

Individual Report

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Section 1: Introducing the Research Paper and Topic Development

1.1 Paper Details (Title, Author(s) and Year of Publication)

This report examines the research article "‘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", by McDonald, Lester and Michelson (2023), published in the British Journal of Educational Psychology. The study investigates school attendance problems (SAPs) among primary school children in England following the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the experiences of parents and education professionals in order to understand why some children struggled to return to school, and what kinds of support could help improve attendance (McDonald, Lester and Michelson, 2023).

1.2 Main Topic or Problem Explored in the Paper

This paper focuses on school attendance problems (SAPs) and how poor attendance can affect children's education and wellbeing. The researchers consider a range of factors that may influence whether a child attends school, including physical and mental health, special educational needs, family relationships, parental wellbeing, engagement with school, and the level of support available within the community. The paper also examines how the COVID-19 pandemic affected school attendance. School closures and periods of isolation created difficulties for children, leading to ongoing attendance problems, particularly among those who already faced social, educational or mental health challenges. The authors argue that SAPs are rarely caused by a single factor, but usually develop gradually from several overlapping pressures, which is why the study takes a broad, multi-stakeholder view.

1.3 Who Is the Research About?

The research centres on children and young people who experience school attendance problems, and it also draws on the perspectives of parents, school staff, and other people who support children and families. The researchers focused on these groups because school attendance can be shaped by a wide range of factors, including mental health, family difficulties, special educational needs, and problems experienced at school. Exploring the experiences of these different groups can help researchers identify more effective ways of supporting children and improving school attendance. Including multiple stakeholder perspectives within a single study also allows the researchers to compare how a child's attendance difficulties are understood differently depending on who is describing them, which can highlight

gaps between the support families feel they need and the support schools and services are able to provide.

1.4 Why Is This Topic Important in UK Health and Social Care?

This topic matters within UK health and social care because poor school attendance can affect children's education, mental health, wellbeing and future opportunities. Children who are frequently absent from school may need support from schools, families, health professionals and social care services. The COVID-19 pandemic further increased school attendance problems and created additional difficulties for many children and families. Understanding the reasons behind poor attendance can help professionals offer early support and prevent problems from escalating. Because attendance difficulties often overlap with wider health and welfare concerns, professionals across education, health and social care need to work together, and evidence of this kind can help services identify children at risk earlier and target support more effectively rather than responding only once a problem has become severe.

Section 2: Understanding the Purpose and Research Question

2.1 Research Question(s) or Objectives

The purpose of this research is to understand school attendance problems (SAPs) and the various reasons why children may struggle to attend school regularly. The paper explains that poor attendance can lead to serious consequences, such as lower educational achievement, early school leaving, unemployment and mental health difficulties. By gathering the views of children, parents, school staff and other professionals, the researchers also aimed to identify what kinds of support and early intervention might help children return to, and remain in, regular school attendance following the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Section 3: Understanding the Research Methods

3.1 Overview of Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed-Methods Research

Research in health and social care is generally described as quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods. Quantitative research collects data that can be counted or measured, such as through questionnaires or existing statistics, and uses statistical analysis to identify patterns or relationships between variables. It is well suited to answering questions about how much, how many, or whether groups differ from one

another. Qualitative research, by contrast, is concerned with understanding people's experiences, views, and the meanings they attach to them, usually through methods such as interviews, focus groups, or open-ended surveys, with the resulting data analysed thematically rather than numerically. It is particularly useful when a researcher wants to explore why something happens, rather than simply measuring how often it occurs. Mixed-methods research combines both approaches within a single study, so that the strengths of each can help answer different parts of a research question. In health and social care research more broadly, quantitative methods are often used to measure outcomes, while qualitative methods are more commonly used to understand patients', families' or staff's experiences of care.

3.2 Research Methodology Used in Your Chosen Paper and Why

The research also aims to address a gap in previous studies. Earlier research has largely relied on numbers and statistics and has not fully explored the experiences and opinions of children, parents, school staff and other people involved. The researchers therefore wanted to understand the views of different stakeholders and identify what might help to improve school attendance. The main research questions can be understood as follows:

- What factors contribute to school attendance problems?
- How has COVID-19 affected children's school attendance?
- What are the experiences and views of children, parents, school staff and other stakeholders?
- What support or early interventions could help children attend school more regularly?

Data were collected using two methods, both of which produced qualitative data, meaning the study remained qualitative rather than mixed-methods. The researchers wanted to understand the experiences of parents and education professionals rather than collect numerical data, so a qualitative approach was the most appropriate choice for this research (McDonald et al., 2023).

Data collection took place in two stages. In the first stage, the researchers used online surveys with open-ended questions to gather information from parents and education professionals; these responses helped them identify the main topics and shape the interview questions. In the second stage, they carried out semi-structured interviews with a smaller number of participants to gain more detailed information about their experiences (McDonald et al., 2023).

Although the study used two different methods of data collection, both produced qualitative data: the surveys generated written responses, while the interviews provided detailed personal accounts. The researchers then analysed all of the data

using Framework Analysis to identify common themes across participants' responses (McDonald, Lester and Michelson, 2023). Framework Analysis is a structured approach to thematic analysis often used in applied health and social care research, as it allows data from different types of participants to be organised and compared systematically within a shared set of themes.

3.3 Primary and Secondary Data: Definitions, Differences, and Application to Your Paper

Primary data is information collected directly by researchers, for example through interviews or questionnaires, whereas secondary data is information that has already been collected by other people, such as government reports or previous research. Primary data allows researchers to design their questions around their own specific aims, while secondary data can be quicker to access but may not match a new research question as closely. In the chosen paper, the researchers collected primary data by interviewing participants, including parents and education professionals, in order to understand their experiences and views of school attendance problems during COVID-19. The paper also drew on secondary data from existing sources and previous research to help contextualise the findings and support the discussion.

Section 4: Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper has helped me understand the factors that can affect children's school attendance, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have learned that research can draw on different types of data, and that researchers need to collect information in a clear and organised way. I have also learned the difference between primary and secondary data, and how to identify the methods used by researchers. This assignment has helped me develop my skills in finding, reading and understanding academic sources, as well as a clearer appreciation of why a qualitative, multi-stakeholder design suited a study aiming to understand people's experiences rather than simply measure them. These skills will be valuable in my future studies, as I will need to locate reliable information and use evidence effectively, and in my future health and social care practice, as professionals need to draw on reliable research to understand people's needs, work collaboratively across services, and make appropriate decisions.

References

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