



A Comparative Mixed Method Case Study in North East of England and Peninsular of Malaysia: Understanding Children's Emotional Health and Wellbeing, And Educational Attainment in A Post COVID-19 Restrictions World

Nik Nuraisyah Nik Nasir

Newcastle University, UK

Abstract

COVID-19 exposed and widened inequalities in children's learning and mental health. Evidence remains scarce on how recovery unfolds across contrasting welfare, structures and education systems. This study investigates how social, structural and cultural factors influence children's emotional health and wellbeing and educational recovery in the North East of England and Peninsular Malaysia using a critical realist comparative case study design. A mixed-methods comparative case study was conducted (2023–2025). The qualitative strand comprised semi-structured interviews with 30 participants (5 children, 5 parents and 5 teachers per region), analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis. Preliminary quantitative work maps current evidence on post-COVID child wellbeing and learning to support later triangulation. Three exploratory patterns emerged: (1) emotional dysregulation and fragile confidence, reflecting anxiety and low self-esteem on school return; (2) structural and digital inequalities, revealing how gaps in access and policy provision hindered recovery; and (3) relational resilience and adaptive support, where teacher empathy, family routines and peer belonging sustained re-engagement. UK participants highlighted school-based wellbeing and structured catch-up initiatives, while Malaysian participants emphasised family and community coping grounded in cultural and faith values. Children's post-pandemic recovery is contingent on both institutional capacity, and social and relational support systems. Policies that combine school-centred mental-health frameworks with digital equity and culturally responsive family engagement are essential to sustain wellbeing and learning recovery globally.

Keywords: child wellbeing; comparative study; education recovery; mixed-methods; post-COVID