Exploring the emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants when supporting secondary school Children and Young People to emotionally regulate

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Abstract

Over the past 25 years in the United Kingdom (UK), the prevalence of emotional needs amongst children and young people (CYP) has gradually increased. During that same period, the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) role has broadened and they are increasingly supporting CYP with their emotions. Despite LSAs making up around 27% of the UK's school workforce, very little is known about their emotional experiences, particularly for those working in secondary schools. Previous studies have largely ignored and marginalised the voices of LSAs, and there does not seem to be any research exploring how LSAs support CYP during instances of dysregulation and how they manage their own emotions. The current study therefore took an exploratory approach and aimed to better understand the emotional experiences of secondary school LSAs supporting CYP with their emotions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four LSAs working in a single mainstream secondary school. Utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), four main themes were identified. The first theme related to the LSAs appearing to have an important role in supporting students' emotions. They reported using a variety of strategies to support their students to regulate, and they often went above and beyond to ensure their wellbeing. The second theme related to the very close relationships the LSAs could build with their students, which appeared to have many mutual benefits. The third theme related to how the school environment could shape many different positive and challenging emotions in LSAs and students, with emotional experiences appearing to be interconnected. Whilst the LSAs shared that their job was often rewarding, they also faced constant

emotional challenges and had to frequently regulate their emotions. The final theme related to school support systems that could benefit the emotional wellbeing and development of students and staff members respectively. It is hoped that these findings can provide many new insights for those working in and with schools, and several suggestions have been outlined.

Student Declaration

University of East London (UEL)

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Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Declaration:

I declare that whilst registered as a degree student at UEL, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award of this university or of any other academic or professional institution. I declare that no material contained within the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award. I declare that my research required ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (the School of Psychology Ethics Committee) and that confirmation of approval is embedded within the thesis.

Signed: 

Reiss Greenblatt

Date: 06/09/2024

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I would firstly like to express my sincere gratitude to all of the LSAs who gave their time to take part in this study. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and making this research possible.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to my family. To my incredible parents, Adam and Sharon, and my wonderful sister, Lucy, I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to you all for your constant love, kindness, patience, and support throughout this whole journey. And to Aurelia, my love, thank you for always being by my side and for giving me so much inspiration, care, and joy at even the most difficult of times. I would not have gotten here without all of you.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BPS	British Psychology Society
CYP	children and young people
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
ERIC	Education Research Information Center
EHCP	Education, Health, and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
EFPA	European Federation of Psychologists' Associations
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GEST	Group Experiential Sub-Theme
GET	Group Experiential Theme
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LSA	Learning Support Assistant

Abbreviation	Full Term
NHS	National Health Service
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PEST	Personal Experiential Sub-Theme
PET	Personal Experiential Theme
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses
SEMH	social, emotional, and mental health
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
UK	United Kingdom
UEL	University of East London
WoE	Weight of Evidence

1. Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will provide an overview of the context in which the current project was conducted, introduce relevant theoretical concepts, and outline the rationale for the research. The context for Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) working in United Kingdom (UK) schools will firstly be examined. This will include an exploration of the different job titles used to describe school support staff and the various roles that their job can include. There will be a particular focus on LSAs working with children and young people (CYP) in secondary school settings and arguments around how LSAs can best be utilised. The increasing prevalence of emotional needs for both CYP and school staff will then be explored, alongside the factors contributing to these emotional experiences. Particular focus will also be given to the context of the school and local authority that the current research project took place in. Different theories and models of emotional regulation will then be presented, with an emphasis on the theories that acknowledge the social and environmental aspects of emotional regulation. This will be followed by a summary of how CYP can be supported to develop their emotional regulation skills, particularly in school contexts, and why this is important. The final section will outline the rationale for the current research project. This will include a discussion on the unique position of the researcher and why this topic is important to study, culminating with a description of the aims of the current research project.

1.2 The Context for LSAs

1.2.1 Use of Terminology

In the UK, various different job titles are used to describe school support staff. Much of the literature appears to have a preference for the term ‘Teaching Assistant’ over alternative job titles such as ‘Learning Support Assistant’, ‘Special Needs Support Staff’, or ‘Classroom Assistant’ (Blatchford, Webster, et al., 2012; UNISON et al., 2016). The UK government’s National Careers Service (n.d.) similarly shows a preference for the job title ‘Teaching Assistant’, though presents ‘Classroom Assistant’ and ‘Learning Support Assistant’ as synonymous alternatives. Whilst the majority of UK primary schools mostly use the job title ‘Teaching Assistant’, there seems to be more variation in job titles across secondary schools; they often use the title ‘Learning Support Assistant’, or occasionally ‘Learning Mentor’ or ‘Personal Assistant’ (Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). Despite the general preference for the term ‘Teaching Assistant’, this thesis will primarily refer to school support staff as LSAs. This is because the participants in the current study all held the job title of LSA, and whilst the subtleties of such job title variations can be pertinent (Hancock & Colloby, 2013), it is generally accepted that titles such as ‘Teaching Assistant’ and ‘Learning Support Assistant’ are largely interchangeable (Blatchford, Webster, et al., 2012; National Careers Service, n.d.).

1.2.2 The Role of LSAs

It can be challenging to define the precise role of LSAs as there is so much variation in the work they do. Individual LSAs often have many different roles, and the role of the LSA can vary significantly across different schools (Chopra & Giangreco, 2019; Kerry, 2005; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). Many studies have noted that school support staff have been experiencing 'role creep' over time, which is where they have increasingly been asked to do more work and take on a broader range of responsibilities in their role (Blatchford et al., 2009; Geeson & E. Clarke, 2022; Warhurst et al., 2014). Historically, school support staff were given few responsibilities and mostly had 'peripheral' and 'housekeeping' roles, such as helping CYP get changed for Physical Education and keeping the classroom tidy (Lowe, 2010); over time, LSAs took on an increasing role in directly supporting CYP with their learning, welfare, and making adjustments for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). In the modern age, it is recognised that LSAs have a very wide variety of roles (Geeson & E. Clarke, 2022), and in the UK government's most recent analysis of LSA deployment information, a large number of roles and responsibilities were identified (Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). These roles included providing general support to a whole class (such as by rotating around different groups of students); supporting individual students with SEND academically, socially and/or emotionally in class; delivering a wide variety of interventions to specific students outside of class; evidence gathering and target-setting; resource preparation and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) support; providing personal care for students with mobility and/or medical needs; and taking on supervisory roles, such as for after-school clubs, lunchtime supervision, and lesson cover (Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). As there is so much variety in the responsibilities of LSAs, some have argued that it might be more

effective to give school support staff members distinct job titles to reflect the varied roles they might be doing (Kerry, 2005).

It is also worth noting that the LSA role can be unique in mainstream secondary schools compared to other settings. Academic expectations and pressures increase at secondary school, culminating in students taking their General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs; Department for Education, 2014a). Secondary school systems are also generally constructed and governed in a different way than most primary school settings (James et al., 2014). At secondary school, the planning of curricular provision is more complex, and governing is typically done at a larger scale that is more distant from the school and its students. CYP with SEND are therefore typically supported by LSAs in a different way in secondary schools compared to in primary schools. Secondary school students are likely to spend less time interacting with their LSAs overall, and they are often put in separate classes from their peers if they are attaining at a lower level (Blatchford & Webster, 2018). Additionally, LSAs in secondary schools generally spend less time supporting groups of students, where most support is given to students individually, and they are usually allocated less time to meet with teachers for planning and feedback meetings compared to LSAs working in primary schools (Webster et al., 2011).

As the LSA role has broadened over time, so has the number of LSAs working in schools. In the UK government's most recent census of the school workforce, they reported a total number of 281 ,100 full-time LSAs (making up around 27%

of the total school workforce), which was an increase of 5,300 LSAs since the previous year, and an increase of 59,600 LSAs since 2011 (Department for Education, 2023a). Despite the increasing numbers of LSAs being employed, it has been noted that there has been very limited guidance from the UK government regarding how LSAs should best be utilised (Webster et al., 2013). Whilst the previous SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2001) was clear that LSAs had a role in supporting CYP with SEN Statements, the current SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2014a) does not specify how CYP with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) should be supported or which professionals should be supporting them. It has been argued that a lack of government guidance has led to an inconsistent deployment of LSAs in schools, where LSAs would be able to work more effectively if they were helped to better fully understand their role (E. Clarke & Visser, 2019). It should be noted that most LSAs do not undergo training before starting their role, which can arguably create further issues with consistency and effectiveness (Ihenacho, 2020), although apprenticeships and college courses are sometimes available for prospective LSAs (National Careers Service, n.d.).

With there being little government guidance, and the LSA role being so varied, there has been much discussion about how LSAs should best be utilised to support schools and CYP, with some researchers even producing their own guidance (Sharples et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2021). It has been argued that LSAs have a key role to play in supporting the academic progress of CYP, particularly when their role involves delivering targeted interventions (Farrell et al., 2010). However, some research has suggested that CYP can actually make less academic progress when supported by an LSA (Blatchford, Russell, et al.,

2012). It has since been contended that LSAs can in fact help CYP make academic progress, but they need to be fully prepared for their role; not be utilised informally with low attaining CYP; add value to what teachers are doing (and not replace them); help CYP develop their own independent learning skills; deliver evidence-based interventions to small groups; and help CYP to make explicit connections between learning in interventions and learning in the classroom (Sharples et al., 2016). Many studies have highlighted how LSAs are often positioned as having a key role and expertise in supporting CYP with SEND in particular, where they can provide additional support, promote inclusion, and manage behaviour (Cozens, 2014; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & De Boer, 2019).

Moreover, as there has been a gradual increase in social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs amongst CYP (Department for Education, 2021, 2023b; Pitchforth et al., 2019), it has been argued that LSAs are in a good position to support such SEMH needs (Conboy, 2020; Graves, 2014; Kimber, 2023; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019; Wren, 2017). Although current research is limited, it has been shown that LSAs can provide SEMH support for CYP by developing close relationships with them, taking a caring approach, making time to talk with them about issues they are having, and running targeted SEMH interventions (Conboy, 2020; Kimber, 2023; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). Both CYP and parents seem to particularly value the pastoral and nurturing support that LSAs can offer (Bland & Sleightholme, 2012; Williams & O'Connor, 2012). Since 2001, some LSAs have been able to receive additional training from Educational Psychologists (EPs) and take on the role of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs), who are able to run individual and group

interventions with CYP that focus on topics such as social skills, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and bereavement (Balampanidou, 2019). ELSAs seem to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of students and can play a key role in supporting their social and emotional development (Barker, 2017; Krause et al., 2020). Although many ELSAs may have previously worked as LSAs before undergoing ELSA training (with some continuing to work partially as LSAs alongside their new job), ELSAs clearly have distinct roles and experiences in comparison to most LSAs. This thesis will therefore not be considering the experiences of ELSAs when attempting to better understand the emotional experiences of LSAs.

1.2.3 Prevalence of Emotional Needs in CYP and School Staff

Over the past 25 years in the UK, the prevalence of emotional needs in CYP has gradually increased, alongside the identification of other forms of SEND (Department for Education, 2021, 2023b; National Health Service Digital, 2018, 2023). In a 2023 survey completed by the National Health Service (NHS), it was found that 20.3% of CYP between the ages of 8 and 16 had a probable mental health disorder (National Health Service Digital, 2023), which seemed to be linked to financial difficulties, bullying, and worries about climate change. The survey also found that a risk of mental health problems generally increased with age from childhood to adolescence. Other research has suggested that mental health difficulties can continue to increase significantly throughout adolescence, particularly as CYP move from around 13–14 years of age to around 15–16 years of age (Waite et al., 2022). Adolescence is widely accepted to be an

emotional period, with emotions becoming more frequent, intense, and volatile as a result of various interacting biological, environmental, and psychological changes (Guyer et al., 2016). These can include changes in brain function, hormones, sleep levels, interpersonal relationships, self-appraisal, social learning, academic pressures, and social media usage (Guyer et al., 2016; Waite et al., 2022). Adolescence is also a very important period for the development of emotional regulation, with most CYP improving their regulation skills and some experiencing continued difficulties (Silvers, 2022). Although it is typical for emotional needs to increase to some extent during adolescence, the current prevalence of emotional needs and mental health difficulties is quite concerning, with many noting societal issues such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the cost of living crisis, and the climate emergency as having had a significant lasting impact on the emotional needs of CYP (Bevilacqua et al., 2023; Broadbent et al., 2023).

Working in schools can also have an emotional impact for staff members. According to the most recent Teacher Wellbeing Index (Education Support, 2023), 78% of all school staff members reported feeling stressed, with 35% experiencing symptoms of burnout. Likewise, 81% of all staff members had experienced symptoms of poor mental health, with 55% reporting that their organisation's culture was having a negative impact on their wellbeing. Not a lot of research has been conducted exploring the emotional experiences of LSAs specifically (the current existing research will be outlined and synthesised in Chapter 2), though there has been a considerable amount of research conducted into the emotional experiences of teachers (Camacho et al., 2018; Day & Qing, 2009; de Ruiter et al., 2020; Macuka et al., 2017; Näring et al.,

2012). In a literature review by Keller et al. (2014), a range of factors were identified that had contributed to negative emotional experiences for teachers. These included teachers being unprepared and overwhelmed by their job demands; feeling impeded by school structures; being subjected to scrutiny; not having close relationships with students; feeling misunderstood; experiencing frustration and/or anger when students are misbehaving; and feeling anxiety, shame, and/or guilt during teaching (particularly when they are uncertain whether they are doing a good job). Due to teaching having such an emotional component, many have commented on the 'emotional labour' teachers do by frequently regulating their feelings in an effortful way to do their job effectively. Although this prolonged emotional labour can ultimately contribute towards burnout (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020; Kinman et al., 2011; Lee & van Vlack, 2018), emotion regulation ability is important for teachers in maintaining a sense of positive affect, job satisfaction, reduced stress, and effectiveness in their job (Brackett et al., 2010; Mankin, 2020). Teachers have been shown to successfully regulate their emotions by utilising various strategies, including mindfulness-based approaches, cognitive reappraisal strategies, deep acting (putting effort into both displaying and actually feeling socially expected emotions), and having space to acknowledge and reflect on deeper emotional issues (Carson et al., 2011; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Mankin, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). One of the most common regulation strategies among teachers is emotional suppression, despite this being generally ineffective and contributing to burnout (Keller, Chang, et al., 2014; Taxer & Gross, 2018). It is also worth noting that teachers can have positive emotional experiences, especially when they have good relationships with students, other staff members, and parents; feel a sense of autonomy in their role; value their profession and their potential

to nurture students' overall development; receive helpful feedback; have opportunities for professional development; and have a sense of self efficacy (Dreer, 2024; Manasia et al., 2020; Tsang & Jiang, 2018).

1.2.4 The Local Context

The current research took place in a single secondary school that is located within a diverse inner-London borough. A high percentage of the school's students come from a variety of ethnic minority groups. There is much need in the local population, where there are a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and an increasing number of CYP being identified as having SEND in the local authority. This is reflected in the school's student population, where the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average, and the percentage of pupils with SEN support is also higher than the national average. It is worth noting that the school's exclusion and suspension rates are also significantly higher than the national average, and during their most recent inspection by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED), they were given a rating of 'Requires Improvement'. It will be important to consider the unique context of this school and the local community when trying to understand the findings and draw conclusions from the current research.

1.3 Conceptualising Emotions and Emotional Regulation

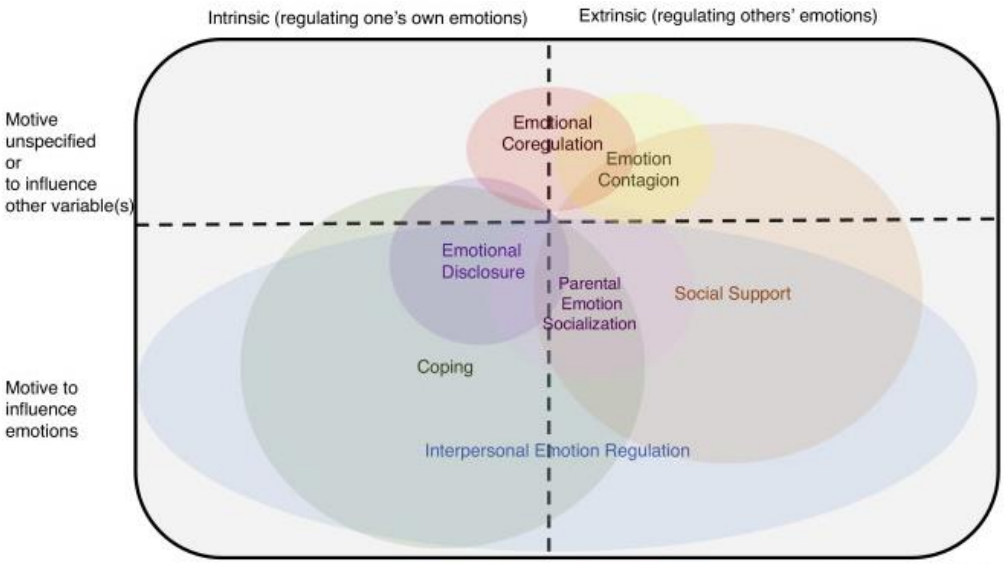
1.3.1 Models of Emotional Regulation

There are many different theoretical models that have attempted to conceptualise and classify human emotions (Harmon-Jones et al., 2017; Karandashev, 2020; Mesquita & Boiger, 2014; Scherer, 2000; Thompson, 2013; Tracy & Randles, 2011). For the purposes of the current project, the theoretical focus will be primarily on examining the models and processes of emotional regulation specifically. Though it is worth noting that some researchers have argued that the processes underlying both emotional regulation and emotions in general are largely one and the same (Campos et al., 2004). Traditionally, emotional regulation has been understood as the processes individuals undergo to influence their emotional state, consciously or unconsciously, which typically involves the minimising of negative emotions and the maintaining or maximising of positive emotions (Gross, 1998). One of the most famous classic models of self-regulation is Gross' (1998) process model, which has five components: ‘selection of the situation’, ‘modification of the situation’, ‘deployment of attention’, ‘change of cognitions’, and ‘modulation of responses’. As this model has such an emphasis on the internal experiences of individuals, much related research has focused on the individual cognitive and biological processes involved in emotional self-regulation, with associated strategies including problem solving, distancing, cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness, acceptance, and distraction (Aldao et al., 2010; Hofmann et al., 2009; McRae et al., 2010; Naragon-Gainey et al., 2017; Ochsner et al., 2012).

However, it has been noted that much of this traditional thinking around emotional regulation has ignored many of the developmental, social, and cultural aspects of emotional regulation, where people rarely experience emotions in an isolated context, but rather experience and regulate their emotions with others and through others (Barthel et al., 2018). A model of interpersonal emotion regulation was therefore introduced to acknowledge the social nature of emotional regulation (Rimé, 2007; Zaki & Williams, 2013), where people often seek others for support when emotionally dysregulated. The interpersonal model sees emotions as inherently existing between individuals rather than just within them, with emotional experiences often being 'contagious' and shared between people (Butler, 2015; Rimé, 2009). A related model, the sociodynamic model of emotions, similarly conceptualises emotions as coming out of interactions and relationships between people, whilst also recognising the influence of the sociocultural context in which they occur (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). Patterns of co-regulation may also emerge during instances of interpersonal emotion regulation between two people, which is where their constantly changing behaviours and emotions lead to a shared stable regulatory system (Niven, 2017). Though it is worth noting that some researchers do not define interpersonal regulation as including processes such as emotional contagion or co-regulation, as these can occur independently of a person's deliberate attempt to regulate their own or another person's emotional state (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015). A visualisation of one way interpersonal emotion regulation can be conceptualised as relating to other emotional processes can be seen in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Conceptualisation of How Interpersonal Emotion Regulation May Compare and Cross Over With Other Related Emotional Processes, As Defined by Dixon-Gordon et al. (2015)



Note. The region below the horizontal line encompasses Dixon-Gordon et al.'s (2015) definition of interpersonal emotion regulation, which itself includes multiple categories. They view interpersonal emotion regulation as relating to any interpersonal interactions that are deliberately devoted to influencing one's own (intrinsic) or others' (extrinsic) emotions. However, Dixon-Gordon et al. (2015) note that other researchers' definitions of interpersonal emotion regulation have included some of the regions they exclude or have excluded some of the regions they include.

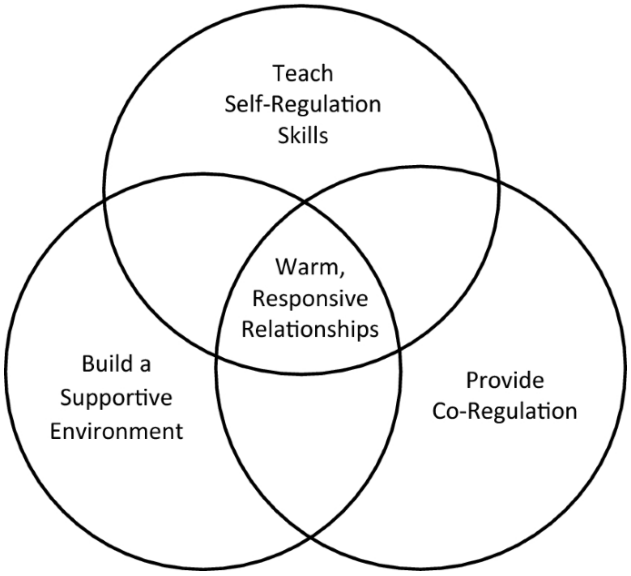
1.3.2 Supporting the Emotional Regulation of CYP

Early self-regulation skills can be seen in infants during their first year of life, where they often display strategies such as attentional orienting and self-soothing, and these regulation abilities appear to originate as early as the prenatal period (Thomas et al., 2017). Emotional self-regulation then continues to develop throughout childhood and adolescence, influenced by a range of both neurobiological and environmental factors (Sabatier et al., 2017). It is important that CYP are supported to develop their self-regulation skills so they can better maintain their wellbeing, develop their social competence, and achieve personal, academic, and social goals (Zeman et al., 2006). As emotions and regulation processes appear to exist inherently within specific social and environmental contexts, it has been argued that building warm and responsive relationships with CYP is central to helping them develop self-regulation skills. This can be seen in the self-regulation promotion model proposed by D. W. Murray et al. (2019), in which the key components include building a supportive environment, providing co-regulation, and teaching specific self-regulation strategies (please refer to Figure 1.2). Emotional co-regulation in particular, which has often been observed between infants and caregivers, has been highlighted as an important process in the development of emotional wellbeing, self-regulation ability, and social competence (Buhler-Wassmann & Hibel, 2021; Erdmann et al., 2019; Kiel et al., 2024; Silkenbeumer et al., 2016). Co-regulation appears to involve biological processes such as neural attunement (Bornstein & Esposito, 2023); humans seem to intuitively ‘feel’ the emotions they perceive in others, and there is some evidence to suggest that this phenomenon is the result of a mirror neuron system in the brain (Bastiaansen et al., 2009; Bekkali et al., 2021). Emotional co-regulation has also been linked to attachment theory, where early co-regulation between

two people may scaffold the emergence of a secure attachment, reinforcing co-regulation and creating a circular relationship (Butler & Randall, 2013).

Figure 1.2

Self-Regulation Promotion Model, As Proposed by D. W. Murray et al. (2019), Showing Key Intervention Components for Building Self-Regulation in CYP



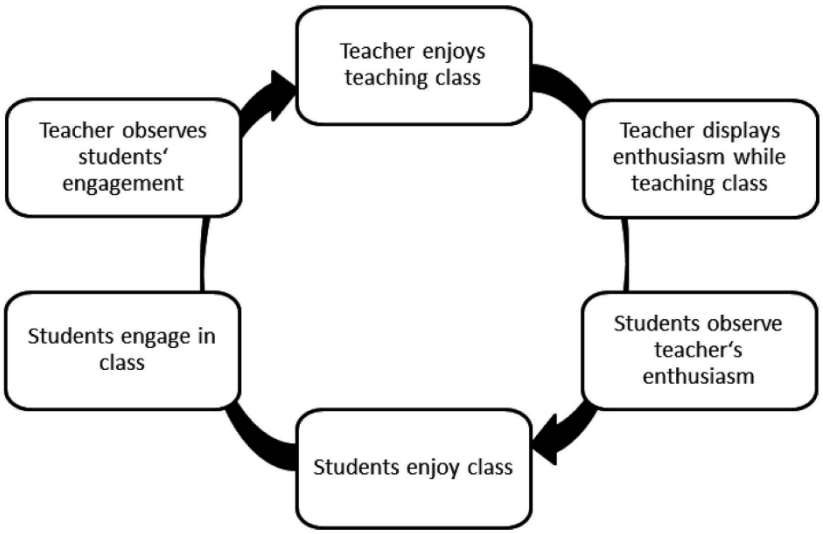
Note. The researchers explain that the overlapping circles show how each component is interrelated, and how warm responsive relationships with caregivers are central to each component.

It is arguably very important to support the emotional needs of CYP and the development of their self-regulation skills in the school context, and a wide range of school-based interventions are currently used to achieve this in the UK (Mackenzie & Williams, 2018; McLaughlin, 2008; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). D. W. Murray et al. (2019) argued that emotional regulation should be taught at

school in a similar way to the way literacy is taught. Like with literacy, self-regulation involves the learning of a series of sub-component skills that build upon each other to enable coping and adaptability, and it is recognised that some CYP will need additional interventions to overcome biological or environmental factors that have disrupted their progress. Additionally, as people's emotions are so greatly influenced by the emotions of others, it has been argued that school staff could better support the emotional wellbeing of CYP by giving more consideration to their own emotions and the relationships they have with their students (Mainhard et al., 2018). When teachers display positive emotions, this generally provokes positive emotions in their students, and likewise negative emotions in teachers generally provoke negative responses (Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016). Observing this phenomenon, Frenzel et al. (2018, 2020, 2021) proposed a reciprocal model of emotions between students and teachers, where their observations of each other's classroom behaviours were seen to influence each other's emotions in a circular manner (please refer to Figure 1.3 for an example of this). Mainhard et al. (2018) similarly made note of the reciprocal emotional processes that occur between students and teachers, though put more emphasis on the specific relationship that evolves between them as being the biggest factor in determining students' emotional experiences. Emotional co-regulation processes have also been observed to occur between CYP and school staff, though most research in this area has focused on younger children (Frivold Kostøl & Cameron, 2021; Silkenbeumer et al., 2016; Spilt et al., 2021).

Figure 1.3

Possible Mechanisms for Reciprocal Effects Linking Teacher Enjoyment and Student Enjoyment via Mutual Social Perception, As Proposed by Frenzel et al. (2018)



The current study predominantly adopts two overarching models in its theoretical conceptualisation of emotional regulation: interpersonal emotion regulation (Rimé, 2007; Zaki & Williams, 2013) and the sociodynamic model of emotions (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). These models informed much of the thinking about emotions in this research, and they will be taken into consideration when interpreting the emotional experiences of the participants in Chapter 5. However, other theoretical models will also be applied where relevant, such as psychodynamic thinking and organisational psychology.

1.4 Research Rationale

1.4.1 Position of the Researcher

As a researcher, my interest in the current topic partially originated from my own personal and professional experiences. Growing up as a child with diagnoses of Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), I greatly valued the emotional and academic support offered to me by LSAs. This led to me wanting to work as an LSA in a specialist provision for autistic students within a mainstream secondary school, which I did for two years. Following this, I continued to work directly and indirectly with LSAs in my roles as a Psychology Assistant and Trainee Educational Psychologist respectively. Having been a child supported by LSAs, an LSA supporting CYP, and a professional supporting LSAs, I have gained a unique insight and interest in the important contribution that LSAs can offer. I have therefore viewed myself as being both an 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher (Gair, 2012). I have seen how LSAs can build particularly close relationships with CYP, putting them in a uniquely fit position to advocate for their needs and support them emotionally. I hoped my research would give a greater voice to LSAs and provide a better understanding of their experiences, which have arguably been largely underrepresented, misunderstood, and undervalued.

However, I have also acknowledged the need for reflexivity at every stage of the research process (Berger, 2015), especially as I have my own preconceptions about the LSA role and how it is experienced. When preparing to conduct the interviews and interpret the data, I considered the fact that I may display instances of interpretation bias and confirmation bias by subconsciously looking

for findings that were conducive to my own preconceived views and beliefs (Gao, 2020). In response, I took various steps to minimise my biases, such as by becoming more aware of them, reflecting with other professionals (for example, during university tutorials), and ensuring I utilised member checking during interviews so that participants would be happy with how I recorded and interpreted their experiences (Noble & J. Smith, 2015). Although there can be various challenges to overcome when having an 'insider' position as a researcher, it can also arguably be an advantageous position; when done well, such research can offer a valuable and authentic insight that can potentially get closer to providing a more representative and trustworthy account of people's lived experiences (Chavez, 2008; Greene, 2014).

1.4.2 The Importance of Exploring the Emotional Experiences of LSAs

As previously discussed, LSAs have a very important role in supporting CYP, particularly when it comes to SEMH needs. With the LSA role becoming increasingly complex and broad, and with emotional needs becoming more prevalent for both students and staff across the UK, it is arguably a very pertinent time to hear the voices of LSAs and attempt to better understand their experiences. Although LSAs currently make up approximately 27% of the entire school workforce (Department for Education, 2023a), there is a consensus among researchers that previous research has largely ignored and marginalised the voices of LSAs, particularly when it comes to understanding their emotional experiences (Armstrong, 2016; E. Clarke, 2021; E. Clarke & Visser, 2019; Farrell et al., 2010; Roffey-Barentsen, 2014; Sharples et al., 2016; Trent, 2014;

Webster et al., 2013; Wood, 2016). Therefore, the aim of the current study was to take an exploratory approach and provide new insights into the emotional experiences of LSAs supporting CYP with their emotions in secondary school settings. It was hoped that the findings from this research would have much relevance for schools, EPs, and other professionals in education. Chapter 2 will go on to present a systematic review of the existing literature, Chapter 3 will provide a detailed account of the current study's research process, Chapter 4 will then present the findings, and finally Chapter 5 will discuss the findings in relation to existing literature and relevant psychological theories.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will present a systematic review of the existing literature that has previously explored the emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) supporting children and young people (CYP) in the United Kingdom (UK). The strategy used for identifying relevant studies will first be presented. This will include a list of the databases and search terms used, as well as a description of how studies were chosen for inclusion in the literature review. An outline of the critical appraisal process will then be presented, based on Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence (WoE) framework. Six studies were ultimately included in the literature review, with five overarching themes being identified across them. Each of these themes will be outlined individually, followed by a summary. Finally, an overview of the identified gaps in the current literature will be presented, highlighting the unique contribution of the current study.

2.2 Literature Review Process

2.2.1 Search Strategy

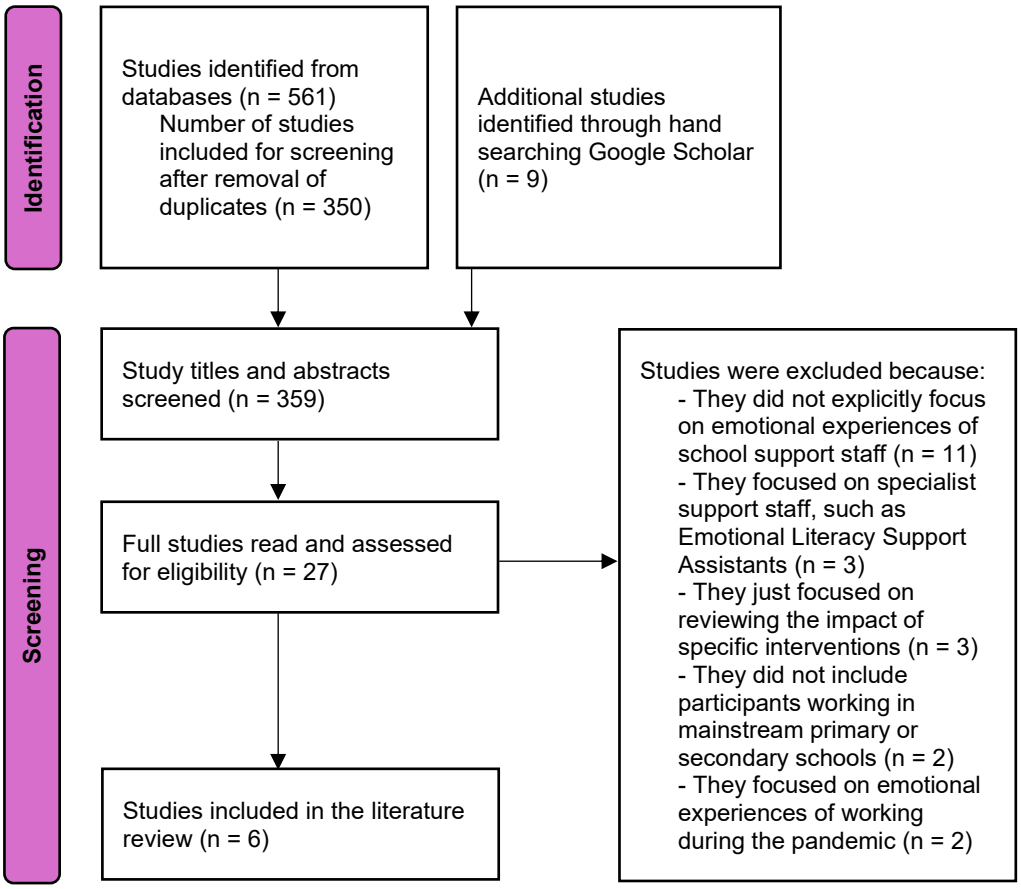
A literature review was carried out to answer the question, ‘What is known about the emotional experiences of LSAs supporting CYP in mainstream

schools in the UK?'. A systematic search of the existing literature was therefore carried out on 31/01/2024 to ascertain what studies had already been conducted on this topic. Several online databases were utilised for the literature search: Academic Search Ultimate, PsycInfo, the British Education Index, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, and the Education Research Information Center (ERIC). The key search terms used were ("teach* assistant*" OR "learn* support assistant*" OR "class* assistant*" OR "SEN* assistant*" OR "teacher* aide*") AND ("emotion*" OR "wellbeing" OR "mental health"). Following this, a hand search was carried out on Google Scholar using the following phrases: 'Emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants' and 'Emotional experiences of Teaching Assistants'. This was done to find additional studies that had not been identified when searching the other online databases. Studies were included if they were original pieces of research published during or after 2012 that explicitly explored the emotional experiences of typical school support staff members working in mainstream primary and/or secondary schools in the UK. A full list of the inclusion and exclusion criteria and their respective rationales can be viewed in Appendix A. Initially, 359 studies were identified for screening; following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, six studies were ultimately included in the review (Angel, 2019; Conboy, 2020; Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021; Kelly, 2020; Ravalier et al., 2021; A. P. Willis, 2017). An outline of the study selection process can be viewed in Figure 2.1, which shows an adapted version of a flow diagram template originally from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement (Page et al., 2021). Of the six studies, four were doctoral theses, two focused primarily on how LSAs supported CYP with particular needs, five collected qualitative data through

conducting interviews, and one was a large-scale questionnaire study that collected quantitative data. It should be noted that Conboy's (2020) research was later published as a journal article (Conboy, 2021). However, only the original thesis (Conboy, 2020) was included in the literature review, as it contained much more information than the published article. An additional search was then carried out to see if the journal articles included in the literature review (Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021; Ravalier et al., 2021) were similarly published in greater depth elsewhere, though no other versions were found.

Figure 2.1

Adapted PRISMA Flow Diagram Outlining the Study Selection Process in the Literature Review



2.2.2 Critical Appraisal of Included Studies

Once the literature search was completed, the six included studies were read thoroughly and summarised (this summary can be viewed in Appendix B). Following this, the studies were critically appraised using Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence (WoE) framework. This method was chosen so that the literature could be critically assessed in a systematic, comprehensive, and transparent manner. The WoE framework consists of four sets of judgements:

- WoE A: a generic judgement about the coherence and integrity of a study
- WoE B: a review-specific judgement on how appropriate a study's design is
- WoE C: a review-specific judgement about the relevance of a study
- WoE D: an overall rating of a study based on the previous WoE evaluations

A table containing a summary of the critical appraisal judgements using the WoE framework can be viewed in Appendix C. Two of the studies were given an overall WoE D rating of 'medium', one was given a rating of 'medium-high', and four were given a rating of 'high'. Through closely examining the tables containing the study summaries and critical appraisals respectively, it was possible to identify five overarching themes across the literature.

2.3 Themes Identified From the Literature Review

2.3.1 Positive Emotional Experiences

Four of the six studies found that most of their participants had positive emotional experiences of supporting CYP in their roles. Kelly (2020) explored the emotional experiences of four primary school LSAs working 1:1 with students. She conducted two free association narrative interviews with each participant, collected pen portraits, kept a reflective diary, and then analysed the data by undergoing a reflexive thematic analysis. She noted that the participants found their jobs rewarding, where they felt satisfaction and joy when empowering students to make progress and overcome challenges. The LSAs also found it to be a positive experience to feel part of their school's community. This study did a good job of representing participants' views with direct quotes and well-considered interpretations. Trustworthiness and transparency were increased with the use of a reflective diary and a clear outline of the researcher's own personal positioning. Conboy (2020) similarly noted that LSAs found it rewarding to help children and make a difference in their lives. She carried out semi-structured interviews with seven LSAs from primary, junior, and infant schools regarding their lived experiences of supporting the mental health of their students, and then analysed the data using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). She was also very reflexive and transparent in her approach and explained how she took a relativist and constructivist stance, which seems to have been appropriate for her research aims.

A. P. Willis (2017) also carried out semi-structured interviews with six LSAs from three mainstream primary schools which he then analysed using IPA, though he focused more on the participants' experiences of working 1:1 with autistic students specifically and the relationships they formed with them. He found that the participants felt positively about helping CYP regulate emotions such as anxiety, developing close relationships with them, and generally supporting them to make progress. Although A. P. Willis (2017) similarly appeared to be reflexive and kept a diary, he did not really outline many of his own personal biases that could have influenced the study. However, it was positive to see that the interview questions were very open and unlikely to be leading. Greenway & Rees Edwards (2021) also found that the LSAs in their study felt positively about their role, where they expressed a love for their job due to the pride and satisfaction they experienced when seeing students make progress. They focused specifically on 15 LSAs in West Wales who were supporting children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in mainstream primary schools. They did semi-structured interviews with the participants and then conducted a thematic analysis of the data. Although trustworthiness and authenticity were increased by presenting results in a multivocal manner with various quotes from the participants, they appeared to be conceptualising needs largely within a medical model, such as by describing 'symptoms' of ADHD.

2.3.2 Challenging Emotional Experiences

All six studies found that their participants experienced challenging emotions in their roles. The research conducted by Ravalier et al. (2021) was the only study collecting quantitative data in the literature review and the only large-scale study included, where they aimed to investigate working conditions for LSAs and factors that could contribute to their experiences of stress. They sent out a survey across the UK containing Likert scale questions based on various pre-existing questionnaires, such as the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards Indicator Tool, the 'disrespect' element of the Pupil Behaviour Patterns Scale, and the Perceived Stress Scale. In total, 3,242 LSAs completed the survey, with most respondents being female and coming from primary schools. Their scores were compared against benchmark scoring where available, and a series of linear regression analyses were carried out. It was found that LSAs were exposed to high levels of negative working conditions across all UK schools examined. Approximately 30% of the participants' stress was linked to working conditions (particularly high levels of demands and low control) and the impact of student and parental behaviour respectively (for example, around 20% of LSAs experienced derogatory words or behaviours from parents at least once a month). This was an important piece of research, being perhaps the only large-scale study to date focusing primarily on the emotional experiences of LSAs. However, a number of limitations were identified. Participants may have misinterpreted questions and would not have been able to clarify their answers or provide qualitative explanations. Additionally, some of the measures utilised were originally made specifically for teachers, arguably lowering their validity in this research. Moreover, Ravalier et al. (2021) could have used measures which examined a wider range of stressors and emotions, rather than just looking at certain specific causes of

stress (even with this level of focus, approximately 70% of the factors underlying participants' stress were unaccounted for). The researchers also acknowledged the fact that most of the respondents were from primary schools, which may have skewed the data. It is also worth noting that Ravalier et al. (2021) focus quite heavily on Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) appraisal model of emotional regulation in their conceptualisation of stress, which proposes that stress is only perceived based on how it is internally evaluated.

Greenway & Rees Edwards (2021) found that participants experienced both negative physical and psychological effects from their job, where they reported frequently feeling exhausted, drained, lonely, and isolated. Some shared that they often cried from exhaustion and frustration when there was not much progress, and it appeared that challenging emotions were exacerbated when LSAs felt unsupported or unappreciated by others in the school. It is worth noting that the interview schedule was not shared in Greenway & Rees Edwards's (2021) article, so it is hard to judge whether any of the questions were closed or leading. Though it was positive to see that the two researchers coded the data independently, which arguably increased rigour and credibility. Kelly (2020) also found that her participants experienced challenging emotions, such as stress, exhaustion, upset, frustration, pressure, isolation, and boredom. There was also some anxiety when working with new students, and mixed emotions around transition points and endings; some felt guilty when supporting students other than their key child. LSAs also appeared to pick up on the stress coming from systemic factors in the school and emotions from parents. Adopting a psychosocial ontological and epistemological position, Kelly (2020) linked these LSA experiences to concepts such as emotional projection and

transference, which is a seemingly appropriate lens to take. Angel (2019) similarly found that LSAs experienced challenging emotions when supporting CYP with emotional needs. She aimed to explore LSAs' lived experiences of supporting CYP's social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs by conducting semi-structured interviews with three LSAs in the same secondary school in the north of England and analysing the data with IPA. Despite having this aim, she unfortunately did not really explore how the students' SEMH needs directly linked to the emotional experiences of the LSAs. Having been an LSA herself, she described herself as being an insider researcher; she displayed transparency about her interest in the topic and appeared to utilise reflexive bracketing throughout the research process.

Conboy (2020) also found that LSAs experienced emotional challenges, including feelings of helplessness, sadness, and fear that things could go wrong, among other negative emotions. However, she did not really explore how LSAs may have regulated these emotions. A. P. Willis (2017) similarly noted participants experienced frustration and other negative emotions, particularly when there were external issues or they did not know how to help the students to make progress. Some LSAs found their relationships with certain students to be too emotionally intense at times and had to request to be with them less. However, like in Conboy's (2020) study, there was not really any exploration of how the LSAs managed these negative emotions. Some of the studies in the literature review did touch on how LSAs regulated their challenging emotional experiences. Kelly (2020) found that emotional suppression was a common strategy amongst LSAs, which she interpreted as an unconscious defence mechanism in which feelings were being repressed

and denied. However, managing emotions was not a primary focus of this research and she did not explore regulation beyond emotional suppression. Conversely, Angel (2019) identified a number of ways participants managed their emotions. LSAs utilised both internal coping strategies (such as using humour, suppressing emotions, and trying to let go of emotions) and external support systems (such as by talking to family members and getting help from other staff members). In her thesis, Angel (2019) went on to discuss resiliency as a conceptual framework, which she related to both personal resources and external avenues of support. It was positive to see some acknowledgement of the social nature of regulation and resilience, though this was similarly not explored in great length.

2.3.3 The Role of LSAs in Supporting Students' Emotions

It was put forward in all the studies in the literature review that LSAs had an important and unique role, particularly when it came to supporting students emotionally. Many of the LSAs in A. P. Willis' (2017) study discussed how they both helped their students to regulate their emotions and felt they had a role in teaching them about their emotions. They saw themselves as having a close and special relationship with their students, positioning them well to discuss emotional issues and support them to regulate where necessary. The LSAs in Angel's (2019) study similarly had an important role in supporting their students' SEMH needs. Many of them wanted to get to know their students well so they could better make sense of their needs and better support them. However, there was not much focus in the study on what the students' SEMH needs

actually were, meaning that there was a lack of specificity around the LSAs' explicit role in how they managed the CYP's needs and behaviours. Conboy (2020) went into more detail regarding how LSAs emotionally supported their students, where they would talk with them about their feelings, normalise worries, give praise, provide a reassuring presence, and monitor them throughout the day to make sure they were alright. In her thesis, she represented these views in good detail with many quotes presented. However, due to the voluntary nature of her study, she may have attracted LSAs who were more interested in supporting emotional needs, potentially creating a bias in her interpretation of typical LSA experiences.

In some of the studies, it was found that the LSAs would sometimes go beyond their normal role to better support the wellbeing of their students. Greenway & Rees Edwards (2021) noted that the LSAs had a strong feeling of wanting to advocate for their students and challenge practice in the classroom. However, they did not specify the ways in which LSAs actually did this. The LSAs in Kelly's (2020) study similarly felt a lot of responsibility to support their students' various needs and take on different roles, including that of the teacher. The LSAs shared that they often felt the need to go beyond their normal roles, such as by purchasing their own resources for the students, thinking about students outside of work, and refusing to take time off when they perhaps should have. Though it should be noted that, like in many of the studies in this literature review, there may have been volunteer bias in the sampling, where the LSAs recruited were likely to have been particularly passionate about their roles. However, Ravalier et al. (2021) did find in their large-scale research that LSAs across the UK were working more than their contracted hours. Interestingly, this

did not seem to significantly influence the LSAs' experience of stress, leading Ravalier et al. (2021) to argue that the LSAs expected themselves to put in extra work, possibly as a coping mechanism to deal with poor working conditions. However, as they only collected quantitative data, it is questionable whether they were able to make such qualitative interpretations. Their trustworthiness is further in question as they did not name their epistemological position or their potential biases.

2.3.4 Close Relationships Between LSAs and Students

All of the qualitative studies included in the literature review noted that very close relationship were formed between LSAs and their students. A. P. Willis (2017) focused on this aspect of the LSAs' experiences the most, where many of the participants in his study formed close emotional bonds with their students. Some of the LSAs shared that there were often many ups and downs when building close relationships, likening this experience to a journey. Their close relationships felt quite special and unique for the LSAs, with closeness often being perceived non-verbally. They expressed a need for mutual trust, safety, and security in their relationships, and the participants also reported feelings of togetherness, empathy, and teamwork. A. P. Willis (2017) largely interpreted these relationships theoretically through the lenses of attachment theory and the investment model of interdependence theory (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). However, the appropriateness of applying the investment model is questionable in this context, where it is usually applied to relationships between adults, particularly in the context of romantic relationships (Tran et al., 2019).

Additionally, some of the LSAs in A. P. Willis' (2017) research likened their relationships with students to that of fulfilling a parental role, which interestingly was also a theme across Angel's (2019), Conboy's (2020), and Kelly's (2020) studies. Angel (2019) noted that LSAs felt more of an emotional response to CYP when the relationship seemed more familial, which she linked to attachment theory. Kelly (2020) also made links to attachment theory, with all of her participants using parental language in their interviews. This was viewed through a psychodynamic lens, where she considered how the LSA role may have evoked past feelings of the participants' own parental experiences.

Conboy (2020) similarly made links to attachment theory, where all of the LSAs in her study felt they had a special bond with their students. To be able to support them emotionally, they felt it was important for them to get to know them and understand the factors that might have been impacting them, such as home life, bereavement, friendship issues, and academic pressures. The LSAs in Greenway & Rees Edwards's (2021) research spoke about the important attributes they felt they needed to build close relationships with students, such as good communication, care, patience, and trust. However, this study did not delve deeper into these relationships or apply wider theoretical thinking to better understand them. Angel's (2019) participants also discussed the qualities that helped them form close relationships with students. They described themselves as understanding, calm, patient, level-headed, hardworking, and good listeners. Some of the LSAs also mentioned how, by getting to know their students well, they became increasingly perceptive of when something was wrong with them. Kelly (2020) similarly noted that there appeared to be aspects of emotional attunement and 'mirroring' between the LSAs and the students. Although it was

not explored in much detail, the participants shared that they were affected by the emotions of the students, and the students were affected by their emotions. Some of the LSAs therefore emphasised the importance of not showing negative feelings in their role, as they feared the possibility of transferring their feelings on to the students.

2.3.5 The Importance of Support From Others in the School

All of the studies in the literature review discussed how important it was for LSAs to feel supported by other school staff members. The participants in Angel's (2019) research shared that they highly valued receiving advice from other staff members such as their line manager and the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). They also expressed a preference for practical support over emotional support from other staff members. The LSAs in Greenway & Rees Edwards' (2021) study similarly valued receiving support from other people, such as headteachers and parents. They found it positive when they could have regular staff meetings, maintain consistent contact with parents, and have a sense that their opinion mattered. Conversely, systemic barriers for the LSAs included a lack of support from school staff and parents, limited resources, a busy work environment, a feeling of being unappreciated, and a lack of training. Though it is worth noting that Greenway & Rees Edwards' (2021) study only had a limited scope, where they just focused on how a small number of LSAs in a single Welsh region supported students with ADHD specifically. However, similar systemic barriers were identified in the other studies in the literature review. Ravalier et al. (2021) found that LSAs'

experience of stress was impacted by factors such as managerial support, peer support, relationships, lack of control, and job demands. Interestingly, they noted that levels of managerial support were generally higher in specialist schools than mainstream schools. Ravalier et al. (2021) suggested this might have been due to specialist schools usually having fewer students and staff members, as well as the fact they are more likely to have an ethos and culture in the school of supporting others. This study really demonstrated the importance of systemic support for LSAs, with its large sample making the results much more generalisable than the other studies in the literature review. However, it should be noted that many of their findings were correlational, which limited their ability to make causal claims about the factors impacting stress in LSAs.

The participants in Kelly's (2020) study also expressed a sense of frustration when they felt they were not being supported or valued by their colleagues, and they were not given much space to process their emotional experiences. She also considered the fact that the participants may have subconsciously taken on some of the systemic stresses from their schools, such as worries around budgets, inspections, and performance. However, it is worth noting that Kelly (2020) considered herself a novice researcher, so it is possible that she made errors or unintentionally influenced the direction of interviews. In A. P. Willis' (2017) study, only one participant spoke about being frustrated about receiving a lack of support from other school staff. She explained how difficult it was when a teacher left her alone to support a student with a high level of needs, and how this ultimately impacted her relationship with the student and her ability to support them. Conboy (2020) also found that the LSAs in her research felt

frustrated with systemic factors in the school, particularly the fact that they were not given enough time to adequately support their students' mental health needs. However, the participants did value being able to get advice and support from other colleagues. Other systemic issues identified to be limiting the LSAs' ability to support CYP's emotional needs included a lack of training about mental health, being given too much paperwork, difficulties with funding, and feeling like they had a low hierarchical position within their school systems. Theoretically, Conboy (2020) considered these experiences through the lens of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), where the complexities of the school system would certainly have had an impact on the LSAs. Whilst the study's small sample suggests that the findings are difficult to generalise, Conboy (2020) argued that her approach allowed for a 'theoretical generalisability', where she was able to triangulate her findings with the existing literature and her own experiential knowledge.

2.4 Summary of Findings From the Literature Review

This literature review aimed to answer the question, 'What is known about the emotional experiences of LSAs supporting CYP in mainstream schools in the UK?'. A systematic search of the literature was conducted, with six relevant studies being identified for inclusion before being critically appraised using the WoE framework (Gough, 2007). Five key themes were then identified across the included studies.

Perhaps the most prevalent theme coming out of the literature review was that it was very common for LSAs to have challenging emotional experiences in their role, and these presented themselves both physically and psychologically. Challenging emotions LSAs experienced included feelings of anxiety, sadness, frustration, stress, exhaustion, pressure, boredom, guilt, loneliness, isolation, fear, and helplessness. These emotions sometimes left LSAs feeling overwhelmed, and some reported they were often brought to tears. Various causes of challenging emotions were identified, including LSAs not knowing how to help students, high levels of job demands, a lack of professional support, feeling unappreciated, not having much control, job transition points, negative student behaviour, and negative parental behaviour. It was noted that LSAs across the UK were exposed to high levels of negative working conditions, and they appeared to be directly and indirectly impacted by wider systemic issues. Some of the studies touched on how their participants managed their challenging emotions, and common strategies included emotional suppression and seeking support from school staff and family members.

However, another theme from the literature review was that participants did also have positive emotional experiences. LSAs shared that their job could be very rewarding and could create feelings of pride and satisfaction, and it was nice to feel part of the school community. They particularly enjoyed forming close relationships with their students and supporting them to make progress, regulate their emotions, and overcome challenges. LSAs also had more positive experiences when systems worked to support them; the importance of wider systemic factors was therefore identified as another theme coming out of the literature review. LSAs valued being supported by other staff members, having

regular staff meetings, feeling appreciated, having space to process emotional experiences, and being given enough time to support their students effectively. Conversely, systemic barriers included a lack of support, limited resources, a busy work environment, a lack of training, funding issues, and feeling disempowered within a hierarchical school system.

Another theme identified in the literature review was that the LSAs generally formed very close bonds with their students. Many described themselves as having special and unique relationship with the CYP they worked with, though it was noted that these bonds were not always formed easily or quickly. Their relationships often contained feelings of mutual trust, safety, security, togetherness, empathy, and teamwork. Interestingly, many of the LSAs expressed feeling like they were sometimes fulfilling a parental role, and most of the studies considered relationships between students and LSAs through the lens of attachment theory. LSAs were able to form close relationships with students by being calm, patient, trusting, level-headed, hardworking, good listeners, good communicators, and perceptive of the issues impacting them. As LSAs had such a unique and close relationship with their students, a final theme coming out of the literature review was that LSAs seemed to be in a good position to support their wellbeing. They both helped CYP to regulate their emotions and taught them about their emotions. They talked with them about their feelings, normalised worries, gave praise, provided a reassuring presence, and monitored them throughout the school day to make sure they were alright. Many LSAs also discussed how they would go beyond the normal boundaries of their role to better support them. Ways they did this included working more than

their contracted hours, purchasing their own resources, and advocating for students in the classroom by challenging practice.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature and the Unique Contribution of the Current Study

With only six studies being eligible for inclusion, this literature review demonstrated the current lack of research exploring the emotional experiences of LSAs in the UK. Across the studies that were included, a number of gaps were identified where the researchers had not focused on some potentially pertinent areas. For example, whilst all of the studies reported that LSAs often faced emotional challenges in their role, very few of them touched on how LSAs actually managed their emotions. Similarly, although most of the studies identified that LSAs had an important role in supporting students' emotional needs, research often lacked specificity around the needs of CYP and how LSAs supported them to regulate during specific instances of dysregulation. It was also clear in much of the research that LSAs' emotions could change the emotional state of students and students' emotions could change the emotional state of LSAs. However, none of the researchers fully examined how the emotions of LSAs and students could often be linked and passed on, perhaps with consideration to processes such as emotional contagion (Rimé, 2009) and co-regulation (Butler & Randall, 2013). All of the studies did acknowledge that emotional experiences are influenced by social contexts and wider systemic factors, though it was noticeable that none of them considered relevant theoretical conceptualisations of emotions such as the sociodynamic model of

emotions (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014) or the interpersonal model of emotion regulation (Rimé, 2007; Zaki & Williams, 2013). It is also worth noting that the study by Angel (2019) was the only qualitative piece of research included in the literature review that actually interviewed LSAs from secondary schools, with the vast majority of participants across the other studies coming from primary schools. Moreover, Angel's (2019) study took place in the north of England, and it is possible that LSAs' emotional experiences could differ in a very different geographical location, such as an inner-London borough. Given all these gaps in the current literature, it was felt that the current study would be a novel and important piece of research in aiming to better understand the emotional experiences of secondary school LSAs. By focusing on how LSAs conceptualised their unique role, supported specific instances of students' dysregulation, and how they managed their own emotions during such moments, it was hoped that this study would provide a unique contribution to the existing literature.

3. Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will describe the research process of the current study, providing an account of how the research was conducted. The research questions and their rationale will first be discussed, and I will outline my ontological and epistemological positions. The research design will then be described, which will include information about the sample and a justification for the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study. The process of data collection will be outlined, including the rationale for using semi-structured interviews, the procedures taken for conducting interviews, and a timeline of the research process. This will be followed by a discussion of the chosen method of data analysis, including the rationale for using this approach, some critiques, and the individual steps involved. Finally, potential ethical considerations will be explored, as will factors affecting the quality, validity, and trustworthiness of the research.

3.2 Purpose of Research

This research project was exploratory, where it aimed to better understand the emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) supporting children and young people (CYP) with their emotions in secondary school settings. As outlined in the previous chapters, there have been very few prior studies exploring the experiences of secondary school LSAs, where most

previous research has been conducted with teachers and/or in primary school settings. Prior studies have also lacked specificity around how LSAs have supported students during specific instances of dysregulation and how they have managed their own emotions. As noted in the introduction, emotional needs appear to be becoming more prevalent amongst students and school staff respectively (Department for Education, 2021, 2023b; Education Support, 2023; National Health Service Digital, 2018, 2023) and LSAs seem to be increasingly supporting students' emotional needs as part of their role (Blatchford et al., 2009; Geeson & E. Clarke, 2022; McConkey & Abbott, 2011; Radford et al., 2015; Warhurst et al., 2014; Webster et al., 2010). Given this current context, it is arguably a very pertinent time to be conducting research that explores the emotional experiences of LSAs. It was hoped that the current study would be able to provide unique insights into how LSAs support CYP to regulate, how they emotionally experience this, and what their reflections are on their role. The study's research questions were therefore as follows:

1. What are LSAs' perceptions of how they are able to support CYP to regulate their emotions?
2. What are LSAs' emotional experiences of supporting CYP to regulate their emotions, and what do they do to manage their own emotions?
3. What are LSAs' reflections on supporting students' emotions as part of their role?

3.3 Ontological and Epistemological Positions

I worked within an interpretive paradigm, which aims to understand the world from the subjective experiences of individuals (J. W. Willis et al., 2007). Within this paradigm, an ontological stance of relativism was taken. This ontology emphasises the idea that individuals create their own meanings about life, where reality is understood and constructed by the individuals living it (Robson & McCartan, 2017). This worldview links to the epistemological approach taken of social constructivism, which is an epistemology that maintains that it is important for researchers to consider how individuals create their own constructs of the world (Creswell & Clark, 2017). It has been argued that these constructions come about from the interactions of what individuals already believe, and the people, ideas, and activities they come into contact with and experience (Ültanir, 2012). As the aim of the research was to explore the personal, unique, and subjective experiences of LSAs, it was therefore arguably appropriate to take such ontological and epistemological positions.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Qualitative Approach

As the methodology of a study is influenced by the ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher (Willig & Rogers, 2017), it was felt a qualitative approach would be most appropriate. Qualitative approaches are particularly useful when a topic needs to be explored in depth, data is not easily identifiable, and knowledge needs to be developed (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study aimed to gain a rich understanding of participants' subjective

experiences, and quantitative approaches would not have been appropriate as they are typically influenced by the ontological position of positivism, where researchers attempt to identify an objective reality (Gelo et al., 2008). Qualitative approaches allow researchers to consider other peoples' subjective realities, and there is often more emphasis on researchers being able to identify their unique perspectives and biases when interpreting data (Braun & V. Clarke, 2013; J. Smith et al., 2021). This study utilised a phenomenological research design, which is a design that focuses on trying to understand how individuals make sense of their own lived experiences (Patton, 2002; Wilson, 2015). As the aim of the research was to better understand the emotional experiences of LSAs, it was felt that this research design would be most appropriate as there could be an in-depth exploration that attempted to view things from the participants' individual perspectives.

3.4.2 Sample Size

I aimed to recruit between 4-10 participants, which has been suggested as an appropriate sample size for a study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; J. Smith et al., 2021) for a professional doctorate research project (V. Clarke, 2010). If an insufficient number of participants had been recruited from the Local Authority within which I was on placement, the inclusion criteria would have been extended to include any LSAs working within London, and then extended again to include any LSAs working in England. However, this was ultimately not necessary as four participants were recruited for the study from within the Local Authority I was on placement with.

3.4.3 Participant Recruitment

I aimed to recruit participants from the Local Authority I was on placement with during my professional training and completion of the research. Following the study's initial ethical approval (which can be viewed in Appendix D), I collected a list of all the mainstream secondary schools in the Local Authority and contacted their Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) to gain written consent that their school would be happy for me to invite their LSAs to take part in the research. However, schools that I had a prior relationship with were excluded from the study to reduce bias; if participants were aware of my involvement with their school, they might have displayed greater social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Bispo, 2022), and my preconceptions about their schools might have influenced how I perceived and interpreted their experiences. In total, three different SENCos sent me their written consent over email, which were added as amendments to my ethics application form. A volunteer sampling design was used where, once the amendments to my ethics application form were approved, I asked the SENCos to disseminate an information sheet about the study to the LSAs in their school, inviting them to volunteer (this can be viewed in Appendix E).

Ultimately, I only received responses from LSAs working in one of the schools that were contacted, though this was felt to be advantageous as it created a homogeneous sample. As all the participants worked in the same setting, their experiences would arguably be much more comparable than LSAs working

across settings. Different schools can vary greatly in their ethos and approach to supporting students emotionally (Banerjee et al., 2014; Donnelly & Brown, 2022). It was therefore felt to be very beneficial that there was a level of homogeneity across the participants recruited in the current study, where they all existed within one particular school culture.

3.4.4 Participant Information

The research participants consisted of four LSAs working in a mainstream secondary school who all worked with a variety of students across different years. The secondary school was located within an inner-London borough; information regarding their local context was previously noted in Chapter 1. All of the participants were women with a variety of professional experiences prior to working as LSAs. Specific demographic information was not explicitly collected as it was not felt to be relevant to the aims of the research. To ensure anonymity, the participants were given the option of either choosing their own pseudonym or having one randomly assigned to them. They all opted to have pseudonyms randomly assigned to them, which were ‘Zahra’, ‘Sophia’, ‘Ariana’, and ‘Esma’ respectively.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Use of Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured approach was utilised for the interviews. Although certain key questions were constructed ahead of time, discussions were allowed to develop naturally and go in different directions, ensuring a high level of flexibility, depth, and adaptability (Magaldi & Berler, 2020; Ruslin et al., 2022). More structured approaches to interviewing have been criticised for not being able to facilitate a more explorative approach to human experience (Englander, 2017). It has also been argued that semi-structured, one-to-one interviews are better methods for exploring peoples' rich experiences than other methods such as focus groups, postal questionnaires, email dialogues, and observational methods (Reid et al., 2005). One-to-one interviews are often preferable as they are simpler to manage, rapport can be developed more easily, and participants can have space to think more deeply (J. Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, by encouraging participants to speak freely about what is important to them, this can sometimes rebalance potential power imbalances by making them feel less constrained by perceived expectations.

3.5.2 Developing an Interview Schedule

As this was a phenomenological study, the pre-constructed questions were designed to be open-ended and reflective, encouraging participants to talk at length and in depth about their experiences. J. Smith et al. (2021) suggested that 45–90 minutes is a good range of time to allow for in-depth interviews, and an interview schedule with between six and ten open-ended questions (alongside prompts and shorter descriptive questions) should take up approximately that amount of time. The questions were presented in an

appropriate order, where participants were first asked to briefly describe their role, and were then asked to talk about one or two recent experiences and their reflections about them. They were then asked to reflect on their role more broadly, and at the end of the interview they were asked about how they found the process of reflecting on their experiences. The interview schedule can be viewed below:

1. Can you briefly explain your role (and the number of CYP you support)?
2. Can you share a recent experience of supporting a CYP with their emotions?
3. What do you believe the CYP's emotional experience was during this situation?
4. What was your emotional experience during this interaction?
5. How were you able to manage your emotions during this interaction?
6. Were you able to help the CYP regulate their emotions, and if so, how?
7. Do you think there is a relationship between the CYP's emotions and your emotions?
8. Are there any other factors that help you in supporting CYP with their emotions?
9. How often do you support CYP with their emotions in your role?
10. Do you believe supporting CYP with their emotions is part of the LSA role (and should it be)?
11. Have you found the process of reflecting on your experiences to be beneficial (and if so, in what ways)?

Whilst the interview schedule acted as a guide, specific questions and the direction of conversations ultimately varied with each interview.

3.5.3 Interview Procedures

After reading through the information sheet (which contained my contact information), the participants contacted me over email to let me know that they wanted to take part in the study. Before each interview, the participants were asked where they would like to have the interview, and all four participants opted to have the interview in person at their school at the end of the school day. They were told that the interview would last approximately an hour, and they were asked to book a private room in the school that could be used for the interview. A date was then agreed, and the consent form was emailed over for each of them to complete ahead of their interview (this can be viewed in Appendix F).

Rapport was built at the beginning of each interview in order to help the participants feel comfortable and to gain trust. Before beginning each interview, I briefly went through the participant information sheet and consent form with the participants to ensure that they fully understood the research and any questions they had could be answered. Once I had ensured fully informed consent had been gained, two secure recording devices were turned on to capture the conversation. Two devices were utilised so that none of the interview would be missed in the event of a technical difficulty with one of the devices. The participants were then asked questions from the interview

schedule, though discussions were allowed to develop naturally and go in different directions. A balance was gained between the plan for the interview and the natural progression of the discussion. I took the role of active listener throughout, displaying curiosity and attentiveness, and providing occasional prompts to help the participants deepen their thinking. Occasionally, I would utilise 'member checking' by relaying back information that was heard to ensure my understanding was correct (Candela, 2019; McNair et al., 2008).

At the end of each interview, the participants were offered a short debrief to discuss how they found the process and to answer any questions they might have had. They were also asked if they would like the findings of the research disseminated to them following the completion of the thesis. Finally, they were thanked for their participation and were given a debrief sheet containing contact details, information about how the data would be used, and links to further resources (this can be viewed in Appendix G).

3.5.4 Interview Transcription

Transcription is usually an essential process in IPA studies and other qualitative pieces of research (Davidson, 2009; J. Smith et al., 2021), and therefore the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Alongside capturing the actual words spoken, the transcripts aimed to capture pauses, non-verbal gestures, emphases on certain words, tone, repetitions, and non-speech sounds (such as laughs, coughs, and sighs). This level of detail in transcription is arguably needed to ensure trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative research, where

transcripts need to accurately reflect what was expressed (and the way in which it was expressed) when making sense of the data (Poland, 1995). To aid the process of transcription, the software Otter.ai was utilised; this transcription software had been pre-approved by the University of East London (UEL) as being secure and safe to use. Interview recordings were uploaded to the software and then manually edited to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were also pseudonymised and anonymised at the point of transcription. Finalised transcripts were then saved to a secure location and the data held by Otter.ai was deleted.

3.5.5 Research Timeline

To give a sense of the when each stage of the research process took place, a timeline has been constructed. This can be viewed below:

- November 2021: research proposal was submitted to UEL
- January 2022: research proposal was approved by UEL
- February 2022: initial ethics form submitted to UEL
- March 2022: secondary school SENCos were contacted for their initial consent to invite their LSAs to participate in the research project
- April 2022: amended ethics form approved by UEL
- April 2022: data management plan created and approved by UEL
- April 2022: schools were contacted again to begin participant recruitment
- May 2022: research registration completed and approved by UEL
- May 2022 – June 2022: interviews were carried out

- August 2022 – November 2022: interviews were transcribed and data was analysed
- November 2022 – January 2023: the findings chapter was written up
- February 2023: the methodology chapter was written up
- March – December 2023: thesis writing was paused to focus on completing the other requirements of the doctorate
- January 2024 – April 2024: the remaining thesis chapters were written up
- April 2024: the thesis was submitted
- June 2024: the viva examination was completed
- July 2024 – August 2024: following the viva, final amendments were made to the thesis prior to the final submission

3.6 Data Analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

3.6.1 Rationale for Choosing IPA

As this study utilised a phenomenological research design within an interpretivist paradigm, it was felt that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; J. Smith et al., 2021) would be the most appropriate method of data analysis. IPA is a qualitative research approach that examines how people make sense of their personal lived experiences in their own terms. IPA was felt to be conducive to my ontological position of relativism, where the study aimed to explore the multiple, complex, and socially constructed realities of the individual participants. Unlike descriptive phenomenology, which is rooted in realist ontological assumptions, interpretive phenomenology recognises that

researchers have their own biases and should therefore reflect on how their experiences may influence their interpretations (Neubauer et al., 2019). It has been argued that IPA has the potential to be a very useful approach for research in educational psychology, where it can be used to better understand the individual experiences of students, family members, and school staff (Oxley, 2016). IPA has also been found to be particularly beneficial for exploring complex, ambiguous, and emotionally laden topics (J. Smith & Osborn, 2015). As the experiences of LSAs supporting CYP to regulate their emotions was considered to be an under-researched area, it was felt that it would be helpful to take an exploratory approach that allowed the participants to freely reflect on their experiences. IPA was therefore arguably the best approach for gaining a complete and in-depth account of the complex emotional experiences of secondary school LSAs, being such a highly analytical method that attempts to get as close as possible to fully understanding peoples' lived experiences (Pringle et al., 2011).

IPA has been informed by three key concepts of philosophical knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Each of these will be subsequently explored in their relation to IPA and the current study. Following this, criticisms about IPA will be considered, providing justification for its use in this study. Finally, the procedure for how IPA was used will be outlined in detail.

3.6.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the approach to studying the experience of what it is like to be human, particularly in terms of what is meaningful to people (Alase, 2017; J. Smith et al., 2021). Phenomenology is largely rooted in the work of Husserl (1931), who conceived of it as a philosophical approach to understanding the core structures of experience and consciousness. Husserl encouraged people to 'go back to the thing itself' (P. Willis, 2001), the 'thing itself' being the experiential content of consciousness. Husserl's (1931) work has therefore influenced IPA by suggesting people should focus and reflect on lived experience (i.e., the content of consciousness), which was the approach taken in the current study. Heidegger (1962) developed on some of Husserl's ideas, though was more concerned with the ontology of existence itself and how practical activities and relationships create meaning in peoples' lives. Heidegger's (1962) view of the person is that of a worldly 'person-in-context', where the concept of intersubjectivity (i.e., the shared and relational nature of the world) is central (J. Smith et al., 2021). Some of his key ideas have influenced IPA, such as that people exist in a world full of objects, relationships, and language, and that people create meaning based on their own perspectives and interpretations. In the current study, there was an emphasis on the participants' meaning making in the context of their relationships within a particular school environment. Somewhat conversely to Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that humans see themselves as different from everything else in the world, where the body is more of a means of communicating with the world than an object in it. The implications of his work for IPA researchers are that the lived experience of being a 'body-in-the-world' is important for understanding others' perspectives, and peoples' experiences need to be closely attended to so they can be understood as much as possible

(J. Smith et al., 2021). Close attention was therefore given to the participants in the current study to better understand their individual and unique perspectives. Unlike other philosophers, Sartre (1956) believed that human nature is more about ‘becoming’ than ‘being’, where people are constantly developing, becoming, and discovering themselves throughout their lives. He also wrote about ‘nothingness’, which is the idea that things that are absent are as important as the things that are present in defining how individuals view the world and themselves. J. Smith et al. (2021) noted that Sartre's (1956) work has influenced IPA by perhaps giving the clearest glimpse of what a phenomenological analysis of the human condition could look like. More recent authors have also expanded on phenomenological theory to make it better align with modern qualitative research; van Manen (2016) wrote about using phenomenology to interpret the lived experiences of research participants, and Moustakas (1994) wrote about trying to move beyond the personal experiences of the researcher when understanding a participants’ experience (a practice researchers now refer to as ‘bracketing’). Taking a phenomenological approach was key to analysing the participants' lived experiences in the current study, and bracketing was used throughout to reduce potential researcher biases.

3.6.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics describe the theories, methods and purposes of the interpretation of phenomena, with a particular emphasis on contextual meaning making (Oxley, 2016). J. Smith (2004) described IPA as involving a ‘double hermeneutic’ due to its two-stage interpretation process. In the current study, I

was attempting to make sense of how participants made sense of their experiences as LSAs supporting students with their emotions. Schleiermacher (1998) was one of the first to write about hermeneutics. He offered a holistic view, arguing that interpretation involves both a grammatical component (i.e., considering the objective meaning of the text) and a psychological component (i.e., considering the individuality of the author). He also argued that interpretation is an art that involves a range of skills to provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis. These ideas laid the foundation for the interpretive aspect of IPA (J. Smith et al., 2021), with such interpretive skills being essential for the data analysis process in the current study. Heidegger (1962) elaborated on the analytical method for interpreting peoples' words, such as by suggesting that analysts should attempt to distinguish between 'visible' and 'hidden' meanings (i.e., what is on the surface and what their words might be concealing). He also encouraged analysts to be aware of their 'fore-conceptions', which are their prior experiences, assumptions, and preconceptions that could lead to a biased and potentially incorrect interpretation. Heidegger's (1962) work has influenced IPA due to his formulation of phenomenology as an explicitly interpretive activity, and his encouragement of researcher reflexivity and bracketing (J. Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, before attempting to interpret the participants' meaning making, it was important for me to first consider how my prior experiences had influenced my preconceptions about how the LSA role is experienced. Gadamer (2013) similarly wrote about the complex relationship between the interpreter and interpreted, including the impact of preconceptions. He also argued that the focus of interpretation should be on understanding the content rather than understanding the person. These concepts have influenced the development of

IPA, and J. Smith et al. (2021) noted that his ideas are particularly useful for IPA studies focusing on making sense of historical texts. One final concept that has influenced IPA is the 'hermeneutic cycle', which encourages a non-linear and dynamic approach to interpretation that examines the relationship between the 'part' and the 'whole' (J. Smith et al., 2021). The hermeneutic cycle was thought about during the analysis stage of the current study, such as when considering how individual quotes related to whole transcripts and how single episodes in participants' lives related to their entire lived experiences.

3.6.3 Idiography

Idiography, another major theoretical influence on IPA, is concerned with the 'particular'; IPA studies such as this one aim to gain a greater level of detail by analysing particular cases in more depth, examining how experiential phenomena are understood by particular people in particular contexts (J. Smith et al., 2021). This is in contrast to the majority of 'nomothetic' psychological research, which aims to make generalisations about larger groups and populations. Although idiographic methods such as IPA focus on single cases, it has been argued that generalisations can still be made, albeit in a different way to how nomothetic studies establish generalisations (Harré, 1979). Case studies have a lot value for exploratory research in particular, and it is arguably still possible to draw individual cases together for comparative analysis which can lead to 'low-level' generalisations (Bromley, 1985, 1986). Whilst the current research project was more concerned with understanding the emotional experiences of a few LSAs without the need to make wider generalisations, it

was still hoped that the findings could provide new insights that would have some relevance for those working in and with schools. The idiographic approach of IPA research also allows for both shared and diverse experiences amongst individuals to be fully explored and creatively thought about (Eatough & J. Smith, 2017). Therefore, in the current study, the participants' experiences were considered on both an individual and group level respectively.

3.6.4 Critiques of IPA

In choosing IPA as the data analysis method for this study, it was felt to be important to first consider some of the criticisms made about IPA as an approach. Firstly, it has been argued that the idiographic and small-scale nature of IPA research is a weakness, as findings cannot be generalised and it is challenging to establish which variables are of significance (Giorgi, 2010; Pringle et al., 2011). However, J. Smith et al. (2021) have argued that using IPA with small samples allows for a richer and more detailed level of analysis and understanding of individual experiences. The aim of the current study was never to generate findings that could be generalised to LSAs across the United Kingdom (UK), but rather to better understand the experiences of a few individual LSAs by a conducting a close and detailed analysis. Findings from IPA studies can also take both an exploratory and explanatory approach to offer context and contribute to theory development (Cassidy et al., 2011; Pringle et al., 2011). Additionally, focusing on individuals can help with "understanding the part to illuminate the whole" (Oxley, 2016, p. 60). Idiographic research projects such as the current study can arguably provide much needed detail about

individual experience, and comparative analyses can still be used to make 'low-level' generalisations (Bromley, 1985, 1986; Harré, 1979).

IPA has also been criticised due to the limitations of trying to understand experience through the medium of interviews. IPA relies on participants being able to effectively articulate their experiences in an effective manner, meaning that interpretations will be limited if participants cannot adequately articulate themselves (Willig, 2021). Interpretation is then also limited by the ability of the researcher to be skilled and reflexive in their analysis of the participants' words (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The reliance on spoken language in interviews also arguably raises concerns around representational validity, where words add additional meanings and only provide an understanding of how individuals construct their experiences (Willig, 2021). Due to the reliance on participant accounts of phenomena, without a true exploration into the cause and explanation of such phenomena, IPA can arguably be more descriptive than it can be explanatory (Willig, 2021). For this reason, it has been argued that IPA is often more psychological than phenomenological in its approach, as the focus is typically on individuals having experiences rather than the experiences themselves as the phenomena (van Manen, 2017). However, J. Smith (2018) countered this argument by contending that the psychological and phenomenological aspects of IPA are not mutually exclusive. He also argued that the reflective aspect of experience is just as important as the actual experience of phenomena, especially as they influence each other and can be examined holistically. This was felt to be the case during the interview process of the current study, where participants appeared to consolidate and develop their thinking about their experiences by reflecting back on phenomena.

Finally, IPA has been criticised for potentially being superficial compared to other qualitative research methods. Giorgi (2010, 2011) contested that IPA does not fully adhere to its principles of phenomenology and hermeneutics, and it misuses concepts such as bracketing and phenomenological reduction. He argued that IPA "is an example of poor science" (Giorgi, 2010, p.7) due to its freely adaptable method and lack of systematic analysis. J. Smith (2010) responded to these criticisms by discussing how IPA was designed to be flexible, making it more accessible to novice researchers, and validity could be assessed through focusing on transparency rather than replicability. I was partially drawn to IPA as a novice researcher due to its accessibility and flexibility, and I have tried to ensure validity through remaining transparent at every stage of the research process. However, it has also been argued that, in reality, IPA studies often just look like thematic analysis studies with very small samples, and thus there are many situations where it would actually be better to use thematic analysis (Braun & V. Clarke, 2021). In response, others have noted that, whilst IPA starts with a standard thematic analysis, it should really go beyond thematic analysis in its depth (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). IPA is preferable to thematic analysis when research is aiming to understand individual experience (J. Smith et al., 2021), and some studies utilising both IPA and thematic analysis have found that IPA adds much more depth and may be a more informative approach (Spiers & Riley, 2019; Warwick et al., 2004). As the aim of the current study was to conduct an in-depth exploration of LSAs' experiences, it was felt that an approach such as thematic analysis would not allow for a deep enough level of analysis in comparison to IPA.

3.7 IPA Procedure

3.7.1 Step 1: Reading and Re-Reading

The procedure will now be outlined for how IPA was used in this study. Following transcription, the first stage of IPA is to immerse oneself in the data (J. Smith et al., 2021). This was done by reading and re-reading the transcripts, alongside listening to the audio recordings of the interviews. Field notes were written in the form of a reflective diary immediately after each interview (an example of this can be viewed in Appendix H).

3.7.2 Step 2: Exploratory Noting

The second stage of IPA is to create exploratory notes throughout each transcript, examining the semantic content and the participants' use of language (J. Smith et al., 2021). This stage often merges with stage one, where a comprehensive and detailed set of notes was created for each transcript in a similar way to how one would complete a free textual analysis. A large amount of these exploratory notes had a clear phenomenological focus and attempted to stay as close to the participants' explicit meanings as possible. These were often descriptive and attempted to highlight what was important to each participant (such as relationships, processes, and values), and how the participants made sense of those things. Alongside these more descriptive notes, more interpretive notes were also created which examined the participants' language, considered contextual factors, identified more abstract

concepts, and included some researcher reflections (an example transcript with exploratory noting and an experiential statement can be viewed in Appendix I).

3.7.3 Step 3: Constructing Experiential Statements

The third stage of IPA is to analyse the exploratory notes in order to reduce the volume of detail (whilst maintaining complexity) and articulate the most important features of the exploratory notes (J. Smith et al., 2021). Through this process of summarising exploratory comments, ‘experiential statements’ can be created, which are statements that relate directly to the experiences of participants. Experiential statements were therefore constructed throughout each of the interview transcripts to capture what was crucial at each part of the text (an example transcript with exploratory noting and an experiential statement can be viewed in Appendix I). There was a greater level of interpretation at this stage, and statements were clearer and more stable than exploratory notes in how they reflected participants’ experiences. Experiential statements represented both what was important at different points in the text, but also what was meaningful broadly across the text. This shows how the hermeneutic cycle factors into analysis, where the parts were interpreted in relation to the whole, and the whole was interpreted in relation to the parts (J. Smith et al., 2021).

3.7.4 Step 4: Searching for Connections Across Experiential Statements

The fourth stage of IPA is to analyse how experiential statements best fit together to produce a structure that highlights the most important and interesting aspects of the participants' accounts (J. Smith et al., 2021). This was done by physically printing and cutting up the experiential statements on pieces of paper and distributing them randomly across a large surface. This provided a 'bird's eye view', allowing the experiential statements to be easily moved around as different possible connections were explored. Each experiential statement was also treated with equal importance as connections were searched for. This process led to clusters of experiential statements being formed which mapped out interconnections and revealed certain patterns across the clusters (a photograph exemplifying this clustering process of searching for connections across experiential statements can be viewed in Appendix J). To reduce possible bias in this stage of analysis, flexibility, creativity, and open-mindedness were utilised to consider different possibilities of how clusters could be best organised (i.e., attempting to look beyond what was immediately obvious and expected when examining how statements could fit together).

3.7.5 Step 5: Naming the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

The fifth stage of IPA is to give a title to each of the clusters of experiential statements, which are from that point referred to as Personal Experiential Themes (PETs; J. Smith et al., 2021). Personal Experiential Sub-Themes (PESTs) can also be identified when distinct groups of clusters are felt to relate to a broader overarching PET. PETs and PESTs are 'personal' as they are at the level of each individual participant, they are 'experiential' as they directly

relate to their experiences or sense-making, and they are ‘themes’ as they reflect analytic entities present throughout the transcripts. Once PETs and PESTs were named for each participant, they were consolidated and organised into a new document (an example document extract in which PETs were named and organised can be viewed in Appendix K).

3.7.6 Step 6: Continuing the Individual Analysis of Other Cases

The sixth stage of IPA is to repeat steps 1–5 for each individual participant (J. Smith et al., 2021). As IPA recognises that each person will have their own unique experiences, each case was treated on its own terms during the analysis. Whilst the analysis of each case led to new understandings about participants’ experiences, it also created new preconceptions and expectations. It was therefore felt to be important to attempt to minimise the influence of previous analyses so that ideas were not simply reproduced. I attempted to notice when I was starting to make mental comparisons at this stage between different participants’ transcripts; by becoming more aware of when this was happening, it was easier to bracket my expectations and assumptions.

3.7.7 Step 7: Working With Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) to Develop Group Experiential Themes (GETs) Across Cases

The seventh and final stage of IPA is to compare the PETs identified for each participant to discover patterns of similarity and difference across the entire

sample (J. Smith et al., 2021). This cross-case analysis explored points of convergence and divergence to highlight the shared and unique experiences of the participants. Whilst this process demonstrated patterns of broad similarity, the aim of this stage was not to present an explicit ‘average’ or ‘group norm’ across the cases, and each participant’s individual experience was still considered on its own terms. In a similar process to how connections were searched for across experiential statements, PETs and PESTs from all cases were physically printed out on pieces of paper which were then cut up and distributed randomly across a large surface. Connections across PETs and PESTs were then creatively and dynamically examined, leading to clusters being formed which mapped out certain patterns. These clusters were given appropriate titles, and from that point were referred to as Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and Group Experiential Sub-Themes (GESTs). Once GETs and GESTs were named, these were consolidated and organised into a new document. Following university tutorials and additional reflection, the GETs and GESTs were further consolidated and refined (the document containing the development of the GETs and GESTs can be viewed in Appendix L).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

3.8.1 Context of Ethical Practice

Several professional bodies have informed the context for ethical psychological research in the United Kingdom. The European Federation of Psychologists’ Associations (EFPA) identified four key ethical principles that psychologists and

psychological associations should keep central to their practice: respect for a person's rights and dignity, competence, responsibility, and integrity (European Federation of Psychologists' Associations, 2005). These principles have informed the British Psychology Society (BPS) in both their *Code of Ethics and Conduct* for all psychologists (British Psychological Society, 2018), and in the guidelines specified by the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (Division of Educational and Child Psychology, 2002). The BPS' *Code of Human Research Ethics* (Oates et al., 2021) has also informed ethical research for psychologists, as has the Health & Care Professionals Council's *Standards of conduct performance and ethics* (Health & Care Professions Council, 2018). The principles and standards outlined in these documents were therefore adhered to at all stages of the research process. In addition to these national guidelines, the principles and procedures outlined in UEL's *Code of Practice for Research Ethics* (University of East London, 2020) were also adhered to throughout. This included applying for ethical approval from UEL's School of Psychology Ethics Committee, which was granted on the 7th April 2022 (this can be viewed in Appendix D). Two amendment requests to change the research title were also granted by the School of Psychology Ethics Committee on 31/01/2023 and 29/01/2024 respectively (these can be viewed in Appendix M).

3.8.2 Anonymity, Confidentiality and Data Protection

As this study explored peoples' personal experiences, an important ethical issue to consider was around anonymity, confidentiality, and data protection. As the research findings would be publicly accessible, it was not possible to offer

the participants true confidentiality (J. Smith et al., 2021). However, it was still possible to offer the participants anonymity through the removal of identifying information and the use of pseudonyms. To ensure all the data collected remained secure, guidance outlined by the Data Protection Act (2018) was followed throughout. A Data Management Plan was also created, which was approved by UEL's Library and Learning Services on 27/04/2022 (this can be viewed in Appendix N). This included information about how data would be securely collected, the documentation and metadata that would accompany the data, how data would be securely stored, how access to data would be managed, how data would be preserved, what resources would be utilised, and who would be responsible for data management.

3.8.3 Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw

It was important to ensure that all the participants gave fully informed consent before they participated in the research (Schofield, 2014). Each participant was given an information sheet ahead of being interviewed (this can be viewed in Appendix E), which clearly explained the principles of informed consent and withdrawal. Following this, they were asked to complete a consent form (this can be viewed in Appendix F). Just before starting the interview, participants were asked if there was anything they did not understand or would like to discuss, and they were reminded that they could withdraw at any point. I ensured that I was open and transparent about the aims of the study throughout the research process.

3.8.4 Risk of Harm and Duty of Care

Perhaps the biggest ethical issue in this research was the risk of emotional harm. As the study aimed to explore the participants' personal and emotional experiences, the research process could have become potentially uncomfortable or even distressing for them. This may have also occurred if there was a perceived power imbalance between participant and researcher (Allmark et al., 2009). It was therefore very important that I created a non-judgemental space in which the participants were positioned as the experts in their experiences. It was hoped that the interview process would actually be beneficial for the participants, particularly at a time where the wellbeing of school support staff across the country had been gradually deteriorating and where they often did not feel comfortable talking about their difficult experiences with their line managers (Savill-Smith & Scanlan, 2022). It has been found that qualitative research interviews have the potential to be therapeutic for participants, as they give them space to talk through and make sense of their experiences (Rossetto, 2014). To ensure there had not been any psychological harm from the interviews, participants were offered a debrief at the end of their interview to discuss the research experience. They were also given a debrief sheet to signpost them to information about looking after their mental health (this can be viewed in Appendix G). Additionally, they were given the option of contacting me or their school's link Educational Psychologist (EP) following the study if they had any further concerns.

3.9 Ensuring Quality, Validity and Trustworthiness

3.9.1 Sensitivity to Context

Yardley (2015) identified ‘sensitivity to context’ as one of the four main principles of ensuring validity in qualitative research. She suggested that researchers could demonstrate sensitivity to context by becoming familiar with the relevant theories and literature of their research, as well as attempting to better understand the sociocultural context of the research participants. As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, I became familiar with the local context of the research setting during the research process, I familiarised myself with different theories relating to emotional regulation, and I conducted a systematic review of the existing literature that has explored the emotional experiences of LSAs. Interview questions were also designed to be open-ended to rebalance potential power imbalances and encourage participants to speak freely about what was important to them, rather than being constrained by perceived expectations.

3.9.2 Commitment and Rigour

Yardley (2015) identified ‘commitment and rigour’ as the second of the four main principles of ensuring validity in qualitative research. She explained that commitment refers to the act of researchers fully engaging with the research topic and immersing themselves in the data, and that rigour refers to the completeness and depth in which data is collected and analysed. I demonstrated commitment and rigour in the current study by learning the skills

to effectively collect and analyse the data, following each of the in-depth steps of the IPA process, engaging with the data over several months, and pausing to reflect at each stage of the research process.

3.9.3 Coherence and Transparency

Yardley (2015) identified ‘coherence and transparency’ as the third of the four main principles of ensuring validity in qualitative research. Transparency can be achieved through researchers demonstrating reflexivity and being clear about each stage of the research process. Coherence can be achieved through researchers showing clarity in their writing and providing a clear narrative from participant interviews. In the current study, details about every stage of the research process, including data collection and analysis, has been transparently presented. Reflexivity was also maintained throughout the research process. I examined how my beliefs, assumptions, and prior experiences influenced me to want to carry out the research; active listening was utilised during interviews (as were techniques such as ‘member checking’ to ensure my understanding was accurate); and a reflective diary was kept to acknowledge and bracket potential biases and assumptions (an example of this can be viewed in Appendix H). Reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of interpretive research approaches such as IPA, and good reflexivity can enhance both the research experience and the conclusions drawn from the data (Shaw, 2010).

3.9.4 Impact and Importance

Yardley (2015) identified ‘impact and importance’ as the fourth and final main principle of ensuring validity in qualitative research. This refers to a researcher’s ability to reveal something useful, important, and/or interesting through their research. Yardley (2015) suggested that impact is the biggest marker of validity in a study, where research should ultimately be judged by its utility. It was hoped that the current study would have a positive impact by providing a unique insight into the experiences of its participants and their emotional processes. There has previously been very limited research exploring the emotional experiences of LSAs, and this appears to be the first study that has asked secondary school LSAs to reflect on specific instances of supporting dysregulated students and consider how they supported them and how they managed their own emotions. The discussion chapter goes into greater detail about the strengths of the current study and its implications for those working in and with schools.

3.9.5 Audit Trail

In addition to outlining the four main principles of ensuring validity in qualitative research, Yardley (2015) recommended that researchers keep a ‘paper trail’ of all the evidence linking the raw data to the final report, as this would make it possible for an independent auditor to retrace all the stages of the research. J. Smith et al. (2021) similarly noted that the independent audit is a really powerful process for enhancing validity in qualitative research. They suggested that documents included in the audit trail in an IPA study could include reflective notes, a sense of the experiential statements, and evidence of how the PETs

and GETs were developed. I have therefore provided an audit trail in the current study for each stage of the research process to offer clarity and transparency. To facilitate readers following the audit trail, documentation relating to each stage of the research process (such as an example interview transcript, an extract from my reflective diary, and a record of the development of the GETs and GESTs) have been included in the appendices.

4. Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

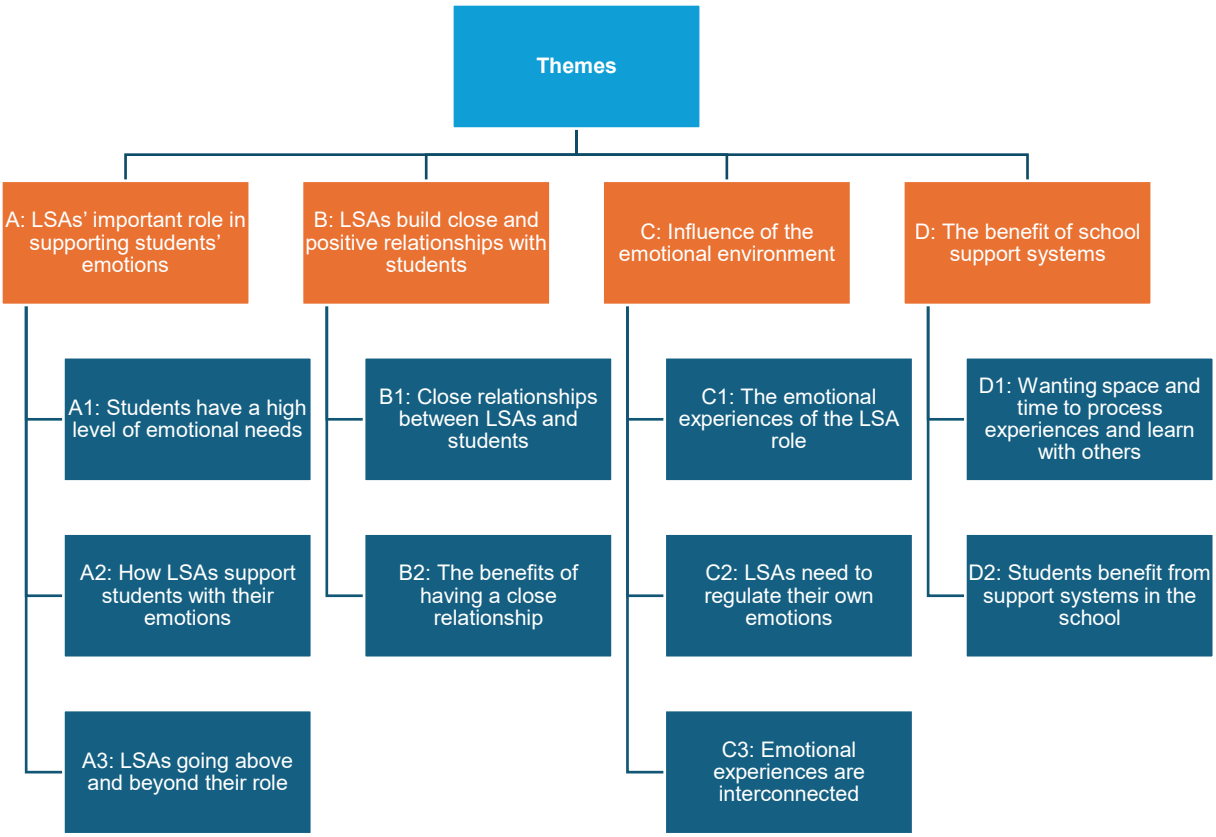
This chapter will present the themes that were identified from interviews with four secondary school Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) that explored their emotional experiences of supporting students to regulate their emotions. The findings were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; J. Smith et al., 2021), which has been outlined in Chapter 3. Through this analysis, four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) were identified: 'LSAs' important role in supporting students' emotions'; 'LSAs build close and positive connections with students'; 'Influence of the emotional environment'; and 'The benefit of school support systems'. Within these overarching GETs, 10 Group Experiential Sub-Themes (GESTs) were identified. An overview of these GETs and GESTs can be seen in Figure 4.1.

Rather than presenting the findings from each interview individually (i.e., a 'theme within case' approach), the presentation of findings will take a 'case within theme' approach, which allows for greater comparison between participants' experiences. Each GET and GEST will be examined in order and will include my interpretation of participants' accounts of their experiences. To maintain the phenomenological aspect of IPA, extracts from the interviews will be presented in the text alongside my interpretations. Each GET subsection will also begin with a figure that outlines the GESTs alongside pertinent quotes with

the aim of giving the best possible representation of the participants' experiences to the reader.

Figure 4.1

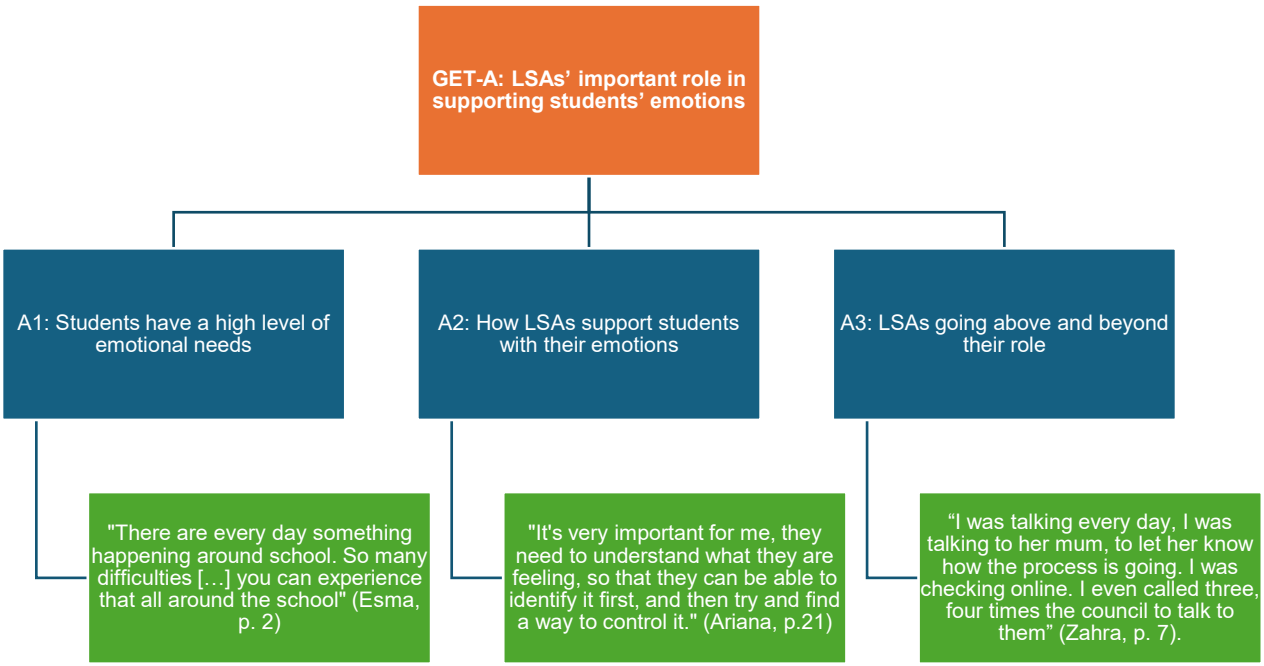
Overview of Group Experiential Themes and Group Experiential Sub-Themes



4.2 Group Experiential Theme A (GET-A): LSAs' Important Role in Supporting Students' Emotions

Figure 4.2

Overview of GET-A, including pertinent quotes from each GEST



4.2.1 GET-A1: Students Have a High Level of Emotional Needs

The participants expressed the view that many of their students often had a high level of need, particularly around emotional wellbeing. When asked how often LSAs were having to support students with their emotions, Ariana answered, "From period one to six […] we deal with their emotions 100% every single day" (p. 35). Similarly, Esma explained, "There are every day something happening around school. So many difficulties […] you can experience that all around the school" (p. 2). Their firm and arguably exaggerated language here really emphasised how they perceived that students were almost always needing support with their emotions. Phrases such as 'every day', '100%', and 'all around' suggest that they were constantly surrounded by such needs. Zahra similarly noted that, "It's like your kids, they are always in need to talk to you […]

they will make it bigger so they always need someone to support them" (p. 3). She acknowledged how teenagers can emotionally process things as being 'bigger' than they are and emphasised how they therefore 'always' needed support from LSAs. It was also identified that students often appeared to become easily emotionally dysregulated whilst at school, where their emotional state could change rapidly. For example, Sophia shared how one child "Went from 100 to probably slowly, slowly calming him down to let's say halfway, but then suddenly something again continued reminding him why he was upset […] so he was just going up and down, up and down" (p. 6). This shows how unpredictable emotions could be for students, and how suddenly the LSAs may have needed to support them.

Whilst the participants reported a high level of emotional need amongst the students, the LSAs all felt they were in a good position to support the students with their needs. Ariana explained that LSAs have a very important role: "Think about SEN. Think about their mental health. Think about being in an inclusive environment […] You have to be there for them. You have to be there. You have to teach them how to control that" (p. 37). Through repeating the phrase 'you have to' three times, Ariana really emphasised the importance of always having an adult present to support students with their emotions. Sophia similarly noted that, "Having a TA there, so it's not just academic support, but also emotional, because they can come to us and we are there" (p. 20). It was felt that LSAs were in a good position to support students with their feelings, even if they could not necessarily 'fix' their problems. With one student, Zahra shared, "I think I was like a guide for her […] It's not always helping her like sorting things out for her" (p. 9). This comparison of the LSA role to that of a guide

shows how Zahra saw herself as being able to help students ‘navigate’ their way through emotional experiences. Zahra similarly compared her role to that of a wheelchair: “I wanted to support the students themselves. I'm a caring person […] It's to help them to go through sometimes, like, when you can't walk, you will use a wheelchair” (p. 25). This comparison positions LSAs as being a crucial source of care and support for students, where they would arguably not be able to make progress without their help. Because of this, the LSAs often seemed to be valued in the school community for being able to support students with their emotions. Ariana explained, "They're always saying at the end of half terms, ‘thank you for the LSAs, thank you for the amazing job’ […] they do not mean thank you for differentiating the work. They mean […] for your behavioural assistance” (p. 38).

Some of the participants identified how the scope of the LSA role had widened over time, and how emotional support had become a much more pertinent aspect of the job. Learning can be an emotional process for students, and the LSAs therefore sometimes had to support both learning and emotions simultaneously. Esma noted that, when supporting students with tests, “It not only the test you are supporting. You also dealing with the behaviour issues in the class, it's always around you” (p. 8). Ariana similarly reflected on how the students could not make academic progress unless they were emotionally supported: “Getting to a good level at the end of the school year, it takes a lot of support, a lot of mental health support to get there” (p. 38). Esma felt that they were actually supporting students’ emotions more than they were supporting their learning: "You don't only support for the lesson. So it's, it's all in one bubble. So 60% is emotional, maybe 40% is academically" (p. 22). Ariana

similarly said, "I would put first the emotional regulation and the emotional support, and then the education support" (p.37). If learning support is secondary to emotional support, this raises the question of how accurate the job title ‘Learning Support Assistant’ truly is: “An LSA is just not an LSA, it's way more than that. Way more than that" (Ariana, p. 38). Ariana shared her thoughts on how supporting students’ emotions had become an ‘unofficial’ aspect of the LSA role:

> "It started with being giving extra support to the students that they must need it; special needs or learning difficulties. But no, it's now it becomes a wider thing. It has to do with emotions, almost from all the students […] I'm doing my research. And I can tell, I can tell that it becomes more and more as a thing to support emotional regulation. Not official, unofficial […] I didn't know that I'm going to do emotional regulations. But let's face it, it is what it is." (Ariana, p. 36)

Therefore, although the LSAs felt they were in a good position to support students’ emotions, they may not have realised before applying for their post that supporting emotions would be such a large ‘unofficial’ part of the role.

4.2.2 GET-A2: How LSAs Support Students With Their Emotions

When students were emotionally dysregulated, the participants shared how they used a range of strategies to support them in the moment. Often the first step was for them to take the student out of the classroom and find a calmer environment. Ariana explained, "I'm always trying to take my, myself out of the situation and just try to get the student away […] all I want to do is just get them

just away from the trouble" (p. 8). As she located the 'trouble' as being within the classroom, this could suggest that it was the environment and situation causing the emotional difficulties. Likewise, Esma said, "You need to take that child out of the classroom or somewhere quiet that you can sit down and talk about it openly. Otherwise, that is not an appropriate environment, having that conversation with the child" (p. 7). She similarly viewed the classroom as being 'not an appropriate environment' to help them regulate their emotions and talk things through. Students likely did not feel comfortable openly discussing their emotions in front of others, especially if they played a role in their dysregulation. Additionally, if people are emotionally influenced by their environments, then it would make sense that the LSAs tried to find 'somewhere quiet' to help their students calm down.

Once the students were in an appropriate environment to regulate their emotions, a particularly helpful approach was for the LSAs to simply give the students space and make them feel listened to. Once students were given space to calm down, they often wanted to talk about their feelings: "We take him out for, for a timeout, he gets calm, then we go back. And if he's ready, usually, usually at the end, he will tell you" (Ariana, p. 27). Sophia shared, "We sat on the stairs, we talk and let, I let him talk because I think, in that way, he was able to take out whatever he is, he was feeling" (p. 3). This need to 'take out' what he was feeling suggests there was a cathartic element in the regulation process. Often just knowing the LSAs wanted to be there for them seemed to be regulatory for the students. When one student was feeling anxious about a piece of work, Zahra shared how she supported him: "But we did it together. So for him, it was, I can feel that he was more relaxed. Even his breathing was

better” (p. 12). By connecting with him and offering to face the problem together, she could see the positive effect it had on him.

However, the participants also noted that, if students were dysregulated, they may not have been able to talk things through straight away. The LSAs therefore often would just give them space without talking, or they would do an activity to calm them down. Esma explained, "I might give some time, some time to relax actually, maybe not getting into conversation straight away […] Helping them putting heart rate down; anger down” (p. 18). Here she acknowledged the physiological aspect of emotional dysregulation, where their anger was directly linked to their heart rate. Breathing exercises were often identified as a helpful strategy to support students in calming down physically: “It's really helping. At the beginning, I didn't let her talk to me. I just took her out of her class, I let her self-regulate, do some breathing" (Ariana, p. 2). Sometimes, the LSAs would use strategies that they knew would work particularly well for individual students. Sophia noted that, with one student, “He loves meditation […] So I use his meditation, I say, ‘Okay, before you get angry again, just think that you are, you know, in […] a really nice place’ and then he laughs again” (p. 15). Therefore, knowing what helped the students could make a big difference. Ariana shared a more structured approach she learned to help students regulate their emotions:

> "I have to take them out from the class or from the playground, let them walk up and down a little bit […] Then I'm asking them about their body, how they feel. Then I'm asking them ‘who was around you, who would you, you could talk?’ and then I say ‘okay, next time…’" (Ariana, p. 5)

After bringing the student to an appropriate environment, Ariana would have them think about their body. By doing a physical activity and having them really focus on how their body was feeling, this seemed to have a regulatory function for them. This then allowed them to have a conversation about what happened and what the student might do differently next time.

The LSAs also identified that it was important for them to be mindful of how they were acting when supporting students to regulate their emotions. As it could be difficult to talk to students when they were dysregulated, it was important to communicate what needed to be said whilst keeping language as simple as possible: "Short sentence is best, you know. Me trying to, I need to try be simple to understand but give the message at the same time, so we need to be quiet" (Esma, p. 17). All the LSAs emphasised the importance of remaining calm whilst supporting the students. Sophia explained, "If you are calm, and listening, I think that will give them also, they will feel more confident to speak to you for that issue, and give them time as well" (p. 13). Conversely, if the LSAs were not calm and acted insensitively, it could cause a further escalation of emotions. Ariana noted that, if she were to give a detention to a student straight away, before taking the time to calm down and connect with them, "It's like I'm adding to her list one more thing to be angry about!" (Ariana, p. 18). Like with appearing calm, the LSAs noted that it helped to remain positive: "I think we need to show positive attitude all the time, so that's important. Smiling, greeting people, children" (Esma, p. 27). It seemed that the LSAs' emotions would impact the students' emotions, so it was important for them to be aware of how they were presenting themselves. This could sometimes mean concealing their true feelings so they could give students what they need: "I'm hoping she

doesn't know how I feel […] They need to know that we care, because this is what they need" (Ariana, p. 16).

Some of the LSAs felt that an important aspect of their role was to teach students how to identify their emotions. Ariana noted that, for students to regulate their emotions, they first needed to understand what they were feeling: “It's very important for me, they need to understand what they are feeling, so that they can be able to identify it first, and then try and find a way to control it” (p. 21). Zahra similarly explained, “It's hard for them, you know, but we need to get to understand how to let them say it […] or to read their feelings and emotions” (p. 24). Phrases such as ‘it’s very important’ and ‘we need to’ highlighted how crucial this aspect of the role was to the LSAs. However, they also acknowledged that it could be challenging for the students to learn this skill. Ariana shared that one helpful approach was to have them really focus on what was happening in their bodies:

> "I find it very, very helpful […] if you give, give them an example from yourself. So I always say ‘when I'm angry, my ears are getting red’. So I asked her, ‘do you, did you realise what happened to your body?’ And then you can tell that they stop, and they're starting to think, 'what is happening when I get angry?'" (Ariana, p.3)

In this scenario, Ariana was able to relate to the student’s emotion and model how she identified anger in her own body. She was then able to really make the student take a moment to reflect on their own physical experience of emotion. By taking such steps, students could potentially learn to identify what different emotions felt like in their bodies.

Additionally, the LSAs felt they were in a good position to teach the students strategies to regulate their own emotions. Perhaps the most mentioned approach was to teach the students that they could ask staff members for help. For example, Sophia would tell her students, “Any problems come and see me or come and see your teacher and then we can deal with any other issues” (p. 5). Zahra explained how she would model asking for the teacher’s help in front of the students: “I will say even ‘I will go and ask the teacher’, just to show him that it's okay if we ask questions. […] And when they feel that they can do it with someone else, it's better” (p. 14). By pretending that she was having difficulties, she was able to show the student how to ask for help, whilst also showing that it is normal to have questions and it is good to ask for help. Some of the LSAs would also explore different strategies to help students calm themselves down. Ariana shared strategies with the students that helped her personally and then had them think about their own strategies: “I started telling her that when I am angry, I just start counting backwards from 70 […] I told her, ‘you know that you can get some techniques’” (p. 4). By modelling what worked for her, she engaged the student and encouraged them to think about what would work best for them. Ariana went on to explain, “I gave her the first one then she said, ‘I like to listen to music’ […] And I said, ‘Okay, why don't you just start singing that song?’" (p. 4). She was therefore able to help the student come up with her own self-regulation strategy based on her interests.

The participants also taught their students the importance of emotional regulation, as there can be consequences in the real world when people fail to

manage their feelings. Ariana told one student, "You cannot just go and fight someone because today it's detention, tomorrow, it's going to be the police and maybe prison and everything" (p. 3). She felt that, whilst school is a safe environment in which students could express emotions such as anger, getting into fights as an adult could be something that leads to serious trouble. Sophia similarly explained, "So I say, ‘imagine you are in the street’, giving him examples […] And, actions and consequences" (p.15). The LSAs therefore taught their students about the importance of managing their feelings by getting them to understand that emotional behaviours can be unsafe, particularly outside of school. Esma shared, "They are starting to understand that, we are asking those things, it's not because making them anger or angry or upset, but making environment safer, calmer, easier" (p. 15). Therefore, when students learned why regulating their emotions was important, they may then have responded better to the LSAs trying to support them. Sophia put a particular emphasis on helping the students to “Think what is right or what is wrong, what needs to be done next time" (p. 2). One way she did this was by activating their empathy: “I have to make him to understand that, you know, hitting others is not something that we do. I told him, ‘you know, you don't hit girls […] if you hit your mum, you won't be happy’" (Sophia, p. 14). By getting them to imagine how a close family member would feel about getting hit, it gave them some perspective as to how others may feel in such situations.

4.2.3 GET-A3: LSAs Going Above and Beyond Their Role

All the LSAs spoke about how they sometimes went beyond the normal boundaries of their roles to better support their students. One way they did this was by taking a position of advocacy for them in school: “The most important thing is inclusion for them […] we could simply fight for them as well” (Zahra, p. 1). Zahra discussed her key value of wanting to be an advocate for students to be included and fully supported with their needs. The fact she wanted to ‘fight’ for her students suggests that she must have really gone out of her way to advocate for them, and her casual use of the adverb ‘simply’ implies fighting for her students was something that was fundamental and/or common in her role. Zahra explained, “Inclusion is everything […] It’s the key. I think the key word is inclusion” (p. 23). The word ‘everything’ suggests that inclusion was at the heart of all her work with her students. One way Zahra did this was by asking other staff members to make reasonable adjustments for them: “We ask always the teachers if we can extend like the deadline of the homework. If we can extend like, give them extra time for their assessments” (p. 11).

Sophia spoke about how she had sometimes gone against what other staff members had said if it meant better supporting the students’ emotional needs. For example, when some staff members said one boy should not be given pictures of a dress, as they could not understand why he wanted it, Sophia thought, "Instead of putting more barriers between you and him, just give him a picture, make him happy, that's it” (p. 12). She was therefore prepared to go against what other people in the school were saying to prioritise creating connections and positive emotions for the student. Sophia also shared that she would sometimes take on additional responsibilities that she usually would not be prepared to do. In one instance, a student wanted her to scribe for him in an

exam, which was not something that was part of her role or something she felt she should do: “I say ‘no it's better if somebody else scribes for him’. But then I ended up scribing for him for the rest of his exams" (Sophia, p. 10). This demonstrates how Sophia wanted to help her students as much as possible and was prepared to take on additional responsibilities such as this.

Another way in which the LSAs would go beyond their role in supporting their students was to create links with their parents. Esma felt, “We are actually very important person between child, parents, school and teacher […] We are building bridges between those” (p. 12). As she worked closely with her students and often liaised with the people around them, she was in a good position to create connections. Esma felt this was needed as, often, “This connection has failed” (p. 4). After meeting with parents on one occasion, they “Agreed to communicate often, better, having regular meetings, sharing the positives and negatives" (p. 4). Esma discussed her experience of this collaborative approach, and how it had an instantly positive impact:

> "You can tell around the table that his behaviour is going to change straight away from the next day! From the moment he walks from the meeting room! […] we need to make a link between family, between parents and school […] I believe that's the only way we can make progress" (Esma, p. 3)

The fact that Esma felt this was the ‘only way’ they could have made progress highlighted the importance of such an approach. Zahra similarly explained that, “Sometimes I go a step forward” (p. 4) in collaborating with parents. She even went out of her way to try and support the family in organising free school meals

from the council: “I was talking every day, I was talking to her mum, to let her know how the process is going. I was checking online. I even called three, four times the council to talk to them” (Zahra, p. 7). This demonstrates how Zahra was very invested in advocating for her students and their families, being prepared to go well beyond the normal boundaries of her role to do this.

Some of the participants also went beyond their typical LSA roles by finding new and creative ways to support their students. Ariana explained how she was "Always keeping very updated with my research. But then, once you do it in practice, you realise that all the research is not for all the students […] you just have to adjust your techniques” (p. 4). She talked about wanting to read up on the best ways to support students with their emotions and tried to embed these in her work, whilst also noting that such strategies often had to be adapted in practice. Taking a different approach, Zahra discussed how she would use her knowledge of her students’ interests to find creative ways to support them. For example, she was able to help a student interested in music create a rap song to feel better about his schoolwork. Zahra shared, “He was always quiet in the class. He never participated. But after that rap song he did, he's now participating. It's not too much. But still, he's better” (p. 18). Working creatively like this therefore helped students increase their confidence and level of engagement at school.

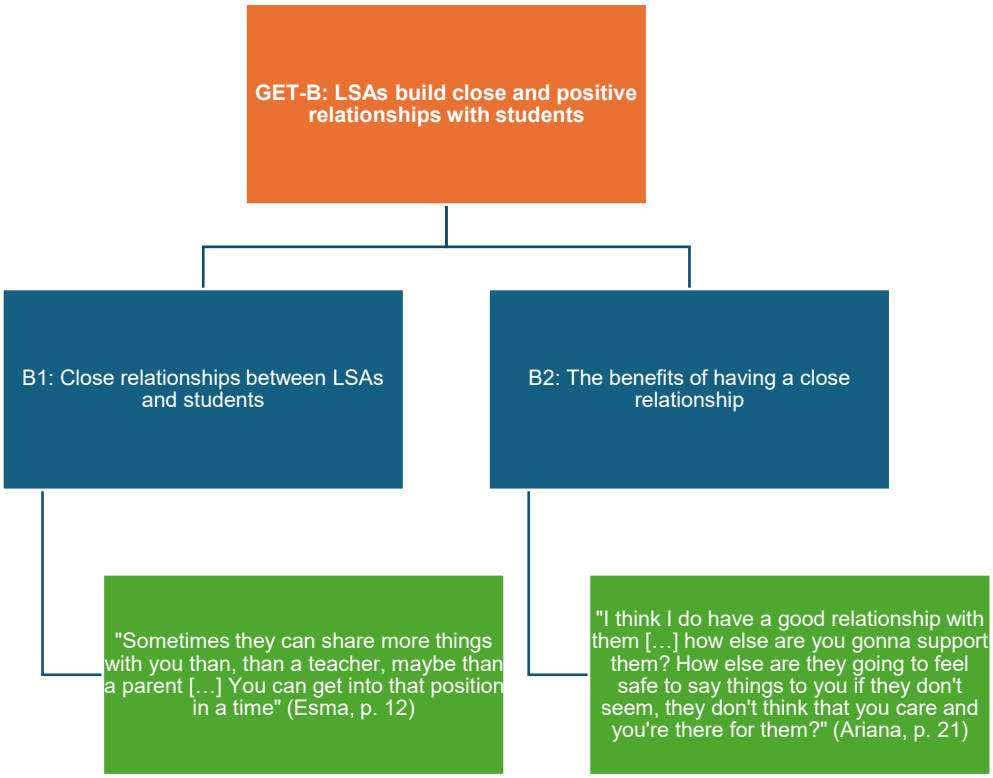
Whilst the LSAs often wanted to go beyond the boundaries of their role, some also acknowledged that it was important to know their limits. For example, Esma noted that it was not always possible to work collaboratively with a child’s

parents: “That is only much you can do; help […] you know that you cannot change anything at home. But if only you can manage you something little changes on the child, makes a big progress” (p. 25). She identified that LSAs could ultimately only change what was happening at school, finding reassurance in the fact that this could still have a big impact.

4.3 Group Experiential Theme B (GET-B): LSAs Build Close and Positive Relationships With Students

Figure 4.3

Overview of GET-B, including pertinent quotes from each GEST



4.3.1 GET-B1: Close Relationships Between LSAs and Students

All the participants explained that they were able to build very close relationships with their students: “You get very, very close with your students” (Ariana, p. 2). One reason for this was they often only had a small number of students to work with. Zahra shared, “Mainly, I have like, seven students” (p. 2), and Sophia similarly noted that she supports “Seven from year 7, three from year 9, three year 8s, and two year 11s” (p. 2). Ariana acknowledged that it took time to build close relationships with students: “You need to build it. It doesn't happen in, in a day […] you have to build that” (p. 22). Although it may take time to build relationships, it was felt that it was not a hard thing to do. For example, Esma shared, "Sometimes it's very simple thing gives you a big progress. Just spending some time with that child, talking to them, be close" (p. 12). Therefore, by spending time with a small number of students over a long period of time, the LSAs were all able to form strong connections with them.

It was noted that the LSA–student relationship could be so strong that the students sometimes felt more comfortable confiding in LSAs than other adults. Esma explained, “Sometimes they can share more things with you than, than a teacher, maybe than a parent […] You can get into that position in a time" (p. 12). The fact that the LSAs could be confided in over teachers, and even parents, really showed the level of trust that could be built. Esma later noted that, for teachers, "It's very under pressured, you know, it's very limited” (p. 23), where they had more work responsibilities and more children to support. Zahra

similarly felt that LSAs have a greater connection with students than teachers due to the amount of time they were able to spend together:

> “I think us as a support staff, we really, I think we have more connection with them, because we spend more time with them, sometimes in the classroom, outside the classroom. So there is a connection between us and them.” (Zahra, p. 5)

Ariana discussed how their close relationship often led students to want to share things about themselves with the LSAs: “There is this thing in the students; they like us. They know we are in their team […] You hear everything, if you're an LSA" (p. 14). The fact that they felt ‘in the same team’ suggests that students really identified with their LSAs, perhaps making the relationship comparable to a friendship. This allowed the LSAs to ‘hear everything’, where the students may have shared things with the LSAs that they may not have shared with other adults: “This is when I know that, 'Okay, he feels safe to, or she feels safe to speak to me'. When they start complaining about the subjects [laughs]!" (Ariana, p. 21). Whilst the LSA–student connection could be compared to a friendship, it was also compared to a familial relationship. Esma shared that:

> “When I am talking to a child, I can, I know how family, Turkish family raising a child […] And also feels close with me, you know? And then it helps, they can open up easily, they feel like we are relatives." (Esma, p. 11).

When Esma was working with students from a similar cultural background, this added a sense of closeness to such an extent that they felt like relatives with

each other. Having such a strong connection with students, where LSAs could be perceived as comparable to a friend or a relative, really gave some insight as to why students felt so comfortable opening up, thus allowing the LSAs to get to know them very well.

4.3.2 GET-B2: The Benefits of Having a Close Relationship

The LSAs all shared their view that having a strong relationship with their students was mutually beneficial. Ariana explained that students would not confide in staff members or feel cared about unless they were close with their LSAs:

> "I think I do have a good relationship with them […] how else are you gonna support them? How else are they going to feel safe to say things to you if they don't seem, they don't think that you care and you're there for them?" (Ariana, p. 21)

Ariana clearly felt that a strong LSA–student connection was essential for supporting students, to the extent that they may not actually have benefitted from having an LSA there unless they were close with them. As LSAs were the staff members that were always with the students, Ariana noted that this allowed them to support them with whatever they were going through: “They're going to trust you, they're going to see that you are always there. Because you are always there […] we are there for their happiness and sad moments” (p. 36). Having close relationships built trust, which Ariana felt was needed to care for the students and truly support them with their emotions.

Similarly, Sophia talked about how students often felt that LSAs were the best adults in the school to emotionally support them in the moment. She explained, "They don't want to talk to the teacher or to the head, the head of year, they want just somebody that they can feel, you know, that will care for them in that moment that they are in need" (Sophia, p. 21). Students seemed to benefit from having a caring relationship with LSAs, where other staff members may not have been able to help them in the same way. Due to this, Sophia noted that students had wanted LSAs with them in challenging situations such as exams: "He said 'she doesn't understand what I say'. So I say 'oh okay', and he say 'Miss can you, can you be, are you with me in the exam?' […] I think he believed that I understand him better." Students therefore seemed to benefit from feeling understood and supported by the LSAs in situations such as these.

The participants also felt it was beneficial for them to have good relationships with the students as it helped them do a better job. Ariana discussed an instance where having good relationships with the students made it easier to teach them emotional regulation skills: "It's helping them a lot. Because they can see that we're not in the opposite side […] and it feels like with them that, 'oh, we're thinking with the teachers now'" (p. 16). By having the students feel like they were on the same 'side' as the staff members, they became more receptive to thinking together about the strategies Ariana was trying to teach them. Having strong LSA–student connections also sometimes helped the LSAs discover ways to better support them. Zahra shared that getting to know one student allowed her to find out he enjoyed making rap music, which she then

used to support him more effectively. She explained, “It's very important to have like, one to one conversations sometimes. So I discovered his, his talent during the such thing” (Zahra, p. 21). If Zahra had not formed a strong relationship with this student, she likely would never have had the opportunity to discover and utilise his musical abilities.

The participants similarly reflected on how having close relationships could help them be more receptive and understanding of their students’ needs. Zahra explained how she could identify her students’ emotional needs from non-verbal indicators: “He won’t express in telling you, but his emotions, his, his feelings, I can tell his cheeks turn red. So it's worth to say that I can understand now […] I know straight away” (p. 12). The fact that she knew ‘straight away’ suggests that picking up on students’ body language had become an automatic process for her. Some of the LSAs felt that these skills developed due to their knowledge of working with particular students over a long period of time. Esma noted that, just through talking with them, she could easily learn about their needs and what could help them:

> "This kind of opening themselves gives us a lot of clues about their lifestyle, their needs, how they, how we can help them. So many things you can't actually follow. So many things happening! […] Every day is like that!" (Esma, p. 14)

Esma’s exclamations here suggested a sense of amazement at how much she could learn about her students’ needs just from talking to them, particularly as this could happen ‘every day’. Sophia was similarly able to gain more awareness of one student’s needs after working with him for a period of time:

“Because I've been working with him since September, and I know that sometime he's very impulsive, he's very, he can do things just out of the blue” (p. 9).

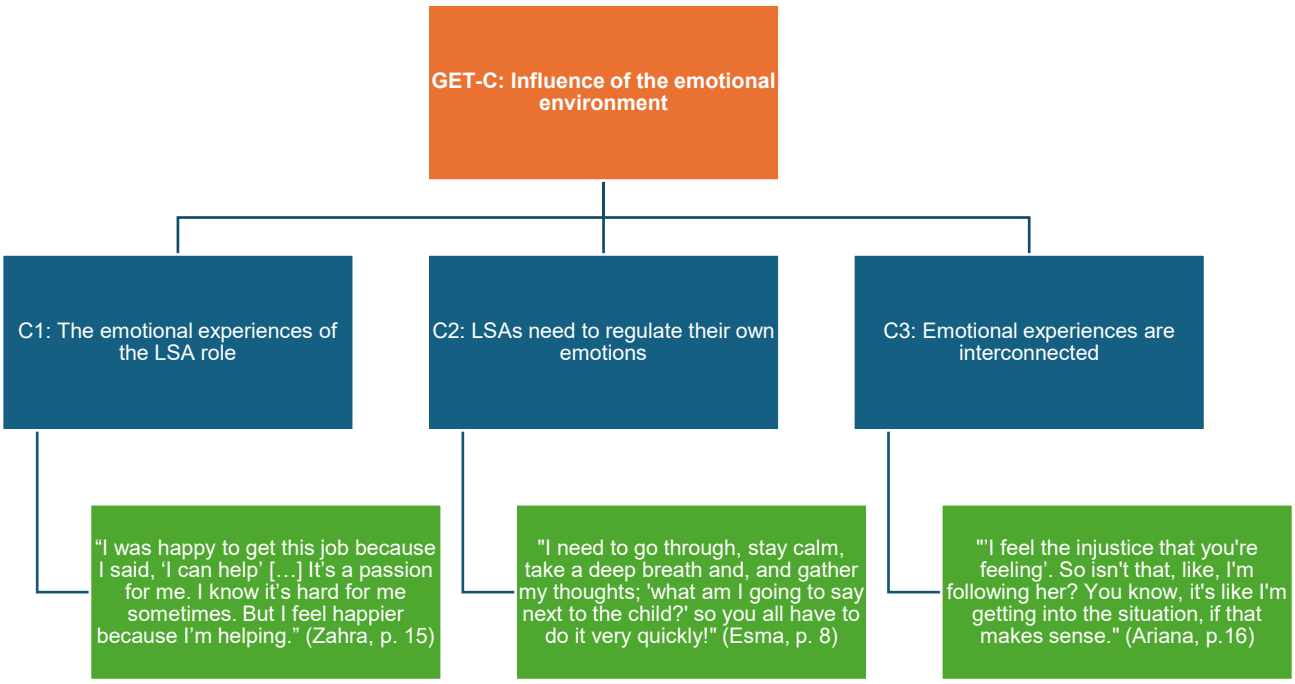
Ariana also felt that her ability to understand her students’ emotional needs came from knowing them well, but also acknowledged her broader experience likely factored in. She shared, "I think it comes from experience, but, plus, knowing the students, that, that helps […] We have a student, if you see him like this [imitates body language], he needs a timeout” (Ariana, p. 27). Conversely, Esma felt that her sociable and positive personality underpinned her ability to be receptive to children and others: “Positive personality. I'm always smiling person, so that helps me a lot. I'm very social, I can interact very quickly with children, even strangers, foreigners” (p. 28). Interestingly, Zahra was unsure where exactly this skill came from, and reflected that it could be a natural ability, or it could have come from experience. She explained, “You can tell when they are anxious. So yeah, I always intend to read the emotions […] I think it's, it's a gift that I have. Or maybe because of my background of nursing” (Zahra, p. 12). The fact she saw her skills as a ‘gift’ demonstrated her positivity and gratitude, though she also considered the possibility that these skills had developed during her time as a nurse. Ultimately, the LSAs’ ability to understand their students’ needs may have come from a combination of knowledge about their students, personal and/or professional experiences, individual personality, and innate ability.

Having close connections with students also allowed LSAs to support other staff members. Esma explained that it was helpful for LSAs to have good relationships with various students, as this allowed the LSAs to support each other when another person was needed: “It is very good for us that we can build relationships with any other children in school. Whichever, there is an emergency you need to step in” (p. 1). Due to their knowledge of the students, Ariana noted that other staff would often turn to the LSAs for information: “When they want to know information about a student, do you know that they always ask the LSAs? […] Because we are, we are around them all the time" (p. 42). This therefore suggested various school staff members benefitted from there being strong LSA–student relationships.

4.4 Group Experiential Theme C (GET-C): Influence of the Emotional Environment

Figure 4.4

Overview of GET-C, including pertinent quotes from each GEST



4.4.1 GET-C1: The Emotional Experiences of the LSA Role

All the LSAs spoke about how supporting students with their emotions could be emotionally challenging for them. Ariana discussed the emotional impact of helping students regulate their emotions: “When I go back to the office, I do get a deep breath, like [deep exhale]. Like, sometimes it’s hard. Not sometimes, it’s always hard” (p. 13). It was like she had to ‘hold her breath’ emotionally when supporting students, and then needed a moment afterwards due to the difficulty of that experience. It was interesting that she corrected herself from saying ‘it is sometimes hard’ to ‘it is always hard’, where it was only upon reflection that she realised how constantly she was experiencing these difficult emotions. In one case, Ariana shared, “It was too intense” (p. 3), where some situations could

feel too challenging to handle in the moment. Even when the LSAs felt they were good at keeping calm, they sometimes noticed themselves getting emotional in the moment. Sophia noted, “I don’t shout, I don’t, well I, when I have to raise my voice, I think it goes too high! [laughter] But I, usually I’m a calm person; very calm” (p. 7). The fact that her voice would go ‘too high’ indicated to her that she was less in control of her emotions than she wanted to be.

One reason for the LSAs experiencing challenging emotions was because they sometimes felt they wanted to do more to help the students. Esma shared, "I would be happier if I can help sorting any, anything for him […] but I would be upset if I can't help the child” (p. 15). This highlights how invested Esma was in supporting them, where she would feel upset if she was unable to help them. She also explained that she would try to help the students by working with their parents, and it could be difficult for her if the parents did not also want to do more:

> "If I can't get any response from the family, so that is actually not motivating you at all! It's so bad if you cannot. You came across some families that they don't care. So that is not a nice word, but, and then it breaks your heart" (Esma, p.25)

It was hard for Esma to accept that she could not necessarily help the student with their home life. The fact it was ‘heartbreaking’ for her really emphasises the extent of the emotional impact. Zahra similarly noted, “We have to keep it a limit between us like, 'it's fine, we're here to help you', but sometimes we can't go

further. And it's hard for us” (p. 5). As Zahra wanted to do as much as she could to support her students, it seemed to be challenging for her to accept that there were limits to how much she could actually do.

Although challenging emotions were often felt in the moment, the participants also noted that they sometimes did not process their feelings straight away. Sophia explained that:

> “At the moment when things are happening, you don't think of 'how I am going to do?', 'what I want to do?'. You just act. But after, you know, everything comes out, then you're like, 'Oh, my God, what's happening?'" (Sophia, p. 16)

When she was so focused on supporting a student, she would not consciously think about the situation or how she was feeling. Once it was over, however, she could suddenly process all the challenging emotions created by the situation. Ariana similarly noted, "Usually, when it starts, it's like, I have no emotions at that point […] In the situation when it happens, I freeze, I feel nothing” (p. 8). Although she sometimes did not feel any emotions in the moment, she later shared how it would impact her afterwards: “When I go home, so that means I'm very, very relaxed, it will, it will hit me. I would say ‘What a day’. And I would think about the things […] I'm reflecting on my day” (Ariana, p. 14). Therefore, the LSAs often did not feel their emotions until they had time to relax and process what had happened.

Whilst the LSAs reported often feeling challenging emotions after supporting students with their emotions, in some cases they would feel bad for an extended period of time. Zahra shared, “You want to think that, yeah, it's not a burden on me now […] But with this girl, I told you, it took like three weeks, I was thinking about her every day” (p. 7). Whilst she was trying not to let the situation affect her, she could not stop herself from worrying, and the fact this was ‘every day’ shows how pervasive the emotions were. Ariana talked about why it was often impossible for her to stop herself from feeling the emotional impact of her work:

> "Have you ever heard the expression, 'try to separate work from home?' […] How? I, I'm trying my best. I'm here eight hours […] How can I not reflect or take the things that are happening in my job at home?" (Ariana, p. 31)

Conversely, the LSAs shared that they also experienced positive emotions in their roles. They all noted that it was particularly rewarding for them when they were able to help their students. Sophia celebrated the progress of one of her students: “From being really, really scared, I, we talked with my friend all the time, and I said, ‘you see how he is now?’, he is smiling, he is very confident, he goes to the lunch hall by himself" (p. 25). Ariana noted that when she was able to help her students succeed “It can make your day" (p. 6), which really demonstrates how impactful this was for her. Zahra explained that it made everyone happy when a student achieved something: “His mum was so happy […] And yeah, you, they feel proud. And even, you know, even his walk was changed that day” (p. 18). Thus, both Zahra and the student’s mother could

share the feeling of pride he was experiencing. Sophia similarly felt proud after being able to help a student: “I think I feel proud that 'Oh, yes, I help him to do it' […] I think that the TAs, we do a lot of, you know, we make a different children's life by dedicating time and, and helping them” (p. 27). This suggests that students and LSAs could mutually benefit from each other, where students benefitted from their support, and this was in turn rewarding for the LSAs. The positive emotional experiences of supporting students sometimes had a profound impact on the LSAs. When helping one student, Zahra reflected, “I was so excited. Like, as if a big event will happen […] we were proud of what he did. But I think that we were more excited than him! [laughter]” (p. 20). The fact that the student’s achievement was like a ‘big event’ for the LSAs highlights how significant it was for them, especially as it was even more emotionally rewarding for them than it was for the student himself.

The LSAs reported that it could even be rewarding to help students when situations were emotionally challenging. When Zahra shared an example of a student feeling upset about receiving a detention, she said, “At the same time, I was feeling really happy because she came to me when she was upset” (p. 9). Therefore, even though the situation was difficult, Zahra was able to celebrate the fact that the student was able to share her emotions with her and she could help her to manage them. Zahra explained that, although there were many emotional challenges in the LSA role, these were often balanced out by the positive experiences: “I know it sounds sometimes hard for me. But at the end of the, let's say, the journey of the day, I feel happy because I've done something good for them. So I like to balance my emotions” (p. 16). Esma

similarly spoke about how the positive feeling of helping students often counteracted potentially challenging emotions:

> "Mostly I am satisfied that I could give some support and help, mostly. But there are some occasions that you feel bad! […] if I could be a good role model to them, so that is most beneficial things for me, then so I could go to sleep without having any hesitation that 'oh did I did good or bad?'" (Esma, p. 24)

This example highlights how they sometimes had quite mixed feelings about certain situations, and how it was thus important for their wellbeing for them to consciously focus on the positive aspects. In some cases, small positive experiences could greatly outweigh negative ones. When one student gave a kind letter to Zahra, she shared, “This really gave, gave me a lot of energy to continue working, even if it's a small word from them, but it will always give us you know, like a, how can I say; energy to go?” (p. 16), and then added on, “Even a smile will make you happy” (p. 17). This showed how powerful a positive experience could be, and how such emotions could be felt as an ‘energy’ that motivated her to continue supporting students.

The participants also spoke about how they enjoyed the LSA role generally, where it was emotionally rewarding to be in a helping profession. Ariana shared, "I love my job. I cannot do anything else” (p. 13), which highlighted that she could not imagine a more rewarding job for her. Esma also spoke about how much she loved her job as an LSA: “I really love what I'm doing, yeah. I love teaching as well. I wish I could give more! […] I find so, so nice to see I made a small positive progress in their, in their life, so that makes me so happy” (p. 28).

When considering how challenging the role could be, the fact she wanted to give even more showed just how rewarding it could be to make a difference to students' lives. Zahra similarly said, "I was happy to get this job because I said, 'I can help' […] It's a passion for me. I know it's hard for me sometimes. But I feel happier because I'm helping" (p. 15). Having so much passion for being able to help others, Zahra seemed to be fine with having occasional challenges. The participants spoke about why they were initially drawn to the LSA role. Sophia explained, "I really like working with teenagers […] Because change is happening. They're growing up. They're becoming young adults" (p. 22). It seems that supporting secondary school students was uniquely rewarding for Sophia as she could see them begin maturing into adulthood. Ariana shared that she was drawn to the role due to her own personal experiences of secondary school: "I didn't have good pastoral care in the school […] even now I say, 'don't let the students feel the way that you were feeling'" (p. 19). As she knew how detrimental it was to not be emotionally supported growing up, she became highly motivated to ensure others had that support.

4.4.2 GET-C2: LSAs Need to Regulate Their Own Emotions

The LSAs reported that they felt it was important for them to remain emotionally regulated in the moment when helping students manage their emotions. Esma noted that it was not possible for her to help students unless she first regulated herself: "I need to stay calm. If I can't regulate my thoughts, my emotions, how am I going to help with that, that child" (p. 17). Esma explained that it could actually make things worse if LSAs were not able to manage their emotions, as

otherwise, “It's going to escalate the situation” (p. 8) and "The child will learn, 'okay, this is how you actually sorting the problem; you have to raise your voice, be aggressive, challenge, and this is how people listen to you'" (p. 17). Therefore, if LSAs were dysregulated, this could have caused the students to become more dysregulated and they may have learned from this that it was fine to deal with emotions in such a way. For this reason, Esma noted, "We have to be so, be careful how we are talking to the children; which language we are using, which right words we are using” (p. 26), which was a thought echoed by Ariana: “I need to carefully choose my words” (p. 10). Being careful about the language they used appeared to be challenging whilst also trying to manage their own emotions.

The participants explained how they were able to remain regulated in the moment when supporting students. Sophia shared that she was naturally quite a calm person, which was beneficial in remaining regulated: “I am very calm person. Yeah, when I, you know, if something is happening I just keep calm and try to work out what else can I do” (p. 7). Conversely, Ariana had to learn how to stay calm: “I think out of my experience, I know how to control my, my emotions and my feelings, from my perspective, so I am there for them at the moment” (p. 2). Esma shared that one helpful method was to reassure herself and remind herself to be patient: "You have to be strong and patient with the child, even if you are angry […] we have to reassure ourselves, we need to stay calm” (p. 7). The repeated phrases ‘have to’ and ‘need to’ again highlighted the importance of remaining regulated. She shared another strategy of taking a moment to breathe and think:

> "I need to go through, stay calm, take a deep breath and, and gather my thoughts; 'what am I going to say next to the child?' so you all have to do it very quickly! […] I think it's coming automatically" (Esma, p. 8).

She acknowledged that it could be challenging to do this quickly, though also noted that she eventually learned to do this without having to consciously think about it.

As the LSAs shared that they often experienced challenging emotional difficulties after a situation had happened, this was often when they had to self-regulate their emotions. One approach commonly used was trying to distract themselves from how they were feeling. Sophia noted that, if "You think over and over and over, I think you make things worse, rather than better" (p. 28), so it was better for her to not let herself overthink things. Ariana shared that baking could be a particularly helpful distraction for her: "Baking helps everything. Everything. Yeah, it gets out. Because my mind goes […] The instructions, and the counting, and the mixing and everything. My mind forgets everything" (p. 29). The fact that baking 'gets out' her emotions shows that it was cathartic, and the focus on following precise instructions suggests it had a mindful component. Zahra similarly spoke about doing enjoyable activities to distract herself and 'get rid' of her thoughts: "I do other things, like entertain myself, like do crochet, or drawing or anything, just to get rid of the ideas that I've got, all the while I'm thinking about them. I distract myself" (p. 6). Though as she still thought about the students 'all the while' perhaps suggested she could not completely distract herself. Another approach was trying not to get too emotionally invested in the students, though this was often hard to do. Ariana said she tried "To find the way not to get too much attached. Not to get it inside me […] I'm not gonna lie,

it, it affects me, it affects me a lot" (p. 13) and Zahra said, "Emotionally we, we try hard to be separated. Yeah. It's hard for us, sometimes even on my way home, I keep thinking about them" (p. 6). Zahra noted that it was ultimately just not possible to switch off her emotions: "It's hard. You can't control yourself" (p. 6).

Another approach the LSAs used to self-regulate was to find a way to process their thoughts and feelings. Ariana spoke about how she would often accept the way she was feeling:

> "If I'm having a bad day, I'm gonna go home and it's gonna be there […] If I'm sad, I'm sad. If I'm upset, I'm upset. I will not fight it […] let it out there, deal with it, and then continue" (Ariana, p. 31)

Here she seemed to acknowledge that it was not possible to avoid her emotions, so it was important to let herself feel what she was feeling to process it and move on. Zahra similarly spoke about the cathartic benefit of crying: "My tears were a way to take it out" (p. 28). By letting herself cry, she was able to process her emotions. The participants also mentioned it was helpful to give themselves positive self-talk and be kind to themselves. Esma would remind herself, "It's not against me. There is something else behind this, but I shouldn't take it, it personal" (p. 16) and that "You can only do that much" (p. 26). It was regulatory to remind herself that students' dysregulation was not about her and that she could only do her best. This sentiment was also shared by Ariana: "That's all we can do. We are okay with that. We need to understand, it's okay" (p. 35). Sophia felt that a helpful way to process her experiences was to talk about them with another person: "Once the situation is over, I just talk to

somebody, like a friend, and discuss what, you know, just tell somebody, I don't like to internalise the situations to myself" (p. 7). Conversely, Ariana said she preferred to be by herself when upset: "It's not easy for me to meet with friends. So I don't do that. I choose not to do that. Even if I have plans, I cancel them" (p. 28), and Zahra felt that she could not talk to others due to confidentiality: "And because it's confidential, sometimes you can't say. I, I always say to myself, 'I can't say to anyone'" (p. 28). Therefore, the LSAs varied in how much they felt they could talk to others to process their emotional experiences.

4.4.3 GET-C3: Emotional Experiences Are Interconnected

The LSAs reported that their negative emotional experiences would often mirror their students' experiences. Ariana shared, "If a student was crying, I would go home and cry and cry and cry […] it is affecting me in a way if I, like I told you, if I see them upset, yes sometimes I will get upset" (p. 33). The fact that Ariana would have the same emotional experience as her students showed that there was a connection between their emotional states. She explained that she could not help having an emotional reaction to the students' emotions due to her natural empathy and connection with them: "My empathy will always be there. Am I going to feel in a specific way, based on what she's saying? Yes" (Ariana, p. 16). The LSAs would often put themselves in the situations of their students and take on their emotions. For example, by remembering what it was like for her when she was in school, Sophia was able to empathise with a student and connect with his emotional experience: "When I can imagine, you know, just remember when you were in school, and you have to line up for lunch, pushing

and shoving everybody! So he was scared of that" (p. 25). The LSAs seemed to have particularly strong empathetic reactions when they could relate to the reasons causing the dysregulation. For example, when Ariana could really see how a situation was unjust for a student she was supporting, she explained, "'I feel the injustice that you're feeling'. So isn't that, like, I'm following her? You know, it's like I'm getting into the situation, if that makes sense" (p. 16).

The LSAs and their students were also emotionally influenced by each other's positive emotions. Zahra explained that students would often want to share good news with her: "They will come to us and say, 'Miss, I've got this mark. I've got this, miss, my homework was good!'" (p. 17), and when asked how that made her feel, Zahra replied, "Oh yeah, very happy and proud!" (p. 17). This shows that when students shared their happiness with Zahra, she experienced a similar emotion. Likewise, when the LSAs displayed certain emotions, this could influence how the students felt. When helping a student to regulate their emotions, Esma noted, "Usually we are following with the child, you know. If I try to make him follow and calm, because I am acting calm, slow tone, nice, calm, easier, that helps with the child and it reflects!" (p. 19). The fact that their emotions 'reflected' shows how they mirrored each other's emotional experiences; acting calm helped the student to feel calm. Sophia similarly explained how she would "Try not to show that I'm surprised or shocked with what they say […] I think that calms them down as well" (p. 7). Acting regulated therefore seemed to be a key aspect of regulating the student's emotions. Interestingly, their emotional connection meant that the LSAs felt more regulated themselves when helping students to regulate. Esma shared, "When you are saying the child, 'Okay, it's okay. Take some few several deep breath'.

And, when you are asking child to do it, actually you are doing it as well. So it's helping both way" (p. 8). By doing a breathing exercise with the student, she noticed that the deep breathing also helped her to regulate. Zahra similarly noted, “It was like, I was helping myself as well. Like, 'I'm doing it, she will be okay'. So yeah, it was for both actually [small laugh]” (p. 8). These examples highlight how co-regulatory processes would simultaneously impact the emotions of both the LSAs and their students.

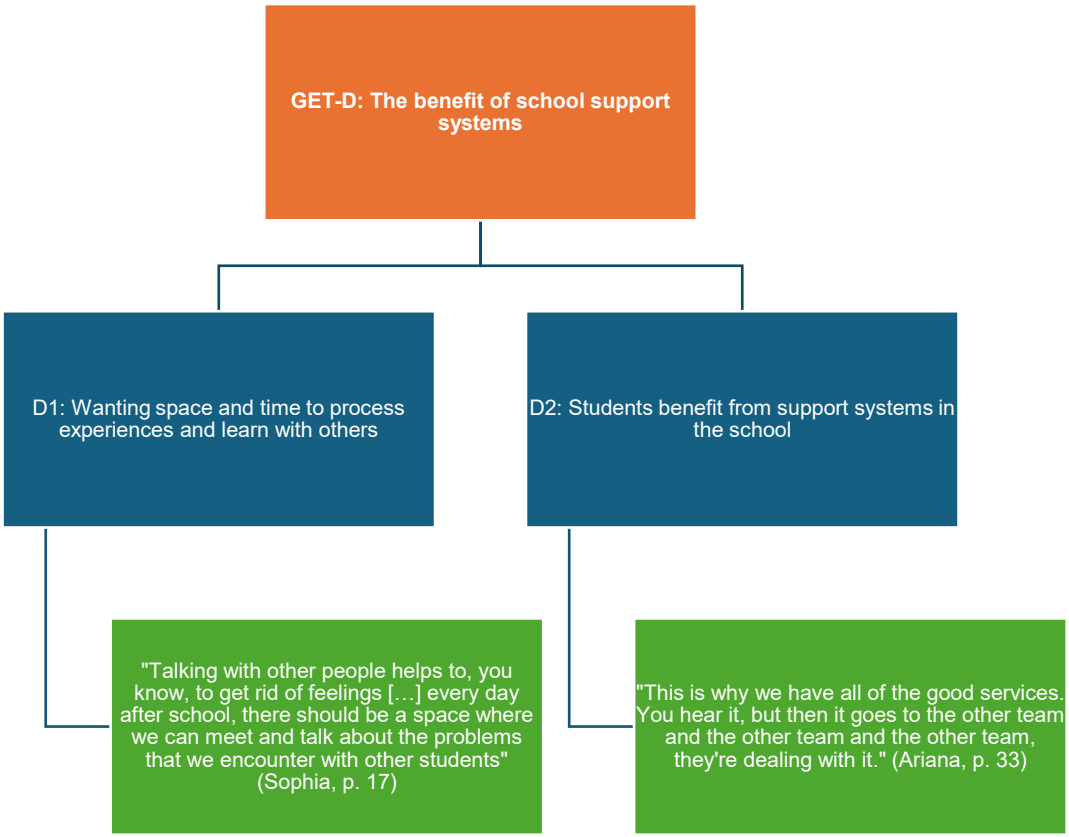
Just as students were influenced by the emotions of the LSAs, they could also be influenced by the emotions of other students around them. Esma explained that it can be “Such a quick escalating, they're copying to each other. It's like a domino effect […] If they react, like with the anger, loud voice and the arguing […] they starting as well” (p. 3). Her description of emotional escalation creating a ‘domino effect’ amongst the students shows how susceptible they were to each other’s emotions. For this reason, many of the LSAs reported that an important regulatory strategy was to take the students to a different environment. Sophia noted that doing this could prevent further emotional escalations: "It's better to remove the student from the classroom and have a chat outside rather than keep the student in the classroom and, seems to you know, will escalate because the other student will not get quiet” (p. 8). Conversely, dysregulated students could sometimes be positively influenced by the regulated emotions of other students. Sophia explained how a calm classroom environment helped a student to regulate on one occasion: “Sometimes they see a fight and they, they see somebody who is upset or angry, they encourage them to fight […] but the rest of the class was calm so

that, that, that helped for him to stop and think" (p. 3). Although the calmness of the class helped the student in this example, the fact that they could have encouraged him in a negative way highlights that it was unpredictable who would be more influenced by the other's emotions.

4.5 Group Experiential Theme D (GET-D): The Benefit of School Support Systems

Figure 4.5

Overview of GET-D, including pertinent quotes from each GEST



4.5.1 GET-D1: Wanting Space and Time to Process Experiences and Learn With Others

The participants found it beneficial when they had people in the school they could talk to about their emotional experiences. Sophia explained, "Talking with other people helps to, you know, to get rid of feelings […] every day after school, there should be a space where we can meet and talk about the problems that we encounter with other students" (p. 17). As she found it helpful to talk through her emotions, she expressed a desire to have a greater level of support in the school system for this, particularly as external systems of support could feel inaccessible:

> "To see a professional, you have to book an appointment, you have to, and then you have to think about what are you going to talk? It's not so spontaneous […] if it's not inbuilt you really have to get, you know, the fact that you have to get a phone and call that makes it 'oh, do I really need to speak to this person?'" (Sophia, p. 19)

Ariana also spoke about the cathartic power of having someone to talk to, where she similarly wanted a space "Just to speak more […] just to take it out of our system. Have you ever heard that phrase? 'Take it out of my system'. Let me just say it with no judgement." The LSAs seemed to find both speaking about their experiences and being listened to without judgement important for their wellbeing. Sophia reflected, “That seems very important, to listen and have time to be listened to” (p. 18). The LSAs seemed to particularly value having support systems within the school. Ariana noted that trying to talk about her experiences with her friends “Doesn't help me […] I don't think they will

understand. They will listen, but they will not understand” (p. 30). Conversely, talking with other LSAs who could relate to her experiences was profoundly impactful for her:

> "You take it out from your, from your soul. If I go back home, my flatmates, even if I start talking about it, they don't know the situation […] The LSAs, they know the situation, so it's easier, of course, it's easier to talk about it with them." (Ariana, p. 24)

This powerful cathartic imagery highlighted how much she valued talking to those who were able to understand her emotional experiences.

The LSAs also shared that they found the interview process itself beneficial, where it gave them a space to reflect on their emotional experiences. Ariana spoke about how she felt good after the interview and thus no longer felt the need to do a regulatory activity at home: “I feel really, really fine. I think you, I don't have to go back home now and bake [laughs], because we did it here. Yeah, so you gave me less thinking for home […] Come every week!” (p. 44). The fact she wanted to talk on a weekly basis suggested that a weekly reflective space would be helpful for her. Zahra also found the interview process helpful, saying “We need it from time to time […] Because we're going through a rough time. Sometimes. It's not always, it's rewarding at the end, because you can see the change” (p. 29). She found the interview beneficial as it allowed her to get a better sense of both the challenging and rewarding aspects of her job, which was a thought mirrored by Esma: “I find it beneficial as well. You made me to go through my journey. It's been nearly 10-15 years […] realising that actually yeah, we have rewards but also very difficult times!" (p. 29). The participants

noted that they did not often get the opportunity to talk about their emotional experiences in such depth, and it was beneficial to discover new things about themselves. Esma reflected, "When you're doing it, you're not realising the pressure and difficulties; your daily life, the working life! […] I've been going through today; you never actually think that, 'what I've been going through today?' You made me think" (p. 29). As the LSAs were often too busy or just not used to being reflective, they seemed to perhaps lack some awareness of their experiences. Sophia noted that it was therefore helpful to have a space to better understand her role:

> "Usually I don't, I don't think about what I did. [laughs] It's good to, you know, to think about what impact you have, you know, you have in, in the child's behaviour, in the child's achievement. Yeah, and the child's emotional wellbeing as well […] It's good to reflect on things." (Sophia, p. 28)

The LSAs also expressed their view that it is important to have systems in the school to share information about students with each other. Esma shared that it was helpful to have weekly meetings as this allowed them to get updates on students they were working with and pass on information where necessary: "We always have once a week, meeting, sharing our experiences, what's happening during the week […] we're always sharing, escalating that information around the school and our team. That also helps us as well" (p. 10). Zahra similarly said they have "A weekly meeting, [where] we discuss the situation of our students; what's getting better? Things like this" (p. 13). Ariana noted it was also helpful to have more informal systems of communication amongst the LSAs, where they would talk to each other "Every day, every day […] That's really, really helping

us, I think; the communication around the team" (p. 23). This way they were able to give each other helpful advice: "We would ask each other, 'who do you have next?', and if we say, Mary; 'oh be careful with Mary because she's having a bad day'" (p. 23). It seemed that it was important for the LSAs to know their students well and for such information to be shared. Esma explained that knowing the students well also meant different LSAs could support them at different times and give each other breaks where needed: "We're sharing and also we, we're swapping the children as well, not sticking only one child. We are giving breaks to each others" (p. 1).

The LSAs also reported that they found it helpful when systems could enable them to collaboratively problem solve and develop their practice. Sophia explained, "If you have a problem and you don't have no one to talk, it's difficult, you think more and more and more about, you are unable to solve the problem" (p. 27). When dealing with a problem, it was therefore important for Sophia to gain new insights by discussing it with her colleagues: "They made me think that, you know, what, probably approach the situation differently. What can be done, you know" (p. 8). Ariana similarly found it helpful to "Get the other perspective as well, then you get another opinion" (p. 24). She explained, "If we sit here, five, six of us and talk about our things, get other suggestions, what we do in the LSA office: 'let's do it all together'; 'oh, you know what, I do with that, this'" (Ariana, p. 41). Meeting with each other was therefore very beneficial as they could learn from each other and develop their knowledge and skills. The feeling of 'doing it all together' may have also made them feel less alone and more supported in their job generally.

It was also felt that it was valuable to have systems in the school for the LSAs to learn more and develop professionally. For example, Zahra shared, “I'm a person like, always like to read. And so I always think that I would like to be up to date” (p. 27). The participants felt it would be helpful to have more training opportunities, particularly around supporting students’ emotions. Sophia noted, "Training will be given, should be given to TAs as well […] there are new TAs that they haven't dealt with emotions" (p. 23). As supporting emotions was perceived as such a large aspect of the LSA role, it was felt that training should be given, especially for those who did not have much experience. Ariana similarly pointed out that LSAs needed more training “Around more feelings. We, we know everything about autism and ADHD. We know everything […] Bring more trainings about self-regulation, about emotions, these things, these kind of things” (p. 43). However, Sophia pointed out that it is not enough to just have short training sessions:

> "We have some training but it's very short, that one session, and they say, "go and do it, what you have to do" […] It's not enough, it's not enough [..] I need to see how you apply. How you use this [social] story to, to help a student" (Sophia, p. 24)

It was important for her that any training they received be thorough and provide opportunities for practice. Ariana similarly noted, “The research is not for all the students […] you just have to adjust your techniques” (p. 4), and that LSAs develop the most when they have opportunities both to learn and practically apply that knowledge: “I've met LSAs with just the experience […] it has to be a combination, because everything that I read, I come here, I put it out” (Ariana, p. 43). In addition to trainings, Zahra also expressed a wish to have a space for different professionals across the Local Authority to talk and learn from each

other: “I think we should do something here in [Local Authority] […] it could be a forum or something that we can share” (p. 22).

4.5.2 GET-D2: Students Benefit From Support Systems in the School

The LSAs explained it was good for the students when a range of staff were able to support them with their emotions. Zahra felt that, although students spent more time with certain LSAs, “It's so important not to leave one person connected to that specific student […] Because they need social skills. And this is one of the things that we have to do” (p. 23). She therefore really emphasised the importance of helping students develop their social and emotional skills and not become too reliant on particular people. School staff were also able to work collaboratively to support the emotional needs of different students simultaneously. For example, when two students were dysregulated, Sophia was able to support one whilst a teacher supported the other: “I saw the teacher was dealing with the girl, I took him out of the class […] We just sat on the stairs and talked about the situation” (p. 4). Moreover, when students needed more emotional support beyond what the LSAs and teachers could offer, Ariana noted that it was important for there to be good support services in the school system available: “This is why we have all of the good services. You hear it, but then it goes to the other team and the other team and the other team, they're dealing with it” (p. 33).

It was also felt that students emotionally benefitted from having additional systems of support available to them at school. For example, Sophia said

students responded well to having a meditation group: “There is a meditation group, and he goes after school. So he loves that, he loves to be there […] there are students that really love to be there” (p. 16). The LSAs seemed to find activities that promoted peer support particularly helpful. Esma noted that a poetry sharing initiative had a profound impact on the students’ social and emotional wellbeing:

> "Our receptionist reading the poem, one poem every morning. It was so nice to share! They were clapping for their colleagues, and hearing the different poems every morning and trying to improve their positive behaviour around school; cutting if there is bullying around, if there is misbehaving” (Esma, p. 20)

Students seemed to have the potential to be a real source of support for each other when given opportunities to be creative and learn about each other. Sophia shared that the students could be very supportive of each other in support groups and were even able to learn how to regulate each other’s emotions:

> "The other students were very supportive, very welcoming […] So make him feel him part of the group, helped him a lot in becoming more confident […] in the group, we tried to discuss that, what can we do if we see somebody who is upset" (Sophia, p. 25)

However, Sophia also felt that there should be more school support groups: “There are no specific supports for the students […] about, you know, how they feel, body conscious […] personal hygiene and everything. So all that, I think they should be a small group" (p. 23).

The only school system the participants felt somewhat contentious about was detentions, and thus often avoided giving them to students. Esma shared, “Many times we trying not to give detention actually, just trying a lot of time keeping positive, giving, reminding, reminders" (p. 20). Sophia noted that detentions can actually be “Making things worse” (p. 13) and so thought it was good when “The school also gives, you know, the support that they understand the situation, his situation, so there is not detention" (p. 13). Therefore, detentions could be perceived as doing more harm than good, and the LSAs often felt positive when some leniency was given.

5. Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will discuss the findings from the current study in relation to existing literature and relevant psychological theories. Each Group Experiential Theme (GET) and Group Experiential Sub-Theme (GEST) will be presented in order and will address the study's research questions. In each section, the experiences of the Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) will be summarised, linked to other studies, and examined through a range of theoretical lenses. Following this, the research will be critiqued in relation to strengths, limitations, and the researcher's reflexivity. Implications from the research will then be discussed and, whilst this study did not set out to make generalisations about LSAs' experiences, it was hoped that the findings may be of interest to those working in and with schools. Finally, plans for dissemination of the research and suggestions for future research will be presented, followed by the study's final conclusions.

5.2 GET-A: LSAs' Important Role in Supporting Students' Emotions

5.2.1 GET-A1: Students Have a High Level of Emotional Needs

The participants felt that the children and young people (CYP) they supported had a high level of emotional needs and could easily become dysregulated at

school. They explained how quickly the students' emotional states could change and how they were therefore constantly supporting them with their emotions. These experiences may be reflective of the general increased prevalence of emotional needs amongst CYP in the United Kingdom (UK; Department for Education, 2021, 2023; National Health Service Digital, 2018, 2023), alongside the fact that emotional needs generally tend to increase during adolescence (Guyer et al., 2016; Waite et al., 2022). However, the students' emotional needs would likely have also been impacted by wider societal issues such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the cost of living crisis, and the climate emergency (Bevilacqua et al., 2023; Broadbent et al., 2023). It is also important to consider the unique local context of the school, being in a diverse inner-London borough. As a high percentage of the school's students were from ethnic minority groups, lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), they were at an increased risk of becoming marginalised and experiencing emotional difficulties (Barnett et al., 2019; Deighton et al., 2019; Edbrooke-Childs & Patalay, 2019; Graham et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2023; Lereya et al., 2024). It was interesting to learn that the LSAs felt they were supporting students' emotions and behaviours more than they were supporting them academically, and yet supporting emotional needs was not necessarily something they were expecting to do prior to the commencement of their jobs. This may be partially reflective of the 'role creep' observed in the profession, where the LSA role has broadened substantially over time, leading to much confusion about what the specific role of the LSA actually is and what their responsibilities should include (Blatchford et al., 2009; Geeson & E. Clarke, 2022; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019; Warhurst et al., 2014). However, supporting emotions does not necessarily have to be seen as

separate from supporting learning. Emotional regulation can be seen as a fundamental aspect of the learning process (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Graziano et al., 2007); for example, students are less able to process and recall information when they are dysregulated (Curtis, 2009; Lindau et al., 2016). The participants in the current study felt they were in a good position to manage behaviour and support emotions, viewing the support they provided as being crucial for their students. Other studies exploring the experiences of LSAs have also found that they see themselves as having an important role in supporting the emotional needs of CYP, where they are positioned well to discuss emotional issues and support regulation (Angel, 2019; Kimber, 2023; A. P. Willis, 2017; Wren, 2017). The participants in this study felt that the emotional support they provided to students was greatly valued by others in the community, and previous studies have similarly found that parents and CYP particularly appreciate the pastoral and nurturing support that LSAs can provide (Bland & Sleightholme, 2012; Williams & O'Connor, 2012).

5.2.2 GET-A2: How LSAs Support Students With Their Emotions

The LSAs all spoke about how they supported students with their emotions during instances of dysregulation. One of the first things they reported doing was to take students out of the classroom to a quiet location, giving them time and space to regulate. The LSAs would often connect with them by acting calmly and attentively listening to the students whilst they talked about their feelings, which appeared to be cathartic for them. These experiences could be understood through a number of theoretical lenses. For example, the

sociodynamic model of emotions sees emotional experiences as being shaped by social environments and reinforced within relationships (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). Instances of dysregulation in the classroom might have therefore been constructed out of particular situations and influenced by the interactions happening in that space, and LSAs bringing students to a quiet environment with a calming presence likely reconstructed their emotions in a regulatory manner. Listening to the students attentively also allowed for a social sharing of emotions (Rimé, 2009), which may have helped the students to better understand their experiences, alleviate pent-up feelings, receive validation, and feel consoled and comforted by their LSAs, whilst also strengthening bonds with them. The participants emphasised the importance of remaining calm, using simple communication, and being sensitive when students were dysregulated, demonstrating an awareness of how their own emotional states could influence the students' emotions. Other studies have similarly found that LSAs feel they are better able to connect with students and support them emotionally when they are good at listening to them and take a calm, caring, patient, and understanding approach (Angel, 2019; Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021).

The participants in the current study also explained how they would do calming activities with dysregulated students, such as breathing exercises and meditation. In directly guiding the students' emotional experiences, the LSAs were demonstrating a process of extrinsic interpersonal regulation (Rimé, 2007; Zaki & Williams, 2013). These activities would sometimes be personalised based on their knowledge of certain students, and some of the LSAs would have their students think about what was happening inside their bodies. It has been argued that encouraging mindfulness and interoceptive awareness in this

way can help with emotional regulation (Price & Hooven, 2018), and the participants seemed to feel it was an effective approach. The LSAs also felt they had a role in providing psychoeducation around the importance of emotional regulation and strategies the students could use to better identify, understand, and regulate their emotions. Though they noted this could be challenging, they felt it was important to teach the students these skills. The LSAs also shared how they would model certain regulatory strategies, such as asking for help, counting, and listening to music. Other research has similarly shown that LSAs can teach students to identify and communicate their emotions to others, alongside supporting them to regulate by discussing feelings, providing reassurance, and trying to better understand their needs (Angel, 2019; Conboy, 2020; A. P. Willis, 2017). The approach that LSAs took in supporting students' emotions in the current study was also interestingly very similar to what was suggested in D. W. Murray et al.'s (2019) self-regulation promotion model. The participants all had warm and responsive relationships with their students, created supportive environments, provided co-regulation, and taught students specific self-regulation strategies. However, it was interesting to note that the LSAs did not talk much about facilitating structured evidence-based interventions as part of how they supported students' emotional needs, despite it being argued that LSAs provide more effective support when their role includes delivering such interventions (Sharples et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2021).

5.2.3 GET-A3: LSAs Going Above and Beyond Their Role

All of the LSAs appeared to go above and beyond the normal boundaries of their role in order to better support their students. Some spoke about how they advocated for their students, such as by asking teachers to make reasonable adjustments, going against the wishes of other staff members to prioritise a student's wellbeing, and even contacting the local council on behalf of a student to arrange free school meals for them. Greenway & Rees Edwards (2021) similarly found that the LSAs in their study felt strongly that a key aspect of their role was to advocate for the CYP they supported, which they did by challenging practice in the classroom and 'fighting' on behalf of their students. Many LSAs may be aware of the various systemic inequalities marginalising disadvantaged students (Aiston & Walraven, 2024) and are motivated to use their unique position to advocate for their inclusion and wellbeing at school. In the current study, some of the participants shared that they took on extra responsibilities such as scribing for students in exams and creating links with parents. Similarly, Kelly (2020) found that the LSAs in her research took on different roles to support students, including that of the teacher, and the LSAs in Greenway & Rees Edwards' (2021) study wanted to maintain regular contact with parents and work in partnership with them. Additionally, participants in the current study would go above and beyond their normal roles by reading up on research in their own time to learn how to better support students' emotional needs, as well as taking a creative approach with students, such as by creating songs with them. Ravalier et al. (2021) noted that LSAs often seem to work beyond their contracted hours, where they may place an expectation upon themselves to go beyond their normal roles. However, the desire that some LSAs have to learn more in their own time may be reflective of the limited opportunities they

typically have to attend trainings and develop their professional practice (Ihenacho, 2020; Sharples et al., 2016).

5.3 GET-B: LSAs Build Close and Positive Relationships With Students

5.3.1 GET-B1: Close Relationships Between LSAs and Students

All of the participants spoke about how they had built close relationships with their students. As each of the LSAs had a relatively small number of students to support overall, they were able to spend a lot of time with each of them and get to know them well. Other studies exploring the emotional experiences of LSAs have similarly found that LSAs can often get to know their students well, which can lead to a special and unique relationship being formed (Angel, 2019; Conboy, 2020; Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021; Kelly, 2020; A. P. Willis, 2017). Many of these studies discussed close LSA–student relationships in the context of attachment theory, and this theoretical lens is also arguably applicable within the current study. It is typical for school staff to form secure attachments with their students as this allows them to have close, supportive, and successful relationships that can improve their wellbeing and development (Colley & Cooper, 2017; García-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Geddes, 2006). The participants noted that students would often feel very comfortable confiding in them, to the extent that they would sometimes share things with the LSAs that they would not share with their parents or teachers. A. P. Willis (2017) also found that students could form very trusting relationships with their LSAs, where they would similarly talk about problems with them that they had not shared with

anyone else. In the current study, the LSA–student relationship appeared to be comparable to a friendship or even a familial relationship. Several other studies also found that LSAs sometimes felt that they were fulfilling a parental role with their students (Angel, 2019; Conboy, 2020; Kelly, 2020; A. P. Willis, 2017), which really highlights just how close LSAs can become with their students. The almost familial bond between participants and their students appeared to be particularly strong when they shared a similar cultural background. It has previously been noted that students can have more positive school experiences when they share a cultural identity with key staff members (Glock & Schuchart, 2020; Kleen et al., 2019; Redding, 2019). Moreover, the sociodynamic model of emotions views emotional experiences as emerging from specific sociocultural contexts and environments, where different cultures seem to have unique constructions and appraisals of different emotions (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). It could therefore be suggested that participants were able to emotionally connect with students from similar cultural backgrounds partly due to them sharing similar constructions of emotional experiences.

5.3.2 GET-B2: The Benefits of Having a Close Relationship

The participants felt that it was beneficial for both LSAs and students when they had close relationships with each other. When the LSAs had close relationships with students, the students appeared to align themselves with their LSAs, making them feel safe enough to share things with them that they would not tell to other adults. A. P. Willis (2017) had similar findings, where building mutual trust, safety, and security in the LSA–student relationship could create feelings

of togetherness, empathy, and teamwork. In the current study, close relationships also helped the participants to better notice and understand their students' strengths and needs. This in turn helped the students to feel more understood and allowed the LSAs to provide more bespoke and timely support, such as by noticing when they were becoming dysregulated. Angel (2019) similarly reported that LSAs found it beneficial when they could get to know their students well, as this allowed them to make better sense of their needs, be increasingly perceptive of when something was wrong, and know how to best support them. Likewise, the LSAs in Conboy's (2020) study felt that, in order to support students emotionally, it was important to get to know them and understand the factors that might have been impacting them. Having a good relationship with students arguably allows for better interpersonal regulation to occur, and the process of interpersonal regulation can in turn help to build trust and enhance the quality of a relationship (Niven, 2017). The participants in this study also felt it was beneficial to have close relationships with students as it made it easier for them to provide psychoeducation and teach them emotional regulation skills. In D. W. Murray et al.'s (2019) self-regulation promotion model, they suggest that building warm and responsive relationships with CYP is central to helping them develop their self-regulation skills. One final reported benefit of the participants knowing their students well was that they were able to help other staff members in the school by sharing key information about students where appropriate. It has previously been noted that LSAs are in a good position to gather information about students' needs, they are often positioned as experts in SEND by other staff members, and they can add value by using their skills and knowledge to work in collaboration with teachers (Sharples et al., 2016; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019; Webster & Blatchford, 2013).

5.4 GET-C: Influence of the Emotional Environment

5.4.1 GET-C1: The Emotional Experiences of the LSA Role

The LSAs reported having mixed emotional experiences when supporting CYP with their emotions, particularly during instances of dysregulation. They appeared to face constant emotional challenges in their role, where some situations could be too intense for them and it was not always possible to control their emotional responses. Other studies have similarly found that LSAs can experience a range of challenging emotions when supporting students, including sadness, stress, anxiety, exhaustion, frustration, helplessness, pressure, and fear that things could go wrong (Angel, 2019; Conboy, 2020; Kelly, 2020). Ravalier et al. (2021) also noted that LSAs across the UK are exposed to high levels of negative working conditions, and their levels of perceived stress can be impacted by factors such as managerial support, peer support, relationships, lack of control, and job demands. In the current study, the participants found it particularly emotionally challenging when they felt they were not able to do more to help their students. Similarly, both A. P. Willis (2017) and Greenway & Rees Edwards (2021) found that LSAs could experience challenging emotions such as exhaustion and frustration when they felt unable to help their students make further progress. Whilst participants in this study often had emotional responses in the moment when supporting students with their emotions, they sometimes did not fully process their emotional experiences until afterwards. It has been noted that, during stressful

events (such as when LSAs support emotionally dysregulated students), it can become harder to identify, differentiate, and process emotional experiences, and negative emotions from such stressful events can linger throughout the day (Erbas et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020). The participants' emotions were therefore often processed and felt later at home whilst they reflected back on their day, and they could sometimes feel bad for an extended period if they were particularly worried about certain students. Kelly (2020) and Angel (2019) also found that LSAs would sometimes think about their students outside of work and worry about them at night.

The LSAs also experienced positive emotions in their role. It was particularly rewarding for them when they were able to help students succeed academically, socially, and/or emotionally. Supporting students seemed to be profoundly impactful in some instances, where the participants shared it could make their day or feel like a big event. Other studies have similarly found that LSAs experience rewarding emotions such as joy, pride, and satisfaction when they can help students to make progress, overcome challenges, develop relationships, regulate emotions, and ultimately make a difference in their lives (Conboy, 2020; Kelly, 2020; A. P. Willis, 2017). The participants demonstrated a real passion for helping their students; the positive emotions they experienced in their role were very motivating for them and could overshadow the more challenging aspects of being an LSA. It has been argued that job satisfaction and commitment is partially determined by the balance between events at work that induce positive emotions and negative emotions respectively (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Greenway & Rees Edwards (2021) similarly found that the LSAs in their study expressed a real love for their job, where they felt pride and

satisfaction when seeing students make progress. In the current study, working in a secondary school appeared to be uniquely rewarding for the participants due to it being a pivotal time in their students' lives, with one LSA reflecting on how she wanted them to have the emotional support she did not receive herself at that age. Taking a psychodynamic lens, it has been noted that working in a school can bring up emotional memories of being in school, and such childhood memories can shape the values and practice of school staff (O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Osborne et al., 1983; Sonu et al., 2020).

5.4.2 GET-C2: LSAs Need to Regulate Their Own Emotions

The LSAs felt it was important for them to manage their own emotions, particularly when they were helping students to regulate their emotions. Emotion regulation ability has similarly been found to be important for teachers (Brackett et al., 2010; Mankin, 2020), though it has been noted that prolonged emotional labour in teaching can contribute towards burnout (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020; Kinman et al., 2011; Lee & van Vlack, 2018). The participants emphasised the need to appear calm and choose their words carefully when supporting students; if they themselves became dysregulated, they felt this could potentially escalate the students' state of dysregulation and/or send a bad message about how challenging emotions should be managed. It is possible that the LSAs had to resist the effects of emotional contagion when students became dysregulated, as otherwise such situations could have possibly led to cycles of co-dysregulation (Butler, 2015; Reed et al., 2015). Some of the participants felt they could naturally remain regulated due to having a calm

disposition, whilst others had to consciously learn to use strategies such as breathing exercises and self-reassurance to appear calm when supporting students. Kelly (2020) similarly found that LSAs thought that it was important for them to not exhibit negative emotions when supporting CYP, where they feared transferring their feelings on to the students. Examining such situations through the sociodynamic model of emotions (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014), it could be argued that LSAs' and students' dynamic emotional experiences are largely shaped by their shared interactions within the social context of the school environment.

The participants also had to manage challenging emotions following instances of supporting students emotionally, including when they were back at home. Many of the LSAs attempted to utilise emotional suppression and distraction, especially with the use of mindful activities such as baking and crocheting. However, they often found that they could not stop themselves thinking about their students. Angel (2019) and Kelly (2020) similarly found that emotional suppression was a common strategy used by LSAs. Other studies have highlighted that emotional suppression is not an effective strategy for school staff when managing challenging emotions and can contribute to burnout (Keller, Chang, et al., 2014; Taxer & Gross, 2018). The LSAs in the current study appeared to find it much more regulating when they could accept their emotions and allow themselves to feel and process them, which could include crying. The act of embracing challenging emotions and allowing oneself to process them has been shown to be effective in mindfulness-based approaches such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Harris, 2006; Ruiz, 2010). Some of the LSAs found it beneficial to talk with others about their emotions,

which can be viewed as a form of intrinsic interpersonal regulation (Rimé, 2007; Zaki & Williams, 2013). However, some chose not to talk with others due to concerns that they would not be understood or they would risk sharing confidential information about students. This arguably highlighted a need for a space in the school where the LSAs could confidentially process their emotions by talking with other staff members who could relate to their experiences. Angel (2019) noted that LSAs found it beneficial when they were able to talk about their emotional experiences with staff members at their school, as well as their family members.

5.4.3 GET-C3: Emotional Experiences Are Interconnected

It was interesting to hear how the LSAs' emotional experiences often mirrored their students' emotional experiences, such as when they reported becoming upset when they saw that their students were upset. Kelly (2020) similarly observed emotional attunement and 'mirroring' between LSAs and their students, where they could be affected by each other's emotional states. Teachers and students have also been seen to influence each other's emotions (Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016), and Frenzel et al. (2018, 2020, 2021) proposed a reciprocal model of emotions to explain this. Such phenomena could be examples of emotional contagion, whereby emotional experiences are unconsciously passed on and shared between people (Butler, 2015; Rimé, 2009); it has also been suggested that emotional contagion could possibly be underlined by a process of neural attunement (Lerner et al., 2016). In the current study, the participants appeared to have particularly emotional reactions

to their students' emotions when they could really empathise with them and think back to their own school experiences. This can be viewed psychoanalytically, where working with students can remind staff of their own emotional memories of being in school, and this can influence how they go about their job (O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Osborne et al., 1983; Sonu et al., 2020). The LSAs and their students also seemed to be influenced by each other's positive emotions. They would often celebrate good news with each other, which can be viewed as a social sharing of emotions (Rimé, 2009). Moreover, the LSAs often helped students to emotionally regulate by acting calmly, and when the students became calm this often then made the LSAs calmer themselves. This positive feedback loop is arguably a demonstration of emotional co-regulation, which can happen between people with secure attachments (Butler & Randall, 2013); co-regulation has also previously been observed to occur between young children and school staff (Frivold Kostøl & Cameron, 2021; Silkenbeumer et al., 2016; Spilt et al., 2021). Additionally, the participants discussed how students could emotionally influence each other, which could either have a regulating or dysregulating effect depending on the situation. This is arguably an example of emotional contagion (Butler, 2015; Rimé, 2009), though it could also be explained using the sociodynamic model of emotions, which proposes that emotional experiences are constructed and shaped by social environments (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014).

5.5 GET-D: The Benefit of School Support Systems

5.5.1 GET-D1: Wanting Space and Time to Process Experiences and Learn With Others

The participants felt that it was beneficial when there were people in the school they could talk to about their emotions. They found it cathartic to share their experiences with other staff members who were able to understand them, especially as external systems of support could often feel inaccessible. Previous studies have similarly found that LSAs value being supported by others at school, where they can experience challenging emotions such as frustration when they do not feel supported or are not given space to process their experiences (Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021; Kelly, 2020). The LSAs shared that the interview process of the current study was also beneficial; it helped them to better understand their experiences as LSAs, and some found the interview to have a regulatory component. They all appeared to really value the process and some expressed a wish to have regular opportunities to reflect on their emotional experiences as they did during the interview. Kelly (2020) similarly reported that her participants found it helpful to process their emotional experiences during their interviews, arguing that it would be beneficial for LSAs to have further opportunities for reflection. It has been noted that discussing emotional experiences with others has various emotional, social, and cognitive benefits (Rimé, 2009), and school staff are arguably better able to support the emotions of CYP when they themselves are supported to better understand their own emotions (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014; Mainhard et al., 2018).

The LSAs also spoke about the benefits of systems that allowed them to share information about students, such as weekly staff meetings and more informal check-ins with each other during the school day. Greenway & Rees Edwards (2021) similarly found that LSAs valued having regular staff meetings, especially when they felt that their opinion mattered. However, it has been noted that LSAs working in secondary schools may be allocated less time to meet with other staff members than those in primary schools (Webster et al., 2011), and having limited support from managers and peers can contribute to feelings of stress for LSAs (Ravalier et al., 2021). The participants in the current study seemed to particularly benefit from opportunities in their school to learn from other staff members, share knowledge, and collaboratively problem solve. Previous studies have similarly reported that LSAs value being able to gain advice and support from other members of staff, and that it can be challenging for them when there are barriers to accessing support in the school system (Angel, 2019; Conboy, 2020; Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021; A. P. Willis, 2017). Additionally, the LSAs in this study expressed a wish for more training opportunities and perhaps even for a forum to be set up within the borough where school staff could support each other and develop their practice. They also felt that training sessions would be particularly effective if they focused more on emotions, were sufficiently long enough, and provided opportunities to embed new learning into their practice. It has been noted that LSAs often lack opportunities to attend trainings and develop their professional practice (Ihenacho, 2020; Sharples et al., 2016), and LSAs have reported feeling that their ability to fully support students has been limited by their lack of training (Conboy, 2020; Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021; A. P. Willis, 2017).

5.5.2 GET-D2: Students Benefit From Support Systems in the School

The LSAs discussed how their students benefited from different systems of support in the school. They thought it was positive when students could be supported by various LSAs throughout the day; this meant that students did not become overly reliant on individual LSAs, they had opportunities to develop their social skills, and different staff members could support different students during instances of emotional dysregulation. The participants seemed to feel that a balance was needed between individual LSAs having close relationships with students and other staff members also being involved in providing support. Compared to primary school LSAs, secondary school LSAs are often assigned to work more with individuals rather than groups of students (Webster et al., 2011), however, many have criticised the tendency for schools to 'Velcro' LSAs to individual students as this can have a negative impact (Balshaw, 2010; Bosanquet et al., 2021; Butt, 2016; Webster, 2014). Additionally, one participant commented on the need for students to be able to access emotional support from other services and teams. LSAs have previously shared that they feel limited in their ability to provide therapeutic support due to a lack of training (Conboy, 2020; Danby, 2020; Hall, 2019). It is arguably very important for CYP to have good access to therapists and external mental health services, especially when there are good systems of interagency collaboration between schools and external professionals (Cooper et al., 2016; Cortina et al., 2019; Rothi & Leavey, 2006; Werlen et al., 2020). The participants in the current study also appeared to value in-school interventions such as meditation groups and peer support groups, with one suggesting that even more should be set up. Many researchers have discussed the importance of teaching CYP self-

regulation skills through the use of structured evidence-based interventions at school (Mackenzie & Williams, 2018; McLaughlin, 2008; D. W. Murray et al., 2019; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). The LSAs felt it was particularly positive when school initiatives and interventions encouraged students to learn about each other and support each other with their emotions. As emotional experiences can be seen to be shaped by social environments and reinforced within relationships (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014), creating a supportive school environment appears to have a positive impact by encouraging interpersonal emotion regulation amongst students (Rimé, 2007; van der Meulen et al., 2021; Zaki & Williams, 2013). In the current study, the only school system that participants reported feeling contentious about was detentions. They noted that detentions could make things worse for students, meaning that they often took a lenient approach where possible. Many have commented on the negative impact of punitive school systems such as detentions and exclusions, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised groups of CYP (such as those with SEND, in poverty, and from certain ethnic minority groups); they can result in detrimental school experiences, worse developmental and learning outcomes, and an increased risk of entry into the youth justice system (Graham et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2023; Mallett, 2016; Valdebenito et al., 2019).

5.6 Critique of the Research

5.6.1 Strengths

A key strength of the current study is that it provides a unique contribution to the literature by addressing an under-researched area. It has been noted that previous research has largely ignored and marginalised the voices of LSAs, particularly when it has come to exploring their emotional experiences (Armstrong, 2016; E. Clarke, 2021; E. Clarke & Visser, 2019; Farrell et al., 2010; Roffey-Barentsen, 2014; Sharples et al., 2016; Trent, 2014; Webster et al., 2013; Wood, 2016). With the LSA role becoming increasingly complex (Blatchford et al., 2009; Geeson & E. Clarke, 2022; Warhurst et al., 2014) and emotional needs becoming so prevalent amongst students and school staff respectively (Department for Education, 2021, 2023b; Education Support, 2023; National Health Service Digital, 2018, 2023), this research has arguably been conducted at a very pertinent time. In the few studies that have recently explored the emotional experiences of LSAs in the UK (Angel, 2019; Conboy, 2020; Greenway & Rees Edwards, 2021; Kelly, 2020; Ravalier et al., 2021; A. P. Willis, 2017), only one interviewed secondary school LSAs. Given the unique context of secondary school settings (Blatchford & Webster, 2018; Department for Education, 2014b; James et al., 2014; Webster et al., 2011) and the emotional needs that can arise during adolescence (Guyer et al., 2016; National Health Service Digital, 2023; Silvers, 2022; Waite et al., 2022), this research arguably provides many novel insights.

Moreover, previous studies have lacked specificity around how LSAs manage their own emotions and how they support CYP to regulate during specific instances of dysregulation. It was therefore beneficial to provide much more of a focus on these important areas in this research, especially as there was a unique theoretical perspective. Much previous research has conceptualised

emotional regulation as an individual cognitive process, such as in Gross' (1998) process model of self-regulation. In the current study, the developmental, social, and cultural aspects of emotional regulation were acknowledged, where emotions are rarely experienced in an isolated context, but rather with others and through others (Barthel et al., 2018). The findings were therefore interpreted through the lens of theoretical models such as the sociodynamic model of emotions (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014), the interpersonal model of emotion regulation (Rimé, 2007; Zaki & Williams, 2013), emotional contagion (Rimé, 2009), D. W. Murray et al.'s (2019) self-regulation promotion model, and Frenzel et al.'s (2018, 2020, 2021) reciprocal model of emotions. It is also possible that this is the first study that has reported emotional co-regulation (Butler & Randall, 2013) occurring between LSAs and secondary school students, with previous research primarily focusing on co-regulation with young children (Frivold Kostøl & Cameron, 2021; Silkenbeumer et al., 2016; Spilt et al., 2021). Findings from studies using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; J. Smith et al., 2021) have been shown to have the potential to contribute to theory development (Cassidy et al., 2011; Pringle et al., 2011), and it was hoped that this would be the case in the current study by taking a novel approach in how LSAs' emotional experiences were theoretically conceptualised.

Utilising IPA in this research also had several other strengths, where it allowed for a rich, in-depth, and highly analytical exploration of how LSAs made sense of their personal lived experiences in their own terms (Pringle et al., 2011; J. Smith et al., 2021). IPA is arguably very useful in educational psychology research (Oxley, 2016), particularly when it is used to explore complex,

ambiguous, and emotionally laden topics, such as in the current study (J. Smith & Osborn, 2015). Following the steps of IPA created a high degree of reflexivity by encouraging me to examine my biases and reflect on how my experiences influenced my interpretations, which other similar approaches may not have done (Neubauer et al., 2019). Additionally, focusing on LSAs from a single school was advantageous as it created a homogeneous sample in a diverse environment. The only other identified study that recently interviewed secondary school LSAs about their emotional experiences (Angel, 2019) took place in the north of England, so it was beneficial to focus on the very different geographical location of an inner-London borough. It was hoped that the study would also add value to the school by feeding back the main findings and suggestions in the form of a one-page summary sheet following completion of the thesis. Another strength of the research was that interviews were able to take place in person, making it easier to build rapport with participants and better understand what they wanted to communicate, which likely would have been more challenging if done remotely (Irani, 2019). The participants appeared to find the process beneficial, where qualitative interviews can be therapeutic for participants by giving them space to talk through and make sense of their experiences (Rossetto, 2014). As it was hoped that the research process would give the LSAs more of a voice, direct quotes were included wherever possible when reporting the findings in Chapter 4, which the IPA approach encourages (J. Smith et al., 2021).

5.6.2 Limitations

It is important to note that the current study has several limitations. Firstly, it is possible that I displayed biases as a researcher in how I carried out interviews and interpreted the data (Agee, 2009; Gao, 2020; Noble & J. Smith, 2015). For example, I sometimes noticed myself influencing the direction of interviews at times and looking for information that was in line with my experiences, preconceptions, and expectations (this can be viewed in an extract from my reflective diary in Appendix H). I also later reflected on the fact that I could have given greater consideration to cultural aspects of participants' experiences during interviews; whilst these were discussed where relevant, there could have arguably been further explicit exploration. Completing this research was my first experience of conducting qualitative interviews, and it has been noted that novice researchers may lack competence and can produce data with a lower value (Roberts, 2020). However, I did ensure that I closely followed the steps of how to carry out an IPA study (J. Smith et al., 2021), I had regular meetings with my university tutor to discuss the research, I kept a reflective diary, and I followed Yardley's (2015) recommendations for increasing validity in qualitative studies. A further limitation of the study was the extent to which it was beneficial for the participants. Whilst the interview process appeared to be therapeutic, it might not have been transformative or empowering in the way that other research methods such as participatory or action research might have been (Bennett, 2004; Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024). However, such approaches have their own disadvantages, and it was hoped that taking part in the study might have still been somewhat empowering for the participants by increasing their self-knowledge and critical consciousness.

The participants may have also exhibited biases that impacted the trustworthiness of the data. They may have talked about their experiences in a way that they perceived to be more socially desirable (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Bispo, 2022) and there may have been self-selection bias due to the use of volunteer sampling (Alarie & Lupien, 2021; Costigan & Cox, 2001; Elston, 2021). The LSAs in the study all seemed to go above and beyond in their roles, and it is possible that studies such as this one attract those who are particularly eager to do more to help others and contribute to research. IPA studies have been criticised as their limited samples can make findings difficult to generalise (Giorgi, 2010; Pringle et al., 2011). However, making generalisations about the experiences of LSAs was never a primary aim of this research; rather, this research took a more exploratory and in-depth approach in trying to better understand the emotional experiences of a few LSAs. Despite this, focusing on a small number of individuals can still help with "understanding the part to illuminate the whole" (Oxley, 2016, p. 60), and 'low-level' generalisations can still arguably be made in studies with small samples (Bromley, 1985, 1986).

5.6.3 Reflexivity

Maintaining reflexivity has been important at every stage of the research process (Berger, 2015), where reflexive bracketing is a fundamental process in IPA studies (J. Smith et al., 2021). The trustworthiness and validity of my interpretations have largely been dependent on my ability to be reflexive when carrying out interviews and analysing the data (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Shaw, 2010). Before beginning the research, I reflected on how my own experiences

of being supported by LSAs, working as an LSA, and supporting LSAs had led me to develop preconceptions about how the LSA role is experienced. Recognising my position as both an 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher, I was able to identify and bracket many of my biases and expectations, which allowed me to provide a more authentic and trustworthy account of my participants' lived experiences (Chavez, 2008; Greene, 2014). For example, I was open to information during interviews that went against my assumptions and personal experiences, such as when participants reported sometimes having positive emotional experiences when supporting dysregulated students or not perceiving any emotions at all until later on in the day. I also reflexively noticed myself influencing the direction of interviews at certain points; I responded to this by either ensuring I gave participants more space or asking them to tell me more about something they had shared earlier, as well as sometimes utilising member checking (Candela, 2019; McNair et al., 2008).

I also found it beneficial to keep a reflective diary and discuss my research during university tutorials (Noble & J. Smith, 2015). Having such conversations helped me to become more aware of myself and accept the fact that, due to the nature of IPA studies, others might have gone about the research or reported the findings in a different way to how I did it. Whilst reflexive bracketing has been important in my research, I have come to appreciate the value of not always dismissing myself and my experiences when interpreting participants' experiences. Additionally, I have reflected during tutorials on the influence of the order in which I chose to complete my thesis. For example, having conducted the literature review after having already written up my findings, I noticed myself looking for themes across the literature that coincided with the themes I had

identified in my study. Becoming more aware of this helped me to overcome my biases when conducting my literature review (Pati & Lorusso, 2018). However, some have argued that it is actually advantageous to complete literature reviews following data collection and analysis (such as in studies utilising a grounded theory approach), as this can help to reduce preconceptions that may emerge from reviewing the literature (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019).

5.7 Implications for Professionals Working in and With Schools

As I have taken an ontological position of relativism (Robson & McCartan, 2017) and an epistemological position of social constructivism (Creswell & Clark, 2017), this research has been more concerned with understanding how a few individual LSAs created meaning in their lives rather than being able to make broad generalisations with firm implications for LSAs across the UK. However, it was hoped that the findings from this study can provide some new insights into the emotional experiences of LSAs within a particular context, and that such insights could potentially still be useful for people working in schools and those who support school staff members. It is worth noting that the suggestions coming from this research have also been informed by my professional values of promoting autonomy, social justice, and equity for CYP and school staff.

Firstly, it would likely be helpful if there was more awareness around how frequently LSAs are typically supporting CYP with their emotions as part of their job. Schools may wish to consider making this aspect of the role more explicit in LSA job descriptions and perhaps even give consideration as to whether

‘Learning Support Assistant’ is the most appropriate job title, given the amount of variety within their role. When advertising the job, they may find it helpful to emphasise the fact that supporting emotional regulation is a fundamental part of supporting learning (Curtis, 2009; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Graziano et al., 2007; Lindau et al., 2016). It might also be helpful for schools to become more aware of instances where LSAs are going above and beyond in their roles so they can give recognition where possible and ensure LSAs are not putting their wellbeing at risk (such as when they work beyond their contracted hours). Similarly, it would likely be beneficial for professionals working in and with schools to develop a greater awareness around the emotional challenges that LSAs can face in their role. Many LSAs have to frequently regulate their emotions at school and manage challenging emotions after work, which is concerning when considering how prolonged emotional labour can contribute towards burnout in school staff (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020; Kinman et al., 2011; Lee & van Vlack, 2018). In the current study, the participants were able to most effectively regulate their emotions by discussing their experiences with others and allowing themselves to fully process their feelings. Schools may therefore wish to provide LSAs with a regular space where they can confidentially reflect on their emotional experiences with others and learn effective strategies for better managing their emotions whilst supporting students. Schools could potentially make use of external professionals that offer supervision, such as Educational Psychologists (EPs), where supervision has previously been found to be beneficial for other staff members such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) and teachers (Hanley, 2017; L. Murray, 2022; Ridley, 2017). When school staff are supported to better understand their own emotional experiences, they will likely be better equipped

to support the emotions of CYP (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014; Mainhard et al., 2018). LSAs may therefore find it particularly beneficial to reflect on situations that cause particularly strong emotional reactions and perhaps consider how their own experiences of being at school might be shaping their practice.

LSAs and schools might find it helpful for their own practice to consider how the participants in the current study were able to best support their students' emotional needs. For example, as the participants reported that taking students to a calm space was often regulatory for them, schools may wish to consider providing a quiet space where LSAs can bring dysregulated students. Other LSAs may similarly find it effective to support dysregulated students by connecting with them, acting calmly, listening attentively, using simple communication, and modelling mindful activities such as breathing exercises. Approaches could be personalised and LSAs may wish to provide students with incidental psychoeducation around how they can identify, understand, and regulate their emotions. Schools could also be made more aware of the fact that LSAs often build very close relationships with students and that this can have several benefits, such as students feeling more comfortable talking about their emotions, LSAs being able to provide more effective support, and LSAs being able to help other staff members by sharing key information. However, whilst it would likely be good for schools to ensure that LSAs have opportunities to build close relationships with students, it also seems to be helpful when students are supported by various staff members. The participants in this study felt it was positive when students were supported by a number of LSAs as they had more opportunities to develop social skills, different staff members could support different students during instances of emotional dysregulation, and students did

not become overly reliant on individual LSAs. Additionally, other LSAs may also find that they can provide better support when there are good systems of communication in their school for sharing information, such as regular staff meetings, opportunities for check-ins, and collaborative links with professionals from other teams and services.

The findings from the current study also suggest that schools may find it beneficial to consider doing more systemic interventions around supporting emotional needs. The participants seemed to really value school interventions and initiatives that encouraged students to learn more about each other and their emotions. Having a supportive and inclusive school environment appears to benefit the wellbeing of students and can even encourage interpersonal emotion regulation amongst them (van der Meulen et al., 2021). Other schools may wish to similarly create interventions such as peer support groups that aim to improve students' emotional literacy abilities and prosocial behaviours. Initiatives would likely work best if it they could involve the whole school community, including students, parents and staff members, and there could even be some focus on helping them understand the social and environmental underpinnings of emotions (Barthel et al., 2018; Mesquita & Boiger, 2014). Such an approach would hopefully create a more supportive school environment and reduce the need for punitive approaches such as detentions and exclusions. The participants in the current study really seemed to appreciate having opportunities to learn with others, share knowledge, and collaboratively problem solve. Schools may wish to consider setting up spaces where staff members can continue to develop collaboratively, such as peer supervision groups and training sessions. The participants expressed a desire to have more training

opportunities, particularly if sessions focused on how to support emotional needs, were sufficiently long enough, and allowed them to embed learning into their practice. There are many different external professionals that could offer schools additional training, including EPs; training sessions could potentially focus on teaching LSAs and other staff members how to support dysregulated students, provide psychoeducation, and understand how people's emotional states can influence those around them. Additionally, one participant suggested it would also be helpful for a forum to be set up within their borough where school staff could support each other and develop their practice. Those working in schools and/or for their local authority may find it beneficial to consider setting up such an initiative.

5.8 Dissemination of Research

Following completion of the thesis, the main findings and suggestions from the study will be summarised in a one-page document that will be shared with the participants and their school. The research has already been presented to EPs and other colleagues during a research day at the University of East London (UEL) on 14/07/2023, and the research may similarly be presented to EPs in the local authority where the research took place. Once the thesis has been finalised, it will be published online freely as part of UEL's research repository. Following this, plans will be considered for further dissemination, which could include applying for publication in an academic journal and/or inclusion in a professional conference (such as those organised by the Association of

Educational Psychologists). The research may also be shared more widely with other relevant groups, such as local ELSA networks.

5.9 Recommendations for Future Research

Following on from this study, there are a number of different areas that researchers may wish to consider exploring in the future. One identified limitation of this research was the extent to which the process was empowering and transformative for the participants. It would therefore likely be beneficial to conduct a piece of participatory and/or action research (Bennett, 2004; Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2024) involving LSAs and further exploring their emotional experiences of supporting CYP's emotions. Such research could focus on empowering LSAs at just an individual level as co-researchers or could involve other staff members to create change at a more systemic level within their school. One of the suggestions coming from the current study was that schools might find it beneficial to consider doing systemic interventions around helping people across their school community better understand emotions and how to support each other, and this could be the basis of a particularly impactful piece of action research. Alternatively, future research could focus specifically on how students can best support each other with their emotions, which could also potentially take place as a participatory and/or action research project. Another area for research could be further studying the social and interpersonal aspects of emotional experiences (Barthel et al., 2018; Mesquita & Boiger, 2014) in school environments. Participants could include students, teachers, LSAs, and other staff members, and the research could further explore

concepts such as emotional contagion (Rimé, 2009), the social sharing of emotions (Rimé, 2009), reciprocal emotional experiences (Frenzel et al., 2018, 2020, 2021), interpersonal emotion regulation (Rimé, 2007; Zaki & Williams, 2013), and emotional co-regulation (Butler & Randall, 2013). Future research could also focus more on exploring the close and emotionally-attuned relationships LSAs can form with their students; a longitudinal case study approach might be particularly helpful to better understand the nuances of how such relationships develop. Another limitation of the current study was that there could have been more consideration around the cultural aspects of how LSAs supported their students, where they seemed to emotionally connect with them more easily when they shared similar cultural backgrounds. It may therefore be beneficial for future research to more closely explore cultural aspects of emotional support from LSAs, particularly as sharing cultural identities with teachers has already been shown to positively impact students' experiences of school (Glock & Schuchart, 2020; Kleen et al., 2019; Redding, 2019).

5.10 Final Conclusions

The aim of this research was to explore the emotional experiences of LSAs supporting CYP to regulate their emotions in secondary school settings. With emotional needs increasing amongst CYP in the UK, the LSAs in the current study seemed to have a very important role in providing emotional support to their students. They reported using a number of effective strategies to support them to emotionally regulate, and they often wanted to go above and beyond to

ensure their students' wellbeing. The LSAs also shared that they had built very close relationships with their students, and this appeared to have many mutual benefits. One of the most pertinent findings from the study was around how the school environment could shape many different emotions in LSAs and students, both positive and challenging, due to the interconnected nature of their emotional experiences. LSAs' emotions seemed to influence their students' emotional states, and students' emotions seemed to influence the emotional states of LSAs and other students. Whilst the participants often experienced positive and rewarding emotions in their role, they also faced constant emotional challenges and therefore had to frequently regulate their emotions during and after work. Systems of support in the school appeared to play a very important role for the LSAs, where they expressed a need to process their emotional experiences with others and continue to learn and develop with others. They similarly felt positively about school systems that benefited the emotional wellbeing of their students.

There has previously been very limited research in the UK giving LSAs a voice regarding their emotional experiences, particularly for those working in secondary schools. To my knowledge, this is the first study that has asked secondary school LSAs to reflect on specific instances of supporting dysregulated students and consider how they supported them and how they managed their own emotions. This study also provides novel insights by utilising a relatively unique theoretical perspective, conceptualising emotions and processes of regulation as being shaped by relational, environmental, and sociocultural contexts. This research therefore provides a unique contribution to the knowledge base; whilst the findings were never intended to be

representative of all LSAs' experiences, they hopefully still have much relevance for those working in and with schools. Implications from this study include the need for more awareness around how often LSAs might be supporting students' emotions and the impact this can have on them; suggestions for how LSAs could better support students to regulate whilst also managing their own emotions; and suggestions for how schools could better ensure the emotional wellbeing and development of those in their community, particularly through the use of systemic interventions. It was positive to hear that the participants found the research process to be beneficial, and it is hoped that their experiences can provide many new insights for LSAs and other professionals who have a role in supporting the emotional needs of CYP and school staff members.

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Appendix A

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in the Literature Review

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
1. Study design Studies were included if they were novel pieces of research	Studies were excluded if they were opinion pieces, literature reviews, or other papers not reporting the results of novel research	The aim of the current literature review was to review information from primary data sources only
2. Location Studies were included if they were carried out in mainstream primary and/or secondary schools in the UK	Studies were excluded if they were published outside of the UK or did not focus primarily on LSAs in mainstream primary and/or secondary schools	The LSA role in mainstream UK primary and secondary schools is unique to the LSA role in other locations
3. Participants Studies were included if they explored the emotional experiences of typical school support staff such as LSAs and TAs	Studies were excluded if they explored the experiences of specialist support staff carrying out particular interventions (e.g. ELSAs) or other school staff such as teachers	School staff who have received specialist training to carry out a particular role will likely have very different emotional experiences than typical LSAs and TAs supporting the needs of students
4. Focus of research Studies were included if they explicitly explored the emotional experiences of school support staff in their normal roles	Studies were excluded if they did not focus on the emotional experiences of school support staff or if they specifically focused on their emotional reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic	Exploring emotional experiences was the main topic of the current research and it was felt that studies exploring LSA experiences during the pandemic would reveal more about the general impact of COVID-19 than the impact of their normal role
5. Publication date Studies were included if they were published during or after 2012	Studies were excluded if they were published before 2012	There has been a unique context for school support staff since Blatchford, Webster and Russell's (2012) research project into the 'Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA)'

Appendix B

Summary of Studies Included in the Literature Review

Authors / Studies	Aims	Participants	Design and Methods	Key Theories	Key (relevant) Findings
Greenway, C. W., & Rees Edwards, A. (2021). Teaching assistants' facilitators and barriers to effective practice working with children with ADHD: A qualitative study	3 main research questions: 1. How do TAs feel about their role in working with children with ADHD? 2. What facilitates TAs in their role in working with children with ADHD? 3. What are the barriers that TAs face in their role in working with children with ADHD?	Fifteen TAs who work with children with ADHD in mainstream primary schools across West Wales, UK. The TAs' ages ranged from 20 to 52 years (mean age = 38 years), with an average of nine years of service and seven years of experience working with children with ADHD. The TAs had worked with a combined total of over 60 children with ADHD during their time as a TA.	Qualitative research utilising semi-structured interviews Interviews were anonymised and analysed using thematic analysis. Trustworthiness and authenticity were determined by multivocality.	Not explicitly stated Seems to take a social constructionist approach based on them trying to understand the experiences of TAs as a group Seems to take a somewhat medical model in terms of ADHD (e.g. referring to 'symptoms') Somewhat holistic in terms of considering the impact of interacting social, biological, and environmental factors.	All TAs felt positively about their role. They had a love for their job and took pride / satisfaction in seeing CYP's progress. They felt their role was to advocate for students, and would challenge practice. Negative physical and psychological impacts of job: exhausted, drained, lonely, isolating, may cry from exhaustion and frustration around lack of progress. Negative emotions exacerbated by feeling unsupported and unappreciated in their role. Positive effects of receiving support from headteachers and parents. Valued regular progress meetings, regular contact with parents, and having the sense that their opinion mattered. TAs knowledge improved over time and they often did their own research into ADHD. They improved in understanding emotions, behaviours and children's triggers. In addition, by working with the children, they could individualise interventions. Also more confidence. All TAs felt one-to-one relationships with the child were important. They spoke of good communication, caring, patience and trust to build a positive relationship. Important to understand the needs of each child. Barriers included lack of support from school / parents, negativity from others towards ADHD, a busy environment, limited resources, and a lack of training / knowledge of SEND.
Ravalier, J. M., Walsh, J., & Hoult, E. (2021). The impact of working conditions on the UK's teaching assistants	They aimed to investigate working conditions and factors that could create stress for UK TAs, including psychosocial hazards, working hours, student behaviour, and parental behaviour.	They collected data from 3,242 TAs based across the UK. 2,980 (92%) were female and 259 (8%) male, with three identifying as 'other' or transgender.	Quantitative survey (psychometric) study They had participants complete a range of Likert scale questions online via SurveyMonkey. This included	They focus quite heavily on the appraisal model of emotional regulation. They note Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue stress is the result of a transaction between an individual and their environment, but	TAs in the UK are exposed to high levels of negative working conditions, irrespective of the phase of schooling (primary, secondary, etc.). This study demonstrated that a proportion (between 29% and 31%) of perceived stress was accounted for by working conditions, student behaviour, and parental behaviour. They found that demands, control, managerial support, peer support, relationships, student behaviour, and parental behaviour on school premises each significantly contributed to

		Respondents taught in either primary schools, secondary schools, or specialist schools.	HSE's Management Standards Indicator Tool, the 'disrespect' element of the Pupil Behaviour Patterns, and the Perceived Stress Scale. Participant scores on the MSIT were compared against benchmark scoring where available. A series of multivariate linear regression analyses were used to investigate the extent to which MSIT factors, pupil behaviour, parent behaviour, and work hours disparity predicted perceived stress.	people only feel stress due to the way in which it is internally evaluated. They do not name their epistemology, but the fact it is quantitative research suggests that they take a positivist position.	increased experience of stress. Across each group the level of demands that individuals had to face at work, as well as a lack of control of the way in which they undertook their work, were related to higher levels of perceived stress. Special school TAs received more organisational support than mainstream TAs, possibly due to different work culture and smaller staff / student numbers. Approximately 20% of TAs were the subject of derogatory words or behaviour either on school premises or online from parents at least once a month. Although they found TAs worked more than their contracted hours, this did not significantly influence the experience of stress. They argued that this meant TAs expected to put in extra hours throughout the working week, although it may have also been a coping mechanisms used by TAs to deal with the poor working conditions that they were exposed to.
Kelly, L. J. (2020). The emotional experiences of Teaching Assistants, working 1:1 with a child	This study sought to explore the emotional experiences of TAs engaging in 1:1 work with a child.	Four primary school TAs working 1:1 with children	Use of Free Association Narrative Interviews (two interviews each) plus pen portraits and a reflective diary. Data analysed via a reflexive thematic analysis first individually and then for all participants collectively.	Psycho-analytic approach, particularly regarding object relations. She adopts a psychosocial ontology and epistemology, where an individual's worldview is shaped through their individual, internal experiences, interacting with the external, social world on conscious and unconscious levels.	They all felt some anxiety about starting their TA roles, and they may have felt systemic stress from the school. Mixed emotions from changes, transitions, and endings. Feelings of guilt leaving key child to help other students. Not always given the time and opportunity to think and process children's emotions. Some negative emotions – stress, exhaustion, upset, frustration, guilt, isolation, and boredom. Some wish to avoid talking about negative feelings. Frustration when not being supported or valued by colleagues, and when not knowing how to help child. Feeling sense of pressure for being in a position of responsibility. Feeling the need to go extra step beyond the role (purchasing own resources, reluctant to take time off during bereavement)

					Enjoyment of role – supporting others, being part of a community. All TAs shared the joy experienced when seeing their child succeed. Their role in empowering and supporting students to overcome learning challenges and progress was rewarding and satisfying. All of the TAs shared aspects of emotional attunement to the child – mirroring the child's mood and noticing their emotions could affect the children's. Emotional suppression is common. Strong attachment – almost parental role, which links to own experiences. Also emotions dealing with parents – transference, rivalry, taking on feelings
Angel, N. E. (2019). An exploration of secondary school Teaching Assistants' lived experiences of supporting young people identified with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	3 research aims: To explore TAs' lived experiences supporting CYP with SEMH needs and challenging behaviour / To discuss implications for secondary school's practice regarding TAs within this role / To discuss the implications for EP practice regarding direct and indirect working with TAs in this role.	3 full-time female TAs all working in the same secondary school in the north of England, all supporting students with SEMH needs.	Qualitative research. Semi structured interviews carried out individually and analysed using IPA. Considers herself an insider researcher.	Makes links to attribution theory in how TAs understood the students. Resiliency is discussed as a conceptual framework, relating to both personal resources and external avenues of support. Some link is made to ecological systems theory. Attachment theory is discussed in relation to relationships with students and their needs, particularly how the TA role felt almost familial. Phenomenological ontology and epistemology.	All the TAs experienced negative emotions when supporting SEMH needs. Quite a lot of focus on emotional suppression and often take feelings home with then (thinking about students at home). A feeling of 'needing to get through' challenging situations. A feeling of not wanting to show the students their emotions. The TAs do discuss some of their coping strategies and support systems, such as using humour, suppression, trying to let go, talking to family members, getting help from staff members, and being with their dog. The TAs described themselves as understanding, laid back, easy going, calm, patient, level headed, hardworking, good listeners. They mentioned being able to tell when something is wrong (though this is not explored in great detail). Some TAs felt their role was similar to a paternal relationship, which led to an emotional response
Conboy, I. (2020). Teaching assistants' experiences of supporting children's mental health: An IPA study	This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of teaching assistants (TAs) in mainstream primary schools regarding their role in supporting children's mental health.	7 TAs from primary, junior and infant schools with a wide range of experience and training, all within one London LA.	Qualitative IPA study. Semi-structured individual interviews were carried out before being analysed collectively.	A constructivist stance was adopted as the epistemological position for this research. As a constructivist stance reasons that individuals create their own meanings, for this research a relativist ontology was therefore adopted.	TAs were perceptive of CYP's emotions, particularly anxiety, low mood, and anger. They were aware of factors impacting the students, such as home life, bereavement, friendship issues, academic pressures, and video games. They all wanted to know what was affecting them. They also wanted more support / training about mental health. All the TAs expressed that they had good relationships with the students and were caring and had a calming presence. Question about giving hugs / touch – talks about fulfilling a parental role. Getting to know the students is important in supporting them, and TAs

				Made links to organisational theory, attachment theory, ecological systems theory, and self-efficacy.	could form special relationships with the students. The TAs helped the students by talking with them, normalising worries, giving praise, just being there, and 'keeping an eye' on them. They expressed frustration with school systemic issues, such as lack of time. They expressed other emotional challenges, including helplessness, fear that things could go wrong, general negative emotions, sadness, etc. Some struggled to express their negative emotional experiences. All participants found their role rewarding. They enjoy helping children and making a difference to their lives.
Willis, A. P. (2017). An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of teaching assistants' experiences of forming relationships with pupils who have Autistic Spectrum Disorder in mainstream primary schools	The primary research aim was to explore the experiences TAs had of the relationships they formed with the pupils with ASD they were supporting in mainstream primary schools. The research purpose was exploratory in that it did not set out with a particular hypothesis but was seeking to provide a detailed examination of each TAs personal lived experience of the relationship, the meaning of that experience to them and how the TAs made sense of that experience.	This research was undertaken with 6 teaching assistants from 3 mainstream primary schools located in a medium-sized town in a large County local authority, who all supported ASD students 1:1.	Qualitative framework – semi-structured interviews analysed with IPA.	Findings were discussed in the context of Interdependence Theory, particularly the investment model put forward by Rusbult and Buunk (1993). This relates to costs and rewards in relationships, satisfaction, dependence, and commitment / investment. Ontology of Relativism / Epistemology of Constructivism / Theoretical perspective of Phenomenology	Bond / attachment between students and TAs. Mutual trust in relationship as well as safety and security. Sense of togetherness, empathy, and teamwork. Closeness can be non-verbal. Building relationships can be a journey with ups and downs. Some felt emotionally close to their students and others didn't. For those who were close, there was a sense of it being quite a special / unique relationship. All of them had experienced challenges in their relationship – feeling like they don't know how to help them or there are external issues. Some felt they wanted to detach themselves from the children for different reasons. Some of them felt they have a role in teaching students about their emotions. Some of them felt the TA role was similar to a parental role, and they wanted to care for them. Distinct to the teacher's role. They all supported them with their emotions. It felt good to help them with emotions such as anxiety. The role can be emotionally intense for the TAs – one asked to not be with a student full-time as it was too full on for her. "I find it a difficult relationship because you are giving all the time". A lot of frustration when there isn't progress or TAs aren't supported by the school. TAs took pride in their relationships with the children and the progress they were able to help them with. The relationship is important to them, it means a lot to them – feeling very invested. "it is such a joy to see her progress every week".

Appendix C

Critical Appraisal of the Literature Using Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence Framework

Authors / Studies / WoE D overall rating	WoE A (transparency, accuracy, accessibility, and specificity)	WoE B (purposivity – fit for purpose method)	WoE C (utility and propriety)
Greenway, C. W., & Rees Edwards, A. (2021). Teaching assistants' facilitators and barriers to effective practice working with children with ADHD: A qualitative study **WoE D: Medium**	Medium They do not state their own philosophical viewpoint or acknowledge their biases / background. They do not state what participants were actually asked (interview schedule) so it is hard to judge how open or leading the questions were. They do maintain some trustworthiness / authenticity by utilising multivocality to accurately represent the participants' voices. They do justify the importance of the research (unique study and highlights important implications for improvements in schools and further research). They do discuss some of the implications of the findings, but do not touch on how this was disseminated. They acknowledge the limited scope of the study and the small sample based in a region in Wales. Two researchers coding independently increased inter-rater reliability, rigour, and credibility.	Medium They seem to answer their research questions through conducting semi-structured interviews with TAs. However, limited scope due to only focusing on experiences of supporting ADHD needs. Provides insight being the first study of its kind to explore TA's emotional experiences of supporting ADHD needs Relationships are highlighted as important throughout, but these aren't delved into in a deeper level. Generally lack of deeper theoretical thinking – though they do make links to some of the wider literature and implications.	Medium This research is mostly useful to me and my research question, though the specific focus on ADHD is less relevant. Plus there is very little focus on processes of regulation. However, all the exploration or emotional experiences, relationships, and factors impacting TAs is very pertinent. The research taking place in a small area in Wales may mean that TAs' experiences are quite different from other areas like London. The research seems to be done in an ethical manner. They got approval from a university ethics panel. Participants were informed on the information sheet that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Plus everything was anonymised.
Ravalier, J. M., Walsh, J., & Hoult, E. (2021). The impact of working conditions on the UK's teaching assistants **WoE D: Medium**	Medium They justify why the study is important, being such an under-researched area. Only large-scale quantitative study looking at TA's emotions. They also do state some implications of the research and areas for further research. Clear link to research questions. Whilst they do note their backgrounds, this isn't linked to the study and they do not comment on potential biases. Some interpretations they make are questionable (e.g. coping strategy point).	Medium They mostly answer their research questions. While this study demonstrated that a proportion (between 29% and 31%) of perceived stress was accounted for by working conditions, student behaviour, and parental behaviour, this also suggests that there are likely a number of other factors also influencing TA stress. Their data was only correlational, limiting their ability to make causal claims about stress.	Medium It's very useful in the sense that it's both the only quantitative and the only large scale study that answers my research question. They look at a range of settings, though it's mostly primary schools. Plus it's only partially useful considering they don't really go into questions of emotional regulation or emotional experiences other than stress. Ethical approval for this cross-sectional survey study

	Large sample is positive and increases generalisability. Quite transparent about their methods and analyses. Various limitations due to use of quantitative online Likert scales. Participants may have misinterpreted questions, and could not clarify or qualify their answers. Some measures were made for teachers – may not be valid for TAs. Plus mostly primary school respondents may have skewed data.	Lack of qualitative information is a disadvantage as they don't have a full picture. They could have used better quantitative measures arguably which were more appropriate for TAs and allowed for a wider range of stressors and emotions to be reported.	was gained from the Bath Spa University research ethics board.
Kelly, L. J. (2020). The emotional experiences of Teaching Assistants, working 1:1 with a child **WoE D: High**	High Clearly explains philosophical position and reflective diary adds transparency (e.g. talking about own anxiety). Not much discussion of own biases though. Clearly explains why this research is important – important TA perspectives and paucity of research. Clear link between aims, RQs, and methods. Good representation of participants' views with direct quotes and thoughtful considered interpretations. Very reflective approach. Views are very appropriate for research area. Good level of specificity – it all seems to make sense in context. She acknowledges some limitations, such as difficulties generalising from small sample / her being a novice researcher meant she may have made errors and unintentionally influenced the direction of uncomfortable interviews.	High The research question was well answered, and her psychosocial FANI approach seemed an appropriate lens / method to take. Although there is a lack of generalisability, she does a good job of making links to other research that is in line with her own findings. She clearly outlines the implications of her study, justifying it's purpose. Clear argument for more support for TAs.	High This study is very relevant to my own research question – both exploring TA emotional experiences through qualitative interviews. The bit about how their emotions could affect each other is particularly interesting to me. However, there isn't a huge focus on emotions in relation to regulation. Both when supporting children's emotions and trying to regulate their own emotions. There is some touching on this – but it is certainly not the main focus. The psychosocial approach is interesting, as it considers both the internal and external. The research is ethical, though there was some risk of emotional harm during interviews. This was well responded to though and ethical approval was gained from the university.
Angel, N. E. (2019). An exploration of secondary school Teaching Assistants' lived experiences of supporting young people identified with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis **WoE D: High**	High Clearly explains why the research is important (e.g. gaps in the literature) and links this to the research aims. Outlines ontological and epistemological position and her own interest in the topic having been a TA. Reflexive bracketing throughout, though not too much focus on biases. Good representation of participants' views with quotes throughout – captures their lived experiences well with a degree of interpretation. Detailed specific information throughout.	High The research questions were addressed clearly, with IPA being a very suitable approach. Interesting links to different theoretical models. Not much focus on the SEMH needs themselves – a lack of specificity about what these needs and behaviours were and how they directly linked to the emotional experiences of the TAs.	High This study is very relevant to my own research, perhaps being the most similar study to my own (IPA study with secondary school TAs). Good amount of focus on negative emotions and ways of managing emotions. Though not much real exploration of how TAs explicitly helped students manage their emotions, and how this process felt. Some link to social nature of regulation and resilience, but this is not really explored in great length. Some

	Implications are stated for school practice, EP practice, and future research. Small sample so hard to generalise, though this was not an aim of the research.		different theoretical positions to me, though both are phenomenological. The research is ethical, with considerations being made to discomfort and inconvenience. Ethical approval was gained from the university.
Conboy, I. (2020). Teaching assistants' experiences of supporting children's mental health: An IPA study **WoE D: High**	High Clearly explains personal position (including interest in the topic) and reflective diary / reflexivity. Not much discussion of own biases though. Justifies why research is important and links these to her aims / research questions. Good representation of participants' views with quotes throughout – captures their lived experiences well with a degree of interpretation. Detailed specific information throughout. Though notes that due to the voluntary nature of the study, the results may be biased by attracting TAs who are more interested in supporting mental health. Small sample so hard to generalise, though notes a 'theoretical generalisation'.	High The research seems to mostly answer the research question and provides pertinent implications for both schools and EPs. Lots of links to different psychological theories. IPA seems to have been an appropriate method.	High Very relevant to my research, particularly in how TAs feel when supporting emotional needs. However, there is no real focus on how TAs may regulate their own emotions, or explicit links between the TA and student emotions. Though good to see consideration of relational and social thinking (attachment, ecological systems theory, etc.) The research is ethical, with approval being gained from the university.
Willis, A. P. (2017). An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of teaching assistants' experiences of forming relationships with pupils who have Autistic Spectrum Disorder in mainstream primary schools **WoE D: Medium-High**	High Very clear philosophical positioning and how this led to research questions and methods. Research is well justified and implications are clear. Good reflexivity, kept a diary, did supervision, etc. Though doesn't mention personal biases. Represents participant's views well with quotes – interview questions are open and aren't likely to be leading. Sampling critiques – all women, less experienced, just primary school, small number	Medium-High The research questions are clearly answered The choice to interpret things through costs and rewards seems a strange theoretical model as this usually used for adult relationships.	Medium Relatively relevant to my study- good to have a paper that focuses more on the interpersonal relationship between TA and student. Although not much theoretical thinking about emotional experiences, nothing about regulation really (for the students or TAs). Plus it's just looking at supporting children with ASC. This study underwent ethical consideration and received ethical approval from the university.

Appendix D

Approved Ethics Application From UEL's School of Psychology Ethics Committee

University of East London

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION LETTER

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

Reviewer: Please complete sections in **blue** | **Student:** Please complete/read sections in **orange**

Details	
Reviewer:	**NAME**
Supervisor:	**NAME**
Student:	**NAME**
Course:	**Prof Doc in Educational and Child Psychology**
Title of proposed study:	**Exploring the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of Teaching Assistants (TAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to co-regulate their emotions in secondary school settings**

Checklist

(Optional)			
	YES	**NO**	**N/A**
Concerns regarding study aims (e.g., ethically/morally questionable, unsuitable topic area for level of study, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Detailed account of participants, including inclusion and exclusion criteria	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding participants/target sample	☐	☐	☐
Detailed account of recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐
All relevant study materials attached (e.g., freely available questionnaires, interview schedules, tests, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Study materials (e.g., questionnaires, tests, etc.) are appropriate for target sample	☐	☐	☐
Clear and detailed outline of data collection	☐	☐	☐
Data collection appropriate for target sample	☐	☐	☐
If deception being used, rationale provided, and appropriate steps followed to communicate study aims at a later point	☐	☐	☐
If data collection is not anonymous, appropriate steps taken at later stages to ensure participant anonymity (e.g., data analysis, dissemination, etc.) – anonymisation, pseudonymisation	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data storage (e.g., location, type of data, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data sharing (e.g., who will have access and how)	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data retention (e.g., unspecified length of time, unclear why data will be retained/who will have access/where stored)	☐	☐	☐
If required, General Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks/burdens to participants have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks to the researcher have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
If required, Country-Specific Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐
If required, a DBS or equivalent certificate number/information provided	☐	☐	☐
If required, permissions from recruiting organisations attached (e.g., school, charity organisation, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
All relevant information included in the participant information sheet (PIS)	☐	☐	☐
Information in the PIS is study specific	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the PIS is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
All issues specific to the study are covered in the consent form	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the consent form is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
All necessary information included in the participant debrief sheet	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the debrief sheet is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
Study advertisement included	☐	☐	☐
Content of study advertisement is appropriate (e.g., researcher's personal contact details are not shared, appropriate language/visual material used, etc.)	☐	☐	☐

Decision options	
APPROVED	Ethics approval for the above-named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice), to the date it is submitted for assessment.
APPROVED - BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES	In this circumstance, the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made **before** the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box at the end of this form once all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to the supervisor. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records. **Minor amendments guidance:** typically involve clarifying/amending information presented to participants (e.g., in the PIS, instructions), further detailing of how data will be securely handled/stored, and/or ensuring consistency in information presented across materials.
NOT APPROVED - MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED	In this circumstance, a revised ethics application **must** be submitted and approved **before** any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application. **Major amendments guidance:** typically insufficient information has been provided, insufficient consideration given to several key aspects, there are serious concerns regarding any aspect of the project, and/or serious concerns in the candidate's ability to ethically, safely and sensitively execute the study.

Decision on the above-named proposed research study	
Please indicate the decision:	**APPROVED**

Minor amendments
Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

Major amendments
Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

Assessment of risk to researcher		
Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
	If no, please request resubmission with an **adequate risk assessment.**	
If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard, please rate the degree of risk:		
HIGH	Please **do not approve a high-risk** application. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not be approved on this basis. If unsure, please refer to the Chair of Ethics.	☐
MEDIUM	Approve but include appropriate recommendations in the below box.	☐
LOW	Approve and if necessary, include any recommendations in the below box.	☒
Reviewer recommendations in relation to risk (if any):	Please insert any recommendations	

Reviewer's signature	
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**
Date:	**07/04/2022**
This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee	
RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE For the researcher and participants involved in the above-named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place. For a copy of UEL's Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard.	

Confirmation of minor amendments (Student to complete)	
I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data	
Student name: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**
Student number:	**STUDENT NUMBER**
Date:	**07/04/2022**
Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed if minor amendments to your ethics application are required	

Appendix E

Participant Information Sheet Disseminated to Participants

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Exploring the emotional experiences of secondary school LSAs / TAs when supporting children and young people to co-regulate their emotions

Contact person: TEP

Email: EMAIL

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part or not, please carefully read through the following information which outlines what your participation would involve. Feel free to talk with others about the study (e.g., colleagues, friends, family, etc.) before making your decision. If anything is unclear or you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above email.

Who am I?

My name is TEP; I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London (UEL) and am studying for a doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology. As part of my studies, I am conducting the research that you are being invited to participate in.

What is the purpose of the research?

I am conducting research into the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of LSAs and TAs working in secondary schools. In the United Kingdom (UK), school support staff are increasingly taking on more of a role in supporting children and young people with their emotions. This is due to an increasing number of children and young people being identified with emotional needs, alongside other special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This study is therefore aiming to create a space for LSAs/TAs to reflect on their 'in-the-moment' experiences of supporting children and young people to regulate their emotions. It is hoped that this research will offer new insights into the experiences of LSAs/TAs, as well as a better understanding of emotional processes within such interactions. This will be useful information for schools, Educational Psychologists (EPs), and other professionals who work directly or indirectly with LSAs/TAs.

Why have I been invited to take part?

To address the study aims, I am inviting LSAs and TAs working in secondary schools to take part in my research. If you are currently in such a role, and often support children / young people to regulate their emotions, you are eligible to take part in the study.

It is entirely up to you whether you take part or not, participation is voluntary.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to attend an interview with myself that will last for approximately 1 hour. These can be done either in-person (most likely within your school setting), or remotely using a virtual communication platform such as Microsoft Teams. It is hoped that these interviews will feel more like a chat than a formal interview, though they will be recorded (with a recording device or computer application), and transcribed / analysed. Despite this, all information will be anonymised and kept as confidential as possible.

As this study is exploring specific situations of you supporting children and young people with their emotions, I will ask you to share one or more recent relevant experience(s). This will allow us to then explore the different aspects of those experiences, such as how you imagined the young person felt, how you remembered feeling, and how emotions may have been regulated within and between you. Additionally, we can explore your perspectives on the role of the LSA in supporting children and people with their emotions. It is hoped that you find reflecting on your experiences to be beneficial and that this process will give you more of a voice.

Can I change my mind?

Yes, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. If you would like to withdraw from the study at any stage,

you can do so by simply letting me know (in-person or over email). If you withdraw, your data will not be used as part of the research.

Separately, you can also request to withdraw your data from being used even after you have taken part in the study, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

Whilst it is hoped that you will find the research process to be beneficial, it is important to acknowledge that exploring personal and emotional experiences can potentially become uncomfortable or even distressing. I am therefore aiming to create a non-judgemental space in which you are the expert in your experiences. I will also offer you a debrief at the end to discuss the research experience, and give you a debrief sheet to signpost you to information about looking after your mental health. Additionally, you will be given the option of contacting myself or your school's link EP following the study if you have any further concerns.

How will the information I provide be kept secure and confidential?

All information will be anonymised and participants will only be referred to using a pseudonym. You will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym or have one assigned at random. During transcription, all identifying information (e.g. names of children, staff, schools, etc.) will be removed. Any personal data that is collected will be held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Participants will not be identified by the data collected, on any material resulting from the data collected, or in any write-up of the research. Confidentiality may need to be broken only in the event of a risk to themselves or others.

During the research process, I will store raw and anonymised data (including personal contact details) using my secure UEL account on Microsoft Office (Outlook, Teams, OneDrive, etc.); all of which require 2-factor authentication to access. A virtual back-up of the data will exist on my secure Microsoft One-Drive account. All data will be primarily accessed by myself, though anonymised data may also be shared with my thesis supervisor and other relevant individuals (e.g. university examiners) where appropriate. Data will only be transferred using secure accounts (UEL accounts on Outlook and OneDrive). Data will be stored and analysed using word processing / spreadsheet software (e.g. Microsoft Word and Excel). Secure transcription / analysis software may also be utilised.

Anonymised interview transcripts and subsequent data analysis are of long-term value and will be retained for the duration of the thesis process. Anonymised research data will be securely stored for a maximum of 3 years, following which all data will be deleted (though it will likely be deleted following completion of the thesis). Raw data with identifying information will be deleted following anonymisation. Personal contact data will be kept for dissemination purposes where requested, and will be deleted following dissemination of the research findings.

For the purposes of data protection, the University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University processes this information under the 'public task' condition contained in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Where the University processes particularly sensitive data (known as 'special category data' in the GDPR), it does so because the processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information about how the University processes personal data please see www.uel.ac.uk/about/about-uel/governance/information-assurance/data-protection

What will happen to the results of the research?

The research will be written up as a thesis and submitted for assessment. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. Findings may also be disseminated to a range of audiences (e.g., academics, clinicians, public, etc.) through journal articles, conference presentations, talks, magazine articles, blogs, etc. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally.

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed for which relevant contact details will need to be provided.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored by UEL for a maximum of 3 years, following which all data will be deleted.

Who has reviewed the research?

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

What if am adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will be adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise distress or harm of any kind. Nevertheless, it is possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may be challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you are affected in any of those ways, you may find the Staff Wellbeing section of the LOCAL AUTHORITY website to be helpful (WEBSITEhttps://www.islingtoncs.org/node/18575). Along with providing many resources aimed at supporting wellbeing, they have signposted several other useful service, including:

- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) - provides telephone based support any time of day as well as online resources to support your wellbeing and help you with the issues that matter to you
- Free counselling for education staff - trained counsellors (BACP accredited) available any time, 365 days a year, to listen without judgement and help you find a way forward, whatever your worries or concerns
- Text 'Shout' to 85258 - for free 24/7 text support from a trained crisis volunteer to help with a range of issues including feeling overwhelmed, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, relationship problems and bullying
- Samaritans - free anytime from any phone on 116 123 for a safe space to talk about whatever you are going through
- Public Health England Every Mind Matters – expert advice and tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing, including self-care, dealing with change and coping with money worries
- Your mind plan – answer the five questions in this interactive quiz to get top tips and advice personalised to you
- Resources for individuals - guides, articles and videos on a range of topics including managing anxiety, stress and promoting wellbeing
- NHS mental health helpline for urgent help - 24-hour help, advice and support from a mental health professional for you, your child, your parent or someone you care for
- Free online NHS adult psychological therapies (IAPT) - offers talking therapies, like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and help for common problems including stress, anxiety and depression
- Cruse bereavement care - coronavirus, bereavement and grief online information, advice and support. Helpline: 0808 808 1677
- LOCAL AUTHORITY Schools' HR guidance on work-related stress
- Able futures - offer nine months of confidential, no cost advice, guidance and support from mental health professionals to help you cope with work while you manage a mental health condition such as anxiety, depression or stress. Apply online or by calling **0800 321 3137**
- Apply for a confidential grant if you are suffering financial problems caused by unemployment, ill health, sudden life events, bereavement or a personal injury or call **0207 697 2772** to discuss your circumstances
- The National Sleep Helpline helps anyone having sleep problems, including adults, young people and parents. Call FREE on **03303 530 541** from **7pm -9pm, Sunday to Thursday**

Who can I contact if I have any questions/concerns?

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

TEP (email: EMAIL)

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor, TUTOR. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: EMAIL

or

Chair of School Research Ethics Committee: RESEARCH DIRECTOR, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: EMAIL)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet

Appendix F

Consent Form Disseminated to Participants

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Exploring the emotional experiences of secondary school LSAs / TAs when supporting children and young people to co-regulate their emotions

Contact person: TEP

Email: EMAIL

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet for the above study and that I have been given a copy to keep.	
I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without explanation or disadvantage.	
I understand that if I withdraw during the study, my data will not be used.	
I understand that I have 3 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw my data from the study.	
I understand that the interview will be recorded using a recording device or computer application.	
I understand that my personal information and data, including audio recordings from the research will be securely stored and remain confidential. Only the research team will have access to this information, to which I give my permission.	

It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.	
I understand that short, anonymised quotes from my interview data may be used in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in academic journals resulting from the study and that these will not personally identify me.	
I would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed and am willing to provide contact details for this to be sent to.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date

.....

Appendix G

Debrief Sheet Disseminated to Participants

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET

Exploring the emotional experiences of secondary school LSAs / TAs when supporting children and young people to co-regulate their emotions

Contact person: TEP

Thank you for participating in my research study on the experiences of LSAs/TAs supporting children and young people to regulate their emotions. This document offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

How will my data be managed?

The University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. More detailed information is available in the Participant Information Sheet, which you received when you agreed to take part in the research.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The research will be written up as a thesis and submitted for assessment. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. Findings may also be disseminated to a range of audiences (e.g., academics, clinicians, public, etc.) through journal articles, conference presentations, talks, magazine articles, blogs, etc. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally.

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed for which relevant contact details will need to be provided.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored by UEL for a maximum of 3 years, following which all data will be deleted.

What if I been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise distress or harm of any kind. Nevertheless, it is possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways, you may find the Staff Wellbeing section of the LOCAL AUTHORITY website to be helpful (WEBSITE). Along with providing many resources aimed at supporting wellbeing, they have signposted several other useful service, including:

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- Samaritans - free anytime from any phone on 116 123 for a safe space to talk about whatever you are going through
- Public Health England Every Mind Matters – expert advice and tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing, including self-care, dealing with change and coping with money worries
- Your mind plan – answer the five questions in this interactive quiz to get top tips and advice personalised to you
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- NHS mental health helpline for urgent help - 24-hour help, advice and support from a mental health professional for you, your child, your parent or someone you care for
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- Able futures - offer nine months of confidential, no cost advice, guidance and support from mental health professionals to help you cope with work while you manage a mental health condition such as anxiety, depression or stress. Apply online or by calling **0800 321 3137**

- Apply for a confidential grant if you are suffering financial problems caused by unemployment, ill health, sudden life events, bereavement or a personal injury or call **0207 697 2772** to discuss your circumstances
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Contact person: TEP

Email: EMAIL

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor TUTOR. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: EMAIL

or

Chair of School Research Ethics Committee: RESEARCH DIRECTOR, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

Email: EMAIL

Thank you for taking part in my study

Appendix H

Example Reflective Diary Extract Following Interview With Zahra (19/05/2022)

I had a very positive first interview with Zahra (pseudonym for anonymity). She shared some really interesting experiences about her role and how she supports the students she works with. I think we built a good rapport at the beginning (such as by having a cup of tea whilst waiting for the room to be ready and talking about her daughter) – I'm happy I could create, from my perspective, a relaxed, friendly and comfortable space. I really didn't want the interview to be too formal, and I think we got that balance right.

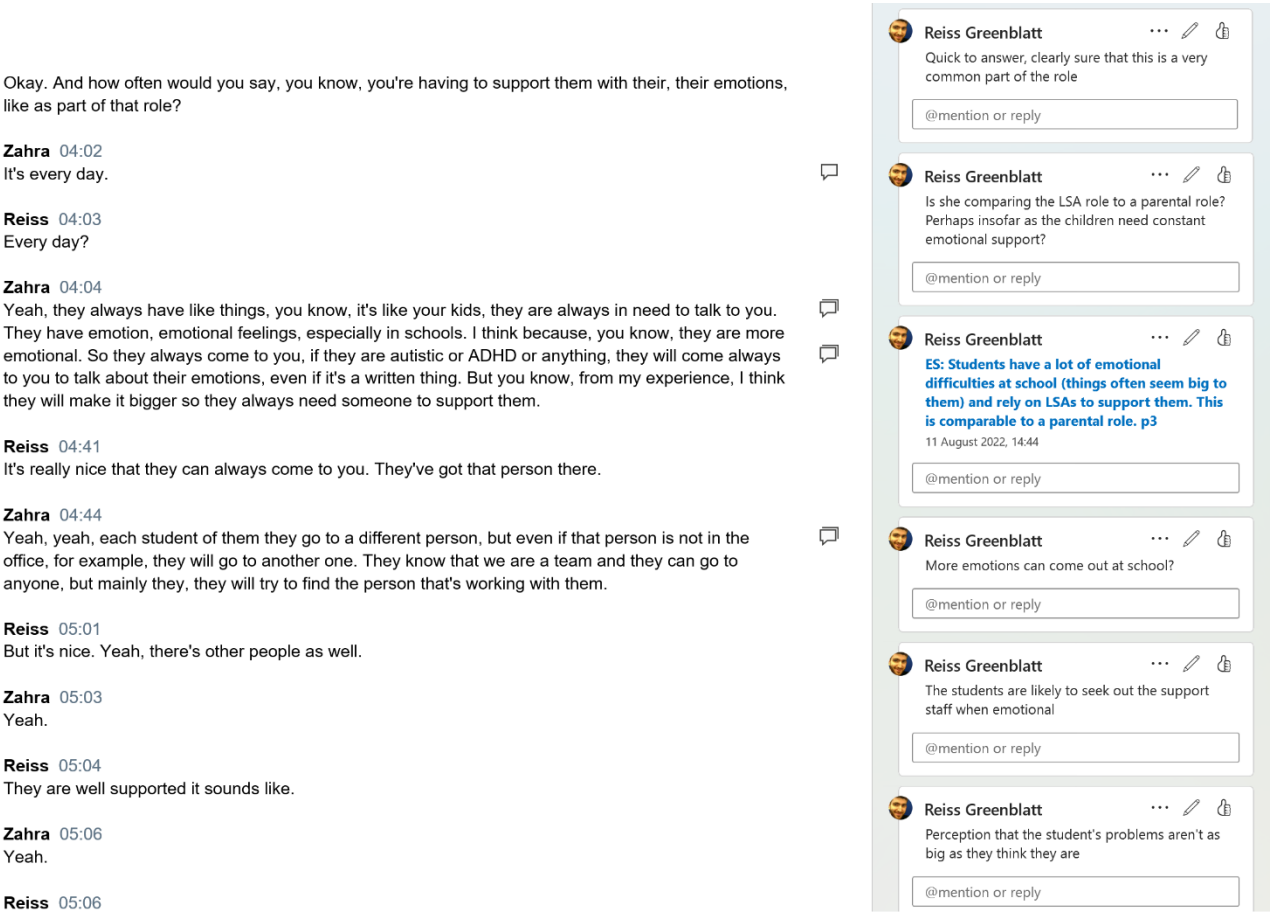
Zahra made some really interesting comments about the link between her emotions and the students' emotions. She clearly displayed so much care and investment, and she takes on so many emotions (i.e. when they were sad, she was sad). A key theme seemed to be around the connection between Zahra and her students, and how their emotions could influence each other. I reflected in the moment how these experiences were in line with my thinking around co-regulation (emotions existing between people; influencing each other). I am cautious though of not wanting to project too many of my preconceptions onto Zahra. Whilst I did summarise some of her comments, and share a few of my own thoughts, I am hopeful that I did not influence her comments too much. Though some new ideas came about during our conversation. When a child approached her who was crying, she actually said that it made her happy /

excited (because she knew she could help her, and she was happy that she had sought her out) – an emotional relationship I hadn't thought about before.

It was interesting to hear the things that helped Zahra better manage the student's emotions and her own emotions. Her previous training and jobs (e.g. Nursing) seemed to factor in. She would often have to manage her own emotions off in the moment ("switching") in order to support the student. Having good peer support seemed to be equally important; being able to give each other reassurance and ideas for helping the students. This widened my thinking in the moment to how I was conceptualising emotional support / regulation. Not just existing between two people, but within (and informed by) the different systems. Interesting theory to explore later. I was trying to direct the conversation towards the end to think about LSAs' role in supporting student's emotions (and training, role definitions, etc.), though on reflection, I do wonder if my questions were a little leading and closed-ended at times. I must make sure to think more about how to explore this topic in future interviews.

Appendix I

Example Interview Transcript With Exploratory Noting and an Experiential Statement



Okay. And how often would you say, you know, you're having to support them with their, their emotions, like as part of that role?

Zahra 04:02
It's every day.

Reiss 04:03
Every day?

Zahra 04:04
Yeah, they always have like things, you know, it's like your kids, they are always in need to talk to you. They have emotion, emotional feelings, especially in schools. I think because, you know, they are more emotional. So they always come to you, if they are autistic or ADHD or anything, they will come always to you to talk about their emotions, even if it's a written thing. But you know, from my experience, I think they will make it bigger so they always need someone to support them.

Reiss 04:41
It's really nice that they can always come to you. They've got that person there.

Zahra 04:44
Yeah, yeah, each student of them they go to a different person, but even if that person is not in the office, for example, they will go to another one. They know that we are a team and they can go to anyone, but mainly they, they will try to find the person that's working with them.

Reiss 05:01
But it's nice. Yeah, there's other people as well.

Zahra 05:03
Yeah.

Reiss 05:04
They are well supported it sounds like.

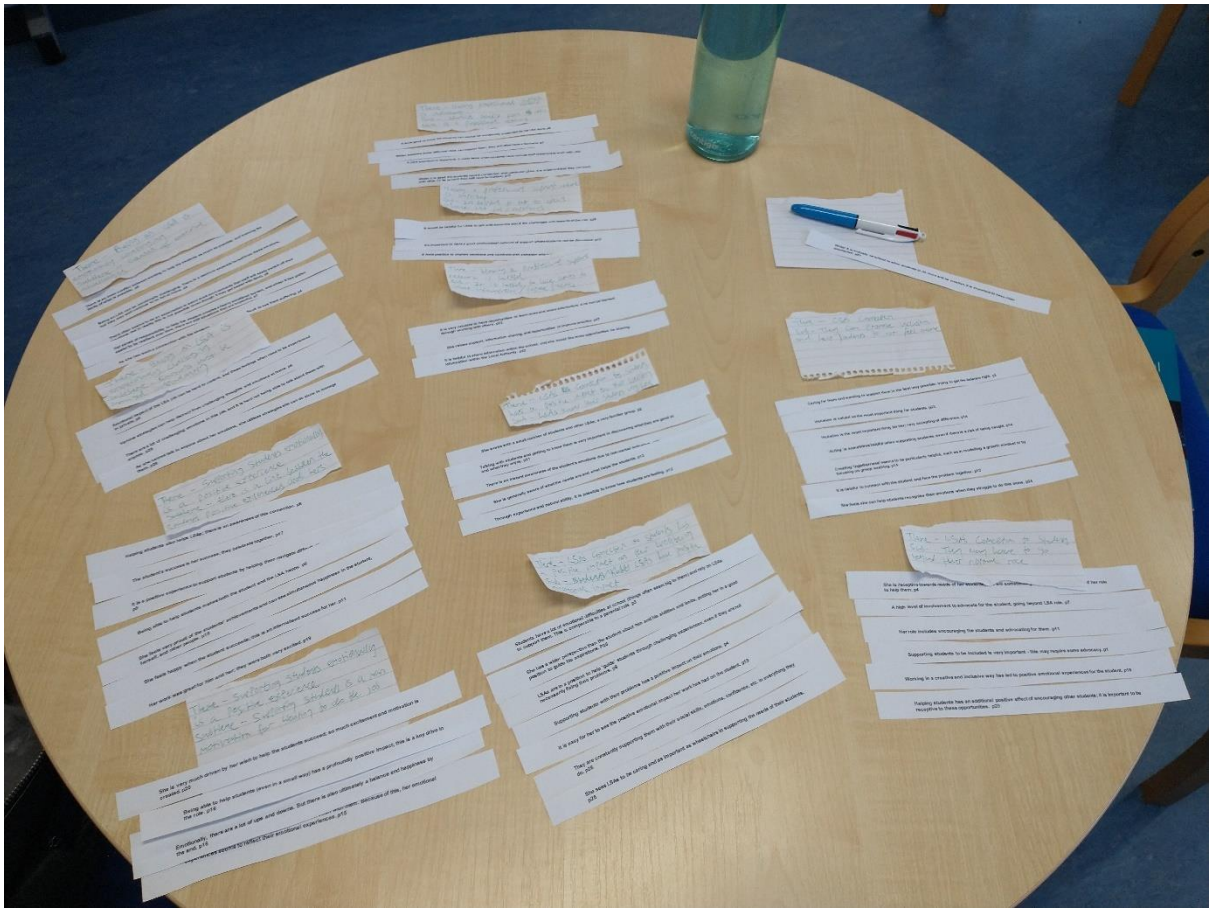
Zahra 05:06
Yeah.

Reiss 05:06

*The 'comment' tool in Microsoft Word was used to write exploratory notes and construct experiential statements (experiential statements were written in blue).

Appendix J

Photograph Exemplifying the Process of Searching for Connections Across Experiential Statements



Appendix K

Example Document Extract in Which Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) Were Named and Organised

A. ARIANA FEELS LSAs HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONS

Ariana feels LSAs have a very positive impact in being able to support students' emotions

She feels it is important to teach students to manage their emotions, due to real-life implications. p3

Ariana: "You cannot just go and fight someone because today it's detention, tomorrow, it's going to be the police and maybe prison and everything"

She can see that her support has really helped the students learn to self-regulate. p6

Ariana: "We worked really, really hard on that to deflect his anger. And it's working!"

Ariana can see the difference her support has made when supporting her students' regulation skills. p12

Ariana: "I think definitely, she was more calm [...] I could tell from her expression, facial expression, that she was impressed by the 'sing a song, and maybe you will forget about your anger at the moment'.

She can see the impact she has had on the student's emotional wellbeing. p26

Ariana: "But you can tell she's more, she's more calm."

She cares for students with additional needs and feels it is very important to have someone there to support them emotionally. p37

Ariana: "Think about SEN. Think about their mental health. Think about being in an inclusive environment [...] You have to be there for them. You have to be there. You have to teach them how to control that."

Students need to constantly be supported with their emotions in order for them to make academic progress. p38

Ariana: "getting to a good level at the end of the school year, it takes a lot of support, a lot of mental health support to get there. [...] It's not just differentiating the work. Constant praises, you have low moods because they cannot get the work. You are there for them. You praise them. You do it all over again, all over again."

LSAs are valued in the school for being able to support the students with their emotions. p38

Ariana: "they're always saying at the end of half terms, "thank you for the LSAs, thank you for the amazing job" [...] they do not mean thank you for differentiating the work. They mean, thank you for the behaviour, for your behavioural assistance"

Ariana feels the role of the LSA has widened over time and now has a larger focus on supporting emotions

The LSA role is multifaceted and includes many types of work. p1

Ariana: "we support other students in the class with SEN needs, and not only. I run interventions about, around social skills, reading literacy, I run an enrichment [...] we are responsible for the behaviour [...] it's a wide role."

LSAs are constantly having to support students with their emotions. p35

Appendix L

Document in Which Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) From Each Case Were Compared to Develop Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

PETs from all four interviews before being developed into GETs:

Zahra	Sophia	Ariana	Esma
A. LSAs HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS	**A. LSAs HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING STUDENTS TO REGULATE THEIR EMOTIONS**	**A. ARIANA FEELS LSAs HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONS**	**A. LSAs HAVE A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS**
A1. LSAs have an important role in supporting students' emotions	A1. The LSA role is important as students need a lot of support emotionally	A1. Ariana feels LSAs have a very positive impact in being able to support students' emotions	A1. LSAs are constantly supporting the needs of students and making a difference in their lives
A2. She can promote inclusion and help students not feel alone	A2. She can help students to regulate their emotions by listening to them and giving them space	A2. Ariana feels the role of the LSA has widened over time and now has a larger focus on supporting emotions	A2. LSAs can use a range of strategies in the moment to help students regulate their emotions
A3. She may go beyond the boundaries of her normal LSA role to support the students' wellbeing	A3. She can support students' emotional development by deepening their thinking	**B. ARIANA HAS BECOME SKILLED AT SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONS (AS A RESULT OF BOTH RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE)**	A3. LSAs are often in a good position to bring everyone together to better support a student
B. ZAHRA KNOWS HER STUDENTS AND THEIR EMOTIONAL NEEDS VERY WELL	**B. LSAs ARE ABLE TO FORM VERY CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR STUDENTS, WHICH IS BENEFICIAL FOR SUPPORTING THEIR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**	B1. Ariana has been able to contain her students' feelings and help them to co-regulate their emotions	**B. LSAs OFTEN HAVE STRONG CONNECTIONS WITH THEIR STUDENTS**
C. BEING AN LSA IS EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGING	**C. BEING AN LSA IS AN EMOTIONAL ROLE, PARTICULARLY AS THERE IS SO MUCH CARE FOR THE STUDENTS**	B2. Ariana has been able to teach her students how to identify the emotions that they are feeling	B1. LSAs are in a good position to build positive relationships with their students
D. SUPPORTING STUDENTS EMOTIONALLY CAN BE A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	C1. Challenging emotions may arise when working with students, though these may not be	B3. Ariana has been able to teach her students to self-regulate their own emotions	B2. Esma is very empathetic towards the needs of her students

	processed until after a situation has happened		
There is a link between the student's positive experiences and hers	C2. She cares a lot about the students; her empathy makes her very receptive to their emotions	**C. ARIANA HAS GOTTEN TO KNOW THE STUDENTS SHE WORKS WITH VERY WELL**	B3. It is beneficial for both Esma and her students to build a close relationship
Being able to support students emotionally is a primary motivation for wanting to do the LSA job	**D. STUDENTS' EMOTIONS ARE INFLUENCED BY THEIR ENVIRONEMNTS**	C1. Ariana has built good relationships with her students, which has allowed her to better support them	**C. BEING AN LSA CAN BE EMOTIONALLY IMPACTFUL**
E. ZAHRA FEELS SHE MUST MANAGE CHALLENGING EMOTIONS BY HERSELF	D1. Students' emotions are influenced by how others react to them	C2. Ariana is good at identifying how the students are feeling	C1. People in the school are emotionally impacted by the emotional states of others
F. IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE A PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK	D2. Being an LSA is emotionally rewarding, especially when the students are achieving	**D. THERE IS A CONNECTION BETWEEN HOW THE STUDENTS ARE FEELING AND HOW ARIANA IS FEELING**	C2. Being an LSA can be emotionally rewarding
F1. It is beneficial for LSAs to be able to discuss their experiences with others	**E. SUPPORT SYSTEMS ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE WELLBEING OF LSAs**	D1. Due to her empathy, supporting students with their emotions has a big emotional impact for Ariana (though this may not always be felt immediately)	**D. AS THE LSA ROLE IS EMOTIONALLY IMPACTFUL, IT REQUIRES A LOT OF SELF-REGULATION**
F2. It is helpful for school staff to have ways to share information and improve practice	E1. It is important for LSAs to talk about their emotions after a situation	D2. Ariana's empathy and care for young people has motivated her to be an LSA, and the role can often be emotionally rewarding for her	**E. IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT WITHIN THE SCHOOL**
F3. Students benefit when there is a supportive network of LSAs	E2. She is often not given enough time to reflect and develop her practice	**E. AS THE LSA ROLE HAS A BIG EMOTIONAL IMPACT FOR ARIANA, SHE OFTEN HAS TO SELF-REGULATE HER OWN EMOTIONS (BOTH IN THE MOMENT AND AFTERWARDS)**	E1. It is helpful to have systems in place to allow LSAs to reflect on the students and their own experiences
	E3. It is important for school systems to support children's emotional needs	**F. ARIANA FEELS IT IS IMPORTANT FOR LSAs AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF TO BE WELL SUPPORTED**	E2. It is helpful to have systems of support and connection in the school for both staff and students
		F1. Ariana benefits from being able to talk about the emotional challenges of being an LSA with people who can	

		understand her experiences	
		F2. Ariana values being able to improve her practice as an LSA through her own research and professional support within the school	

PETs from all four cases sorted into initial GETs and GESTs:

Group Experiential Themes	Group Experiential Sub-Themes	Zahra	Sophia	Ariana	Esma
A. LSAs HAD AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES	A1. Students had a high level of need and LSAs were in a good position to support them with their emotions	**A. LSAs HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS**	**A. LSAs HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN HELPING STUDENTS TO REGULATE THEIR EMOTIONS**	**A. ARIANA FEELS LSAs HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONS**	**A. LSAs HAVE A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS**
		A1. LSAs have an important role in supporting students' emotions	A1. The LSA role is important as students need a lot of support emotionally	A1. Ariana feels LSAs have a very positive impact in being able to support students' emotions	A1. LSAs are constantly supporting the needs of students and making a difference in their lives
				A2. Ariana feels the role of the LSA has widened over time and now has a larger focus on supporting emotions	
	A2. LSAs could use a range of strategies to help students co-regulate their emotions			**B. ARIANA HAS BECOME SKILLED AT SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONS (AS A RESULT OF BOTH RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE)**	

			A2. She can help students to regulate their emotions by listening to them and giving them space	B1. Ariana has been able to contain her students' feelings and help them to co-regulate their emotions	A2. LSAs can use a range of strategies in the moment to help students regulate their emotions
	A3. LSAs could educate students about their emotions and the importance of managing them		A3. She can support students' emotional development by deepening their thinking	B2. Ariana has been able to teach her students how to identify the emotions that they are feeling	
				B3. Ariana has been able to teach her students to self-regulate their own emotions	
	A4. LSAs could go beyond their normal role in supporting the emotional wellbeing of students	A2. She can promote inclusion and help students not feel alone			A3. LSAs are often in a good position to bring everyone together to better support a student
		A3. She may go beyond the boundaries of her normal LSA role to support the students' wellbeing			
B. LSAs BUILT STRONG AND BENEFICIAL CONNECTIONS WITH THEIR STUDENTS	B1. LSAs could build very close relationships with their students	**B. ZAHRA KNOWS HER STUDENTS AND THEIR EMOTIONAL NEEDS VERY WELL**	**B. LSAs ARE ABLE TO FORM VERY CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR STUDENTS, WHICH IS BENEFICIAL FOR SUPPORTING THEIR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**	**C. ARIANA HAS GOTTEN TO KNOW THE STUDENTS SHE WORKS WITH VERY WELL**	**B. LSAs OFTEN HAVE STRONG CONNECTIONS WITH THEIR STUDENTS**
				C1. Ariana has built good relationships with her	B1. LSAs are in a good position to build positive relationships

				students, which has allowed her to better support them	with their students
	B2. LSAs were very receptive and understanding towards the needs of their students			C2. Ariana is good at identifying how the students are feeling	B2. Esma is very empathetic towards the needs of her students
	B3. It was mutually beneficial to have a strong connection for both students and LSAs				B3. It is beneficial for both Esma and her students to build a close relationship
C. BOTH LSAs AND STUDENTS WERE IMPACTED BY THE EMOTIONS OF OTHERS, AND THE LSA ROLE COULD THEREFORE HAVE A BIG EMOTIONAL IMPACT	C1. The LSA role could be emotionally challenging	**C. BEING AN LSA IS EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGING**	**C. BEING AN LSA IS AN EMOTIONAL ROLE, PARTICULARLY AS THERE IS SO MUCH CARE FOR THE STUDENTS**	**D. THERE IS A CONNECTION BETWEEN HOW THE STUDENTS ARE FEELING AND HOW ARIANA IS FEELING**	**C. BEING AN LSA CAN BE EMOTIONALLY IMPACTFUL**
			C1. Challenging emotions may arise when working with students, though these may not be processed until after a situation has happened	D1. Due to her empathy, supporting students with their emotions has a big emotional impact for Ariana (though this may not always be felt immediately)	
			C2. She cares a lot about the students; her empathy makes her very receptive to their emotions		
		D. SUPPORTING STUDENTS EMOTIONALLY CAN BE A	**D. STUDENTS' EMOTIONS ARE INFLUENCED BY THEIR ENVIRONEMNTS**		

		POSITIVE EXPERIENCE			
	C2. Everyone's emotional experiences were connected	There is a link between the student's positive experiences and hers	D1. Students' emotions are influenced by how others react to them		C1. People in the school are emotionally impacted by the emotional states of others
	C3. The LSA role could be emotionally rewarding	Being able to support students emotionally is a primary motivation for wanting to do the LSA job	D2. Being an LSA is emotionally rewarding, especially when the students are achieving	D2. Ariana's empathy and care for young people has motivated her to be an LSA, and the role can often be emotionally rewarding for her	C2. Being an LSA can be emotionally rewarding
	C4. As the LSA role could be emotionally impactful, LSAs needed to manage and self-regulate their own emotions	**E. ZAHRA FEELS SHE MUST MANAGE CHALLENGING EMOTIONS BY HERSELF**		**E. AS THE LSA ROLE HAS A BIG EMOTIONAL IMPACT FOR ARIANA, SHE OFTEN HAS TO SELF-REGULATE HER OWN EMOTIONS (BOTH IN THE MOMENT AND AFTERWARDS)**	**D. AS THE LSA ROLE IS EMOTIONALLY IMPACTFUL, IT REQUIRES A LOT OF SELF-REGULATION**
D. IT WAS HELPFUL TO HAVE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT WITHIN THE SCHOOL		**F. IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE A PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT NETWORK**	**E. SUPPORT SYSTEMS ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE WELLBEING OF LSAs**	**F. ARIANA FEELS IT IS IMPORTANT FOR LSAs AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF TO BE WELL SUPPORTED**	**E. IT IS HELPFUL TO HAVE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT WITHIN THE SCHOOL**
	D1. It was helpful for the emotional wellbeing of LSAs to have a space to explore their emotional experiences	F1. It is beneficial for LSAs to be able to discuss their experiences with others	E1. It is important for LSAs to talk about their emotions after a situation	F1. Ariana benefits from being able to talk about the emotional challenges of being an LSA with people who can understand her experiences	E1. It is helpful to have systems in place to allow LSAs to reflect on the students and their own experiences

	D2. It was helpful for improving practice amongst LSAs to have a space in the school system to learn and reflect		F2. It is helpful for school staff to have ways to share information and improve practice	E2. She is often not given enough time to reflect and develop her practice	F2. Ariana values being able to improve her practice as an LSA through her own research and professional support within the school	E2. It is helpful to have systems of support and connection in the school for both staff and students
	D3. Students benefitted from systems of support in the school		F3. Students benefit when there is a supportive network of LSAs	E3. It is important for school systems to support children's emotional needs		

Initial List of GETs and GESTs:

A. LSAs HAD AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Students had a high level of need and LSAs were in a good position to support them with their emotions

LSAs could use a range of strategies to help students co-regulate their emotions

LSAs could educate students about their emotions and the importance of managing them

LSAs could go beyond their normal role in supporting the emotional wellbeing of students

B. LSAs BUILT STRONG AND BENEFICIAL CONNECTIONS WITH THEIR STUDENTS

LSAs could build very close relationships with their students

LSAs were very receptive and understanding towards the needs of their students

It was mutually beneficial to have a strong connection for both students and LSAs

C. BOTH LSAs AND STUDENTS WERE IMPACTED BY THE EMOTIONS OF OTHERS, AND THE LSA ROLE COULD THEREFORE HAVE A BIG EMOTIONAL IMPACT

The LSA role could be emotionally challenging

Everyone's emotional experiences were connected

The LSA role could be emotionally rewarding

As the LSA role could be emotionally impactful, LSAs needed to manage and self-regulate their own emotions

D. IT WAS HELPFUL TO HAVE SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT WITHIN THE SCHOOL

It was helpful for the emotional wellbeing of LSAs to have a space to explore their emotional experiences

It was helpful for improving practice amongst LSAs to have a space in the school system to learn and reflect

Students benefitted from systems of support in the school

Refined List of GETs and GESTs:

A. LSAS' IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS' EMOTIONS

Students have a high level of emotional needs

How LSAs support students with their emotions

LSAs going above and beyond their role

B. LSAS BUILD CLOSE AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

Close relationships between LSAs and students

The benefits of having a close relationship

C. INFLUENCE OF THE EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The emotional experiences of the LSA role

LSAs need to regulate their own emotions

Emotional experiences are interconnected

D. THE BENEFIT OF SCHOOL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Wanting space and time to process experiences and learn with others

Students benefit from support systems in the school

Appendix M

Approved Title Change Requests From UEL's School of Psychology Ethics Committee

University of East London

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

For BSc, MSc/MA and taught Professional Doctorate students

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for a proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology

By applying for a change of title request, you confirm that in doing so, the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed, then you are required to complete an 'Ethics Application Amendment Form'.

How to complete and submit the request	
1	Complete the request form electronically.
2	Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3	Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to NAME (School Ethics Committee Member): EMAIL ADDRESS
4	Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with the reviewer's decision box completed. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your dissertation.

Required documents	
A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.	**YES** ☒

Details	
Name of applicant:	**NAME**
Programme of study:	**Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology**
Title of research:	**Exploring the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of Teaching Assistants (TAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to co-regulate their emotions in secondary school settings**
Name of supervisor:	**NAME**

Proposed title change	
Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below	
Old title:	Exploring the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of Teaching Assistants (TAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to co-regulate their emotions in secondary school settings
New title:	Exploring the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to co-regulate their emotions in secondary school settings
Rationale:	The original title referred just to Teaching Assistants (TAs). However, all the people I interviewed were Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). LSAs were included in the ethics form (as it essentially the same role as TAs have), so I just wanted to be slightly more accurate in my title.

Confirmation		
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed change of title and in agreement with it?	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?	**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒

Student's signature	
Student: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**
Date:	**28/01/2023**

Reviewer's decision		
Title change approved:	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Comments:	Please enter any further comments here	
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**	
Date:	**31/01/2023**	

University of East London

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

For BSc, MSc/MA and taught Professional Doctorate students

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for a proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology

By applying for a change of title request, you confirm that in doing so, the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed, then you are required to complete an 'Ethics Application Amendment Form'.

How to complete and submit the request	
1	Complete the request form electronically.
2	Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).

3	Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to NAME (School Ethics Committee Member): EMAIL ADDRESS
4	Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with the reviewer's decision box completed. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your dissertation.

Required documents	
A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.	**YES** ☒

Details	
Name of applicant:	**NAME**
Programme of study:	**Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology**
Title of research:	**Exploring the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to co-regulate their emotions in secondary school settings**
Name of supervisor:	**NAME**

Proposed title change	
Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below	
Old title:	Exploring the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to co-regulate their emotions in secondary school settings
New title:	Exploring the emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to regulate their emotions in secondary school settings
Rationale:	I realised that the phrases 'co-regulation' and 'in-the-moment' were too specific as, whilst they were still a primary focus, the research was ultimately more broad and looked at regulation strategies beyond co-regulation and examined both 'in-the-moment' as well as 'after-the-moment' experiences.

Confirmation		
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed change of title and in agreement with it?	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?	**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒

Student's signature	
Student: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**
Date:	**25/01/2024**

Reviewer's decision		
Title change approved:	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Comments:	**The new title reflects better the research study and will not impact the process of how the data are collected or how the research is conducted.**	
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**	
Date:	**29/01/2024**	

University of East London

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

For BSc, MSc/MA and taught Professional Doctorate students

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for a proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology

By applying for a change of title request, you confirm that in doing so, the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed, then you are required to complete an 'Ethics Application Amendment Form'.

How to complete and submit the request	
1	Complete the request form electronically.
2	Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3	Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to NAME (School Ethics Committee Member): EMAIL ADDRESS
4	Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with the reviewer's decision box completed. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your dissertation.

Required documents	
A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.	**YES** ☒

Details	
Name of applicant:	**NAME**
Programme of study:	**Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology**
Title of research:	**Exploring the emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to regulate their emotions in secondary school settings**
Name of supervisor:	**NAME**

Proposed title change	
Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below	
Old title:	Exploring the emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to regulate their emotions in secondary school settings
New title:	Exploring the emotional experiences of Learning Support Assistants when supporting secondary school Children and Young People to emotionally regulate
Rationale:	During my recent viva with EXAMINER and EXAMINER, one of the amendments they requested was changing the thesis title to this slightly updated version.

Confirmation		
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed change of title and in agreement with it?	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?	**YES** ☐	**NO** ☒

Student's signature	
Student: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**
Date:	**15/08/2024**

Reviewer's decision		
Title change approved:	**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Comments:	Please enter any further comments here	
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	**NAME**	
Date:	**21/08/2024**	

Appendix N

Approved Data Management Plan From UEL's Library and Learning Services

University of East London
Pioneering Futures Since 1898

UEL Data Management Plan

Completed plans must be sent to EMAIL ADDRESS for review

If you are bidding for funding from an external body, complete the Data Management Plan required by the funder (if specified).

Research data is defined as information or material captured or created during the course of research, and which underpins, tests, or validates the content of the final research output. The nature of it can vary greatly according to discipline. It is often empirical or statistical, but also includes material such as drafts, prototypes, and multimedia objects that underpin creative or 'non-traditional' outputs. Research data is often digital, but includes a wide range of paper-based and other physical objects.

Administrative Data	
PI/Researcher	NAME
PI/Researcher ID (e.g. ORCiD)	N/A
PI/Researcher email	EMAIL ADDRESS
Research Title	Exploring the 'in-the-moment' emotional experiences of Teaching Assistants (TAs) when supporting children and young people (CYP) to co-regulate their emotions in secondary school settings
Project ID	
Research start date and duration	Spring 2022 – Summer 2023

Research Description	The aim of this study is to explore the emotional experiences of secondary school support staff when supporting children and young people (CYP) with their emotions. In the United Kingdom (UK), school support staff, such as Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs), are increasingly taking on more of a role in supporting CYP with their emotions. This is due to an increasing number of CYP being identified with emotional needs, alongside other special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). However, a large number of LSAs/TAs have not received any training in how to support these complex needs, and little is known about their experiences of supporting CYP with their emotions. This study shall therefore use a phenomenological research design to conduct semi-structured interviews with a small number of LSAs/TAs. This will hopefully create a space for reflection on their 'in-the-moment' experiences of supporting CYP to regulate their emotions. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed and then analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Theoretically, the findings will be examined through the lens of emotional co-regulation (Butler & Randall, 2013) and the sociodynamic model of emotions (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014), as both conceptualise emotions as emerging from the interactions and relationships in which they take place. It is hoped that this research will offer new insights into the experiences of LSAs/TAs supporting CYP with their emotions, as well as the process of co-regulation. This will be useful information for schools, Educational Psychologists (EPs), and other professionals who work directly or indirectly with LSAs/TAs.
Funder	N/A
Grant Reference Number (Post-award)	N/A
Date of first version (of DMP)	11/02/2022
Date of last update (of DMP)	26/04/2022 - this version updated to reflect advice from the DPO on use of transcription software
Related Policies	Research Data Management Policy

Does this research follow on from previous research? If so, provide details	No.
Data Collection	
What data will you collect or create?	I will be collecting qualitative data using a phenomenological research design, as this design focuses on individuals' meaning making as the quintessential element of human experience (Patton, 2002). This is because I aim to better understand the emotional experiences of LSAs/TAs, and it is important that I attempt to view things from their individual perspectives. The phenomenological research design goes a step beyond basic qualitative designs, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of people's experiences and the underlying structures of shared social phenomena (Worthington, 2013). Several data types will be collected during my research: • Contact information of participants (raw data - stored on a Word document - .docx files) – 1 document, approx. 10KB • Completed consent forms (raw data - Word document - .docx files) – 4-10 documents, approx. 50KB • Interview recordings (raw data - created with a recording device or through Microsoft Teams) (video - .mp4 / audio - .mp3 or .wav files) – 4-10 recordings, approx. 6GB • Interview transcripts (created by Teams or using a software - Otter.ai) (pseudonymised data - Word document - .docx file) – 4-10 documents, approx. 50KB • Personal reflections on interviews (pseudonymised data - Word documents - .docx files) – 4-10 documents, approx. 50KB • Individual level analyses (pseudonymised data - Word / Excel documents - .docx / .xlsx files) – 4-10 documents, approx. 500KB • Wider level analyses (pseudonymised data - Word / Excel documents - .docx / .xlsx files) – document, approx. 50KB • Thesis write-up (pseudonymised data - Word document - .docx files) – 1 document, approx. 20MB All data will be kept securely as virtual data on my UEL OneDrive account. Some of the data is personal data (e.g. contact information of participants), though some of the data may be special category data. For example, interview

	transcripts that include discussions about personal information and circumstances that are relevant (e.g. information about health, political views, racial / ethnic backgrounds, philosophical beliefs, etc.)
How will the data be collected or created?	I plan to collect data by conducting 1:1 semi-structured interviews with school support staff. The participants will be given the choice of carrying out the interviews in-person (most likely within a school setting), or remotely using Microsoft Teams (a virtual communication platform). These interviews will be recorded with a secure recording device (i.e. a Dictaphone) or through Microsoft Teams (which has a function to record meetings), before being transcribed for the analysis stage (a transcription software may also be utilised – Otter.ai). Transcripts outside of Otter.ai on the UEL network and delete the copy of the transcript/audio held by Otter as soon as is practicable. Each interview will last approximately one hour, depending on the individual conversations and time constraints of each participant. I intend to use a transcription software (e.g. Microsoft Teams auto-transcription / Otter.ai) and then manually go over all the transcripts whilst listening to the recordings to ensure they are correct. Transcripts will be pseudonymised at the point of transcription. Transcripts will be saved outside of transcription software (Otter.ai) on the UEL network, and I will delete the copy of the transcript/audio held by Otter.ai as soon as is practicable. I will ensure I organise my data meaningfully and logically. I will have distinct subfolders for each participant (each folder will contain interview recordings, transcripts, reflections, and individual-level analyses). I will also have a subfolder for analyses and reflections across participants / interviews. I will name my files 'pseudonym– type of data – date' (e.g. Lucy – transcript – 20220607).
Documentation and Metadata	
What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?	We will not use a formal disciplinary metadata standard but will prepare a README file containing descriptions of: the research aims; data collection methods and instruments; quality assurance protocols; folder structure and file-naming conventions. Additionally, a template consent form and participant information sheet will be included.

Ethics and Intellectual Property	
Identify any ethical issues and how these will be managed	There are several different ethical issues to take into account when conducting qualitative research in applied psychology (Haverkamp, 2005). Firstly, it is important that consent to participate is fully informed, and participants are aware they can withdraw at any point. I will ensure this by being open and transparent throughout the research process, and by clearly explaining the principles of consent and withdrawal in my information sheet, my consent form, and before beginning each interview. They will be asked to confirm the following in the consent form: • I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet dated XX/XX/XXXX for the above study and that I have been given a copy to keep. • I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have • had these answered satisfactorily. • I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without explanation or disadvantage. • I understand that if I withdraw during the study, my data will not be used. • I understand that I have 3 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw my data from the study. • I understand that the interview will be recorded using a recording device or computer application. • I understand that my personal information and data, including audio • recordings from the research will be securely stored and remain confidential. Only the research team will have access to this information, to which I give my permission. • It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed. • I understand that short, anonymised quotes from my interview data may be used in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in academic journals resulting from the study and that these will not personally identify me. • I would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed and am willing to provide contact details for this to be sent to. • I agree to take part in the above study.

	Another important issue is around anonymity, confidentiality and data protection. I will of course be aiming to write about the personal experiences of my participants. However, I will attempt to ensure anonymity and confidentiality by offering each participant a pseudonym. Data will also be stored securely on my university account, and only secure devices and applications (approved by the university) will be used to record data. The anonymised research data will be securely stored by the university for a maximum of 3 years, before being deleted. To comply with GDPR and the Data Protection Act (2018), several measures shall me taken (e.g. minimising the amount of data collected, storing data within the EU, and robust anonymisation). We will be collecting personal and special category data related to mental health, so the protection of participant privacy is an ethical concern. Any identifying information will be anonymised (such as by using pseudonyms for participants, schools and students). In compliance with GDPR principles, we will only use data for the purposes it was obtained, retain only for as long as necessary, store within the EU on UEL OneDrive, and gain written consent from participants for collection, storage, archiving, and sharing of anonymised data. Confidentiality is an ethical issue pertinent to this project, as we will be interviewing a small, vulnerable population about sensitive subject matter. Anonymising voices and video content will not be feasible, so we will de-identify upon transcription. Interview recordings will need to be handled securely, so access will be restricted to the PI and supervisor, stored on UEL-managed services and deleted after transcripts have been checked. The transcripts will be stored separately from the pseudonymisation log which could be used to re-identify participants (further information in the 'Storage and Back-up' section). Participants will not be identified by any material resulting from the data collected (such as my analysis and write-up of the research). Confidentiality may need to be broken only in the event of a risk to themselves or others. Before I begin my research, I will first obtain ethical approval from the University of East London's ethics committee and gain official permission form the LOCAL AUTHORITY. Moreover, the principles and standards outlined in the following documents will be adhered to all stages of the research process; the British Psychology Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (British Psychological Society, 2021) and Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological

	Society, 2018), the Health & Care Professionals Council's Standards of conduct performance and ethics (Health & Care Professions Council, 2018), and the University of East London's Code of Practice for Research Ethics (University of East London, 2020).
Identify any copyright and Intellectual Property Rights issues and how these will be managed	There should not be any copyright or Intellectual Property Rights issues in this study.
Storage and Backup	
How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?	Any personal data that is collected will be held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Participants will not be identified by the data collected, on any material resulting from the data collected, or in any write-up of the research. This will be achieved through giving each participant a unique pseudonym (and removing all identifying information during transcription). Confidentiality may need to be broken only in the event of a risk to themselves or others. Data will be stored on word processing and spreadsheet software (e.g. Microsoft Word and Excel) during the analysis stage, as well as in raw audio / video form. A virtual back-up of the data will exist on my secure Microsoft One-Drive account. Only anonymised data will be shared with relevant individuals (e.g. my supervisor). Data will not be shared unless necessary, and if so, it will only be shared internally through secure Microsoft Office accounts.
How will you manage access and security?	During the research process, I will store raw and anonymised data (including personal contact details) using my secure UEL account on Microsoft Office (Outlook, Teams, OneDrive, etc.); all of which require 2-factor authentication to access. Raw data such as contact information and consent forms will be kept in a separate folder from other data. Once data is created (e.g. Teams recordings in the Microsoft Stream Library / audio files on a Dictaphone), they will be downloaded and uploaded to my OneDrive account. This will be done as soon as possible after being created. Any local copies will then be deleted; I will ensure personal Cloud storage is switched off to avoid backing-up local copies. All data (e.g. consent forms, transcripts, etc.) will be stored electronically on my OneDrive, and no paper records will be

	kept (if created, these will be securely shredded after being scanned and uploaded onto OneDrive). Only anonymised data will be shared with relevant individuals (e.g. my supervisor). Data will not be shared unless necessary, and if so, it will only be shared internally through secure Microsoft Office accounts. All data will be primarily accessed and managed by myself, though anonymised data may also be shared with my thesis supervisor and other relevant individuals (e.g. university examiners) where appropriate. Data will only be transferred using secure accounts (primarily through UEL accounts on Outlook and OneDrive).
Data Sharing	
How will you share the data?	Certain individuals may be interested in accessing the data from my study for further research purposes. Where appropriate, they will be permitted to access and re-use my data. Much anonymised data from my study will be included as an appendix in my thesis write-up (e.g. anonymised interview transcripts). I plan for my thesis (and the anonymised data in the appendices) to be available in an open file format on UEL's online research repository.
Are any restrictions on data sharing required?	The terms of accessing my data will come under a Creative Commons Licence; Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0). This will allow people the right to share my data (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format). However, they must not use the data for commercial purposes, they must not distribute it if modified in any way (such as by remixing, transforming, or building upon the data), and they must also give attribution to me as the original data owner (they must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made – they may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses them or their use).
Selection and Preservation	

Which data are of long-term value and should be retained, shared, and/or preserved?	Anonymised interview transcripts and subsequent data analysis are of long-term value and will be retained for the duration of the thesis process. This data may be useful for further research purposes, for example.
What is the long-term preservation plan for the data?	I intend for anonymised research data to be preserved indefinitely in the appendices of my thesis on the UEL research repository. Following my completion of the course, I will arrange to securely transfer my data as I will no longer have access to UEL storage. I may at this point explore opportunities to publish my research in an appropriate journal. Raw data with identifying information will be deleted following anonymisation. Personal contact data will be kept for dissemination purposes where requested, and will be deleted following dissemination of the research findings.
Responsibilities and Resources	
Who will be responsible for data management?	I will be primarily responsible for managing data throughout the research process. As I will be sharing data with some individuals where appropriate (e.g. my thesis supervisor, university examiners, etc.), they will also have a responsibility to ensure data is kept secure. I will recommend to them that we only use secure links via UEL OneDrive when managing data.
What resources will you require to deliver your plan?	The use of secure accounts to store data (primarily through UEL accounts on Outlook and OneDrive). Data will be stored and analysed using word processing / spreadsheet software (e.g. Microsoft Word and Excel). Secure transcription / analysis software may also be utilised.
Review	
	EMAIL ADDRESS
Date: 27/04/2022	Reviewer name: NAME Assistant Librarian (Research Data Management)

Guidance

Brief information to help answer each section is below. Aim to be specific and concise.

For assistance in writing your data management plan, or with research data management more generally, please contact: **EMAIL ADDRESS**

Administrative Data

Related Policies

List any other relevant funder, institutional, departmental or group policies on data management, data sharing and data security. Some of the information you give in the remainder of the DMP will be determined by the content of other policies. If so, point/link to them here.

Data collection

Describe the data aspects of your research, how you will capture/generate them, the file formats you are using and why. Mention your reasons for choosing particular data standards and approaches. Note the likely volume of data to be created.

Documentation and Metadata

What metadata will be created to describe the data? Consider what other documentation is needed to enable reuse. This may include information on the methodology used to collect the data, analytical and procedural information, definitions of variables, the format and file type of the data and software used to collect and/or process the data. How will this be captured and recorded?

Ethics and Intellectual Property

Detail any ethical and privacy issues, including the consent of participants. Explain the copyright/IPR and whether there are any data licensing issues – either for data you are reusing, or your data which you will make available to others.

Storage and Backup

Give a rough idea of data volume. Say where and on what media you will store data, and how they will be backed-up. Mention security measures to protect data which are sensitive or valuable. Who will have access to the data during the project and how will this be controlled?

Data Sharing

Note who would be interested in your data, and describe how you will make them available (with any restrictions). Detail any reasons not to share, as well as embargo periods or if you want time to exploit your data for publishing.

Selection and Preservation

Consider what data are worth selecting for long-term access and preservation. Say where you intend to deposit the data, such as in UEL's data repository (https://repository.uel.ac.uk) or a subject repository. How long should data be retained?