



The Class of 2010 Project

Education policies in the UK have a different emphasis depending on the Government at the time. There have been many significant changes to education as a result of social policies introduced by different governments



The Class of 2010 project was designed to investigate the experiences of first-year students starting at a school in 2010, and looked at how changes in the structure of education influenced their educational achievement.

The information in this Factsheet will be useful for the education topic, and will be helpful as evidence when studying research methods.

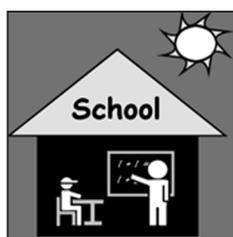
Context of the Research

The policies of the UK Labour government of 1997 – 2010 were aimed at creating academies that were independent of local authorities and managed instead by a team of independent co-sponsors with the freedom to run the academies like businesses.

The Coalition government of 2010 expanded the programme and required all schools to become academies as a solution to raising educational standards in primary and secondary schools.

Key Term: Academies State-funded schools in England. These are self-governing and most are constituted as registered charities or operated by other educational charities and may receive additional financial support from personal or corporate sponsors. They must meet the same national curriculum core subject requirements as other state schools and are subject to inspection by Ofsted.

Activity: Investigate the number of academies in your area.



The Research

The research was conducted by Tanya Ovenden-Hope and Rowena Passey.

It was a qualitative longitudinal study which investigated the changes experienced by one school that converted to academy status in 2010.

Key Term: Longitudinal Study A study taking place over an extended period of time, often with periodic gathering of data.

Key Term: Qualitative data Information that is in a non-numerical form (e.g. feelings, opinions and meanings.)

The Sample

The research followed a group of students from when they started in Year 7 of the academy in 2010, up to the age of 18.



The academy that was chosen for the study was located in a coastal area with high levels of socio-economic deprivation. The school had the lowest performance at GCSE in the local authority and was often the last choice school for parents and prospective pupils.

The new academy status was seen as an opportunity to turn the school around.

The study was expanded in 2011 to include two further academies. In 2013 three more academies were included. All were coastal academies.

Characteristics of the Academies

All six academies had at least met (and most exceeded) the 2012/13 DfE standard of 40 per cent of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalent) including English and mathematics.

All academies had high numbers of pupils eligible for pupil premium and high or medium-to-high levels of pupils with SEN and/or disabilities; all had very low numbers of students who have English as an additional language (EAL).

All participating academies reported that the levels of student attainment on entry to Year 7 were below the national average, and all reported that the resulting low teacher expectations, for students, together with institutional structures that perpetuated such expectations, had been an issue.

Research methods

The aims of the research was to monitor and evaluate changes undertaken in the academy over time.

The research methods used were:

1. Annual school visits including semi-structured interviews with:
 - The principal and/or senior leader
 - A sample of four teachers who were teaching the class of 2010
 - A sample of 15 pupils
2. Collecting anonymised Class of 2010 data on levels of progress and attainment
3. Examining the academy's data that was publicly available e.g. school policies
4. Each year the school was provided with a report on the findings.

Exam Hint: The aforementioned study is a useful piece of research to show your knowledge of research methods

Activity: Why do you think the researchers used several different research methods for this study?

Findings

The academies put a number of objectives into place to address the issues identified as affecting the educational achievement of the students. These included:

- Raising expectations and improving student engagement with learning.
- Ensuring teacher attendance, maintaining staff morale while undertaking significant changes to staffing levels and responsibilities.
- Improving the quality of data.
- Developing new policies.
- Involving students in school leadership and management.
- Involving sixth formers in running clubs and meeting and greeting visitors.
- Supporting students through their secondary education by assigning a key adult to each student in one academy, and each member of the executive team working with 15 students to guide them when selecting GCSE options in Year 9 in another.
- Recruiting high quality teachers as the reputation of the academies improved.
- Increased work in the community, e.g. running a community leisure centre close to the academy site.
- Investment in staff through providing continuous professional development (CPD).

As the project progressed, most of the academies reported that behaviour was no longer an issue, and that the academy could now focus on improving the standard of teaching and learning with the ambition to become an ‘Outstanding’ academy.

It was clear from this research that these academies have challenges to face, but they have made and are making substantial progress with some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged students in England.

Exam Hint: Use this piece of research as evidence to show:

- The changes in schools over time (linked to education policies)
- Evidence of educational achievement of children from more disadvantaged backgrounds
- The work of academies and the influence they have on educational achievement

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research

What do you think the strengths and weaknesses of this research are? Before reading further, complete the table below:

Activity: What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of using a qualitative longitudinal study for this research?

Advantages	Disadvantages

Strengths of the Research

In this research, it was possible to:

- See the differing patterns of response by staff and students. Some embraced new developments, others just accepted them, and others left the school.
- Interview the same participants over time, allowing issues and concerns to be followed up from previous years.
- Develop a good relationship with the students, which generated rich, detailed data on a new academy.
- Interview different teachers each year to those who were teaching the class of 2010 in each year allowed a wider range of views to be obtained. This provided a deeper understanding of the academy than interviewing the same staff each year.
- Research over extended periods of time, so that the impact of social, political and policy changes could be assessed during the project.



Exam Focus: Outline two advantages of using longitudinal studies in sociological research.

This question is asking you to outline two advantages of using longitudinal studies – you could include: they allow you to see changes over time, they use the same participants so you can see how their behaviour changes, they can identify trends and patterns, etc.

Weaknesses of the Research

- Longitudinal research takes a lot of resources – time, money and hours – to plan, prepare, undertake and analyse the interviews.
- It took several years.
- Participants were lost during the project. Over the first 5 years there were 7 students who withdrew.
- The principals selected the teachers every year for the interviews. Was their bias in this selection?
- Were the teachers truthful? If the Principal chose the teachers, they knew that the responses given would have come from those few teachers.
- How independent were the researchers after being involved with the academies? Was it possible after such a long-term involvement in the academies to stay impartial?

Exam Hint: Strengths and weaknesses of different research methods can be used for evaluating research and can help you achieve evaluation marks in the exam.

Exam Focus: Outline and explain two problems of using longitudinal studies in sociological research

This question is asking for more information than the previous question as it is asking you to outline and explain. You need to outline two problems of using longitudinal studies – for example, it takes a long time, participants may be lost during the study, etc. You must also explain why the points you have identified are problems – for example, why is it a problem that people may leave the study?