

How parents think their child's mental health and wellbeing are affected by compulsory core subjects at school: A qualitative study



Robyn Mutch

This is Robyn, she began her academic year in 2019, where she studied Fastrack: Preparation for Higher Education - Edge Hill University. Then in 2020, she began her undergraduate degree in Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing. Robyn is passionate about children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on educational settings. As she experienced difficulties in school herself with learning in a way, she felt does not suit all children and young people. And for this reason, she chose to research the United Kingdom's curriculum, she conducted a qualitative study because she enjoys verbally communicating with others. The study explored parents or caregivers' perspectives in relation to the United Kingdom's compulsory core subjects and the potential impact they may have on their child's mental health and wellbeing. Robyn believes that if children and young people were allowed to focus on core subject which they enjoyed, this could possibly promote healthier mental health and wellbeing for children and young people. Robyn found that further research is required in this field, due to the absence of children and young people's wellbeing measures, which could be published alongside the school and college performance tables in England. The school or college performance tables illustrates how well they are performing academically, yet the children's wellbeing measures are unidentified.

Abstract

Introduction: The demands to succeed in the General Certificate Secondary Education (GCSE) were mentioned in some of the literature, which associated the UK National Curriculum (NC) with children and young people's (CYPs) mental health and wellbeing in secondary school. However, much of the present studies on CYPs mental health and wellbeing in secondary school focuses on the impact of COVID-19. Therefore, what is not yet clear is the impact of the compulsory core subjects on CYPs mental health and wellbeing. But factors found to influence CYPs mental health and wellbeing have been explored in numerous studies. This dissertation seeks to explore parent or guardian's perspectives of the impact the core subjects have on their child's mental health and wellbeing in secondary education in England.

Aim: This study aimed to address the following research question: How Parents Think Their Child's Mental Health and Wellbeing are Affected by Compulsory Core Subjects at School: Qualitative study.

Methods: Participants were recruited from social media platforms; the seven participants involved in this study were all female, who had children aged 11-16 years and studied the UK's NC were involved in this study. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and all the participants were asked ten questions, to investigate the impact that the UK's compulsory core subjects had on their child's mental health and wellbeing. The interviewing involved audio and video record and the research transcribed the data, prior to the thematic analysis.

Result: Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data for this study and three broad themes including, the compulsory core subjects, the positive and negative effects, and the way the core subjects are delivered. These themes had sub-themes, which were English, Maths, and Science,

likes and dislikes, future benefits, impact on their mental health and wellbeing, engage with subjects at how do they behave, setting, and a day of subjects they enjoy, all of which emerged from the analysis.

Conclusion: This study set out to determine the effects of the UK's compulsory core subjects on CYPs mental health and wellbeing in England. Therefore, by conducting semi-structured interviews with parents or guardians of children aged 11-16 years, provided their perspectives on the potential affects. According to the findings of this study, subjects that a child dislikes mostly has negative influence their mental health and wellbeing, and behaviour. However, further work needs to be done to established whether the core subjects, which are English, Maths, and Science have an effect on CYPs mental health and wellbeing. Due to the three core subjects are compulsory during their time in education. Although this study has successfully demonstrated that CYPs mental health and wellbeing, behaviour, and academic performance are affected in school and at home, it has certain limitations in terms of exploring sensitive topics that may produce emotions.

Introduction

In 1980's, the establishment of the UK's NC governs the quality of education across England (Oates, 2011). The English education provides approximately eleven years of compulsory education for CYP, and they are required throughout to study a range of subjects (HMC Project, 2023). The NC is designed to provides a set of subjects and standards to educate CYP across primary and secondary schools in England (GOV.UK, 2023). The key aspects of the NCs framework are constructed in stages that can be listed as follows: key stage (KS) 1, 2, 3, and 4, all of which deliver the compulsory core subjects of English, Maths, and Science (Department for Education, 2014). However, the UK's NC only applies to maintained schools Roberts (2021). In most secondary educational settings, CYP study KS 3 and 4, which include further compulsory NC subjects including History, Geography, Modern Foreign Languages, Design and Technology, Art and Design, Music, Physical Education, Citizenship, and Computing (GOV.UK, 2023). The Education Reform Act 1988 chapter 40 (3), states secondary education focuses on KS 3 and 4, equally providing compulsory core subjects of English, Maths, and Science (Legislation.gov.uk, 2022).

Furthermore, during KS4 most children work towards National qualifications-usually GCSE, yet the compulsory core subjects remain mandatory until CYP legally leave compulsory education (Brown and Woods, 2020). In March 2017, government laid an amendment to the Children and Social Work Act 2017 sections 34 and 35, all state-funded secondary schools in England must deliver Relationships, Health, and Sex Education (RHSE) (also known as RSE) all of which are compulsory in state-funded secondary educational settings (Children and Social Work Act 2017; Office for National Statistics, 2018). The RHSE subjects aim to address aspects of relationships and sex education in an integrated approach (Department for

Education, 2021). Likewise, Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) subjects became statutory in 2020, which offers a holistic view of the child including his or hers personal, social, and emotional development to help them prepare for adult life (PSHE Association, 2023). Therefore, subjects within the PSHE covers the RHSE, which are due to be embedded across England's secondary educational settings by September 2021 (Anna Freud, 2023). Whereas independent schools have a long-standing delivery of PSHE subjects within their curriculum (PSHE Association, 2017). The RHSE subjects can be seen as fundamental building blocks for developing relationships, human growth, and reproduction; educating CYP helps them to make informed decisions about their wellbeing, health, relationships, also build self-efficacy and develop resilience (Department for Education, 2019).

Additionally, across the UK all children are entitled to free full-time education from the age of 4-5 years, which can be found in the English government's guidelines (GOV.UK, 2023). The parent or guardian can determine the child's education and where the child attends school (Goldring and Phillips, 2008). The Education Act 1996, section 7 clarifies that parents have the responsibility to apply for their child's place at school, which begins their journey of education, up until they reach the compulsory school leaving age (Legislation.gov.uk, 2022). However, there are a range of settings CYP can learn education in the UK, which include state-funded, independent, alternative provision, and special needs schools, and pupil referral units, as well as home schooling (IPSEA, 2023). Consequently, not all CYP study the NC, due to unexpected circumstances such as religious beliefs, behavioural issues, disabilities, bullying, and uncontrollable behaviours may determine the child's place of education (Department for Education, 2022). In 2017/18 across the UK approximately 7,905 children in England were permanently excluded from school because uncontrollable behaviours (Anna Freud, 2022). Thus, all local authorities have the responsibility to provide CYP with an alternative provision

(Department for Education, 2013). Danechi (2018) found in 2018/19, pupils achieved 5% English and Maths GCSE grades, while pupils across mainstream schools generally gained 64%. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states all children have the right for free primary and secondary education in England, education is a key social and cultural right (UNICEF, 2019). Education plays an important role for creating wellbeing, future opportunities, and healthier lives (Daly et al., 2006).

Defining mental health and wellbeing

The term 'mental health' is a general term used to refer to concepts of mental wellbeing, mental health problems and mental disorders (Eriksson et al., 2018). The terms 'mental wellbeing', 'mental health difficulties' and 'mental health problems' are used throughout this paper to refer to the diverse range of psychological problems that CYP may experience. Pitchforth et al. (2018) highlights that since 1995-2014 England had experienced an 4.2% increase in long-standing mental health problems among CYP aged 4-24 years. In order to promote CYP's mental health and wellbeing, carers must be supported in meeting their child's needs; additionally, the establishment of education provides fundamental social and emotional learning skills (World Health Organization, 2023). Moreover, adolescence is a time of rapid physical and social change, and some adolescents may find it difficult to build solid social and emotional routines that are necessary to sustain mental health (World Health Organization, 2023). According to The Children's World survey 2016-19, CYP across the UK (England) presented the lowest percentage (6.3) of low wellbeing out of 35 countries who participated (Children's World Report, 2020). However, the research to date tends to focus on child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing in relation to the impact of the global pandemic COVID-19 (Cowie and Myers, 2020; DClinPsy et al., 2020; Newlove-Delgado et al., 2021; Panchal et al., 2021). The UK's government have acknowledged the impact of lockdown restrictions on the mental health

of CYP (Department of Health & Social Care, 2022). Townsend (2019) highlights that prior to lockdown there was an increase among adolescence mental health problems and self-harm. Therefore, over the past couple of decades CYPs mental health and wellbeing has increased, which shows deterioration of the UK's CYPs mental health before the pandemic (Kauhanen et al., 2022).

Supporting mental health in schools

As was mentioned in the previous chapter the impact of COVID-19 on CYPs mental health and wellbeing, CYP missed out on a majority of learning the UK's NC through the absence of face-to-face teaching (Scott et al., 2021). Findings show during the COVID-19 pandemic, 37 participants (aged 13-24 years) took part in semi-structured interviews, which explored their experiences and many adolescents identified concerns for social isolation, education distribution, difficulties to remote learning and the lack of mental health support (McKinlay et al., 2022). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) highlights that the use of qualitative methods can translate an individual's perspectives to help understand experiences. The impact of lockdown restrictions including school closures and education disruptions, which influenced routine, structure, and socialisation (Joseph et al., 2020). As result, this reduced access to coping mechanisms or infrastructures for CYP in need of mental health support (e.g., mental health services and peer support) (Almedia et al., 2022). Therefore, the National Health Service (NHS) aim by 2023/24, across schools and colleges an additional 345,000 CYP aged 0-25 can access school or college-based Mental Health Support Teams, to provide early intervention on mental health and emotional wellbeing issues (NHS, 2019).

Literature review

The aims of education in the United Kingdom

Education aims must acknowledge that schools are established to serve both individuals and the larger society (Lundvall et al., 2008). Burke and Grosvenor (2003); Noyes et al. (2013) believes that the UK's compulsory NC teaches old-fashioned information and lacks twenty-first century skills that may help prepare CYP for the pressures of the "complex world". However, school plays a crucial role in CYPs academic, emotional, and social development, due to them consuming most of their waking hours in education (Maelan et al., 2018). Volstanis et al. (2013); Jessiman et al. (2022); Miseliunaite et al. (2022) insists that a more holistic approach to learning (also known as holistic education) throughout the NC, would consider CYP as a whole because much traditional education tends to be static and fragmented. Jeffrey and Craft (2004) proposes adopting more creative approaches to learning the NCs compulsory core subjects may promote greater aspects of CYPs educational and mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Findings show approximately 13,000 pupils in secondary schools, that participated in music education had greater achievements in the three compulsory core subjects than those who never participated (Hallam, 2010). This is exemplified in the work undertaking by Noddings (2022) who describes how teachers can use creative methods in the fundamental areas of the NC. One question that must be addressed is whether the UK's NC affects CYP in the term of mental health and wellbeing (Colwill and Gallagher, 2007).

This topic can be best treated under three headings: English, Mathematics, and Science, all of which are the compulsory NC subjects (Department for Education, 2013). Wilkinson and Penney (2013) believe that English and Mathematics are taught more frequently than Science, which reduces how often science is taught. According to Boyle and Bragg (2006), because there is no statutory guidance, each school has the authority to allocate the most efficient

amount of time that CYP spend on each subject. However, there is more research into science. Toplis (2012) studied student's attitudes towards science in the classroom, he discovered that practical experiments functioned as the primary source of motivation to study Science in school. Osborne et al. (2010); Archer et al. (2014) argues that gender identity influence adolescents' interest in school Science and career goals. In their study of female's disinterest in science in secondary education, Miller et al. (2007) discovered a strong correlation between Science, Mathematics, and engineering. As a result, girls are underrepresented in engineering careers, which may contribute to female's disinterest in science during their secondary education. Schurtz et al. (2014) argues that adolescents begin to demonstrate interests in specific subjects, whereas young children explore interest in almost everything. As follows, adolescence signifies the beginning of complex thought, and during this phase of development, individuals typically become more independent and form their own identities and beliefs (Turkstra, 2000). Although some research has been carried out on the compulsory NC subjects, limited studies have been found which highlights the relation between the potential impact they may have on CYPs mental health and wellbeing.

Additional school-based factors that influence child & adolescent mental health & wellbeing

Child or young person's factors

Early childhood experiences and relationships in the first five years of life are critical for development, additional influences on development include: environmental, genetics, nutrition, health, and social factors (Papadopoulou et al., 2014). The environments that CYP grow up in can influence educational outcomes, health, and mental health outcomes (Braveman and Gottlieb, 2014). Burger (2010); Boe (2014) believes that families with lower socio-

economic backgrounds may indicate a key cause of early childhood differences including cognitive and language development, which influences the child reaching their developmental milestones. These results are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that early child development provides the building blocks for later adulthood outcomes and opportunities (Winston and Chicot, 2016). However, exposure to adverse circumstances in childhood effects the normal development of the child's brain architecture and result in long run changes to stress response regulation (Pectel and Pizzagalli, 2011) For many children, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as childhood trauma, forms of abuse, caregiver mental illness, child poverty and other highly stressful and potential traumatic events or situations, that influence a multitude of present and future outcomes (Lewer et al., 2020). A large and growing body of literature has investigated the potential consequences of ACE exposure include impaired social and cognitive development and compromised immune systems, increasing the risk of adverse adult health outcomes and early morbidity (Bellis et al., 2018; Brown, 2020). However, a single experience or event, like starting a new school, can affect the child's involvement, learning, and behaviour (Barber and Olsen (2004); Docket et al., 2012). This research broadens our understanding of every child's lived experience is unique and influenced by their interactions with their environments and childhood traumatic experiences impacts developmental stages, which increases the risk of a range of difficulties and later mental health (Etzel et al., 2020; UK Trauma Council, 2023).

Family factors

Parent-child interactions and relationships are important driving factors for CYPs educational, mental health and wellbeing outcomes (Cogan et al., 2005; Bond et al., 2007). Parent-child attachment is a concept that greatly influences a child's interactions with others throughout their lifetime (Raikes and Thompson, 2008). According to attachment theory Bowlby (1988)

illustrates the importance of a child's emotional bond with their primary caregiver (Etzion-Carasso and Oppenheim (2000). A strong attachment bond ensures that the child feels safe, secure, and emotionally connected to their primary carer (Braungart-Rieker et al., 2001). However, disruption to or loss of this bond can affect the child emotionally and psychologically into adulthood and have an impact on future relationships (Malekpour, 2007). Hardy (2007) highlights that insecure attachment is a common disorder characterised by the bond is not met by their primary caregiver. As some parents may find it difficult to develop or maintain safe relationships with their children. (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2021).

Additionally, an Ofsted report surveyed parents of students in English secondary schools, which revealed that many of them frequently lacked the skills and knowledge necessary to help their child's learning outside of the classroom (Ofsted, 2011). Sometimes parents who are experiencing mental health issues, may find it difficult to deal with the everyday challenges of parenting alongside their mental health problems (Afzelius and Ostman, 2018). Studies found CYP's experience of parental mental illness, and the three common issues that were expressed are: reduced peer connections, and comprehension of the mental illness, and the worries that child protection may remove them from their parent (Cogan et al., 2008); Gladstone et al., 2011). The evidence presented in this section suggests that the importance of children developing secure attachments with their primary caregiver, however, parental mental illness may influence parent-child interactions and relationships (Lytton, 2000; Foster et al., 2017).

School factors

School is an institute that are local and community-based and play a central role in families with children and communities; school is a setting where children spend most of their day detached from their caregivers (Nash and Browne, 2019).

Schools are key locations for learning values and norms that may conflict with those of both family and community (Taliaferro et al., 2009). One major drawback from this approach is that not all schools provide safe and supportive environments as recent research provides clear evidence of bullying in relation to sex orientation and gender identity (Horton, 2022). As a generally accepted definition of bullying is lacking, therefore, a clear understanding of repeated and intended behaviours to hurt another person is an aspect of bullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2010; Lui and Graves, 2011). Public Health England (2018) identify a survey conducted across England among YP aged 15 years, who represent as heterosexual have greater wellbeing scores of 48.0 than the average of 47.6, whereas all other sexual identities presented much lower wellbeing scores of 43.1. The Department for Education (2022) report that pupils who have higher wellbeing are more likely to have greater attendance than with pupils with lower wellbeing. As a result, many aspects of the school environment can have an impact on CYPs mental health and wellbeing (Huan et al., 2008; Vanderbilt and Augustyn, 2010).

Moreover, as regards to wellbeing Roome and Soan (2019) research the lack of YPs wellbeing support in schools in relation to the pressures of achieving C or above GCSE grades, which had a major impact on their mental health and wellbeing and exam performance. Furthermore, there is some evidence, according to Goodwin et al. (2021), that high-achieving secondary schools frequently lack support for student's mental health and wellbeing, due to the pressure to achieve higher grades and academic success. What is surprising is that is the wellbeing of

CYP are unidentified within the school performance tables, as they are simply based on ‘raw results’ (Gorard, 2006). In England the school performance table measures performance and achievements of maintained schools, and the framework provides a guide on how well the school is performing in relation to the child’s attainment (Gathercole and Pickering, 2000; Leckie and Goldstein, 2017). Additionally, the school performance measure pays no attention to non-school factors such as socioeconomic influences, and many other external factors that may affect the child’s performance (West and Pennell, 2000; Perry, 2016). However, the establishment of the PSHE across secondary schools addresses mental health disorders, which supports YP in school and out of school (Department for Education, 2015). Putwain, (2011) discovered self-belief to be a primary consequence for YP to achieve in a subject that they perceived as challenging or threatening across secondary education. In general, therefore, it seems that the aim of the school performance tables in the English state education systems provides measures on pupil’s achievements, yet the wellbeing of CYP are unidentified across these tables (Leckie and Goldstein, 2009).

Peer factors

A large and growing body of literature has investigated peer support and school engagement (Millings et al., 2012). Peer support has diverse meanings in the literature. In the UK, the Mental Health Foundation (2022) defined peer support in mental health as “healthy relationships are built through kindness, care, trust, honesty and respect”. Study findings suggests that peer support might be the most important protective factor against low wellbeing (Shin et al., 2007). This view is supported by Butler et al. (2022) who writes that children with low peer support were over six times more likely to experience low mental wellbeing. A well-known example of peer support is peer relationships and during adolescence the role of peers may potentially influence positive self-efficacy beliefs (Hartas, 2016; McCauley et al., 2019).

The term self-efficacy has been applied to situations where pupils achieve tasks and reach goals, which refers to school tasks, education attainment, all together improves school performance and career prospects (Supervia and Robres, 2021). In contrast, adolescents who have peer relationships may experience negative peer pressure, which are often related to bullying and risk-taking behaviours such as drinking alcohol, and drug use (Leather, 2009). Research shows that the effects of negative peer pressure is a predictor for increased stress levels, symptoms of anxiety, and sleep issues (Maume, 2013). Research further states that there is a direct correlation between negative peer pressure and depressive symptoms among adolescence (Homel et al., 2020). Peer factors are thought to be one of the main protective factors for YPs psychological wellbeing, which has been explored in several studies (Zych et al., 2019; Goldbaum et al., 2013; Kia et al., 2021). YP who have more fulfilling social and personal lives are happier overall and perform better academically, they also have stronger social ties, are more resilient, and have better physical and mental health (Park, 2004).

Conclusions, research questions and aims

This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understandings of the UK's NC, with a particular focus on CYP aged 11-16 years. Also, it has explored additional factors that may potentially influence CYPs mental health and wellbeing, and all of which have been explored in the literature review. By exploring additional factors provides a holistic view of the child, alongside the impact of the compulsory core subjects may have on CYPs mental health and wellbeing. Vostanis et al. (2013); Jessiman et al. (2022); Miseliunaite et al. (2022) states that promoting a holistic approach as a new trend in educational settings creates a feeling of the full person.

However, a generally accepted definition of holistic education is lacking. Carr (2010) believes that holistic views of reality refer to as life experiences, which are essential for establishing the

child's wellbeing. Studies conducted by Putwain (2011) and Roome and Soan (2019) explain that UK's secondary schools lack understanding of the NC may have on CYPs mental health and wellbeing. Therefore, the current research will explore the perspectives of parent's or guardian's, who are over the age of 18 years, have a child aged 11-16 years and that study the UK's NC. It was decided that the best method to adopt for this investigation was to preform semi-structured interviews to answer the following research question: How Parents Think Their Child's Mental Health and Wellbeing are Affected by Compulsory Core Subjects at School: Qualitative study.

Methodology

Approach

The approach of this study delivered qualitative methods. These techniques offer an effective way of face-to-face verbal or non-verbal approaches such as individual or group semi-structured interviews (Knox and Burkard, 2009). Although qualitative studies are criticised for its small sample size because of the in-depth nature of the interviewing (Boddy, 2016). However, qualitative research is a well-established approach in understanding how people experience the real world and provides a deeper insight into human's perspectives (Devers and Frankel, 2000; Khan, 2014). As qualitative methods have many attractive features including establishing trustworthiness relationships, prolonged engagement and presenting authenticity helps promote greater findings (Cope, 2014). For this reason, the researcher decided semi-structured interviews was the best method. This enhanced the researcher's study as it allowed an informal approach, which translated a free-flowing conversation (Dempsey, 2016). As semi-structured interviews are well-suited for conducting qualitative research, due to the blend of structured and unstructured questions, which creates a natural form of conversation in relation to the research question (Rees, 2019). However, there are common criticisms that qualitative research is subjective, subject to researcher bias and lacks generalizability (Galdas, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research carries unique challenges in all stages of the study process (Mishna et al., 2004). Padilla-Diaz (2015) argues that qualitative research methods are fundamental for studying human experience. These findings show that when conducting qualitative research on potential sensitive subjects, which may have an impact on participants the researcher needs to be aware of their strategy and use the skills they have acquired (Orr, 2021).

Sampling and recruitment

The researcher designed a poster that was advertised by social networks across social media platforms via Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The universal use of social media provides greater opportunities for humans to communicate across wider communities (Cheng et al., 2017). The advertised poster contained a link to the participant information sheet, which provided straightforward online access for the participant to find out about the study. However, the poster illustrated an inclusion criterion and the eligibility required any parents or guardians who are over the age of 18 years, who have children aged 11-16 years in secondary educational settings including state-funded, independent, alternative provision, and special needs schools, as well as home schooled may take part in this study. If interested and met the criteria parents contacted the researcher. Following the recruitment process, the researcher arranged via email, the date and time that was convenient for the participant. One finding that must be expressed is that all the participants were female, and they requested for their interview to take place in the evening and from 8pm onwards. The qualitative study required a virtual interview via Microsoft Teams and all participants were asked an equal amount of semi-structured interview questions. The power of social media allowed the researcher to recruit participants and undertake a qualitative study (Robinson, 2014). Social media sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are primarily designed to facilitate communication among individuals or groups, which present a popular method for university students to recruit potential participants and conduct a qualitative study (Kelleher and Sweetser, 2012).

Data collection

The benefits of virtual platforms for delivering interviews commonly provides a quicker way to recruit and commence an interview (Newman et al., 2021). The researcher acknowledged that the parent's children were not physically involved in the interviewing, yet it was important

that the participant was alone at the time of interviewing process, due to respecting the confidentiality of the child. Hence, the reason the 7 interviews took place in the evenings and in their home settings. The benefits of online technologies allow individuals from a variety of backgrounds who may not be able to access in-person interviews to participate in a familiar setting through video interviewing (Upadhyay and Lipkovich, 2020). At the beginning of the interview the researcher gained verbal consent from the participant to audio record the interview. Sadzaglishvili et al. (2021) identifies that seeking consent is fundamental in research involving people. With participants' permission, all the interviews were audio and video recorded and were transcribed before undertaking thematic analysis. The researcher asked all participants ten interview questions, for example "How do you feel that your child must learn the compulsory core subjects, which are English, Maths, and Science" and "How do you feel they impact your child's mental health and wellbeing". This is a widely used technique that is frequently used in conjunction with interviews because the researcher can record the conversation on audio and listen to and read them repeatedly (Coughlan et al., 2022). Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

Data analysis

The data analysis used for this study was thematic analysis. The use of thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytical method to analysis data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach involves listening, reading, identifying, and reporting trends and patterns within the qualitative data (Tambling et al., 2021). By using thematic analysis assists the researcher to examine and identify characteristics of repeated of words used (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). As a result, the benefits of audio and video record via Microsoft Teams provides future viewing, as well as transcribing the conversation (Keen at al., 2022). This approach enhances knowledge and understanding of the study phenomenon (Grossoehme, 2014). The goal of thematic

analysis reflects grounded theory, according to Kiger and Varpio (2020), therefore this instrument is typically not employed to take part in data interpretation and transformation for the intention of creating theory. Next, the highlighted texts would be coded using the systematic process of coding (Assarroudi et al., 2018). The method of analysis developed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework, which describes and explains the process of analysis, this reflects that the data can be summarised and organised, rather than analysed (Scharp and Sanders, 2019). The researcher was able to identify common themes of the semi-structured interviews using Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the study, the researcher ensured that ethical considerations were met, and the process will be demonstrated. Firstly, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the ethics committee (UGRAD232) at the Undergraduate Faculty of Health, Social Care & Medicine Research Ethics Sub-Committee dated 1 March 2023. For research requiring ethical approval is initial step, which must be approved by a Research Ethics Committee (REC) (McAreevey and Muir, 2011). The purpose of an ethics committee is to ensure that research is conducted accordance moral standards and humane practices, with minimal risk to participants (Kimmelman, 2004). However, once ethics approval has been obtained, the study cannot be changed without first obtaining REC approval (Morgans and Allen, 2005). Some important ethical considerations that should be considered while carrying out qualitative research are anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent (Brown et al., 2020). Secondly, informed consent has been recognised as an integral part of ethics in research carried out in different fields, for qualitative research, to protect personal information, for instance secure storage data methods and removal of identity (Beardsley et al., 2019). The researcher understood the importance of the storage of how and where their data will be stored and removal of the

participants name, therefore, the researcher provided a link to the advertised poster for the participants to access this information about this study. Additionally, the researcher addressed that this study was on a voluntary basis, and they had the right to withdraw at any time. Next, as the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with an adult participant in relation to their child, therefore, only consent was needed from participant. In contrast, research carried out with CYP, consent must be obtained from both child and parent or guardian (Coyne, 2010). Although interviews were conducted virtually, the researcher ensured to be alone at the time of the interviewing. Overall, ethical considerations are a set of principles that guide research designs and practices in which promotes behaviour to coordinate actions or activities throughout the study (Gajjar, 2013).

However, although there were no known or intended risks the participants, therefore, the researcher was mindful that they may have experienced different emotions. The researcher was aware that by exploring parental views on their child's mental health may have possibly led to an unexpected disclosure of risk or safeguarding issues. Therefore, the researcher attached a link on the participant information sheet for a support website for participants to seek information to reduce any potential risk or harm. Listening is an effective communication tool, and it is just as important as talking, and empathetic listening skills allows a person to see things from another person's point of view (Bodie, 2011). The researcher recognised the value of empathetic listening skills for investigating topics that might be sensitive to participants. As parent's views and beliefs serve as an indicator of their parental responsibilities such as the tendency to be protective of and supportive of their child (Muench et al., 2017). To establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, listening is considered a core competency for successful interaction (Stewart and Arnold, 2018).

As the researcher delivered empathetic communication skills to form and enhance relationships with participants led a stronger understanding of what was being communicated. According to Gilmour et al. (2019) in future professional roles, supporting CYPs' mental health and wellbeing, listening to others, and expressing compassion is an important way to develop and maintain effective collaborative relationships. Research conducted by Hansen et al. (2021) explores parent's perspectives of their experiences with mental health professionals, and parent's perceived that professionals lacked empathetic listening, parent's observations were not taken seriously, and numerous parent's sensed professionals suspected them of the cause of their child's issues.

Results

The results of this study were that parents who had children in secondary educational settings including state-funded, independent, alternative provision, and special needs schools, as well as home schooled met the criteria for this study. The most interesting finding was that the 7 participants were all female (mean age of 35 years). Another important finding was that 2 of the participants children attended an independent secondary school. As the exclusion criteria involved people who were not a parent and CYP. The results obtained from the thematic analysis included: the compulsory core subjects, mental health and wellbeing and behaviour, and educational setting. Three broad themes emerged from this analysis and 7 sub themes both have been identified in these responses, which are presented in figure 1. And the participant information will be presented in figure 2.

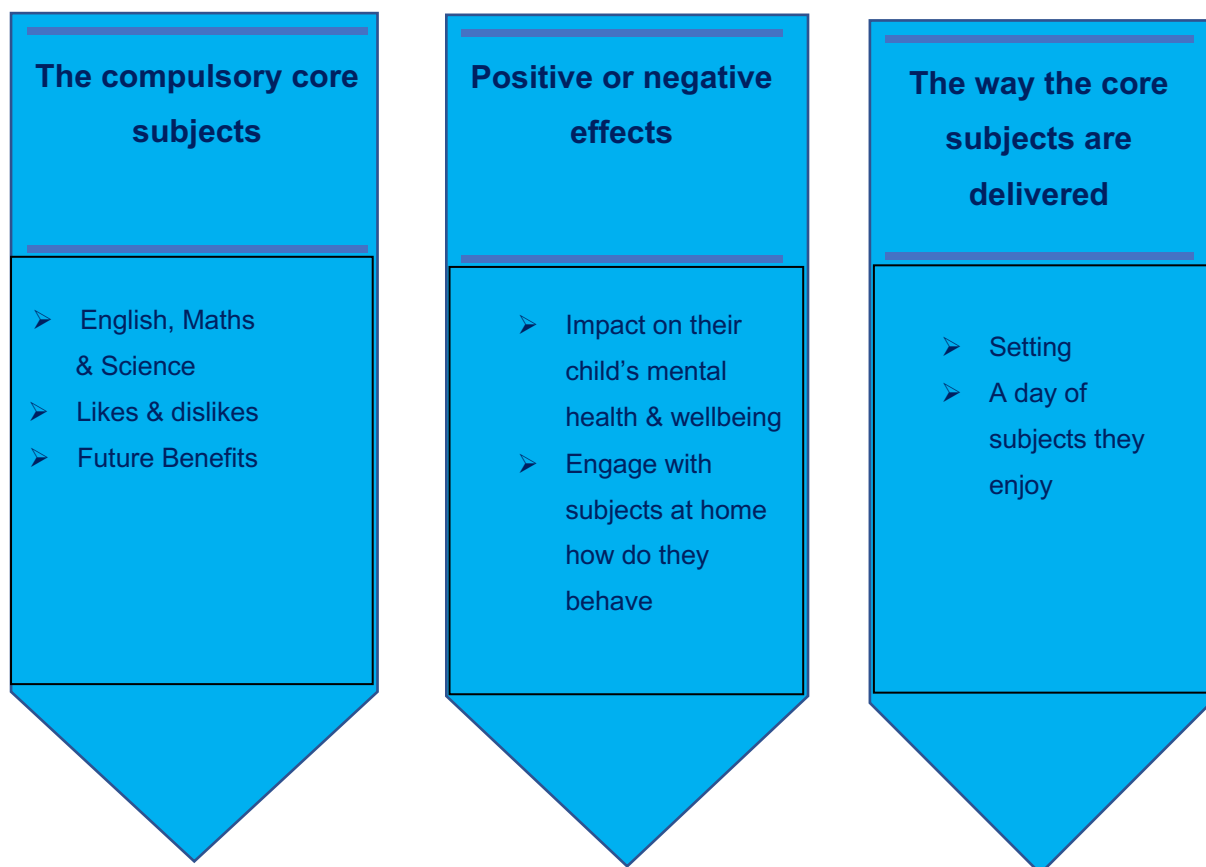


Figure 1 Results themes.

Anonymised Name	Code
Participant 1	P1
Participant 2	P2
Participant 3	P3
Participant 4	P4
Participant 5	P5
Participant 6	P6
Participant 7	P7

Figure 2 Participant information.

The compulsory core subjects

English, Maths & Science

The compulsory core subjects are a set of subjects and standards that are divided into four key stages, which are delivered across primary and secondary education in England. All participants were asked how they feel about their child studying the compulsory core subjects which are: English, Maths, and Science, parents expressed their thoughts about their child's educational setting. For example,

“I feel like there's a lot of pressure, but they put a lot of pressure on the children”. (P6)

“I find the school are more interested in how good they are doing for Ofsted scores”. (P6)

“I think It should be changed the way they teach”. (P3)

“She struggles with Maths, but that’s because of how the teacher teaches the lesson”. (P2).

In summary, these results show that some participants expressed the belief that changing the way schools deliver and teaches these subjects would reduce pressure off their children. For example, one interviewee said: *“I wish the Maths lessons consisted of teaching the kids numbers based on finances and budgets and stuff because this would benefit their future”. (P3)*

Likes & dislikes

When the participants were asked to express their thoughts around the subjects their child’s likes and dislikes, the majority commented that English represented the most likeable subject. For example, *“And the subjects she likes are English”. (P6).*

“Well, she is really good at English”. (P2).

“He loves English”. (P4).

“He is really good at English”. (P7).

However, only one individual stated that *“English and Maths I would say she dislikes out of the three core subject”. (P3)*

A common view that view that was expressed amongst interviewees was that their child disliked Science out of the three core subjects. For example, *“He doesn’t enjoy Science”. (P5)*

And another commented *“Like mine doesn’t like Science”. (P1).*

Another interviewee, when asked so isn't Science a priority for your child: Said: *"No, he does it but if he didn't want to do it, I would not be bothered"*. (P4)

Overall, these results identify that Science presents as the least favourite subject among the core subjects. If we now turn to the future benefits.

Future benefits

Participants were asked to describe how their child may benefit in the future from focusing on subjects they enjoy. As some participants expressed that their children may benefit more from subjects that taught them life skills to help them prepare for the real world. For example, *"I think she would get more out of school"*. (P3)

"Well, she would be even better at them subjects and she would be happier in herself more than she is now". (P2)

"I think he would benefit at the moment from focusing on the subjects he likes". (P7)

Other responses to this question included studying English was important. Many of the participants expressed that English was an important subject for their child to learn, however, a couple suggested teaching children more current knowledge and understanding would be a greater benefit.

"I definitely think all children need English". (P6)

"If she didn't have to do maths say and could do more English". (P2)

"he doesn't mind English because he knows English is our first language and he has to do it".

(P1)

“As English I do think he needs it”. (P5)

Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between focusing on subjects they enjoy and the child’s wellbeing and educational outcomes, as well as, to study more English across their education. For example, *“Yes 100%”. (P6)*. The overall response to English out of the core subjects were more positive.

Positive or negative effects

Impact on their child’s mental health & wellbeing

The interviewer asked: *“How do you feel they impact your child’s mental health and wellbeing”*. The issues that most parents felt like child was experiencing in relation to the core subjects were that they recognised a positive impact on the subjects they like and vice versa. Talking about this issue one interviewee said: *“The subjects he dislikes does have an impact on his existing mental health issues”*. (P7)

“Well, the active stuff will impact her in a positive way, but the subjects like English and Maths I think affect her wellbeing”. (P3).

“I do feel Maths has an impact on her because she stresses out about the teacher”. (P2)

“The subjects she likes massively impact her mental health in a positive way”. (P6)

Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between the subjects the child dislikes and the impact they have on mental health and wellbeing.

Engage with subjects at home how do they behave

The interviewee asked all participants *“When your child has to engage with these subjects at home how do they behave”*. There was a sense of difficulties amongst interviewees as shown below.

“When he has Science homework his attitude is poor towards me”. (P1)

“I have to ask her 20 time to do her work, then she argues with me and makes excuses not to do it”. (P2)

“It’s difficult for her as she is not interested in English and maths, but I try and help her”.
(P3)

“Maths and Science like, them subjects are hard work at home as he will just not engage at all and am sick of having arguments with him over it”. (P7)

Overall, these results indicate parents experience difficulties when their child must engage with subjects they dislike.

The way the core subjects are delivered

Setting

The researcher identified that the two participants of children who attended private school and they were happy with their child’s educational setting. As most of (P2) and (P4) were generally

positive. For example, *“The teachers have respect for them and care about their wellbeing”*. (P2)

The other interviewee said: *“I think it’s really good, that’s why I wanted him to go to an independent school”*. And *“Because the schools where I live were not that good”*. (P4).

However, the further five participants never addressed their child did not attend a state-funded school. Therefore, in general they more than likely attend a state-funded school.

On participant said in response to the child’s educational setting *“The schools have big classes”*. (P3)

As one interviewee said: *“He didn’t get in the chosen school or none we put down, which he wasn’t happy”*. (P5)

As another one put it: *“He picked it to be honest, so it wasn’t really my choice”*. (P1)

Together these results provide important insights into the different perspectives of educational settings. These findings may enhance further research linking the impact of the core subjects on CYPs mental health and wellbeing in relation to where the child studies. These results may be explained by the fact that independent schools established PHSE subjects within their NC ahead of state-funded schools, which may have provided a better approach for CYP’s educational and mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

A day of subjects they enjoy

Participants were asked by the interviewer: *“when your child has a day of subjects, they enjoy how do they express this”*. The theme here seems to be more like “Positive impact on mood”.

“She comes home from school to sit as a family with use, tells us about her day and she even wants to eat tea with us”. (P3)

“By wanting to engage with me more at home, which makes me happy, most of the time he sits in his room”. (P5)

“By engaging with me more before and after school”. (P7)

“He’s happier and more chattier. For example, he might ask me, and his dad shall we watch a film as a family instead of sitting in his room”. (P4)

“Well, she will get up in the morning easier”. (P6)

It is not a problem for him to wake up”. (P1)

Comparing the two results, it can be seen that the subjects they enjoy have a positive on impact on their children at home.

Discussion

This study set out with the aim to explore how parents think their child's mental health and wellbeing are affected by compulsory core subjects at school. Almost half of the participants expressed concerns for their child's educational settings. As Burke and Grosvenor (2003); Noyes et al. (2013) articulated that the English educational system delivers a long-standing outdated curriculum, rather than fostering current knowledge of the real world to date. The purpose of secondary schooling is to educate the upcoming generation to become active participants in society (Garrison, 2003). Education is essential for physical, emotional, and social development; all children in the United Kingdom are entitled to free education and prepare them to engage in society (GOV. UK, 2023). The overall findings in agreement with West and Pennell (2000); Perry (2016) who suggested that schools sometimes may not take into consideration how external factors may influence the child's performance mental health and wellbeing and behaviour. As discussed in the literature review the potential additional factors were explored. This implies that by providing holistic education to give a child-centred approach (Volstanis et al., 2013); Jessiman et al., 2022; Miseliunaite et al., 2022).

The compulsory core subjects

English, Maths & Science

The first sub-theme provided further support for the research question, the result of this study displayed that Science represented the least favourite subject (P5, P1, P4). Archer et al. (2014) suggested that gender identity plays a significant role for the interest in science and this may create barriers for female individuals who may wish to pursue a career in Science. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to the child's self-confidence. CYP that lack confidence to achieve has been recognised to form disengagement with subjects they may find

problematic (Putwain, 2011). These results further support the idea of the assumption that an individual's capacity for task completion and goal achievement (Supervia and Robres, 2021). As most participants commented that their child enjoys English (P6, P2, P4, P7). This result may be explained by the fact that English and Maths are taught more often throughout education may help to explain this outcome (Wilkinson and Penney, 2013). Ofsted (2012) reports that high achieving pupils commonly obtain an A or B grade in GCSE in English and Maths. As P6 commented about schools may possibly be more interested in how they preform for Ofsted. This also accords with our earlier observations of Roome and Soan (2019), which showed that schools place pressure on CYP to achieve grade C or above in the core subjects. As CYP who may not achieve grade C or above in English and Maths, the English government have established further resources for post-16 pupils to acquire the knowledge and skills to achieve grade C or above in English and Maths GCSE (The Department for Education et al., 2014) In England to progress onto further education pupils must obtain grade C GCSE in English and Maths (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2014).

Likes & dislikes

The second sub-theme, the subject English represents the most likable subject out of the three core subjects (P2, P4, P7). This finding may support that many participants viewed English is an important subject to study (P6, P2, P1, P5). As English and Maths are commonly delivered more than Science (Boyle and Bragg, 2006). However, the English government states that the core subjects should be delivered equally across KS3 and KS4 (Legislation.gov.uk, 2022). A common view suggested that Science was the most disliked subject (P5, P1, P4). A possible explanation for this might be that the role of gender identity may influence females interests for the subject of Science (Archer et al., 2014). However, another possible explanation for this is that adolescence is a period where YP engage more with their personal interests (Schurtz et

al., 2014). Also, YP experience a range of transitions in their lives, but one of the most critical is the move from school to adulthood (Thompson et al., 2002). The English government emphasises the importance of learning English and Maths because these courses are necessary for a person's professional and personal life (Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills and Nick Boles, 2014).

Goldring and Phillips (2008) highlighted that one of the most important ways parents are involved in their child's education is through choosing the school they attend. Findings observed in this study mirror those of the previous studies that considered the impact of a school transition (Barber and Olsen, 2004; Docket et al., 2012). According to some studies have found that a low socio-economic status and unemployment is associated with poorer mental health (Backhans and Hemmingsson, 2011).

Future benefits

The last sub-theme in this section suggests the benefits of incorporating modern world situations across education may possibly improve future outcomes for CYP (P3). Lundvall et al's. (2008) identified that the purpose of the education prepares pupils to live in a society. Educational settings help build foundations that represent the norms, values, and skills they need to function in society (Taliaferro et al., 2009). Also, schools are locations where children can develop friendships and interpersonal relationships (Maelan et al., 2018). Some participants suggested that their child would benefit from focusing on subjects they enjoy, and this would be a better approach for their mental health and academic outcomes (P3, P2, P7). It is important to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses. It thus can be suggested that adolescents experience heightened emotions and as children mature, as they develop the abilities to process, connect and express their feelings (Turkstra, 2000). In addition,

adolescence is a period where many YP experience various changes in their bodies and brains including physical, social, and emotional factors during this time (World Health Organization, 2023). However, many participants highlighted the importance of their child studying English (P6, P2, P1, P5). The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with living in England and English is their first spoken language. These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution. Another possible explanation for this is that individuals missed out on nearly a year of their schooling, due to lockdown restrictions (Scott et al., 2021). Many CYP experienced a loss of protective factors during lockdown, however, returning to school for some CYP may have caused the onset of mental health difficulties (McKinlay et al., 2022).

Positive or negative effects

Impact mental health & wellbeing

A sub- theme in relation to the impact the core subjects have on their child's mental health and wellbeing, and the subjects they enjoy had a positive impact on their child's mental health and wellbeing (P3, P6). These findings further support the idea of adolescents have greater wellbeing when they are satisfied with their lives and relationships (Park, 2004). A strong relationship between positive peer interactions and CYPs wellbeing has been reported in the literature. According to the Department of Education (2022), students who attend school more frequently typically exhibit greater wellbeing. However, due to some variables identified in the literature review, which may influence a child's wellbeing and affect their school attendance (Huan et al., 2008; Vanderbilt and Augustyn, 2010). Another important finding was that the core subjects their child dislikes has an impact on their child's existing mental health issues (P7). This finding was unexpected and suggest that children may find other aspects of their lives difficult. An implication of this is the possibility that the school may lack mental health

support. This finding further supports the idea of some schools may tend to focus on achievements, rather than the child's mental health and wellbeing (Goodwin et al., 2021). The pressure to achieve in the core subjects may cause the child to experience stress (P3, P2). It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to the fact that the core subjects are delivered more frequently throughout education (Boyle and Bragg, 2006). Moreover, negative peer pressure among teenagers have been connected to elevated stress levels (Maume, 2013). What is surprising is that this sub-theme did not detect any evidence for the subject science. In this section English and Maths were found to cause stress and impact wellbeing (P3, P2).

Engage with subjects at home how do they behave

Another sub-theme, several participants expressed arguments arose when their child must engage with subjects at home (P1, P3, P7). The findings of this study will now be compared to previous literature findings. Since parent-child connections are one of the main key factors to support children's physical, emotional, and social development (Bond et al., 2007; Cogan et al., 2005). Development in adolescents most parent's focus on how well they are doing in subjects, however, at home they may face barriers with the child's behaviour (P1, P2, P3, P7). Furthermore, some parents may find it challenging to encourage their child's learning outside of school hours (Ofsted, 2011). Schools that work in partnership with parents would provide greater understandings of the challenges parents may face outside of the classroom (P1, P2, P7). Often parents help their child learn to the best of their abilities even though they might not be familiar with the subject (P3). As parents of an adolescent often experience change in their parent-child relationships, due to youths frequently desire for more independence and less parental authority (World Health Organization, 2023).

The way the core subjects are delivered

Setting

The first sub-theme in the third theme, found that a couple of participants had positive beliefs about how the core subject are delivered in their child's educational settings (P2, P4). Teachers that care for CYP can change their school experience and especially for CYP who experience difficulties (P2). A possible explanation for this might be that teachers who communicate positive beliefs and expectations to students by using encouraging words to motivate the child (Supervia and Robres, 2021). Another possible explanation for this is that these students benefitted from the long-term establishment of PSHE subjects within their curriculum (PSHE Association, 2017). Further research should be done to investigate the wellbeing of CYP across a range of settings where CYP study the NC compulsory core subjects. In the UK there are many settings where CYP can be taught the compulsory core subjects (IPSEA, 2023). These findings may help us understand the difference between the impact of the core subjects on CYPs mental health and wellbeing. As state-funded schools have larger classes than the range of educational settings (P3). Research questions that could be asked include do larger class influence CYPs education and mental health and wellbeing. However, during lockdown restrictions, children experienced a lack of face-to-face contact with their peers and teachers, and returning to their educational settings with many peers may have caused the child to experience difficulties (Joseph et al., 2020). Even though state-funded schools have a higher number of students per classroom, parents frequently experience difficulties about the school they choose for their child (P5). Because all publicly financed schools in England have admission standards that are often established by the school or local authority (GOV.UK, 2023). It seems that these results are due to the educational setting are funded by local

authorities. Goldring and Phillips (2008) highlighted that one of the most important ways parents are involved in their child's education is through choosing the school they attend. However, P1 expressed that they were not involved in their child's choice of secondary school. This finding may suggest that parents of CYP in secondary education may frequently stop being overly involved, due to them developing greater maturity, yet parental school involvement continues to be a significant predictor of school outcomes through adolescence (Hill and Taylor, 2004). In secondary education parents usually do not need to observe or support CYP during the school day, yet parental support relates to events out of the school day (Ofsted, 2011).

A day of subjects they enjoy

The second sub-theme, some of the comments that emerged from this finding related to positive results (P3, P5, P7, P4, P6, P1). The UK's NC provides secondary education pupils with a wide range of subjects (GOV.UK, 2023). Therefore, CYP may foster interests for more creative subjects (Jeffrey and Craft, 2004). In the home environment parents can recognise if their child has had a good day in school (P3, P5, P7, P4). As a result, CYP that are optimistic about attending their school setting that day, due to them displaying positive behaviour in the morning (P6, P1). Parents have the responsibility for their child to attend school until they reach the age of 16 years (Legislation.gov.uk, 2022). Parents that establish strong emotional ties encourages the children to communicate their experiences and emotions (Raikes and Thompson, 2008). This finding supports the link between strong bonds and interactions between parents and children (Braungart-Rieker et al., 2001).

Limitations and recommendations

Although the study successfully demonstrated that the UK's NC provides a set of subjects and standards, which serves an equally approach for all children to acquire the knowledge, skills, and understanding that a society desires, it has certain limitations in terms of the researcher's status of an undergraduate student. However, the researcher was aware that emotions may arise, due to the research topic involving their child. As described in the methodology section, sensitive topics included in some of the research questions, the researcher must consider any possible risk or harm that participants might experience (Orr, 2021). A further limitation of this study was that it was not possible to investigate the significant impact the core subjects may have on CYPs mental health and wellbeing in one school because the sample size was too small. The use of technology could enable a larger sample size of participants to participate in a qualitative study (Upadhyay and Lipkovich, 2020).

Following this dissertation, the researcher recommends conducting additional research with both the parent and the child, as this may potentially reduce researcher bias and promote generalizability (Galdas, 2017). This study provided the first stage of exploring the possible impact the core subjects may have on CYPs mental health and wellbeing. As a result, there is a clear need for secondary schools to provide opportunities for parents to get more involved in their child's school day (Hill and Taylor, 2004; Ofsted, 2011). Therefore, the creation of an ethical committee provides clear instructions on how to perform ethically, which establishes safe practise (Kimmelman, 2004).

Taken together, the overall findings, therefore, recommendations may benefit policy. Firstly, incorporating practical work, by using more practical activities may promote engagement with

the individual, peers, teachers, academic performance and their mental health and wellbeing. Secondly, schools that offer more mental health support would lessen the risk of existing or the development of mental health issues, during periods of change and exam preparation. Finally, secondary schools should engage more closely with parents to identify specific areas that affect their child's mental health, well-being, and behaviour.

Conclusion

This study set out to determine the impact of the UK's NC compulsory core subjects on CYPs mental health and wellbeing. This research has thrown up many questions in need for further investigation. However, the study has shown that alongside studying the core subjects CYP may experience additional factors, which can impact their mental health and wellbeing. According to the Children's World Report (2020), of the 35 participating countries, CYP in England had extremely low levels of wellbeing. It is suggested that the association of these factors are investigated for future studies.

Most participants had the opinion that because schools tend to concentrate on the compulsory core subjects, students felt pressured and under pressure. This issue has been addressed in the literature by authors such as Roome and Soan (2019); Goodwin et al. (2019); Gorard (2006); Gathercole and Pickering (2000); Leckie and Goldstein (2017). The three key subjects, according to several participants noted that Science was their least favourite subject compared to English, which identified their enjoyment, and participants expressed the value of the subject. This finding may relate to Archer et al. (2014), who implied that Scientific careers have a higher rate of men. Taken together these results suggest that most participants find English as an important subject for their child to study out of the three core subjects. More broadly, research is also needed to determine individual's experiences across a range of settings, in what manner the compulsory core subjects are delivered and the possible impact on CYPs mental health and wellbeing.

It is recommended that further research be undertaken in the following areas: the impact of the core subjects on CYPs mental health and their behaviour in and out of school hours. Many participants recognised that subjects their child enjoys have a positive impact on their child's

mental health, wellbeing, and behaviour, as opposed to subjects they dislike or find difficult. Park (2004) implied that adolescents who are happier, perform better in school and positive relationships influences mental health. Some participants commented that focusing on subjects CYP enjoyed would promote positive mental health and wellbeing, as well as provide them with the knowledge and skills to prepare them for their future career aspiration. Therefore, the researcher recommends that CYP in secondary education would benefit from studying subjects they enjoy, which would influence many aspects of their personal lives including mental health and wellbeing, behaviour, family, and social interactions, for example, studying subjects alongside peers who share the same interests would promote interactions and help form good relationships with teachers and peers all of which is linked to greater academic performance.

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