

An analysis on primary and secondary education status during the Pandemic in England, UK

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Abstract. The most serious period of COVID-19 seems to have passed, but the sequelae brought by COVID-19 are still threatening the society. The England government once shut down the whole country to try to slow down the spread of the pandemic, but the blockade policy was not conducive to the development of various fields, and the public showed that they could not bear to stay at home for a long time. The education system is one of the most seriously damaged systems where original teaching orders and patterns are changed significantly by the covid policy. This paper analyses the impact of policies on the education system and the state of students affected by policies. By analysing related theoretical texts, this paper supports the updating of the existing education system and the creation of new learning methods to support students who have suffered from the pandemic blockade to learn better, which takes an imperative role for students to follow up in the current situation.

Keywords: Covid-19, mental health, children development, education system, education policy.

1. Introduction

The Pandemic induced by Covid-19 leads a huge impact on education areas around the world [1]. For students' healthy and better control of the pandemic, each country adopted a policy of blockade at the beginning of the Pandemic. The policy interrupted the development of various fields and has impacted the education system seriously that caused the greatest damage in history [2]. Students could not go to schools and institutions to study, and the education process of billions of students is terminated and their future plans are disrupted [3]. Moreover, after the Pandemic was accepted, returning to campus learning brought challenges because part of the students and teachers had become accustomed to the new teaching methods during the blockade period [2]. Therefore, it is the most important thing for the government and the education sector to set up an appropriate education system and scoring method after the Pandemic. This is considered by scholars and educators as a good opportunity to improve the education system [1]. During the Pandemic, the Education Bureau generally adopted three teaching methods: 1) full online courses, 2) some online courses and some offline courses, and 3) all offline courses. During the implementation of different teaching policies, students and teachers behaved differently. However, few studies working on the effectiveness of these teaching policies have been conducted. The Education Bureau has yet seized this special opportunity to collect the status data of students and teachers in different periods. Neither has it analysed the reflections based on the collected data, communicated with teachers, nor proposed targeted training. The under-investigated field thus left a research gap for further improvement.

The purpose of this study is to create efficient learning methods for students and help develop a creative education system. Through comparing the states of primary and secondary education systems in England before and after the pandemic, this study focuses on exploring the impact of factors that may negatively influence students' development. The first section lists the policies published during the pandemic and summarises the changes in public opinion on Covid-19. The second section of this paper is set to analyse the psychological changes of students and teachers with different education policies.

2. The changes in policies of the education system

Britain's epidemic prevention policy was changed with three major turning points during the Pandemic. The first reported case of Covid-19 was found on January 30th, 2020 and the number of infected people starts to rise sharply. In the middle of March, the country implemented a blockade for stopping the spread of the virus [4]. As the government appealed to the public to reduce unnecessary egress, the students could not go to school and institutions and teachers had to work online at home. However, from the beginning of the implementation of the blockade policy, the British government and the education sector began to receive help from a number of families and schools. Because parents and children did not have previous experience working and studying under one roof, as parents typically spend their working day at the workplace whereas students spend their school life on campus, they feel anxious when sharing life in the same space. They have never worked and studied together. In the case of a lockdown caused by the pandemic, parents needed to do their own work while taking into account the children's learning status. This made parents and students anxious and fidgety. In addition, in the case of being unable to get along well for a long time and having no private time, family conflicts escalate. Therefore, students cannot study in an orderly way as they do at school, parents cannot do their own work with ease, and countless families turn to school teachers and the government for help. During the blockade, the government continued to issue a series of instructions and documents to provide guidance and help to students and families affected by the pandemic blockade, such as vocational and technical guidance, changes and guidelines of GCSE, AS and A-Level, calculation requirements for summer grades changed due to the impact of the pandemic, and reports on epidemic surveillance of preschool and primary school students [5-8].

The second turning point was on May 10th. After a two-month observation of the virus and analysis of the blockade circumstances in England at that time, the government decided to stop the overall closure and implement a semi-open policy [4]. The semi-open policy in school means students could go back to school to study but had several limitations, including a decreased number of students in one classroom, necessary cleaning during the epidemic, wearing masks, and so on. In addition, the school and institutions created a new educated method that students would have lectures online and seminars offline. In order to help part of students and families who are not familiar with online courses with electronic products, the government published documents in 2021 to provide distance learning support and listed distance education information resources for better education, as well as suggestions for parents on how to know students' distance courses [9].

On April 13th, 2022, the education system ushered in new changes under the impact of the Pandemic. The school has been fully opened and the Department of Education in England decided to comprehensively restore the education system for those who were in the most need of help, including vulnerable children and disabled people [10]. The guidance shows plans of training for educational staff, a special series of courses for supporting early years students, additional funding in schools, and continuous professional development support for teachers. In October 2022, the government planned to promote an 'Early Years Education Recovery Programme'. Up to 180 million pounds would be prepared to help mitigate the impact of the Pandemic on children, which will be implemented in early 2023. The relevant groups covered by this programme are extended to include families, children themselves, nannies, school and institution staff, leaders, and all relevant practitioners. This program will maximize the assurance that children's educational opportunities will not be reduced due to accidents (such as COVID-19).

3. The condition of students

Children, as a special part of society, are easily impacted by various factors, and the environment is one of the most influential [11]. Therefore, the living experience of children is important; however, when the surroundings are unfavourable for children's healthy growth or cannot build correct perspectives, the risks will affect both children themselves and the whole family [12]. Since the blockade by Covid-19, children's living experience was negatively impacted by a series of factors,

such as unstable economic sources, boring life, and a worse mentality. When children are in an important period of physical and psychological development, they have a strong desire to explore the outside world and do not have good self-control. Therefore, staying at home for a long period will hinder children's development.

3.1 Negative Psychological Impact on Children in England

The closure and control affected by the epidemic situation made it difficult for students to remain optimistic. In late September 2020, hundreds of healthy students were blocked in the city where they study and they were not allowed to visit their families. Some students were even threatened that they could not go home for Christmas. This has a great negative impact on students' mental health and mental state [13]. In a survey, 927 respondents, who are guardians of children aged 5 to 11, reported their emotions and children's emotions have changed seriously before the epidemic [14]. The most common state of children was boredom. 73.8% of guardians observed that their children liked to be dazed and often felt lonely. In addition, depression is one of the common emotions, with 61.4% of guardians agreeing. There were also more negative emotions, such as 'irritability, restlessness, anger, anxiety, sorrow and being like to address with the rest of the family' presented by children [14]. In order to have online classes, children increased their screen use time significantly. Besides, a part of the parents were not good at communicating with children or playing with them, or they were under pressure at work, so they were unable to accompany their children for a long time. In this situation, electronic products have become the best way for children to relax. The data shows that the number of children who use the screen for more than 30 minutes per day was decreasing, while the number of children who use the screen for more than 3 hours was increasing from 1.4% to 33.8% [14]. In addition, since outdoor activities were restricted by the epidemic, the time for children to participate in sports activities decreased significantly. This is not good for children's physical development and character building. In this situation, children could not have a higher degree of acceptance of new knowledge as they did before in school. In addition, some courses such as dance, sports, painting, and other courses that are particularly important to the venue and communication with partners would be only well practiced at school. Therefore, children's studies would be in trouble because of their poor mental state, lack of a strong learning atmosphere, lack of professional guidance, and so on.

3.2 Socioeconomic Status Impact

On the other hand, long-term closed schools and online teaching would have a worse impact on students from poor families and even aggravate social inequality [15]. For example, students from poor families cannot obtain good online teaching equipment as well as those used in superior families, and they even lack a room suitable for taking online classes [16]. In addition, the backward economy and unstable sources of income make it impossible for low-income families to provide nutritious food for their children. At school, the school will ensure that every student enjoys a healthy diet, and research shows that a healthy diet is conducive to maintaining and improving performance [16]. Therefore, the blockade policy aggravates the inequality of educational achievements for students from poorer families.

3.3 How and Why the Factors Caused Negative Impacts

To sum up, staying at home for a long period leads students and parents arise negative emotions. The main factors affecting students include a lack of peer communication, a standard education system, and mental pressure from parents. The school, as one of the most important places for children's development, provides students with a good communication environment and teaches them how to communicate correctly and amicably. Also, a standard education system in the school can help students to find their advantages and practice them. However, the lockdown policy prevents students to grow and learn in. Moreover, the pressure of parents will infect children. In the survey mentioned above, most of the caregivers said that it was difficult for family members to live together harmoniously during the epidemic blockade, and one-third of them thought it was very difficult [14].

When parents believe getting along with children is not an easy and pleasant thing, children will feel this emotion and be negatively affected, resulting in negative emotions.

4. Conclusion

Children and young people are the main force of development and the future of society. The years affected by the epidemic are the most important years in children's growth. Also, the economy destroyed by the epidemic began to retreat, and young people nowadays were forced to bear the declining economic policies. In addition to considering the general environment, attention should also be paid to children's mental health to protect their healthy growth. In order to mitigate the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society, the blockade policy adopted by England has destroyed the education system that has lasted for decades. Although the government and the Education Bureau issued improved education policies during the blockade urgently, the situation did not become better. The growth of children's physical, psychological and personal consciousness has caused damage, and even family relationship has been broken. On the other hand, the change in education policy further aggravates social inequality. Students from poor families are unable to respond to the new education policy (online courses) in a timely manner due to the lack of stable and quiet qualified school places and equipment. Moreover, when families cannot provide them with enough nutrition and enough food, their learning efficiency decreases significantly. Although the blockade policy has been abolished, the limitations and shortcomings of the education system exposed by the blockade have not been improved and solved. One limitation of this article is that it mostly focuses on analyzing how the negative effects have been caused but lacks specific methods of how these negative effects can be reduced. Therefore, it is urgent to improve and create an education system that can adapt to the current environment, which can be done by other researchers based on the analysis of this article.

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