

Austerity and Education

The impact of austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015 on the English education system and the subsequent influence on inequality.

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Abstract

The thesis discusses whether the austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015 affected the education system and subsequently influenced inequality in England. The two research questions guide the examination of the thesis, where the first research question studies: *How austerity measures have affected education in England, both in general and more specifically for disadvantaged children?* Furthermore, the second research question investigates: *How the distribution of austerity cuts influenced inequality in England?* In order to structure the arguments, the thesis is divided into five chapters. Initially, the first two chapters form a background for the examination of the thesis statement. By applying the literary review method, the third chapter analyses the implemented education austerity measures by studying relevant research on educational inequality. The fourth chapter discusses the previous findings together with research on the topics of inequality, poverty and social mobility. Finally, the fifth chapter summarises the main finding and presents a conclusion.

In summary, the thesis has confirmed that the education austerity measures were unsuccessful at reducing educational inequality, as disadvantaged children were negatively impacted by the changes to school spending, pupil funding and the increased tuition fees. As the attainment level remained low for disadvantaged pupils, opportunities were limited for further success in the education system and employment. Subsequently, the risk of poverty rose, and the chance of social mobility reduced. Therefore, the government must invest further in both education and future employment to improve inequality in England and increase mobility in deprived areas. However, Brexit and the Coronavirus further challenge the sitting administration's priorities, as additional austerity cuts may be required.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, the coalition government embarked on balancing the country's economy after the 2008 financial crisis. Austerity politics were implemented and resulted in significant reductions to public expenditure and changes in taxation. Although school spending was protected from the cuts, economic measures indirectly impacted the English education system. The absence of an annual rise in real-term school expenditure, changed per-pupil funding, local government cuts and increased tuition fees directly affected all tiers of the education system, with the most severe impact on disadvantaged children. Additionally, the austerity cuts disproportionately affected low-income families and subsequently expanded the number of children living in poverty. To improve children's opportunities growing up in deprived families, the Coalition aimed at stimulating social mobility. However, after five years in office, three out of four young people believed it was challenging to move between socio-economic classes (Machin & Major, 2020). As education and inequality are closely associated, both topics will be linked in a discussion concerning the influence of education austerity measures on inequality in England and the opportunities for disadvantaged children.

1.1 Thesis statement

The master's thesis will study the austerity politics implemented by the coalition government in 2010. The scope of the thesis is focused on a detailed examination of education austerity measures and the distribution of the severe cuts. The reduction of public spending has increased the number of families living in poverty, which has raised concerns for disadvantaged children in the education system (Social Metrics Commission, 2020). Pupils from deprived backgrounds are less likely to acquire the same level of qualification as their wealthier peers, limiting their future opportunities. Therefore, the thesis argues that the austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015 affected the education system and

subsequently influenced inequality in England. In consequence, the analysis of education austerity measures is closely linked to the discussion of inequality.

Furthermore, the thesis statement will be examined using two research questions. The first question focuses on educational inequality with the subsequent attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged peers. Therefore, the first research question is: *How have austerity measures affected education in England, both in general and more specifically for disadvantaged children?* The findings from the analysis of the education austerity measures found that the most significant changes were the modified school funding system, the altered per-pupil spending, cuts to local authority support, and increased tuition fees. Subsequently, the examined research found that disadvantaged children were more affected by the education austerity cuts.

The second research question examines the degree of inequality in the austerity cuts and highlights the consequences of unequal distribution, both from an educational perspective and by studying social mobility numbers. Therefore, the second research question is: *How has the distribution of austerity cuts influenced inequality in England?* The analysis found that low-income families were hit harder by the reduced government support, which resulted in high poverty numbers with a subsequent increase in the rate of child poverty. Additionally, research on educational inequality demonstrated that children from a deprived background found it more challenging to achieve the same qualifications as a wealthier peer (McKnight, 2015). Furthermore, the research findings reinforced the decreased social mobility numbers after the implementation of austerity politics.

1.2 Constraints of the Literature

The thesis is supported by a document analysis of literature concerning austerity politics. The analysis of cost-saving measures is limited to the period between 2010 and 2015.

An examination of the consequences of austerity politics requires a review of a selection of reports and articles that account for a period beyond 2015, as the long-term effects are yet to develop. Relevant data was gathered from independent research reports and political analyses of the implemented economic measures. Therefore, the thesis includes a study of both primary and secondary sources. The implemented education austerity measures are analysed in-depth, supported by original research on educational inequality. Therefore, the discussion of inequality primarily focuses on educational inequality and social mobility in England. A detailed investigation of inequality would have required a closer study of statistical data outside the scope of this thesis. However, the degree of objectivity varies across the different research material examined. The majority of the reports have been compiled by government-led institutions and independent foundations, where the data is presented in an objective manner. In contrast, the newspaper articles and other sources may be more subjective, where personal opinion or funding may influence the criticism of austerity and interpretation of inequality.

1.3 Development of the Thesis

Additionally, the thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the thesis statement, the two research questions, and the constraints of the reviewed literature. The structure of the thesis and definitions of essential terms will follow. Subsequently, Chapter 2 explains the background to why the coalition government introduced austerity measures. The chapter includes a summary of the political challenges leading up to the 2010 general election. Additionally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the cost-saving measures introduced by the new administration, focusing on education policies.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 provides a critical analysis of the implemented austerity politics, divided into two sections. The chapter's initial section is guided by the second

research question, with an analysis of the distribution of austerity cuts and a study of how the unequal distribution has influenced inequality in England. The final section is guided by the first research question and examines how education austerity measures have impacted different levels of the education system, focusing on children from deprived backgrounds.

Chapter 4 discusses the education austerity measures against the background of increased inequality in England. The unequal distribution of austerity cuts has made it more challenging for disadvantaged children to succeed in the education system. As lower levels of qualification influence their future choices and opportunities in life, the children are more inclined to experience downward social mobility (McKnight, 2015). In addition, the chapter includes observations of how Brexit and the Coronavirus could also affect the education system and social mobility. Finally, Chapter 5 contains a summary of the main arguments and findings, with a conclusion of the thesis.

1.4 Definitions

To further develop and discuss the thesis, the most fundamental concepts require to be defined. Therefore, the following terms will be outlined: *austerity politics*, *inequality*, *disadvantaged children*, and *social mobility*.

1.4.1 Austerity politics

Austerity politics resurfaced after the global financial crisis in 2008. However, austere ideas have been an established part of political philosophy. In Aristotle's time, the term *austerity* referred to "harsh or rough conditions" (Schui, 2014, p. 11). A more modern definition of *austerity* is "difficult economic conditions created by government policies aimed at cutting state spending" ('Austerity', 2020). The definition implies that the government has introduced a set of economic measures to reduce a country's budget deficit, leading to a challenging financial situation. Therefore, the economic policies introduced are often referred

to as austerity measures, which commonly include raised taxes or reductions in public expenditure. The coalition government under David Cameron primarily introduced spending cuts to prevent a further increase in Britain's budget deficit. A more detailed discussion of the austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015 is presented in Chapter 3.

1.4.2 Inequality

Leading up to the 2010 election, the Conservative Party campaigned for an economic recovery where the population was "all in it together" (Conservative Party, 2010). However, low-income families were more affected by austerity cuts (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Therefore, one may argue that the distribution of the cuts has been unequal. *Inequality* is defined as "the unfair difference between groups of people in society, when some have more wealth, status or opportunities than others" ('Inequality', 2020). Consequently, the thesis will study how the distribution of public savings has affected the English population. The socio-economic disparity will influence the study of education austerity measures, as family background and geography influence the educational performance of disadvantaged pupils.

1.4.3 Disadvantaged pupils

A typical term when reviewing educational inequality is *disadvantaged pupils*. The Department for Education (DfE) defines *disadvantaged pupils* as children who are either eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) or are in state care (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). The majority of the included research on educational inequality refers to children from deprived backgrounds as both disadvantaged pupils and FSM children. A more general term applied in the discussion is *disadvantaged children*, including children from underprivileged backgrounds, regardless of their academic status.

1.4.4 Social mobility

The final term, *social mobility*, is referred to as "the ability to move from one level of society to another" ('Social Mobility', 2020). The process demonstrates the change from an

individuals' starting point in life to where they end up as adults. A vital factor in making the transition is success in the education system, as the level of qualification influences the pupil's opportunities. Also, the coalition government regarded social mobility as one of their key goals and asserted that "everyone, regardless of background, has the chance to rise as high as their talents and ambitions allow them" (Cabinet Office, 2010). Nevertheless, more recent studies suggest that social mobility is primarily influenced by family background and geography (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). The topic will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Background

Chapter 2 studies the backdrop for why austerity politics were introduced between 2010 and 2015. The chapter will form the basis for analysing and discussing how austerity measures have affected the education system and subsequently inequality in England. The period of Labour governments under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, from 1997 to 2010, faced intense criticism for high state spending and were partially blamed for the financial crisis of 2008. In response, the Conservative Party presented austerity politics as the sole solution for saving Britain's economic prospects. After the election victory in 2010, the Coalition presented a set of cost-saving cuts to reduce state outlay. The final section of the chapter will introduce the most significant austerity measures and an overview of the main education austerity measures.

2.1 Challenges

Following the 2010 general election, two major challenges required the attention of the newly elected administration. The coalition government was formed between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, with David Cameron elected prime minister. Firstly, the Coalition had to address the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008, followed by an assessment of the high state outlay introduced by the previous Labour administrations. Both the financial crisis and increased public expenditure formed the background for why significant spending cuts were introduced by David Cameron and his coalition government between 2010 and 2015.

2.1.1 Global Financial Crisis

In 2008, the world economy faced the most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression. The global financial crisis developed due to a long period of high risk-taking by banks and the bursting of the United States housing bubble, which further prompted an

international banking crisis (Foster & Magdoff, 2009). As leading banks were no longer able to guarantee their customers' mortgages, the banks were declared insolvent. The banking crisis was not limited to the United States, as multiple banks across Europe were declared bankrupt and required government intervention to survive. Also, national banks were affected, which resulted in a substantial number of countries unable to service their sovereign debts (Blyth, 2013). The incident has later been termed the *sovereign debt crisis*.

Prior to the events of 2008, there was little concern about the increased British sovereign debt. As the country borrowed against its own currency and controlled the money supply, Britain was regarded as low risk and unlikely to go bankrupt (Blyth, 2013). However, the sovereign debt crisis introduced the concern that Britain's budget deficit was too large and required urgent reduction. Following the financial crisis, political opponents quickly accused the previous Labour governments of irresponsible economic control and unsustainable public spending (Krugman & Morris, 2015). In truth, the sovereign debt crisis was a problem created by the banks, where the state had to bail out the financial participants who had taken excessive risks (Krugman & Morris, 2015). Therefore, the fault was not entirely generated by Brown and his economic policies.

Nevertheless, the sitting government faced both responsibility and blame for the financial crisis. The arguments persuaded Brown and his administration to rethink the economic future of the country and saw the need to make adjustments to state expenditure. In order to reduce fiscal borrowing, there was a need to make cuts to public expenses. However, the Conservative Party was quick to promote a more drastic solution to the problem. Austerity politics became a popular means to cure the debt crisis in many European countries, including Britain. The discussion of austerity politics will continue at the end of the chapter.

2.1.2 High Government Spending

After twenty years of conservative rule, Tony Blair was elected prime minister in 1997 and expanded public outlay. At the time, state expenditure accounted for 39.9 per cent of national income, but after a decade of Labour governments, the expenses had increased to 48.1 per cent (Chote et al., 2010). However, civic spending adjustments were implemented to improve the quality of the National Health Service (NHS), education, and other funding areas, which had been reduced under the Conservative Party (Chote et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the financial crisis of 2008 changed the outlook of state expenditures, as tax revenues and other state incomes did not cover the total cost of public outlay (Agostini et al., 2015). In consequence, the government was dependent on loans, which resulted in an increased budget deficit.

Additionally, the Labour administrations did not save money when there was a surplus and instead allocated funds to new investments. The approach contrasted the political philosophy of the economist John Maynard Keynes, which highlighted the importance of supporting the economy through a crisis and saving money in better times (Foster & Magdoff, 2009). On a positive note, public services improved during the Labour period. However, productivity fell, as the output per pound spent did not meet the required level (Chote et al., 2010). However, the gap between the expenditure under Labour and tax revenues was not excessive. Therefore, several economists argued that the deficit was healthy for the economy, and the governing under Blair and Brown could not be deemed as irresponsible (Peston, 2015). Nonetheless, the reckless borrowing conducted by banks should have been prohibited by the Labour governments.

2.2 Solutions

As previously discussed, Britain was under financial pressure in 2010 due to the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 and high state spending. The Conservative Party was convinced that austerity politics could restore the economy, whereas the Labour Party proposed less drastic reductions. The Conservative Party has traditionally been influenced by liberal philosophers and in more recent times by neoliberals. In contrast, the Labour Party has been shaped by classical sociological thought and notably John Maynard Keynes. The section will briefly present the main differences between the Conservative and Labour ideologies and underline the key goals from the election manifestos from 2010.

2.2.1 Comparison of Conservative and Labour Policies

Giddens (2003) contrasts the two political approaches to state governing, where classical social democracy favours an active state, compared to the neoliberalist view of minimal government interference. In other words, neoliberals have a strong belief in the power of market forces and an autonomous civil society (Giddens, 2003). Additionally, neoliberals value strong economic individualism, whereas collectivism and strong egalitarianism are favoured in classical social democracy (Giddens, 2003). Furthermore, a resilient welfare state is at the core of classical social democracy. In contrast, the welfare state is considered a safety net in neoliberal political thought. For both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, the core of the political approaches remained, although some modification had to be made to appeal to the British electorate in the 2010 election manifestos.

2.2.2 Election Manifestos from 2010

Despite the differences in political philosophies, both parties agreed on the need to reduce state outlay in 2010. The Labour Party suggested spending reductions in the election manifesto, though not as severe as those presented by the Conservative Party (Conservative Party, 2010; Labour Party, 2010). As the previous Labour administrations had not limited

expenditure in better economic times, Gordon Brown was required to propose cuts in public expenses from 2011 and the following ten years. However, the increased national debt favoured the implementation of severe conservative austerity cuts to the British economy. Nevertheless, the extent of the planned spending reduction by the Conservative Party led to the suspicion that the austerity cuts were not solely a means to lower the budget deficit but an aim to limit government participation.

2.3 General Election 2010

The period leading up to the 2010 general election proved to be a turbulent time for the Labour administration. The sitting prime minister, Gordon Brown, experienced the most challenging economic recession since the Great Depression. Additionally, Brown faced sharp criticism on the handling of the financial crisis and the government's record of high spending. Consequently, the election manifesto from the Conservative Party focused primarily on fiscal reform to reduce the increased national debt, with significant reductions to public expenses (Conservative Party, 2010). Additionally, an emergency budget was suggested to get rapid control of the economic state of the country (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). The financial promises secured David Cameron's victory in the 2010 general election. Nevertheless, the Conservative Party were unable to secure enough votes to form a majority government, and Cameron was forced to invite Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats to form a coalition administration.

Despite political differences, the Coalition agreed on the importance of reducing the country's budget deficit. However, the Liberal Democrats demanded reassurance that the Conservative Party were not taking advantage of their support. As a result, the Fixed-term Parliaments Act was implemented in 2011, stating that elections would be held every five years (Fixed-Term Parliaments Act, 2011). The prime minister could no longer call for a new general election before the five-year term was over. Also, a set of shared policies were agreed

upon before the Cameron-Clegg coalition entered Office (Cabinet Office, 2010). Both parties conceded that substantial savings in government spending were required in repairing the country's economy. As cuts to public expenditure remained one of the fundamental characteristics of austerity politics, the newly elected administration set out to govern the country with stringent measures. The following section will discuss the austerity politics under the Coalition in further detail, focusing on education austerity measures in the final section.

2.4 Austerity Politics

A closer examination of the implemented austerity politics is required to demonstrate how austerity measures have affected the English education system and subsequently influenced inequality in England. The stringent cuts introduced by the Coalition were disproportionately distributed, with low-income families hardest hit. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of spending cuts resulted in fewer people from deprived backgrounds considering social mobility as a credible option. Additionally, education austerity measures influenced different levels of education, where children from disadvantaged backgrounds were more affected by the changes in the school system. Therefore, the final section of the chapter will summarise the fundamental changes made to the education system.

2.4.1 General Austerity Measures

The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the period of high state expenditure under Labour became the primary reasons for introducing austerity politics. The two challenges formed the backdrop of the 2010 election and introduced the new coalition government. The Coalition's first priority was to "reduce the deficit and restore economic growth" (Cabinet Office, 2010), which prompted significant austerity cuts. However, a cross-party consensus required certain expenditure areas to be protected from the cuts, such as the

NHS and schools (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Below, the thesis presents how austerity measures altered the economic policies, public spending and taxation.

2.4.1.1 Economic Policies

After the financial crisis of 2008, Labour administrations were blamed for irresponsible state expenditure, which led to an enlarged budget deficit. However, the opposing parties argued that the previous governments had run with a more considerable debt than necessary. Before the financial crisis, the British economy was stable, as the increased state expenditure was largely matched with raised taxes (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Although the explanations for the enlarged budget deficit varied, all political parties agreed on reducing government outlay, thus with a varied extent of budget cuts.

In consequence, the Cameron-Clegg Coalition implemented an emergency budget within a month of taking office. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, presented a budget that included substantial spending cuts and some tax rises to balance the current budget by the end of the Parliament. Nearly 80 per cent of the planned reduction came from cuts in public expenses (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). However, the budget deficit reduction proved difficult to achieve due to low economic growth and considerably higher fiscal borrowing than outlined in the 2010 budget (Chandler & Johnson, 2015; R. Crawford & Johnson, 2015). Nonetheless, the Conservative Party planned for further cuts to address the large budget deficit in case of a victory in the next election.

2.4.1.2 Public Spending

In terms of government funding, the austerity cuts were unequally distributed, as some areas of expenditure were excluded. In total, public spending was lowered from 46 per cent in 2009-10 to 40 per cent in 2014-15 (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Unprotected areas of expenses experienced average reductions of 19 per cent, though some departments were cut by up to 30 per cent (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). In contrast, healthcare and education

received a considerable amount of state funding to secure voter support. The expenditure reductions were met with little resistance from the electorate in 2010, and the Coalition could therefore continue to reduce the size of the public sector.

Although unemployment numbers remained lower than expected after the financial crisis, the people in employment were significantly affected by the spending cuts. Half of the expenses of the government departments consisted of salaries. Due to the austerity measures, a pay freeze was introduced and led to a considerable reduction in state sector real-term income (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). However, the employment growth helped justify the zero increase in public sector pay. Concurrently, pensioner benefits were protected from severe cuts, resulting in substantial reductions in working-age benefits and child support (Chandler & Johnson, 2015; Hills, 2015). In sum, the reduced spending was unequally distributed across the population and between areas of government expenditure.

2.4.1.3 Taxation

The Coalition introduced adjustments to taxation, but the additional revenues had little influence in reducing the budget deficit. In 2010, the value-added tax (VAT) was modified from 17.5 per cent to 20 per cent in 2010 and increased the state income (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). However, one could question why VAT was not raised further, as other taxes were lowered or included additional allowances to taxpayers. Additionally, the reduction in corporation tax intended to boost investment was unsuccessful, as the lack of economic growth did not encourage businesses to invest (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, adjustments to taxation bands contributed to an unequal distribution of benefits among the population. The personal allowance was increased to reward taxpayers, yet people with higher earnings gained most from the changes to the system (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). In sum, the section confirmed that the coalition administration lacked a clear strategy for reducing the budget deficit through taxation.

2.4.2 Education Austerity Measures

Although a closer analysis of the education austerity measures follows in Chapter 3, a brief introduction to the policies is required at this point. The restraining measures affected the English education system by changing the school funding regime, altering per-pupil spending, cutting local government support, and increasing tuition fees. Michael Gove, the Education Secretary between 2010 and 2014, applied the new measures. Gove initiated his time in Office by renaming his area of responsibility from “Department for Children, Schools and Families” to merely “Department for Education” (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). The title was considered controversial, as the role dismissed policies relating to the greater well-being of children and families. The new title and reduced responsibilities also conflicted with a vital goal of the coalition administration, which was to increase social mobility (Cabinet Office, 2010). Despite the criticism, Gove ignored a wide range of studies that demonstrated that opportunities are primarily determined by family background and geography, not solely on education (Barker & Hoskins, 2017).

2.4.2.1 School Spending

As previously discussed, schools were promised protection from the implemented austerity cuts. However, education outlay as a share of national income was lowered when the coalition government came to power. Additionally, there was no real-term increase in education expenditure between 2010 and 2015 (R. Crawford, 2015). School spending accounted for 68 per cent of the resource budget of the Department for Education (DfE). However, the implemented austerity measures led to the budget being cut by one-third in real terms under the Coalition (Grayson & Williams, 2018). The cuts to school expenses were substantial, as the DfE is responsible for education from age 3 to 19. In consequence, the per-pupil funding and capital expenditure were significantly reduced. Although school expenditure rose by 11 per cent, capital outlay decreased by 57 per cent (Lupton & Thomson,

2015). Capital spending was reserved for the establishment of new schools and to maintain schools in poor condition. However, the Coalition cancelled Labour's *Building Schools for the Future* programme and argued that education was independent of the school buildings and merely relied on good teaching (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). The government received stark criticism and therefore had to develop a new strategy. However, the primary focus remained on demand for pupil places and the present state of school buildings.

Although no new state schools were built, the Coalition made an exemption for establishing new academies. Initially, academies were introduced by the Labour Party as a means to lift the attainment level for students in deprived areas and were limited to secondary education institutions (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). However, the Academies Act of 2010, passed by the coalition government, allowed all schools to apply for academy status (Academies Act, 2010). Consequently, the school spending numbers were affected, and a total of 10 per cent of the capital outlay was put towards the installation of new academies (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). Additionally, more money was directly passed on to the individual schools (Sibieta, 2015a). In consequence, less money was distributed through the local authorities. In return, the schools were permitted greater autonomy over the curriculum, staff salaries and the length of school days. In sum, the intention of academies had changed from helping struggling schools in deprived areas to running schools as independent units.

2.4.2.2 Pupil Premium

The education austerity measures also altered the pupil funding system in England. The Coalition introduced the new pupil premium, which was reserved for children eligible for free school meals (FSM) or under state care (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). Subsequently, schools were allocated more money for taking in FSM children. Prior to the new pupil premium, school funding was already heavily targeted at disadvantaged pupils. The subsidies were 35 per cent higher for the most deprived primary schools, but the reformed pupil funding

increased the figure to 42 per cent by 2014-15 (Sibieta, 2015a). However, the modified system resulted in substantial differences in subsidy between schools, as it relied on their category of pupils. As a result, the existing per-pupil funding was frozen, and thereby the average per-pupil spending was reduced by eight per cent between 2010 and 2015 (Sibieta, 2015a). For pupils between 16 and 19, the expenditures declined by 13 per cent (Sibieta, 2015a). In consequence, more schools struggled to keep up with the increasing pupil numbers with less funding.

Initially, the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, advocated for a fixed amount to be spent per child, regardless of the children's social needs and home background. The suggestion contrasted the per-pupil funding implemented by Labour, where the goal was to improve attainment for children from deprived backgrounds. Nick Clegg was firmly against Gove's proposal, as the Liberal Democrats had promised to reduce educational differences (Liberal Democrats, 2010). As a result, the pupil premium was introduced as targeted funding for schools that admitted children from low-income families. The distribution of the pupil premium was divided between primary and secondary schools. For primary schools, the pupil premium was set for £1,300 per pupil and at £935 per pupil for secondary schools (Sibieta, 2015a). The argument for the difference in funding relied on the importance of early intervention to improve attainment levels of disadvantaged pupils. However, the number of secondary schools experiencing financial difficulties increased from 34 per cent to 59 per cent due to the new funding arrangement under the Coalition (Grayson & Williams, 2018). In sum, the pupil premium increased support for disadvantaged pupils, but the lowered per-pupil funding led to a rise in secondary schools unable to pay expenses.

2.4.2.3 Local Government Funding

Education austerity measures also affected local authority funding. Traditionally, each local authority received a grant from the central government to spend on schools. However,

the new measures resulted in less money being distributed through the local authority and more money allocated directly to the individual schools (Sibieta, 2015a). As previously discussed, funding for academies was given directly to the individual school and not through the local authority. In exchange, the schools were given more autonomy over their business and financial decisions, which came with additional responsibilities. However, the expansion of academies and independent schools led to intense criticism, which resulted in the introduction of the simplified national funding formula (NFF) in 2017. However, the full consequences of the new funding system will be evident at a later date.

In addition, the austerity measures led to cuts in local government services. In total, local support services were cut by 55 per cent by 2018, which forced several facilities to close (Coughlan, 2018). Additionally, support programs for deprived families, such as Sure Start, were cut by 32 per cent between 2010 and 2013 (Obolenskaya & Stewart, 2015). Sure Start Services provide government support to parents with pre-school children on parenting, health, finances, and employment issues (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021). Other cuts were made to amenities offering additional career guidance for vulnerable teenagers (Sibieta, 2015a). A selection of youth services was given to schools but received no extra funding. Additionally, the average per-person spending for local authorities was cut by 24 per cent (Innes & Tetlow, 2015). The cuts ranged between 6.2 per cent and 46.3 per cent, but the most deprived local authorities received the most extensive cuts (Innes & Tetlow, 2015). In sum, changes to local authority funding affected people from disadvantaged backgrounds the most.

2.4.2.4 Tuition Fees

The final area affected by education austerity measures was higher education. In 2012, significant cuts were made to higher education funding, with tuition fees being increased to compensate for the reduced revenues. The Coalition agreed to raise the cap on tuition fees to £9,000, resulting in expenses ranging from £3,000 to £9,000 in England and Wales (Belfield

et al., 2017). On a positive note, the university spending expanded by 25 per cent, and the per-student resources remained higher than for all other education levels (Belfield et al., 2017, 2018). However, the modification in tuition fees required students to cover the funding previously provided by the state. Consequently, the majority of students had to take up student loans to meet the raised tuition fees and living costs.

From a state perspective, the new funding arrangement was positive, as the per-student funding remained high without compromising the rate of fiscal borrowing. However, government debts increased due to the expansion of student loans (Belfield et al., 2017). In consequence, a significant number of students would not be able to repay their student loans. Additionally, the Coalition replaced the maintenance grant for students from deprived backgrounds with loans in 2017, which would affect their total student debt after a completed degree (Belfield et al., 2017). The implied consequences of the altered funding arrangement have challenged the aim to “promote fair access to universities” from the 2010 Conservative Election Manifesto (Conservative Party, 2010). Also, the Liberal Democrats received criticism as they promised to abolish tuition fees altogether (Liberal Democrats, 2010). Regardless of the political assurances, the tuition fees were increased to maintain considerable per-pupil spending for higher education.

Chapter 3: Analysis of Education Austerity Measures

The second chapter has presented the background for why the coalition government introduced austerity politics in 2010. To analyse how politics affected the English education system, Chapter 3 studies the implemented education austerity measures between 2010 and 2015. By conducting a document analysis of selected reports and research material, the chapter will examine the first research question of how austerity measures have affected education in England. Although the education policies are discussed in general, the primary focus is how cost-saving measures have affected disadvantaged children in the education system. Prior to the document analysis of education policies, a critique of the economic consequences of austerity politics is presented, with a study of how the cuts were distributed. Therefore, the next section will discuss the second research question of how the distribution of austerity cuts has influenced inequality in England.

3.1 Critique of Austerity Politics

Although the main focus of the thesis is how austerity politics have affected the education system, there is a strong link between inequality and education in England. Therefore, the background on how the restraint measures have been distributed is relevant for the further discussion of the second research question, examining the influence of the distribution of austerity cuts on inequality, which will be reviewed further in Chapter 4. The critique of austerity politics is divided into three sections. The first section highlights the direct economic consequences of cost-cutting measures, where the second section highlights the unequal distribution of austerity cuts and lays a foundation for the discussion of inequality in Chapter 4. As disadvantaged families were more affected by the measures, the poverty rate in England increased, which will be analysed in detail in the third and final section.

3.1.1 Economic Consequences

After the global financial crisis, the coalition government introduced spending cuts through a set of austerity measures in order to mend the British economy. The sovereign debt was primarily enlarged due to the substantial costs incurred by the state bailing out with a high-risk profile before the financial crisis (Blyth, 2013). Nevertheless, the Conservative Party argued that the sovereign debt crisis was primarily due to the excessive public expenditure under the previous Labour administration. Therefore, the Coalition introduced a set of preventative measures after the election victory in 2010. The Office for Budget Responsibility was established to prevent irresponsible choices and high risk-taking by British banks (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, austerity politics were implemented to narrow the budget deficit within five years. The drop in expenditure successfully reduced public spending, but the lack of economic growth prevented a decrease in the budget deficit. In sum, the Coalition was not successful at budget deficit reduction, and the issue was passed on to the next parliamentary period.

Although the Coalition was successful at improving employment numbers, the lack of real-term increase in household incomes remained the primary reason for the low economic growth (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, the taxation and benefits changes did not contribute to deficit reduction, as the raised revenue was spent on increasing the personal income tax allowance (Agostini et al., 2015). A relevant question to ask then is whether the primary aim in fixing the British economy should have been economic growth instead of deficit reduction. Nonetheless, Cameron's promise remained to prioritise deficit reduction regardless of the limited economic growth and subsequent squeezed living standards. Although the stringent measures were not successful at reducing the budget deficit, it is still important to discuss the actual distribution of austerity cuts among the population.

3.1.2 Unequal Distribution

The unequal distribution of spending cuts became evident through the long-lasting fall in real-term earnings, the tax-benefit system and the income gap between older and younger generations. Wages and incomes recovered more slowly than expected after a recession, as there was no growth in real wages after 2009 (R. Crawford & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, median incomes did not increase and remained at levels seen prior to the financial crisis (R. Crawford & Johnson, 2015). The groups most affected were young people and those with minimum incomes. Despite the higher level of qualifications, the younger generation experienced a fall in earnings, where people with the lowest incomes faced the most extensive cuts. As a result, the median incomes after housing costs fell by nearly 18 per cent for both young people and those at the bottom of the income ladder (Hills et al., 2015).

In addition, the unequal distribution widened the gap between the old and younger generation. Pensioners experienced a continued increase in revenues compared to people in the workforce who underwent an average fall of 11 per cent in real incomes (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). Additionally, low-income households were more affected by inflation due to rapidly increasing food and energy prices (Chandler & Johnson, 2015). In consequence, more working families required state support due to the modest salary and lack of full-time employment (Agostini et al., 2015). In sum, the austerity cuts have been unequally distributed, as low-income families have lost out the most in terms of income.

Furthermore, the taxation benefits were also distributed unequally. People in the bottom half of the income ladder lost out on taxation changes, whereas the top half gained revenue. In total, the increased income tax allowances did not compensate for the cuts to tax credits and benefits for people with low incomes, primarily single parents, large families with young children and children in general (Hills, 2015). The Coalition did not fulfil all the changes to the tax-benefit policies within their period in office. However, the government set

out a plan for further changes, where the bottom half of the income ladder would continue to lose out (Agostini et al., 2015). On a positive note, the new Universal Credits system would ensure that the bottom tenth would break even (Agostini et al., 2015). However, the success of the Universal Credits system is dependent on the people who have previously received benefits to re-register in the new system. In sum, the austerity cuts have been distributed unequally, as low-income families have lost out most in terms of income and taxation benefits. Despite higher qualifications, deprived families have lost out in comparison to older generations. Therefore, the next section will discuss how the unequal distribution of austerity cuts has influenced inequality in England.

3.1.3 Increased Poverty

The primary focus of the section is the increased rate of poverty among low-income families and children in England. A report from 2020 found that 14.4 million people in Britain were currently living in poverty (Social Metrics Commission, 2020). The primary reason for the raised poverty numbers were the substantial cuts to welfare spending, as presented in Chapter 2. A total of 4.5 million people in Britain were living in deep and persistent poverty, meaning that they have been living more than 50 per cent below the poverty line for two of the three last years (Social Metrics Commission, 2020). The people most disposed to ending up in deep poverty were either working part-time or had lower qualifications. After the austerity cuts were implemented, a significant change was that employment no longer guaranteed an escape from ending up in poverty. Of the children living in poverty, more than half had one parent in employment, and one in six children had both parents working (Butler, 2019). The increase in hardship for low-income families has been a result of the raised rate of child poverty, where one-third of all children in the UK live under the poverty line.

A consequence of the increased child poverty can be found by studying school attainment levels. On average, children from deprived backgrounds have lower performance

in the school system than their more affluent peers (Rolph, 2017). The raised measure of educational inequality contradicts the goal of the Coalition to improve social mobility numbers. Due to the austerity cuts, parents have been unable to afford material for school, meals and after-school activities for their children (Smith, 2014). Additionally, the new curriculum does not focus on social and emotional learning, and children are therefore dependent on after-school activities to practice such skills (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Admittedly, the activities often require an attendance fee, which families from deprived backgrounds are less able to afford. As family background and household income influence children's social mobility prospects, austerity politics have significantly impacted disadvantaged children, as low-income families were hit hardest by cost-saving measures.

In summary, the section confirms that austerity politics did not have the desired effects. Although the high government spending was reduced, the new policies did not narrow the budget deficit or provide the expected economic growth. Additionally, the cuts affected low-income families the most, as there was no increase in real-term incomes in the period, and the taxation changes were not beneficial. In consequence, more working families ended up in poverty, with raised rates of child poverty. Subsequently, the children growing up in financially constrained families did not have the same access to after school activities as wealthier peers. As family income and background influences the chance of social mobility, there is reason to argue that austerity politics have increased inequality in England, which will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2 Analysis of Education Austerity Measures

An analysis of the education austerity measures is required to argue the thesis that austerity politics implemented by the Coalition between 2010 and 2015 affected education and further influenced the growing inequality in England. The analysis is guided by the first

research question that examines how austerity measures have affected the education system, both in general and more specifically for disadvantaged children. The discussion is divided into the topics of school expenditure, early education, primary and secondary education, and higher education. Prior to examining how education austerity measures have affected different levels of education, the changes made to school spending will be addressed. The primary research method applied is document analysis of relevant reports and research material regarding education austerity measures.

3.2.1 School expenditure

After the austerity measures were implemented between 2010 and 2015, the main economic challenge for schools was the lack of funding for increasing pupil numbers and the shortage of capital outlay. Additionally, the restraint cuts reduced funding for qualified teachers and put pressure on the future cost of staff (Sibieta, 2015b). As there was no real-term rise in school spending, a significant number of secondary schools experienced financial difficulties. In contrast, early education and the new pupil premium was allocated extra funding (Sibieta, 2015b). Nonetheless, the success of the pupil premium has been questioned, as several schools were forced to redistribute some of the funds to cover the loss of government subsidy. In sum, austerity measures affected the economic aspect of education, although there were no cuts to direct state funding. Firstly, the economic challenges of the cuts will be discussed, followed by a review of the areas that experienced raised funding.

3.2.1.1 Reduced funding

The first economic challenge for schools was the rapid escalation in pupil numbers. Between 2010 and 2014, the pupil numbers for primary schools increased by eight per cent, and secondary schools decreased by four per cent (Sibieta, 2015b). However, between 2016 and 2020, the pupil number was expected to rise for both primary (five per cent) and secondary schools (ten per cent) (Sibieta, 2015b). Although the schools reported an expansion

in the number of pupils, there was no additional funding allocated for extra staff. Nonetheless, the local councils were legally responsible for finding a place for every child. Therefore, a fifth of all primary schools had either reached or were over capacity by 2012 (Toynbee & Walker, 2015). As a result, class sizes increased for both primary and secondary schools. In primary schools, one in eight pupils were taught in classes that exceeded the statutory maximum of 30 children (Adams, 2014). In 2019, the ratio had increased to one in five pupils (McCárthaigh, 2019). As the schools were unable to pay for the additional trained staff, the number of unqualified teachers expanded and subsequently reduced teaching quality (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). The further consequences on disadvantaged pupils will be discussed in the section detailing the effects of education austerity measures for primary and secondary education.

Despite the rising pupil numbers and restricted funding, the government had no clear plan to address the divergence. In order to keep the same level of per-pupil funding and employee costs in the next Parliamentary period, school spending would need to be expanded by 20 per cent (Sibieta, 2015b). However, the Conservative Party only committed to increasing school expenditure in line with pupil numbers between 2015 and 2020 and did not promise a rise in outlay based on the expected cost pressures (Sibieta, 2015b). Thereby, the trend of reducing per-pupil school spending in real terms was likely to continue.

Education austerity measures also influenced capital outlay. The Coalition primarily invested in independent schools, with less money allocated to maintaining the established state educational institutions. A report from the Committee of Public Accounts (2017) on school funding further highlighted the cuts in real-term funding per pupil and subsequent cost pressures, where the Committee warns that there is a potential risk that the cuts may lead to a decline in school standards, as schools are already narrowing their curriculum, reducing maintenance and not updating essential IT equipment. Furthermore, the Committee worries

that the DfE intends to monitor the impact of the funding changes merely from government school inspections, Key Stage tests and exam results, as these indicators involve a time lag (Committee of Public Accounts, 2017). Instead, the Committee suggests that the real-time impact on education is more accurately monitored by analysing indicators such as curriculum breadth, class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios (Committee of Public Accounts, 2017).

A significant consequence of the reduced expenditure is the high number of secondary schools reporting financial difficulty. Under the Coalition, the proportion of state secondary schools spending more than their available income rose from 34 per cent to 60 per cent (National Audit Office, 2016). Secondary academies also suffered, where the number of academies exceeding their income had changed from 39 per cent to 61 per cent (National Audit Office, 2016). The background for the financial difficulties has been the fixed annual per-pupil funding and the increased number of established academies. Consequently, the number of secondary schools unable to meet financial commitments drastically rose after 2015 and by 2017, one third were unable to pay expenses (The Sutton Trust, 2017).

Due to the inadequate finances, secondary schools have introduced measures to cut back on their outlays. Several secondary schools have closed earlier on some days, reduced student options and cut critical services for the vulnerable pupils, such as student support workers (Coughlan, 2019). Additionally, Labour's investment in vocational studies was also abolished as part of the spending cuts (Coughlan, 2019). Researchers have also argued that the child's welfare has been lost within the system of academies, as these secondary schools are exempted from the nutrition standards that are compulsory for state schools (Adamson et al., 2013). Secondary schools have also reported a substantial rise in expenses and resources regarding non-educational issues, such as career guidance, that has previously been the responsibility of local authorities.

Furthermore, secondary schools are expected to face further financial challenges. Due to a rise in future salaries, government changes in employment conditions, and support to businesses providing apprenticeships, the schools' total outlay will increase annually (National Audit Office, 2016). Nonetheless, the DfE anticipates that mainstream schools will be able to make a saving of approximately £3 million by 2019-20 (National Audit Office, 2016). However, a strategy for cutbacks has not been clearly communicated. Therefore, there is no guarantee that educational outcomes will be achieved, as some schools have already reduced expenses by replacing experienced teachers with less qualified staff.

3.2.1.2 Increased funding

Although the austerity measures introduced economic challenges, early education experienced an increase in funding. The introduction of two new reforms raised the expenditure on free nursery care by nearly 40 per cent (Sibieta, 2015a). Therefore, the number of free hours of nursery care for 3- and 4-year-olds expanded to 15 hours in 2010, with the same hours implemented for disadvantaged 2-year-olds from 2013 (Sibieta, 2015a). Other expenses were linked to the tax-benefit system, including early education and childcare subsidies. However, in total, the outlay per child on early education fell by a quarter between 2010 and 2013, as substantial cuts were made to other areas of early education (Obolenskaya & Stewart, 2015). For instance, local government funding that supported early intervention services, such as Sure Start children's centres, fell by nearly 30 per cent (Sibieta, 2015a).

Another area of education expenditure that increased was funding for the new pupil premium that targeted disadvantaged pupils, where the schools received additional funding to support the children academically. However, the schools lacked clear guidelines on how the extra money should be invested. In consequence, a number of the schools reported spending the additional funding on general activities for all students (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). Due to the austerity cuts, nearly one-third of headmasters stated that resources from the pupil

premium were used to cover daily administration costs (The Sutton Trust, 2017). As more precise guidelines were later introduced, more schools allocated the extra funding to employ additional staff and teaching assistants and thereby providing smaller classes and the opportunity for one-to-one tuition (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). The new guidelines were supported by research that recommended one-to-one catch-up tutoring to improve learning outcomes.

One example of research was presented by Nicoletti & Rabe (2014) and introduced additional suggestions on how schools could invest the pupil premium to best support disadvantaged pupils. The authors argue that early investment is vital to bridge the attainment gap, as spending in secondary school is most productive for those pupils who have performed well in primary school (Nicoletti & Rabe, 2014). In order to best help the students with special needs, investing in teachers is regarded of the highest importance, to provide one-to-one tuition. Additionally, the authors argue that investing in teaching assistants improves the weaker students' outcome, children on FSM and those learning English as a second language (Nicoletti & Rabe, 2014). The suggested methods are recommended to narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more privileged peers.

In sum, the section confirms that education austerity measures have put a strain on school expenditure. The growth in pupil numbers has exerted pressure on class sizes and staff cost for schools, with no additional government funding. A significant concern is that the lack of capital funding will ultimately result in a decline in school standards. Also, a considerable number of secondary schools have reported financial difficulties, where several have been forced to reduce teaching staff and educational activities for the pupils. However, funding for early education, the new pupil premium and academies have all been increased. Nonetheless, a substantial number of academies are in financial difficulties, and many schools have used the pupil premium to make up for lost revenue. Therefore, the education austerity measures

have put a strain on many schools in terms of funding, teaching staff and the rising number of pupils.

3.2.2 Early Education

Early education was also affected by the education austerity measures. In order to answer the thesis of how austerity politics affected different levels of English education, a closer study of early education measures is required. Primarily, the focus of the analysis will be on how the spending cuts have influenced disadvantaged children in the early education system, also supporting the later discussion of inequality in England. The previous section highlighted the importance of early investment in educational success for disadvantaged pupils. Therefore, it is relevant to open the study of early education and austerity politics with an analysis of the measures targeted at reducing educational inequalities.

A report on educational inequality states that access to high-quality early education for all children is vital in reducing socio-economic inequalities present when children enter school (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018). In other words, early education is essential in reducing the attainment gap between children with hardship backgrounds and their wealthier peers. Additionally, children who attend early education are more likely to complete other education levels and attain a university degree (Reynolds et al., 2007). Therefore, the previous Labour administrations prioritised early education support to reduce the attainment gap between children from low-income backgrounds and their more affluent peers. In contrast, the Coalition mentioned little of early education in their shared measures. Nevertheless, the government was met with pressure from the Child Poverty Act, passed in March 2010, and research promoting the importance of early intervention to increase social mobility (Child Poverty Act, 2010; Obolenskaya & Stewart, 2015). As a critical goal for the Coalition was to improve social mobility, new strategies for reducing child poverty in England were introduced based on the requirements from the Child Poverty Act (2010).

As early education was significant in reducing educational inequality, all children in England were entitled to free hours of state-funded pre-school from the term after turning age three (Campbell et al., 2018). The new measures were introduced to reduce the attainment gap between children from deprived backgrounds and those of more affluence. Although the offer was universal, there was a stark disparity among the families that accessed the funded hours. Nearly a third of children from deprived backgrounds were not in pre-school from the beginning of their entitlement, compared to a fifth of children from average families (Campbell et al., 2018). Regrettably, the children that would benefit the most from the universal provision attended preschool for the shortest period. The trend coincides with other statistics on education inequality, where children from low-income households were less likely to attend early education (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018). Although the government implemented free universal early education to improve educational inequality, the figures demonstrate that the change is not yet successful, as fewer children from deprived families attend preschools. Thereby, access to universal early education remains a source of educational inequality.

Although the state subsidised free early education, the hours were not accessed equally among families. Consequently, children in greatest need of a head start were less likely to access the funded hours, whereas children from a more privileged background were provided with an additional benefit in the education system. Additionally, the extension of free entitlement to 30 hours only applied to children of working parents, where disadvantaged children are less represented (Campbell et al., 2018). Therefore, the degree of universality for pre-schooling is questionable, as children who claim free school are far less likely to have accessed an early place. However, areas with more Sure-Start provision have higher attendance in pre-schools for all families and additionally a smaller gap between income

groups (Campbell et al., 2018). Regrettably, funding for Sure-Start provisions was considerably reduced by the Coalition.

Modifications to the early education measures are required to prevent an increase in educational inequality, as the children attending preschool acquire additional benefits in the school system. Also, researchers have been concerned about the funding trend for early education. During the Coalition period, child centres have held up better than expected, despite significant spending cuts. Nonetheless, the services are stretched, and the possibility of further cuts is alarming regarding the importance of early intervention for children in deprived families (Obolenskaya & Stewart, 2015). As the effect of restraint measures are not likely to be evident until a later stage, the chance of reducing the gaps is then more challenging. In addition to structural changes, another approach to improve the early education system would be to further develop the staff's qualifications and training.

In summary, the section endorses new austerity measures that have affected early education by providing additional funding to secure free early education for all children from the age of three. The background for the increased funding was based on evidence that early intervention is vital in reducing educational inequality. However, the number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who attended preschool was low compared to wealthier families. The areas with the highest attendance numbers for disadvantaged children in early education are those where Sure-Start provisions have been higher. Regrettably, funding for Sure-Start has been significantly cut since the austerity cuts were implemented. An unintended consequence may be that children from wealthier backgrounds are given a hidden benefit, as early education is regarded as essential for future success in the education system. However, the full effect of the new policies for early education will only be visible after several years. Disadvantaged children are not receiving the full benefit of the new measures, especially since funding for local authority services supporting deprived families has been severely cut.

3.2.3 Primary and Secondary Education

The thesis argues that austerity measures implemented under the Coalition impacted the education system and further influenced inequality in England. Therefore, the next section will address the first research question of how education austerity measures affected primary and secondary education, both in general and, more specifically, disadvantaged children. Education cost-saving measures primarily affected all education levels by implementing a more academic approach to the curriculum and forms of assessment in the school system. Additionally, the reduced funding for local government services targeted at deprived children widened the areas of responsibility for schools. In consequence, the performance level of pupils from deprived backgrounds in the education system was lower, which further influenced the children's prospects. The previous section discussed the attainment gap in early education and provided evidence that children attending preschool are more likely to succeed in the education system. Therefore, it is natural to open with a closer study of attainment levels in primary and secondary schools.

3.2.3.1 Educational inequality

In primary and secondary education, the overall improvement in the level of attainment among pupils increased. However, the attainment gap between children receiving free school meals and their wealthier peers has remained significantly broad (*Education in England, 2017*). Additionally, the attainment gap expanded with age, as children aged five had a 17 per cent attainment gap, which rose to 29 per cent at age sixteen (*Education in England, 2017*). Also, there was no evidence of reduced educational attainment at the GCSE level, as the difference in attainment remained close to 29 per cent throughout the Coalition period. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is an academic qualification received after secondary education, primarily achieved at age sixteen. As the disparity

developed through the education system, there is reason to question the effect of the measures implemented by the Coalition and previous governments.

A standard method of measuring educational inequality is by conducting tests in reading and vocabulary. Disadvantaged children scored on average poorer on both tests, where a pattern was detected by studying the parental background. In grade 4, children whose parents had low-status occupations scored notably lower on the reading tests, whereas children with at least one parent with higher education performed significantly better than children of non-professional parents (OECD, 2016). Similar evidence was found by studying attainment levels in secondary school, as the parents' occupational background could be related to the performance of the pupils (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018). However, children of parents with poor vocabulary had a negative impact on the child's educational performance, regardless of the family's socio-economic background (Fitzsimons et al., 2017). Therefore, children from deprived backgrounds are dependent on their parents to have a richer vocabulary to bridge the social gap. Nevertheless, children of parents with higher qualifications and that are employed in professional positions have, on average, a richer vocabulary (Fitzsimons et al., 2017). In sum, an enhanced vocabulary can increase educational success for disadvantaged children.

3.2.3.2 Curriculum and assessment

To narrow the attainment gap, the Coalition revised the curriculum and implemented new forms of assessment. Additionally, the changed national curriculum and forms of assessment were motivated by a belief that the taught standards were too low. To raise the educational standard, Gove disregarded international consensus on curriculums that favoured learning and instead implemented a teach and test system in primary schools (Barnard, 2017). Additionally, the content of the subjects became more academic, with an emphasis on facts, spelling, grammar and maths (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). Consequently, the GCSEs became

more challenging for the students, and the final form of assessment was changed to a final examination at the end of the year (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). As the grades serve as a final qualification from the school system, the results both influence and possibly limit the chances of further education, training, and future job prospects.

The academic shift in focus for the curriculum and assessment was criticised for weakening the prospects for children from deprived backgrounds. The main concern was for children who were reliant on relating abstract ideas to their own lives and experiences, and due to the changes, performed lower in the school system (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). In consequence, the pupils did not acquire the required skills necessary to succeed in the job market. As the new curriculum and exams valued more theoretical than practical skills, there were limited resources invested in helping children with special needs and other vulnerable children in the school system (National Audit Office, 2015). Also, disadvantaged children had relied more on vocational subjects to acquire the expected levels of GCSE (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). The Coalition's decision to remove the option to take vocational subjects negatively impacted the already challenged pupils.

In addition to the modified curriculum and assessment, local government cuts affected disadvantaged children in the education system. The spending cuts resulted in an inferior offer of essential support services for children at the risk of falling out of the education system, such as career advisors, exclusion units and assistance for children with special needs (Toynbee & Walker, 2015). As discussed previously in the chapter, a significant amount of local authority funding was instead allocated to the implementation of new academies. Initially, the academies were established by Labour to improve schools in more impoverished areas. However, later research has found that the academies did not lift attainment levels for disadvantaged children (Barker & Hoskins, 2017)

The main consequences of the new curriculum and reduced funding for vocational education and local authority services are found by studying pupil's GCSE results and geography. The attainment gap between children on FSM and their more affluent peers did not improve in the aftermath of the newly implemented curriculum and GCSE arrangement. Children from a deprived background and with low attainment performed poorest in the school system (Lupton & Thomson, 2015). Furthermore, two-thirds of children on FSM did not acquire good GCSE results (Barnard, 2017). However, the chance of success in the school system is also linked to geographical location. For children from deprived backgrounds, the region they grow up in will influence their performance in the school system (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Part of the reason is the lack of available economic opportunities in some regions, which have difficulty recruiting and retaining good quality teachers (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Due to the lack of economic prospects, aspirations and morale are generally lower in deprived areas.

3.2.3.3 Pupil premium

As discussed above, education austerity measures have negatively affected disadvantaged pupils. However, the performance of initially high attaining pupils from deprived backgrounds in the English school system has also been affected. Crawford et al. (2015) studied cognitive achievement between initially high performing children from poorer backgrounds and low performing children from wealthier backgrounds during secondary school. The results demonstrated a convergence of cognitive achievement between the two groups, as the pupils of modest performance and greater wealth move towards the initially high attaining poor children (C. Crawford et al., 2015). Additionally, the initially high performing pupils from low-income backgrounds perform considerably poorer than their initially high attaining peers from wealthier backgrounds at GCSE level (C. Crawford et al., 2015). The results could be a consequence of the pupils from deprived backgrounds attending

schools with low-performance levels. Additional factors affecting attainment could be educational values, aspirations and expectations, both from the students themselves and their parents. For initially high achieving poor children, the government should ensure that the pupils have access to good quality secondary schools.

As previously discussed in the paper, the overall real-term school funding was reduced, whereas the funding from the pupil premium increased for schools with a higher intake of disadvantaged pupils. Nonetheless, there was no strategy for how schools were to improve the attainment of children from deprived backgrounds. The pupil premium targeted disadvantaged pupils in the educational system. Although the pupils' attainment level remained unchanged, the disparity widened by the time the students reached sixteen. Part of the reason may be that schools had the freedom to choose which pupils required resources. However, there is a concern that the students in need of extra support are not receiving the expected benefits from the pupil premium (National Audit Office, 2015). Additionally, schools with lower intakes of disadvantaged pupils reported spending money from the pupil premium for activities aimed at all students, and not those of a deprived background (National Audit Office, 2015). However, new guidelines led to the more targeted use of the money, as more schools invested in additional staff to secure more one-to-one teaching. Although it is too early to evaluate the full effect of the pupil premium, there is a considerable concern for secondary schools, as the pupil premium has not narrowed the attainment gap as expected.

Disadvantaged pupils of both low and high attainment were negatively affected by the implemented education austerity measures, as a significant attainment gap remained and influenced their prospects. Therefore, the persisting attainment gap made English schools question the effectiveness of the pupil premium. The initially high achieving children from low-income backgrounds performed poorer later in the school system. A suggestion put forward was that the pupil premium should be targeted at high performing poor children of

disadvantaged background to help them achieve their potential and ensuring that attending university is still an attainable goal (C. Crawford et al., 2015). On the other hand, children from more privileged backgrounds and with low attainment were more protected from downward social mobility (McKnight, 2015). The differences may be attributed to factors such as the parent's higher education, the children's higher performance scores in maths by the age of 10, enrolment in private or grammar secondary schools, and reaching university (McKnight, 2015). Thereby, the withstanding educational inequality affects the future prospects of the children and furthermore influences inequality in England.

3.2.3.4 Pupil-teacher relationship

Another focus for the funds allocated to schools should be further investment in the professional development of teachers. Positive pupil-teacher relations are regarded as vital in reducing inequality in the classroom, especially for disadvantaged children. Pupils from deprived backgrounds report having positive relationships with their teachers (Barnard, 2017). Therefore, well-qualified teachers are essential for educational equality, as good teaching is regarded as significant in the academic success of low-income pupils (Barnard, 2017). Additionally, the increased number of academies did not appear to benefit disadvantaged pupils, as the performance of children from deprived backgrounds did not improve with a lack of evidence of prospects being transformed (Barker & Hoskins, 2017). Although the academies were given more freedom in terms of curriculum and exams, the lack of educational success for children in hardship questions the initial motive to improve schools in impoverished areas.

3.2.3.5 School accountability systems

As a number of the implemented education austerity measures were unsuccessful at reducing educational inequality, it is vitally important that the method of accountability portrays an accurate evaluation of school performance. In 2016, a new secondary school

accountability system was introduced for all mainstream state-funded schools in England. The previous Attainment 8 gave the individual pupils a score based on eight subjects at the end of secondary school (Leckie & Goldstein, 2019). Furthermore, the new Progress 8 measured the pupils' development from the end of primary school to the GCSE examination at the end of secondary school and thereafter compared the pupil's attainment to a national average (Leckie & Goldstein, 2019). However, Progress 8 does not take student background into account. The purpose of the change was to hold the schools accountable for the GCSE results via the national school performance tables, although the new system measuring differences in GCSE results indicate more the type of pupils taught at each school and not the effectiveness of the education given by the schools (Leckie & Goldstein, 2019). The authors reveal that if values are adjusted for pupil background, the performance of the English schools changes dramatically (Leckie & Goldstein, 2019). In other words, the accountability system is likely to reward or punish the wrong schools if the pupil background is left out.

Therefore, the authors present an adjusted Progress 8, including seven further measures to account for the pupil performance at the end of secondary school. Compared to the original Progress 8, the schools' ranking changes considerably after the adjustments, where fewer schools are ranked as "underperforming" (Leckie & Goldstein, 2019). Progress 8 is criticised for not explaining the data and simplifying the method of research. Consequently, the image portrayed is that schools primarily account for the varying results across schools and regions, whereas if the Adjusted Progress 8 is applied, more responsibility is moved to the government and society in the pupil measures (Leckie & Goldstein, 2019). In sum, the article claims that Progress 8 and other school accountability processes based on tests risk classifying a school as underperforming without a clear explanation of the numbers and the ranking.

In summary, education austerity measures have affected both primary and secondary education. By implementing a new curriculum and form of assessment, the teaching content

was formed from a more academic perspective. The school system valued theoretical skills, making it difficult for children with a more practical oriented mind. Also, vocational subjects were no longer an option when taking the GCSEs, and less funding was allocated to apprenticeships. Therefore, the disadvantaged pupils were more affected by the new measures, as the vocational subjects had been significant in acquiring the GCSEs. Furthermore, reduced state funding resulted in cutbacks to services for children at risk of falling out of the school system.

However, the pupil premium was introduced to target disadvantaged pupils in the school system. Nonetheless, the pupil premium was not effective in reducing the attainment gap between children of a deprived background and their wealthier peers. More detailed guidelines for affordable funds could be a means to improve the performance of pupils from a background of hardship. Also, targeted investment in initially high achieving pupils could help improve the social mobility rate, as this would increase their chances of attending higher education. Another approach to reducing the attainment gap is to invest more money in teacher education and training, as student-teacher relations are crucial for the educational success of disadvantaged pupils. In order to attract aspiring teachers, there could also be a need to improve teacher salary. Furthermore, an adjustment to Progress 8 would provide more accurate data on both the progress of the pupil and the school's performance. In consequence, the information should hold the government accountable for allocating sufficient resources to the underachieving areas.

3.2.4 Higher Education

The previous analysis of the effects of austerity politics on early education and primary and secondary education has shown that the new policies and spending cuts have negatively impacted disadvantaged children. The findings have also supported the thesis that austerity measures have affected the education system and further influenced inequality in

England. The final section of the analysis of education cost-saving measures addresses the first research question of how austerity cuts have influenced higher education, both in general and, more specifically, for students from a disadvantaged background. The examination of higher education primarily focuses on universities and colleges. However, adult education and vocational studies are also reviewed.

As previously discussed, Michael Gove introduced several controversial approaches to education during his time as Education Secretary. To achieve educational success in the English school system, Gove's aim was that a majority of children would accomplish a university degree. Consequently, there was limited investment in career guidance for vulnerable children, vocational studies and adult education (Lupton et al., 2015). Additionally, people classified as not in employment, education or training (NEET) were twice as likely to be from a deprived background (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Subsequently, the grants for adult learning were changed to loan arrangements, resulting in a substantial decline in the attendance and completion numbers. Also, the Education Maintenance Allowance for vocational students from disadvantaged backgrounds were significantly reduced, influencing the numbers of students applying (Lupton et al., 2015). Additionally, the Coalition did little to investigate what the employers expected from schools and valued in their employees (Roche et al., 2018).

In terms of higher education, more students from challenged backgrounds applied to university, although pupils on free school meals were still half as likely to attend university (Lupton et al., 2015). Part of the reason for the uneven numbers of students entering university was the raised tuition fees, as discussed in Chapter 2. The Coalition increased tuition fees to replace the cuts in government funding to higher education. In consequence, the students without financial support from home had to take up student loans to complete a university degree. The raised tuition fees introduced the debate of whether the English

education system favours more affluent children, as access to higher education is primarily dependent on parental support. As children from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to receive financial assistance from their parents, they are also more likely to attend university (Piketty, 2020). In other words, family background is a vital factor in limiting access to higher education, which will be further examined in Chapter 4.

Based on statistics, the disadvantaged students are expected to have lower future earnings and are subsequently more at risk of being unable to repay their future debt. As many as three-quarters of students are likely to never repay their student debts in total (Belfield et al., 2017). Additionally, the interest rate on student loans is high and results in the total debt increasing significantly both during the study period and after their graduation (Belfield et al., 2017). Also, the replacement of maintenance grants by loans has resulted in an additional burden for disadvantaged students. In total, the student debt will be higher for poorer students, which contradicts the goal of the Coalition to improve social mobility rates in England.

As stated above, students from a low-income background with a university degree remain less likely to acquire a well-paid job and are, therefore, less likely to repay their student loan. The decision to further raise the student loan for deprived students to provide additional financial support during the study period is likely to have a considerable impact on their future financial prospects. The paradox remains, as people of disadvantaged backgrounds are encouraged to perform well in the education system, as the high attainment will help them acquire a university degree. However, the increased tuition fees and subsequent student loans may negatively impact students from challenged backgrounds that are not apparent at this time. The changes in the tuition fees and student loan arrangement were recently introduced, and the full consequences will not be evident until a later date.

In summary, Chapter 3 has analysed the consequences of the implemented education austerity politics on the different levels of education. The main findings support the thesis that

austerity politics introduced between 2010 and 2015 affected the English education system and influenced the increased inequality in England. Although education expenditure was intended to be protected from severe cuts, funding changes and newly invoked measures negatively affected the education system, especially for children from a deprived background. Additionally, the initial critique of the general austerity measures demonstrated that the spending cuts were not equally distributed across the population and affected low-income families the most. In sum, the analysis chapter highlighted the unequal distribution of austerity cuts and the consequences for the education system, which influenced inequality in England.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Education and Inequality

Chapter 3 analysed the effects of the unequal distribution of austerity cuts and the subsequent effect of restraining measures on the English education system. The main findings demonstrated that low-income families were hardest hit by the spending cuts, which subsequently increased the number of children living in poverty. Furthermore, children from deprived backgrounds were negatively affected by education austerity measures. Chapter 4 further examines the link between the distribution of austerity cuts and the English education system. Primarily, Chapter 4 focuses on the second research question examining how the distribution of austerity cuts has influenced inequality in England. The section discusses how cost-saving measures have made it more difficult for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve qualifications similar to their wealthier peers. Additionally, the chapter examines how the cuts have influenced social mobility in England.

An important goal for the coalition government was to improve social mobility. A measure introduced was to change the curriculum and form of assessment to further prepare children to take a university degree. However, the findings in Chapter 3 demonstrated that austerity politics did not improve educational inequality, and the unequal distribution of the spending cuts led to increased inequality in England. Thereby, the social mobility rate did not improve between 2010 and 2015 (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Nonetheless, the research presented in Chapter 3 demonstrated a strong correlation between educational accomplishment and family background. Therefore, schools alone cannot improve future prospects for disadvantaged children, as family income and geography significantly influence children's chances of success in both the English education system and further determines their future opportunities. Consequently, Chapter 4 will examine how austerity politics influenced educational inequality, social mobility and regional differences.

The main reasons the social mobility numbers remained at a minimum during the Coalition were the increasing rate of child poverty, the ingrained educational inequalities, and low-income levels (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Three central issues require to be addressed in order to improve the social mobility rate in England. Firstly, the high level of children living in poverty has to be reduced, requiring a thorough evaluation of the spending cuts to social welfare during the Coalition period. Secondly, schools would need further support to reduce educational inequality, as the Coalition were not successful at narrowing the attainment gap between children on Free School Meals (FSM) and their wealthier peers. Finally, the persistently low pay level led to decreased living standards, especially for low-income families. Therefore, a real increase in wages is required to improve social mobility.

4.1 Educational Inequality

To further discuss how austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015 affected the English education system and subsequently influenced inequality in England, a closer investigation of educational inequality is required. Thereby, the section combines both research questions to examine further how the consequences of education austerity measures for disadvantaged children influenced inequality in England. To reduce educational inequality, Michael Gove introduced a more academic-focused curriculum and new forms of assessment. The goal was to advance the theoretical skills of the children to provide an opportunity for hardworking pupils to climb the social ladder. However, there was minimum support for children with a more practical skillset, as vocational subjects were omitted as an option when taking the GCSEs, and the overall investment in vocational studies was reduced. Regardless of the academic focus, the pupil premium was introduced to support disadvantaged children in the school system. However, the analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrated that the performance of underprivileged children in the English school system did not improve, and the attainment gap remained stubbornly wide. Consequently, two-thirds

of children on free school meals received poor results in their GCSEs, which subsequently influenced the pupil's chances of further educational training, apprenticeships and acquiring work with a reliable income.

Additionally, the increased tuition fees for higher education influenced university access, as socio-economic background remained a strong predictor of higher education attendance. Although there was a slight rise in students from challenged backgrounds accessing higher education, the raised tuition fees challenged their participation. The funding arrangement for children from disadvantaged backgrounds was changed from grant-based to additional loans. Thereby, students from deprived backgrounds took up a higher level of loans than the average student. Furthermore, the raised tuition fees have resulted in more pupils dismissing a university degree as a realistic option due to the associated level of debt (Hoskins, 2017). Therefore, more pupils are dependent on family and community networks to secure future employment (Hoskins, 2017). The government's increased tuition fees should be reviewed and considered reduced, as students are discouraged by the prospects of acquiring high student debt and the risk of being unable to repay the loan due to an unstable job market.

A consequence of the persistent attainment gap, the new curriculum, and the raised tuition fees was that more disadvantaged children were leaving school without qualifications. Since 2005, the number of pupils unable to achieve basic qualifications has grown and continued to increase. The rising rate correlates with the escalated number of children on FSM failing to achieve five GCSEs (grade A*-C) or equivalent technical qualification, which surged from 28 per cent in 2005 to 37 per cent in 2015 (Children's Commissioner, 2019). Furthermore, children on FSM are twice as likely as their wealthier peers to leave school without the basic qualifications (Children's Commissioner, 2019). As the attainment gap between FSM children and their more affluent peers has not narrowed, there is reason to

question the measures implemented to reduce educational inequality and improve social mobility by the Coalition.

A reason for the substantial rise in FSM children not achieving the basic qualifications by the age of 19 may be due to the lack of investment in vocational studies and the removal of vocational subjects as an option when taking the GCSEs. Furthermore, teenagers without basic qualifications are then limited in future opportunities, including apprenticeships, technical courses and access to a considerable number of workplaces (Children's Commissioner, 2019). Therefore, one explanation for the fall in attainment from the introduced education measures could be removing the option for schools to offer students courses with non-GCSE qualifications. For more practical pupils, the courses were important in achieving essential attainment, which secured them the opportunities for apprenticeships and further technical qualifications. As the Coalition removed these courses, the fall in attainment from 2015 may be due to the stronger focus on academic qualifications.

As discussed above, the qualification level is significant for further success in both the education system and future employment. Additionally, the level of qualification is linked to the risk of ending up in poverty. People with higher qualifications are more likely to be employed and commanding higher salaries, in contrast to those with no or minimum skills, which are more likely to be in poverty (Department For Work And Pensions, 2020). More than one in three of the working-age population with no qualifications is in poverty, compared to one in ten for those with some level of qualification (Department For Work And Pensions, 2020). The findings underline the importance of success in the education system in order to reduce the risk of living below the poverty line. Additionally, children of low-income families have a lower level of attainment than their wealthier peers, which indirectly places them at a higher risk of ending up in poverty.

In other words, the social reproduction of socio-economic conditions is present in the English education system and demonstrates that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have more difficulty in achieving the same qualifications as their wealthier peers. Therefore, the implemented education austerity measures were not successful in narrowing educational inequality and have continued to strongly influence inequality in England. Solutions to reduce education inequality were briefly presented in Chapter 3. Firstly, there is a need for a more detailed plan on how the pupil premium funding would improve the performance of low-income children. A suggestion on how to allocate the money is to provide additional resources for initially high performing disadvantaged children to ensure that they achieve their full potential in the English school system and have access to good secondary schools. On the other hand, pupils with more practical skills would benefit from further investment in vocational studies to increase the quality of apprenticeships, where the businesses would be more involved in developing relevant educational programs. Additionally, further investment in teacher training and continuous professional development of teachers would benefit children from deprived backgrounds, as a solid pupil-teacher relationship is critical for academic success.

4.2 Social mobility

Successful social mobility is crucial in improving the opportunities for the children growing up in deprived families. Therefore, the section will discuss the second research question of how the distribution of austerity cuts has influenced inequality in England. As initially presented, education is not solely responsible for the decrease in social mobility numbers. Social mobility is not merely dependent on the student's merit or abilities but more on the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities in society (Hoskins & Barker, 2016). More recent research demonstrates that social inequality is primarily influenced by the

children's family background and the location where they grow up, where social mobility is only an advantage for a few of the disadvantaged children (Milburn, 2012). The research is founded on the capital theory from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977), who argues that more successful families can support and give their children advantages that are beneficial in altering conditions and opportunities. In contrast, the research argues that deprived families are less able to provide the same benefits for their children due to the lack of resources and opportunities.

The argument of parental support could be applied in terms of securing benefits through the educational system. Although higher numbers of students with low-income backgrounds take a university degree, there is still an evident disparity in access to the best educational establishments and jobs in British society (Milburn, 2012). Additionally, the increased tuition fees influence university choice for disadvantaged pupils due to the lack of parental financial support. Bourdieu (1984) explains the disparity in both the education system and the job market through cultural and social capital theory, as wealthier families are likely to apply their available resources to equip their children with the necessary skills and knowledge to attain positions of power and privilege in society. In other words, social mobility is more the result of the ability of the family than the work of the individual.

An additional explanation of the negative social mobility trend links to the adapted job market. Prior to the financial crisis, there was more significant demand for skilled workers. As the younger generation acquired higher qualifications, it was expected that they achieve more than their parents (McKnight, 2015). However, the aftermath of the financial crisis resulted in reduced demand for high skilled workers and a subsequent decline in living standards (McKnight, 2015). Thereby, the chance of advancing from a relatively low skilled job to more highly skilled work became more limited, despite having more qualifications. In sum, the

changed job market has made it more challenging to acquire a secure job with good prospects for advancement and thus climb the social ladder.

Although the reduced demand for highly skilled workers affected the social mobility numbers, family background remained a vital predictor of social advancement. Therefore, researchers investigated the possibility of a “glass floor” between people from an advantaged background and downwards social mobility. Regardless of cognitive ability and the expected low socio-economic position, researchers found that those with a more advantaged family background were less likely to move down the social ladder. McKnight (2015) found that children from families with either a minimum income or low social class performed on average poorer on cognitive tests at age five than children of wealthier backgrounds or higher social class. For children with modest attainment in the cognitive test, the chance of achieving a high earning and leading job was determined by their social background (McKnight, 2015). In contrast, children with high attainment levels at the cognitive test were more likely to secure a high earning and top job. The findings support the argument that people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more challenged in achieving the same qualifications as their wealthier peers, contributing to the increased inequality in England.

However, the additional advantage for children from wealthier backgrounds or higher social class is not fully explained. The findings are similar to those of C. Crawford et al. (2015), which state that initially high attaining children from deprived backgrounds are more likely to fall behind later in the school system. Similarly, McKnight (2015) found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to achieve future success in the labour market. Contrastingly, children with initially low attainment from wealthier backgrounds are more protected from downwards social mobility due to parental support in improving cognitive skills and securing a place at a more successful secondary school (McKnight, 2015). Subsequently, children from advantaged backgrounds are more likely to

achieve a degree qualification. In sum, children from a wealthier background and with parents of a higher social class are more likely to succeed in both the education system and later in the job market.

Also, the research on family background and social mobility is reflected in the opinion of the British people. More than three quarters thought that the gap between social classes was significant, where 44 per cent believed that parental background determined their future place in society (Social Mobility Commission, 2020a). Additionally, 39 per cent of the people interviewed answered that social mobility was deteriorating (Social Mobility Commission, 2020a). However, the British public thought that the best opportunity for progression was through apprenticeships or to acquire a degree from higher education (Social Mobility Commission, 2020a). Unfortunately, the analysis of education austerity measures found that less money was invested in vocational studies and apprenticeships, which has been significant for children from deprived background to acquire basic qualifications. Also, the increased tuition fees challenged the attendance numbers for disadvantaged pupils in higher education and may further influence the rate of social mobility.

The data presented from the Social Mobility Commission (2020a) corresponds with the increased trends in downward social mobility. A degree of downward social mobility is also required for upward social mobility in society, but there is a difference between voluntary and involuntary downward social mobility. Although some may voluntarily move down the social mobility ladder, as many as one in five people in the UK are in low-status jobs than their parents (Social Mobility Commission, 2020c). The group most at risk of moving down the social mobility ladder are women and those with caring responsibilities, ethnic minorities and people with minimum educational qualifications (Social Mobility Commission, 2020c). The majority of the people that become established in a low-status occupation are likely to stay there. Consequently, social mobility numbers are not improving in England.

Although parental background was highlighted as an essential factor in predicting the likelihood of social advancement, education and affluence were introduced as essential in achieving upwards social mobility. The chance of experiencing downward mobility remains lower for those with GCSEs or minimum qualifications and therefore agrees with the previous finding that people with basic qualifications are more likely to end up in poverty.

Additionally, people that experienced downward social mobility reported that they had missed out on educational success and future opportunities due to a lack of timely intervention, a lost connection to the school and poor academic attainment (Social Mobility Commission, 2020c). In consequence, the same people were unable to identify a career that could have fulfilled them (Social Mobility Commission, 2020c). As support for the local career guidance for pupils in secondary school was affected by the cost-saving cuts, the number of students that have missed out on crucial career guidance may have risen further.

The research on social advancement presents evidence of how austerity cuts have affected social mobility numbers in a negative manner. As the cuts were unequally distributed with more low-income families in poverty, inequality in England increased. The reason may be linked to the unequal opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, both in education and employment. In consequence, the rate of social mobility has been negatively affected, where people from deprived backgrounds are more likely to move down the social ladder. The introduction to Chapter 4 presented suggestions to improve social mobility numbers in England, and the solutions for socio-economic inequality are similar.

As improving social advancement proved more complicated than in the discussion regarding educational inequality, there is a set of possible solutions to improve the socio-economic conditions for children growing up in low-income families. The first proposal of a real pay raise is in agreement with the suggestion presented in the introduction. The raised income is significant for those receiving the minimum level of pay, as a considerable number

of them are unable to secure better work (Barnard, 2017). Subsequently, the poverty figures for working families have increased. A second solution to improve the conditions of low-income families is that the government cooperates with businesses to boost productivity in minimum-pay sectors and secure access to job training for those interested in improving their working situation (Barnard, 2017). As a third solution, the universal credit system should allow working people to retain more of their earnings and ensure that the received benefits are adjusted for inflation (Barnard, 2017). The suggested improvements to socio-economic differences could help reduce the inequality in England that has come as a consequence of austerity politics.

Although the majority of the measures introduced by the Coalition between 2010 and 2015 did not reduce inequality in England, the full effect of the introduced austerity politics will first be evident in later decades. One of the critical goals for the government was to improve social mobility. However, the objective was not met due to a lack of policies, and the resulting consequences will occur once the younger generation enters adulthood. As the mobility rate has continued to stagnate, the issue requires urgent attention from the administration with a review of proposed solutions.

4.3 Regional differences

The previous section confirmed that austerity measures have made it more difficult for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve the same qualifications as their wealthier peers, which has led to both a lower rate of social mobility and increased inequality in England. The unequal distribution of spending cuts made it difficult for low-income families to support their children to the same degree as more affluent families. However, children growing up in deprived regions in England are more limited in their opportunities. The Northern region in England has the least positive outlook on opportunities, contributing to the

poor social mobility numbers for the area (Social Mobility Commission, 2020c). The primary reasons for the regional inequality are linked to deindustrialisation, lack of investment in the Northern areas and the significant attainment gap of the region (Roche et al., 2018).

Therefore, the discussion will focus on the lack of opportunities, low levels of attainment, and the subsequent negative social mobility numbers for deprived areas in England.

As stated above, deindustrialisation is the primary reason for the disparity between different regions in England. The major reforms to British industry were implemented during Thatcher's time in office, although the manufacturing businesses had experienced challenging times over an extended period (Barnard, 2017). Therefore, modifications to industry were required to keep up with changes in international markets and the process of globalisation. However, some regions have been unable to rebuild and reactivate economic growth after deindustrialisation. The characteristics of the affected areas are low incomes, lack of skills and few opportunities to acquire secure and long-term employment (Barnard, 2017).

Additionally, the Northern region's economic challenges formed part of the backdrop for the Brexit vote, as regional differences were an important issue of debate. The majority of people in the region voted to leave the European Union (EU), as the area did not feel prioritised by the British government. A closer discussion of Brexit and the possible future challenges for Britain will follow in the next section.

Admittedly, the deindustrialisation of the North has limited the opportunities for the local children and may negatively influence the rate of social mobility for the area. Despite a limited selection of opportunities, education is still regarded as an effective means to move up the social ladder. However, the attainment level of the region is considerably lower than for the rest of the country. On average, children from deprived backgrounds perform one GCSE grade below that attained by their peers in the South (Roche et al., 2018). As the education system is unable to support disadvantaged children, poor performance may influence the

future development of the local children. Subsequently, the region may experience a shortage of skilled workers (Roche et al., 2018). In sum, the consequences of the region's low attainment level influence outcomes for both the individual and society.

Furthermore, the period of deindustrialisation combined with continued low levels of attainment has affected the opportunities and the chance of social mobility for deprived children in the North. The regional inequality is evident from a study of social mobility for a group of pupils born between 1986 and 1988 (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). However, the study was criticised for only including sons in the report, as social mobility affects both genders. Nevertheless, the report found that the area where you grow up influences your future earnings, especially for sons from a disadvantaged background. In some regions, sons from families in hardship could earn on average twice as much as their peers of similar background in another area of the country (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). Additionally, the pay gap between the wealthiest and most deprived sons was two and a half times larger in the areas with the least social mobility compared to the most mobile areas (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b).

The report also highlights the importance of education in determining future opportunities. The data confirms that sons from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve lower attainment than their wealthier peers in the same area (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). However, in areas with high social mobility levels, most of the pay gap is explained by educational performance (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). Contrastingly, for sons in more deprived areas in England with less mobility, close to 33 per cent of the pay gap was unrelated to the educational background (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). In the low-mobility areas, other influences beyond educational attainment are needed to explain the pay gap. In other words, reducing the attainment gap would not influence the degree of mobility in contrasting areas, merely reduce the difference in income.

Therefore, the report suggests that the government looks beyond educational factors when investigating why sons with equivalent qualification have different opportunities when entering the labour market. One explanation for the disparity in opportunities may be due to support from the family, either in the form of financial aid or connections in the job market (Hoskins & Barker, 2016). Another explanation of the differences in acquiring secure and long-term employment may be due to a lack of career guidance for the local labour market in schools or colleges (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). However, the local authority cuts by the Coalition have led to reduced support in investigating suitable employment opportunities. In addition, sons from deprived backgrounds in the least mobile areas are also less likely to seek better opportunities in other areas of the country than their peers in more equal areas (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b).

Both research reports on regional inequality in the North agree that additional support should be given to the worst-hit local authorities to improve the chances of social mobility (Roche et al., 2018; Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). To improve attainment in the struggling regions, all levels of education require more funding. Investment in early education is vital in securing that all children are ready for school at age five and avoid pupils falling behind in the education system. Additionally, pupils in the North perform, on average, one grade below their peers at the GCSEs, where the results influence their future opportunities. Consequently, the low attainment affects the skill level of workers in the region, making it difficult for the region to supply highly skilled workers, which will attract new industries and improve economic growth in the area.

A positive example of successful measures to improve attainment for children from families in hardship was found in the London area. On average, children from deprived backgrounds living in London perform better than their peers of similar backgrounds in other regions. Nearly half of the disadvantaged pupils attained a five or higher on their GCSEs,

whereas only between 30 to 40 per cent of children with similar backgrounds attained the same score in other parts of England (Blanden et al., 2015). An important driver for the enhanced results for the group of pupils has been the higher entry standards for secondary school. Additionally, pupils from London were more likely to continue their schooling after compulsory education and seek employment outside the region (Blanden et al., 2015). The positive development in educational attainment in London may improve social mobility in the capital.

Nonetheless, there is little evidence of overall conditions improving for Northern regions, both due to the future uncertainties regarding Brexit and the aftermath of the global pandemic. The level of social mobility in the area has decreased since the Coalition, and constraints in the future job markets require a considerable effort by the sitting government in order to improve the opportunities for children growing up in the area (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). To narrow the attainment gap and reduce regional inequality in the North, better support services and funding arrangements should be developed to help deprived families. Additionally, changes to the curriculum and increased investment in vocational studies are significant in guaranteeing that more pupils finish school with a set of qualifications. Subsequently, the number of apprenticeships has to be expanded, where secondary schools and businesses are required to cooperate more closely to make sure that the future workforce develops the relevant skillsets. Additionally, measures to attract well-qualified teachers to the region should be introduced, as well as a strategy of raising standards for secondary school entry, as successfully implemented in London.

4.4 Future Challenges

As initially stated, the scope of the thesis confines the discussion of austerity politics to the period of the Coalition between 2010 and 2015. The previous sections of the chapter

have reviewed the first research question of how the education austerity measures have affected disadvantaged pupils, in combination with examining the second research question of how the distribution of austerity cuts has influenced inequality in England. However, the political development following 2015 has continued to be influenced by conservative politics under David Cameron, Theresa May and now Boris Johnson. Although the listed governments have not openly campaigned for austerity politics, critics have claimed that Britain has been under stringent economic measures for more than a decade.

The austerity measures were implemented to improve the economy of the country after the 2008 financial crisis, where the Coalition was successful at reducing public expenses. However, the unsuccessful reduction of the budget deficit introduced the argument that the spending cuts did not have the desired effect after five years of austerity politics. Nevertheless, the Conservative Party planned for a second period of budget deficit reduction prior to the 2015 election. As David Cameron was re-elected prime minister for a Conservative government in 2015, further cuts were quickly introduced. The new measures came on top of the already discussed cuts between 2010 and 2015 and continued to affect the English education system. Additionally, the long period of low investment in schools made it challenging to improve conditions for disadvantaged children. Increased state outlay is required to improve both educational inequality and social mobility in England. However, the concerns for the economic effects of Brexit and the consequence of the coronavirus introduces the question of whether the sitting government will include this priority in future budgets.

4.4.1 Brexit

As Brexit negotiations were recently completed, it is too early to make explicit assumptions about the economic effects the changes will have on Britain. However, leaving Europe will directly affect trading opportunities, as individual trade deals have to be made by the British government. There will be a lag between leaving the EU and establishing

relationships with new trading partners. Future economic prosperity is dependent on the time span and success of future partnerships (Patrington, 2021). Additionally, the uncertain prospects of conducting trade from Britain make international companies reconsider the location of their factories or offices. Examples of this have already be seen, especially in traditional industrial areas in the North, where Nissan have considered relocating resources abroad to minimise future economic risk (Jack, 2021). Additional consequences may come from the decrease in the total revenue for the British economy, which may require a further reduction in public expenditure.

The people at greatest risk if more industry is relocated to Europe are people with minimum qualifications, and as seen through the thesis, the group is more likely to consist of people from a disadvantaged background. Subsequently, low levels of qualification further increase the risk of ending up in poverty. Additionally, deprived families are more likely to be affected by both the spending cuts and the termination of workplaces across England. Industrial areas in the North are facing additional challenges, as there has been limited funding to improve educational performance and employment skills. Also, the future prospects for employment are looking bleak, especially for young and low-qualified people. In addition, the European Union has traditionally targeted vital support to deprived areas in Europe through measures to boost economic growth and improve the quality of life (Brien, 2020). As the regional investment will be removed, a substitute will be dependent on how the British government allocate future funding. The significant reduction in support for deprived areas will serve as an additional burden for the already vulnerable areas.

4.4.2 Coronavirus

In addition to the economic consequences of Brexit, the ongoing pandemic has generated considerable concern for future inequality and the degree of social mobility in England. As the thesis has discussed, the implemented austerity measures contributed to an

unequal distribution of wealth and heightened educational inequality. Additionally, the social mobility numbers decreased under the Coalition. Although the full economic consequences of the coronavirus remain to be seen, younger generations expect to face the most challenging labour market in fifty years. Furthermore, there is a growing concern for the arrangements in place for unemployed people under 25 (Brown, 2020). The former prime minister, Gordon Brown, has criticised the sitting administration for the lack of expansion of new apprenticeships, college and university places and a more generous future jobs program (Brown, 2020). Additionally, children from a deprived background are already less likely to succeed in the education system and secure themselves a degree of qualification, especially after the academic shift in the national curriculum. In consequence, the social mobility numbers have dropped since austerity politics were first introduced in 2010 and are expected to continue to drop.

Furthermore, the pandemic has raised concern for disadvantaged children in the English school system, as a significant number of pupils have had long periods of schooling at home. In consequence, educational inequality has further increased since March 2020 (Machin & Major, 2020). The main reason for the high disparity between children from low-income families and their more affluent peers is that the children have spent more time at home, where the access to technology, physical space, and family relationships differ (Sharp et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the government has set money aside for catch-up tutoring, as particularly pupils in state-owned schools have performed poorer (Sharp et al., 2020). However, the long-term effects of homeschooling on the attainment levels in England remain to be seen.

Additionally, the future opportunities for disadvantaged children in the education system have been affected by the coronavirus. For students in higher education, close to 30 per cent have reported that they are less able to afford to study due to the consequences of the

pandemic (Machin & Major, 2020). Additionally, working-class families and young people are more likely to be affected by the economic consequences and to have been furloughed, unemployed, or placed on zero-hour contracts due to the corona restrictions (Machin & Major, 2020). Contrastingly, middle-class families have saved money by not going on holidays and not dining out. In consequence, the socio-economic inequality has further increased. Additionally, the chances of social mobility have been reduced, where more than three out of four believed it difficult to move between socio-economic classes (Machin & Major, 2020). If social mobility is not dealt with by the government, families risk being trapped at a disadvantage over generations, preventing children from deprived backgrounds to break out of the cycle of social reproduction.

As discussed previously, the education sector alone cannot improve inequality and social advancement in England. Areas with limited social mobility are often characterised by less professional and managerial occupations, low-performing schools and more deprivation (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). Therefore, the administration must cooperate with businesses and employers in the worst-hit areas to reduce the local inequality, as children's life chances are still significantly defined by the area where they grow up (Social Mobility Commission, 2020b). Additionally, the government should secure sustainable employment outside of London and improve the vocational education system, to increase social mobility for the whole of England. Another suggestion is to implement a one-off progressive wealth tax (Machin & Major, 2020). However, such taxation changes are unlikely to be introduced by a conservative administration. A consequence of the government not addressing the present issue of social mobility is that the problem will prove even more challenging to solve in the future.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The thesis statement claims that the austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015 affected the education system and subsequently influenced inequality in England. The evidence to support the statement has been confirmed through the analysis and discussion of education and inequality. In addition, the two research questions have guided the thesis, with the first research question to examine: *How have austerity measures affected education in England, both in general and more specifically for disadvantaged children?* Furthermore, the second research question investigated: *How has the distribution of austerity cuts influenced inequality in England?*

Initially, the Coalition introduced austerity cuts to address both the economic aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the high level of public outlay from previous governments. The financial crisis raised concern about Britain's budget deficit, which led to drastic cuts in state expenditure. However, the cost-saving cuts were unsuccessful at reducing the budget deficit due to the lack of economic growth. Austerity politics were also criticised for the unequal distribution of spending cuts, as real-term income decreased and the taxation changes did not benefit low-income families. In consequence, the restraint measures resulted in higher rates of poverty, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The people most disposed to ending up in poverty were either without full-time employment or had low qualifications.

Despite the substantial reduction in expenditure, schools were promised protection from the austerity cuts. However, the measures directly influenced all education levels by changing the school funding system, altering per-pupil spending, cutting local authority support, and increasing tuition fees. Although the Coalition invested significantly in early education, the initiative had the opposite effect, as low-income families did not access the funded hours. Additionally, disadvantaged children were greatly affected, as both the new

academies and the pupil premium were unsuccessful in narrowing the attainment gap. The academic focus of the new curriculum and forms of assessment reduced the deprived pupils' opportunities to attain educational qualifications relevant for employment. Additionally, the increased tuition fees restricted the option and motivation for higher education. In sum, the education austerity measures were unsuccessful at reducing educational inequality.

The evidence presented in the thesis advocates a strong link between education and inequality. The level of qualification is vital for further success in the education system, future employment and reducing the risk of descending into poverty. As disadvantaged children have a low level of attainment, they are indirectly at risk of remaining in a life of hardship. Therefore, successful social mobility is crucial in discontinuing the spiral of further social reproduction. Nevertheless, the Coalition's austerity cuts have not improved the circumstances required for transitioning across social boundaries. Education alone cannot enhance social mobility, as family background and geography are also essential contributors to future prospects. In some regions of England, there are both lower levels of attainment and limited employment opportunities, thus further restricting social advancement and is therefore dependent on targeted government investment.

Nevertheless, the thesis has the luxury of hindsight in reviewing both the positive and negative outcomes of the austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015. The present government is faced with the dilemma of either applying the same tactics as in 2010 or accepting that the scale of the new challenges demands radical policies. Once more, the quandary of either prioritising economic growth or budget deficit reduction will need to be addressed. The slogan presented by Cameron attempted to promote a feeling of solidarity by stating that "we are all in it together" proved to be untruthful. Therefore, the present administration will have to be more consistent in how future measures are being distributed.

Although the scale of the challenges will demand decisions at the macro level, the thesis has presented evidence that education austerity measures did not improve the problems of educational inequality and, ultimately, the increasing levels of poverty in England. Therefore, reducing the attainment gap, improving social mobility, and increasing real-term income is essential in securing a sustainable solution to the immediate challenges. The underlying issues regarding educational inequality have previously received lower priority but now demand more attention as they are essential cornerstones in providing a well-equipped and motivated workforce across all regions of England.

As the issues were not successfully dealt with by the Coalition, there has been a significant rise in both inequality and poverty levels. In order to address the new challenges from Brexit and the pandemic, the previously unsolved issues of educational inequality require serious and immediate attention. Economic growth depends on attracting new and technologically innovative business investments, which demand a suitably skilled and mobile workforce. As the inequality in England has continued to increase, further public spending cuts will receive more criticism than in 2010. Therefore, the government will be forced to consider a new approach to the discussed issues and plan for a more long-term solution to promote economic growth by providing future employment opportunities.

To conclude, the evidence presented in the thesis has endorsed the initial claim that the austerity measures implemented between 2010 and 2015 affected the education system and subsequently influenced inequality in England. Unfortunately, with both Brexit and the Coronavirus coinciding, the pressure to implement future cost-saving measures will heighten. Austerity politics has continued for the last decade and are likely to remain as a means to rebalance the economy. Consequently, fewer people view social mobility as a realistic option, as the younger generation is more directly affected by the economic fallout from both Brexit and the ongoing pandemic. Additionally, the country is still dealing with the collateral

damage from the choices made by the Coalition in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

Therefore, difficult decisions will need to be taken to approach the future challenges of Brexit and the Coronavirus.

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