

*Journal of Trainee Teacher Education Research***A study of Year 6 pupil perspectives on home learning
following the COVID-19 lockdowns****Hannah Lyden**

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Abstract

The COVID-19 lockdowns shifted the space for education primarily to children's homes, and research has shown this emphasised and exacerbated the importance of the home learning environment (HLE). However, there is minimal research consulting children's perspectives of home learning, as parents and teachers are usually the voices sought. This small-scale case study proposal seeks to explore how pupils in Year 6 conceptualise their learning at home during and since lockdowns. Data will be obtained through questionnaires, interviews and a drawing task to establish a holistic understanding of children's experiences of home learning. Emphasis is placed on a comparison between pupil premium eligible pupils' experiences with those who are not, as research reveals an association between familial social-economic status (SES) and children's academic attainment.

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A study of Year 6 pupil perspectives on home learning following the COVID-19 lockdowns

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Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UK schools shut their doors in March 2020 and learning for the majority was transported from the classroom to children's homes. Schools closed for the first national lockdown on March 23rd 2020, and "remained closed to most pupils until the beginning of the autumn 2020 term" (Danechi & Roberts, 2022, p.10). From January 4th 2021 until March 8th 2021, schools were closed again for a second national lockdown (Danechi & Roberts, 2022). Learning in lockdown reshaped education for pupils as the home became a centre for school directed learning activities. The shift to home learning shone a light on the impact of the family and the home learning environment (HLE) on children's education (Smetackova & Stech, 2021). The pandemic forced education communities to adjust, while also presenting opportunities to re-evaluate approaches to learning and significantly to review home-school relationships to ensure appropriate support for pupils (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

As those most affected by these changes, I am keen to investigate pupil perspectives on their experiences of learning at home during lockdowns and in the ensuing months. I seek to gain insight into how to best navigate the relationship between school and home learning as a developing reflective practitioner by examining the views of learners. This small-scale case study research will focus on the perspectives of Year 6 pupils as they are old enough to reflect upon experiences during the two-year pandemic.

Experiences of home learning are diverse and marked by unequal access to resources required for school learning, an inequality which became more pronounced during lockdown. I aim to explore learning experiences so that I may choose beneficial and educationally impactful home learning strategies for every child in my classroom. In my research, pupil premium will be an identifier for disadvantaged pupils from families with lower social-economic status (DfE, 2022). Pupil premium funding is provided by the government to schools "to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England" (DfE, 2022). The pupil eligibility criteria for pupil premium are as

follows: pupils who are eligible for free school meals, pupils who are adopted or have left care, and/or pupils who are looked after by the local authority (DfE, 2022). Although this small-scale case study cannot elicit generalisable conclusions, an in-depth exploration of pupils' experiences provides the opportunity to facilitate reflective practice.

My research will explore Year 6 pupil perspectives of home learning since lockdown through the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. What do pupils understand as home learning?

RQ2. What are pupil perspectives on their experiences of home learning during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

RQ3. Are there differences in perspectives from pupil premium eligible pupils?

Literature Review

The Importance of Pupils' Perspectives

The pandemic narrative often excludes the voices of children (Pascal & Betram, 2021), yet children were and continue to be one of the most significantly impacted demographic groups. This exclusion is typical of research into home-school relations, where children are commonly viewed as passive recipients of the relationship between educators and families. Researchers often ask parents and schools to speak on behalf of pupils (Markström, 2015; Vyverman & Vettenburg, 2009). The Children's Workforce Development Council critique the exclusion of children from this conversation by suggesting pressure to be perceived as a 'good parent' can introduce bias into research data on HLEs and only address the perspective of adults (Chapman & Wood, 2009).

However, recent education research has consistently demonstrated the value of providing children with opportunities to communicate their experiences and perspectives. The promotion of children's voices is derived from a child-oriented research approach which aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Vyverman & Vettenburg, 2009). Article 12 from this UN convention declares that children have the right to voice their opinions on activities and decisions which shape their lives (Bucknall, 2012). This challenges the common power imbalance within research which perceives

children as too immature and incompetent to understand research processes, to make decisions about participation and to provide truthful data on their experiences (Bucknall, 2012).

Burke (2007) encapsulates the view that children should be encouraged to articulate their own experiences: “‘Listening to the voice of the child’ is a concept which has come to signify a respect for the different knowledges that children can offer across a range of participation agendas” (p.360). Moreover, Prosser and Burke (2007) argue that children are participants, not simply passive subjects, in their own lives and social worlds. The child-oriented research approach deems it unethical for researchers to regard children with a patronising superiority which assumes that children are somehow not yet fully human (Cullingford, 2002). In this educational research, I concur with the promotion of the inclusion of children’s perspectives, maintaining children are complete humans with unique experiences and perspectives to share that will enhance and enrich researchers’ understandings of the childhood experience (Cullingford, 2002; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

Key Definitions

Parental Involvement

Trained educators are responsible for pupils’ learning in formal schooling; however, in HLEs the responsibility shifts to children and their parents. ‘Parent’ in this research refers to any person who undertakes parental responsibility of a child, as laid out in education law by the UK government (DfE, 2018).

As detailed by the National Parent Forum of Scotland (2017), “the term ‘parental involvement’ is not clearly or consistently defined in literature” (p.14). The concept of parental involvement in children’s learning at home incorporates a multitude of attitudes and activities (e.g., Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018; Hartas, 2011). Due to complexity and ambiguity, some researchers choose to operationalise in terms of roles, while others focus on spaces such as school or home (Jabar, 2020). In this research, I operationalise the concept of parental involvement in terms of the space of home, with my focus on the HLE. Following Hartas’ (2011) conceptualisation, I adopt a working definition of parental involvement in home learning which incorporates activities for three purposes: a response to children’s school demands (e.g., homework and activities set by school), preparation for formal schooling (e.g., reading with child) and enrichment activities (e.g., music activities). A variety of

learning activities fall within these purposes, which will be explored further upon research with pupils.

Home Learning

Conceptualising home learning lends itself to an exploration of the definition of learning, but that is beyond the remit of this research focus. For the purposes of this research, I adopt Pollard's (2014) definition of learning as: "the process by which people acquire, understand, apply and extend knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes" (p.36).

The constitution of home learning has changed significantly recently. One of my research aims is to explore pupils' perspectives of what constitutes home learning as this may differ across HLEs. However, to clarify my pre-research discussion, I expand upon Hartas' (2011) characterisation of the HLE to include within (but not limited to) home learning any activities undertaken by children at home related to educational purposes, including homework, reading, enrichment and, importantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, schooling from home. Thus, home learning incorporates learning activities which are closely connected to the three purposes of parental involvement (Hartas, 2011).

The Influence of the HLE

In 2018, the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) determined that most schools do not have an explicit plan for working with parents and only 10% of teachers had CPD on parental engagement (EEF, 2018). The relationship between learning at home and learning at school was therefore significantly undeveloped before the pandemic. Despite this, the importance of the HLE for children's educational attainment and development has long been recognised by researchers (EEF, 2018; Vyverman & Vetterburg, 2009). Parental involvement in learning has been connected to increased academic achievement and self-esteem, and decreased school absence and behavioural issues (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). The EEF (2018) Teaching and Learning Toolkit suggests effective parental engagement with their children's education can lead to learning gains of 3+ months over a year.

The Millennial Cohort Study (MCS), a large-scale national longitudinal birth cohort study, offers information about children born in the year 2000 (Hartas, 2011). Data from the fourth sweep of this study in 2007–8, when the children turned age seven, was analysed by Hartas (2012) to evaluate the impact of maternal involvement in home learning on educational attainment. The MCS data revealed

that when mothers read with their child several times a week, the likelihood their child would be rated below average reduced 73% in reading, 71% in writing and 29% in speaking and listening. For mothers reading to their child once or twice a week, this reduction was 58% in reading and 57% in writing, demonstrating a correlation between reading at home and children's school attainment age seven. This research provides large-scale insight into the impact of the home learning activity of reading, although it lacks a review of individual family's experiences of learning at home.

The importance of the HLE was well established by research before the pandemic. When the majority of children's learning was moved primarily to the home in the lockdowns, the home became the key learning space for both school and non-school learning activities. Crucially, the HLE became paramount to children's learning.

Changes to Learning during Lockdowns

There is consensus among researchers that one significant shift in the learning experiences of primary pupils during lockdowns was the time spent on school activities substantially decreased during home learning compared to pre-pandemic levels (Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS], 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2021).

Andrew et al. (2020) researched the time pupils engaged in learning activities between April and June 2020 in a survey completed by 5,582 parents of children aged 5–14 in England. Parents provided information on what their children were doing in each one-hour slot of the day, selecting from pre-chosen categories: sleeping, personal care, learning, at school, reading, playing outdoors, playing indoors, socialising, on a screen, other hobbies, housework. Data from the survey was compared with pre-pandemic data from the UK Time Use Survey in 2014–2015 to determine how time spent had changed. This large-scale quantitative data collection is advantageous as an overview of how children's learning time shifted when education moved to the home. Nonetheless, it relies upon the assumption that parents knew all activities their children engaged in throughout the day. While parents may be considered a reliable source for this data collection method, the survey lacks consultation with children on their own learning experiences. The data revealed a decline in the proportion of children engaged in learning-related activities at times of the day when they were most prevalent before lockdown and generally, children spent less time learning. Primary school pupils attended online classes on average for 1.3 hours a day and spent a further two hours on learning activities.

Survey results from The IFS (2020; 2021) corroborate these findings. 4157 English parents of school children completed time-use diaries in both school closure periods to map how they and their children spent each hour in a day. The diaries provide a useful synopsis of the day, but they did not provide exact timings; parents ticked how many hours each day their children engaged in learning, and within those hours there is no specification for how long or what those learning activities were. Importantly, the survey revealed the time primary pupils spent learning increased during the second school closure from 22 hours to 26 hours a week. However, weekly learning time remained much lower than pre-pandemic benchmarks. The IFS voiced concern at the findings as learning loss was considerable; during the second school closure, learning time was still down by a fifth.

Research into primary school children's learning experiences in lockdown has been dominated by large-scale surveys employing quantitative data collection methods, which provide an overview of changes to learning times for children across the country. However, these data collection methods lack insight into individual experiences of families. There is a dearth of research detailing specific learning activities children engaged in at home during lockdown which limits the development of a holistic view of educational experiences. This is a gap in research data I seek to uncover in my own investigation.

Inequalities in the HLE

The time children spent engaged in learning activities decreased during lockdown; however, parental involvement requirements increased. During the hours children were usually in school, they were at home, which potentially enhanced the existing significance of the HLE.

Research conveys a clear relationship between familial social-economic status (SES) and children's academic attainment. This highlights the implications of the home for children's educational success. For example, the 2007–8 MCS revealed family income and maternal educational qualifications (key indicators of SES) yield strong effects on children's language and literacy (Hartas, 2011; 2012). This is consistent with findings across research (Entwisle et al., 2005; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The frequency of parental involvement in learning activities (except reading) was revealed to have no correlation to the SES of families, yet teacher ratings of pupils' language and literacy at the end of KS1 were correlated to SES. It is therefore perhaps not the frequency of home learning activities that defines a strong HLE. Hartas (2012) suggests effective home learning in low SES families may be compromised by limited access to resources and services, thus reducing the quality of learning

activities rather than quantity. This large-scale cross-sectional study provides important insight into diverse experiences of pupils' HLEs in connection to familial SES. Additionally, the MCS survey advantageously collects data on specific home learning activities and their impact on educational attainment, namely the importance of reading. Yet, the MCS survey participants are parents; therefore, as the CWDC (2009) imply, results may be implicated by the bias of desiring to present oneself as a 'good parent' rather than reflecting the reality of home learning and thus impacting the validity of the findings.

The inequalities prevalent in the relationship between educational attainment and familial SES existed before March 2020, and there is concern that attainment gaps will be exacerbated due to the transference of education to the home. Research across various countries has revealed that access to technological resources and study space were two major barriers to effective home learning for primary children (Beasy et al., 2021; Mohan et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2021; Smetackova & Stech, 2021).

Andrew et al.'s (2020) comparison of time use data from 2014–15 and lockdown placed emphasis on the connection between socio-economic characteristics and time spent on learning. SES was measured by familial income, equivalised to "best reflect the amount of resources available to household members" (Andrew et al., 2020, p.659). Results revealed that for primary pupils, family income was more closely connected with time spent on learning during lockdown than prior. There was a difference of nearly 1.5 hours a day between children at the bottom and top of the income distribution chart during lockdown. Access to resources for home learning was a barrier for pupils across the economic spectrum; approximately 50% of primary pupils had access to a computer for school, shared or individual. However, pupils from low SES families were less likely to have access to the resources beneficial to learning, such as technology and study space. This constituted an inequality which did not exist before the pandemic when the length of the school day and space of schooling was similar for pupils and research identified no relationship between frequency of parental involvement and SES (Hartas, 2012).

Similarly, Mohan et al. (2021) identified a connection between pupil engagement in home learning and HLE inequalities for secondary school pupils during the 2020 lockdown. This is relevant to those pupils who transitioned from Year 6 to Year 7 during COVID-19. Average access to high-speed broadband and educational attainment in school catchment areas were used as the indicating measures

of home resources. Therefore, the data was generally representative of areas rather than specific families. This research benefits from a mixed methods data collection; school leaders nationally completed surveys yielding quantitative data and then ten nationally representative school leaders were selected for interviews for additional qualitative data. The national survey revealed schools in areas with greater access to high-speed broadband reported higher engagement of pupils in school. Moreover, interviews with school leaders demonstrated that areas with lower educational attainment had higher probabilities of reduced attendance in online school. Although data from individual families within those school communities was not collected, the findings are corroborated by research in which parents were asked about their HLE resources and time spent in school (Andrew et al. 2020; Ariyo et al. 2022; IFS 2021).

Interestingly, Bubb and Jones (2020) researched the home learning experiences of pupils, parents and teachers in a Norwegian municipality. Incorporating the voices of children in this research strengthens its conclusions on the experiences of children. The municipality invested to provide all pupils with necessary technology, therefore this research provides insight into what happened when families were provided with the necessary resources to access home learning. 74% of teachers, 64% of parents, 71% of Grade 1–4 pupils and 78% of Grade 5–10 pupils agreed that pupils became more independent learners during home school. 79% of pupils in Grade 1–4 strongly agreed that they learnt lots of new things. Moreover, parents and teachers reported improved relationships with each other and 2/3 of parents reported gaining more insight into their children's learning. While this case study is unique in its analysis of a region in which all children had access to resources for education, it reveals the potential benefits of removing the barriers to learning at home.

Pupil Narratives of the Pandemic

Key gaps in research on home learning prevail. Firstly, pupils have been significantly excluded from the discussion on their experiences of lockdown learning, with parents most often being consulted. Where the voices of children during the COVID-19 pandemic do exist, it is typically through informal research. For example, photographer Booth (2021) wrote an article for the Guardian on a project where Year 3 and 4 pupils shared pictures of their home learning experiences. Children took pictures to answer a new question each week, such as: "What does school look like to you now?" Common photos taken were of pets, drawings and toys which were part of their home learning experience.

Secondly, the impacts of the loss of learning time and inequalities of access to education resources are still relatively unknown. While schools have faced the challenge of assisting catch-up for missed learning, there will be no statutory assessment evidence until summer 2022 because this will be the first year of examinations in their pre-pandemic form. Data from those assessments will provide important evidence of the impact of home learning through comparison to previous data.

In sum, research has demonstrated that pupil learning outcomes and experiences are impacted by the HLE, and the diversity in home learning experiences was exacerbated during the pandemic when education was accessed primarily in the space of the home. In my research, I will seek to explore how pupils conceptualise their learning at home and what activities they associate with home learning both during and since lockdowns, with a particular emphasis on the comparison between pupil premium eligible pupils with those who are not. It is hoped that this will reveal whether pupils view their home experiences as impactful to their learning, thus narrowing a current gap in research.

Research Methods

Research Paradigm

Research design is shaped by the perceptions of researchers, and the paradigms of positivism and interpretivism underpin much educational research. Denscombe (2017) defines positivism: “social reality is treated in a similar way to physical reality as something that exists independently ‘out there’ with properties that can be studied scientifically” (p.8). Positivist researchers seek definitive and objective conclusions, commonly characterised by large-scale quantitative data collection focused on identifying facts (Barker & Weller, 2003; Denscombe, 2017; Taber, 2013). Instead, my research will align closer to interpretivism, which regards the social world as “a nuanced, multi-layered phenomenon whose complexity is best understood through a process of interpretation” (Denscombe, 2017, p.8). My research will be unique to the pupils who participate, following the interpretivist paradigm’s emphasis on small-scale detailed research (Taber, 2013).

Research Design

In line with interpretivism, my research strategy will be a case study, defined by Taber (2013) as “an empirical enquiry that explores a phenomenon within its context, rather than attempting to isolate it”

(p.94–95). Case studies incorporate rich sources of data which expose the complexities within the specific case and facilitate an in-depth specific exploration to understand how complex factors operate without attempting to decontextualise the evidence (Denscombe, 2017; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Taber, 2013).

Case studies do not dictate the methods used to obtain and analyse data (Denscombe, 2017). I plan to select a mixed methods data collection and analysis approach incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data has the benefit of revealing rich, in-depth experiences which numbers cannot encapsulate. Quantitative data can reveal diversities in experiences through definite measures for investigation. (Greene & Hill, 2005). A mixed methods approach has the advantage of using multiple sources of data to draw findings, improving the accuracy of conclusions and painting a more complete picture (Denscombe, 2017). However, the mixed methods approach works under the assumption that the findings from multiple methods will be complimentary. Therefore, if this is not the case in my research, I will adapt my data analysis approach appropriately to consider incomparable results (Denscombe, 2017).

My research seeks to explore pupils' learning experiences at home during lockdown and beyond. I will collect quantitative data through the administration of self-completion questionnaires and qualitative data through pupil drawings and semi-structured individual interviews. The intention is to yield a rich insight into the pupils' experiences to gain a more holistic understanding of home learning. The participants will be a Year 6 class from one primary school in Cambridgeshire comprising 31 pupils; 3 pupils have SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) and 7 are pupil premium eligible. I have selected this age group specifically because they will be able to reflect upon their experiences from the past two years, which younger pupils might struggle to do, and they will also be taking SATs examinations this year which will provide post-project evidence of attainment changes linked to lockdown.

Questionnaires will be administered to the class to obtain an overview of lockdown learning activities and experiences. This will be followed by a drawing task and individual interviews with six pupils, selected firstly on whether they were able to reflect on their home learning experiences in the questionnaire and secondly to address my third research question exploring the experiences of pupil premium eligible pupils. This sampling technique is purposive as the participants will be selected

deliberately, rather than representatively of the population of Year 6 pupils (Denscombe, 2017; Taber, 2013). Since I specifically seek to compare the experiences of pupil premium eligible pupils with those who are not, the purposive sample of six will be split in half.

Questionnaires

Self-completion questionnaires will be administered to the whole Year 6 class. The first question will ask whether children spent each lockdown at home or at school. I will exclude those who learnt at school from my lockdown data analysis. The design of the questionnaire will lend itself to both quantitative and qualitative data analysis through a combination of question types (Appendix 1). Questions which ask pupils to rate on a scale and those which instruct to circle the answer which best describes learning experiences will generate quantitative data, while open-ended questions will enable qualitative thematic analysis. Questionnaires are notoriously not child-friendly and are only successful if completed fully and accurately (Barker & Weller, 2003; Denscombe, 2017). Therefore, I will carefully consider its length, display and the question wording, incorporating the use of clipart to dual-code where appropriate. Moreover, pupils will be reminded that there are no correct nor incorrect answers. The questionnaires will be administered by the class teacher to help ensure where possible they are completed fully, with permission to support those pupils who face barriers to completion alone by reading and writing the questionnaire with them.

The questionnaire will provide the foundation for the consideration of pupils' perspectives, but it cannot produce the in-depth exploration necessary to address all my research questions. Therefore, individual interviews with a pre-interview drawing task will be key. This will be sequential; the questionnaire will be used to inform the participants and some questions for the interviews.

Pre-Interview Drawing Task

Upon selecting the six pupil participants for interviews, I will ask the pupils to draw a picture to bring to the interview. The brief for the drawing provides space for children to interpret it to best suit their learning experiences: I will ask them to draw what home learning looks like to them. I recognise that pupils might not draw their own home learning experience, but it will provide a starting place in the individual interview to stimulate discussion on their conceptions of home learning and how this relates to their own learning experiences. The task will occur in school to prevent parental influence or home distractions. Documentary research methods are relatively new to educational research;

researchers are increasingly asking pupils to communicate ideas through drawings, photographs and stories as an inclusive research method (Barker & Weller, 2003), as also argued by Prosser & Burke (2007, p.907):

“Words are the domain of adult researchers and therefore can be disempowering to the young. Images and their mode of production, on the other hand, are central to children’s culture from a very early age and are therefore empowering”.

Drawing enables communication and expression freely in a child-friendly domain. Children often use representation when drawing to express experiences and feelings in abstract ways (Barker & Weller, 2003; Freeman & Mathison, 2009). This is poignant in my research because children may face barriers in communicating their experiences fully through written or spoken language; it enables all pupils with parental consent to participate, including SEND pupils who are “habitually and systematically excluded from discussions about their education” (Prosser & Burke, 2007, p.414). While some may communicate through language comfortably, the drawing activity presents the opportunity for reflection before interviewing with an adult researcher. There is also no time pressure for expressing thoughts in the way an interview might (Freeman & Mathison, 2009).

Drawing requires a secondary layer of investigation through interpretation. A discussion about each pupil’s drawing in the interview is imperative to ensure that I do not imprint my own subjective adult interpretation onto pupils’ expression. Drawings are a representation which require interpretation by the child to ensure it represents the child’s meaning (Barker & Weller, 2003).

Although I will select drawings as the documentary research method, photography is a popular choice among researchers. Photography would be insightful by enabling pupils to record their learning experiences in the space of home and through their own lens. It is empowering and revealing and does not require researcher participation beyond instruction on how to use the cameras (Barker & Weller, 2003). However, since my research focuses on the home, this raises a wealth of ethical concerns on sensitivity and intrusion. To remain cautious while also facilitating creativity, I have chosen drawings to be the best choice for my case study.

Individual Interviews

The final research method in my proposed sequence is to carry out semi-structured individual interviews with the six purposively sampled pupils. Interviews provide opportunity to explore experiences, opinions and emotions (Denscombe, 2017). The decision to interview pupils

individually reflects my desire to focus on the pupil's individual perspective. Group interviews typically seek collective viewpoints, and some pupils may feel slightly intimidated and perhaps less forthcoming in their contributions. Moreover, group interviews risk confidentiality issues if pupils share what was said after the session (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). As my research focuses on the private space of the home, I seek to avoid breaking confidentiality or engaging in discussion which makes pupils feel they have differing experiences to their peers.

The interviews will be semi-structured; I will create questions and a list of topics I wish to discuss based on my research questions and questionnaire findings, while also providing space for the pupils to freely discuss and develop their ideas in an order that works best for them (Denscombe, 2017). Structured interviews would be too rigorous and formal as questions and answers are controlled in a way comparable to a questionnaire. This is not the goal of the interviews as I seek to make pupils relaxed and willing to explore their learning experiences. Unstructured interviews are also unsuitable as they are nondirective (Denscombe, 2017), which would not benefit the age group or my data analysis.

As suggested by Flutter and Rudduck (2004), the pupils will be reassured in the interviews that their participation is confidential and voluntary, and they can withdraw at any point. I will begin with a chat to ensure they feel relaxed, before starting a conversation on the drawing they have brought as a prompt to begin discussion. The interviews with pupils will be no longer than 20 minutes and with permission, I will audio record and transcribe the interviews for data analysis. Audio recording ensures I maintain face-to-face contact throughout.

Data Analysis

The research design will incorporate a mixed methods approach, therefore generating quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. In my questionnaire, nominal and ordinal quantitative data will be generated with circling and scaling questions respectively (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Prior to data analysis, I will check through the questionnaires and 'edit', a process "intended to identify and eliminate errors made by respondents" (Cohen et al., 2018, p.265). I will use the survey analysis software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to assemble my data and translate into numerical values. Such software aids researchers in the processing of questionnaire data (Cohen et al., 2018). Nominal data will be summarised and described in frequencies and percentages which will be represented by tables and graphs created through SPSS. Ordinal data will also be presented as

frequencies and percentages to determine data distribution (Gorard, 2010). In terms of variables, I will use the data to compare the views of children who are pupil premium eligible to those who are not. It will also be interesting to consider whether gender is a relevant variable. This quantitative analysis will reveal numerical patterns in the data which will enhance the qualitative analysis process.

Open-ended questions in the questionnaire and individual interviews will generate qualitative data, therefore requiring reflection, inference and interpretation of transcripts. The aim of analysis will be to establish themes regarding home learning among the six participants (Cohen et al., 2018). I will undertake thematic analysis of the transcripts from interviews, incorporating discussions on pupil drawings here, to explore the qualitative data. Defined by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), “thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data” (p.3352). The identified themes will address the research questions. This process will involve familiarising myself with the data, then coding the data and analysing the codes breaking them up into themes. Coding is the process of organising and categorising data to give it meaning and address research objectives. The coding process is multi-layered to narrow down key themes (O'Reilly et al., 2013).

I seek to compare the qualitative data collected from interviews with pupil premium eligible participants and participants not eligible for pupil premium to address my third research question. I will consider this comparative layer of my data analysis during the coding process. Therefore, one code will be a participant characteristic code for pupil premium eligible participants (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). I will multi-code the data to both explore themes prevalent across all participants and to identify any distinctions.

Thematic analysis is inductive; it facilitates interpretation of data without a pre-determined framework. It has the benefit of giving all data and participants equal attention and it directly gives voice to participants, as the researcher must quote participants. However, due to its lack of pre-determined categories for analysis, it can be difficult to decide what to focus on within the data (Cohen et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2013). To overcome this limitation, I will use the research which informed my literature review and my research questions to establish some provisional themes for analysis. These are not rigid and may change upon data collection but create a starting point for coding. My provisional themes are:

- 1 Pupils' understanding of home learning.
- 2 Parental involvement in home learning.
- 3 Learning activities at home.
- 4 Reflections on home learning experiences in lockdowns.
- 5 Reflections on home learning experiences now.
- 6 Access to resources for home learning.

Triangulated with quantitative data from the questionnaire, this thematic analysis will be a systematic and rigorous data analysis method to address my research questions.

Ethics

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) ethical guidelines underpin my research ethics. I initially sought ethical approval from my personal tutor at the University of Cambridge, who reviewed and approved my research proposal.

I will seek informed consent from the pupil participants in my research. Edwards and Alldred (1999) define informed consent as “providing potential research subjects with clear and unambiguous information about the purpose and nature of the particular research study, in order that they can make choices about participation” (p.265–266). I therefore plan to introduce the research project orally and in written form to the pupils and will clarify their participation is voluntary. This will be reiterated throughout, reminding pupils that they can withdraw their consent at any time (BERA, 2018).

I will also request consent from the designated school. I will then distribute consent forms appropriate to participants and parents using the school's usual consent forms. This follows BERA's (2018) recommendation to “take into account the rights and duties of those who have legal responsibility for children” (p.15). Edwards and Alldred (1999) critique the establishment of rules specifying the age up to which parental consent is required, claiming it implies children are incompetent in informing consent themselves. However, I believe it is important to request parental consent due to the nature of my research topic which involves asking pupils about their homes and how their parents are involved in their learning.

Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity are also important ethical considerations (BERA, 2018). As recommended by Alderson and Morrow (2011), my research will be opt-in rather than opt-out to respect privacy. I plan to ask participants to share their experiences of learning in the private space of the home, therefore their privacy is respected if they do not wish to participate. To ensure anonymity, all names and the school will be pseudonyms, and any names written on the drawings produced by pupils will be blurred when incorporated into the research. In addition, all audio recordings of interviews will be deleted once the research project concludes, and the children will be given possession of the original copy of their drawing (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). While confidentiality is paramount, if a pupil discloses anything which raises a safeguarding concern, I will follow the school's policy and protocol immediately. This is particularly important as I plan research on the space of home.

BERA (2018) outlines: "Researchers should immediately reconsider any actions occurring during the research process that appear to cause emotional or other harm, in order to minimise such harm" (p.19). Therefore, I will design my questioning to ensure I avoid making pupils feel uncomfortable. One of my research questions focuses on the home learning experiences of pupils eligible for pupil premium in comparison to other pupils. To avoid harm, the purposive sampling of pupil premium participants will not be made clear to the pupils; the gatekeeper for this data will be the headteacher. The semi-structured interview schedule will be consistent for everyone and the whole class will be offered the questionnaire to complete unless a parent objects. This will be regardless of where they learnt in lockdown. I aim for the research process to be as positive as possible for all participants.

As recommended by BERA (2018), ethical decisions will be an ongoing part of my research project and adaptations will be made if necessary or if issues arise.

Implications for my Future Practice

The aim for this research project is closely linked to my current and future teaching practice. I set out to determine how to best navigate home-school relations as a teacher to maximise home learning experiences for pupils. Exploration of literature on home learning has confirmed the significance of the impact of home learning on educational attainment in school (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). This emphasises the relevance of the conversation on learning at home. As a result of literature review findings, I will encourage reading at home by consistently sending pupils home with books and

reading diaries to complete with parents and I will not assume homework can be accessed through technology. In addition, I will aim to establish and maintain positive and proactive communication with parents to ensure they are knowledgeable on their own importance for their child's learning experiences and development (Hartas, 2011; 2012). Obtaining pupil perceptions will aid my planning for homework to ensure I target areas for improvement in home learning activities. I will be mindful of research findings that convey it is the quality rather than quantity of parental involvement in the HLE that has the greatest positive impact on pupils' learning experiences.

A motivator for this research is the ongoing school COVID-19 catch-up programmes. I have observed catch-up interventions on my school placements, and my study has provided a deeper understanding of why these interventions are crucial. Pupils spent significantly less time engaged in learning activities during lockdowns, and new inequalities came into being as children had unequal access to educational resources such as study spaces and technology (Andrew et al., 2020). Catch-up for missed learning time is imperative and school-based interventions are a vital part of this. As a teacher, I will consider how to adapt instruction to cover missed learning. This research will also bring pupils' voices to those who organise and facilitate catch-up interventions and offer a perspective not necessarily considered in published guides (for example, see DfE, 2021).

Another meaningful implication of this study is a developed understanding of the importance of pupil perspectives on their own learning. Teaching is a research-informed practice, yet research has detrimentally excluded the voices of children from the narrative of their learning. I have learnt that pupils are the best informed to discuss their own experiences and they have a right to be involved in research which impacts their lives (Bucknall, 2012; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Gaps prevail in research on home learning resulting from a lack of pupil participation. Parents play an undeniably important role in their children's learning at home, but children's voices should also be heard to obtain a holistic view of the HLE.

Based upon this project, I cannot make generalised conclusions on the state of home learning experiences for pupils. I seek to be a reflective practitioner so my findings will not be definitive; rather, this project will inform my development and the steps I wish to take to optimise pupils' learning outcomes in and out of my future classroom.

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Appendix 1

Proposed Questionnaire

This is my proposed questionnaire to be used in the research.

Questionnaire all about learning at home

This questionnaire is part of a research project to find out about your experiences about learning at home. You are going to be asked some questions about your experience of learning at home when school was closed for COVID-19 lockdowns. There are no right or wrong answers to any question.

You can choose to not take part or can stop taking part at any point.

Question 1:

Did you spend the lockdowns coming to school or at home? Tick your answer.

both lockdowns at home

☐

a mix of home and school

☐

both lockdowns in school

☐

If you spent both lockdowns in school, skip to Question 7. If not, go to Question 2.

Question 2:

Circle one phrase which finishes the sentence best:

When I went to school at home during lockdown, I did my school work _____.

by myself

sometimes with an adult

mostly with an adult

always with an adult



Question 3:



Circle one number which completes the sentence best:

When I went to school at home during lockdown, I usually spent _____ hours a day in online school lessons.

Less than 1

1

2

3

4

5

More than 5

Question 4:

What learning activities set by your teacher did you do in lockdown?

Question 5:

Rate out of 5 much you agree with this sentence:

During lockdown, I did home learning activities that were not given to me by my teachers.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree



Question 6:

Rate out of 5 much you agree with this sentence:

I always enjoyed learning at home during lockdown.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree



Question 7:

Circle one phrase which finishes the sentence best:

When I learn at home now, I mostly learn _____.

by myself

sometimes with an adult

mostly with an adult

always with an adult



Question 8:

What learning activities do you do at home now? This can include work set by your teacher or other learning activities.

Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire.

If there is anything else you want to share, write it here:
