



University of Wales Trinity Saint David Birmingham

Module: Digital Skills and Research Methods

Module Code: LCHS4007

Assessment Component 2: Research Literacy- Learning How to Read a Research Paper

Submitted by: Muniza Muniza

ID number: 2536776

Submitted to

Name of the lecturer: Dr. Masud Siddiqui

Submitted on

Date: 21/07/2026

Table of contents

Section 1.....	2
Section 2.....	3
Section 3.....	4
Section 4.....	4
References.....	5

Section 1

Introducing the Research Paper and Topic Development

The research paper being reviewed for this assignment is titled “She didn’t know how to go back”: school attendance problems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic - A multiple stakeholder qualitative study with parents and professionals. The authors of the paper are McDonald, Lester and Michelson and it was published in 2023 in the British Journal of Educational Psychology.

The main topic explored in the paper is the increase in school attendance difficulties among primary school children following the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focuses on understanding why some children found it hard to return to school after periods of lockdown, online learning and reduced contact with peers and teachers. To explore this, the researchers gathered the views of two key groups: parents of children who were experiencing attendance problems, and educational professionals such as teachers and attendance support staff.

The research topic was developed because of concerns raised in schools and by government services after the pandemic. During COVID-19, children spent a long time learning at home and had less structure and social interaction. When schools reopened, many schools reported that some children were anxious, reluctant, or unable to return to normal attendance. The Department for Education (2023) published guidance highlighting that persistent absence had increased and that this was linked to poorer learning outcomes and wellbeing.

The authors identified that while statistics showed absence rates were rising, there was not enough research explaining the personal reasons behind it. In particular, there was a gap in research that included both parents’ and professionals’ perspectives together. Therefore, the study was developed to fill this gap by listening directly to the people affected.

This topic is important for Family Support Work because attendance problems are rarely caused by one reason. They are often linked to anxiety, family stress, changes in routine, or emotional difficulties. By understanding the findings of this research, Family Support Workers can assess families more accurately and provide support that addresses the real causes of non-attendance.

Section 2

Understanding the Purpose and Research Questions

The main purpose of the study by McDonald, Lester and Michelson (2023) was to explore why some primary school children experienced difficulties returning to school after the COVID-19 pandemic. The central research question was: What are the experiences and views of parents and educational professionals regarding school attendance problems post-COVID?

The aim was to understand the issue from multiple perspectives to identify key factors. This purpose is important for health and social care because poor attendance affects learning, wellbeing and future outcomes. The findings can help professionals to provide support based on evidence rather than assumptions.

Section 3

Understanding the Research Methods

The study by McDonald, Lester and Michelson (2023) used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is used to explore people's experiences, feelings and views in detail (Punch, 2014). This approach was appropriate because the researchers wanted to understand the reasons behind school attendance problems, which cannot be measured with numbers alone.

Data Collection Method

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews use a set of main questions but also allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions. This method was chosen because it gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences in detail while keeping the discussion focused on attendance after COVID-19.

Two groups of participants were interviewed. The first group was parents of primary school children who were having difficulties attending school. The second group was educational professionals, including teachers and staff who support attendance in schools. Including both groups was a strength because it allowed the researchers to compare the views from home and school. This is important because attendance problems often involve factors from both environments. Using multiple perspectives also helps with triangulation, which increases the trustworthiness of qualitative findings.

Data Analysis Method

The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The researchers read through all the transcripts, noted important points, and grouped similar ideas together into themes.

This method was suitable because it provided a clear and organised way to analyse a large amount of interview data. It also ensured that the findings were based on what participants actually said. This makes the results more reliable and representative of real experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical guidelines. All participants were given information about the study and asked to provide informed consent before taking part. They were also told that they could withdraw at any time. To protect confidentiality, names and identifying details were removed from the data. Ethical approval was obtained from a university ethics committee before data collection began. These steps are important when researching sensitive topics involving families and children.

Strengths of the Research Methods

One strength was the use of qualitative interviews. This allowed the researchers to collect detailed and rich information about emotions, family life and school experiences. A survey would not have been able to capture this depth.

Another strength was including both parents and professionals. This gave a more balanced view of the problem. Parents could talk about challenges at home, while professionals could talk about what they saw in school. This made the findings more complete.

A third strength was the use of thematic analysis. This is a well-known and accepted method in social research. It made the analysis process clear and transparent.

Limitations of the Research Methods

There were also limitations. First, the sample size was small. Only a limited number of parents and professionals took part. This means the findings cannot be generalised to all families in the UK. The experiences may be different in other areas.

Second, there was a risk of self-selection bias. Because people volunteered to take part, those who agreed may have had stronger views or more difficult experiences. Families who were managing well may not have participated.

Third, the children themselves were not interviewed. The study is about children's attendance but only adults gave their views. Children may have different reasons for not attending that adults do not know about. Including children's voices would have strengthened the study.

Overall Evaluation

Overall, the research methods were suitable for the aims of the study. Qualitative interviews and thematic analysis allowed for an in-depth exploration of a complex issue. The ethical procedures were followed correctly. Although there are limitations with sample size and lack of children's views, the study still provides useful and current evidence. For Family Support Workers, understanding these methods helps us to judge the quality of the research and decide how to apply it to practice.

Section 4

In conclusion, this report has critically reviewed the research paper by McDonald, Lester and Michelson (2023) which explored school attendance problems following the COVID-19 pandemic. The study addressed a current and important issue affecting children, families and schools.

The research used a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. This was an appropriate method for exploring personal experiences. Key strengths included the inclusion of both parents' and professionals' perspectives and the clear approach to data analysis. However, the study also had limitations including a small sample size and the fact that children were not directly included.

For Family Support Workers, the findings are very relevant. The research shows that attendance problems are often linked to anxiety, changes in family routine and emotional difficulties rather than simply behaviour. This means that assessment should be holistic and consider the whole family context. The study also highlights the importance of working together with schools and other agencies to support children.

This assignment shows why research literacy is essential in health and social care. By reading, understanding and applying research, Family Support Workers can make sure that their practice is evidence-based. Using research in this way helps to provide better support and improve outcomes for children and families, especially in the period of recovery following the pandemic.

References

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2018) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department for Education (2023) *Working Together to Improve School Attendance*. London: Department for Education. Available at: [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) (Accessed: 14 July 2026).

McDonald, B., Lester, K.J. and Michelson, D. (2023) 'She didn't know how to go back': School attendance problems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic—A multiple stakeholder qualitative study with parents and professionals. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(1), pp. 386–401.

NHS England (2023) *Children and Young People Services Mental Health Services*. Available at: [england.nhs.uk](https://www.england.nhs.uk) (Accessed: 14 July 2026).

Punch, K.F. (2014) *Introduction to Social Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. 3rd edn. London: Sage.