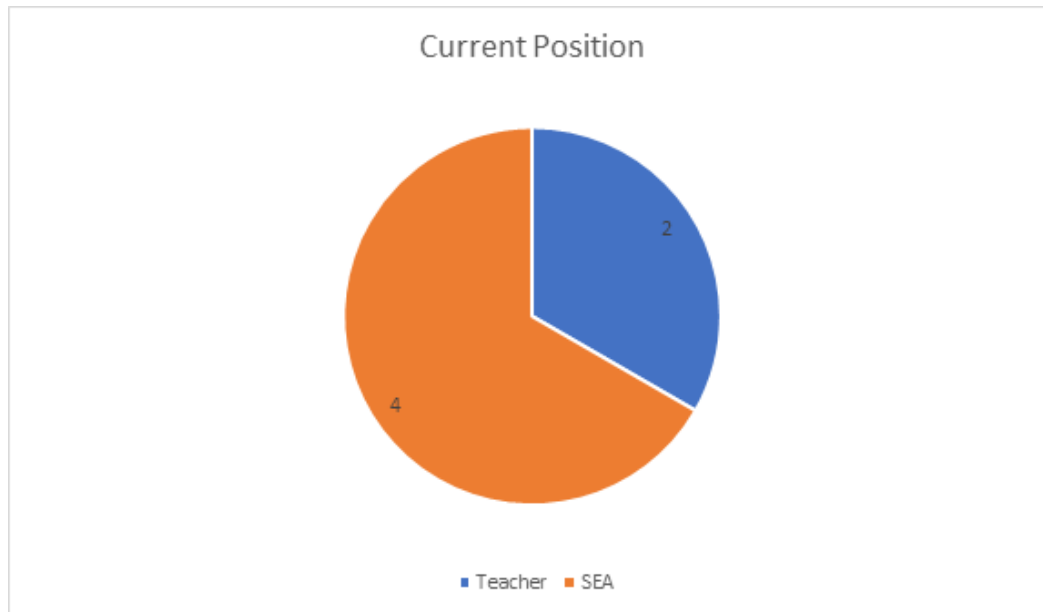
The processes and methods employed to analyse the transcripts to uncover themes from the six individual interviews will be discussed in this chapter. The three levels of analysis conducted in this project were:

- A. Open
- B. Selective
- C. Theoretical.

The findings from the conducted research will be examined and compared with existing data on the research topic to find any similarities or common themes. This chapter includes tables and graphics to represent the codes used and the themes that emerged from the data. Quotes and snippets from interviews were used to highlight the emergent themes and the resultant theory.

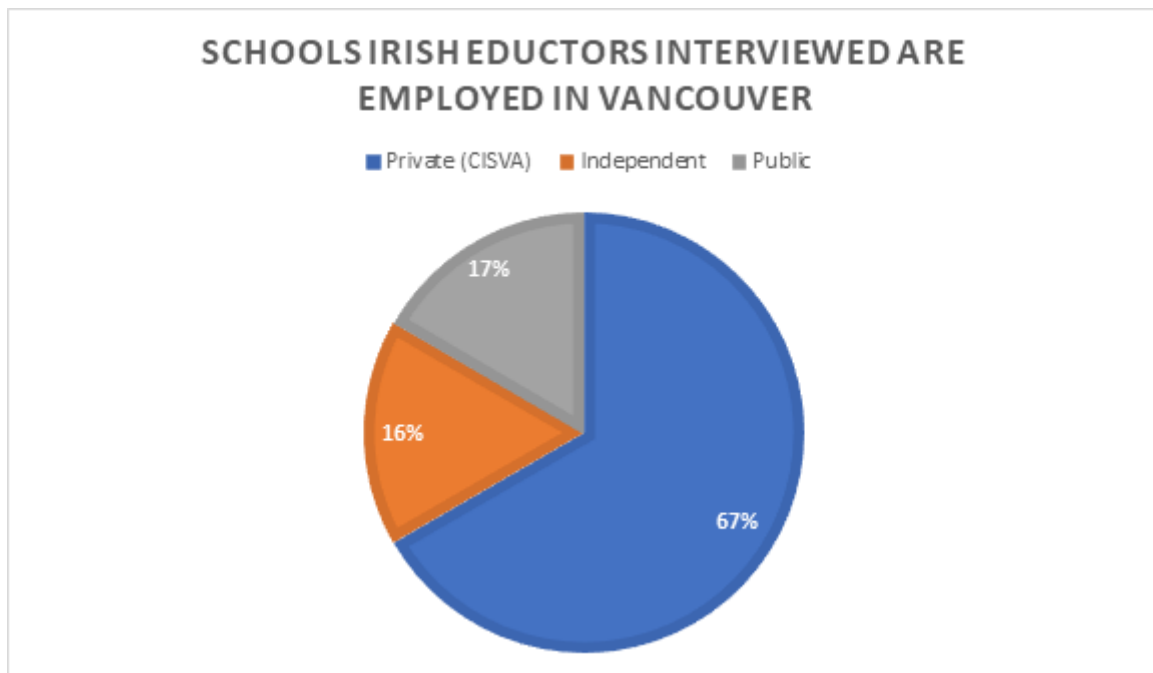
## Sample

The sample consisted of six Irish educators who were living in the Vancouver area and were interviewed during the course of this study. However, not all interviewees held the same position in education. The breakdown between teachers and special education assistants (SEA) is shown below:



In Ireland the number of students in the public school system dwarfs the numbers of those in the private school system (Ireland - School Enrolment, Secondary, Private (% Of Total Secondary) - 1998-2018 Data | 2021 Forecast, 2021). There were under 25,000 secondary level students enrolled in private schools in Ireland compared to over 300,000 in the public system (Donnelly, 2016). In British Columbia, the private school sector is more competitive against the public school sector, with almost one in every five students attending independent or private schools in the province (Cardus, 2109).

Irish teachers in Vancouver have had great success when being employed by both sectors, however it has become a common practice for private schools in Vancouver to reach out to Irish educators as they are known for their exceptional ability. Interviewee 5 states, “It is becoming more popular for schools to put out ‘feelers’ for Irish teachers through their existing Irish employees”. The chart below shows the breakdown of Irish educators interviewed who are employed in public schools, private schools and independent schools:



### Thematic Analysis

Once completing all interviews and reviewing all the information gathered, four main themes were identified. These themes were: adjusting to the cost of living, levels of Catholicism in Catholic schools, feeling isolated and financial stress, and suggestions for immigrants moving to Vancouver.

#### ***Theme 1: Adjusting to the cost of living***

The first finding that emerged when analysing the completed interviews was that the Irish immigrants struggled initially to adjust to the cost of living in Vancouver. This was a common

finding among all of the participants. Vancouver is renowned for having an extremely high cost of living, and ranks among the most expensive cities in North America (Hristova, 2021). The cost of renting and especially purchasing real estate, can shock many new immigrants to the area (Lindeman, 2019). Real estate prices in the Greater Vancouver area are some of the highest in the world (Kwan, 2021).

Interviewees discussed how they felt adjusting the cost of living was difficult for them initially, but after a period of time they became accustomed to it. Examples of interviewees stating their experiences can be seen from interviewee 5, "I had come from living in a relatively rural part of Ireland and it definitely was a shock to me how expensive life in Vancouver was," and from Interviewee 1, "So once I arrived it took me quite a while to adjust to things being more expensive".

This finding from the interview can also be seen in some of the literature associated with the research topic, and is not a challenge unique to Irish immigrants. Challenges such as adapting to the higher cost of living and change in currency can make it a difficult transition for immigrants to Vancouver (Reddan, 2016). Immigrants, particularly those from counties with a lower cost of living, can have a hard time adapting to the cost of living in Vancouver.

The reasons for the Irish educators struggling to adapt to the cost of living may be due to several different variables. Firstly, a number of the interviewees stated that previously, while living in Ireland they were living at home and not paying rent, and the change to paying high rent in Vancouver "took quite a while to adjust to" as stated above by Interviewee 1. Secondly, the cost of groceries and eating out was more expensive in the experiences of the interviewees. However, as Interviewee 5 mentioned, "Eating out was a lot more expensive as tipping is a lot more popular and the tipping rate usually starts at 18%". This interviewee explains that eating out can be quite costly due to the tipping culture that exists in Vancouver. Canada shares a similar tipping culture to America, and many Irish struggle to grasp the tipping culture which is not as prevalent in Ireland. However, an upside of the tipping culture in Vancouver is that many Irish work in the service and hospitality sector as they can earn a decent salary as "the tips were excellent, a lot better than home".



Another reason for many who struggled to adapt to the cost of living, was pointed out by Interviewee 1, noting that teachers were paid a ten-month salary in Vancouver, compared to a yearly salary in Ireland and “[t]he change in salary period as a teacher also took some time to get used to”. For two months of summer that classes were not in session, some of the teachers interviewed did not have any income, resulting in a need to budget carefully over the other ten months.

In order to overcome and adapt to the cost of living, creating a budget and not straying from it was suggested to be integral. Maintaining a budget helped Interviewees 1 and 5, saying that “utilising and sticking to a budget helped to overcome [the cost of living]” and that “we had to plan and budget our finances to be able to live financially stress-free”. They had to keep on track on their spending and ensure they were not spending beyond their means. Adapting to the currency and conversions is something that all interviewees tackled after emigrating, but once settled, all stated they became accustomed to the conversions. Buying groceries and other necessities at more inexpensive supermarkets and stores helped save money in the long term according to Interviewee 5. The time periods that interviewees eventually adapted to the cost of living varied. In combination with the length of time it took to gain employment which will be discussed further in another theme, the time it took to adapt to the cost of living varied from several weeks to up to a year and more.

The outcomes from this theme would suggest that Irish educators struggle to adapt to the cost of living in Vancouver. This is mainly due to the higher rental prices compared to many areas in Ireland, the unfamiliarity with the tipping culture and the change in salary plans from a twelve-month salary in Ireland to a ten-month salary in Vancouver. To adapt to the change in cost, it was suggested by interviewees that any Irish educators new to the area create a detailed budget and maintain it to ensure they spend within their limits and spend their hard earned money wisely.

### ***Theme 2: Levels of Catholicism in Catholic Schools:***

Another statement that emerged from analysing the interviews was that many Irish teachers who are employed in the Catholic school system in the Greater Vancouver area (CISVA)

struggle with “the levels of Catholicism” in the schools. CISVA is a large educational organisation composed of over forty-five schools across the province of British Columbia. CISVA currently have over sixteen thousand students and two thousand staff members (CISVA, 2021)

It has become increasingly popular for young Irish teachers to gain employment from the CISVA organisation to work in their schools. Four of the six interviewees interviewed were working in Catholic schools, and although they were experienced when it came to Catholic traditions in schools in Ireland, the extent and levels of Catholicism in the schools was “off the charts” according to one interviewee. Interviewee 1 claimed that it actually made her quite uncomfortable as she had to pretend about certain elements of her life and she was not able to express herself as she had wished; “It unfortunately was a very uncomfortable situation as I could not be honest about my life outside of work with my work colleagues”. It seemed that many CISVA employees had to conceal the truth in some way and that it was difficult as they initially did not have anyone in work they could confide in. Interviewee 1 stated that as soon as another Irish employee began to work at her school, she became much more comfortable as she had someone to discuss these cultural differences. Interviewee 2 discloses that the pressure on teaching in a Catholic school became too overwhelming and she made the decision to resort back to an SEA role rather than a teaching role.

However, although CISVA employs quite a few Irish educators, Interviewee 5 believes that CISVA are also exploiting the Irish teachers for their own gain, stating it was “Very unfair of them to exploit the Irish teachers in that way when they know that unlicensed teachers can still be hired on a temporary contract”. This is due to the trend of CISVA employing fully qualified Irish teachers as special educational assistants and classroom assistants on lower salaries as they do not yet possess a BC teaching licence. Fully qualified Irish teachers can gain much higher salaries by teaching in independent schools in the Greater Vancouver area and by gaining their BC teachers licences. Two of the interviewees started off as an SEA even though they might have been able to gain actual teaching positions by possibly teaching at independent schools.

Teaching in Catholic schools in Vancouver is something that many Irish teachers could not prepare for, and some were unable to adjust to. As one interviewee mentioned, this pressure can be eased by having an employee or employees with a similar mindset to you and having a confidant. There are other options such as teaching in public schools or independent schools, but these schools may not be able to compete on salary with the Catholic schools. If an Irish teacher is hoping to emigrate to Vancouver and work as a teacher, the interviewees suggest that they should apply for their BC teaching certificates prior to moving over. This certificate would make it easier for educators to gain a teaching job and potentially increase their salary. However, Catholic schools may not be the best options for some Irish teachers due to their culture being vastly different from the majority of Catholic schools in Ireland.

### ***Theme 3: Feeling Isolated and Financial stress:***

Several stated that after emigrating to Vancouver they felt emotions of loneliness and at times they felt isolated and under a lot of financial stress to make ends meet, and one interviewee stated “[she] felt isolated, bogged down and sad at times”. Particularly immigrants who moved to Vancouver outside of summer months found it more difficult to settle into life in Vancouver. The Greater Vancouver area is known for having a particularly wet, rainy climate at certain times of the year, usually from October to March, which can have a negative effect on many people’s mood (Lukmanji et al., 2019). Additionally, many struggle to initially settle in Vancouver due to loneliness combined with stress from financial difficulties.

Interviewee 1 recounted in her interview that she struggled initially in Vancouver with loneliness and isolation. Difficulty in making friends and homesickness were the major factors which she felt caused her to feel isolated and lonely. According to the interviewee, friends were difficult to make as people her age were already in established friends groups and ‘cliques’ and did not normally associate with people outside of the groups. Additionally, the interviewee made an interesting observation, that in her opinion it was easier for males to make new friends as they were more involved in sports and different social activities to make friends. “My partner found it easier to make friends, not sure why to be honest. Maybe males are just better at mixing as they can interact about sports”.

The interviewee's experiences are echoed by the other interviewees who experienced similar emotions with feelings of sadness and regret about moving to Vancouver during the fall and winter. During these months, Vancouver is renowned for its long stretch of dreary weather, which can lead to people developing SAD, or seasonal affective disorder, an illness that is mentioned by a number of the interviewees. SAD is a type of depression that normally happens in correlation with changes in the weather, especially during the winter months (Lukmanji et al., 2019). SAD, combined with a limited social circle, can emphasize feelings of loneliness. Considering the weather common during the colder months, it can be more difficult to socialize and meet others when outdoor activities are limited. Vancouver provides more opportunities for social gatherings in the summer, which is a long wait for those who arrived in the fall. Several interviewees mentioned that their mood improved with the warmer weather, as they found sports and organizations to join and meet friends.

Interviewee 4 noted feelings of homesickness, which can be sometimes highlighted when the interviewees viewed social media to follow what friends and family were doing back home and feeling left out. All of these factors compounded together, making many feel as though they made a mistake in moving to Vancouver.

The added pressure of finding a job when arriving in Vancouver adds to the financial stress of new immigrants. Vancouver is known for having a highly competitive job market ('A vicious circle': Newcomers struggling to find jobs in Canada despite education, experience | CBC News, 2021), which can lead to new immigrants struggling to find employment. The time period for gaining employment in the education sector in Vancouver varied among the interviewees from days after arriving to months later. Some of the teachers stated that they had to find alternative employment as they found it difficult to find an education job in Vancouver, which added to feelings of inadequacy. For example, Interviewee 3 states that she had to substitute teach for three months prior to getting a solid more permanent position. Interviewee 4 details how it took her the "guts of a year" to be a teaching position she wanted. Combined with the high cost of living in Vancouver, job seekers are often stressed when searching in a competitive market. These financial struggles also impact loneliness, as without

the finances to partake in social activities, such as dining out or sports, many new immigrants find themselves socially isolated. This results in difficulties making new friends and adds to them feeling lonely and isolated, creating a vicious circle.

#### ***Theme 4: Suggestions for Immigrants to Vancouver***

The final area of findings that emerged involved the suggestions made by the interviewees for Irish educators making the move to Vancouver. Suggestions included networking prior to arrival to attempt to secure a job, researching the BC teaching certificate and its requirements and also creating budgets to factor in the cost of living. The interviewees suggest that following these three steps can make the transition from life in Ireland to Vancouver much smoother. Research shows that immigrants who conduct in-depth research on the area they plan to move to, tend to settle in and adapt to their new environment easier than those who do not (Frank, 2013).

Networking is an effective method for gaining connections that may be utilised for both professional and personal gain (Gibbs, Singh, Butler and Scott, 2018). Networking may be useful for immigrants when moving to a new area to gain useful connections. The participants of the interviews conducted during this research project suggest networking through social media sites to gain employment within the education sector in Vancouver. One recommends to “reach out to friends and network on LinkedIn hard prior to going over”. Sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook are useful in their experience of gaining connections for the interviewees. Facebook groups established and maintained by Irish people exclusively for Irish immigrants were extremely helpful according to Interviewee 3, saying “I also used the ‘Irish and new in Vancouver’ Facebook group. It was a much larger group but definitely helped answer some queries I had about things in Vancouver”. It is noted in previous literature on Irish emigration that when abroad, Irish expatriates will in most cases work and assist each other, both in a personal and professional aspect (O’Rourke, 2020). Utilising websites such as Moving2Canada is another way of gaining information and connections that is suggested by the interviewees. Interviewee 5 states how she regrets that a website like Moving2Canada was not established when she moved over and that she thinks she would have found it extremely useful, “I would have definitely availed of support if they were there”.

Prior to making the move to Vancouver, Irish teachers should spend some time researching the various different teaching certificates within the province of British Columbia, and “research what licence you require and try to start the application. It will save so much time and stress in Vancouver”. Having an understanding and knowledge of the teaching certificates that they are entitled to apply for will help the Irish teachers gain the teaching certificates quicker but also boost their employment prospects. This is due to certified teachers being much more employable than uncertified teachers (Alphonso, 2018). Becoming a certified teacher in BC will help avoid being exploited by private organisations such as CISVA, who are known for employing qualified Irish teachers as SEA’s on a lower salary than they would be entitled to if they were certified. Interviewee 4 suggests that Irish educators should apply for their teaching certificate prior to coming over as she has experience of it being a lengthy process “that took ages!”. Gaining as much information as possible about the certificates and applying for them prior to going to Vancouver is an overall suggestion of Interviewee 3.

Planning and preparing for the cost of living is another suggestion that is evident from the interviews conducted. As described in some of the interviews, the cost of living can take some time to adjust to, mainly due to Vancouver having a higher cost of living than many parts of Ireland (Reddan, 2016). It is suggested by Interviewee 3 to budget for the move to Vancouver, factoring in costs such as rent, public transport and necessities, but also factor in the cost for flights home in the case of an emergency. Budgeting and sticking to the budget is essential on a teacher’s salary in Vancouver according to Interviewee 1. Failure to do proficient research and prepare for prices of services and goods in Vancouver could be an error that leads to an Irish teacher struggling to adapt to the cost of living in Vancouver.

This section describes the processes and methods used to gain an answer to the research question. This chapter details how the six interviews conducted with members of the Irish community living in the Greater Vancouver area employed in the education sector were analysed by the researcher and it gives details of the findings that emerged from the interviews. From the interviews conducted the results were analysed which led to identifying four main themes that were prominent. The themes that were identified were:

Theme 1: Adjusting to the cost of living

Theme 2: Levels of Catholicism in Catholic Schools

Theme 3: Feeling Isolated and Financial stress

Theme 4: Suggestions for Immigrants to Vancouver

The four themes were examined and compared to existing literature on the research topic. Similarities were drawn between elements of the interviews and existing topics.

## Discussion

It was essential to determine and interpret the six interviews that were conducted with Irish educators in the greater Vancouver area in order to effectively answer the research question “What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?”. In order to accomplish this, the transcripts from the interviews were analysed and interpreted to reach a conclusion of the research project. This chapter discusses the findings and themes that were identified upon analysing the research. The findings are discussed along with potential causes and reasons for each one identified by the researcher.

### **(i) Interpretation**

The results that were disclosed in the previous chapter provided a valuable insight into the topic of Irish immigration to Canada. The results were provided by conducting and analysing interviews to answer the research question effectively. The findings showed several cultural challenges and difficulties that faced Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area. The challenges that can be identified throughout the interviews as themes are coping with the cost of living, adapting to the levels of Catholicism in schools, and battling homesickness and isolation.

#### ***Coping with the cost of living***

The interviews revealed that Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver Area found it difficult to adjust to the expensive cost of living in Vancouver. The higher rent prices, compared with many parts of Ireland, along with higher cost of necessities such as groceries can make the transition to life in Vancouver a struggle financially. A potential reason for this theme is that prior to emigrating, many educators live with their parents and have to pay little or no rent, resulting in them struggling to adapt to the high cost of rent in the Greater Vancouver area. Vancouver is more expensive than Ireland for groceries and other basic necessities, which may be another potential reason why Irish immigrants struggle to adapt to the cost of living (Numbeo, 2021). According to the interviewees, it can take time



for new Irish in Vancouver to learn where to shop for their groceries and necessities, as there can be a big price difference between the many stores. One interviewee stated, “The prices of food were far more expensive than in Ireland and it took me some time to learn where I should do my grocery shopping. No Frills is the cheapest store of the lot”.

### ***Adapting to the levels of Catholicism in Catholic schools:***

The reason theme is potentially due to Irish schools not placing the same emphasis on religion as those CISVA schools that some of the educators were employed in. Many Irish educators would not have experienced quite the same intensity of ‘religiousness’ either while working in or attending a Catholic school in Ireland. The curriculum in Irish schools is much less focused on religion and the religious curriculum is based much less on Catholicism compared to the CISVA curriculum (Irish Times, 2020). The Irish system is still mainly Catholic focused, however it does give students insights and knowledge about the various different religions throughout the globe (Faas, Darmody and Sokolowska, 2015). Religion within Catholic schools in Vancouver is solely Catholic focused and very intense on the schools producing ‘good Catholic students’ with very little time spent on other religions (CISVA, 2021). One interviewee mentioned how she was becoming irritated working for CISVA and their “outdated” methods. Another unexpected finding from this theme was that the interviewees expressed how they felt that CISVA took advantage of many of the young Irish teachers and they felt that it was unjust and “unfair”.

### ***Battling homesickness and isolation***

The research conducted suggests that at times while living in Vancouver, Irish immigrants can experience feelings of isolation and long for home comforts and their homeland, Interviewee 3 saying “I got there then I felt very homesick and I really missed my family”. This finding was expected by the researcher and was part of the hypothesis. Literature reviewed on the overall topic of Irish emigration to Canada stated that it was common for many Irish to experience homesickness as well as social isolation (Cooney, 2020). The research suggests that many Irish in Canada find it difficult to make new friends and peers other than Irish due Canadians being very “clique-y” in nature among their peers, this can lead to the social isolation mentioned by

the interviewees “Canadians were very polite but I thought they did not make any effort to mix or mingle with any people outside of their own established friend group” mentioned Interviewee 2. Combating homesickness however, is being made easier with the advances in technology according to interviewee 5, “When we moved over it was much harder to keep in touch but now with FaceTime and the likes it is easier than ever”. The use of FaceTime, which is mentioned by interviewee 5, and the various other social media platforms can make it easier for Irish immigrants in Vancouver to keep in touch with their family and friends in Ireland.

The findings gathered did have some similarities with the researcher’s hypothesis. From reviewing existing literature on the research topic, the researcher expected that the cultural challenges facing Irish educators in the Greater Vancouver Area would experience challenges such as adapting to the high rent, high cost of living in Vancouver and difficulty finding employment.

## **(ii) Implications**

The research gathered as a result of undertaking this research project mirrors some of the existing data of the overall research topic such as *The Irish in Canada* (Wilson, 1989) and *Experiences of Irish people living in Canada* (Perry, 2014). By successfully answering the research question, the findings and data gathered add useful insights and relevant data to the topic area. It provides new, first-hand information on the relevant topic of Irish people working and living on the west coast of Canada. This research project successfully helps to fill a gap in the existing literature on this topic.

The results fit in with the existing theory that Irish immigrants throughout the world emigrate tend to stick together, look out for each other and socialise together. The potential reasoning for this is that settled immigrants are aware of the difficulties and challenges of immigrating to a new area and they are inclined to help their fellow country men and women in adjusting to life in their new home. The cost of living in Vancouver is a common theme among existing literature which is also mirrored in the findings. In Vancouver, every month there are meet-ups for Irish new to the city to help them gain friends, connections and advice about living in the area. Interviewee 5 stated how attending these meets and gaining information helped

her in adjusting to the demanding cost of living in Vancouver. Events such as these help keep the common practice of Irish sticking together and helping each other going throughout the city.

The results and findings gathered as part of this research project should be taken into account when considering a number of different factors associated to Irish emigration. Firstly, analysing the findings will give an understanding of the potential reasons why young Irish people emigrate from their homeland. This information may be useful for the potential Irish emigrants to Vancouver, both those who hope to work in the education sector and those that do not. The interviewees discuss various elements of life in Vancouver in comparison to their homeland and by outlining these it can give an insight into what Ireland and its government as a nation can strive to improve to keep their young educated workforce in the country. An example of an element of Irish life in Vancouver that was mentioned by interviewee 4 was the Irish public transport systems being far inferior to those in place in Vancouver, “Things like the public transport were much better than in Ireland. Unlike Ireland, buses and trains never seemed to be late”.

By successfully answering the research question, it outlines the difficulties and challenges facing Irish immigrants in Vancouver. The findings will be useful for Irish emigrants who are moving to Vancouver as it will outline for them what to expect and how to prepare for the challenges they may need to overcome. This new data will provide recent and accurate material which will add to the material on the topic but also fill a gap in the existing literature on the Irish immigrants to Vancouver.

### **(iii) Limitations**

There were several limitations that the research project faced, including generalizability, lack of data on the topic, methodology constraints, reliability, and cultural bias, and this section will also delve into recommendations for future research.

***(a) Generalizability:***

The main limitation of the piece of research was to do with the sample size. It was a small sample size as it only consisted of six interviewees. Interviewees were difficult to acquire as many did not respond to the request for participants by the researcher. The issue with having only six participants is that it increases the likelihood of the results being skewed and less reliable (Hackshaw, 2008). Having a larger sample size is preferable as it increases the reliability of the results. More participants and results decrease the likelihood of a 'chance' or skewed result (Faber and Fonseca, 2014), and in this case, perhaps more challenges would have been unearthed if more interviews had been conducted.

Another issue with this research project was that all of the interviewees who participated in the research were female. Having no differentiation from the participants did allow for a control, but the study may have yielded different findings. It is possible that the cultural challenges facing Irish males within the education sector in Vancouver would have differed from the cultural challenges facing Irish females within the education sector in Vancouver. Having participants of different genders can increase the reliability of the results as different genders can add different perspectives and findings (Tannenbaum, Greaves and Graham, 2016).

***(b) Lack of data on topic***

The research question created by the researcher aims to fill a gap in the existing literature associated with the topic of Irish immigration to Canada. Due to this, the data and findings gathered during the course of the research were unable to be compared against other data and confirmed as a result. Selecting a research question and topic that has an abundance of relevant data enables researchers to compare their findings and also confirm or deny their findings in comparison to existing research on the topic (Brown, Kaiser and Allison, 2018).

Existing data on the overall topic is accessible, however data associated with the research question is far less prevalent. As a consequence, time was spent sifting through a sizable amount of data in an attempt to find data associated with the question. If the question was

based on an area which had more existing data, it may have made it easier and quicker to gather relevant data.

***(c) Methodology constraints:***

The methodology employed by the researcher was the most suitable methodology to effectively answer the research question. However, using the exploratory methodological approach were constrained by a number of factors. The main issue was due to the geographical location of the interview participants. The location of the interviewees was Vancouver, Canada and the researcher was based in Dublin, Ireland. As a result of the geographical location, in-person interviews were not feasible which meant that virtual interviews were the best option and chosen to complete the research. The interviews were still a success even though they were conducted virtually as the research was still able to gather the necessary data.

The second issue which arose due to the geographical location was attempting to arrange a suitable time to conduct the interviews. The time zone difference between the two locations made it difficult to arrange a suitable time for the interview to take place. Planning in advance and clear communication from the researcher enabled the interviews to be conducted without any error.

***(d) Reliability:***

The reliability of the data gathered during this research project is also a limitation. This is due to the data gathered being current and new data. The information that was gathered was accurate as of now but it may not be the same in the years to come. It may also change potentially as a result of the economic climate and the impact of globalisation. Frequent studies on the topic area should be conducted to document if there are differing answers to the research gathered in this project.

***(e) Cultural bias:***

There is no doubt that cultural bias was a limitation to this research project. The research question in itself makes the resulting research culturally biased. Focusing on Irish immigrants living in Vancouver is the prominent example of cultural bias and as a result all literature gathered in order to help answer the research question was done so from a culturally biased point of view. Gathering irrelevant literature would have been time consuming and not helpful in answering the research question. The answers to the question will not add to literature on all immigrant experiences in Vancouver, it is just limited to Irish immigrant experiences in Vancouver.

The question is also biased from the viewpoint that it focuses solely on the education sector and is limited to the experiences and opinions of educators in Vancouver. As a result, this study cannot be generalized to the experiences of immigrants or even all Irish immigrants in Vancouver.

There were several factors, constraints and methods that limited this research project. Adapting to the changing demands of the data and ensuring that the same methodological approach is employed throughout is essential in ensuring the validity of the research gained. Understanding the limitations and being able to overcome them is also part of the researcher's role in documenting their data.

***(iv) Recommendations:***

The research question was answered successfully and the objectives of the project were sustained. There are a few recommendations that should be taken into consideration if doing a project similar to this. The primary recommendations are associated with sample size and the participants used in collecting the research for the study. The sample size for this project was smaller than ideal, and to capture more comprehensive data it is recommended to have a larger sample size. This was not an error on the researcher's behalf as participants were difficult to gather, however perhaps more time could have been spent attempting to gather participants.

The next recommendation relates to the participants who partook in the virtual interviews. All of the interviewees were the same gender, female, and although it allowed for a controlled factor throughout the interviews, if there were different genders it may have resulted in different results gathered and may have given a more thorough and accurate answer to the research question. This also relates to the issue of sample size, as the participants had to volunteer to join the study and it so happened that all who volunteered were female.

The final recommendation is that more studies need to be undertaken on this research topic. From reviewing the literature associated with the topic it is evident that a lack of recent accurate data on the topic exists. Research should be undertaken in both a quantitative and qualitative capacity to help gain a better understanding on the topic of Irish emigration to Canada. This research project partially fills a gap related to the experiences of a section of Irish immigrants in Vancouver, nonetheless there are numerous other gaps like these that still exist.

In this chapter, the six interviews and their transcripts were interpreted and discussed by the researcher. Though the research faced several constraints as all projects do, the researcher analysed which limitations were the most significant and how to best reduce their impact. Interpreting the findings gathered enabled the researcher to develop an answer to the research question “What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?”. The significance and implications of the findings that emerged are also detailed in this chapter, as well as recommendations for any future research done on this topic.

## Conclusion

This piece of research was conducted to formulate an answer to the research question “What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?”. An exploratory approach was used in conjunction with a qualitative methodological approach to successfully enable the researcher to formulate an answer to the research question, based on the evidence provided in the interviews.

It can be concluded that there are a number of cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants in the Greater Vancouver that are employed within the education sector. The results suggest that the main cultural challenges are related to adjusting to the cost of living in the Vancouver area, struggling to deal with the levels of Catholicism in CISVA schools and battling emotions of loneliness and financial stress. These challenges are faced by many of Irish educators who emigrate to Vancouver. The cost of living in Vancouver is very high in comparison to many parts of Ireland and Irish immigrants struggle to adapt to it. Working for Catholic schools in Vancouver has become popular among Irish educators in Vancouver, and many have noted how uncomfortable they have felt working their due to the extreme levels of Catholicism in the schools. Making new friends in a new city and obtaining a well paid job is a challenge for many new Irish to the city and combining that with dark dreary winters can lead many immigrants to experience emotions of loneliness and depression while worried about their financial security. Comparisons were able to be drawn between the findings in the interviews and to the literature that was reviewed as part of the literature review. The themes highlighted from the interviews can also be seen in parts of the literature that was reviewed.

The methods used to gather and analyse the accumulated data were successful in helping formulate a conclusion to the research question. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain detailed and accurate information which other options such as surveys may not have provided.

There were some unexpected insights that arose during the course of the study. The main one being how CISVA were accused by some of the interview participants of taking advantage



of Irish teachers' naivety and lack of knowledge of the BC teaching certs and licenses. This is potentially something that could be researched further into.

As mentioned in the discussion, there are a number of recommendations that could further add to this research project. When conducting research on this topic the sample sizes would ideally be larger than the sample size in this project, however there were also time constraints limited the ability to gather more participants. The genders of the participants ideally would be a more even split between male and female. Similar to having a larger sample size, having both male and female participants increases the validity of the results. A study into the treatment or use of Irish teachers in the CISVA organisation would be worthwhile as it is suggested within the research project that CISVA are using the naivety of Irish teachers for their own gain by giving them lower paid jobs that they may be qualified for.

More studies should be conducted into the overall topic of Irish emigration to Canada. From reviewing literature on the topic, there is a clear lack of recent, accurate and relevant data.

This research project has succeeded in answering the research question "What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?" by providing an answer based on the evidence gained by conducting both secondary and primary research on the topic.

# Appendix A

## Interview Questions for Thesis & Reasoning:

### “A Qualitative Study into Irish Emigration to Canada”

What are the cultural challenges facing Irish immigrants employed in the education sector in the Greater Vancouver area?

1. **How long have you been living in Vancouver?**
2. **What were the factors that drew you to Vancouver, rather than Toronto or Montreal for example?**
  - *Eases into the interview by finding out the time period and identifies reasons for emigrating to Van.*
3. **Was the experience of gaining employment in Vancouver similar or different to the experience of gaining employment in Ireland?**
  - *Expecting references to CV and Resumes and themes that show up in the existing literature.*
4. **How long did it take to gain employment in the education sector?**
  - *Duration to find employment, does it match the info given in existing literature within the lit review?*
5. **Were there any noticeable cultural differences between living in Vancouver and living in Ireland?**
  - *Do the answers echo the cultural challenges noted in the existing literature?*
6. **How did you find the difference in the cost of living in Vancouver compared to Ireland?**
  - *Key Theme in existing Literature - Vancouver has a high cost of living*

**7. Were there any cultural differences within the workplace that you had to adapt to?**

- *Provides an insight if cultural challenges differ in and out of the workplace? Answers to Q5 and Q7 provide some cultural differences*

**8. What helped you to adapt to the cultural challenges either in day-to-day life or within the workplace?**

- *Gives an indication of what helps Irish emigrants overcome change and unknown.*

**9. What types of emotions did you feel after immigrating to Vancouver?**

- *Does the answer match up with the common theme of loneliness?*

**10. Did you use any resources to help get settled in Vancouver? Would you have availed of supports available to Irish emigrants to Vancouver? Is it something that you feel could have a positive impact on new Irish immigrants to the area?**

- *Provides info that may be useful in implementing supports for combating loneliness among immigrants to Vancouver.*

**11. How long do you intend to stay in Vancouver? Do you intend to go back home or move somewhere else?**

- *Gives insight into the duration of stay, are Irish educators moving temporarily or permanently?*

**12. Finally, what advice would you give to any Educator from Ireland seeking to move to Vancouver?**

- *Provides tips and suggestions which can help make the transition easier for other Irish immigrants to Vancouver.*

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