Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective.

Nazma Rahman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Educational & Child Psychology

School of Psychology

November 2022

Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective

Abstract

Adopted young people from care are likely to have experienced profound adversity. Understanding the enduring impact of their early life experiences has been historically overlooked by educational professionals, with adoption perceived to be as a 'happy ever after' ending. However, increasingly, research has shown that adopted young people are achieving poorer educational outcomes than their peers. Few studies have elicited the voices of adopted young people about their experiences of education, those that have, are predominantly negative in their discourse. This study seeks to focus on strengths and resilience from a positive psychology perspective so that positive educational outcomes can be facilitated and understood better for adopted young people. The current study sought the views of four adopted young people (aged 17-23 years) about their positive educational experiences through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis of the data identified the following themes of positive educational experiences: 1. Academic success; 2. Supportive teachers; 3. Other nurturing adults; 4. Awareness and support for adoption related needs; 5. Positive peer interactions and 6. Identity. Participants further identified three factors of resilience (sense of relatedness, sense of mastery and sense of emotional reactivity) to be of importance in their educational experiences as well as identifying further sub-themes that were of increasing importance to this group. Participants also suggested that there are three ways in which educational settings can do better: 1. Upskilling teachers to show that they care and to support them to have greater knowledge in understanding the needs and ways in which to support adopted young people;

2. Adapting the school curriculum to ensure that it is sensitive to the life experiences of adoptees; and 3. promoting support for mental health to enable adopted young to seek out support when needed. Findings highlight the need for whole school relational approaches centred around viewing young people with unconditional positive regard. Implications of the research are further outlined for educational professions, Educational Psychologists, policy makers and researchers.

University of East London

School of Psychology

Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Declaration

I declare that while registered as a research student at this university, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award at this university or of any other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in 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 (UREC) and confirmation of approval is embedded within the thesis.

Nazma Rahman

31.10.2022

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Appendix A: Table of funding across the nations of the United Kingdom (Clarke, 2020).

Appendix B: Trail of systematic search for literature review.

Appendix C: Summary table of final papers for the systematic literature review.

Appendix D: Finalised interview schedule and prompts.

Appendix E: Documentation of ethical approval and approval for change to title.

Appendix F: Recruitment advert for research.

Appendix G: Information sheet for prospective participants.

Appendix H: Expression of interest form for the study.

Appendix I: Participant consent form.

Appendix J: Participant Debrief letter sent after the interviews were conducted.

Appendix K: Example of how data was analysed via NVivo and the way in which that evolved from initial coding to refined themes.

Appendix L: Photo of initial stage of immersion in data following transcription.

Appendix M: Photo of initial exploratory codes.

Appendix N: Part of the process in naming a theme and a message sent to a fellow trainee.

Appendix O: Excerpts from reflective diary.

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AUK	Adoption United Kingdom
BACP	British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
BPS	British Psychological Society
BTHD	Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development
CYP	Children and young people
DECP	Division of Educational and Child Psychology
EBSCO	Elton B. Stephens CO (company)
EHC	Education, Health and Care
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological analysis
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
LAC	looked after children
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NICE	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
PACT	Parents And Children Together
PPCT	process, person, context and time
PSHE	Personal, social, health and economic
RSCA	Resiliency Scale for Children and Adolescents
RSYA	Resiliency Scale for Young Adults
SEMH	Social, emotional & mental health difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
TA	Teaching Assistant
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UK	United Kingdom
UKHLS	United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey
UREC	University Ethics Committee

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter overview

The introduction will be presented in this chapter. To begin with, the researcher's definition of adopted young people is outlined and an overview of the national context is provided. The researcher then discusses the significance of adverse life experiences, the importance of gathering young people's views and the theoretical underpinnings of positive psychology. Following this, the importance of this research for the profession of Educational Psychology will be outlined. Finally, the researcher's position will be outlined including the rationale and aims for the current study.

1.2 Who are adopted young people?

Adoption is a significant life event which has a permanent impact on the lives of young people and their families forever. It is a legal process in which a child separates from their birth family to join their new family who will now have parental rights and responsibilities transferred to them (Adoption and Children Act, 2002). Most adopted children in England are currently adopted from local authority care and would therefore be previously known as "looked after children" or LAC (DfE, 2021a). Children in care have often been removed from their birth family home due to experiences of abuse and neglect and relatively recent data suggests that approximately 70% of adopted young people who were adopted in the year ending March 2018, were exposed to these risks also known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (DfE, 2018a). The principle of 'permanence' for all children has become a significant driving force in children's social care to ensure "a secure, stable and loving family to support them

through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging," (DfE, 2015a). Consequently, adoption is viewed as a successful outcome for a looked after child as it is a well-regarded process in which the child can now access a permanent and loving home (Wright, 2009). In light of this, the Adoption Action Plan (DfE, 2012), which was introduced to tackle delay in the adoption system in England, has led to an increasing number of children finding permanence through adoption and special guardianship orders. Special guardianship orders refer to a special order that is put in place for children who would benefit from a secure placement whilst they cannot live with their birth parents. However, the number of children adopted from care has been falling since 2015. In the year 2021 (by 31st March 2021), only 2,870 adoptions are recorded to have taken place in England (DfE 2021a). Whilst the most recent decreases in adoption are likely to have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic on court related proceedings (DfE, 2021b), the government's National Adoption Strategy (launched at the end of July 2021) recognises that there are wider barriers to adoption which need to be addressed, including reducing waiting times for a child to be adopted and a renewed commitment to adopters not being discouraged to adopt due to their social background, ethnicity, sexuality or age (DfE, 2021b).

1.3 National Context

Across the United Kingdom (UK), approximately 3,416 children were adopted in total within England, Wales and Northern Ireland, during the year ending March 2021 and Scotland, during the year ending July 2021 (CoramBaaf *Statistics*,

n.d.). The greatest number of adoptions took place in England (2,870 children), with significantly less adoptions taking place in Scotland (224 children), Wales (265 children) and Northern Ireland (57 children). Each nation's government (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) take differing approaches in policy and legislation to support adopted young people leading to differences in statutory services and funding provided post adoption (see Appendix A for further information). It is therefore important to note that research conducted across the UK should also consider the adoption specific context of each nation.

In general, national monitoring data of adopted children has been historically scarce. Local authorities in England routinely collect information regarding looked after children, however this used to cease once a child was adopted until recent changes were made (Dfe, 2018b). From 2015, 'Experimental Statistics' have been collated to begin to provide information on the attainment outcomes of previously looked after children who have left care under a permanence arrangement such as adoption, special guardianship order or child arrangements order (Dfe, 2018b). Due to the nature of not being able to access attainment data for all previously looked after and now adopted children as adoptive parents do not all share their child's adoptive status with schools, these statistics are requested to be interpreted with caution. In general, attainment data for adopted children suggest that they are achieving poorer outcomes than the general population with 64% of all pupils achieving the expected threshold at GCSE in comparison to 35% of children adopted from care. Furthermore, almost half of adopted children appear to have identified SEN at Key Stage 2 (DfE, 2018c). Adopted children are however achieving better outcomes in comparison to children who remain in care (DfE, 2018b).

Research studies have found similar findings supporting the view that adopted young people are facing significant challenges in their education including: higher than average diagnoses of physical, mental health and learning needs; more likely to be excluded and twice as likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) as young adults; 16% of them have had contact with the criminal justice system and 39% have needed help from mental health services ('AUK', 2019; Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2017; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; King, 2009). The same body of research has further identified that despite adopted young people experiencing greater difficulties in their education, this is not being recognised enough and schools continue to misunderstand the needs of this group ('AUK', 2019; Best, Cameron, & Hill, 2021 and Templeton, McGlade, & Fitzsimons, 2020). It is important to note however that there is not a legal requirement for adoptive parents to report their child's adoption status and so there is likely to be a hidden population of adoptees whose needs are not being understood by schools due to this lack of information.

It was previously understood that achieving permanence through adoption for care experienced children would alleviate the impact of abuse, neglect, trauma and loss (Gore Langton, 2017). However, research has suggested otherwise and this misplaced assumption is considered to be a key explanation as to why adopted children run the risk of not always being perceived as vulnerable and therefore do not receive timely support for their needs (Syne, Green, & Dyer, 2012). Research has uncovered that these views exist amongst educational

professionals (Dunstan, 2010 and Gore Langton, 2017) and most likely can be attributed to inadequate training in early child development and attachment in initial teacher training courses (Dunstan, 2010).

Another explanation for the delay in understanding the extent of the needs of adopted young people is that the needs of looked after children have been prioritised by both research and service provision. This has led to schools and local authorities not recognising adopted young people as an equally vulnerable group. Despite research indicating that adopted young people are likely to have undergone comparable if not more significant levels of adversity in comparison to their looked after peers (Ks, 2019 and 'NICE Guideline [NG26]', 2015). In response to this, there has been a recent top-down political shift in England and several national initiatives have been introduced to better support adopted young people in schools (DfE, 2018d and DfE, 2014). These include the DfE giving looked after and previously looked after children greater parity in funding and priority in education by extending the role of Virtual School Heads (VSHs) and Designated Teachers (DTs); extending access to the Pupil Premium Plus Fund provided to schools to support the development of emotional, social and academic needs of adopted young people (DfE, 2018d and DfE, 2014). These measures of course continue to only support adopted young people that are known to the authorities and therefore serious debate is required as to whether legislation should support the sharing of adoption background of children and young people with all services.

1.4 Context of this study

This study was undertaken with adopted young people, aged between 17 and 23, who experienced education and resided in either England or Northern Ireland. Due to the broad differences in their geopolitical contexts and policies regarding adopted young people, the researcher was aware that this may impact on adopted young people's experiences of education. Whilst gaining an in depth understanding of the local context for each participant was not possible for the researcher due to the time constraints of the interviews, the researcher remained curious about potential geopolitical and cultural differences whilst engaging with participants.

1.5 The impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Although not all adopted children experience adversity in their early life (Waid & Alewine, 2018), a significant number of adopted young people are known to have been exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), defined as stressful or traumatic events taking place during childhood (DfE, 2018a and Bellis et al., 2015). Children who have endured early trauma (e.g. pre-natal exposure to harmful substances and post-natal trauma such as maltreatment, neglect and attachment disruption) are more likely to have a range of complex physical and psychological needs which can potentially impact across many areas of development (Anda et al., 2006). Research has uncovered that ACEs can lead to children experiencing chronic stress which can damage brain cells and therefore impact on the development of critical cognitive skills such as language and executive functioning (McCrory, De Brito, & Viding, 2010),

impacting school performance (Shonkoff et al. 2012 and Brown & Ward, 2013). Behaviourally, children may display hypervigilance to threat, preoccupation, difficulties with attention and disproportionate emotional responses to outwardly small events, such as a teacher raising their voice or finding learning a challenge (Music, 2017).

Research therefore suggests that irrespective of the age that adopted children are placed with their adoptive families, they continue to be at significant risk of a variety of psychological difficulties in comparison with their non-adopted peers (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). Education professionals should therefore receive effective training to enable a secure understanding of the potential impact of trauma on adopted young people to ensure that they are not perceived as poorly behaved students (Stewart, 2017).

Whilst evidence from neuroscientific research (including long term studies) suggests that there can be long-term impact of abuse and neglect on brain structure and functioning (Teicher & Samson, 2016), this research should however be treated with caution as there are recognised limitations of neuroscience. Evidence is leading us to understand that individuals who are exposed to similar experiences, can have different neurological alterations and those who do have similar neurological changes can achieve different outcomes (Geake, 2008) and so a more holistic approach must be undertaken within early trauma and developmental research. In support of this, overall, research supports that adopted children benefit from the stable and nurturing environment that is provided by their new family (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). Research has documented children who experienced severe pre-adoption deprivation in institutions, to make remarkable recovery with their physical

growth and progress in their IQ, cognitive function, behaviour, language development and school performance (van IJzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005). This also corresponds with neuroscientific research that emphasises the plasticity of the brain throughout childhood suggesting that optimal environments including that of their school environment can contribute to positive changes for adopted children (Rees, Booth, & Jones, 2016). Promoting neuroscience research that draws attention to neuroplasticity may therefore be more helpful to help bring about positive change for adopted young people in educational contexts.

1.6 Importance of young people's views

Respecting and listening to the views of children and young people should no longer be an unfamiliar value: indeed, young people's rights have been recognised by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991), Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) and Care Matters agenda (DfES, 2007) and has been statutory since the Children Acts of 1989/2004. Despite this emphasis, the research that currently exists on the educational experiences of adopted young people has largely focused on the views of professionals and adoptive parents, with a handful of studies focusing on the perspectives of adopted young people. At the time of data collection for this study there was only one published study that directly gathered the in-depth views of adopted young people regarding their experiences of education (Crowley, 2019); whilst only a further two qualitative studies have been published in the last three years (Best et al., 2021; Templeton et al., 2020). A relatively small number of studies have also collated the views of adopted young people by conducting surveys, these are however limited by their research design in gathering rich information (AUK,

2019). There has been no published research to date, in the UK, that has

gathered the views of adopted young people aged 16 to 25 years on their

experiences of education using a positive psychology and resiliency based

theoretical framework. The current study adopts the view that there is a moral

and ethical obligation (Gersch & Nolan, 1994) to explore the views of adopted

young people whose views should inform policy and practice including placing

value on the views of older adoptees who are either at the end of their

compulsory schooling or of post compulsory schooling age. Eliciting the views of

this underrepresented group will allow for varied and multiple perspectives and

a more in-depth understanding of the educational experiences amongst this

group.

1.7 Adopting a Positive Psychology Perspective

There is now a growing shift in research to identify the prevalence of poor

educational outcomes for adopted young people, the contributing factors and

how best to enable progress to be made for this group ('Adoption UK (AUK)',

2018; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; King, 2009). No published

research to date has focused solely on understanding the breadth of

educational experiences of adopted young people from a positive perspective.

In a shift away from 'deficit-based' and problem saturated thinking, a 'strengths

perspective' has been growing within social care practice to encourage a

greater focus instead on strengths and capacities (Chase, Jackson & Simon,

2006). This strengths-based perspective comes from positive psychology

(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), a theoretical approach that focuses on

virtues, inner strengths and resilience. Positive psychologists argue that by

applying this approach to research, positive developmental outcomes can be

facilitated and understood better (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Research which therefore includes the views and positive experiences of

adopted young people will contribute to a more comprehensive picture of the

issues surrounding the educational experiences of adopted young people.

1.8 Why Resilience matters

Within the theoretical lens of positive psychology, the researcher believes that a

resiliency theoretical framework could also be used to understand the

educational experiences of adopted young people. A resilience framework is

underpinned by the goals of positive psychology by recognising that individuals

have the capacity to cope with stressors when faced with adversity (Dent &

Cameron, 2003). Although there continues to be debate regarding the definition

of resiliency (Windle, 2011), resilience theoretical models commonly describe

an individual's ability to adapt to significant stress and adversity in order to

achieve positive outcomes, such as competence, hardiness, or educational

achievements (Buckner, Mezzacappa & Beardslee, 2003; Masten, Best, &

Garmezy, 1990) or at least avoid negative, developmental outcomes (Luthar,

2006).

Socio-ecological theories of resilience propose that contexts surrounding

individuals contribute to resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2013). Based upon this theory,

the educational context is likely to play an important role in the development of

resilience for children and young people. Indeed, this has been recognised by

an evidence review commissioned by Public Health England which highlights

that "schools have a statutory responsibility to promote the 'wellbeing' of

students" (Institute of Health Equity, 2014, p16) and "have an opportunity to

ensure that children and young people are supported and enabled to build

resilience" (Institute of Health Equity, 2014, p 40).

Whereas risk factors and protective resources are unequally distributed

throughout the population, educational settings provide a universal service for

all children and young people and are therefore likely to play a more significant

role in promoting resilience for children from disadvantaged backgrounds

(Song, Doll & Marth, 2013), thereby including adopted young people who are

likely to have experienced adversity (Institute of Health Equity, 2014).

1.9 Importance of this research for the profession of Educational Psychology

The current study has important implications for the role of Educational

Psychologists (EPs). Indeed, adopted young people are more likely than the

general population to be diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN) and

to have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) ('AUK', 2017; Cooper &

Johnson, 2007; DeJong, Hodges, & Malik, 2016; Selwyn et al, 2014 and

Sturgess & Selwyn, 2007). EPs are therefore well placed to provide effective

support for adopted young people, their adoptive parents and schools due to

their knowledge and skills in addition to their role in statutory assessment (DfE,

2015). To support this, a small number of studies have found EPs to make a

positive contribution when conducting consultations with adoptive parents

(Osborne & Alfano, 2011 and Syne et al., 2012).

Findings from this study are likely to encourage EPs to extend their work

beyond their role in statutory assessments and to engage in support at a

systemic level: delivering school training in attachment, trauma and loss.

Furthermore, EPs can also engage in direct work with adoptive parents in

supporting their adopted child's learning, social, emotional and mental wellbeing

through assessment, consultation, supervision and work with virtual schools

(Gore Langton, 2017).

Despite the potential for EPs to make valuable contribution to adopted young

people's lives, EPs have been found to work 'incidentally' with adopted young

people whilst spending twice as much time with children in care (Osborne,

Norgate, & Traill, 2009). This is also reflected within guidance for practice,

where the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP, 2006) specifies

a protocol for working with care experienced children but primarily focuses on

children-in-care and limited guidance is provided on how to support families

post-adoption. It is therefore unsurprising that some EPs have expressed

uncertainty about their role in this area (Osborne et al., 2009). However, this

research is dated and further research is required to provide a current picture of

EPs and their work with adopted young people.

1.10 Introduction to the Researcher's Position (values, beliefs, knowledge and biases)

The following section will be written in the first person to introduce readers to

the researcher's position.

At the time of data collection, I was a second-year trainee educational

psychologist (TEP), on placement with an Educational Psychology Service

(EPS) based within a local authority. At this current point in time and time of

data analysis, I have just entered into my fifth year of working within the same

local authority. The core values that drive my work are that of empowering and advocating for young people who should be viewed as 'experts' in all matters that relate to them and supporting a greater sense of social justice by increasing awareness of matters of inequality. I believe that EPs are positioned well to ensure that whilst contributing to significant areas of research, our excellent communication skills and ability to build effective rapport lead us to be best placed to elicit the voices of marginalised groups of people in our research. After several years of working in an EPS, I continue to value the importance of positive psychology and solution-focused approaches in my work to ensure that I avoid slipping into eliciting an all too negative narrative and within-child deficit-based narrative when speaking to adults who support children. This study is underpinned by positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), where the aim is to explore adopted young people's positive educational experiences with the view that there are always exceptions to one's experiences and to understand these exceptional moments for this group will be of great value to educational settings and other adopted young people and their families.

I am a 35-year-old female of Bangladeshi origin, born and raised in London. I identify myself as a member of the Islamic faith. I am married to my husband and I am a mother of two children. I am from a 'working class' background, my birth parents continue to be my parents and I have not experienced any time in the care system nor have I experienced personal relationships with young people who have gone into care or have been adopted. Although I have worked with a few children who have been adopted in my professional capacity, this experience is limited and I am therefore approaching this research with

'unfamiliarity' due to my lack of experience in this field. This can be an empowering experience for participants as they will be positioned truly as the 'expert' (Berger & Malkinson, 2000) and this is very much the approach that I have undertaken.

My interests in supporting the wellbeing of adopted children stems from my early childhood of Islamic teachings which strongly encourage and place great religious value in caring for 'orphaned' children. In Islam, 'adoption' as currently defined by UK law, would not be accepted due to adopted children not retaining any legal ties to their birth families and their adoptive parents effectively taking the place of their birth family. In Islam, there is clear guidance that children who are 'adopted' must retain their surname given at birth and retain their rights to inherit from their birth family (and not automatically inherit from their adoptive parents). In effect, Muslims are encouraged to consider themselves as long term guardians of another person's child and this role is given great importance. My motivation as a Muslim is not to challenge the definition of adoption in the UK, but as a Muslim trainee educational psychologist (TEP), I am committed to seeking out the views of adopted young people in order to learn more about what works and to advocate for their needs.

1.11 Aim of the research

This current thesis intends to explore the educational experiences of adopted young people in the UK aged 16-25 years who were previously in care by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews. The purpose of this exploratory research is to identify the factors within the education system that contribute to the positive experiences of adopted young people. The findings are hoped to

help inform future policies and practice for educational professionals, including EPs, in their work with adopted children.

A significant aim of this study is to empower adopted young people aged 16 to 25 years (who continue to be under-represented in current research) by exploring their views and positive experiences of education in depth. Not only does this study aim to redress the imbalance of adopted young people's voices in adoption literature, but it also seeks to enable a more positive and strength-based dialogue on adopted young people's educational experiences so that there is greater insight into 'what worked' and 'what we can do more of' to help adopted young people to have better educational and life outcomes.

1.12 Rationale for the study

Adopted young people are a group who remain under-represented in research: only a small number of studies have invited them to share their views on education ('AUK', 2017; 'AUK', 2019; Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2019; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Gilling, 2014 and King, 2009), with only a handful of recent qualitative studies gathering views directly (Best et al., 2021; Crowley, 2019 and Templeton et al., 2020). The available literature will be reviewed in detail in Chapter 2 of the thesis. Whilst recent legislation has begun to identify and put in place support to help adopted young people within education (DfE, 2014a and DfE, 2018), recent research suggests that despite extending the role of Virtual School Heads and Designated Teachers and extending access to the Pupil Premium Plus Fund, this support is yet to be felt and educational professionals continue to misunderstand the needs of this vulnerable group which may be contributing to poor outcomes ('AUK', 2019; Best et al., 2021 and Templeton et

al., 2020). Schools are extremely important to children who have experienced early adverse experiences and can contribute to positive outcomes for young people including their social and emotional wellbeing (Crowley, 2019). As identified earlier, this group of young people are also more likely to have SEN in comparison to their non-adopted peers (DfE, 2018c). Where views have been gathered from adopted young people, only one very recent study gathered views from adopted young people aged 16 to 21 years in Northern Ireland (Templeton et al., 2020). The need to have a greater understanding of the needs of older young people is important within the context of the Special Educational Needs Division (SEND) Code of Practice (2015) which extended support for this 'older' group of young people who transition into early adulthood and have identified SEN needs recognised in an EHCP (DfE, 2015). This means that EPs now have the opportunity to work with young people up to the age of 25 years. However, working with this age group remains a relatively new venture for EPs. It is therefore important for school-based professionals to develop their understanding in this field and for EPs to think about how they can support adopted young people in a meaningful way.

1.13 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the topic of adopted young people, it describes the current national context and then focused on issues relating to adopted young people and their experiences of education. It has explained the rationale for this thesis and the relevance of the topic to educational psychology practice. It has also included the researcher's position. The next chapter will outline a literature review and the subsequent research questions which were guided by the literature itself.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Chapter Overview

The previous chapter highlighted the need to recognise that adopted young people can continue to face significant challenges, despite being placed permanently with a new family, due to the impact of their early adverse experiences on their social, emotional and academic development.

This chapter details the systematic search which was carried out to identify and review the existing research evidence that answers the following literature review question:

What is the current understanding of adopted young people's experiences of education?

This literature review furthermore sought to find gaps within current research to help inform a greater understanding of adopted young people's educational experiences. A description of the process in obtaining the available evidence, including the databases searched and inclusion and exclusion criteria, will be outlined. This will be followed by a synthesis of findings and a critical evaluation of the research studies placed within Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (BTHD) theoretical lens. Lastly, the implications of the literature review are placed within further relevant theoretical perspectives in order to inform the research questions which were addressed in the current research study.

2.2 The Systematic Search

A systematic literature search was conducted between 11 and 13 November 2019 and updated on 1st September 2022, using the search engine EBSCO Host to identify all available literature in the research area with no limitations imposed on when these research studies were carried out.

The following databases were searched:

- APA PsycInfo

- British Education Index

- Child Development and Adolescent studies

- Education Research Complete

- ERIC

- Scopus

- Social Care Online

Search terms, listed below, were applied for each database independently using the search fields for Title, Subject Terms, Keywords and Abstracts:

- ("adopt* status" OR "adopt* child*" OR "adoptees" OR "adopt* young person" OR "adopt* young people" OR "adopt* parent")

- AND ("school*" OR "educat*")

- AND ("experience" OR "views")

The following table (Table 1) outlines the inclusion and exclusion for the literature search:

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Sample

	Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
Time frame	All available literature to date.	n/a
Type of Study	Published in academic journals that are peer reviewed. Charity-conducted research.	Clinical opinion and reflective articles. Policy documents. Unpublished doctoral theses. Meta-analyses or literature reviews. Published in non-peer reviewed journals.
Scope	Publications must report on educational experiences of Adopted CYP.	Publications which include research that is not related to the educational experiences of Adopted CYP.
Participants	CYP finding permanence through an adoption order Parents who had adopted a child through an adoption order. Professionals supported Adopted CYP.	CYP living with their birth families. Parents caring for their birth child. Looked after children.
Geography	UK context-Adopted CYP educated in the UK as well.	Studies conducted outside of the UK-Adopted CYP who have been educated outside of the UK.

Titles and abstracts were screened to determine relevance to the topic and ascertain whether they met the inclusion criteria (please see Appendix B which outlines the systematic search process for the final articles).

This screening process left four articles which were subjected to a full content screen, resulting in the following articles meeting the inclusion criteria between 11th and 13th November 2019: Brown, Waters & Shelton, 2019; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019 and Gilling, 2014.

2.21 Use of grey literature

Hand searching of the journal 'Adoption and Fostering' and citation searching using the SCOPUS database yielded no further articles which met the inclusion criteria. Due to the sparsity of available research, a hand search was also conducted through using google scholar and by examining research regarding experiences of education in the UK conducted by Adoption charities: Adoption UK, PACT, After-adoption, CORAM and PAC-UK. This search yielded two separate pieces of research conducted by Adoption UK (Adoption UK, 2018 and Adoption UK, 2017). A decision was made by the researcher to include these specific forms of grey literature due to their substantial sample sizes which are likely to lead to a deeper understanding of a significantly under-researched area.

The search process was repeated above on the 1st September 2022 and two

further studies were identified: Best, Cameron & Hill (2021) and Templeton,

McGlade & Fitzsimons (2020).

Finally, reference lists of the eight included articles were hand searched for any

further articles meeting the inclusion criteria. No additional articles were found.

Appendix C provides a summary table of the final eight articles included in the

review.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in his original model proposed that in

order to understand an individual's development, it is best understood through a

holistic consideration of interactions or transactions between an individual and

their environment (proposed as proximal systems). Bronfenbrenner (1994) later

revised this ecological model (known as the Bio-ecological model) to ensure his

theory was not reduced to an understanding of contextual influence on

development by emphasising the importance of understanding how person and

context characteristics influence proximal processes over time and therefore

four interdependent principle components are important to consider when

understanding child development: process, person, context and time (PPCT)

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This review will be using the 'Context' component of

the PPCT model to help synthesise emerging themes and evaluate research by

understanding how environmental influences of adopted young people may

have interacted and impacted on their experience of education in the UK. The

context, according to Bronfenbrenner (2005), constitutes of five systems: micro,

meso, exo, macro, and chrono, each having either direct or indirect influence on a child's development. The microsystem is the most proximal system which includes the child, family and prominent social structures such as the school and the community. The mesosystem encapsulates the interactions between the different components of the microsystem e.g. home/school communication and communication between external agencies, school and home. The exosystem refers to the influences that the child is not directly involved with, but these influences have a direct impact on the context of the microsystem and mesosystem e.g. school structures that impact on the adopted young person such as how the school is organised, its policies and ethos. The macrosystem, the final outer layer consists of the political, social and cultural attitudes, government initiatives and legislation that have undue influence on structures and individual behaviours both within and outside the school. The chronosystem refers to the dimension of time to account for the impact of changes that may occur due to events or experiences across an individual's lifetime (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).
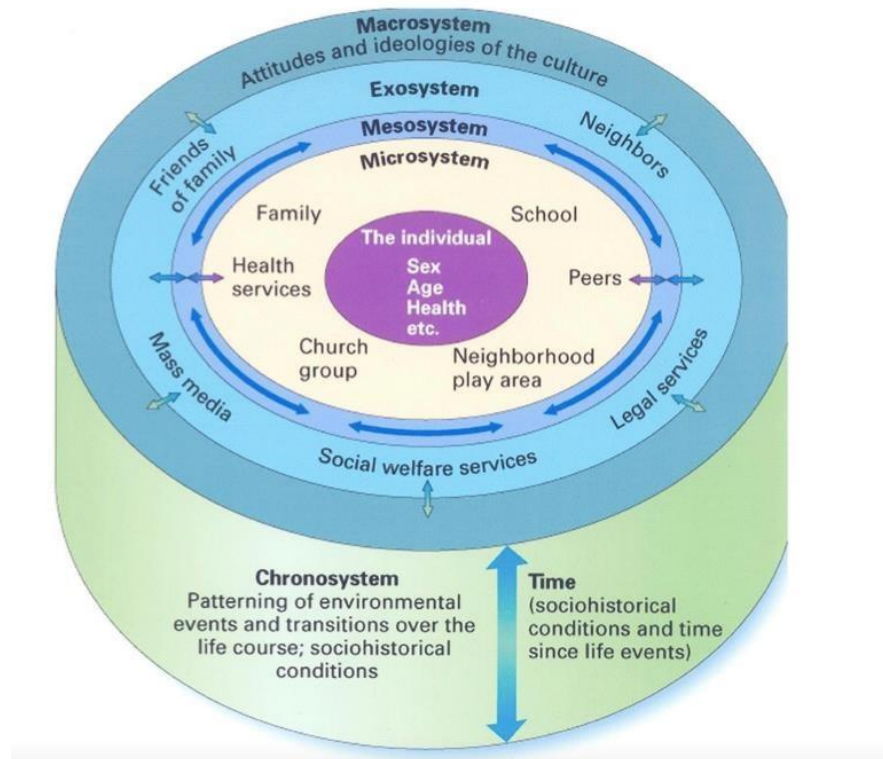
Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The current research study intends to use Bronfenbrenner's theory as a conceptual framework to consider practices and provisions within the wider context.

2.4 Critical Review of Existing Research

2.4.1 Macrosystem: social and cultural context of adoption.

The majority of adoptive parents and adopted young people in current research have expressed that they are subject to societal and cultural assumptions which leads to a lack of understanding of their needs ('AUK', 2017; Best et al., 2021; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; Gilling, 2014; Templeton et al., 2020).

Adoption UK ('AUK', 2018), a leading charity for adopted young people and their families, surveyed adoptive parents and adopted young people (n= 2,218 and n= 1,972 respectively) to explore how effectively their social and emotional wellbeing was supported in school. Findings from this survey claimed that there is an "understanding gap," referring to the lack of understanding that school professionals and non-adopted peers have about the needs of adopted young people ('AUK', 2018 p. 9). AUK suggest for example, there is a lack of awareness of the potential implications of attachment and trauma on adopted young people's behavioural, social and emotional wellbeing ('AUK', 2018). To support this claim, the report indicates that 65% of primary aged adopted children and 74% of secondary aged adopted children stated that they "do not feel teachers fully understand how to support them" and less than a quarter of parents "felt completely confident that their child's teachers understood their needs", with more than half of parents of secondary aged children reporting that "their school did not fully know how to support their child's emotional and mental health," ('AUK', 2018, p. 9). A key strength of this research is that it places equal value on the voice of adopted young people as well as adoptive parents and gathered information from a large sample size for each population; by gathering views of two different groups supports the triangulation of the data and adds greater validity to this finding.

The AUK (2018) report makes a second assertion that an "empathy gap" also exists whereby adopted young people struggle to be treated with empathy for difficulties that they may be experiencing, including a negative perception of their adoptive status from peers which lead to acts of bullying ('AUK', 2018, p. 12). This claim is supported by the finding of two thirds of secondary aged

children who report that they had been bullied or teased specifically because they were adopted. The researchers provide further data that 46% of adopted parents of primary aged children reported that their child had been bullied at school. The researchers do however, make several assumptions: firstly, that bullying incidents regarding adoptions have not been treated as seriously as other forms of bullying; teachers find it difficult to empathise with adopted young people and finally, that all teachers are aware of the adopted young people's adoption status. Due to the lack of data supporting these assumptions which support the view that teachers are lacking in empathy towards adopted young people, the evidence in the study suggests that the 'empathy gap' is mostly demonstrated by peers.

In support of this lack of empathy from peers, Best, Cameron & Hill (2021) reported similar findings in their recent qualitative research study in which views were gathered from secondary aged adoptees (n=11) and adopters (n= 6) in the first part of their study through semi-structured interviews. They identified misperceptions and prejudice as a major theme in which four of the eleven adoptees were bullied/teased about their adoption status by the same 'adoption song' sung to them by other children (Best et al., 2021). Due to the more in-depth design of their study, the researchers identified more nuanced misconceptions, for example, the belief that adopted children are unwanted/rejected by their birth parents and are inherently 'bad.' However, due to the small sample size, it does not allow for the generalisation of these findings to the wider population of adopted young people.

Overall, the AUK (2018) report makes a clear statement of the aims of the research and clear statements of findings gathered from a substantial sample size. However, this is non-peer reviewed research which has a substantial lack of transparency regarding the research design, the recruitment strategy, data analysis and no discussion regarding researcher's bias and the credibility of findings. This therefore raises questions regarding the trustworthiness of how the reported themes were derived in this research paper and the stated findings.

Cooper and Johnson (2007) report similar findings in their postal survey research design within one local authority, which also sought the views of adopted parents (n=100) and their children (n=33) on their views of education (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). Half of the parents also reported that their child's school did not have a good understanding of their child's needs and one child stated "understand why I might not be happy" when asked what further help they would like from their teacher (Cooper & Johnson, p. 26). Further qualitative data is elaborated on as the researchers report that some adoptive parents also felt that teachers' misunderstanding about adoption and its antecedents led to poor judgements such as blaming all the child's difficulties on the adoption, expecting recovery to be more rapid than it is and setting low expectations that become self-fulfilling. However, as this research was conducted over a decade ago, findings may not represent current views amongst adoptive families.

Gilling (Gilling, 2014), a service user case study written by an adoptive mother, utilises ethnography/ auto-ethnography methodologies and focuses on her adopted child's (12-year-old Jasper) educational journey in two primary settings:

Jasper's "needs were ignored and misunderstood at one school" but "fully taken

into account by another" (Gilling, 2014, p 60). Gilling's (2014) account suggests

that societal and cultural assumptions were to play in the event of one school

which misunderstood the needs of Jasper and disregarded the context of his

early experiences. Gilling's (2014) account however also indicates that Jasper's

second primary school had a better understanding of Jasper's needs and could

provide the appropriate support, suggesting that there should be recognition of

where progress has been made in schools with understanding the needs of

adopted young people. One of the main advantages of Gilling's (2014) use of a

narrative methodology is that it provided rich data and gave importance to the

experiences of one adopted child and his family. However, when considering

the ladder of participation (Hart, 1992) in emancipatory research, Jasper's direct

voice was quoted by his mother, a minimal number of four times in the article.

Although Gilling (2014) acknowledges that this narrative is a construction of her

family's events, she does not provide sufficient information about how Jasper's

views were collected, recorded and examined, nor does she explicitly

acknowledge the inextricable influence of Jasper's parents on his views, which

brings into question as to whether Gilling (2014) can legitimately identify this

narrative as 'Jasper's story' as opposed to that of Jasper's adoptive mother.

All but one of the research studies (e.g. Best et al., 2021) that have been

appraised so far, privilege the voices of the adults who support adopted young

people, and where views have been gathered from adopted young people, this

has been conducted in a restricted manner, such as questionnaires, resulting in

limited information being gathered. Best, Cameron & Hill (2021), Templeton,

McGlade & Fitzsimons (2020) and Crowley (2019), do however address this

imbalance through their research.

In Crowley's (2019) study, two participants reported positive peer relationships

and three of the participants talked about peer rejection because of their

adopted status and considered ways of keeping their adoption private to protect

themselves from discrimination. Similarly, in Best, Cameron & Hill's (2021)

study, one participant regretted sharing their adoption status due to the lack of

support that followed from peers. Whilst this is likely to suggest that social and

cultural misunderstanding of adopted young people's needs and experiences

existed amongst non-adopted peers, it is important to continue to consider the

small sample sizes of both studies which, combined, report the views of sixteen

adoptees and therefore cannot be representative of all adoptees in the UK.

Whilst Crowley (2019) reported some positive experiences that were shared by

her participants, there was a limited report of one participant's (Elsa) areas of

strengths. Similarly, Best, Cameron & Hill (2021) obtained only one positive

theme of 'relational repair' in addition to four other problem saturated themes

after analysing their data of adopted children's and adopter's experiences of

education. This suggests that both Crowley's (2019) and Best et. al's (2021)

interview approach may have been biased towards negative discourse and may

therefore have resulted in an incomplete picture of each adopted young

person's education and social development.

2.4.2 Exosystem: indirect social structures impacting on the microsystem and mesosystem of adopted CYP.

2.4.2.1 School exclusions and behaviour management policies

The current research indicates that there are wider, indirect, social structures which are impacting on the educational experiences of adopted young people, for example, the implementation of school exclusions and school behaviour management policies (AUK, 2017; Best et al. 2021; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Templeton et al. 2020).

AUK (2017) commissioned a parental survey which concluded that adopted children were generally overrepresented in exclusion statistics across all nations in the UK (n=2084). However, this clear statement of findings needs to be examined carefully. AUK's (2017) survey varied significantly in its proportion of responses from the different nations in the UK resulting in some small sample sizes (England, 84%; Northern Ireland, 3%; Scotland, 5% and Wales, 7%); not all data was reported (e.g. the number of permanent exclusions reported by survey correspondents in Scotland was withheld due to ethical considerations); contradictory data was not elaborated or explored adequately (in Northern Ireland, none of the 48 respondents reported a permanent exclusion of their child during 2015-16) and the lack of consistency in the reporting of exclusion statistics across the nations (Scotland collects exclusion data biannually in comparison to other nations who collect data annually), suggests that comparison across nations lacks validity.

AUK's (2017) data reported for England however was ascertained from a significant sample size (n=1348, adopted young people who attended school during 2015-16) and more nuanced statistical analysis could take place due to the comprehensive exclusion data that is collected in England. Findings suggested that in England, adopted young people (n=1,303) were just over twenty times more likely to be permanently excluded from school in comparison to their non-adopted peers during 2015-16. Adopted children were also being excluded for fixed periods at younger ages than other children and were 16 times more likely than their peers to be excluded in the first three years of their primary school; in secondary school, adopted young people were mostly excluded within the first three years in comparison to the final two years for the general population.

There are a few potential explanations that can be explored for why adopted young people are vulnerable to exclusions. Adopted children are likely to be over-represented in cohorts of children who are identified to have special educational needs and disability (SEND) and those that have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP); they are also more likely to have social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) as their primary area of need in comparison to their non-adopted peers who also have SEND (AUK, 2017). Children with identified SEND needs, an EHCP and those with SEMH needs are more likely to be permanently excluded or to receive a fixed period exclusion in England (DfE exclusions data 2015-16, reported in AUK, 2017) suggesting that schools are struggling and are poorly equipped to meet the needs of these children.

A key consideration closely related to this would be the impact of behaviour management policies in schools on vulnerable young people who do not benefit from inflexible practices which are not attachment or trauma informed in their approach. Supporting this view, more than half of adoptive parents (n = 2,218) agreed that behaviour management was unhelpful in Adoption UK's Survey conducted in 2018 (AUK, 2018). Quotes shared by respondents in this report shared examples of such practices such as preventing children getting "too" attached to staff (AUK, 2018, p. 9) and policies to split up friendships (AUK, 2018, p.12). This is also a consistent theme that has been identified in two qualitative studies which report the in-depth views of adopted young people (Best et al. 2021 and Templeton et al. 2020). Best et al. (2021) reported 'unsupportive school contexts' as a major theme in their findings from semi structured interviews with adopters (n=6) and adoptees (n=11). Indeed, Templeton et al. (2020) highlighted that school behaviour policies were directly linked to the experiences of four adopted young people who eventually moved schools due to their poor experiences. This suggests that recent studies continue to identify rigid behaviour management policies as a key barrier to adopted young people receiving appropriate support.

Further practices of behaviour management include illegal exclusions (when a child has been asked to either stay at home or to go home during the school day without the school recording it as an exclusion) and managed moves (where an agreement is brokered for a child, at risk of permanent exclusion, to transfer to another school). AUK (2017) reported that 15% of adopted young

people (n=1,588) were illegally excluded in 2015-16, of which 30% had been excluded more than 5 times in one academic year; 11.8% of adoptive parents (n = 1,949) indicated that their child's school suggested to them that the only way to avoid a permanent exclusion was to voluntarily remove their child. In the UK, data is not collected regarding illegal exclusions and managed moves; concern regarding the use of these practices is growing. Whilst adopted young people are likely to be a part of this hidden population as indicated by data collected by AUK (2017), AUK (2017) acknowledges that it is highly likely that there will be non-adopted children who are also subjected to these practices. A strength of AUK's (2017) study is therefore its additional value in contributing to our current understanding of practices such as the use of illegal exclusions and managed moves which are in effect, exclusions, and considering the implication of their findings for the wider population of children and young people in the UK.

There are however further key criticisms of AUK's (2017) research. AUK's (2017) research is not peer-reviewed and has therefore not undergone the same level of scrutiny as other peer-reviewed research. There is a lack of triangulation of data as only adoptive parental views were sought and data submitted regarding their children's exclusion experiences was not verified. AUK's (2017) findings of a high incidence of exclusions for adopted young people may be due to a biased sample skewed towards self-selecting adoptive parents who are keen to voice their frustrations regarding exclusions. To counteract this criticism, AUK (2017) encouraged parents to complete the survey even if their child had not been excluded and over three quarters of adoptive parents in the survey had never received a fixed term exclusion suggesting a significant proportion of adoptive families whose children were not

excluded took part in the survey. However, AUK (2017) did not clarify whether these children were subjected to illegal exclusions or managed moves which are mostly negative experiences and will be a likely motivating factor that contributed to parental engagement. Therefore, findings may not be representative of the general population of adoptive families.

2.4.2.2 The 'Resources Gap'

Difficulties in accessing suitable resources to help support adopted young people in school settings was identified as a key theme in the research conducted by AUK (2018) and Gilling (2014). AUK (2018) makes the assertion that there is a "Resources Gap" based on their findings of a disparity in access to educational funds for adopted CYP across the UK and general difficulties in accessing appropriate support for adopted children which leads to a call for UK schools to "end the postcode lottery of provision" and for schools to be "properly funded and resourced" (AUK, 2018), p. 14). In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, previously looked after children have not been recognised as a group who require additional funding to support their needs in education; in England, however, previously looked after children are eligible for the Pupil Premium Plus fund (a fund of £2,300 provided also for looked after children). Although the information provided indicates a lack of consistency in the provisions across the nations in the UK, AUK (2018) only provided quotes from four adoptive parents in England to support the view that access to appropriate resources is a challenge. Due to the substantial lack of data reported by AUK (2018) in this part of their report, there is no clear understanding whether the views of these four adoptive parents from England are representative of the wider experiences

and views of adopted parents across all nations in the UK, which therefore calls

into question the validity of these findings.

AUK's (2018) findings do however state that 63% of adoptive parents feel that

their child's school is not transparent in the way it uses Pupil Premium Plus and

two thirds of parents feel that funds are not being used appropriately to support

their child's needs. As data is not provided on the number of participants that

reside in England (the overall sample size alludes to the views of "more than

2000 adoptive parents" across the UK) this statistic cannot be contextualised

within a sample size. Furthermore, this finding does not support AUK's (2018)

call for schools to be "properly funded and resourced" but indicates that greater

transparency is needed from schools regarding their use of Pupil Premium Plus

and more importantly, the need for a joint understanding of what support is

required to meet an adopted young person's needs (AUK, 2018. p. 14).

2.4.2.3 The 'Understanding Gap'

What appears to be a highly significant theme is the lack of understanding of

adopted young people's needs which is perhaps the most important barrier to

adopted young people accessing appropriate support (AUK, 2018; Best et al.

2021; Gilling, 2014 and Templeton et al. 2020). Indeed, Best et al. (2021)

through their work with Designated Teachers (DTs, n=20) identified three areas

in which DTs needed to extend their school's understanding of adoption related

matters: knowledge of adoption itself and how to support adopted young

people's needs which included developing relationships and supporting

emotional needs. There are however schools (n=5) that have developed a good

enough understanding of adopted young people's needs with teachers identified by adopted young people to be "informed, empathetic and supportive" (Templeton et al. 2020, n=6). What isn't clear however, is if these schools had specific training in supporting adopted young people, or whether the ethos of the school lends itself to supporting all children with their emotional needs and so approaches such as relational practice, restorative justice and flexible behaviour management policies could explain why these adopted young people felt well supported.

Gilling (2014), a service user case study which talks about the researcher's family's experiences of seeking support for her adopted son in two different primary settings, highlighted how the approach of two schools can make a huge difference to the wellbeing of one adopted young person. Gilling (2014) identifies the first primary school (PS1) as reluctant in providing a "thorough educational assessment" of her son, Jasper's, needs. However, in Jasper's second primary school, Jasper responded well to the school support put in place for him (based on internal school-based assessments and not specialist external support) which included an appropriately differentiated curriculum and access to small group interventions. To ensure that adopted young people are provided with appropriate support, Gilling (2014) suggests that a "systematic support model" be put in place for adopted young people in schools which includes a mandatory "educational assessment" (Gilling, 2014, p. 68). Although Gilling (2014) discusses at length the clear lack of understanding of Jasper's emotional needs beyond his presentation of behaviour by his first primary school, she attributes this to a general lack of understanding of adopted young people's needs. However, there are arguments to be made regarding this

assumption. Jasper's first primary school, according to Gilling's (2014) report, were not welcoming of a restorative approach to children fighting and took a punitive approach. It is likely that whilst Jasper's adoption related needs were not met by this school, there will have been other non-adopted children with emotional and behavioural needs, who will also have experienced great difficulties in accessing appropriate support for their needs. Furthermore, Gilling (2014) does not give consideration to adopted young people who do not have difficulties with learning but may perhaps have difficulties with their social, emotional and mental health.

Overall, the four studies (AUK, 2018; Best et al. 2021; Gilling, 2014 and Templeton, 2020), given their limitations, lack in substantial evidence which supports the view of a 'resource gap,' pertaining to the potential availability to resources for adopted young people, as described by AUK (2018). Findings do however suggest that the lack of access to available support as well as the appropriateness of support provided is a concern for adopted young people (AUK, 2018; Best et al. 2021; Gilling, 2014 and Templeton, 2020).

2.4.3 Mesosystem: Interactions of the different microsystems of school and home for an adopted CYP.

The interaction between adoptive parents and their adopted child's school has been reported in three studies, mainly with respect to how adoptive parents' view support provided by school for their adopted child and the ease in which

they could communicate regarding their child's adoption status (Best et al.,

2021); (Cooper & Johnson, 2007) and (Gilling, 2014).

Best et al. (2021) reported the views of adoptive parents (n=6) shared in a focus

group. The thematic analysis of the data was combined with the views of

adopted young people (n=11) in which adopters expressed lack of

understanding and empathy from schools which was evident in interactions with

school staff; whilst also having to "shout really loud" to have the needs of their

adopted children recognised. Focus groups, although considered useful in

understanding the views of marginalised groups, have significant limitations as

researchers tend to privilege the findings at the end of the conversation and do

not take into account the interactions between participants that would have

undue influence on the views that are reported at the time (Cyr, 2016). Indeed,

Best et al. (2021) do not acknowledge these limitations and the reported views

of adopters suggest that the dominance of a negative discourse may have

impacted on positive experiences being recollected and thus reported.

Gilling's (2014) case study explores her relationship with two different primary

schools as an adoptive parent which arguably was underpinned by each

school's perception of her adopted child's needs. 'Jasper' was viewed as a

'trouble maker' by his first school and his parents consequently had a strained

relationship with the school ultimately leading to a breakdown of placement. In

contrast to this, Jasper's second school, developed a supportive relationship

with Jasper's parents by reframing Jasper as a child who was experiencing

difficulties and therefore adjustments were made to help him thrive. Whilst case

study designs do not seek to generalise their findings to the rest of the

population, they are helpful in contributing to a more detailed picture of the daily complexities faced by adopted children and their families.

A critical aspect of the relationship between adopted parents and their child's school is the sharing of information regarding the adoption of their child. Parental surveys generally indicate most adoptive parents share some details regarding their child's adoption with the child's educational setting (Cooper and Johnson, 2007, n= 90/100; Gilling, 2014, n=1/1) and recent qualitative studies agree with these findings (Best et al. 2021 and Templeton et al, 2020). However, a couple of studies report on the 'satisfaction' on sharing this information: 67% were satisfied with the school's response (Cooper & Johnson, 2007, n=67) and Gilling (2014) reported no difference was made after sharing details of Jasper's adoption with Jasper's first primary school. The research however is unclear as to how many parents inform schools 'proactively' about their child's adoption status as opposed to 'reactively' when difficulties have arisen.

It is difficult to ascertain whether these findings are representative of the general population of adoptive parents. Firstly, adoptive families who contribute to research are more likely to be open about their child's adoption and conversely families who do not intend to share this information may not participate in adoption research with fear of unintended repercussions. Secondly, some of these research studies are dated and do not reflect changes that may have taken place after the roles of Designated Teachers were extended to also include previously looked after children in 2017 (Cooper & Johnson, 2007 and Gilling, 2014).

A further criticism of the current published research is the lack of voices from school professionals (teachers, SENCOs and Head teachers) on their relationship with adopted parents and their view on having knowledge of the adopted child's adoption background. Only one study by Best et al. (2021) reported some views from a relatively small sample of designated teachers (n=20) on how they can support adopted young people. Whilst the DTs identified a key theme of raising awareness about the needs of adopted children, they did not reflect on the group of adopted young people who will not have had their adoption status disclosed to the school by their adoptive parents. Future research is therefore required.

2.4.4 Microsystem: social structures such as home, school and friendships which have a direct relationship with the adopted young person.

2.4.4.1 Family life

Due to the focus on educational experiences of adopted young people in this literature review, there is little information regarding adopted young people's relationships with their adoptive family or possible connections with their biological family. However, one research study makes direct reference to adopted young people's early experiences and development of attachment to adoptive parents (Crowley, 2019); whilst in two other studies, the impact of early adverse childhood experiences on building relationships is reflected on by adopted young people (Best et al. 2021 and Templeton et al. 2020).

Crowley (2014) interviewed four female adopted young people regarding their views of their education and identified 'Relationships' and 'Attachment' to be two (out of a total five) significant themes. Two of the participants described significant difficulties with interacting with others and were also identified by the researcher as young people who "exhibit insecure attachment behaviours;" the other two participants shared more positive social experiences and were identified to have "secure attachments to their adoptive parents," (Crowley. 2019, p. 174). Crowley (2014) concludes that early attachment relationships can lead to social and emotional difficulties. However, not only were there no formal measurements of attachment, Crowley (2014) does not take into account a growing body of critics who dispute attachment theory and consider it to be reductionist and deterministic in nature (Crittenden, 2006) and also unable to explain how attachment of adoptees can change over time (e.g. (Hodges, Steele, Hillman, Henderson, & Kaniuk, 2003). Furthermore, Crowley (2019) does not appear to explore alternative and more comprehensive explanations for poor social experiences, for example in the case of Sophia who has a hearing disability, this may have an important factor in developing early social skills in addition to her early relational experiences. Additionally, in the case of Elizabeth who at the age of 16 is presented to have formed friendships Year 8 onwards, Crowley does not explore as to what may have facilitated this progress in social relationships (aside from early attachment experiences). There is also a flawed assumption that all adoptees were presented with equal opportunities for social relationships to flourish.

Whilst Crowley's (2019) research has provided valuable insight into the world of four adopted young females and the complexities surrounding adoption, these

findings cannot be generalised due the small sample size. Crowley attributes

the young people's adjustment to their adoptive families, their social

relationships and educational performance to their early experiences and

conceptualises this within 'attachment' styles. By explaining outcomes solely

through attachment theory, Crowley may have masked mitigating roles of

specific social processes such as autonomy, support, empathy or warmth that

can play pivotal roles in fostering both security within relationships and positive

outcomes (Ryan, Brown, & Creswell, 2007). In support of this, findings from

Best et al. (2021) and Templeton et al. (2020) suggest that trusted caring adults

that were available at schools for adopted young people supported adopted

young people to form secure relationships in spite of difficulties that may have

arisen from their early adverse experiences.

2.4.4.2 School life

2.4.4.2.1 Educational Aspirations

Data about post-16 outcomes amongst adopted young people is sparse and

very little research to date has been conducted to examine educational

aspirations for adopted young people. Brown, Waters & Shelton (2019)

examined data submitted for the Wave 1 of the Youth Questionnaire (10-15

years old) from the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS).

The researchers selected responses from adopted young people (n=22) and

compared findings to a matched comparison group (n=110). Findings suggest

that there were no differences between adopted young people and non-adopted

young people on the importance given to performing well in end of compulsory

school examinations. Despite this, differences were found however when comparing the level of interest in seeking full time work after compulsory education: 33% of adopted young people in contrast to 7% of non-adopted young people were more likely to want to seek full time work after compulsory education.

When considering occupations for their future, none of the adopted young people aspired for management roles compared to non-adopted young people; adopted young people demonstrated a greater interest in caring roles than their non-adopted counterparts (n=19 adopted young people, 91 non-adopted young people). These findings however are not robust; the sample size is not statistically viable and therefore is not representative of the wider experiences of adopted young people. A further significant criticism is the lack of clarity regarding of when the data was collected. The researchers clarify the data was gathered from Wave 1 of the UKHLS, however the time of this Wave is not clearly stated and we are to presume that as the UKHLS study started in 2009 and collects data for a period of 24 months for each Wave, Wave 1 data would refer to information collated between 2009-2010. This data would therefore be outdated and unlikely to represent the current context of educational aspirations for adopted young people.

Given the lack of research regarding long term education and employment outcomes of adopted young people, there is an urgent need for robust and large-scale studies to ensure that there is parity between adopted young people and their non-adopted peers.

2.4.4.2.2 Transition from Primary setting to Secondary Settings

There are many challenges associated with transitioning from primary school to secondary school, for example, the loss of friendships and new ones that need to be made, adapting to a larger building, a more complex curriculum and multiple teachers. Although such transitions would be expected to be a significant area of difficulty for adopted young people, only one study in this literature review reports on the significance of transitions: Crowley (2019) found two of her four participants spoke about their difficulties with this transition to secondary school, one who overcame these difficulties, whilst another participant who described it to be an ongoing challenge. The current research available is therefore weak and not representative. Further research is therefore required to help explore this area of research.

2.4.4.2.3 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

As legislation in the UK has only recently recognised adopted children as a distinct group, it is unsurprising that the prevalence of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) for adopted young people is yet to be gathered and reported on a national basis. The current literature provides somewhat of an estimation of SEND in this group based on parental reports. AUK's (2017) parental responses suggest that just under 48% of adopted children (n= 2,024) have recognised SEND, 60% of whom have an EHCP or equivalent. This is a stark contrast to national figures in England reported by AUK (2017) who state that just over 20% of children who require SEND support, have an EHCP.

Cooper and Johnson (2007) whilst a more dated and significantly smaller study based in one local authority, found a similar trend. More recently, three qualitative studies also continue to identify the higher prevalence of SEND in their studies: Best et al. (2021), Crowley (2019) and Templeton et al. (2020).

Adopted young people also differ in their profile of special educational needs with an estimation of 45% categorised with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) as primary need in comparison to 16% of the general population (AUK, 2017) with 1/3 parents stating that their children had time off school due to poor mental health; this rose to 48% for parents of secondary school children (AUK, 2018, n= more than 2,000). It is important to recognise however that adopted young people who have SEN needs, continue to display a broad range of needs which are not limited to SEMH needs. In support of this, Cooper and Johnson (2007) identified two further categories of difficulties (learning and concentration/organisation) from their parental responses; this is consistent with SEND needs as identified by Best et al. (2021), Crowley (2019), Gilling (2014) and Templeton et al. (2020).

Overall, the research examined here suggests consistently that adopted young people are at greater risk of experiencing special educational needs; however, it is unclear as to whether these parental reports are indeed elevated figures which are not representative of the wider adopted population. Firstly, parents of adopted children who contribute to these surveys are more likely to participate in order to vocalise the difficulties their adopted young people experience. Secondly, adopted young people may be referred at a greater rate for SEND provision than their non-adopted peers as adoptive parents are more likely to

have greater awareness of additional needs that their adopted young person

may be experiencing through the support of adoption professionals.

Additionally, adopted young people who have SEND may be more motivated to

share their experiences in adoption research in order to bring about greater

support for their needs and therefore may not fairly represent the needs of all

adopted young people.

2.4.4.2.4 Friendships, relationships and social interaction

Relationships and friendships within education have been identified as a key

area of exploration for adopted young people and/ or their parents in six of the

studies in this literature review (AUK, 2017; Best et al. 2021; Cooper &

Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; Gilling, 2014 and Templeton et al. 2020).

Findings from these studies suggest that forming and maintaining friendships

can be an area of difficulty for adopted young people (AUK, 2017; Best et al.

2021; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; Gilling, 2014 and Templeton et

al. 2020). Parental reports suggest that they too are concerned about their

adopted young person's difficulties in navigating social interactions, particularly

during social times such as break times and lunch times (AUK, 2018 n = at least

1,200) and identify the impact of their early adverse experiences as an

explanation (Best et al., 2021). Gilling (2014) provides details of specific social

interactions that her adopted child found difficult: "Jasper would get too close to

other people, not allowing them personal space, and would be oversensitive

when told to back off," (Gilling, 2014), p 64).

Cooper and Johnson (2007) however, reported that a minority of adoptive parents were concerned about their child's friendships (32%, n=93). They report a further 70% of children (n=33) expressed dislikes about school which "evenly divided between areas of social relationships, interactions and schoolwork," (Cooper and Johnson, 2007, p. 26). Further adopted children's views indicated that 29% of responses regarding enjoyment of school were about playing and friendships. Responses regarding what made children happy at school, also pertained to friendships and other aspects of their routine such as "swimming" and "snack time." Due to the lack of nuanced data reported regarding the views of adopted young people on their social relationships, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of need in this area. Furthermore, with a lack of comparison data in which views are also gathered from non-adopted young people across all studies, it is difficult to ascertain whether concerns about social interactions are to be interpreted as a direct implication of a child's adoption history, or whether these findings are also true of the social developmental needs of all children.

Surveys, whilst advantageous in contributing to an overall picture of an area of interest and allows for large and more representative sample sizes (such as in the case of AUK, 2018), a significant limitation is that topics such as how young adopted people experience their social world cannot be explored in depth to allow for a more comprehensive understanding and can therefore lead to more questions than answers.

A further criticism of most of these studies, is the lack of acknowledgement of the interconnected nature of social relationships with other aspects of a young person's self, for example, their self-esteem, learning abilities, environmental factors such as access to positive social opportunities. Crowley (2019) alludes

to this in her research and speaks of Elsa, who struggled with friendships, as a young person with a "fragile sense of self" (Crowley, 2019, p.173). Gilling (2014), whilst she makes no explicit link with Jasper's learning needs and his behaviour with his peers, implies that there may have been one: "Weeks went by, no assessment, and Jasper started to get into conflict with some of the other children," (Gilling, 2014, p. 64). When Jasper transitions into a second school, he describes children to be "kind" (Gilling, 2014, p. 66) suggesting that whilst previously Jasper's difficulties with social interactions were viewed from a 'within-child' perspective, environmental influences were likely to have contributed to a positive social change for him.

Significantly, recent studies (e.g. Best et al. 2021 and Templeton et al. 2020) continue to emphasise the negative social experiences of adopted young people which suggests that there is a bias towards eliciting only negative experiences and thus moments of strengths and resilience in building relationships are overlooked, leading to an incomplete understanding of adopted young people's experiences of relationships and friendships.

2.4.5 Core system of Individual/Self

When gathering views directly from adopted young people, the importance of identity is a recurring theme. Best et al. (2021) reported 'uncertain identity' as a key subtheme in which participants (adoptees and adopters) described their or their child's difficulties with their identity. Templeton et al. (2020) identified the themes of "loss" and "personal understanding of adoption" which explored how the adopted participants made sense of their identity. Crowley's (2019) study highlighted the experience of one transracial adoptee who was of ethnic

minority heritage and encountered challenges that arose from this, such as intrusive questions from her peers. Studies also indicate that adopted young people will consider keeping their adoption status private to avoid being bullied by peers (AUK, 2018; Best et al. 2021; Crowley. 2019 and Templeton et al. 2020). A general sense of difference to non-adopted peers was also reported by adopted young people (AUK, 2018). Adoption UK's recent survey echoed this sense of difference where almost three quarters of adopted young people agreed that "other children seem to enjoy school more than me" (AUK, 2018, n=nearly 2000, p. 8).

The significance of these findings however needs to be interpreted with caution as no control group for comparison was provided in these studies and some sense of difference to others is likely to reflect normal development for all young people. Furthermore, AUK (2018) designed questions which were heavily skewed towards eliciting areas of concerns for adopted young people, with no consideration given to gathering information about the positive experiences these young people have experienced in school and their sense of interests and personal achievements. Only one study (Templeton et al. 2020, n=9) represented the voices of adoptees older than 16 years of age which therefore means that the majority of adoption research is currently focused on specific periods of identity development for adopted children resulting in a less holistic view of an adopted young person's identity.

2.4.6. Summary

In summary, the eight papers analysed in this literature review suggest that the educational experiences of adopted young people, influenced by a complex array of interacting systems that surround and reside within a child, are more likely to be negative than positive. Adopted young people are likely to be subject to the following educational experiences: having their needs not understood by school professionals which further impacts on access to appropriate support (AUK, 2018; Best et al. 2021; Gilling, 2014 and Templeton et al. 2020); at greater risk of exclusion than their non-adopted peers (AUK, 2017); at greater risk of being bullied due to their adoptive status (AUK, 2018); poorer attainment outcomes compared to their non-looked after peers (AUK, 2018); increased identification of SEND needs (AUK, 2017; AUK, 2018; Best et al. 2021; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019 and Templeton et al. 2020); greater difficulties with transitioning from primary to secondary school settings (Crowley, 2019); difficulties with forming friendships and a greater sense of difference to their non-adopted peers (AUK, 2018; Best et al. 2021; Crowley, 2019; Gilling, 2014 and Templeton et al. 2020). Questions have also been raised regarding the potential differences in the educational aspirations of adopted young people (Brown et al. 2019).

There have been however a number of criticisms noted throughout the body of this literature review which brings into question the reliability and validity of the findings reported in these studies. Arguably, due to the significant policy and practice that has taken place in the last decade in England, most recently extending the roles of DTs to also include previously looked after children since

2017; only three papers out of the eight analysed, can be considered in relation

to current practice and policy in England (AUK, 2018; Best et al. 2021 and

Crowley, 2019).

2.5 Gaps in the current literature

There are three key strands of identifiable gaps in the current literature. Firstly,

the current literature aims to identify the prevalence of poor educational

experiences for adopted young people, the contributing factors and how best to

enable progress to be made for this group (e.g. AUK, 2019; Best et al. 2021;

Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019 and Templeton et al. 2020). No

published research to date has focused on understanding the educational

experiences of adopted young people from a positive psychology perspective

nor have they explored the importance of understanding resilience in this

population. Secondly, although three research studies reported the views

directly gathered from adopted young people using a survey/questionnaire

methodology, only three recent studies conducted in-depth exploration of the

views of adopted young people through comprehensive research methodology

and analysis (Best et al. 2021; Crowley, 2019 and Templeton et al. 2020);

suggesting that comprehensive exploration of adopted young people's views of

their educational experiences continues to be needed in the literature. Finally,

only one research study has provided the opportunity for adopted young adults

(defined as 18 years or above in the UK per societal and legal norm) to also

share their views of their educational experiences in Northern Ireland

(Templeton et al. 2020). In the UK, by the age of 18, young adults have the

benefit of a complete educational experience of compulsory schooling and may

additionally be completing/or have completed higher educational qualifications.

From a developmental perspective, young adults are also offering their views having experienced further psychosocial growth than children and adolescents (Erikson, 1963). Therefore, the importance of seeking the views of older adoptees, across the UK, remains a considerable gap to be filled.

2.6 Resiliency Theories

As resiliency continues to be a highly debated construct with no widely adopted model in use, there is no golden standard for measuring resilience in research (Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011). The researcher therefore chose to use a three-factor model of resiliency that underpins a well-known measure of resilience, the Resiliency Scale for Children and Adolescents (Prince-Embury, 2007) which is commonly utilised in the work of EPs in the in the UK. These three factors are based on the following three core developmental systems: Sense of Mastery (optimism about one's life and one's competence, self-efficacy and ability to learn from mistakes); Sense of Relatedness (comfort with others, trust in others, perceived access of support from others) and Sense of Emotional Reactivity (measure of how strongly one reacts to external and internal stimuli). These three factors seem to correlate individually but also collectively with each other (Thorne & Kohut, 2007). This model was chosen to inform the semi-structured interview guides for the current study as it fitted in with the socio-ecological theory underlying this research as well as identifying some important individual characteristics which could arguably be developed in a school environment. It is also a measure that has been altered to measure young adult's level of resiliency and will therefore continue to be of relevance to

research that include young adults (Prince-Embury, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2017).

2.7 The current study: purpose and rationale

The current literature predominantly highlights the poor educational experiences of adopted children (up to the age of 16), with only one recent study that explored the views of adopted young people aged 16 to 21 years old in Northern Ireland, by Templeton et al. (2020). This continues to leave a significant gap in understanding the positive educational experiences of older adopted young people across the UK. The current study used a positive psychology perspective to understand 'what worked' for adopted young people in education; a resiliency framework was applied to gain greater insight into the importance or relevance of particular aspects of resilience for adopted young people. The aim of the study is to also continue to add to a small body of research that directly gathers the views of adopted people and to continue to value the voices of older adoptees alongside the voices of adopted children. Findings are intended to be used to inform much needed practice guidance in supporting adopted young people in educational settings.

2.8 The Research Questions (RQs)

The current study explores the following research questions:

RQ1: What have been the positive educational experiences of adopted young people?

RQ2: What factors of resilience are identified as important to this group of adopted young people?

RQ3: How can educational settings do better for adopted young people?

2.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a review of the literature that informed the purpose and design of the current research. The literature focused on what is currently understood about the educational experiences of adopted children and young people (CYP). Key themes in the literature and the theoretical perspectives used were explored. This chapter concludes with identifying the gaps in the research, an introduction for a further theoretical lens and the rationale for the research questions. The following chapter will provide a detailed account of the methodological approach to conduct this piece of exploratory research.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research methodology will be presented in this chapter. To begin with, the purpose and unique contribution of the study will be discussed, the Research Questions are then re-stated, followed by a description of the researcher's philosophical position which underpins the methodology. This is then followed by the rationale of the research design, a description of the participants, after which data methods, collection and analysis are then discussed. The researcher will then demonstrate consideration of trustworthiness, reflexivity and ethical issues.

3.2 Purpose and Unique Contribution of this Research

Robson (2002) suggested exploratory studies play a significant role in enabling researchers to extend their knowledge in lesser-known areas of research, in addition to generating relevant ideas and hypotheses for future research. The purpose of the current study was informed by the literature review which revealed a limited body of research exploring educational experiences of adopted young people; more specifically no published research to date has used a positive psychology and resilience approach to their research. This current study aims to uncover the positive educational experiences of adopted young people in order to help bring about a greater understanding of how such experiences contributed to their feelings of success, as well as identifying aspects of resilience that are considered to be important to this group of young

people. This information is of great importance due to the increasingly recent recognition of the difficulties that adopted young people experience in education (Brown et al., 2017); DfE, 2018), previously hidden due to societal misconceptions of 'living happily ever after' once adoption takes place (Gore Langton, 2017).

It is hoped that the current study will provide new insights that inform future policies and practice for educational professionals including EPs when working with adopted young people. Furthermore, although no formal UK Government data has been collated regarding the number of adopted young people who have Special Educational Need (SEN), the adopted young people in this study will have been previously considered as 'looked after children' (LAC). LAC as a group has been identified to be more likely to have SEN and have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans in comparison to their non-looked after counterparts (DfE, 2019). The role of EPs will therefore be pertinent to adopted young people as they are more likely to have involvement with EPs from birth until 25 years of age.

An additional purpose of the current research is one of advocacy, by representing the voices of an under-represented age group of adopted young people. In keeping in line with some of Danieli and Woodham's (2007) key principles of emancipatory research such as openness, participation, accountability, empowerment and reciprocity, this researcher hopes to empower participants by encouraging them to have a greater awareness of their own strength and resilience by using a solution-focused and appreciative inquiry approach. The researcher also aims to create debate and discussion, so that

change in current educational practice can occur, for example within the role of

teachers and EPs.

3.3 Research Questions

RQ1: What have been the positive educational experiences of adopted young

people?

RQ2: What factors of resilience are identified as important to this group of

adopted young people?

RQ3: How can educational settings do better for adopted young people?

3.4 Research Philosophy: Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

In order to develop the methodology to be used to answer the research

questions above, the researcher will outline their epistemological (what

constitutes as valid knowledge and how it can be obtained) and ontological

(what constitutes reality and how to understand its existence) philosophy. By

doing so, the researcher will be clear in setting out their values and beliefs, and

acknowledge how this influences their research (Creswell, 2007).

This researcher adopts a social constructionist perspective. Social

constructionism argues that all reality and meaning is subjective and

constructed through dynamic interactions with other individuals and groups;

thus, individuals uniquely experience the world whilst seeking knowledge about

it (Creswell, 2007). Social constructionism views language as one of the

principle means by which social and psychological worlds are constructed (Burr,

2015). This study therefore endeavours to uncover a more in-depth and

thorough account of the positive educational experiences of adopted young

people who have experienced the care system. By doing so, this may enable a

more conceptual representation and a deeper understanding of their

experiences to be achieved.

Ontologically, social constructionism arguably lends itself to a relativist position,

whereby knowledge of an objective reality cannot be gained even if it did exist,

due to the multiple representations and social constructions of the world. Some

social constructionists avoid debating the existence of what reality may be (e.g.

(Potter, 1996). However, this researcher, in agreement with some social

constructionists, adopts a critical realist perspective of social constructionism,

taking the view that much of reality exists but that reality is socially defined and

this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life (e.g. Berger,

[space]

1991; Hammersley, 1995; Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Sims-Schouten, Riley,

& Willig, 2007 and Willig, 2013). Thus, whilst this subjective epistemological

stance assumes each young person would have formed their own constructions

based on personal experience, it permits the exploration of multiple

constructions in order to contribute to a broader picture of the social reality of

adopted children in education (Mertens, 2012).

By developing a shared understanding of the needs of young adopted people in

education, educational institutions and related professionals are better able to

understand their role in developing school provision that can promote better

outcomes for this vulnerable group of young people.

3.5 Qualitative Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study as it was felt to be most effective in eliciting and understanding the unique experiences of adopted young people in a meaningful manner rather than seeking to prove or establish a pre-existing reality (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is also in line with the researcher's social constructionist perspective, thus acknowledging the role of the researcher in constructing shared meanings in this research through data collection, analysis and interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Another benefit of a qualitative design is its application to lesser-known phenomena as it can lead to 'thick' descriptions of participants' experiences and can therefore inform potential areas and hypotheses for future exploration in research. Quantitative research on the other hand assumes a fixed and measurable reality of a phenomenon and therefore cannot ascertain deeper underlying meanings and explanations (Rahman, 2016).

3.6 Data collections

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews (SSIs)

A semi-structured interview was selected by the researcher as the most appropriate technique to capture the views of adopted young people by enabling rich qualitative data to be gathered by following the lead of participants while considering the focus of the study; therefore, enabling a deeper understanding of their life experiences (Smith, 1995).

There are a number of unique advantages to conducting semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the flexibility allows for some interview questions to be

thoughtfully planned in advance and when appropriate, the interviewer can clarify the questions for the participants if needed. Additionally participants can be asked to elaborate and follow a new line of enquiry, all of which support topics to be explored in greater depth (Bell, 2005). This technique is also particularly suitable for this study which has a focus on exploring positive experiences that adopted participants may have, whilst also enabling adopted young people to initiate discussion of areas which are important to them that may not be positive. The researcher also recognises that the interview involves discussing sensitive and potentially very emotive topics for adopted young people and therefore it is important for the researcher to ensure that participants feel at ease. Semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to empathise with participants' social and psychological worlds, leading participants to share their experience without feelings of judgement (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Interviews also importantly allow for potentially confusing or conflicting information to be clarified during the interview by both the interviewer and the participant.

There are however a number of limitations of semi-structured interviews that need to be taken into consideration. They are time consuming in their administration, transcription and coding (Smith & Osborn, 2003). There is also a high level of researcher bias when analysing qualitative data and therefore this impacts on the reliability of the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Furthermore, there is a possibility that when conducting interviews, the researcher is likely to be perceived as a stranger and possibly be positioned as an expert, which may impact on participants who may feel cautious about sharing sensitive information (Hill, 1997). The researcher's professional role as a TEP however

will enable the researcher to use her pre-existing skills and experience in

building rapport with vulnerable young people, which may redress the power

imbalance to some extent between the researcher and participant.

Data collection techniques which are more time efficient, such as focus groups

and questionnaires, were also considered by the researcher for this study.

However, they were not appropriate for the aims and the epistemological stance

of this research study which seeks to gather multiple in-depth narratives of

adopted young peoples' experiences of education.

3.6.2 Development of the interview questions

The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix D) were designed to gather

data to answer the research questions by addressing a number of key aspects

of a young person's school life. These key aspects were developed with a

systemic framework drawing from the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977) and in

light of the literature. For example, schools sit in the adopted young person's

microsystem and this would include adopted young people's experiences of

adults and other young people within these settings. Questions were also

designed to gain insight into aspects of adopted young people's resilience and

these areas were drawn from a three-factor model of resilience by taking a look

at the questions in the Resiliency Scale for Children and Adolescents (Prince

Embury, 2007). The questions were designed to be open and curious without

being overly prescriptive, questions designed to elicit discussion of particular

constructs of resilience were framed positively. Due to the sensitive nature of

adoption, the researcher was aware that painful and negative experiences were

likely to be drawn on and there was a risk to remain in problem saturated

discussions. To support participants within the positive psychology

underpinnings of this study, the researcher also planned a schedule of solution

focused and appreciative inquiry informed questions to continue to help elicit

strengths and positive experiences. The researcher also deliberately began the

interview by asking what adopted young people wanted to share to ensure that

they were given the opportunity to talk about what was important to them first

before beginning to delve into their positive experiences of education.

3.6.3 Piloting the interview questions

The interview schedule was not piloted with young adopted young people due to

the potential small sample size for this particular group and the difficulty in

accessing this group of young people and the sensitive nature of information

shared. Alternatively, three pilot interviews were arranged with young people

aged 16 to 25 years to ensure that questions are delivered at an appropriate

pace and tone using terms and phrases that are easily understood. All pilot

participants reported that they were able to understand the questions during the

interview, felt comfortable to share their views and appreciated reflecting on

positive experiences despite often feeling negative about some aspects

regarding their schooling. The researcher noted that on some occasions, the

interview schedule prompted information from the young person that had

already been shared which was then noted before moving onto the next prompt.

Pre-pilot participants reported that this did not feel frustrating and suggested to

keep the interview schedule the same as other young people may not choose to

share that information unless prompted to do so. No changes were therefore

made to the interview schedule.

There was no prescribed time period for the interviews, however, the pilot

interviews indicated that they would range between 50 minutes and one hour

and participants were notified of this in their Information Sheet.

The interviews ended with the opportunity for the young people to share any

further information should they want to do so to ensure that they were given the

opportunity to share any additional information that they felt would be helpful.

3.7 Participants

3.7.1 Target age group: 16-25 year olds

The views of adopted young people aged 16-25 years continue to be under-

represented in current research with only one small, published study to date

gathering views from this age group (e.g. Templeton et al., 2020). This is

surprising as this particular age group encompasses significant turning points in

a young person's educational journey and can provide a richer and more in-

depth insight into their experiences of education (Erikson, 1963). In the UK, a

young person completes their compulsory education by the age of 18 (which

can include nursery, primary secondary, 6th form and college settings); following

which, they can either continue into higher education, employment or other

training opportunities (Parentkind, 2023). From a developmental perspective,

older adopted young people are also offering their views having experienced

further psychosocial growth than children and adolescents (Erikson, 1963).

Understanding the needs of this age group is further emphasised within the context of the SEND Code of Practice (2015) which has led to EPs exploring the ways in which they can support young people up to the age of 25 (DfE, 2015). Therefore, the importance of seeking the views of adopted young people aged 16-25 years, across the UK, remains a priority.

3.7.2 Recruitment

Due to the age of this group of adopted young people and potential confidentiality regarding the status of adoption, several approaches were utilised to recruit participants following ethical approval from the University (Appendix E) and thorough consideration given to ethical issues that may arise from this (please see section 'Ethical considerations' of this thesis for further information). Firstly, gatekeepers who provide services to adopted young people or their adoptive parent were contacted, for example, charities that provide post-adoption support. Charities were provided with an advert for this research (Appendix F) and were asked to send an email to relevant parties via their mailing lists and to advertise on their websites if this was a possibility. An advert was published on the Adoption UK website (adoptionuk.org.uk) and also shared on their twitter account. The researcher was careful to ensure that potential participants remained anonymous to the researcher until they or their parents made direct contact with the researcher by directing potential participants to contact the researcher via a secure university email.

Secondly, online platforms such as social media, in particular Twitter and Facebook were utilised with due care and consideration to publicise the study

using the researcher's account which has been created for this study. Online

platforms carry an increased risk to confidentiality due to potential participants

becoming identifiable and leaving a virtual footprint, therefore, only details of the

research were posted online, commenting features were disabled and potential

participants were clearly instructed to communicate with the researcher via their

secure university student email address to preserve their anonymity.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants based on the inclusion and

exclusion criteria below:

Inclusion criteria:

- Aged 16-25 years

- Will have been placed with their adoptive family for a minimum of one

    year whilst in an educational setting to enable young people to have

    sufficient experience on which to reflect on during their interview.

- Participants will be able to communicate effectively in the English

    Language with the researcher.

- The young person has experienced at least one care placement before

    adoption.

Exclusion criteria:

- Participants who are unable to access the level of communication and

    language required for this interview will be excluded.

Once potential participants contacted the researcher, they were sent an

Information Sheet (Appendix G) and an expression of Interest form (Appendix H) to complete to ensure that they met the criteria as outlined above for the current study. Following this, participants were then invited to complete a consent form (Appendix I) which they submitted electronically to the researcher.

3.7.3 Participant Information

Participants were four young females aged 17-23, who had been adopted from care and experienced education in the UK. The researcher initially planned to recruit a greater number of participants and also recruit participants of all genders, however, due to the barriers faced in recruiting from this 'hidden' and relatively hard to reach population, a smaller number of participants was considered to be sufficient to explore the research questions posed in this study.

 Further details about the participants can be found in the table below.

Table 2: *Characteristics of participants.*

Name	Gender	Age	Location (Country)	Age at Adoption	Method of Recruitment
Garnet	Female	23	UK	18 months	Twitter
Sapphire	Female	21	UK	5 years	Twitter
Ruby	Female	17	UK	4 years	Twitter
Emerald	Female	18	Northern Ireland	3 years	Adoption UK

3.8.1 The interview process

Interviews were conducted virtually with adopted young people via Skype software. Each of the interviews lasted between 42-69 minutes. The researcher conducted all of the interviews via a laptop in a quiet room booked at the University. At the start of each interview, time was set aside to develop rapport and trust as well as taking time to remind the participant of the purpose and nature of the study and their rights to confidentiality and to withdraw. Verbal consent was then taken from the participants again. At the end of the interview, a debrief letter was shared with the participant (Appendix J).

Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder app on the iPad, with a backup file created on a separate Dictaphone device; audio files were then transferred onto a password protected, secure computer. Participants were informed when the recording started and stopped. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher, which ensured confidentiality and data protection would be upheld and allowed the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data. The researcher listened to the recordings several times (as many as needed) and also slowed the recordings down to ensure that the transcripts were accurate. Orthographic style transcription (Clarke & Braun, 2013) was chosen due to the researcher's interest in what was said as opposed to how it was said. Therefore, interviews were transcribed verbatim for full authenticity. During the transcription process of the four interviews, all identifying information was removed from the data (including locations, names of schools, teachers and peers) and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The transcripts

were then thematically analysed using QSR NVivo Version 12 software which will be described in greater detail below.

3.9 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The data gathered was analysed using thematic analysis, an approach designed for psychological application (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allows one to divide and categorise data by identifying patterns also known as themes in the data to address the research question. There are a number of advantages to this method. Firstly, it is capable of providing "a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" in a manner in which salient idiographic issues are considered and allowed to be represented whilst also enabling the exploration of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Secondly, due to its flexible but robust qualities, this method is appropriate for researchers who are new to thematic analysis or indeed qualitative methodology. Thematic analysis also lends itself with ease to a range of epistemological positions and therefore aligns with epistemological and ontological positioning of this study (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The researcher considered thematic analysis to be more appropriate than other forms of analysis, such as Interpretative Phenomenological analysis (IPA).

IPA is an idiographic method which has a greater focus on the individual, lived experiences of participants. However, IPA was not considered suitable, as the current study is seeking to find themes across the participants. The researcher holds the view that whilst experiences are individual, there are likely to be

consistent themes that are relevant for all adopted young people based on previous research.

One of the criticisms of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) is that it can be poorly executed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is therefore important to ensure that the processes which underpin the thematic analysis are visible and transparent to allow readers to appraise and evaluate. When utilising this form of analysis, the researcher recorded evidence of analysis systematically to help to demonstrate not only the credibility and veracity (Koch, 1994) of the process but also its competence (please refer to Appendix K to see examples of screenshots taken from NVivo as the analysis evolved).

Both an inductive and deductive analysis has been adopted by the researcher for this research study. This 'integrative' approach using aspects of both deduction and induction (Clarke & Braun, 2013) allowed for the emergence of new themes by also taking into account all information provided by the adopted young people to help answer the research questions for this study, therefore providing a richer understanding.

For the first research question, an inductive thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was employed whereby themes were identified directly from the data with no theoretically informed frame for coding as is therefore analysed from the "bottom-up." For the second research question, a deductive theory-driven thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013) was initially employed using a framework for coding and developing themes based on Prince-Embury's three-factor model of personal resiliency (Prince-Embury,

2006). As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, this model (consisting of three core

developmental factors of personal experience: Sense of Mastery, Sense of

Relatedness and Emotional Reactivity), was chosen to inform the semi-structured

interview guides for the current study as it fitted in with the socio-ecological theory

underlying this research (Prince-Embury, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2017). Above

other models of resiliency, this model was particularly chosen due to its reliable and

valid measures of the personal factors underlying resilience outcomes in children

and adolescents (Prince-Embury, 2007; Prince-Embury & Saklofske, 2013), its

grounding in extensive empirical research on developmental competence and its

ease in operationalising resiliency across the lifespan by continuing on from

childhood and adolescence and into young adulthood (Prince-Embury et al., 2016);

therefore, directly applicable to the participants in this current study.

3.9.1 The Steps of Thematic Analysis

This study involved the use of QSR NVivo (Version 12), which is a computer

assisted qualitative data analysis software which supported the research to

process the data by coding sections of the transcripts; the programme also

assisted the research to find quotes for specific codes quickly. Although NVivo

can offer an array of analytical tools, the researcher used NVivo to simply code

the data and to create major themes, subthemes and sub-subthemes.

All data were analysed using the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke

(2006): familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining

and naming themes and then producing the report. Information about each

stage of analysis is outlined below. Please note that whilst the process of

thematic analysis is being recorded as linear below, the researcher found the process iterative and reflective and would move back and forth between the phases to continue to develop a more cohesive and in depth understanding of the derived themes. This also involved recording and questioning the researcher's assumptions which are being drawn on when interpreting, coding and creating themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Step 1: Familiarisation with data

Firstly, the researcher sought to fully become immersed in the data to acquire a comprehensive understanding of all the data that was provided in the interviews. This was done by listening to the audio recordings multiple times (at least three times), transcribing each interview verbatim, re-reading each transcription several times and initially making notes of first impressions and recording these by hand on printed copies of the transcript (see Appendix L).

Step 2: Generation of initial codes

Once the familiarisation process was completed by the researcher, the researcher reviewed transcripts and used NVivo software to generate the initial codes for each transcript, partly by transferring codes from the annotated copies of transcripts but also noting down any new ideas (QSR international, 2015). These initial codes were detailed to ensure that the context was clear to any reader reading the code (please see Appendix M for an example). The researcher found it more helpful to code all four transcripts independently to continue the process of fully immersing themselves in understanding the data.

At this stage in the process, all the codes were purely inductive and aimed to capture the semantic meaning of the data rather than apply a pre-existing framework (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The codes were then reviewed so that codes that were semantically identically, were consolidated to ensure that there was no repetition in the initial codes.

For RQ2, the researcher returned to the original transcripts to re-code the data deductively in line with Prince Embury's (2006, 2007) three factor model of resiliency by uploading the three broad codes (Mastery, Relatedness and Emotional Reactivity) into the software. Examples of coded transcripts are shown in Appendix K.

For RQ3, the relevant parts of the interview which directly addressed this research question were initially coded under a broad code in readiness for the next stage in thematic analysis (see Appendix K).

Step 3: Searching for themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2013) themes should have a "central organising concept" which is different to a code, that captures one idea (p.224). For RQ1, the researcher continued to use NVivo to group the initial codes into tentative themes, at times also writing out quotes on paper to delve deeper with the language used by participants (Appendix N). Due to the small number of participants, whilst frequency played an important part in grouping the codes and generating themes, frequency of notions was not used as the only indicator of themes but instead saliency analysis was used so that data that was

considered of theoretical importance (unrelated to the level of frequency in the data) was also included in the grouping of themes. At the end of this process, the researcher created a list of themes and subthemes for each research question.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

At this stage, the themes were reviewed to ensure that they were coherent and they were distinct to each other. The themes were then reviewed with regards to their respective research questions and consequently some themes were merged whilst other themes were broken down further. Further, the researcher used time within supervision to make further revisions to the themes with the Director of Studies. Finally, the researcher re-read the full interview transcripts to ensure that additional relevant data had not been missed in relation to each of these themes. Thematic maps were created for each of the three research questions and were revised into their final forms. The final thematic maps are illustrated in the findings chapter.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

Defining and naming themes was an ongoing process which took place as the researcher continued to reflect on the thematic maps and the supporting data. Some of these themes were revised after discussion with the researcher's Director of Studies and also in light of the language that was used by the participants to accurately reflect the language that was used. The final themes, as stated above, are illustrated in the findings chapter.

Step 6: Producing the report

The final outcome for the thematic analysis is to report the findings according to each research question. The report was structured by presenting thematic maps (including smaller subsections of the overall thematic map) for each research question. A selection of extracts was used from the data to add context and evidence the varying points identified with regards to the research questions.

The findings of the thematic analysis will be detailed in the next chapter.

3.10 Inter-rater reliability

Due to the challenging nature of coding, coding of data is recommended to be corroborated across two or more individuals to ensure that the codes reflect the data (Yardley, 2007). Various extracts of the coded transcripts were shared through the period of analysis with the researcher's Director of Studies who has had prior experience with the process of thematic analysis as outlined above.

3.11 Validity and Trustworthiness Issues

One way in which researchers can evidence to themselves and readers that their research findings reflect integrity, is through trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Guba (1981) introduced four criteria to increase trustworthiness and demonstrate rigour in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The researcher considered all four criteria in

addition to engaging in reflexivity, to acknowledge the researcher's role in the research.

Credibility

Credibility seeks to establish how congruent the findings are with reality due to highly subjective nature of data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was given credence to in several ways: ensuring to ask clarifying questions or provide summaries during interviews to check that a shared understanding had been reached with the participant; pausing long enough in interviews to allow the participant to pursue their trails of thoughts to ensure that topics were addressed fully; having regular supervision and arranging time for peer scrutiny to ensure that the design of the research was evaluated by others to address potential issues; establishing a research journal to keep a record of decisions made and reflections and prolonged engagement with the data to ensure that the researcher has become deeply familiar with the data (Stahl & King, 2020).

Transferability

As the current study is a qualitative study with a small number of participants (a key limitation), the researcher does not seek to generalise the findings to all adopted young people but hopes that findings, particular from a strength-based perspective, can enhance our understanding of what helps adopted young people in education. Therefore, to allow readers to judge the transferability of the findings of this study to similar contexts, the researcher recorded clear detailed information about the participants including their geographical location,

the methodology, an example of one fully transcribed transcript has been included in the appendices in addition to details of the number and length of these interviews (Creswell, 2007; Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

In place of reliability, for a qualitative study, dependability is an important measure which seeks for data collection to be consistent and the research process to be repeatable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This was addressed by the researcher by providing detailed information on the research design and method and by reflecting on the decisions made throughout data collection and analysis (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to as getting close to the objective reality of qualitative research (Stahl & King, 2020). To enable some objectivity and audit the researcher kept a research journal which kept a log of regular reflections to ensure that the researcher was acknowledging their own beliefs, assumptions and biases in order to avoid having these impact on the interpretation of data (please see Appendix O for an example).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is defined as "the researcher's ability to be able to self-consciously refer to him or herself in relation to the production of knowledge about research

topics" (Roulston, 2010), p 116). Therefore, by engaging in reflexivity, the researcher can explore their positionality (i.e. gender identity, race, ethnicity, age, language, culture) and how it constructs knowledge. The researcher used their research journal throughout the research process to record engagement with reflexive thinking and to therefore enhance the trustworthiness of the current study.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The researcher fully considered and adhered to appropriate guidelines (e.g. BPS Ethics and Code of Conduct) to ensure that ethical considerations pertaining to the current study were explored, as is discussed below. Ethical approval was provided for this research by University of East London's Ethics Committee (Appendix E).

3.12.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with information on how their data would be anonymised, kept confidential and stored securely. Participants consented to two audio recordings of their video-conferencing interviews (one of which served as a backup on a separate device should the primary recording device fail). To maintain anonymity, the young person's name, any other names that were mentioned of other persons and names of places that were shared with the researcher, were anonymised after the interviews were transcribed and then stored on a password protected computer. Following successful transcription and data analysis, the researcher destroyed the original recordings

as outlined in the ethical approval, leaving only fully anonymised transcripts. Any additional personal details that had been gathered from the participant to conduct the interviews i.e. skype usernames were also destroyed as soon as the interview has been completed.

Participants consented to their anonymised transcripts to be kept for three years to enable the research to be published. These will be stored securely in electronic form under a password protected document on an encrypted memory stick stored in a locked file at the researcher's home. The researcher explained to the participants that if the University of East London requested to look at the interview transcripts, they will not have access to any information that would identify the participants or any information relating to them, for example the name of teachers or schools.

Participants were informed that confidentiality would only be breached if the researcher was concerned for the safety of the participant or someone else.

3.12.2 Protection from harm

Protection from harm was essential for the researcher to consider when conducting research with a vulnerable group of people. There is a possibility that by asking adopted young people to reflect on their experiences, this could lead to a recollection of traumatic experiences. To ensure that participants left the interview in a positive state, a positive psychology approach was used during the interview using a solution focused and appreciative inquiry approach, which also led to the researcher summarising the strengths and skills of the participant

which were demonstrated whilst they shared their experiences. The researcher

has also had previous experiencing in speaking with vulnerable young people

and therefore used careful and thoughtful listening and communication skills

when speaking with participants in addition to regular check ins during the

interview where the participant was reminded of the right to not answer

questions or to terminate their involvement should they wish to change their

mind.

Time was also allocated to fully debrief the participants ensuring that any

concerns that they had were addressed. All four participants were positive about

their involvement in the study and were happy with the conduct of the interview.

Support agencies were outlined in the researcher's debrief letter to also help

provide further support should the participant require it. The researcher also

sought consent to follow up the interview with an email one week after the

interview as an additional measure to ensure participants did not require any

further support.

3.12.3 Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw

Participants were provided with a comprehensive Information Sheet (Appendix

G) and a Consent Form (Appendix I), of which a copy of their signed consent

form was requested prior to their interview. To ensure participants were fully

informed, the researcher reviewed the consent form with the participant at the

beginning of their interview. Participants were offered the opportunity to seek

clarification and ask the researcher any further questions at the beginning and

during the course of the interview.

The consent form provided asked participants to sign if they have understood the information sheet, considered the information and had all questions answered to their satisfaction. It outlined the voluntary nature of the research and informed them of their right to withdraw at any time up to the point of three weeks after their interview, without providing a reason, this would mean any data collected would be destroyed immediately on request. Lastly, participants were asked to sign to agree that they had understood how the data will be anonymised and securely kept.

The adopted young people who participated in this research were aged 17 to 23 years. For the participant aged 17 years old, written consent was provided by their parent for the young person to participate in this research in addition to the young person's consent.

3.12.4 Debriefing and Duty of Care

Participants were fully de-briefed and informed of the true nature of the research before taking part in the research. Participants were again debriefed immediately after the interview and provided with a debrief letter (Appendix J) that summarised the research aims, reminded them of how their data will be stored and kept and the period in which they can withdraw their data. The researcher explained to the participants that discussing past educational experiences is an emotive topic and should they have any concerns, they should contact the researcher. The researcher also signposted the participants to support services should they require further support e.g. Adoption UK, in addition to a complaints procedure to safeguard them from any malpractice. The

researcher also felt a duty of care to follow up with each interviewee

approximately via one week after the interview to ensure that they had no

further concerns; each interviewee provided consent for this and welcomed it.

3.13 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology and data collection including the

researcher's philosophical stance that underlies this research; the outline of the

semi-structured interviews; the process of thematic analysis; details of validity

and trustworthiness in addition to the ethical considerations exercised by the

researcher has also been discussed. The next chapter will present the findings

of the thematic analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings and analysis

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an analytic narrative of the findings following the inductive and deductive thematic data analysis of all four of the adopted young people's interviews. Thematic maps have been constructed based on the interpretation of the findings in response to the relevant research questions; there are three thematic maps, each of which address each of the three research questions. Each thematic map is followed by a detailed description of the themes, subsequent subthemes and sub-sub-themes with supporting quotes from the participants to expand and evidence the analysis process.

The findings will be presented according to the research questions that were outlined in the previous chapter due to the different type of analysis that was implemented for these research questions.

The final chapter (chapter five) will describe further how the findings relate to the research literature on this topic.

4.2 Summary of themes from Thematic Map 1: What are the positive educational experiences of adopted young people?

With respect to RQ1 '*What are the positive educational experiences of adopted young people?*' data analysis of the four research transcripts generated six overarching themes, twenty subthemes, and six sub-sub themes. The major themes for RQ1 are illustrated in the figure below:
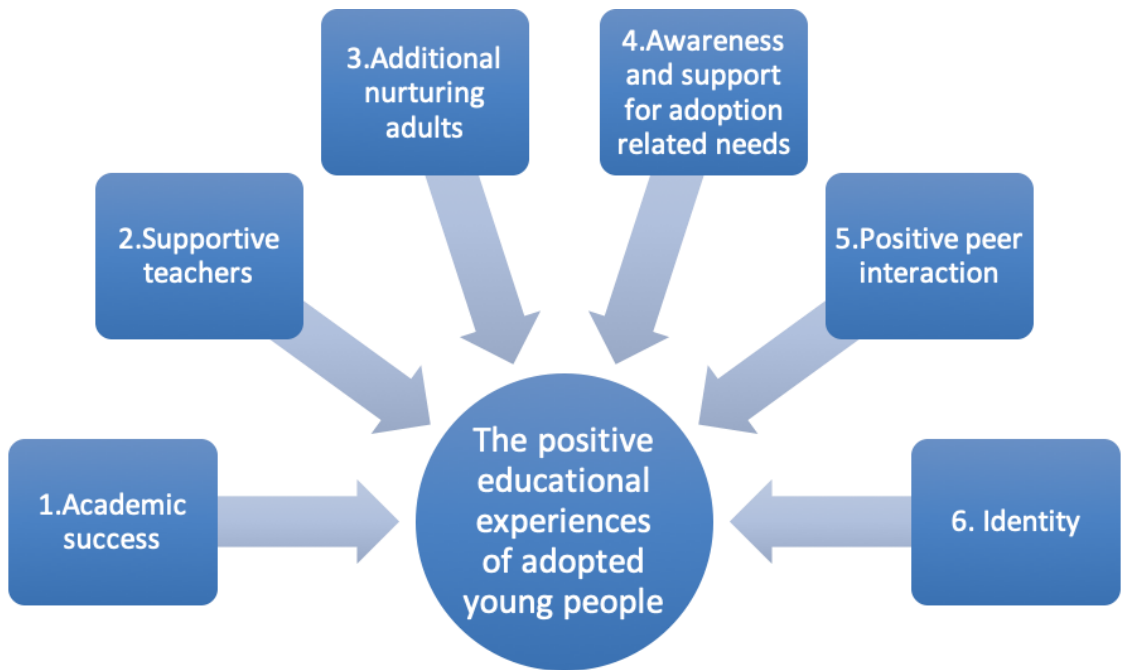
Figure 2: Thematic map depicting the major themes identified for the positive educational experiences of adopted young people.

4.2.1   Major theme 1: Academic Success
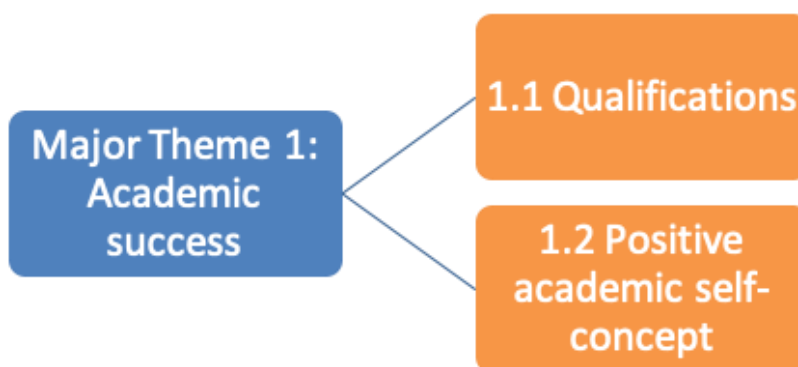
Figure 2.1: Thematic map depicting Major theme 1: Academic success.

This major theme was developed to reflect the adopted young people's positive educational experiences of academic success which was salient in all the adopted young people's interviews. Two subthemes were identified within this overarching theme in which adopted young people spoke about the 'qualifications' (subtheme 1.1) that they were able to obtain as well as how their educational experiences contributed to the development of their 'positive academic self-concept' (subtheme 1.2).

4.2.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Qualifications

Half of the participants made direct references to the qualifications that they had obtained during their school experience as a positive aspect of their educational experiences, with one participant emphasising her performance in a national standardised exam in which she performed beyond expectations.

> *"I got my GCSE in Maths. I wasn't predicted to get a GCSE in Maths,"* (Garnet).

4.2.1.2 Subtheme 1.2 Positive academic self-concept

Most of the participants described how their educational experiences impacted positively on their increasing confidence in their intellect and their ability to achieve, otherwise defined as the development of positive academic self-concept:

> *"Yes (there's been a positive impact) because it's also made me realise that I can achieve things. That I actually am smart because I never felt like I was intelligent. I never felt like I- that I was actually able to, I don't know even go on to do A Levels. Like I didn't think I was smart enough to do A Levels. It's given me confidence in my intellect,"* (Emerald).

Arguably, having a positive academic self-concept is crucial for optimal academic success (Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017). Discussion of the importance of positive academic self-concept is further expanded on in Chapter 5.

One participant demonstrated positive academic self-concept despite her learning needs:

> *"My learning? Pretty good. I've got dyslexia and dyspraxia so I struggled throughout the years but I've been pretty good with learning and I've always been quite self-motivated in getting work done and trying to get best results I can,"* (Ruby).

The importance of performing well academically in education as well as having confidence in their academic ability is a key positive educational experience for this group of adopted young people.

4.2.2   Major theme 2: Supportive teachers
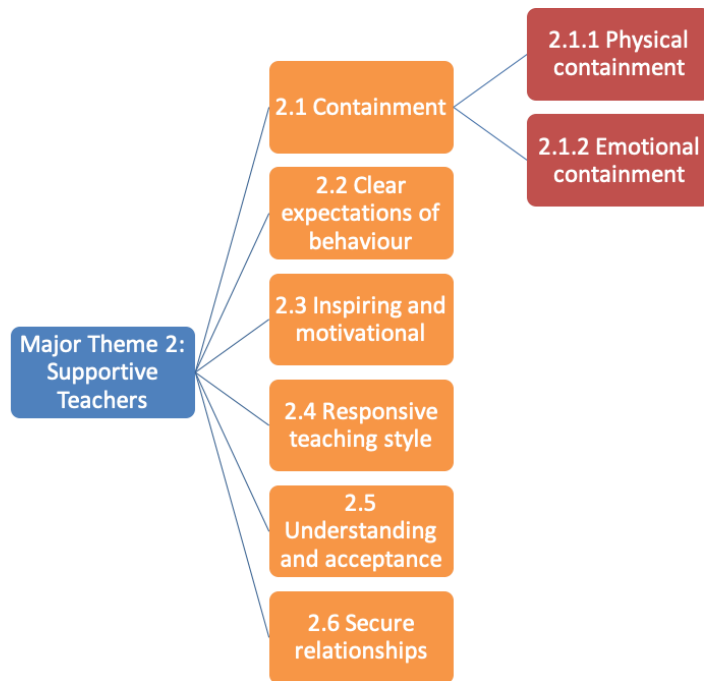
Figure 2.2: Thematic map depicting Major theme 2: Supportive teachers.

Supportive teachers were a significant major theme for all four participants who spoke at length about teachers that were instrumental in contributing to their positive educational experiences. Due to the richness of information gathered, six further subthemes were identified in addition to two sub-sub themes within this major theme. They will be discussed accordingly below.

4.2.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Containment

'Containment' is one of the subthemes that has been identified to describe the way in which teachers supported their adopted young people. Containment, originally introduced by Wilfred Bion in 1962, can be defined as the provision of an emotionally protective and caring safe space created by the teacher wherein

they successfully support the adopted young people to explore, express and manage difficult emotions (Bion, 1962). Three of the four participants described moments in which they felt 'contained' by their teacher and there was a distinct difference in this support being delivered through 'physical' means such as touch or through offering 'emotional' support.

4.2.2.1.1 Sub-sub-theme 2.1.1 Physical Containment

One participant described the physical containment she received when starting a new school after being adopted out of care which enabled her to feel held and protected whilst she experienced complex emotions:

> *"It was really scary because I was six and people sort of already had friends. I remember coming to school …it was a really small school…so everyone sort of knew each other really well…And on my first day I was sat on my teachers lap while she did the register. I think yeah, that helped, I settled in really quick at primary school,"* (Sapphire).

Physical containment here did not seek to remove the adopted young person from a challenging situation, instead, the teacher helped the adopted young person to feel safe as she encountered a challenging experience.

4.2.2.1.2 Sub-sub-theme 2.1.2 Emotional Containment

Two adopted young people spoke about how key members of staff ensured that they were available to provide consistent emotional support regardless of the complexity of the emotions that the young people experienced:

Positively, the roles of the staff varied from being the class teacher, class teaching assistant and the head of year suggesting that this was an important skill that was demonstrated by school staff who held different roles in the school.

An important positive theme was for adopted young people to be able to access emotional support from a trusted adult when needed and strategies, such as notes being written in student planners to enable students to leave the classroom during lessons was a huge help:

> *"Other than just being there all the time and you know I mean I know that she is a very busy person, but she was always there for me when I needed her. If I needed to go out of one lesson to go and see her, then you know I would get out of the lesson,"* (Garnet).

4.2.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Clear expectations of behaviour

For one participant, she reflected on how a class teacher would ensure that there were clear expectations of behaviour in the classroom which included clear consequences (e.g. being told to leave the classroom) in place for children who engaged in negative behaviours. This appeared to work effectively as a

deterrent for other students and also helped motivate the adopted young person

to ensure she completed her homework:

> *"He wouldn't take shit from no-one. He was like, you know, if*
>
> *something happened, he'd be like 'Get out the room!' He'd go and talk*
>
> *to them and scare the shit out of them and then they'd come back and*
>
> *they would be like 'I'm sorry'… Well he scared me enough to make me*
>
> *do my homework so,"* (Garnet).

4.2.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Inspiring and motivational

For one participant, teachers who were inspiring and motivating in their

approach helped support her to feel optimistic about her own learning:

> *"But whenever my weird music teacher would go on his rants about*
>
> *things. He would just teach his lesson, but he would have these like*
>
> *starry eyes that were just so inspiring and so the way he talked about*
>
> *it. It was like I don't know, just lovely. It just made me feel so uplifted*
>
> *and so optimistic,"* (Emerald).

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of why inspiring and motivational

teachers can have such a positive impact on adopted young people would be

an interesting area to further explore.

4.2.2.4 Subtheme 2.4: Responsive teaching style

An important subtheme that was highlighted by two of the participants is the description of ways in which class teachers used a 'responsive teaching style' whereby they adapted their teaching to support the individual needs for the adopted young people in their class. The adopted young people in this study cited a variety of approaches that were used to help meet their needs at the time, examples of which included, explicit teaching strategies, engaging and working with the young person's interests as well as understanding when the adopted young person would prefer to work alone instead of with a partner:

> *"She's one of those people that understood me to a point. She tried to give me work that I understood and that kind of worked with what I wanted to do more than anything…Well she always she'd give me topics to do with animals…She'd give me like the snapshot in time because I'm a huge photographer and stuff,"* (Garnet).

4.2.2.5 Subtheme 2.5: Understanding and acceptance

Three of the four adopted young people spoke about feeling understood and being accepted by teachers at their educational settings which contributed to their positive experiences of education. For one adopted young person, these were shared values amongst all teaching staff in their secondary school suggesting that understanding and accepting students was integral to the school's ethos:

> *"I think that I was always very fortunate in the school that I went to, well it's the secondary school anyway because they were all so accepting and so understanding,"* (Emerald).

For another adopted young person, a college teacher demonstrated various skills in building rapport with the adopted young person which led to a successful positive relationship and enabled the adopted young person to feel understood:

> *"So, I learnt a lot from my college teacher actually. She was a pastry chef. And she was great and she really understood me and she had horses and you know we were able to talk and get things done,"* (Garnet).

4.2.2.6 Subtheme 2.6: Secure relationships

Three of the four adopted young people defined some of their relationships with teachers to be secure in nature, with one adopted young person proudly sharing that she was still very much held in mind by staff at school:

> *"Even now they still ask after me. I know that when my brother was at school, they would ask him how I was,"* (Garnet).

4.2.3   Major theme 3: Other nurturing adults
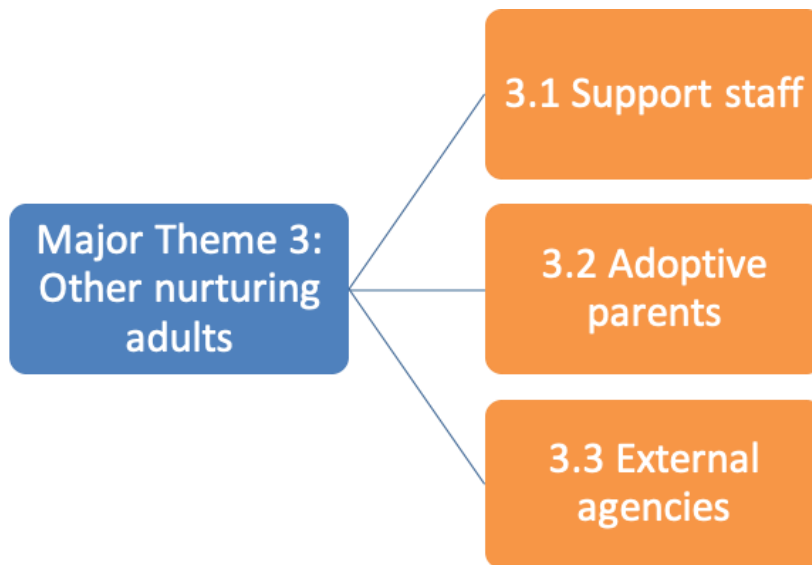
Figure 2.3: Thematic map depicting Major theme 3: Other nurturing adults.

All four adopted young people highlighted the role of additional nurturing adults who played a significant role in contributing to their positive educational experiences. Within this third major theme of "Other nurturing adults," three subthemes were identified to align with the three types of roles that these adults held in adopted young people's lives: "support staff;" "adoptive parents' and "external agencies."

4.2.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Support staff

The adopted young people identified support staff who either held roles within various pastoral care teams in their educational settings (including a Care Leavers team at a university); or even more interestingly, supported students during their meal times in their role as midday supervisors.

For one of the adopted young people, the support provided was on a weekly

basis at their secondary setting:

> *"I went for a weekly session and an hour support…I could talk to her*
>
> *about if I was having issues with someone and she might talk through*
>
> *method for me trying to cope with it or saying let's go and talk to this*
>
> *member of staff who should hopefully manage the kids who are*
>
> *bullying you or whatever and even in the week it was out of session I*
>
> *could just go and talk to her and then I wouldn't get angry towards*
>
> *students and be able to vent it out to her,"* (Ruby).

The same young person received support at their college setting, and although

this was shorter in duration, the weekly check in continued to be of help:

> *"I've got a weekly thing for about 5-10 minutes to catch up with a*
>
> *pastoral support person at College, which has been really helpful,"*
>
> (Ruby).

For one participant, the support that they were offered from the Care Leavers

team at their university was appreciated:

> *"I had an email from the, well a couple of calls from this team who*
>
> *deals with care leavers…this lady in that team she organised like a*
>
> *sort of every few months there was like a coffee morning for care*
>
> *leavers and stuff like that. I felt kind of guilty that I wanted to use that*
>
> *service because I'm not really a care leaver. There's a lot of people*

> *that leave care at eighteen and I obviously didn't do that so I feel like*
>
> *I'm in a much better position than other people but it was still really*
>
> *nice though that that's there,"* (Sapphire).

4.2.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Adoptive parents

All adopted young people were united in their views of their adoptive parents as key adults whose support was instrumental in their positive experiences of education. The role that adoptive parents played was multiple and varied, whether that was to be the adopted young person's greatest advocate, provide pragmatic support which supported adopted young people to address problems that would arise at school, or to provide continued encouragement to help adopted young people feel that they are capable in being successful in their education"

> *"She's (mum) kind of been more like 'Come on you can do it!' It's just*
>
> *her probably has made me realise that I can achieve things or that I*
>
> *am capable of yeah… A good family network. I would say and my*
>
> *mom and my dad love me so much and my granny and all. And them,*
>
> *just having them has been very helpful for me, getting me through*
>
> *school,"* (Emerald).

For one adopted young person, it was clear that the support from her adoptive mother was viewed as equally important as the support from staff at school:

"I've found that the most helpful thing for me has been knowing that I've got a

supportive Mum back here and to have the support of the tutors that I had the

support of to be able to escape from situations and go and see a tutor,"
(Garnet).

Two adopted young people talked about the positive impact of the pragmatic support that their adoptive mothers provided. For one adopted young person, the impact of both of her adoptive mothers' support was felt at a whole school level:

> *"I think my mum discussed it with my social worker the time about how I had been struggling, I think they were trying and my mums as well were trying to find solutions. Yeah, because it had been an issue because my school had suggested anger management for me and I think they're really not grasping that it's about adoption so my social worker offered for social workers to give some training and so they did then understand mostly,"* (Ruby).

For the second adopted young person, her adoptive mother supported her by making helpful suggestions that supported the adopted young person to build a new meaningful friendship:

> *"I just didn't really feel like I belonged in the friendship sort of circle that I had and there was this girl in my class who seemed to be quite similar to me but we were both really shy. And I remember coming home and talking to my mum and being upset about not being able to talk to her and she told me that I should go to school and invite her to go to this after school club with me. And I remember doing that and*

> *just being super proud that I did it and she did come and we ended up*
>
> *being really good friends,"* (Sapphire).

4.2.3.3 Subtheme 3.3: External agencies

One adopted young person spoke about the significance of the support that she received from counsellors during her schooling which suggests that external agencies can also play an important role in supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of adopted young people during their schooling journey. School counsellors are an example of external professionals who can provide their support within the school setting:

> *"I didn't really have any extra help throughout school. I mean, I was*
>
> *quite sort of academic so I didn't really need any extra help. Except for,*
>
> *I did use the school counsellor. I guess she was an adult that was*
>
> *quite important at school. It was less for adoption things. It was more*
>
> *for just school life and how it can be a bit tricky sometimes. But yeah,*
>
> *she was really important,"* (Sapphire).

Sapphire further highlights the importance of a walk-in policy for school based counsellors which helped her to manage her anxieties about seeking support: *"But if you're not struggling with academic stuff, it's really hard to talk to them (teachers). So, having people there and also not having to book an appointment with the school counsellor because it's really scary to, it's just much easier to walk in then to book one and then think about it for the next few days and you'll worry about it,"*

(Sapphire).

External agencies however are often based outside of school and Sapphire had

a positive experience in which her college demonstrated "an openness to

therapy and stuff" and accommodated her private therapy sessions by "let(ing)

me leave" (Sapphire).

4.2.4   Major theme 4: Awareness and support for adoption related needs
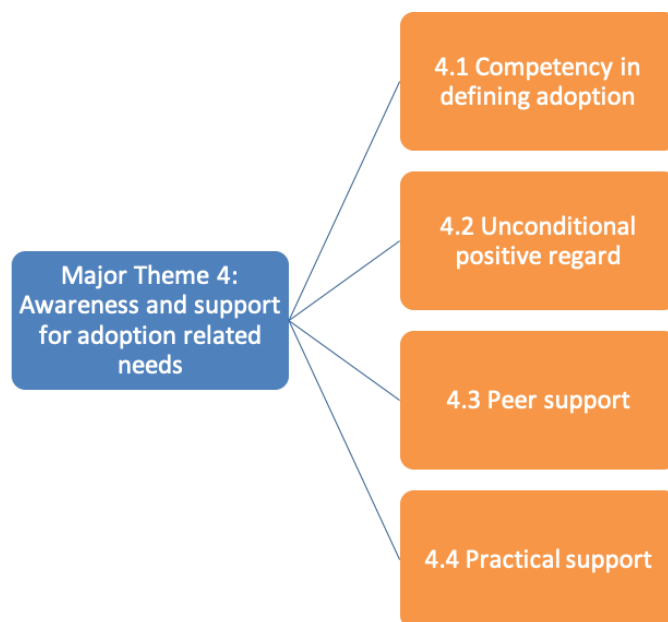
Figure 2.4: Thematic map depicting Major theme 4: Awareness and support for

adoption related needs.

All four adopted young people raised the importance of awareness and support

for their adoption related needs as a major theme. Four sub-themes were

further identified when analysing the ways in which this support was delivered:

"competency in defining adoption;" "empathy"; "peer support" and "practical support."

4.2.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Competency in defining adoption

A salient memory for one adopted young person was centred around a positive experience of her class teacher who explained what adoption meant to the adopted young person's class in an appropriate manner when an opportunity arose to do so:

> *"At primary school we had circle time where we had to share and bring something in…Yeah and I took in my teddy bear that I got given from my mum and dad now when we first moved in with them. And so I took that in not really realising when I was like eight years old that that would provoke a lot of questions. And so I remember sort of saying that I got this when I was adopted and there being one hundred questions from the children about what adoption was. What does that mean? And I remember asking my teacher then if she could help me explain what it meant because I didn't I mean I knew what it meant but it's quite hard. I mean I didn't really know what it meant. Well, she explained in sort of appropriate terms for that age group. I mean you can't explain everything. What it was and then sort of move the conversation back onto the teddy bear which I was talking about. Rather than sort of focusing massively on. Yes, but just to explain it and then move on and that's fine. I think that's kind of what was appropriate at the time,"* (Sapphire).

97

This recollection also highlights how challenging it can be for adopted young people, particularly when they are children, to be placed in a position to explain to other children and young people what adoption means.

4.2.4.2   Subtheme 4.2: Unconditional positive regard

Unconditional positive regard can be simply defined as expressing support, empathy and acceptance of an individual, no matter what they say or do (Rogers ,1957). All four adopted young people describe ways in which they were treated with unconditional positive regard when supported by school staff with their adoption related needs in their educational settings.

For one adopted young person, she described a time in which her negative behaviour did not dissuade a member of staff from continuing to build a relationship with her:

> *"Well I had an amazing TA when I was in my first year at primary school because I really struggled going into school because of the attachment issues and despite me being really horrible towards her, she stayed there…she just made sure she was there throughout the day,"* (Ruby).

Another adopted young person described teachers showing kindness and felt that knowledge of her adoption background helped contribute to this:

"On the whole the majority of teachers and the teachers that did know me and that did like me and they were lovely and were very accepting and very kind but I think it really helped because my mom told all the teachers, you know about my background and about my history. So they had that understanding that if I was being different or behaving differently from any of the other students. It wasn't me misbehaving, I was just different," (Emerald).

For another adopted young person, she described the support she received from her class teacher following a time in which she challenged another student during a religious studies lesson about adoption:

"she (the girl) said something about adoption that I can't really remember what it was now but I knew that it wasn't true. I hadn't really told anyone in the class before that I was adopted but I put my hand up and I said, oh I'm adopted and actually that's not quite right and it was really terrifying. I remember being absolutely terrified about doing that. But yeah, he (the teacher) was really supportive and he sort of didn't really say much at the time because I think he didn't want to point me out and sort of put me on the spot. But I think he sent me an email afterwards and it just said that I was very brave and if I ever wanted to discuss it in more depth or anything, then I was welcome to in the class or out of the class. So that was really good," (Sapphire).

4.2.4.3   Subtheme 4.3: Peer Support

For two adopted young people, it was very important to them to highlight the support that they received from peers in relation to their adoption needs.

For one adopted young person, having a friend who recognised that her feelings of anger were related to her past experiences helped them to form a secure friendship:

> *"I think he really accepted the adoption and the fact anger wasn't completely my fault and stuff,"* (Ruby).

For another adopted young person, she describes the intuitive support that she received from her friends:

> *"My friends sort of didn't do stuff like going and telling everybody that I was adopted because there's a reason I choose certain people to tell. And obviously when I had days where I was struggling with it or with something related just to be supportive I think yeah,"* (Sapphire).

4.2.4.4   Subtheme 4.4: Practical support

A significant subtheme was the varied practical support, often small and easily executed ideas, that school staff provided to adopted young people in relation to their adoption needs which helped adopted young people to cope with significant challenges related to their adoption history and needs.

One member of school staff recognised that the adopted young person required a safe and contained passage around school to help her manage her anxieties about being in crowds:

> *"Well I really struggle with crowds so she suggested using the back stairwell for example,"* (Ruby).

For another adopted young person, a class teacher acted swiftly to help the adopted young person avoid having difficult conversations with others about why her first name had been changed:

> *"I think one of the biggest struggles I had that was that my real name wasn't really Sapphire, it's X. And when I moved in with my family now I started using my middle name, which is Sapphire. But it was never legally changed so in school everything was always still X. It was really hard explaining to people why that was. So, one of the first things that the teacher did was to get my name changed on all the registers,"* (Sapphire).

4.2.5   Major theme 5: Positive peer interaction
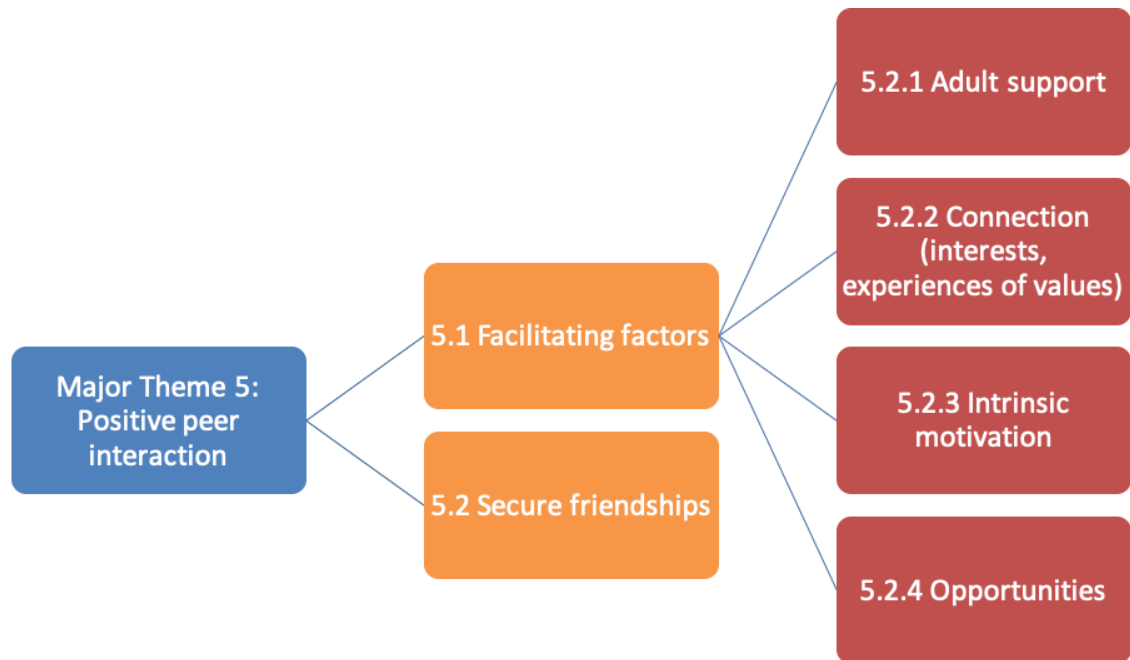
Figure 2.5: Thematic map for Major theme 5: Positive peer interaction.

Another key significant major theme that was identified as a key contributor to the positive educational experiences for all adopted young people were their experiences of positive peer interactions. Within this major theme, two subthemes were identified: the 'facilitating factors' which encouraged positive peer interactions to take place and the presence of 'secure friendships,' which had been developed by some of these adopted young people.

4.2.5.1   Subtheme 5.1: Facilitating factors

Four further sub-sub themes were identified for the subtheme 'facilitating factors' to encapsulate the different factors which supported the development of positive peer interactions. This included the direct support of adults; how adopted young people built connections with their peers; the intrinsic motivation

of adopted young people and the opportunities that were made available to them.

4.2.5.1.1 Sub-sub theme 5.1.1: Adult support

Direct intervention from adults helped two adopted young people to initiate interaction with other children, both of which led to the development of secure friendships:

> *"Yeah she (learning mentor) also works with another girl that she thought I might get on with. So she like introduced us to each other so now we get on and talk,"* (Ruby).

It is important to recognise that the adults who supported did not necessarily have to be a key adult from the educational setting, but could also be a parent, as was the experience of one adoptee.

4.2.5.1.2 Sub-sub theme 5.1.2: Connection (interests, experiences or values)

All four adopted young people described ways in which they could connect with other young people throughout their schooling experience which enabled positive peer interactions.

Firstly, some of the adopted young people recalled having similar interests to their peers:

> *"We used to spend a lot of time together and there was this donkey that was in a field around the corner from her house and one day we both decided that we were going to try and rescue this donkey. So, we sat on a bed and drew out a plan and everything,"* (Garnet),

Secondly, some of the adopted young people recognised that they had shared experiences with another young person which formed the basis of their new friendship:

> *"I think the main person I made friends with exactly hadn't really had friends either and was being bullied quite a lot. So, I think for both of us it was a new thing of being friends,"* (Ruby).

For another adopted young person, there was a strong sense of sharing values with other young people which helped form a connection:

> *"I think the other students or the people that I was, I don't know friends with or had a good relationship with, it was just that they were kind people anywhere and they were understanding, and they were empathetic. But the ones that I could connect with, were just open minded. I think it comes to that, ultimately,"* (Emerald).

4.2.5.1.3 Sub-sub theme 5.1.3: Intrinsic motivation

Three of the adopted young people recognised that having the intrinsic motivation to initiate and build a relationship with others was also a key factor in supporting the development of friendships.

For one adopted young person, she reflects on the power of this:

> *"But I think putting yourself out there, for me, is something that I have had to work really hard to do and that is whenever you make friendships, but I find it very difficult for me to come out of my shell. But I think in the instances where I have done that, I have been very well received, people like me then,"* (Emerald).

Another adopted young person acknowledges that building friendships requires active participation to overcome potential barriers:

> *"I feel we both want friends so like it's like a good opportunity, we're both willing to work and stuff,"* (Ruby).

4.2.5.1.4 Sub-sub theme 5.1.4: Social opportunities

Another important sub-sub theme that was identified as a facilitating factor for positive peer interactions were the opportunities that adopted young people felt helped their interactions with other young people.

One adopted young person described the importance of having time to sit one to one with other young people:

> *"It was just it was always a more positive experience whenever it was just kind of one-on-one like I prefer sitting with one other person. Having lunch or something like that. Like that was nice,"* (Emerald).

For another adoptee, the opportunity to have 'free' time in her timetable whilst at college and university allowed her to explore her friendships with other young people:

> *"So obviously, you know in frees we did a lot of time socializing, it took me a long time to make friends but the friends I made in college and uni are sort of my best friends now,"* (Sapphire).

4.2.5.2 Sub theme 5.2: Secure friendships

Three of the four adopted young people discussed the development of secure friendships which they have been able to maintain until this point in time:

> *"Well, I did make some really.. I made a really good friend away from home at Uni which was very nice. We're still sort of very good friends,"* (Sapphire).

For one adopted young person, the development of secure friendships is a new and welcomed experience due to her painful past experiences:

"Yeah, definitely cos I'm making friends and not being bullied anymore and so it's almost like a couple of years ago that wouldn't have felt possible so I've spent most of my primary school bullied and most of my secondary school and it felt like it wouldn't have been no other way and now I do know it can be different," (Ruby).

4.2.6   Major theme 6: Identity
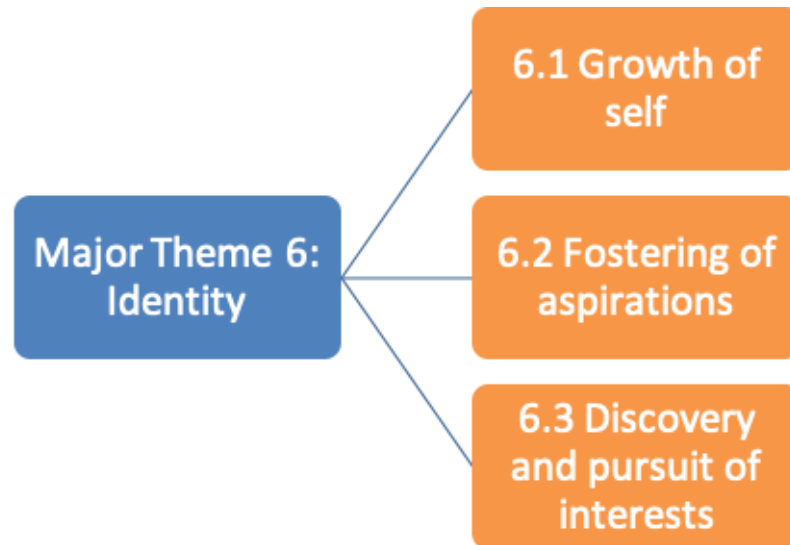
Figure 2.6: Thematic map for Major theme 6: Identity.

All four adopted young people reflected on the ways in which their educational experiences impacted positively on the development of aspects of their individual identities. This major theme of identity consists of three subthemes: growth of self, fostering of aspirations and discovery and pursuit of interests.

4.2.6.1 Subtheme 6.1: Growth of self

Three of the adopted young people reflected on ways in which their educational experiences helped them to learn and grow as individuals, contributing to a clearer and more coherent sense of self. Although each young person talked about their individual experiences, these areas of growth appear to link directly with their early life experiences as adoptees.

For one adopted young person, learning to accept themselves and beginning to develop trust in others was a positive outcome:

> *"Well a lot of it has just been me learning to be comfortable within myself and realising that not everybody is out to get me. For lack of a better,"* (Emerald).

For another young person, learning how to regulate their emotions and cope with difficult situations had a positive impact on them:

> *"I think I learned to walk away from situations I've struggled with over time. I think it helps a lot because it meant I didn't retaliate much and I kept a lot calmer which I think helped,"* (Ruby).

For another adoptee, there were several moments of internal growth throughout her educational journey which directly helped to re-shape her understanding of the world that had been previously impacted on by her early adverse experiences:

> *"I was a really shy child and I really hated getting things wrong because I thought something bad had happened if I got something wrong. Yeah, so just stuff like making mistakes in school and being told by teachers that it's okay. I don't think, you might not realise like people might not realise how important that it is to be told that it's okay to get things wrong and that's really helped long-term to know that it's okay to get things wrong and something terrible isn't going to happen because you made a mistake,"* (Sapphire).

Whilst some of these areas of learning were facilitated through positive experiences with adults in educational settings, friendships were instrumental in developing a new understanding of what a secure attachment could feel or look like in a relationship:

> *"So something that I had to learn with friends is that it's okay if you don't, they kind of taught me that you don't need to be with each other all the time. You don't need to be in contact all the time and you can, they'll still be remembering that you exist. Because I always used to think that if I didn't see someone for like a week, they would just forget that I was a human,"* (Sapphire).

4.2.6.2 Subtheme 6.2: Fostering of aspirations

Fostering aspirations was identified as an important subtheme and a key positive educational experience for two of the adopted young people; such

aspirations would ultimately lend itself to the development of clear goals that are an important aspect of a well-developed identity (Erik Homburger Erikson, 1980). One adopted young person talked about their aspirations to study a particular course at university after having just completed their A-levels; the second adopted young person spoke about future careers after having just completed their university degree. Both adoptees recognised the direct role that educational settings had on their aspirations, for example by helping them to explore their areas of interests and strengths:

> *"I would love to go to Queens (university) to do criminology, it would be quite cool or sociology. Like school taught me that I actually really like Sociology and that I was good at it and that I could excel in that. Like that would be one of the positive things I took from the whole thing,"* (Emerald).

For one adopted young person, their overall positive experiences in educational settings led to a strong desire to choose a related career:

> *"Well I always wanted to be a teacher. I think that's because I love school. But I don't want to be a teacher anymore because I don't think I can handle certain children anymore. But I actually want to be an academic librarian. So I would still want to be involved in school. And I think that's because I like school so much,"* (Sapphire).

4.2.6.3 Subtheme 6.3: Discovery and pursuit of interests

Three adopted young people identified how school experiences positively contributed to the discovery and pursuit of interests by providing opportunities to engage in non-curricular activities. Discovering interests is a key aspect of self-knowledge and can lead to young people finding opportunities to create more positive experiences for themselves as they pursue their areas of interests:

> *"I mean I can pick my camera up and I'd spend the day with my camera in my hand taking pictures of all the guys on the horses (at college),"* (Garnet).

4.3. Summary of themes from Thematic Map 2: Factors of resilience that are important to this group of adopted young people.

With respect to reporting findings for RQ2 (What are the factors of resilience that are important to this group of adopted young people?), a deductive thematic analysis using Prince-Embury's (2006, 2007) three factor model of resilience was conducted to identify factors of resilience that are important to this group of adopted young people. When determining the 'importance' of aspects of resilience for adopted young people, the researcher analysed life events which described aspects of resilience, as well as when participants highlighted the absence of aspects of resilience in their lives. This enabled the researcher to understand the importance or significance of aspects of resilience for each adopted young people in their respective journeys through education.

Data analysis led to the support for three major themes of resilience that have

been pre-identified by Prince-Embury (2006, 2007), in addition to ten sub-

themes and seven sub-sub themes (please see Figure 3 below).
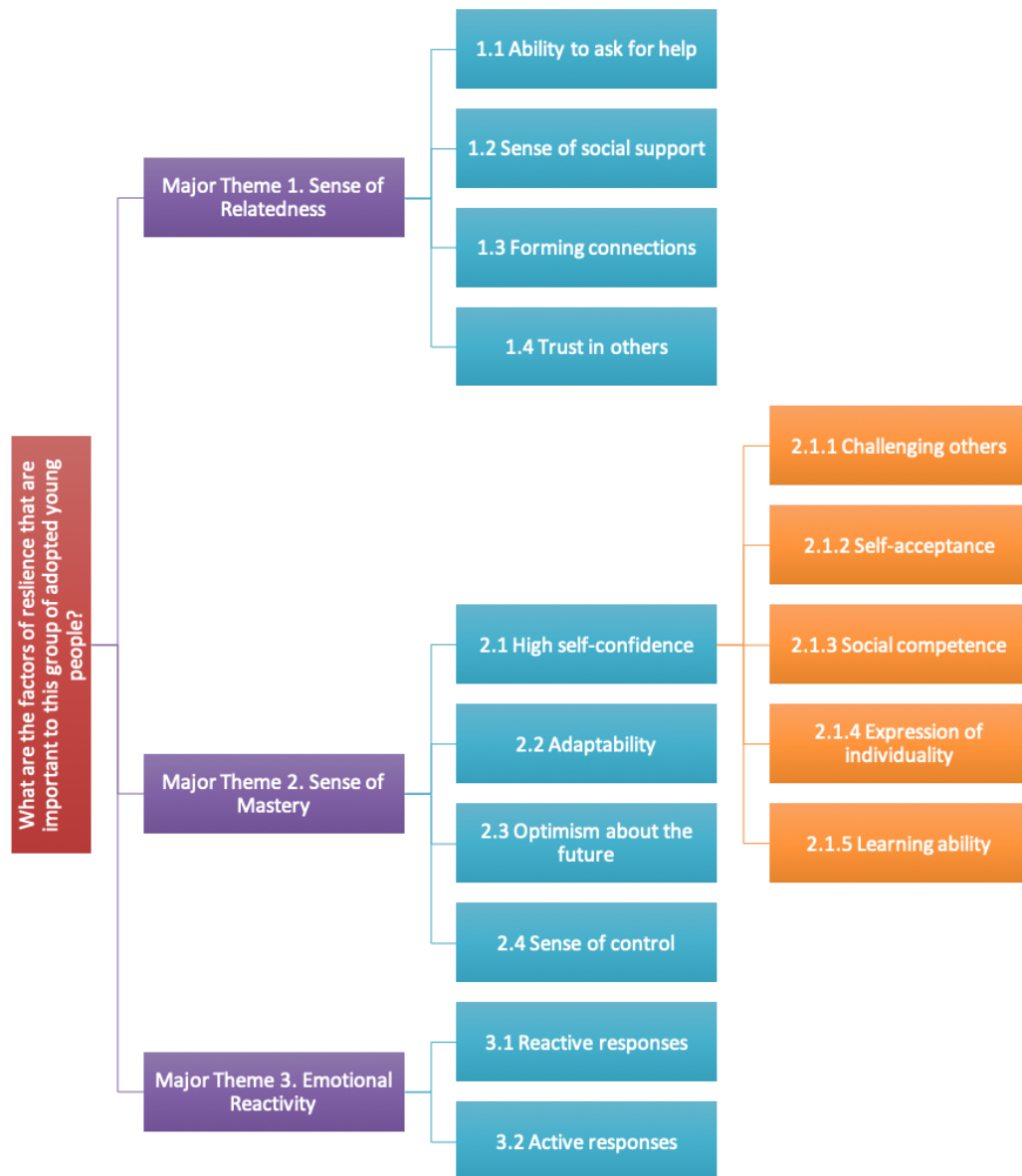
Figure 3: Thematic map depicting the themes for RQ2: Factors of resilience that

are important to this group of adopted young people.

4.3.1 Major theme 1: Sense of Relatedness

Figure 3.1: Thematic map depicting Major Theme 1: Sense of Relatedness.

Sense of relatedness is a factor of resilience defined by Prince-Embury (2006, 2007, 2013 and 2014) as a person's relation or connection to others around them. This major theme was broken down into three sub-themes which have been previously identified consistently in literature by Prince-Embury (2006, 2007, 2013 and 2014) such as an individual's ability to ask for help, their sense of social support and their ability to trust others. A fourth sub-theme was also identified which in effect embodies the central feature of relatedness: forming connections. The four subthemes are discussed in turn below.

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Ability to ask for help

All four participants spoke about their capacity to ask for help during their time in education. For three participants, they identified times in which they felt able to ask for help from school staff. Asking for help was not however limited to just seeking support from school staff, but also from adoptive mothers and help from

other professionals who offered their services within the school setting, for example, the school counsellor:

> *"I just sort of heard about them in school and people were always talking about them and tried to encourage people to use their services and I think I'd had like a bad falling out with a friend or something and I thought maybe I could talk to them about it,"* (Sapphire).

For the fourth participant, she reflected on her ability to ask for help at the time and spoke about missed opportunities: *"Think I didn't reach over to people whenever I could have,"* (Emerald).

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Sense of social support

For three of the four adopted young people, there were varying degrees of social support present in their educational experiences which was identified through the formation of secure friendships. The importance of this social support was reflected on in numerous ways: firstly, the way in which peer support can be seen as more important than that of support from adults at school settings: *"I think on the whole, I was more supported by peers,"* (Sapphire).

For one adopted young person, she described how she felt in response to forming her first secure friendship after years of experiencing great difficulties with peer support:

> *"I think it shows that you can find some people in the world and not to lose hope I think,"* (Ruby).

4.3.1.3 Subtheme 1.3 Forming connections

All four adopted young people talked about their ability to form connections with other young people. This varied from being able to physically connect with others through hugs, forming an emotional connection through shared feelings and thoughts, feeling connected even when physically apart. One adopted young person recalled fleeting moments of connection which took place despite an overwhelming feeling of difference for one of the adopted young people:

> *"I just felt really different and I find it very difficult to actually like properly connect to other students…But the ones that I could connect with, were just open minded,"* (Emerald).

Although the word 'connection' can be used interchangeable with the overarching theme of 'relatedness' as defined by Prince-Embury (2007), the importance of highlighting each adopted young person's ability to form connection with others was clearly a very important aspect for this group of young people as they recalled experiences about relating to others.

4.3.1.4 Subtheme 1.4 Trust in others

Unlike the previous sub-themes in which participants spoke mostly about their strengths in their ability to ask for help, their social support and moments of feeling connected; data analysis highlighted that having trust in others, a key

aspect of resilience, was an area that was less developed for all four adopted young people. For one participant, she explained this in the context of her early childhood experiences:

> *"I never really trusted adults too close to me and I never really liked to get too close to, when I was much younger, I never liked to get too close to people because I always thought people would leave… and adults especially I didn't like them too close to me and I didn't like to get adults angry because I thought that they might hurt me,"* (Sapphire).

For two other participants, their difficulties in trusting others were directly linked to their negative social experiences during their time in education:

> *"It (school) has probably made me a lot more introverted a lot more. I don't want to say I'm shy but it just makes me want to keep to myself more probably made me a lot more untrusting of people,"* (Emerald).

4.3.2 Major theme 2: Sense of Mastery
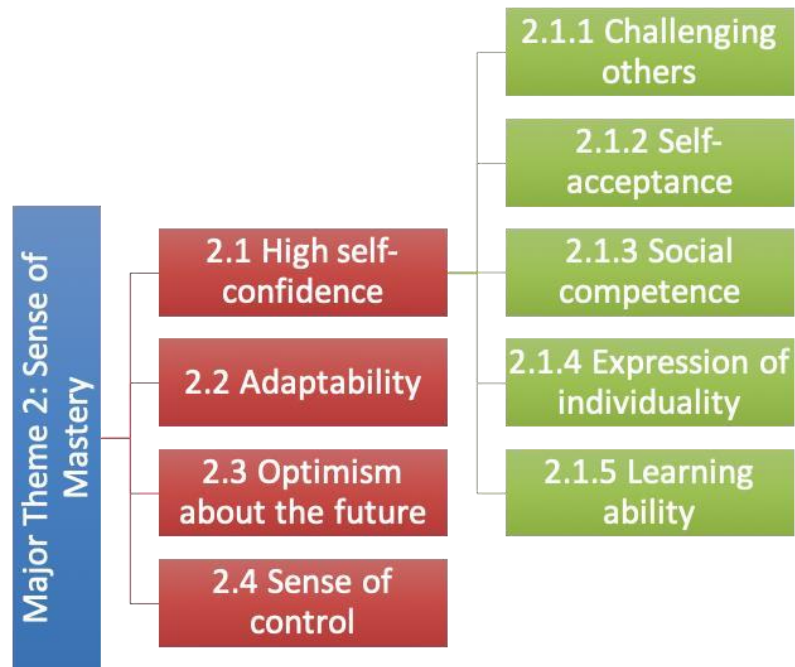
Figure 3.2: Thematic map of Major Theme 2: Sense of Mastery.

The second major construct of resiliency which individuals with high resiliency have in common, as proposed by Prince-Embury (2006, 2007), is a sense of mastery which encapsulates characteristics such as high self-confidence, being able to adapt to changes in a helpful manner and having a sense of optimism about the future (Prince-Embury, 2006, 2007, 2013, 2014). Data analysis has led to the identification of this major theme to consist of five sub-themes and five further sub-sub themes.

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: High self-confidence

All four adopted young people demonstrated high self-confidence, believing in themselves and their ability to achieve the things that want to in varying aspects of their life (Bandura, 1997) which has led to the identification of five sub-sub

themes which encapsulated different areas of self-confidence: challenging others, self-acceptance, social skills, expression of individuality and learning ability.

4.3.2.1.1 Sub-sub theme 2.1.1 Challenging others

One adopted young person demonstrated high self-confidence by recalling a time in which she challenged another young person during a lesson about adoption:

> *"..so we had a lesson on adoption and there was a girl ...she sort of put her hand up and said something about adoption that I can't really remember what it was now but I knew that it wasn't true. And I hadn't really told anyone in the class before that I was adopted but I put my hand up and I said, oh I'm adopted and actually that's not quite right,"* (Sapphire).

4.3.2.1.2 Sub-sub theme 2.1.2 Self-acceptance

For another adopted young person, self-acceptance, the act of embracing all facets of oneself, contributed to her high self-confidence in deciding whether or not her peers should know about her adoption status:

> *"Yeah I was happy for that to be open because I think quite a few are adopted but I almost think that I'd rather people know early on 'cos if they're not going to accept it then there's no point even trying to make*

relationships and it's gone all bad when adoption then ends up getting

in the way…I feel like that's always explained certain things about

me…it's still my present and it's my future," (Ruby).

4.3.2.1.3 Sub-sub theme 2.1.3 Social competence

For two adopted young people, there was a clear sense of high self-confidence in their social competence, which can be defined as a complex and interconnected set of skills that enables a person to navigate social interactions and initiate and maintain relationships with others (Stichter, O'Connor, Herzog, Lierheimer, & McGhee, 2012). For one adopted young person, social competence was always a great personal strength and she was able to build numerous secure friendships: *"I mean I'm quite sociable…I definitely made a lot of friends at school,"* (Sapphire).

For the second adopted young person, there was a significant turning point in her life in which she became more confident in her ability to develop relationships and this had a wider impact on her general wellbeing:

> *"I think especially college as it's such a short amount of time and the fact I'm happier, I'm now feeling like I can do stuff and get on with people better,"* (Ruby).

4.3.2.1.4 Sub-sub theme 2.1.4 Expression of individuality

A sub-sub theme further emerged from the data analysis regarding one young person's confidence in expressing their individuality, particularly in the face of potential social rejection.

One adopted young person talked about her hairstyle and how that could be perceived by others:

> *"Whatever way I had my hair because I had it shaved underneath and I still have it shaved underneath. But I would wear it up and I don't know… I think teachers would find if they didn't know me, that I had the potential to cause trouble or to be a trouble maker,"* (Emerald).

For the second adopted young person, she became confident in pursuing and talking about her hobbies which were considered outside of the 'norm' for her age group:

> *"I knew what my hobbies were and I wasn't ashamed to do those. Like I really liked sewing. So I used to go sewing, on Wednesday afternoons at sewing club and before I never would have told anyone that, because people think it's a bit weird for sort of a teenager,"* (Sapphire).

4.3.2.1.5 Sub-sub theme 2.1.5 Learning ability

A significant area of self-confidence for three of the adopted young people was in their learning ability. Whilst the adopted young people in this study

acknowledged the various challenges to their learning, all three participants

found confidence in their ability to learn:

> *"I've got dyslexia and dyspraxia so I struggled throughout the years but*
> *I've been pretty good with learning and I've always been quite self-*
> *motivated in getting work done and trying to get best results I can,"*
> (Ruby).

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Adaptability

A key sub-theme pre-identified by Prince-Embury (2006, 2007, 2013, 2014), is

the ability to adapt to new challenging circumstances in a positive way. This was

evident for two adopted young people, with one adopted young person

reflecting on how she overcame the challenges to her routine when she was

required to go on study leave to prepare for her GCSEs:

> *"As like the first time where there's been a major break in my routine,*
> *so I didn't have to go to school every day. Which I had been doing for*
> *years, but I needed a timetable and I had all my days planned out and*
> *I'm just feeling really yeah, on top of it,"* (Sapphire).

4.3.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Optimism about the future

Three of the adopted young people were optimistic about their future which was

specific to aspirations regarding further education or future careers.

Unsurprisingly, these three adopted young people were the very same individuals who were positive about their learning abilities as identified earlier in this analysis. For one adopted young person, a sense of hope and optimism was felt at time of when this young person had reached the end of a significant journey in their schooling:

> *"I was most optimistic probably like when I finished near like my GCSE exams cos I knew like they were nearly over and that was like a big thing to get all that work and move on to somewhere new,"* (Ruby).

For all three adopted young people, optimism about their futures was directly linked to educational experiences of success in their pasts.

4.3.2.4 Subtheme 2.4: Sense of control

Analysing when all four adopted young people felt a sense of control during their schooling life highlighted the importance of this as a key subtheme of developing a sense of mastery in life. Two adopted young people spoke about how events leading up to and after examinations offered opportunities to feel a sense of control, for example, the initial stage of being able to choose your subjects in addition to receiving welcomed exam results:

> *"But whenever you know, I got good grades in subjects that I actually cared about, I felt in control and I felt a sense of achievement that I could be somebody if that makes sense,"* (Emerald).

For one adopted young person, she reflected on missed opportunities of having greater control in advocating for her needs during her educational experiences whilst attending a university:

> *"I did find university really hard and I don't think there was a lot of support for that. Because the first year, I found particularly difficult and I missed a lot of lectures and the lecturers themselves weren't sort of very understanding about why. I had to go to see the Pastoral team. And then they spoke to my lecturers about why I was missing lectures. But it had to go through them. The lecturers didn't sort of accept it from me. That is quite annoying because obviously as an adult you want to be able to do the stuff for yourself,"* (Sapphire).

She continued to explore as to why having a greater sense of control is of significance to adopted young people and related this to her early life experiences:

> *"I think especially when you're adopted there's a lot in your early life, there's a lot that isn't up to you and it's always sort of been something I've struggled with that I didn't get to make any choices about what happened to me,"* (Sapphire).
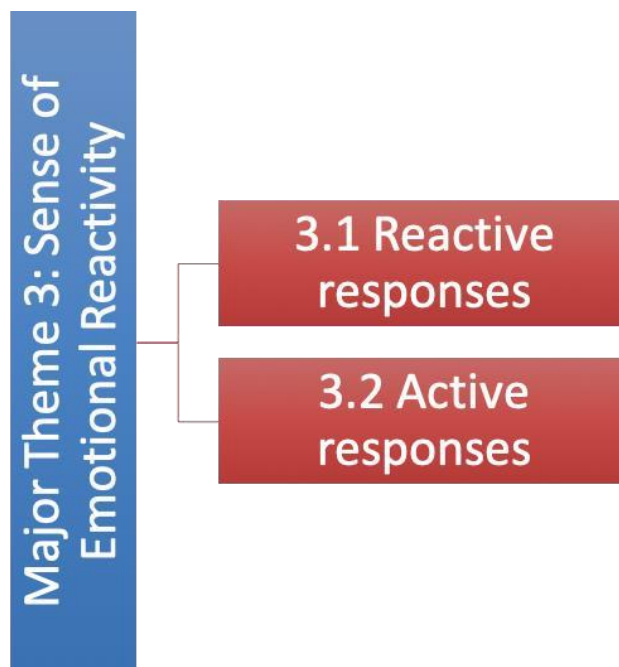
Figure 3.3: Thematic map of Major Theme 3: Sense of Emotional Reactivity.

Emotional Reactivity can be defined as the threshold in which an individual can no longer regulate emotional reactions to external and internal stimuli (Prince-Embury, 2006, 2007). For three of the four adopted young people, there were key moments in which they were unable to regulate their emotions in response to high stress situations. Detailed analysis resulted in this theme to have two sub-themes which reflected the way in which adopted young people responded to high stress situations, this was either by responding in a 'reactive' manner in which the adopted young person's emotions overwhelmed them and led to them engaging in specific behaviours; or responding in an 'active' manner in which the adopted young people were able to cope with their level of emotions and make active decisions about their behaviour in response to the high stress situation.

4.3.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Reactive responses

Three adopted young people who explored their responses to high stress situations highlighted the individual differences in their reactive responses which can be defined in well-known terminology used to describe automatic stress responses.

One adopted young person described her 'fight' response to difficult situations that arose with other young people:

> *"..think especially in secondary school because of my anger issues people would wind me up and if I broke then I would lash out,"* Ruby.

Another adopted young person described a 'flight' response to perceived threats:

> *"I honestly I just went away. My history teacher went through a phase when we learnt about the Holocaust. He just you know put on Saving Private Ryan or something like that and at which point I would just walk out and say I'm going to the toilet and I'd just run away,"* (Garnet).

Whilst, for another adopted young person, her response was initially to 'freeze' in response to fights that would break out in front of her at school:

> *"The reaction is just to sit there. I used to get so scared by conflict, I just sort of would avoid it at all costs and sort of not really have to deal with it,"* (Sapphire).

4.3.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Active responses

For two adopted young people, their level of emotional reactivity led to them seeking support to enable them to respond in an active manner for a more positive outcome when faced with high stress situations. For one adopted young person, she benefited significantly from therapeutic support and learnt to manage her high levels of anxiety when faced with specific triggering events, such witnessing young people fighting:

> *"I was really quite scared but I just managed to and they were like right in front of me, but I just managed to manage it by just leaving the room.. take myself somewhere quiet and calm myself down and I remember being proud of myself because it was really scary...I then reported it to a teacher,"* (Sapphire).

For the second adopted young person, a supportive member of staff was a key strategy to help the young person cope with high stress situations:

> *"I could just go and talk to her and then I wouldn't get angry towards students and be able to vent it out to her,"* (Ruby).

4.3.4 Summary of findings from RQ2

In summary, the analysis of the four adopted young people's interviews suggests that the three factors of resilience (Sense of Relatedness, Sense of Mastery and Emotional Reactivity) as identified by Prince-Embury (2006, 2007, 2013 and 2014) all continue to be of importance to this group of adopted young people. Detailed analysis of each of these areas of resilience suggests that there are certain protective factors which may be of greater relevance due to adopted young people's shared experiences of early life experiences and adoption, for example, the sense of relatedness was a significant major theme across all four participants' interviews as was the sub-theme of having a sense of control in one's life.

The next section will proceed to present the findings from RQ3.

4.4 Summary of themes from Thematic Map 3: How can educational settings do better for adopted young people?

For RQ3, an inductive thematic analysis was conducted on data that was provided by participants in response to their direct reflections on the way in which educational settings could do better for adopted young people. This led to the identification of three overarching major themes, four sub-themes and two sub-sub themes. Please see Figure 4 below.
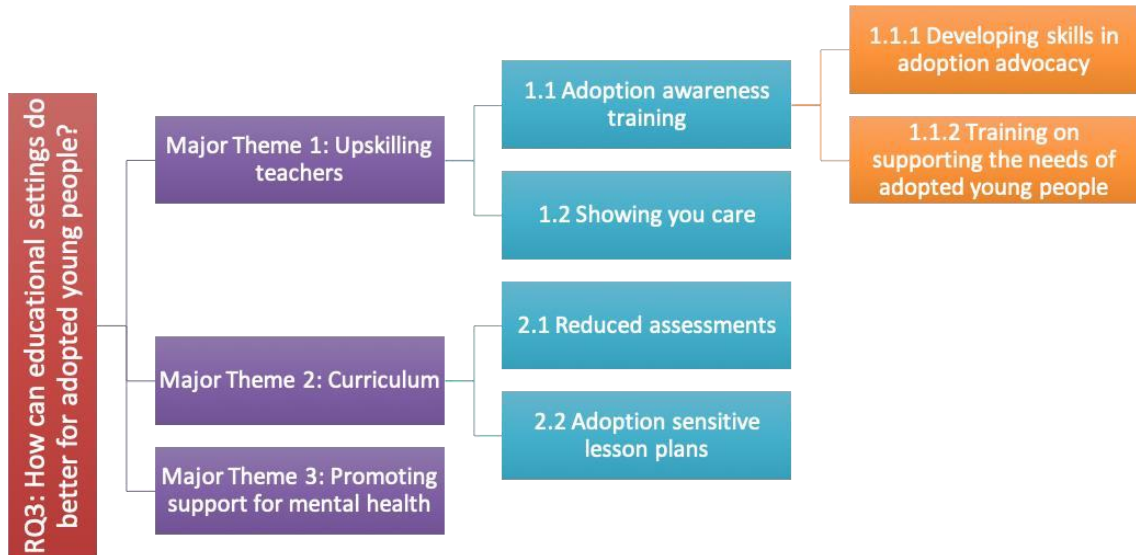
Figure 4: Thematic map for RQ3: How can educational settings do better for adopted young people?

4.4.1 Major theme 1: Upskilling teachers

When asked to consider how educational establishments could improve the delivery of education for adopted young people, the importance of a skilled teacher was a major theme for all participants which led to the identification of two sub-themes: 'upskilling teachers' and 'showing you care'. There was a strong emphasis on upskilling teachers to ensure that they have the training on how best to support the needs of adopted young people as well as ensuring that teachers are skilled in being able to show that they care about the adopted young person. Two further sub-subthemes were further identified when analysing aspects of how best to support the

needs of adopted young people: 'developing skills in adoption advocacy' and 'developing a secure understanding of adoption and its lifelong impact'. These sub-themes and sub-sub themes are further discussed below.

4.4.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1 Training on how best to support the needs of adopted young people

Three of the adopted young people agreed that teachers would benefit from training to help ensure that they had the appropriate knowledge and skills to support the needs of adopted young people throughout their schooling life. Training that would be highly relevant to this population includes trauma informed practice and attachment training which is discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.4.1.1.1 Sub-sub theme 1.1.1 Developing skills in adoption advocacy

For one adopted young person, ensuring that teachers are confident in explaining adoption and clarifying misconceptions about adoption, in effect taking on the role of an advocate, was considered a form of essential support for this adopted young person. She raised the challenge of also coping with adults who also share misconceptions about adoption:

> *"Well I think if all teachers could explain what adoption was then that would be helpful because I think a lot of people are sort of naive about it. It's not always children either. I mean adults have made comments about adoption that is just not true,"* (Sapphire).

4.4.1.1.2 Sub-sub theme 1.1.2 Secure understanding of the needs of adopted young people and the lifelong impact of adoption

Significantly for three adopted young people, there was an important theme of adoption awareness training designed to ensure that teachers have a secure understanding of the needs of adopted young people including how that can impact on a young person's neurodevelopment, for example "our brains can develop differently, which means our fight flight responses may be higher up than others so that might be why we lash out quicker," (Ruby); the lifelong impact of adoption, "people actually like understand it's a present and future thing as well as the past," (Ruby) and how adopted young people will also have their own individual experiences and so it's important "understand that it's not the same for every adopted child," (Sapphire).

4.4.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2 Showing you care

For three adopted young people, teachers to show that they care was an area identified for development. Data analysis suggests that this could be done by actively building rapport with the adopted young person: "more interaction with students" (Emerald) and "getting to know students" (Ruby); demonstrating a duty of care to all students, "they shouldn't have a student they don't like," (Garnet) and a genuine sense of want to be there for the adopted young person, "that aren't just there for money or I don't know a job in general, but they want to be there…they care about their students and their subject," (Emerald).

4.4.2 Major Theme 2: Curriculum

For three of the participants, the curriculum was identified as a major theme that needs to be improved to ensure that appropriate support is in place for adopted young people.

4.4.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Reduced assessments

For one adopted young person, she expressed the importance of reducing assessments for all young people: *"I think they tend to over test or overdo the testing a bit,"* (Emerald).

4.4.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Adoption sensitive lesson plans

For two adopted young people, lesson plans were identified to also be an important aspect of the curriculum that requires significant improvement to ensure that the needs of adopted young people are taken into consideration when planning lessons and ensuring that support is in place. There is a shared consensus that "different things in lesson can be triggering" (Ruby); lessons and other school traditions that also require information from a child's early life can also be highly sensitive and lead to an adopted young person experiencing difficult emotions:

> *"Well, there was one thing that I've remembered but for my yearbook for Year Six or no like Year Eleven we had to send in like a photo of us as a baby and a photo of us as we were, 16. And I didn't have any*

baby photos. I didn't have any photos before I was sort of 5. Yeah, and that was like mortifying that I was five or six in my photo and everyone else had a baby photo and I know that that's part of that tradition of having a yearbook and stuff like that. But I just don't think, they don't necessarily think about how difficult that might be…Yeah so little things like that like in year seven we had to do a like an 'About Me' kind of project in geography. And we had to talk about where we were born and stuff like that and how much weighed. And I didn't know that information. And so that was difficult as well," (Sapphire).

In some instances, lessons have promoted misconceptions and have caused active emotional harm:

"The one thing that I always found really difficult was when we did PSHE lessons and well in an all-girls school they seemed to focus a lot on teen pregnancies… we always learnt that it always came across that you either had an abortion or you gave it up for adoption and it came across really negatively. That like it was something terrible. When we had those lessons and people knew that I was adopted they kind of thought that you know I would have been aborted otherwise. It wasn't very nice to sort of hear and stuff like that so those lessons were really problematic for me," (Sapphire).

Sapphire continued to reflect critically on how adoption was addressed in the curriculum and suggests that the views of adopted young people also need to be reported:

> *"We talked a lot about adoption but we only talked about sort of from the mothers' perspective and we never talked about how it was like for the children. So I think that would be valuable,"* (Sapphire).

This suggests that not only does there need to be greater sensitivity in delivering lessons which can have a harmful impact on an adopted young person, but that teachers need to engage critically with the information that they are provided in the curriculum and to continue to challenge notions that may be outdated and no longer in line with current practice, policies and research, for example, the missing voice of young people on issues that directly relate to them in textbooks that are still being used in educational settings.

4.4.3 Major Theme 3 Promoting support for mental health

For one adopted young person, the importance of educational settings promoting support for mental health and encouraging students to engage in positive forms of support such as therapy was considered to be key in supporting the adopted young person to have a more positive experience in their journey through education:

> *"I think all colleges and schools and stuff should be open about therapy. And yeah sort of mental health. I think it probably is getting better, but I think that would really help because it would make you feel less like you're really weird for you having to go,"* (Sapphire).

4.4.4 Summary of RQ3 findings

In summary, analysis of the four interviews suggest that there is a need to improve the education system for adopted young people and this can be done by targeting three areas specifically, upskilling teachers (who have been highlighted as key significant adults for adopted young people); making adaptations to the curriculum which needs to take into consideration the early experiences of adopted young people and the lifelong impact that this has on adopted young people and cultivating a culture that promotes support for mental health.

A critical issue to consider is that the adoption status of adopted children does not need to legally be disclosed to educational settings and so there are many adoptive parents who will choose to not do so, furthermore, due to current understanding of confidentiality, the adoption backgrounds of some adoptees are shared with selective members of staff. To ensure that adopted young people are receiving the appropriate support, due consideration will need to given to this significant barrier which is discussed further in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion
5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter will discuss the research questions that were stated in Chapter two, within the context of the findings reported in Chapter four. The relevance of these findings to wider literature and theoretical frameworks, as identified in

Chapter two, will be reviewed in detail. The implications of the study will be

discussed, both in general and with direct relevance to EP practice. The

strengths and limitations of the research are reflected on before outlining the

implications for future research. The researcher's reflections on the research

process are then outlined followed by a conclusion of the research which will

end the chapter.

5.2 Revisiting the aims of the study

Due to the 'happy ever after' myth that was and remains a popular

misconception about adopted young people, adopted young people are not

always perceived as vulnerable and have been historically overlooked in

research (Ks, 2010). Relatively recent research, which has grown slowly in the

past decade, has found that adopted young people are facing significant

challenges in their education including higher than average diagnoses of

physical, mental health and learning needs (e.g. Best et al. 2021; Brown et al.,

2019; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019 and Templeton et al. 2020).

Recent research has however focused predominantly on the negative

experiences of adopted young people e.g. (Best et al. 2021 and Templeton et

al. 2020) which dominates the current narratives of adopted young people's

experiences of education. In response to this gap, this study was designed to

explore, retrospectively, the educational experiences of adopted young people

between the ages of 16-25 years using a positive psychology and resiliency

based framework to gain insight into 'what works' for adopted young people and

how we can learn from this to help facilitate better developmental outcomes for

adopted young people. The researcher maintains that whilst it is important to

acknowledge and learn from the painful experiences that have been endured by

adopted young people in education, it is equally important to highlight when educational settings have got it right.

5.3 Addressing the research questions

Findings for both RQ1 (What are the positive educational experiences of adopted young people?) and RQ3 (How can educational settings do better for adopted young people?) will be discussed together, linking key main themes that have been identified in the current study. The subheadings below summarise the main points taken from the data in relation to research questions one and two.

5.3.1 What are the positive educational experiences of adopted young people and how can educational settings do better for adopted young people?

The adopted young people's experiences in this study have provided an in-depth insight into a broad range of positive educational experiences which include the following: academic success, the presence of supportive teachers, the presence of additional nurturing adults, awareness and support for adoption related needs, positive peer interactions and positive contributions towards the development of their identity. Thinking about how educational settings can do better for adopted young people, three key themes were identified: upskilling teachers, adapting the curriculum and promoting mental health support within settings.

5.3.1.1 "It's made me realise I can achieve things"

Whilst previous literature has predominantly focused on the attainment gap for adopted children (AUK, 2017, DfE 2015 and 2017), most of the adopted young people in this study have reflected positively on their performance in national exams, often feeling a sense of pride when achieving beyond expectations. This sense of achievement for adopted young people, whilst experienced in the academic domain, had a far-reaching impact on the adopted young person's sense of self-belief in general: "*it's also made me realise that I can achieve things,*" (Emerald).

Although it was beyond the remit of the current study to understand how these adopted young people performed in national exams in comparison to their nonadopted counterparts, what appeared to be of great significance to most of the adopted young people in this group, was the experience of developing positive academic self-concept. Researchers and multiple sources of empirical data show that in order to achieve well academically, having a positive self-concept is an important prerequisite (Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017). However, it is more likely that the relationship between academia and positive academic self-concept is less linear and more of a reciprocal relationship (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008). According to the reciprocal effect model, academic-concept and academic achievement have a reciprocal effect and they mutually reinforce each other. Hence, progress in academic achievement will result in a more positive academic self-concept and vice versa (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008). The findings of this study suggest that adopted young people will benefit from schools recognising the importance of having a positive academic self-concept

and therefore supporting students to make progress across this important
domain.

5.3.1.2 "She was always there for me when I needed her"

The findings in the current study highlight the significance of supportive
teachers and the positive impact this has had on the educational experiences of
adopted young people. This is a consistent theme that has been found in
adoption research and emphasised within recommendations (AUK, 2019; Best
et al. 2021; Cooper & Johnson, 2007 and Templeton et al. 2020). There is also
an agreed consensus in the literature that a teacher's relationship with each
child is important for raising achievement levels as well as for improving the
child's socioemotional well-being (Bergin & Bergin, 2009), including children
who have experienced trauma (Bombèr, Golding, Phillips, & Hughes, 2020).

Due to the positive psychology approach in this study which pursued exception
finding situations for adopted young people, the data gathered is rich and has
extended our current understanding of the ways in which teachers have
supported adopted young people. Teachers demonstrated great skill in building
positive relationships leading to adopted students feeling understood and
accepted; teachers supported students with their emotions by providing
containment; they helped adopted students to feel secure in their classes
through clear expectations of behaviour; they made themselves available when
needed and also supported adopted young people to thrive in their classroom
by engaging in responsive teaching practice and showing enthusiasm for their
subject matter.

In growing recognition of needing to appropriately support the most vulnerable students in schools, schools are beginning to implement 'attachment-aware' or 'trauma-informed' practice within their settings (Trivedi & Harrison, 2022). Well-developed practice that has been embedded within schools can support staff to support students appropriately in the school environment and ameliorate, as opposed to exacerbate, the impact of trauma (Trivedi & Harrison, 2022).Whilst there is no specific formula for attachment aware and trauma informed practice in schools, schools are trained to adopt policies and practices that are centred around emotional regulation, trust and positive relationships, drawing on research from educational psychology and neuroscience (Trivedi & Harrison, 2022).. It is difficult to ascertain whether the teachers who had a profound impact on adopted young people in this study had undertaken further training in attachment and trauma to help shape their practice. Language used by the adopted young people in this study does however suggest that skilled teachers demonstrated kindness and were caring towards their student, but as these were not attributes of all teachers, adopted young people in this study called for more teachers to 'show that they care' in response to what schools could do better for adopted young people. This study therefore supports the call for prioritising relational practice in all schools e.g. (Best et al., 2021 and Templeton et al., 2020) and argues that having 'unconditional positive regard,' accepting young people for who they are and not what they do, should be at the heart of how professionals approach young people, including teachers, who should ensure that students do not feel they must earn to feel cared for, but simply are cared for, unconditionally (Kohn, 2005).

5.3.1.3 "Understand it's a present and future thing as well as the past"

Perhaps the most meaningful findings of the current research are the ways in which adopted young people were supported with their adoption related needs by school staff. This extended from teachers who demonstrated great skill in being able to actively advocate for adopted young people by appropriately defining what adoption meant to the adopted young person's peers; offering intuitive support for adopted young people when teachers gained knowledge of adopted young people's adoption histories and providing simple but effective solutions to help adopted young people to solve school-based problems. Some of these findings, such as school professionals engaging in acts of unconditional positive regard, are very much in line with previous research in which school staff could be defined as 'caring adults' (Best et al., 2021). However, this current study extends our understanding of what a knowledgeable and skilled teacher can look like, for example having enough knowledge of adoption to be able to be competent in defining it in age-appropriate definitions and being quick to identify the importance of changing the name on a school register in line with the wishes of the adopted young person.

Adopted young people in this study called for a greater awareness of how to support adopted young people and to have a secure understanding of the enduring vulnerabilities: "understand it's a present and future thing as well as the past," (Ruby) whilst "understand that it's not the same for every adopted child" (Sapphire). Guidance for schools to understand the life-long impact of adoption is not new in the literature (e.g. Cooper & Johnson, 2007); however the current study in line with recent studies suggests that little progress has been made in schools. Different challenges related to adoption could certainly arise

as adopted young people progress through the education system, for example, potentially contacting members of their birth family after they turn 18, which is a challenging experience and can lead to the re-surfacing of traumatic experiences (AUK, 2022). Therefore, professionals who work with adopted young people, including EPs, should continue to ensure that the adopted young person's voice is elicited and remains at the forefront of their care to help inform the support that they may require throughout their journey in education.

5.3.1.4 "The most helpful thing for me has been knowing that I've got a supportive Mum back here…"

In the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979); the current study intended to solely focus on the adopted young person's most proximal system, the microsystem and more specifically, the role of educational settings. However, in line with Bronfenbrenner's identification of the mesosystem, in which the interaction between the different microsystems for individuals are recognised, findings suggest that adoptive parents play a vital role in how adopted young people experience education, examples of which include adoptive mothers helping their adopted child to initiate friendships, ensuring that school staff have the appropriate training in place for their adopted child and also sharing their child's adoption history with the relevant professionals at school.

The implications of these findings are such that future research about adopted young people's experiences of education should include the role of their

adoptive parents to ensure that the literature continues to work towards a rich

and complete understanding of all that helps adopted young people to benefit

from their educational experiences.

5.3.1.5 "I'm making friends"

The importance of forming friendships has been identified in the literature as a

fundamental factor for school belonging and also a factor of wellbeing (Craggs

& Kelly, 2018). Limited research regarding this topic appears to indicate that

adopted young people can struggle with friendships, identifying 'social

disconnection' as a key shared experience for some adopted young people

(AUK, 2018; Best et al., 2021 and Templeton et al., 2020). What helps adopted

young people to engage in positive interactions with their peers and to develop

friendships has been largely ignored in current research. By using a solution

focused approach in this study, all participants recalled positive social

interactions and explored the factors that helped these relationships develop.

The findings highlighted that experiencing positive peer interactions and forming

secure friendships is the result of many facilitating complex processes, which

include the following but are not limited to: the support of adults, the ability to

make/find connections with others, developing the intrinsic motivation to initiate

interactions and having opportunities provided for interaction. Identification of

these factors can directly translate into developing guidance to help support

adopted young people to have the opportunity to create meaningful

relationships with other children, for example, by incorporating more

opportunities into the school timetable that allows for young people to get to

know each other better through structured activities that can help identify shared values, interests or experiences.

Current findings also challenge the view that adopted young people who display poor social competence during their early schooling years, will always do so:

> *Yeah, definitely cos I'm making friends and not being bullied anymore and so it's almost like a couple of years ago that wouldn't have felt possible," (Ruby).*

More research is required to further explore how better to support adopted young people in building relationships. Additional factors also need to be taken into account, which were beyond the scope of this study, for example previous research has shown that adolescents who develop a clearer sense of identity, are better able to engage in positive interactions with others (Swann Jr., Milton, & Polzer, 2000).

5.3.1.6 "Learning to be comfortable within myself"

One of the key developmental tasks in adolescence and young adulthood is to develop a coherent sense of self and identity (Erikson, 1963). During this time, adolescents are expected to be preoccupied with developing educational and professional goals whilst also seeking to understand who they are and who they want to be (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019).

. Previous research suggests that a relatively coherent and stable identity makes people more resilient, reflective, and autonomous in the pursuit of important life decisions, while promoting a sense of competence (Flum &

Kaplan, 2006 and Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010). Understanding how educational experiences have impacted positively on the development of adopted young people's identity is still very much an unknown area of research for adopted young people with recent studies only identifying how schools have impacted negatively on adopted young people's identity, in particular with the sharing of their adoption status with peers (e.g. Best et al., 2021; Crowley, 2019 and Templeton et al., 2020). In this positive psychology study, much like all adolescents, adopted young people in this study found their school experiences helpful in discovering hobbies, passion for particular subjects and hopes for future careers. The impact of early adverse experiences on how one adopted young person experienced internal growth however was poignant:

> *"People might not realise how important that it is to be told that it's okay to get things wrong and that's really helped long-term to know that it's okay to get things wrong and something terrible isn't going to happen because you made a mistake,"* (Sapphire).

These findings suggest that future research should endeavour to learn more about how educational experiences have impacted positively on adopted young people's identities, by eliciting the views of older adoptees who are able to reflect on their adolescence retrospectively, so that research can contribute to a deeper understanding of how to support the development of adopted young people's identities to inform the practice of school professionals and EPs.

5.3.1.7 "I think all colleges and schools and stuff should be open about therapy"

One striking finding of this current study was the positive and long-term impact of school counsellors (provided onsite) and therapeutic support (that was arranged privately) on one adoptee's experience of education. Findings from this study continue to support the value that counselling has on adopted young people's confidence, resilience, sense of self-worth, family relationships, friendships, school attendance and academic achievement (BACP, 2022). Having timely access to highly trained professionals has been identified as an area of development in the adoption literature due to the higher risk that adopted young people have in developing difficulties with their social, emotional and mental health (AUK, 2018). The current research supports the argument that access to such support continues to be a 'postcode lottery' for adopted young people and their non-adopted peers in the UK (BACP, 2022; AUK 2019). This links directly to a critical recommendation made by an adopted young person in this study for educational settings to work harder to promote support for mental health in their settings: by not only providing opportunities to access therapeutic support onsite but to also promote a culture which encourages young people to engage with mental health support and to combat stigma around seeking such support.

5.3.2 RQ2: What are the factors of resilience that are important to this group of adopted young people?

Based on resiliency theory, all children can flourish given the right environment (Cefai, 2007). The current study utilised Prince-Embury's (2006, 2007) three factor model of resiliency which allowed for the operationalisation of a complex

construct and enabled the researcher to explore the importance of three well known areas of resiliency (sense of relatedness, sense of mastery and sense of emotional relatedness) with adopted young people. Their experiences were interpreted by the researcher to identify aspects of resilience that were of theoretical importance to this group of young people. Unsurprisingly, findings of this study suggest that all three factors of resilience are important to adopted young people in various ways, however, what can be noted as different, is the identification of particular factors of resilience which resonated deeper with adopted young people due to their early life experiences.

In line with the previous findings of RQ1 and RQ3, 'Sense of Relatedness' was an extremely important aspect of resilience for all four members of this group of adopted young people. Whilst for some of the adopted young people, this was indicated through their strengths in asking for help from others and having a good sense of social support and feeling connected with others. The importance of this aspect of resilience was also noted for participants who equally demonstrated difficulties with these identifiable aspects of relatedness: *"Think I didn't reach over to people whenever I could have," (Emerald).* Significantly, all adopted young people talked about their difficulties in 'trusting others' with one adopted young person making explicitly links to their early adverse experiences: "*I never really trusted adults too close to me especially I didn't like them too close to me and I didn't like to get adults angry because I thought that they might hurt me," (*Sapphire). Difficulties with developing trusting relationships with others has been recognised in recent adoption literature (e.g. Best et al., 2021; Crowley, 2019 and Templeton et al., 2020) and can be understood within the

context of adopted young people's shared experiences of being unable to develop secure attachment with their birth parents or indeed experiencing the disruption of attachment in their early life (Bowlby, 1969). The relevance of this consistent finding however continues to emphasise that adopted young people will benefit from support in this area in their educational settings.

All participants explored various ways in which they positively experienced a 'Sense of Mastery' in their educational journey; however, it was evident that educational settings, extending from primary schools to universities, only encourage young people to make decisions and 'feel in control' of their learning at very few points in their lives, for example, when choosing some subjects for GCSEs and the courses you study in Further Education. The importance of feeling 'in control' however is of significance to adopted young people, who have indeed experienced loss of control due to their early experiences: "*When you're adopted there's a lot in your early life, there's a lot that isn't up to you…I didn't get to make any choices about what happened to me.*" *(Sapphire).* Ensuring educational professionals provide greater opportunities for adopted young people to have a greater sense of autonomy in their schooling life will help adopted young people develop greater resilience (Cefai, 2007).

Although the current study did not intend to 'test' Prince-Embury's (2006, 2007) three factor model of resiliency, the current study found that approaching participants' Sense of Emotional Reactivity through Prince-Embury's proposed subdivisions of 'sensitivity, recovery and impairment,' (Prince-Embury, 2006) was not appropriate or effective in understanding the nature in which adopted young people experienced emotional reactivity. Indeed, the current study's

findings led to the exploration of how adopted young people responded to high

stress situations, either by responding in a 'reactive' manner in which the

adopted young person's emotions overwhelmed them and led to them engaging

in specific behaviours; or responding in an 'active' manner in which the adopted

young person was able to cope with their level of emotions and make active

decisions about their behaviour in response to the high stress situation. The

relevance of these findings are in line with previous literature; the impact of

early childhood trauma on future emotional development and behaviours, is now

well documented both in adoption literature and in literature relating to children

who have experienced trauma (AUK, 2017; AUK, 2018; Best et al., 2021;

Bombèr et al., 2020; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; Gilling,

2014 and Templeton et al., 2020).

5.4 Implications for EP practice

Both Wiley (2017) and Selwyn and Meaking (2017) highlight adoptive parents to

have mixed experiences with EPs with some pleased with EP advice, whilst

others did not feel EPs were 'adoption competent'. Wiley (2017) points out that

psychologists lack greater in-depth training in adoption related matters and this

is therefore a concern that needs to be addressed. The researcher therefore

intends to outline the implications of the study's findings for EPs and EPSs

below to help support the development of the role of the EP for adopted

children.

Table 3: *Implications for EPs and EPSs.*

	Role of EPs or EPSs
Child	• EPs to gather and advocate for the views of adopted CYP when requests have been made for EP involvement. • Ensure adopted CYP are involved in their decision making. • EPSs to ensure their leaflets for young people include how EPs can support friendships.
Microsystem	*School* • Use individual case work to identify wider themes in the school to promote a more systemic way of working. • EPs to support schools to think about adulthood outcomes for adopted CYP. • Using positive psychology practice such as appreciative inquiry to identify and strengthen practice within schools • EPs to support schools to evaluate their provision for supporting adopted CYP's mental health and to ensure there are clear pathways for support as well as advocating for more resources within schools i.e. schools counsellors.
	Adoptive family • Provide support for adoptive parents, such as through parent support groups and training, in partnership with post-adoption support services.
	Friendships • Use planning meetings and staff consultations to discuss interventions in place to facilitate friendships for adopted CYP

Mesosystem	*Parent-School Relationship* • Use consultation with parents and school staff to: further understanding of adopted children's support needs; develop effective home/school relationships; and facilitate appropriate information sharing. • EPs to use planning meetings to understand how schools support AYP and to advise schools to promote the importance of parents sharing information about their child's adoption history by having a section about this on their school website. • DTs to be introduced to adoptive parents as lead coordinator of care. • Challenge overly positive or negative narratives about adoption.
Exosystem	*School Training* • EPs to deliver whole school training in high impact practice i.e. relational practice/ attachment and trauma informed practice. • EPSs to consider providing borough wide training within their core offer for schools in relational practice/ attachment and trauma informed practice. • EPs to support schools in thinking about their behaviour policies and whether they are in line with our current understanding of how to support adopted CYP.
	School Curriculum • To be updated to be sensitive to the experiences of adopted young people. • Lessons around adoption to be examined critically for misconceptions and to also find research which includes the voices of adopted young people as well.
	DECP (2006) guidance for working with adopted children • To be updated to reflect findings from current research.
	• Encourage specialisms within the service so that a working party dedicated to adopted young people can be created to ensure that all EPs remain up to date with the breadth of current research regarding the needs of adopted young people. • EPs to conduct further research to learn more about how to implement positive change for adopted CYP in education e.g. research with school teachers to understand strengths and barriers.

Macrosystem	*Policy level*
	• Participate is policy reforms by actively contributing to wider policies and lobbying the government for educational reforms which will support adopted young people to not just survive in education, but thrive
	Initial Teacher Training Programmes
	• EPs/EPSs to offer relevant training to teacher trainees. This can include regional links being made between Professional Doctoral Programmes for EP training and initial teacher training courses.
	Support for other professions
	• EPSs to acknowledge the professions that also contribute significantly to the support for adopted young people i.e. school counsellors and to lobby for more funding for appropriate professional support to be offered in school.
Chronosystem	• Schools to be mindful of the context of changing needs during the course of the lifetime of an adopted young person and to also be mindful of potential changes in the landscape of how we understand the needs of adopted young people- encourage criticality.

5.5 Feedback and dissemination of the research findings

This study has identified what helped adopted young people to have positive experiences within educational settings in the UK and has considered the importance of particular factors of resilience for adopted young people and therefore has implications for supporting adopted young people in educational settings. As the research was not conducted in a particular local authority, a summary of the findings will be shared within the researcher's local authority in which they are employed with the hopes of informing current practice for fellow EP colleagues and to also inform guidance for schools within the local authority. The findings will also be shared with the participants to acknowledge their

valuable contributions. Further dissemination of research will be considered in terms of pursuing future publications in a peer reviewed journal, following which, sharing findings with adoption charities who took great interest in promoting this research.

5.6 Strengths and limitations of this research

5.6.1 Sample size and recruitment

The current study is of a qualitative design and has a, female only, small sample size (n=4) which is a significant limitation of this study. Indeed, when identifying themes, some of the themes/ subthemes were identified from data that was of theoretical relevance and not due to the weighting of the data. It has therefore not been possible to make generalisations about the educational experiences of all adopted children. However, these limitations can be considered within the context of the strengths of the study. Firstly, the study has focused on older adopted young people (aged 17-23 years) who belong to an under researched community. Secondly, the findings have theoretical generalisability and may be applied in similar contexts to support understanding and lead to practical strategies for change (Yardley, 2007). Indeed, even scientifically flawed studies are being recognised to actually 'energise' the area of research and encourage researchers to examine their phenomenon in interesting new ways (Vance et al. 2013).

5.6.2 Sampling

As outlined in the methodology chapter, participants came forward for the study after promoting the study through Twitter and adoption charities such as Adoption UK. All four participants were alerted to the study by their parents who followed various accounts which allowed them to view my Twitter 'call' for AYP to participate. It is likely that this sample represented a group of adoptees who would feel more comfortable reflecting on their experiences and so perhaps their experiences may have been more positive than other adoptees who may have felt that their experiences did not 'fit' the call for a positive psychology approach.

It was also considered that the all-female gender of the sample may have impacted the identification of themes. It is possible that there are gender differences in what works for adopted young people in education and as this was not considered in the current study, this may warrant further investigation in future.

All four participants were of White British ethnicity and as such the findings are unlikely to fully represent the experiences of adopted young people of different ethnicities. This is an important context to consider as there are already well documented racial differences in how children are adopted in the UK (DfE, 2021b). More research is required to inform policy and practice development that is sensitive to the diversity of the UK's multi-ethnic population.

Three of the participants were educated in England, whilst one participant talked about her educational experiences in Northern Ireland. Due to the different ways in which adopted young people are supported across the different nations of the

United Kingdom and the ways in which EPs are deployed, this has impacted on the transferability of the findings to adoptees across the UK.

5.6.3. The voice of the young person and triangulation

As the current study was designed solely to focus on the views of young people, the researcher acknowledges that a triangulation of critical stakeholders, for example, gaining the views of teachers and adoptive parents, would have offered a richer context to the findings of the current study. However, due to the critical realist perspective of social constructionism of the researcher, the adopted young people are positioned as experts of their own experiences and therefore their sole views are seen to be valid for the aims and purpose of this study.

5.6.4 Theory driven research

The very nature of theory-driven research of this study has led to the identification of already known themes due to the undue influence of theory on the design of the semi-structured interviews and the thematic analysis itself. Whilst the researcher hopes to learn about the aspects of resilience that were important to adopted young people, the use of a particular resiliency model is likely to have limited participants' reflections which would have led to equally meaningful events being missed (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018). Whilst the researcher acknowledges these limitations, the theory-driven approach was a useful way to address an identified gap in the literature and to contribute to knowledge by aiding in the clarification of complex experiences to enhance the

social good- which in this case, is enhancing the educational experiences of

adopted young people.

5.6.5 Context of time

Data was collected before the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic which had a

pervasive impact on all young people and their education including that of

adopted young people. The losses that would have been incurred during the

instability of schooling during the initial years of the pandemic in the UK will

undoubtedly have shaped their experiences of education (AUK, 2020). Whilst

this means that the current study needs to be duly interpreted within a pre-

pandemic context for the UK, the researcher believes that the themes identified

from this study's adopted young people will have highlighted how their

educational experiences supported them in spite of their own significant sense

of loss of their birth families and their experiences of what helped them will

continue to be of relevance, if not greater relevance, to adopted young people

who may have experienced a multitude of further losses in their lives due to the

pandemic (AUK, 2020).

5.7 Researcher's reflections

The 'objective researcher' is a commonly acknowledged myth by many social

scientists (Greene & Hill, 2005). The importance for researchers to engage in

reflexivity when conducting research by uncovering our personal biases,

feelings, attitudes, ideologies and experiences in relation to the research that

we are conducting cannot be understated (Davis, 1998; Greene & Hill, 2005).

The researcher therefore maintained a reflective diary throughout the research

to record thoughts and feelings throughout the process, as well as new understandings that could influence the researcher's practice as an EP. This part of the thesis will be written in the first person.

Due to the extended break that I have had between collecting data (July 2019) and analysing my data (October 2022), keeping a reflexive diary has been an integral way to document the way in which my own worldview has developed over time, particularly in response to the three years that I have spent working effectively as an TEP in an inner London local authority.

A key reflection is that I have no lived experience of adoption, whether that would have been through being adopted myself or perhaps as an adoptive parent, nor have I formed close relationships with others who are adopted or worked extensively within the adoption sector and so my understanding will be limited. This had led me to feel uncertain as to whether a positive psychology approach would be interpreted positively by the adopted young person that agreed to participate in my research, would I in effect do more harm than good? By reflecting deeply on how to structure my interviews and discussing this in supervision, I thought about how my skills as a practitioner would support the adopted young person in feeling listened to and to take great care that painful experiences would be explored as far as needed for participants whilst also ensuring that there are continued opportunities for adopted young person to engage in strength-based discussions.

Whilst engaging in interpreting the data by engaging in the process of a thematic analysis, this experience has continued to re-affirm that each young adopted person's experience should be understood within their own unique

journey and therefore continuing to gather and present a young person's voice and views in my work as an EP remains a key priority.

In an ideal world, an EP can take on many roles to engage in effective support for adopted young people; however, given the current context of the various constraints of working within local authorities in England, EPs continue to be predominantly tasked with overwhelming statutory duties leaving less scope for meaningful and systemic work with schools. At best, some EPs may have supported some schools to begin their journey in providing a trauma and attachment informed setting for young people; at worst, young people continue to receive their education according to a postcode lottery as the offer between educational settings in how they support students with their social, emotional and mental health, continues to vary significantly (AUK, 2018). This had led me to take a stronger position in the role that we need to play in shaping policies which govern the education system, for example, encouraging EPSs to engage with lobbying and also build strong links with other professions, e.g. the BACP, to work jointly to forward our key agenda to ensure that young people have the appropriate support in place in their schools.

As a TEP who identifies as a Muslim, this research has been supportive for my personal beliefs which are entwined with Islamic values., It has encouraged me to continue to value and advocate for the importance of respecting adopted young people's right to know about their birth families and indeed where appropriate, to be supported in making contact with their birth families should they wish to do so. Whilst the experience of adoption does not define an adopted young person, knowledge of their birth family and of the adoption itself

can lead to the adopted young person developing a more cohesive sense of self which can contribute to positive life outcomes (Neil, Beek & Ward, 2015). .

5.8 Implications for future research

The current study has contributed significantly to our understanding of positive educational experiences of adopted young people by gathering the views of older adoptees aged between 16-23 years old. Since the collection of data in July 2019, further research has come to light that has also reported the views of adopted young people and their experiences of education (e.g. Best et al. 2021 and Templeton et al. 2020). As sample sizes continue to be small for these studies, further research continues to be required to gather more views of adopted young people and their experiences of education in the UK to ensure that there is continued effort to extend our knowledge in this area and to continue to highlight the need for change in the education system.

As recent research is beginning to highlight the voices of adopted young people, the voices of male adoptees continue to be underrepresented in the adoption literature with only a handful of male adoptees contributing to recent qualitative research (e.g. Best et al. 2021 and Templeton et al. 2020). Whilst the researcher acknowledges that each adopted young person has their own unique experience, there may be gender related factors which are commonly experienced by males as they progress through their education and it is vital that adopted young males are therefore not overlooked in the research to ensure that their needs are also being met.

Retrospective studies continue to be of great benefit for adoption literature due to the lifelong impact of adoptees' early experiences (Selwyn, 2017). Therefore, future research should continue to gather the voices of unrepresented age groups, for example, the current study highlighted a gap in understanding how adopted young people experience education in university settings and whether more needs to be done to ensure that adopted young people are being supported adequately (only one participant could reflect on this in the current study). Additionally, exploring and eliciting the views of adult adoptees who have settled in careers or jobs on how they viewed the role of education will further enrich our understanding of 'what works' for adopted young people in education.

5.9 Summary and concluding remarks

The aim of this research was to explore adopted young people's views about their positive educational experiences, to first identify what these were and also to understand what helped to facilitate these positive experiences; secondly this study aimed to further understand the importance of aspects of resilience by using a framework of resilience to make sense of the data and finally, the study aimed to understand what adopted young people wanted educational settings to do better. This study has used a positive psychology approach and resiliency theory to understand adopted young peoples' experiences of education from a strength-based narrative and has therefore added to the literature in a unique way. Additionally, this study has sought the views of underrepresented older adopted young people (aged 17-23 years) who have a breadth of educational experience. The views of the adopted young people suggest that they had

positive educational experiences across the following six domains: academic success, supportive teachers, other nurturing adults, awareness and support for adoption related needs, positive peer interactions and identity. Participants also identified all three areas, Sense of Relatedness, Sense of Mastery and Sense of Emotional Reactivity of Prince-Embury's (2006, 2007) three factor model of resilience to be important with suggestions that more nuanced aspects of resilience, such as trust and control, can have greater relevance to adopted young people. The views of adopted young people also suggest that there are three ways in which educational settings can do better. Firstly, upskilling teachers to in effect, show that they care, and to support them to have greater knowledge in understanding the needs and ways in which to support adopted young people. Secondly, changing the school curriculum to ensure that it does not promote misperceptions of adoption and is also sensitive to the life experiences of adoptees. Lastly, promoting support for mental health which is critical to ensure that adopted young are able to seek out support when needed.

This study has highlighted the ways in which EPs can have a positive impact on the lives of adopted young people, and has strengthened the call within current literature for schools to prioritise relationships and have a greater understanding of adopted young people's needs in order to provide practical, emotional and academic support for their adopted young people.

With prevalent view of adopted young people perceived to have poor educational experiences, the current research proposes a shift in emphasis towards a discourse in which adopted young people can be seen to flourish in education, when given the opportunity to do so. By listening to the voices of

adopted young people as to how this has been done is perhaps the most

effective way of ensuring improved outcomes for these young people.

References

Adoption and Children Act, UK Public General Acts (2002).

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents

Adoption UK (AUK). (2022). *The Adoption Barometer. A stocktake of adoption in the*

UK. https://www.adoptionuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=ebb3a36d-

cc0d-45dd-aca9-7dd1d5dbbd23

Adoption UK (AUK). (2020). *Home learning during the Covid-19 lockdown.*

https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Home-learning-

during-Covid-19-V3-002.pdf?mtime=20200518140257&focal=none

Adoption UK (AUK). (2018) *Bridging the gap: Giving adopted children an equal*

chance in schools. https://www.adoptionuk.org/ourresearch

Adoption UK (AUK). (2019). *Top of the Class: How Should We Be Judging Our*

Schools? https://www.adoptionuk.org/our-research

Adoption UK (AUK). (2017). *Adoption UK'S Schools & Exclusions Report*.

https://www.adoptionuk.org/faqs/adoption-uks-schools-exclusions-report

Anda, R. F., Felitti, V. J., Bremner, J. D., Walker, J. D., Whitfield, C., Perry, B. D., Dube,

S. R., & Giles, W. H. (2006). The enduring effects of abuse and related adverse

experiences in childhood. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical*

Neuroscience, *256*(3), 174–186. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-005-0624-4

Bell, J. (2005). Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in

Education and Social Science. *Http://Lst-Iiep.Iiep-Unesco.Org/Cgi-*

Bin/Wwwi32.Exe/[In=epidoc1.in]/?T2000=027124/(100).

Bellis, M. A., Hughes, K., Leckenby, N., Hardcastle, K. A., Perkins, C., & Lowey, H.

(2015). Measuring mortality and the burden of adult disease associated with adverse

childhood experiences in England: A national survey. *Journal of Public*

Health, *37*(3), 445–454. https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdu065

Berger, R., & Malkinson, R. (2000). "Therapeutizing" research: The positive impact of family-focused research on participants. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, *70*, 307–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377310009517594

Berger, T. L., Peter L. (1991). *The Social Construction of Reality*. https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/13488/the-social-construction-of-reality-bypeter-l-berger-and-thomas-luckmann/9780140135480

Bergin, C., & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review*, *21*, 141–170. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-009-9104-0

Best, R., Cameron, C., & Hill, V. (2021). Exploring the educational experiences of children and young people adopted from care: Using the voices of children and parents to inform practice. *Adoption & Fostering*, *45*(4), 359–381. https://doi.org/10.1177/03085759211043255

Bion, W. R. (1962). *Learning from Experience* (1st edition). Routledge.

Bombèr, L. M., Golding, K. S., Phillips, S., & Hughes, D. (2020). *Working with Relational Trauma in Schools: An Educator's Guide to Using Dyadic Developmental Practice*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss. Volume 1. Attachment.* New York: Basic Books.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development* (pp. xvi, 184). Sage Publications, Inc.

British Psychological Society (BPS). (2010). *Code of ethics and conduct.* Leicester: BPS.

British Psychological Society (BPS). (2014). *Code of human research ethics* (2nd ed.). Leicester: BPS.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

British Association For Counselling & Psychotherapy (2022). Available at: https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/campaigns/school-counselling// (Accessed: 20 September 2022).

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). Contexts of child rearing: Problems and prospects. *American Psychologist*, *34*, 844–850. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.34.10.844

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, *22*, 723–742. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.22.6.723

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the Development of Children*, *2*(1), 37–43.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed.). (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development* (pp. xxix, 306). Sage Publications Ltd.

Brown, A., Waters, C. S., & Shelton, K. H. (2017). A systematic review of the school performance and behavioural and emotional adjustments of children adopted from care. *Adoption & Fostering*, *41*(4), 346–368. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575917731064

Brown, A., Waters, C. S., & Shelton, K. H. (2019). The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK. *Adoption & Fostering*, *43*(1), 46–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575919826900

Brown, R., & Ward, H. (2013). *Decision-making within a child's timeframe: An*

overview of current research evidence for family justice professionals concerning

child development and the impact of maltreatment [Report].

Loughborough University.

https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/report/Decisionmaking_within_a_child_s_timef

rame_an_overview_of_current_research_eviden

ce_for_family_justice_professionals_concerning_child_development_and_the_i

mpact_of_maltreatment/9580085/1

Burr, V. (2015). *Social Constructionism* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315715421

Cefai, C. (2007). Resilience for all: A study of classrooms as protective contexts.

Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, *12*(2), 119–134.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13632750701315516

Chase, Jackson & Simon. (2006). *In Care and After: A Positive Perspective*.

https://www.routledge.com/In-Care-and-After-A-Positive-Perspective/Chase-

Simon-Jackson/p/book/9780415352543

Children Act, UK Public General Acts, (2004).

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for*

Beginners.

Cooper, P., & Johnson, S. (2007). Education: The Views of Adoptive Parents. *Adoption*

& Fostering Journal, *31*, 21–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/030857590703100105

CoramBaaF Statistics: England. (n.d.). CoramBAAF. Retrieved 30 October 2022, from

https://corambaaf.org.uk/resources/statistics/statistics-england

Craggs, H., & Kelly, C. (2018). Adolescents' experiences of school belonging: A qualitative

meta-synthesis. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *21*, 1–15.

Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective
https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1477125

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. SAGE.

Crittenden, P. M. (2006). A Dynamic-Maturational Model of Attachment. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, *27*(2), 105–115. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1467-8438.2006.tb00704.x

Crowley, C. (2019). Exploring the views and perceptions of adopted young people concerning their education and social development: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *35*(2), 165–183. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2018.1547895

Cyr, J. (2016). The Pitfalls and Promise of Focus Groups as a Data Collection Method. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *45*(2), 231–259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124115570065

Danieli, A., & Woodham, C. (2007). Emancipatory Research Methodology and Disability: A Critique. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(4), 281-296. doi:10.1080/1364557042000232853

Davis, J. M. (1998). Understanding the meanings of children: A reflexive process. *Children & Society*, *12*(5), 325–335. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.1998.tb00089.x

DeJong, M., Hodges, J., & Malik, O. (2016). Children after adoption: Exploring their psychological needs. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *21*(4), 536–550. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104515617519

Dent, R., & Cameron, R. (2003). Developing Resilience in Children Who are in Public Care: The educational psychology perspective. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *19*, 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/0266736032000061170

Department for Education (2021a). *Children looked after in England including adoptions.*

London: DfE. Available at: https://explore-

educationstatistics.service.gov.uk/find- statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-

including-adoptions#releaseHeadlines- charts

Department for Education (2021b). *Adoption strategy achieving excellence everywhere.*

London: DfE. Available at: chrome

extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://assets.publishing.service.

gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1006232/_Ado

ption_strategy_.pdf

Department for Education (DfE). (2018a). *Promoting the education of looked-after children*

and previously looked-after children. Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/atta

chment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_lookedafter_children_and_p

reviously_looked-after_children.pdf

Department for Education (DfE). (2018b). *Outcomes for children looked after by local*

authorities in England, 31 March 2018: additional tables. Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/atta

chment_data/file/884736/CLA_Outcomes_2018_Experimental_Tables_Text.pdf

Department for Education (DfE). (2018c). *National tables: Children looked after in*

England including adoption 2017 to 2018. Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/atta

chment_data/file/757922/Children_looked_after_in_England_2018_Text_revise

d.pdf

Department for Education (DfE). (2018d). *The designated teacher for looked after and*

    previously looked-after children. Retrieved from

    https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-teacher-for-looked- after-

    children

Department for Education/Department of Health (DfE/DoH). (2015). *Special*

    educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years. Statutory

    guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young

    people who have special educational needs or disabilities. Retrieved from

    https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

Department for Education (DfE). (2014) Beyond the adoption order: Challenges,

    interventions and adoption disruption. Available at:

    assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachmen

    t_data/file/ 301889/Final_Report_-_3rd_April_2014v2.pdf

Department for Education (DfE). (2012). *An action plan for adoption: Tackling delay.*

    Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-action-planfor-

    adoption- tackling-delay

Department for Education and Skills (DfES). (2003). *Every Child Matters*. UK Government

    Green Paper, Cm 5860. London, HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES). (2001). *Special Educational Needs Code of*

    Practice. Retrieved on 17.07.19 from

    https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/atta

    chment_data/file/273877/special_educational_needs_code_of_practice .pdf

Division of Education and Child Psychology. (2006). *Report of the working group on*

   educational psychology service practice with looked after children. Retrieved from

   https://shop.bps.org.uk/report-of-the-working-group-on- educationalpsychology-

   service-practice-with-looked-after-children.html

Dunstan, L. (2010). *Hearing voices: Working with adoptive parents, schools and social*

   workers to support children and young people who are adopted, at school.

   https://www.academia.edu/9170278/Hearing_voices_working_with_adoptive_p

   arents_schools_and_social_workers_to_support_children_and_young_people_w

   ho_are_adopted_at_school

Erikson, E. H. (Ed.). (1963). *Youth: Change and challenge*. Basic Books.

Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle* (p. 191). W W Norton & Co.

Flum, H., & Kaplan, A. (2006). Exploratory Orientation as an Educational Goal. *Educational*

   Psychologist, *41*, 99–110. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep4102_3

Geake, J. (2008). Neuromythologies in education. *Educational Research*, *50*(2), 123–

   133. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880802082518

Gersch, I. S., & Nolan, A. (1994). Exclusions: What the Children Think. *Educational*

   Psychology in Practice, *10*(1), 35–45.

   https://doi.org/10.1080/0266736940100105

Gilling, A. (2014). Jasper's story: 'Letting me down and picking me up' – one boy's story

   of despair and hope at primary schools in England. *Adoption & Fostering*,

   38(1), 60–72. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575913518001

Golding, K. S. (2010). Multi-agency and specialist working to meet the mental health needs

   of children in care and adopted. *Clinical Child Psychology and*

   Psychiatry, *15*(4), 573–587. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104510375933

Gore Langton, E. (2017). Adopted and permanently placed children in education: From

   rainbows to reality. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *33*(1), 16–30.

Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective
https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2016.1217401

Greene, S., & Hill, M. (2005). *Researching children's experiences: Methods and methodological issues* (S. Greene & D. Hogan, Eds.; pp. 1–21). Sage. http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/33746/

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 29*(2), 75-91.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Sage Publications, Inc.

Hart, R. A. (1992). Children's Participation, from Tokenism to Citizenship. UNICEF: Florence.

Hammersley, M. (1995). Theory and evidence in qualitative research. *Quality and Quantity*, *29*(1), 55–66. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01107983

Hill, M. (1997). Participatory research with children. *Child & Family Social Work*, *2*(3), 171–183. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2206.1997.00056.x

Hodges, J., Steele, M., Hillman, S., Henderson, K., & Kaniuk, J. (2003). Changes in Attachment Representations Over the First Year of Adoptive Placement: Narratives of Maltreated Children. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *8*(3), 351–367. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104503008003006

Institute of Health Equity. (2014). *Local action on health inequalities: Building children and young people's resilience in schools.* Public Health England.

Jaiswal, S., & Choudhuri, R. (2017). A Review of the Relationship between Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Performance. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *4*, 110–123. https://doi.org/10.25215/0403.052

King, C. F. (2009). *Adopted children and the transition from primary to secondary school: An examination of pupil, parent and teacher views*. Children's Workforce Development Council. http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2800/1/PLR0809014.pdf

Koch, T. (1994). Establishing rigour in qualitative research: The decision trail. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *19*(5), 976–986. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01177.x

Kohn, A. (2005). *Unconditional parenting: Moving from rewards and punishments to love and reason.* New York: Atria Books.

Kroger, J., Martinussen, M., & Marcia, J. E. (2010). Identity status change during adolescence and young adulthood: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Adolescence*, *33*(5), 683–698. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.11.002

Ks, G. (2010). Multi-agency and specialist working to meet the mental health needs of children in care and adopted. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *15*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104510375933

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. SAGE.

Luthar, S. (2006). Resilience in Development: A Synthesis of Research across Five Decades. *Developmental Psychopathology*, *3*. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939406.ch20

Marsh, H. W., & O'Mara, A. (2008). Reciprocal effects between academic self-concept, self-esteem, achievement, and attainment over seven adolescent years: Unidimensional and multidimensional perspectives of self-concept. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*(4), 542–552. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207312313

McCrory, E., De Brito, S. A., & Viding, E. (2010). Research review: The neurobiology and genetics of maltreatment and adversity. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, *51*(10), 1079–1095.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2010.02271.x

Mertens, D. M. (2012). Transformative Mixed Methods: Addressing Inequities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *56*(6), 802–813. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211433797

Music, G. (2017). *Nurturing natures.* Oxon: Routledge.

Neil, E., Beek, M., & Ward, E. (2015). *A longitudinal study of post-adoption contact arrangements.* 308. London: CoraamBAAF.

NICE guideline [NG26]. (2015). NICE. https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26

Nightingale, D. J., & Cromby, J. (1999). *Social Constructionist Psychology a Critical Analysis of Theory and Practice*.

Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, *18*(2), 34–35. https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054

Osborne, C., & Alfano, J. (2011). An evaluation of consultation sessions for foster carers and adoptive parents. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *27*, 395–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2011.624309

Osborne, C., Norgate, R., & Traill, M. (2009). The Role of the Educational Psychologist in Multidisciplinary Work Relating to Fostering and Adoption. *Adoption & Fostering*, *33*(2), 13–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/030857590903300203

Palacios, J., & Brodzinsky, D. (2010). Adoption research: Trends, topics, outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *34*, 270–284. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025410362837

Parentkind. (2023). https://www.parentkind.org.uk/for-parents/understanding-education-journey?utm_source=parentkind.org.uk&utm_medium=301

Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction* (pp. x, 253). Sage Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446222119

Prince-Embury, S. (2006). *Resiliency Scales for Adolescents: Profiles of personal strength.*

San Antonio, TX: Harcourt Assessment.

Prince-Embury, S. (2007). *Resiliency Scale for Adolescents: A Profile of Personal*

Strengths.

Prince-Embury, S., & Saklofske, D. H. (2013). Translating resilience theory for

application: Introduction. In S. Prince-Embury & D. H. Saklofske (Eds.),

Resilience in children, adolescents, and adults: Translating research into practice

(pp.307). New York, NY: Springer.

Prince-Embury, S., & Saklofske, D. H. (2014). Building a science of resilience

intervention for youth. In S. Prince-Embury & D. H. Saklofske (Eds.),

Resilience interventions for youth in diverse populations (pp.3-12), New York,

NY: Springer

Prince-Embury, S., Saklofske, D. H., & Nordstokke, D. W. (2017). The Resiliency

Scale for Young Adults. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *35*(3), 276–

290. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282916641866

QSR. (2017). *NVivo qualitative data analysis software*. Version 11. QSR International

Pty Ltd.

Rahman, M. S. (2016). The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and

Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language "Testing and Assessment"

Research: A Literature Review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *6*(1),

Article 1. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n1p102

Rees, P., Booth, R., & Jones, A. (2016). The emergence of neuroscientific evidence on brain

plasticity: Implications for educational practice. *Educational and Child Psychology*,

33, 8–19.

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21, 95–103.

Roulston, K. (2010). Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, *10*(2), 199–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356739

Ryan, R. M., Brown, K. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). How integrative is attachment theory? Unpacking the meaning and significance of felt security. *Psychological Inquiry*, *18*, 177–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/10478400701512778

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, *55*, 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5

Selwyn, J., & Meaking, S. (2017). *Beyond the Adoption Order (Wales): Discord and disruption in adoptive families*. Retrieved from https://www.adoptionuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=d676d447-f769-4c05-9c72-7fa2b6573237

Selwyn, J. (2017). The adoption of looked after maltreated children in England: Challenges, opportunities and outcomes. *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 47, 50-63.

Selwyn et al. (2014). *Beyond the adoption order: Challenges, intervention, disruption*. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beyond-the-adoption-orderchallenges-intervention-disruption

Shenton, A. (2004). Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects. *Education for Information*, *22*, 63–75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family

Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, &

Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. (2012). The lifelong

effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, *129*(1), e232-

246. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663

Sims-Schouten, W., Riley, S. C. E., & Willig, C. (2007). Critical Realism in Discourse

Analysis: A Presentation of a Systematic Method of Analysis Using Women's

Talk of Motherhood, Childcare and Female Employment as an Example. *Theory

& Psychology*, *17*(1), 101–124. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354307073153

Smith, J. A. (1995). *Semi structured interviewing and qualitative analysis* (J. A. Smith, R.

Harre, & L. Van Langenhove, Eds.; pp. 9–26). Sage Publications.

https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/rethinking-methods-inpsychology/book204294

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In *Qualitative

psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51–80).

Sage Publications, Inc.

Stahl, N., & King, J. (2020). *Expanding Approaches for Research: Understanding and

Using Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research*. *44*, 26–28.

Stewart, R. (2017). *Children adopted from care: Teacher constructions of need and support*

[Dedpsy, Cardiff University]. https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/105025/

Stichter, J. P., O'Connor, K. V., Herzog, M. J., Lierheimer, K., & McGhee, S. D. (2012).

Social competence intervention for elementary students with Aspergers

syndrome and high functioning autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental

Disorders*, *42*(3), 354–366. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-011-1249-2

Sturgess, W., & Selwyn, J. (2007). Supporting the Placements of Children Adopted Out of

Care. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *12*(1), 13–28.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104507071051

Swann Jr., W. B., Milton, L. P., & Polzer, J. T. (2000). Should we create a niche or fall in line? Identity negotiation and small group effectiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*, 238–250. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.2.238

Syne, J., Green, R., & Dyer, J. (2012). Adoption: The lucky ones or the Cinderellas of children in care? *Educational and Child Psychology*, *29*, 93–103.

Teicher, M. H., & Samson, J. A. (2016). Annual Research Review: Enduring neurobiological effects of childhood abuse and neglect. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, *57*(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12507

Templeton, F., McGlade, A., & Fitzsimons, L. (2020). 'My experience of school': The perspective of adopted young people aged 16–21 years. *Pastoral Care in Education*, *40*(1), 92–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2020.1855675

Thorne, K. J., & Kohut, C. S. (2007). Prince-Embury, S. (2007, 2006). Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents: A Profile of Personal Strengths. San Antonio,TX: Harcourt Assessment, Inc. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *22*(2), 255–261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0829573507305520

Trivedi, H., & Harrison, N. (2022). *Attachment aware & trauma-informed schools programmes.* Report prepared for Derbyshire County Council, Islington Council and Kirklees Council. England.

Ungar, M. (2013). Resilience, Trauma, Context, and Culture. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *14*(3), 255–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838013487805

Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *81*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01067.x

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1991, https://www.ohchr.org/en van

IJzendoorn, M. H., Juffer, F., & Poelhuis, C. W. K. (2005). Adoption and Cognitive

Development: A Meta-Analytic Comparison of Adopted and Nonadopted

Children's IQ and School Performance. *Psychological Bulletin*, *131*, 301–316.

https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.2.301

Vance, D. E., Talley, M., Azuero, A., Pearce, P.F., & Christian B, J. (2013). Conducting an

article critique for a quantitative research study: perspectives for doctoral students

and other novice readers. *Nursing: Research and Reviews*, *3*, 67-

75.https://doi.org/10.2147/NRR.S43374

Verhoeven, M., Poorthuis, A. M. G., & Volman, M. (2019). The Role of School in

Adolescents' Identity Development. A Literature Review. *Educational Psychology

Review*, *31*(1), 35–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-018-9457-3

Waid, J., & Alewine, E. (2018). An exploration of family challenges and service needs

during the post-adoption period. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *91*, 213–

220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.06.017

Wiley, M. O. L. (2017). Adoption research, practice, and societal trends: Ten years of

progress. *American Psychologist, 72*(9), 985-995. doi:10.1037/amp0000218

Willig. (2013). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*. New York, NY: Open

University Press.

Windle, G. (2011). What is resilience? A review and concept analysis. *Reviews in Clinical

Gerontology*, *21*, 152–169. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959259810000420

Windle, G., Bennett, K. M., & Noyes, J. (2011). A methodological review of resilience

measurement scales. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, *9*(1), 8.

https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7525-9-8

Woiceshyn, J., & Daellenbacmarh, U. (2018). Evaluating inductive vs deductive research in

management studies: Implications for authors, editors, and reviewers. *Qualitative*

Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, *13*(2), 183–

195. https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-06-2017-1538

Wright, K. (2009). 'Adoption Success': The Reality of Adoptive Placements Today.

Practice, *21*(2), 119–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/09503150902807607

Yardley, L. (2007). Demonstrating validity in qualitative research methods. In J. A.

Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp.

235-251). London: Sage.

Appendix A: Table of funding across the nations of the United Kingdom (Clarke, 2020).

Country	Programme name	Funding	Aims
England	Pupil Premium Plus (PP+)	£2,300 per year per LAC/adopted pupil, Reception – Year 11, paid directly to schools.	To support the educational, social and emotional needs of adopted children and LAC.
Wales	Pupil Development Grant (PDG)	Approx. £4 million per year across Wales, split between four local consortia according to need.	To support school improvement to reduce the inequalities facing LAC and adopted pupils.
Scotland	Pupil Equality Funding (PEF)	Varies by need. Not automatically allocated to adopted pupils, but head teachers can apply.	To close the poverty related attainment gap.
	Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund	£33 million across Scotland in 2019-2020.	To fund targeted initiative, activities and resources to improve the educational outcomes of care experienced pupils.
Northern Ireland	No additional funding for adopted pupils.		

Table representing the systematic search which led to the selection of final research papers 21.10.2022.

Database	Search terms	Total after appropriate Limiters applied	No. of Papers after Inc/Exc criteria applied (by screening of tiles and abstracts)
APA PsycInfo (EBSCO)	Thesaurus tool was utilised to create following terms: ("adopt* status" OR "adopt* child*" OR "adoptees" OR "adopt* young person" OR "adopt* young people" OR "adopt* parent") AND ("school*" OR "educat*") AND ("experience" OR "views")	n= 219 *Limit to: English Language, scholarly Peer reviewed journals*	n=1 Crowley (2019)
ERIC (EBSCO)	Thesaurus tool was utilised to create	n=48	n=1

	following terms: ("adopt* status" OR "adopt* child*" OR "adoptees" OR "adopt* young person" OR "adopt* young people" OR "adopt* parent") AND ("school*" OR "educat*") AND ("experience" OR "views")	*Limit to: academic journals and reports, English, United Kingdom*	Crowley (2019)
British Education Index	Thesaurus tool was utilised to create following terms: ("adopt* status" OR "adopt* child*" OR "adoptees" OR "adopt* young person" OR "adopt* young people" OR "adopt* parent") AND ("school*" OR "educat*") AND ("experience" OR "views")	n=14 *No limiters applied at this stage.*	n=1 Templeton, McGlade & Fitzsimons (2020)
Scopus	Searched title, abstract and keywords "adopted" OR "adoptive" AND "education"	N=93 Limit: UK location, English, Article Screening of titles and abstracts	n=2 Cooper & Johnson (2007) Crowley (2019)

Social Care Online	Subject term: 'adoption' including related terms AND 'education'-this term only.	n= 46 No limits applied.	n=1 Gilling (2014)
Child Development and Adolescent studies	Thesaurus tool was utilised to create following terms: ("adopt* status" OR "adopt* child*" OR "adoptees" OR "adopt* young person" OR "adopt* young people" OR "adopt* parent") AND ("school*" OR "educat*") AND ("experience" OR "views")	N=23	N=0
Education Research Complete	Thesaurus tool was utilised to create following terms: ("adopt* status" OR "adopt* child*" OR "adoptees" OR "adopt* young person" OR "adopt* young people" OR "adopt* parent") AND ("school*" OR "educat*") AND ("experience" OR "views")	N=97	N=2 Templeton, McGlade & Fitzsimons (2020) Crowley (2019)

Hand search	"adopted children and education"		AUK (2018)
			AUK (2017)
			Brown, Waters & Shelton (2019)
			Best, Cameron & Hill (2021)

Articles were screened for duplication, leaving the following eight research papers: Best, Cameron & Hill (2021); Templeton, McGlade & Fitzsimons (2020); Crowley (2019); Brown, Waters & Shelton (2019); AUK (2018); AUK (2017); Gilling (2014) and Cooper and Johnson (2007).

Appendix C: Summary table of final papers for the systematic literature review

Authors, date and location	Article Title and Journal	Participant No. Gender and Age	Research Methodology and Relevant Findings	Criticisms
1. Best, Cameron & Hill (2021) UK	Exploring the educational experiences of children and young people adopted from care: Using the voices of children and parents to inform practice. Adoption & Fostering *Peer reviewed*	11 adopted participants: 5 male and 6 females (avg. age reported is 14 years and 3 months). 6 adopters: 3 male and 3 female. 20 Designated Teachers (gender not reported)	Qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews (AYP), use of thematic analysis, focus group (adopters) and a workshop (DTs). What difficulties do AYP experience in school? *Inner turmoil (intense emotions and uncertain identity); Social disconnection (negative expectations within relationships and friendship difficulties); unsupportive school contexts (unrecognised needs and inadequate support); misperceptions and prejudice (misconception and adoption stigma).* What supportive factors contribute to the positive educational experiences of adopted children? *Relational repair (caring adults and peer support).* How can the educational experiences of adopted children be used to inform practice? *Raising awareness, prioritising relationships, supporting emotional needs.*	Mostly negative findings (as reflected in the selection of themes) despite intention to identify positive experiences equally- possible bias in the way the semi-structured interview was designed and constructed. The largest sample to date in collected adopted CYP's views. Excellent use of triangulation- however it is difficult to disentangle the voice of the adopted CYP from the adoptive parents' views and the themes were merged. Does not engage critically with the studies in the literature review and accepts findings at face value. The researchers reports averages for sample characteristics in groups with large age ranges- this can be reductionist and oversimplifies the context of development of adopted CYP for the reader.

			Themes raised by DTs in the workshop based on pre-identified themes from adopted CYP and adopters: *raise awareness, develop relationships and support emotional needs.*	DTs from one local authority and 15/20 are based in primary schools. Biased sample of adopted CYP towards those who had SEMH needs; sample also secondary aged adoptees only.
2. Templeton, McGlade & Fitzsimons (2020) Northern Ireland	'My Experience of School'- The Perspective of Adopted Young People Aged 16-21 Years.	9 young people (aged 16-21; mixed gender). Attending mainstream school (n=3) Attending University (n=3) In Further Education (n=1) In work (n=2)	Qualitative study, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Opening question "Tell me about your time at school" which then led to researcher discussing different aspects of school life. Findings identified three overarching themes: the impact of being an adoptee (importance of loss, ACEs and knowledge of adoption); the adoptee in school (importance of relationships, behaviour, lesson content and environment) and the teacher's approach (controlling and punitive, informed, empathetic and supportive).	First published study to gather the views of adopted young people aged 16-21 years. Still biased towards eliciting negative experiences. Findings may not be representative of other nations in the UK as this study was based on adopted young people who were educated and reside in Northern Ireland.
3. Crowley (2019) UK	Exploring the views and perceptions of adopted young people concerning their education and	4 female participants (12, 13, 16, 18)	Qualitative study. Semi-structured Interview- IPA analysis. How does being adopted affect adopted young people's "self-esteem"	Small sample size (4) and therefore not representative of all AYP's experiences. Female only sample. The researcher's stance on attachment theory underpins interpretation of data but

| | social development: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Educational Psychology in Practice
Peer Reviewed | | and "identity" development? ⌊SEP⌋

What are adopted young people's views on their education? ⌊SEP⌋

How do adopted young people experience peer group relationships inside and ⌊SEP⌋outside the classroom? ⌊SEP⌋

Five themes that emerged for all four participants: *identity and self, relationships, school, attachment and adoptive status.*

Early childhood relationships and experiences were closely related to their psychosocial adjustment to their adoption and had a significant impact on their social relationships, particularly with their peers and their educational development.
Link between early attachment disruption and trauma/neglect can lead to cognitive, social, behavioural and emotional difficulties. | this was not explained to the reader from the beginning.

Recruited via advertisement sent out by adoption services- possible only attracting parents/families who remain in contact with adoption services due to difficulties experienced by young people-biased sample.

Not enough pre-adoption history taken or "genetic background"- hard to determine which factors led to what outcomes as stated by the researcher.

Participants may have remembered more of their difficult times- research questions may have been biased towards eliciting more negative views.

Author does not explore or separate some of the disabilities associated with the adopted CYP and impact on education i.e. hearing disability may have impacted on learning in a similar fashion to a hearing impaired non-adopted CYP.
Researcher over-emphasises the importance of attachment patterns and has a fixed within-child mindset about these- has not looked more closely at what other factors will have |

				played a role in 'psychological adjustment' and 'self-esteem.' Research concludes adoption to be a positive intervention to developmental catch up- however, there is no evidence as such for this, no pre-history for yp, also there is some evidence of young people who have 'survived' complex traumatic childhoods and have not been adopted/ in care etc. Cognitive, social, behavioural and emotional difficulties-author does not recognise that these can be interrelated? School connectedness can have an impact on academic performance, motivation and emotional well-being. Reseacher focused mostly on cognitive link to learning- excluded SEMH factors.
4. Brown, Waters & Shelton, 2019 UK	The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK Adoption&Fostering *Peer Reviewed*	Adopted n=22 (aged 10-15 years) and matched comparison n=110 (matched on age, sex, ethnicity and country of residence).	Quantitative study survey research design with one free-response item in the survey regarding aspirations of future careers. Adopted children reported higher externalising and total difficulties scores (based on SDQ) than control groups, but equivalent internalizing scores. Adopted children more likely to seek full-time work at the end of compulsory schooling.	Lacks greater clarity on those who declare they were adopted and what the nature of adoption was i.e. could have included family adoptions. SDQ is context dependent and it is recommended for parents to complete too- but only youth views gathered and so lack of triangulation of views.

				Due to the nature of the study, some relationships were identified in the data that are interesting and will require further investigations as to why these relationships may exist e.g. are caring professions more desirable to children who have been adopted due to their personal experiences? Small sample and difficult to generalise.
5. AUK 2018 UK	Bridging the Gap Giving adopted children an equal chance in school Adoption UK	More than 2000 adoptive parents and nearly 2000 adopted young people.	Appears to be a predominantly quantitative survey research design which reports percentages on particular areas; however unclear, as qualitative data has also been presented including quotes from adoptive parents and also case studies. Issues explored with adoptive parents which highlighted the difficulties that adopted CYP experience: greater prevalence of SEMH and SEN which impacts on learning and attendance; more likely to perceive school as stressful; difficulties during social times; less optimism about the future in learning; lack of transparency about use of pupil premium funds; unhelpful behaviour management policies and secondary schools lack in	Unclear research design- AUK does not provide clarity on how they gather their information and their presentation of findings is in a mixed style which adds to the confusion of their design. Sample bias as more likely to elicit the views of adoptive parents who are experiencing difficulties and want their voices to be heard. Non-peer reviewed research and so lacks rigour. Survey research design seeking which has inherent bias on the views it seeks to collate- questions may be negatively framed. Lacks psychological theory and mostly focuses on reporting statistics.

			understanding how to support mental health. Adopted CYP mostly reported experiencing difficulties in schools with the majority feeling that they are not fully understood/supported by their teachers and at least 47% of children have reported being bullied in relation to their adoption.	Adopts less of a positive psychology approach instead looking to bridge gaps in the deficits displayed in the education system with regard to: understanding, empathy, resources and children's attainment. But views gathered of value- only known large studies in the literature.
6. AUK 2017 UK		2,084 responses per adopted child completed by parents, 84% from UK, 3% N.I, 5% Scotland, 7% Wales.	Appears to be mostly a quantitative survey research design with the inclusion of a few open ended questions. More than ¾ of adopted CYP have never received a fixed term exclusion. Just under 48% of 2,024 had a recognised SEND: 63% SEMH, 28% SCLN, moderate learning difficulty 25%, SLD 21%, ASD 20%, 9% receiving SEND support but no formal SEN assessment completed; more likely to have an EHCP than their non-adopted counterparts. Adopted children disproportionally excluded at a younger age compared to non-adopted peers. Adopted children over-represented in all exclusion statistics across all	AUK unclear on how it has elicited some of the qualitative responses in what appears to be a mostly quantitative study. Respondents self-selecting and may only complete due to bad experiences, however AUK did encourage parents to complete even if child had not been excluded. Retrospective memory- are parents recollecting the number of exclusions accurately? There is no use of nuanced statistical tests, just percentages for different subgroups. Without proper analyses it is difficult to influence and implement policy, even though this is what they are seeking to do.

			nations- highest in Scotland whose rates are recorded to be falling overall. Adopted children more likely to experience change of schools, informal/illegal exclusions, managed moves and home schooling. Peak of fixed period exclusions for adopted young people is in the first three years of secondary schools which does not follow the national trend.	The extent of informal/illegal exclusions are unknown and so it's difficult to have information about the rate of this occurring for non-adopted children to compare to.
7. Gilling, 2014 UK	Jasper's story: 'Letting me down and picking me up'- one boy's story of despair and hope at primary schools in England. Adoption and Fostering *Peer Reviewed*	12 year old boy's experience of school from the age of 7.	Case study and ethnography/auto-ethnography methodologies. Told from mostly the perspective of Jasper's mother, who is also a social worker and service user, supplemented by quotes from Jasper and his adoptive father. Two schools had differing impact on the social and emotional impact on a young adoptee. It highlights how different approaches can lead to different results.	Can be confusing to read as it moves from first person perspective to third person. Unsure if the author is the mother- the relationship between the author and child is not clearly stated. Provides rich data from service users perspective (the adoptive parents) but it is difficult to separate the views of Jasper from his parents as it is told from the mother's perspective.

| 8. Cooper and Johnson 2007 UK | Education The views of adoptive parents

Adoption and Fostering
Peer Reviewed | 100 adoptive parents and 33 adopted children. | A mixed qualitative and quantitative study which utilised a questionnaire (postal survey) to gather information.

Relationships were important for adopted children. Adopted children are more likely to have SEND or experience social or learning difficulties in school; however, positive educational experiences are the norm and how schools have supported is reported. Adoptive parents favoured schools which have a greater understanding of adoption and maintain good communication with parents. Adoptive parents felt adopted children needed additional support at times of transition. | This is a dated study and data was collected several years before the research was published (September- December 2004).

Sample is specific to Sheffield Local Authority.

Child views gathered may also be similar to those of non-adopted children- difficult to know this without having a control population.

Statistical analysis for this study is merely descriptive statistics; no statistical significance can be identified and, subsequently, the chance of this paper having a wider impact on policy is minimal. Although percentages offer a rough idea of the difference between groups of children, without tests of difference, the conclusions have to be considered with a huge degree of caution. |

<u>Interview Schedule</u>

Firstly, I'd like to start off by thanking you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Today I would like to hear about your educational experiences and what might have affected your educational experience. I am also interested to hear about how you have been getting on since you have left education (if this is the case). I have some areas that I would like us to cover, if there are some things that you do not feel you want to speak about- that is absolutely fine, we can keep checking in with each other during this interview to make sure that you are comfortable. Please feel free to request to end the interview at any point in time.

Confidentiality

I should stress that everything you tell me will be treated as confidential unless of course you have raised any safeguarding concerns where someone is at imminent risk; aside from this please be assured that neither your name nor your contact details will be revealed to anyone.

Recording

You have already provided consent to recording this interview- could I just check that this is still okay? Recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask? Can you confirm that you understand about the study and agree to the interview?

Section 1

In the first part of this interview, I'd like for you to help me map out a timeline of your experience in education: what is the first place that you remember in your schooling experience, where did you go after?

Section 2

Secondly, I'd like to talk about what has brought you here today and what your thoughts are about what you wanted to share today.

Section 3

Now I just wanted to get your thoughts on the following aspects of your educational experience:

- The role of adults who worked in the school i.e. teachers, mid-day supervisors, head of years, the head teacher etc.
- Could you tell me more about your experiences with other children?
- How did you find learning in the classroom?
- How did you find break times and lunchtimes? What about the other times in the school day when other children might have spent time talking to each other?

Do you think your experience of education has had an impact on your life today? If so, how?

- What positive impact has it had also do you think in this case?

The next set of questions are looking at areas where you may have felt particularly strong and resilient during your time in education.

- Sense of Mastery ○ Can you think of a time when you felt in control of your life at school?
    How important do you feel that was for you? ○ When do you remember feeling optimistic and hopeful about your future at school?
    - ○ Were there times when you found yourself faced with a problem and you were able to solve it? How important was that for you?
    - ○ Can you think of a time you felt you could ask for help when you needed it?
- Sense of Relatedness ○ How important is it to you to be able to have relationships with other young people and adults at school?
    - ○ Can you think of one good relationship you had/have with someone at school? Can you think of an adult/friend?
    - ○ What did you/they do to make it a good relationship?
    - ○ Can you tell me about the times when you felt you could trust people in school (children or adults or both)?
    - ○ Can you think of a time when you were able to get through a disagreement or a difference with someone?
    - ○ Were there times you felt supported during your education? Either by your peers or the staff?
- Sense of Emotional Reactivity ○ Can you tell me about times of when you felt you coped well with a stressful situation at school? ○ How important is it to you for you to be able to do that?

Section 4

Thinking back on your educational experiences, what has been helpful for you?

What would you like for educational establishments to change? ⟦SEP⟧

Who should this research should be fed back to?

Section 5

Summarise participant's strengths.

<u>The following information was included and approved in my ethics application</u>

Focus Areas

- Previous positive educational experiences of participants, spanning from early years to secondary and college settings.
- Sense of Mastery in one's life
- Sense of Relatedness in one's life
- Sense of Emotional Reactivity in one's life
- What is working/has worked previously? ⟦SEP⟧
- What would you like to change? ⟦SEP⟧
- Who the research should be fed back to? ⟦SEP⟧

Prompts ⟦SEP⟧

Past successes:

- After having been through what you've been through, how did you find the strength to keep pushing on? ⟦SEP⟧
- What do you need to do so that you'll feel good about yourself and in control of your education? ⟦SEP⟧
- What would it take for you to bring back the confidence you used to have? ⟦SEP⟧

Exceptions: ⟦SEP⟧

- I can see you have every reason to dislike school. When do you suppose you like/liked school? How would you say things are/were different when you are/were enjoying school? ⟦SEP⟧
- Tell me what is different for you at those times when school is going well? ⟦SEP⟧
- What would have to happen for school to improve? ⟦SEP⟧

Coping:

- What have you found that is helpful in managing this situation at school?

- Considering how depressed and overwhelmed you feel/felt about school, how is it that you were able to get out of bed that morning and make it to our interview today?
- You say that you're not sure that you want to continue working on your personal goals. What is it that has helped you to work on them up to now?

Miracle question: "Suppose one night there is a miracle while you were sleeping and the problem/s you experience/d in school is solved. Since you are sleeping you don't know the miracle has happened or that the problem is solved, what do you suppose you will notice different the next morning that will tell you that the problem is solved?"

- If the miracle happened, what would be the first thing you would do? ⌞SEP⌟
- If the miracle happened what will be the first change you will notice about yourself? ⌞SEP⌟
- What would your friend/parent notice different about you? ⌞SEP⌟
- If you were to take these steps, what would you notice different around your school? ⌞SEP⌟

Scaling: ⌞SEP⌟

- On a scale of 1-10 with 10 meaning you have every confidence that things can improve in education, and 1 means no confidence at all, where would you put yourself today? ⌞SEP⌟
- On the same scale, how hopeful are you that this/these problem/s can be solved? ⌞SEP⌟
- What would it take for you to move up just one step? ⌞SEP⌟
- What's the most important thing that needs to be done to keep things at a 7 or 8?

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

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

Psychology

REVIEWER: Cynthia Fu

SUPERVISOR: **Lucy Browne**

STUDENT: Nazma Rahman

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Title of proposed study: Educational experiences of adopted young people aged 16 – 25 years

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **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/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES</u>** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION**

REQUIRED (see Major Amendments box below)**:** 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.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

> Approved, but minor amendments are required before the research commences.

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Please confirm that the DBS certificate is in place before beginning recruitment because I didn't see this in the application form and has it been sent separately. YES.

Section 25. Protection of the researcher:
"This may potentially pose a risk to the researcher and therefore safeguarding protocols will be adhered to. Furthermore, all participants may potentially pose a risk to the researcher as they are strangers. To mitigate these concerns, two individuals will be informed of the time and place of each meeting and the researcher will inform both individuals of when they have entered the venue and have left the venue. One individual will be the researcher's supervisor and the other, a family member."

Does the 'family member' refer to the researcher's family member? If this is the case, then a family member who is not part of the research team will have access to confidential information about participants. Could another member of the research team be informed instead of a family member of the researcher.

THIS HAS BEEN AMENDED TO JUST THE SUPERVISOR.

Please clarify whether participants who are 18 year old and older are required to have a consent form from their parents.

PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE 18 YEARS OR ABOVE WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO HAVE A CONSENT FORM FROM THEIR PARENTS (this will only apply to participants aged 16 or 17 years old).

Major amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.
Please see my comments above in red above in response to the minor amendments made.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):* NAZMA RAHMAN
Student number: U1724611

Date: 8.04.19

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

Reviewed following minor amendments made and agreed all minor amendments are made in line with Reviewer's comments.

Dr Lucy Browne
Research Supervisor for Nazma Rahman
15.03.19

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

[ ] HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective

	MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)
x	LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*:   Cynthia Fu

Date: 8 March 2019

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 UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

University of East London Psychology

REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for 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 Amendments Form.

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST

1. Complete the request form electronically and accurately.

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: Psychology.Ethics@uel.ac.uk

4. Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with reviewer's response box completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

1. A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant: Nazma Rahman

Programme of study: Professional Doctorate Educational and Child Psychology

Name of supervisor: Lucy Browne

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
Old Title: Educational experiences of adopted young people aged 16 – 25 years	My previous title lacked clarity in the psychological approach that was undertaken in my research.
New Title: Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective.	

Please tick	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	Y	
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?		N

Student's signature (please type your name): Nazma Rahman

Date: 02/04/2020

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Title changes approved	APPROVED	
Comments		

Reviewer: Glen Rooney Date: 03/04/2020

Seeking Adopted Young People aged 16-25 years to share their experiences of the UK education system

Please have your say in my research!

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from University of East London looking to speak with adopted young people (aged 16-25 years) who are willing to discuss their experiences of education in the UK.

Relatively little research has been conducted exploring the experiences of adopted young people in education. The aim of this research is to gain a greater understanding of how adopted young people can be better supported by professionals in education and to provide a platform for under-represented voices to be heard.

Would you be interested in speaking to me?

Please contact lead researcher Nazma Rahman via email U1724611@UEL.AC.UK to register your interest in the study and to find out more.

<u>**INFORMATION SHEET**</u>

Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective.

This sheet gives you some information about a research project happening in your area which you have the opportunity to be a part of.

Hello, my name is Nazma Rahman and I am training to become an Educational Psychologist. This means I work with schools, families, children and young people, to support and improve education.

What is the purpose of the study?

As part of my training I am doing a research project about adopted young people and I want to find out about their experiences of education and schools.

It may surprise you to know that relatively little research has been carried out in the UK to explore adopted young people's experiences of education and no research to date has asked to speak with young adopted people aged 16-25 years. The aim of this research is to gain a greater understanding of how adopted young people can be better supported in education.

The government have been working to try to improve things for adopted young people and are keen to hear what adopted young people have to say.

I hope that this project will help professionals to understand what adopted young people want from education and how they can be best supported in order to improve their educational experiences.

I am looking for young adopted people aged 16-25 years old who would be interested in talking to me about their experiences of school and education, which will also include what may have helped them in the past, or could help them in the future.

What will I have to do?

If you agree to take part in the research, we will then decide together the best way for the interview to take place. I will be interested in finding out about your views and experiences in a face-to-face/ video call interview which will last no longer than 1 hour and be recorded on audio.

All contact with me is confidential. Neither your name nor any details about you will be available to anyone other than me.

If you are happy to participate in this research or would like to be contacted by me to find out more about the research then please respond to this letter, either by emailing or writing to me.

Do I have to take part?

Your involvement in this study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you should know that you are free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving us a reason for your withdrawal. If you agree to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form that outlines what your participation in the study involves and shows your agreement to take part. If you decide to withdraw from the research, I will destroy any information that you have provided, as long as you inform me of your decision to withdraw within three weeks after your interview.

What will happen to the information that I provide?

After your interview, your recording will be anonymously transcribed by myself. Once anonymised, which means that you will no longer be identifiable as the source of this information, this data may potentially be looked at by responsible individuals from University of East London or from regulatory authorities.

Findings of this research will then be written up and shared with you and the other participants who have contributed to the research. Findings then may be written up into presentations and shared with other responsible professionals whilst protecting your anonymity, for example, my research supervisors, examiners, school teachers and Virtual School Head Teachers.

Audio recordings of the interview will be destroyed after transcripts have been verified to be accurate, and transcripts will be kept up to a period of three years in the event of future publications.

Who has authorised this research?

This research is authorised by the University of East London. It has also been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Who to contact

For any further information please contact:

Nazma Rahman⸬

Trainee Educational Psychologist⸬

School of Psychology
University of East London
Stratford Campus Water
Lane London E15 4LZ
Email: U1724611@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr. Lucy Browne School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ, Email: L.browne@uel.ac.uk

Expression of Interest Form for Participants

Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective.

Nazma Rahman (Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of East London).

By providing the information below, you are confirming that you have read the Information Sheet and that you would like to express an interest in taking part in the study. You are also confirming that you are happy to be contacted by telephone/email by the chief investigator, Nazma Rahman, to arrange an interview date.

Your Name:

_____

Your Preferred Contact Number:

_____

Your preferred email address:

Your Current Age: _____ Your Age at Adoption: _____

Did you attend or are you currently attending a school in the UK?: Y N

Your Signature: _____ Date:

_____

Thank you for expressing your interest in this study. Please return this completed Expression of Interest form to myself in the prepaid envelope.

Nazma Rahman

Participant Consent Form

Research Title:⸬ Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective.

Name of Investigator: Nazma Rahman

Dear Participant, please initial each box below to confirm your agreement with the following statements so that you may participate in this research:

Please initial:

1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the Invitation Letter for the above research project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and decide whether to take part.

2.	I understand that my involvement is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, and without affecting my care in any current educational settings or any support I may be receiving from organisations.

3.	I understand I will be interviewed about my experience in education as an adopted young person and that my comments will be audio recorded and anonymously transcribed. The transcription will be undertaken by Nazma Rahman (University of East London) who will be bound by strict confidentiality guidelines.

4.	I understand that the anonymised data collected during the research may be looked at by responsible individuals from University of East London or from regulatory authorities.

5.	I give permission for any data I provide during the interview to be used in written articles and/or presentations as long as my identity is protected, and that neither I nor any members of my family will be identifiable.

6.	I understand that if I choose to withdraw from the study, I have the right to withdraw any data associated with my involvement (including data I provided during the interview) however I understand that this right to withdraw my data is time limited; my data cannot be withdrawn three weeks after my interview.

7.	I understand that the information I share during the interview will be handled in confidence, unless I provide information that suggests I or someone else is at significant risk. In such circumstances, I understand that my anonymity could not be maintained and the information I disclosed (along with my name) would be passed to the relevant safeguarding professional so that the appropriate procedures could be followed.

8.	I wish to be sent a summary of the research findings once the project is completed and I consent to my personal contact information being held for up to 12 months after the date of my research interview so that I can receive this information by post.

9.	I consent to taking part in the above research study by participating in a recorded research interview.

Name of Interviewee:

Date:

Signature:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. Your participation is extremely valuable.␣

Please return this completed consent form to myself in the prepaid envelope or via email.

Nazma Rahman
Research Investigator
U1724611@UEL.AC.UK

<u>PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF</u>

Research Title: Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective.

Thank you for taking part in this research study about adopted young people's experiences of education. We have now completed the main interview; however, before you leave I wanted to take this opportunity to remind you of some important information about this research study.

The aim of this research has been to gain a greater understanding of how young adopted people experience education, in particular with a focus on when you have had a positive experience, how that has been brought about. By hearing about your experiences, I expect to gain information that will help professionals who work within the education system to offer services and support that will better address the difficulties that some adopted children and young people face.

I have explained that all the information you shared with me will be handled in confidence and stored securely. The audio recording of your interview will now be anonymously transcribed into a written format, which may include full word-for-word quotes or extracts from your interview. Any personally identifiable information that you have shared (e.g. names of people, places, schools, etc.) will however be changed or completely removed. I have also explained that any personal information you provided (e.g. your name and contact telephone number) will be kept on file exclusively for the purpose of contacting you about the research (such as sending you a summary of the research findings, if you requested one) and that this information will be deleted after 12 months.

You have told me that your decision to participate in this study has been voluntary and I have explained that the standard of care you receive from the local authority/school/university currently or in the future, will not be affected by your decision to take part in the research. Having completed the interview, I also wanted to remind you that you have the right to withdraw your data from the study and that you will be able to do this up <u>until three weeks after your interview.</u> After this point in time, your data cannot be withdrawn.

I understand that talking about your experiences of education as an adopted young person could have been upsetting. I hope that I have been able to address any concerns you have raised during the interview; however, if you feel that you have been affected by the issues discussed, then please contact either myself, or my Supervisor, who will be able to support and advise you further:

Dr. Lucy Browne (Supervising Educational Psychologist and Tutor at University of East London)

Adoptees' experiences of education; a positive psychology perspective

You may also like to contact the following adoption support services:

1. PAC- UK Advice Line (London office): 020 7284 5879
2. Adoption UK: England - 07904 793 974 and 07539 733079

Once again, many thanks for your participation in this research study.

Yours faithfully,

Nazma Rahman (Trainee Educational Psychologist, University of East London)

Appendix K: Example of how data was analysed via Nvivo and the way in which that evolved from initial coding to refined themes.

Appendix L: Photo of an example of initial analysis on a printed transcript.

[handwritten: teacher provided physical comfort — do teachers]
[handwritten: will do this today?]
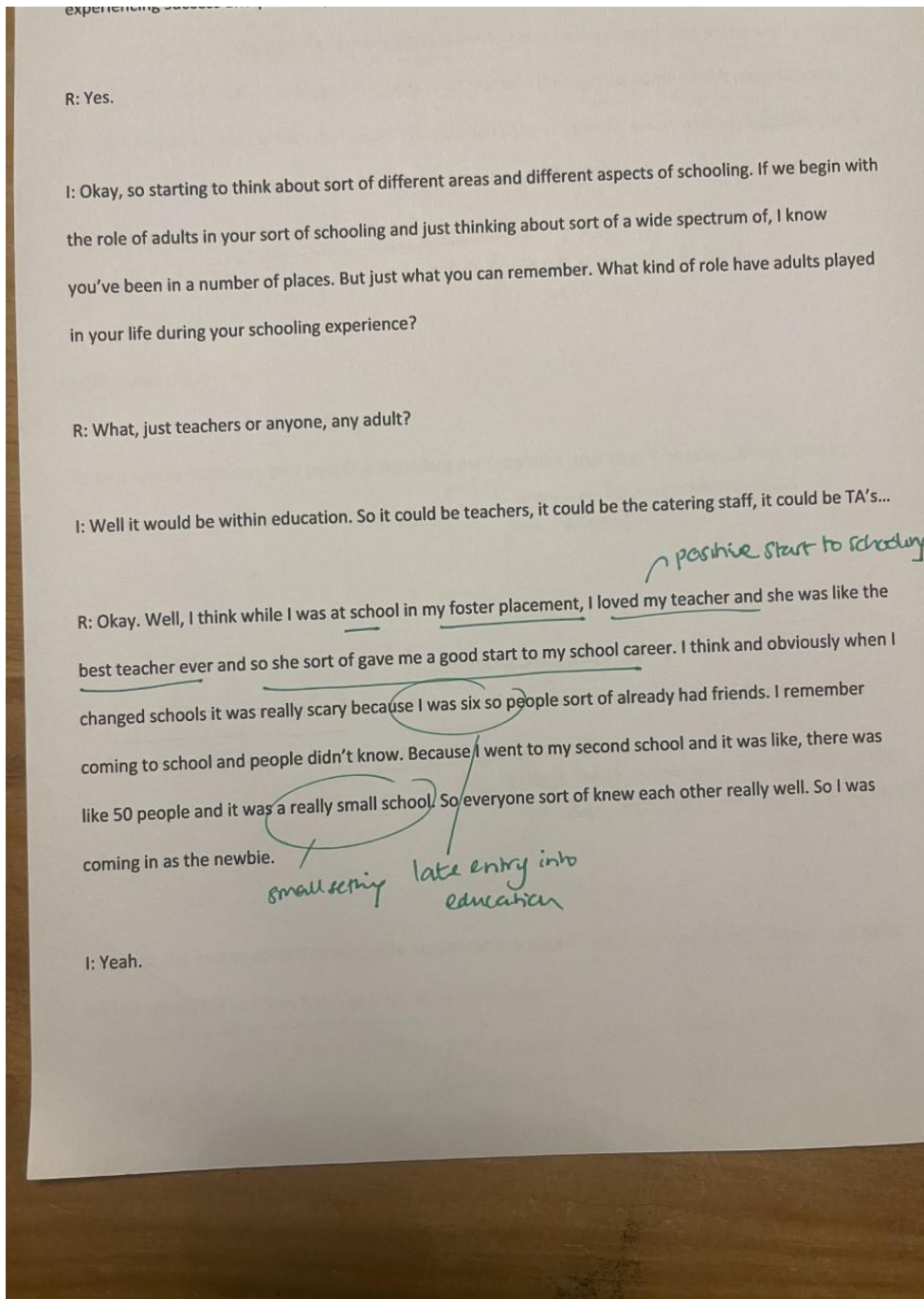
R: And on my first day I was sat on my teacher's lap while she did the register. I think yeah, I settled in really quick at primary school. Primary school was alright. Schools..secondary school was a bit harder because there's so many more people and people aren't so nice.

[handwritten: transition to secondary more challenging]
[handwritten: one HoY knew about adoption (brains)]

And my head of year was sort of the only person that knew that I was adopted. And so she was really nice about it and I think one of the biggest struggles I had that was that my real name wasn't really Sapphire, it's X. And when I moved in with my family now, I started using my middle name, which is Sapphire. But it was never legally changed so in school everything was always still X. It was really hard explaining to people why that was. So one of the first things that the teacher did was to get my name changed on all the registers.

[handwritten: ↳ excellent + quick support for AYP]

I: Oh wonderful.

R: So it was to make sure that people were calling me Sapphire rather than X because I didn't want to explain to people why I had a different name.

[handwritten: → I wonder how common this is for AYP?]

I: Yes, yeah.

[handwritten: academically strong]

R: I didn't really have any extra help throughout school. I mean, I was quite sort of academic so I didn't really need any extra help. Except for I did use the school counsellor.

[handwritten: ↳ school had a school counsellor on site — not always the case in schools]

I: Brilliant.

R: I guess she was an adult that was quite important at school. It was less for adoption things. It was more for just school life and how it can be a bit tricky sometimes.

[handwritten: ↳ AYP dissociates certain challenges in school life from adoption related difficulties]

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: But yeah she was really important. Yeah. I think as I got older the teachers became less important, I guess. Not really I mean because they still taught me but as I became more confident in myself and stuff. I didn't need them to sort of tell me that I was doing well and stuff.

interesting. teacher's importance changes - AYP confident with learning.

→ perception of role of teacher

I: I'm interested in the school counsellor. Was that something that you had asked for or your parents had asked for? Or something the school had decided that would be helpful for you?

seeking support for friendships

R: I think it was me really and I just sort of heard about them in school and people were always talking about them and tried to encourage people to use their services and I think I'd had like a bad falling out with a friend or something and I thought maybe I could talk to them about it.

→ good at seeking out support for problems.

↳ openess to counselling is very positive.

I: Yes, wonderful yeah.

R: But yeah, my parents were always encouraging of that.

importance of adoptive parent's role in engaging with support provided at school

I: Brilliant, yes. It sounds like so you could just request a counsellor. That sounds really, really helpful. Brilliant ok. Are there any other particular teachers that you had in mind as well in addition to the ones you've already spoken about that were quite helpful.

lesson on adoption recalled links with abortion v. negative.
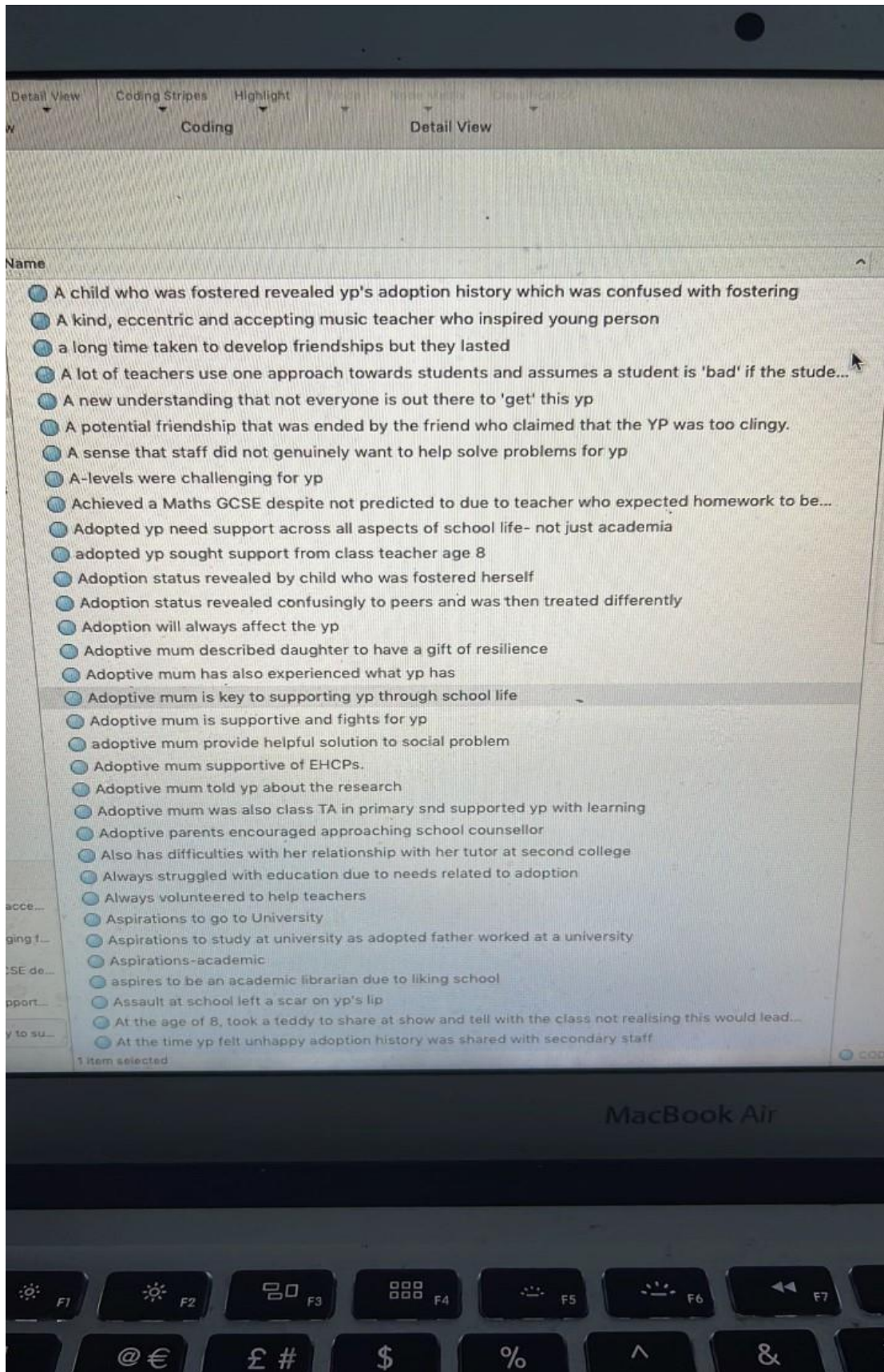
R: Well there was one at college because I did religious studies and part of that was doing an ethics course. And then part of that we had to learn about sort of abortion and adoption and sort of different views on that kind of stuff and so we had a lesson on adoption and there was a girl in my class who was she's a bit of a know-it-all and she was quite annoying but she sort of put her hand up and said something about adoption that I can't really remember what it was now but I knew that it wasn't true.

Appendix M: Photo of initial exploratory codes.

"I don't think this necessarily means that these AYP want to form secure attachments with their teachers, more that they want to feel cared for? I don't know how to collate this into an overall theme -as it currently stands, I've written 'relational/attachment training' but I think 'caring' is the key word.
What are your thoughts?"
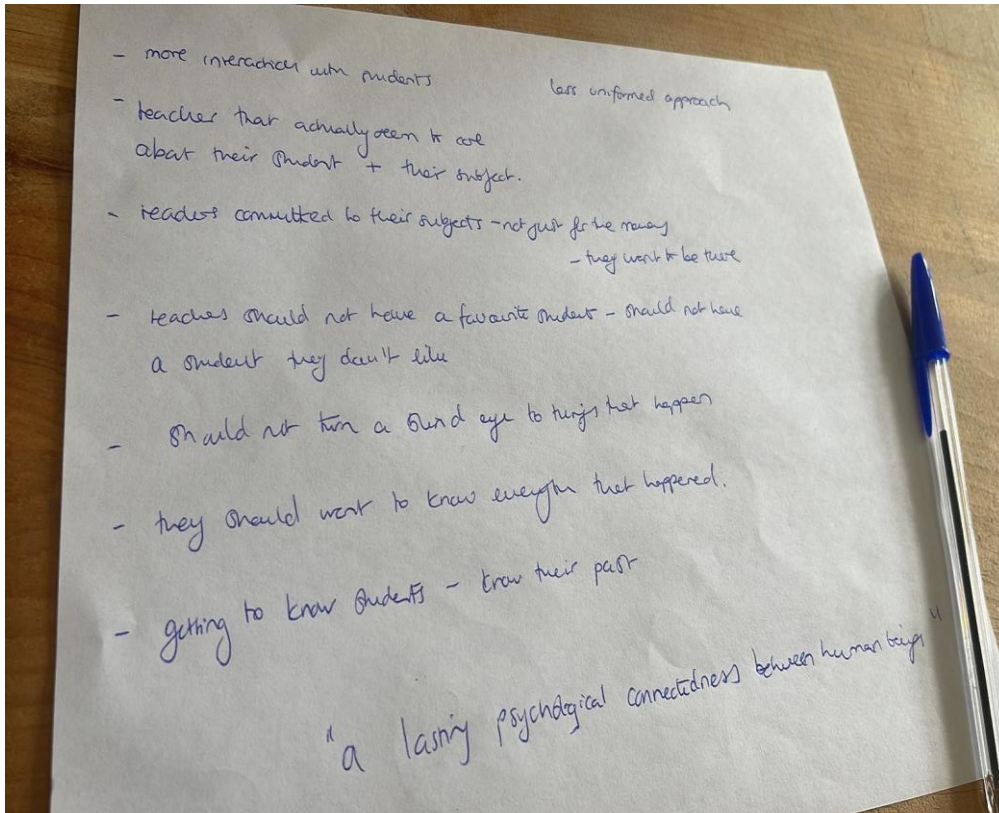
Appendix O: Excerpts from reflective diary.

Excerpt 1:

Reading the transcript- Garnet has just spoken about how EHCPs are the only way to get your needs recognised and she told me about her mums fighting for her to get an EHCP. There was a response from me to that information, I had to quickly recover and I remember noting that feeling and then moving on in the interview- I know EHCPs means a lot to young people and parents but I am sad that it is considered the only way to be supported in a setting- this is always coming up in my practice as an EP even though we continue to do our best to explain that schools can support most of the time with the resources they have and EHCPs are not magic bullets as such. I remembered during one of my own cases where a child was devastated that they had their EHC application rejected- they took it really hard as though they would never receive support again and I knew that the young person was echoing her mother's anxieties. I'm using this moment to park my own personal thoughts on this- so that I can put myself back into seeing the world from Garnet's view- her mum is a hero who will stop at nothing to make sure she gets the support she needs.

Excerpt 2:

Today's interview was hard, the adopted young person was sharing some difficult times with me and I could sense that that she really found it difficult to connect with others and told me so in her own words. At first, having my feet firmly in a positive psychology approach seemed counter intuitive when this adopted young person was visibly upset at their recollection of their journey in school. In that moment I felt powerless as someone who could not directly relate to her experiences. I think I did however use my communication skills effectively to ensure that she felt listened to (I am a trainee EP after all- and even prior to that, I've been working with young people all my professional life)-she thanked me for my support which felt sincere and was very reassuring for me. The power of positive psychology is I think however on reflection understated, here I had a young person upset at her thoughts of not connecting with others…yet when I sought to find exceptions or explored moments of connections with her, she was able to explain what helped some of these positive interactions take place. I wonder how she will remember this interview? I remember, despite her visible pain when recalling some experiences, it was wonderful to see this young person's eyes sparkle as she remembered her favourite teacher. It reminded me and about why I am doing the research that I am doing.

Excerpt 3:

I am completely and utterly new to thematic analysis. I have really under estimated the level of subjectivity required here and it is proving to be a huge block. I can see why we need to record when we make particular decisions, I find myself doubting decisions I make all the time and actually I wish I had the participants with me while I do this-food for thought if I ever do any future research. But- it's reassuring to send snaps of my work to my TEP friend for a second opinion and to also have questions ready for supervision. It's really made me think about how other researchers interpret their data and really the need to include reflexivity in all published research- even if it's just to remind the reader, that the data is of course being presented through the researcher's eyes.

 Excerpt 4:

It's strange beginning to analyse my data after so long and getting to know the reality of an EPs life by continuing to be employed as TEP all this time at my local authority. Reams of implications and pages of advice seem so overwhelming and counterproductive. I've seen newer research published- but it has me thinking, why is it taking so long for change to happen? Why are schools still struggling to support emotionally vulnerable young people? The answer isn't straightforward of course, but it's a question we need to answer to help things move forward.