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# **EDUCOM UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ANNUAL YEARBOOK**



**ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023**



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# INTRODUCTION

The third volume of the EDUCOM Undergraduate Research Annual Yearbook is here and we are very pleased to present some of our students' best work for the academic year 2022-23.

Many thanks to our Dean, Richard Harty for continuing to support the publication of this volume, as well as my colleagues Sydney Jeffers, Jennifer Robson, Susannah Pickering-Saqa, and Evgenia Theodotou for encouraging their students to contribute. Our greatest thanks go to the contributors of this volume for their excellent work, as well as for their willingness to participate. Thank you Tahmina Akter Begum, Dee Cutts, Zoe Flight, Liliana Simone Grigore, Claire Honour, Qumurn Khan, Raluca Lacatus, Lyall Lester, Kanchan Mala, Gerry Mole, Natalie Ann Morgan, Iuliana Novac, Ireti Osinubi, Eleanor Punter, Laura Shanks, Mayesha Uddin and Coralie Wright. This volume would not have been possible without you.

We hope that you will enjoy reading our students' work, as much as we have taken pleasure in bringing the whole volume together.

## **The Editor**

Prof Maria Tamboukou



# RESEARCH DISSERTATIONS







# **GAINING AN INSIGHT INTO THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF SOUTH ASIAN MOTHERS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN**

by Tahmina Akter Begum

ED6088 Independent Research Project

BA (Hons) Special Education



## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Abstract**

Autism seems to be a highly prevalent neurodevelopmental disorder estimating one in every hundred children meeting the diagnostic criteria in the United Kingdom. The impact of autism on parents and families is typically multifaceted and pervasive. However, there seems to be a shortage of research about the challenges and concerns surrounding the mental well-being of mothers with autistic children acculturating to a foreign nation. Thus, this study aims to investigate the difficulties faced by immigrant mothers hailing from South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India, in providing care for their children diagnosed with autism. Furthermore, the research seeks to ascertain coping mechanisms these maternal figures can embrace to enhance their holistic welfare. The study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with six participants who were biological mothers of both autistic and non-autistic children. Thematic analysis revealed three key themes on the maternal obligation of nurturing a child with autism, namely emotional, familial, and societal difficulties. A potential avenue for future exploration involves including supplementary family members, such as fathers and siblings. The study concludes that it is imperative to aid mothers to facilitate their ability to surmount obstacles and concentrate on the growth and progress of their children with autism.

**Key Words:** Mothers' mental well-being, parental challenges, anxiety, stress, autism.

## Introduction

Autism is one of the most prevalent neurodevelopmental conditions in the world, and the prevalence of autism among children in the United Kingdom seems to be increasing, with a current estimate of one in every hundred children meeting the diagnostic criteria (Curley *et al.*, 2023; Romney *et al.*, 2021; Zeidan *et al.*, 2022). According to scholarly literature, autism is characterised by imbalances in social interaction, communication challenges, and restricted behaviour patterns (Lord *et al.*, 2018; Deb *et al.*, 2020). In addition, there exists variability in the extent to which an individual is impacted, with symptoms ranging from mild to severe and exhibiting the potential to fluctuate over time (Curley *et al.*, 2023; Kantzer *et al.*, 2018; Zeidan *et al.*, 2022). Zeidan *et al.* (2022) analysed publications on the prevalence of autism worldwide, considering the influence of geographical, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics on estimated prevalence. The increase in autism cases was attributed to several factors, including global awareness, public health measures, and changes in case definitions that have led to a broader range of diagnoses and more significant detection of less severe forms (Zeidan *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, enhanced identification of autism in previously underdiagnosed populations based on their sex, geographical location, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status was discovered to be the causal factor of autism (Zeidan *et al.*, 2022).

The effects of autism on parents and families tend to be diverse and pervasive. The challenging nature of caring for children with autism can be attributed to factors such as the severity and chronicity of the condition, severe developmental and physical comorbidities, and the limitations of healthcare systems in providing integrated and intensive interventions (Vohra *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, recent research found that prenatal stress may cause increasing severity in autistic children (Varcin *et al.*, 2017). In addition, more extensive epidemiological research has confirmed the link between prenatal anxiety and autism (Beverdorf *et al.*, 2020). It is widely accepted that parents exert the most significant impact on the developmental trajectory of their children, accounting for an estimated 92% of the influence.

In contrast, therapists and teachers are evaluated to contribute only 3-4% to children's development. Hence, it is frequently observed that children with autism possess significant potential for achieving optimal growth during their adolescent and adult years. This potential may include pursuing undergraduate education and careers in fields that align with their unique interests and talents, as Gurbuz *et al.* (2019) noted. Moreover, parents' participation has been shown to raise student performance (Sheldon and Epstein, 2005), improve school attendance (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002), reduce behaviour issues (Vakalahi, 2001), and decrease drop-out rates (Barnard, 2003). Parents of disabled students have a legal and moral obligation to be actively involved in their children's education alongside the practitioners (Goldman and Burke, 2017). Thus, it is imperative to prioritise the mental well-being of parents to facilitate favourable outcomes in the developmental trajectory of children with autism.

Alsa *et al.* (2021) describe mental well-being as a state in which individuals can function optimally, exhibit emotional stability, realise their full potential, demonstrate adequate maturity, and show positive emotional wellness. The construct under consideration encompasses not only affective states of happiness or the absence of negative feelings but also dimensions such as self-acceptance, environmental mastery, self-determination, positive interpersonal relationships, clarity of personal goals, and a sense of personal growth (Alsa *et*

*al.*, 2021). Ryff and Keyes (1995) posit that the cornerstone of psychological well-being is contingent upon an individual with a good mental state and the capacity to function positively. The concept of wellness encompasses a favourable evaluation of one's current and previous life experiences, a willingness to establish meaningful relationships with others, self-sufficiency, the ability to manage one's life and environment effectively, and a personal conviction to lead a purposeful existence. Ryff and Keyes (1995) expounded upon various determinants impacting an individual's psychological well-being, encompassing resilience, religiosity, self-efficacy, and family social support.

Moreover, mothers' well-being seems to be linked to individual family members' well-being and excellent developmental outcomes for their children (Richter *et al.*, 2018). External circumstances and emotional, social, and cognitive development also influence children's well-being. Family variables, such as the mother's overall well-being, are among the most significant and crucial. The consequences for children may be impacted by the mother's parenting style, for instance. In the Theory of Change, Newland (2015) defines "family well-being" as the foundation of "developmental parenting" and "child well-being." Hence, how parents treat their children and are involved in shared activities impacts children's development.

Furthermore, studying child well-being in connection to family well-being and parenting characteristics is beneficial, according to Agache (2017). Trommsdorff (2018) believes that cultural context and person-culture affect self-regulation and well-being, including socioeconomic, cultural, familial, and school influences and biological predispositions. According to Carter (2010), a happy mother is an excellent role model, and there are strong connections between a mother's well-being and her child's well-being (Holte *et al.*, 2014).

This study aims to provide an understanding of the mental health status of South Asian mothers who have children with autism. My experience supporting children with special educational needs (SEN) from various ethnic backgrounds within a mainstream primary school setting has motivated me to expand my knowledge of autism and devise practical approaches to support the academic advancement of students with autism. The results of this study are expected to serve as a valuable contribution towards enhancing support programmes and interventions for mothers of South Asian descent who have children with autism. In addition, improved comprehension of the cultural, linguistic, and social determinants that influence the psychological welfare of these maternal figures would also be beneficial. The study's primary objective was to strengthen the psychological interest and overall wellness of South Asian mothers. Improving the psychological and overall health condition of South Asian mothers will positively affect the mothers and their autistic progeny.

## Literature Review

Multiple studies have indicated that parents who raise children with autism may experience negative consequences, such as heightened levels of stress and anxiety (Meadan, Halle and Ebata, 2010; Zaki and Moawad, 2016), increased mental health issues (Karst and Van Hecke, 2012), difficulties in their marital relationships (Chu *et al.*, 2020), social isolation due to concerns about the stigma associated with autism (Broady, Stoyles, and Morse, 2017), and a decrease in the family's overall healthy lifestyle (Kheir *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, parents encounter several obstacles to raising their autistic children as primary carers, including adjusting new daily habits, coping with challenging behaviour and attitude, lacking support from family members and local authorities and adverse effects on family life (Ludlow, Skelly and Rohleder, 2012). Notwithstanding, parenting can be challenging, irrespective of whether the child has unique requirements, as Glasberg *et al.* (2006) mentioned. However, it might be more difficult for parents of children with special needs (Padden and James, 2017).

Furthermore, various studies have demonstrated that parents of children with autism report lower levels of physical well-being and an increased prevalence of illnesses in comparison to parents of neurotypical children (Allik *et al.*, 2006; Loft *et al.*, 2007; Mugno *et al.*, 2007; Smith, Seltzer and Greenberg, 2012). On the contrary, most research on stress and health in parents of autistic children has relied on parental self-reports of stress, which may be biased (Romanczyk and Gillis, 2006) and provided little information on underlying causes (Padden and James, 2017). Levin and Scher's (2016) comparative study suggests that mothers of autistic children exhibit a greater probability of experiencing sleep difficulties and elevated stress levels when compared to mothers of neurotypical children. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that primary carers of autistic children experience elevated stress levels and decreased physical well-being compared to those of typically developing children (Brobst, Clopton and Hendrick, 2009; Hoffman *et al.*, 2009; Catalano, Holloway and Mpofo, 2018). One of the causes contributing to stress among parents of autistic children is that their children require additional care and assistance (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022; Dabrowska and Pisula, 2010). Children's challenging behaviours tend to exacerbate the difficulties and strains their parents encounter (Agarwal *et al.*, 2022; Baker *et al.*, 2002; Ludlow, Skelly and Rohleder, 2012).

According to Alsharaydeh *et al.* (2019), South Asian parents in the United Kingdom raising children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as autism have reported encountering discriminatory practices within various settings, including schools, hospitals, and social services. Being members of a racial or ethnic minority, they found this treatment biased against them because of their background (Bradby *et al.*, 2007). Conversely, not only parents from South Asian countries feel isolated; immigrant parents from Lebanon, Turkey, Vietnam, East Timor, the Philippines, Croatia, and China who care for disabled children also reported a lack of emotional assistance (Stevens, 2010). Their migratory status and caregiving duties also made them feel alone (Stevens, 2010). Additionally, caring for disabled children was physically and psychologically exhausting and time-consuming for parents in Southeast Asia (Luong, Yoder and Canham, 2009). Despite living with extended family in the host country, some studies found that immigrant mothers were lonely and struggled without structural support (Shtutman, 2016). According to Narayan (2015), the parents experienced social exclusion from their extended family due to their children's impairments, resulting in significant time spent in isolation (Khanlou *et al.* 2015).



According to scholarly sources, immigrant parents have faced stigmatisation because their disabled children exhibit culturally inappropriate behaviours prohibited by indigenous communities (Fox *et al.*, 2017; Ijalba, 2016). Consequently, families opted to retain their offspring within the household and refrained from seeking assistance. Furthermore, according to Blanche *et al.* (2015), empirical investigations have demonstrated that immigrant parents who have a child with special needs undergo a detachment from their extended familial and local social networks. Therefore, the presence of disabilities in children may result in significant financial and emotional strain for the affected children and their families. Providing care for a child with disabilities is arduous regardless of their residence; however, it becomes particularly burdensome in regions with inadequate infrastructure and restricted availability of support and services (Underwood *et al.*, 2020). According to the World Health Organisation (2018), families may encounter financial constraints and environmental obstacles and face discrimination, social isolation, and societal and professional stigmatisation. Recognising the systematic nature of these exclusions is of utmost importance. According to Wells (2018), the issue at hand is not neglect towards black and Asian children but rather the pervasive nature of race and racism in the upbringing of children, which remains a fundamental aspect of both modern childhood and the state.

Furthermore, Narayan (2015) disclosed that Asian Indian immigrant mothers tend to be burdened with significant expenditures of parenting a disabled child, including assessment and professional fees. Since they required more time for their disabled children, they left their employment and lost their money (Narayan, 2015). Accessing resources for their disabled children was especially difficult for immigrant parents, who reported facing discrimination in the education and healthcare sectors, and they felt that they were not treated with respect and compassion (Beatson, 2013). Alsharaydeh *et al.* (2019) mentioned in their study that Asian Muslim immigrant parents have also complained about the lack of cultural sensitivity among health professionals. Parents avoided healthcare services because they perceived experts as impersonal and harsh, spending less time with them and not being compassionate about their culture (Jegatheesan, Fowler and Miller, 2010). Several immigrant parents stated that they actively avoided utilising health and social services based on their perception that they were not respectful of their culture (Bradby *et al.*, 2007; Narayan, 2015). On the other hand, service providers claimed that immigrant mothers might not be as inclined to utilise available programmes due to their inadequate language skills, which hinder their ability to complete the comprehensive evaluation forms required by service organisations (Khanlou *et al.*, 2015). However, most women were grateful for the services once they were utilised, although most were unaware of their entitlement to such free services for a disabled child (Khanlou *et al.*, 2015). According to research conducted by Shtutman (2016), immigrant parents often find it difficult to understand disparities in cultural norms, and it is challenging for immigrant families to adjust to life in a new nation. South Asian parents in the United Kingdom considered changing to a new culture an extra burden that increased the difficulties of parenting a disabled child (Heer, Larkin and Rose, 2015).

Furthermore, immigrant parents struggle with language issues in education and medical care (Lai and Ishiyama, 2004; Lee and Park, 2016; Wathum-Ocama and Rose, 2002). However, interpreters are only available for special events, not regular meetings or daily interactions (Lai and Ishiyama, 2004). Immigrant mothers see English competence as the biggest impediment to forming meaningful relationships with professionals (Lee and Park, 2016). Parents were seen as incapable of meeting the child's requirements or providing adequate care (Lee and Park,

2016). Even for skilled English-speaking immigrant parents, many jargons employed by healthcare experts were difficult to comprehend (Shtutman, 2016). Another qualitative research indicated that parents saw the absence of written communication in their original language as a barrier to accessing the health care system (Blanche *et al.*, 2015). Changing family dynamics, language barriers, societal norms, immigration procedures, employment opportunities, and living conditions are just a few obstacles mothers must overcome (Alsharaydeh *et al.*, 2019; Riggio and Avalos, 2017). Additionally, children of immigrants encounter several difficulties beyond the language barrier, including school bullying and adjusting to new foods and clothing styles (Alsharaydeh *et al.*, 2019). Having a child with a condition while navigating the immigration process may be difficult for parents and the rest of the immigrant family (Khanlou *et al.*, 2015).

Additionally, Bradby and colleagues (2007) investigated the experience of immigrant parents using the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in the United Kingdom. Parents felt embarrassed by their children's mental health condition (Bradby *et al.*, 2007). Parents were concerned that seeking treatment from psychiatrists or psychologists might embarrass their families (Al-Azzam, 2011). However, parents of children with autism are not the only ones experiencing stress in caring for their children, as other parents with neurotypical children are also distressed about their children's prospects (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2020). At the same time, mothers of autistic children reported greater psychological well-being and the ability to reduce stress by embracing the child's condition, without feeling pressured or overwhelmed, according to research by Dykens *et al.* (2014). A systematic review was performed to identify papers evaluating the impact of group training programmes on the stress levels or quality of life of parents with children and the implementation fidelity (Lichtlé *et al.*, 2020). The findings indicate that mindfulness may be a valuable strategy for parent training to enhance their well-being (Lichtlé *et al.*, 2020). Some parents use problem-solving coping mechanisms, identifying the obstacles and attempting to mitigate the adverse outcome (Alsharaydeh *et al.*, 2019). Parents with higher levels of education tended to employ straightforward approaches to problem-solving. In contrast, those with lower levels of education tended to devise strategies to circumvent potential triggers for their child's challenging behaviours, particularly in social settings (Gregoire and Cramer, 2015). Parents may overcome these obstacles by learning as much as possible about their child's impairment and locating valuable community services (Wang and Casillas, 2013).

According to Luong, Yoder, and Canham's (2009) study, Southeast Asian immigrant parents tend to engage in religious practices, such as praying at home, to maintain a sense of optimism. For example, according to reports, Pakistani parents residing in the United Kingdom believed their child's disability was a form of divine retribution (Croot *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, the individuals sought solace in temples and other religious institutions for spiritual direction, a practice that was widely acknowledged and advantageous in coping with their offspring's ailment (Croot *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, According to Fox *et al.* (2017), Somali immigrant parents with autistic children have found solace in their religious beliefs. The Somali immigrant parents conveyed gratitude and faith in the divine plan of their creator, acknowledging that their lives were under the control of the almighty (Fox *et al.*, 2017). According to Kwon's (2016) research, religion and spirituality were reported by South Korean immigrant parents as necessary coping mechanisms and sources of comfort, tranquilly, and optimism.

Subsequently, Lee and Park (2016) discovered that all the mothers who assumed the primary responsibility of caring for their disabled child emphasised the significance of receiving

support from other family members, particularly their spouses, in maintaining their psychological well-being. In addition, mothers tended to engage in informal social support groups and establish connections with other parents facing similar circumstances when their partners acknowledged and supported their child's disability (Lee and Park, 2016). Research showed that families that attend support groups with others in a similar position report feeling less alone and more empowered, and they were grateful to connect with other immigrant families caring for disabled children. (Khanlou *et al.*, 2015). Support groups provided parents with knowledge, hope, optimism, comfort, and encouragement (Khanlou *et al.*, 2015; Lee and Park, 2016). Alsharaydeh *et al.* (2019) found a positive correlation between the level of social support perceived by parents and their stress levels. The study revealed that the parent's spouse was the most significant source of emotional support, followed by friends and support groups. According to John, Bower, and McCullough (2016), a notable proportion of parents, precisely 18.2%, received exceptional aid from doctors, while healthcare practitioners and nurses supported only 3% of the parents. According to Zechella and Raval (2016), Indian immigrant parents reported a decrease in loneliness and an increase in fulfilling their needs when accessing school or community resources.

Furthermore, a few pieces of research investigated the determinants of resilience linked with parental coping (Alsharaydeh *et al.*, 2019). Findings indicated that immigrant parents who got emotional and social support from their families demonstrated resilience (Alsharaydeh *et al.*, 2019). Parents recipient of instrumental assistance, such as fluent speaking, a professional job, earning a high salary, possessing a driver's licence, or having a higher level of education tend to exhibit more resilience (Heer, Larkin and Rose, 2015; Su, 2008; Zechella and Raval, 2016). A combination of two or more of these resources resulted in parents with greater resilience (Su, 2008). In the research by Khanlou *et al.* (2015), service providers said that parents who got emotional, instrumental, and social support from their relatives and care providers seemed more resilient. Anxiety and stress negatively impact parents' well-being and capacity to satisfy their children's requirements (Peer and Hillman, 2014). Families' optimism is crucial to their success in helping their children with special needs to adapt and flourish in mainstream society (Fernandez Alcantara *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, health anxiety seems to be more common among women than men, according to data collected during the Covid-19 study (Tuku *et al.*, 2020). In addition, Ersoy *et al.* (2020) discovered that mothers had higher trait anxiety levels than fathers. Parents of autistic children may benefit from social support and coping skills that lessen the effect of stress on their health and well-being (Boyd 2002; Dunn *et al.* 2001; Hastings *et al.* 2005). There were no gender variations in the availability or quality of social support but substantial disparities in using various coping mechanisms (Padden and James, 2017). In contrast, Padden and James (2017) found no significant mental well-being differences between mothers and fathers. However, mothers are the most responsible for parenting, as both parent groups agreed on two group studies by Padden and James (2017). Neither group reported substantially different levels of parental responsibility, although women in both groups reported taking on more household chores and burdens than their male counterparts (Padden and James, 2017). Other studies on father engagement have shown the same thing (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda, 2004), suggesting that mothers still play a crucial role in caring for their children in many households.

This research will employ a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews with South Asian mothers with autistic children to gain insight into their experiences and coping strategies to achieve the aim. This investigation addresses the following questions:

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Q1: What are the challenges faced by parents of children with autism?

Q2: How do these challenges impact the mental well-being of parents?

Q3: What kinds of interventions do parents find helpful or think would be helpful for mental well-being?

## Methodology

### *Design:*

The present investigation adopts an exploratory qualitative design, utilising the interpretivism paradigm as it is based on the assumptions that diverse individuals within a given society possess distinct perceptions and interpretations of the ostensibly "objective" reality and exhibit unique motivations for their conduct (Alharahshel and Pius, 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Moreover, research tends to be a socially constructed activity, implying that phenomena are not naturally occurring but created by society, and variations are contingent upon cultural differences. Thus, the reality reflected in research is deemed to be socially constructed (Alharahshel and Pius, 2020). The interpretivism paradigm employs in-depth interviews and cost-effective technology for data collection and analysis conducted in various settings such as hospitals, schools, and factories (Denscombe, 2017). Therefore, it is suitable for research on a small scale with limited financial resources, where the researcher is the primary asset. Furthermore, the objective of an interpretivism researcher is to gather qualitative data to gain novel insights and a more profound understanding of social phenomena, focusing on localised matters rather than statistical information (Carter, 2018).

### *Sample:*

This research applied the snowball sampling technique, a non-probability sampling method. This sampling technique is typically implemented when the sample is deliberately selected to include specific individuals or when it is optional to achieve a representative sample of the entire population (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). The snowball sampling technique involves participants recommending individuals who meet the study's criteria for the research (Thomas, 2017). Consequently, this study's sample population was derived from the social network of mutual friends, and the participants were identified through referrals from acquaintances.

Nonetheless, the snowball sampling method presents certain limitations, including the potential for sampling bias and margin of error, as well as challenges in identifying suitable samples (Bhardwaj, 2019). Participants of this study were advised to broaden their referral sources beyond their friends to include individuals from diverse social networks, including colleagues, neighbours, and community members. This approach aimed to mitigate the risk of encountering difficulties in recruiting participants.

Furthermore, the study's participants were provided with explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the homogeneity of the sample concerning the pertinent characteristics under investigation and to prevent sampling bias. Participants were six South Asian biological mothers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India with autistic and non-autistic children of different ages. The children were born in England and diagnosed with autism in reception class. Mothers are immigrants to England, living in east London for over ten years.

### *Instruments:*

The present research utilised a semi-structured interview in person with mothers, as it was deemed to offer the most comprehensive understanding of their viewpoints, emotional states, and lived encounters. In addition, utilising a semi-structured interview approach informed by phenomenology would be optimal as it fosters an environment where participants can express themselves freely while also enabling the researcher to comprehend each participant's distinct viewpoint comprehensively. The semi-structured interview comprised ten open-ended questions formulated in a readily understandable manner to participants. A few example questions are "How have you felt when your child was diagnosed with autism?", "What do you do when you are stressed?" and "What strategies do you use to improve your mental well-being?". As stated by Gill et al. (2013), the interview was conducted in two languages, Bangla, and English, preferred by the participants, enabling them to communicate using their primary language confidently. English questionnaires were administered to participants from India and Pakistan, while Bangla questionnaires were administered to participants from Bangladesh. The researcher, fluent in both Bangla and English, translated the data collected in the Bangla language into English.

Furthermore, posing questions with a detrimental premise was avoided, as this can result in misconceptions. Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) denoted that the piloting process can be instrumental in circumventing such errors. Consequently, the questionnaire was implemented as a pilot study by administering it to a fellow student and a mother who has a child with autism. Following the pilot phase, an interview schedule was established with the participants. All interviews were conducted at the participants' residences as it was convenient for all the participants. The questionnaire was distributed in a printed paper format during the interview session, while the audio data was collected using the Android application "Voice Recorder" on the researcher's mobile device. The interviews were conducted in person with each participating mother, with an average duration of approximately forty minutes per session. Following a preliminary exchange of informal queries to establish rapport, the researcher interviewed the mothers using the designated questions (Creswell, 2009).

### *Procedure:*

Thematic analysis is a prevalent technique for analysing qualitative data, which involves identifying patterns and themes within the data (Clark, Foster, & Bryman, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2006) have devised a form of thematic analysis that is particularly distinguished for its theoretical and methodological lucidity. Ultimately, themes will be derived through the analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants, according to Creswell's (2018) methodology. The audio recordings were transcribed, and any data in the Bengali language were translated into English to facilitate coding and detailed analysis. The thematic analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which involves the identification of patterns and themes within the data, was employed to analyse the data, given its widespread use in qualitative data analysis (Clark, Foster, & Bryman, 2019). Thematic analysis is a methodology that involves categorising and classifying interview transcriptions followed by identifying significant themes through codes derived from the extensive data collected from the interviews. The researcher was cautious in coding the interviews to guarantee the dependability and accuracy of the results. The codes were assessed through discussions between the researcher and supervisor to enable triangulation, which broadened the analysis and served as a quality control method. In addition, the study conducted

by Papadopoulos (2021) included reflexive discussions to assess the potential impact of the researcher's preconceived notions on the analysis outcomes.

### *Reliability and validity*

The study's reliability was bolstered through the utilisation of established interview protocols consistent across all participants during in-depth interviews with South Asian mothers who have children with autism. A standardised set of questions were implemented to collect consistent participant data. Furthermore, only the researcher was interviewed to maintain consistency throughout the data collection process. In addition, the study's validity was enhanced by using a purposive sampling technique to select participants with first-hand experience with the phenomenon under investigation. The process entails identifying and recruiting individuals who possess pertinent knowledge and expertise, such as mothers of South Asian descent who have offspring diagnosed with autism. Moreover, the interview queries were designed to be open-ended and non-leading, which aids in mitigating bias and enhancing the precision of the gathered data.

## **Ethical considerations:**

According to Mukherji and Albon (2018), ethics are commonly perceived as a collection of regulations that dictate the appropriate conduct of individuals and societies. These regulations include obtaining informed consent from participants, preventing harm, and upholding the principles of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality (BERA, 2018). In addition, according to the guidelines set forth by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) in 2018, education researchers must uphold ethical standards that prioritise the value of every individual, including themselves, who participates in the research endeavour. According to BERA (2018), individuals must be treated with respect, sensitivity, and dignity regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, culture, religion, nationality, political affiliation, or any other distinguishing factor.

Ethical rules and guidelines to safeguard the integrity and reputation of their field tend to originate from national organisations such as BERA, universities, or partner groups. The present investigation received ethical clearance from the academic organisation with which the researcher is associated. The ethical approval procedure encompassed a comprehensive evaluation of the possible hazards and advantages of the research for the participants, verifying the implementation of informed consent protocols and safeguarding the confidentiality and privacy of the participants across the study. After obtaining ethical approval, this study was conducted in compliance with ethical standards and principles, which protect the well-being and rights of the study participants.

Informed consent, briefly explaining the purpose and procedures of the study, was signed by all participants upon arrival at their residence before the interview. In addition, the researcher prompted the participants to inquire about any uncertainties they may have had to ensure comprehension of the procedures, constraints on their involvement, and recognition of any probable hazards they may encounter before the interview (SRA, 2003).

Furthermore, the potential for harm to individuals exists in distinct forms, encompassing physical and psychological harm. Therefore, evaluating the potential risks associated with different contexts is crucial (Calder, 2020). Subsequently, an entire interview session was recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure all information was included. Moreover, following the Data Protection Act of 1998, data has been securely stored in the researcher's OneDrive account on the university's password-protected computer. The data will remain stored until the results are published, which will be promptly erased to preserve confidentiality.

Additionally, all participants were informed that they retain the right to withdraw from the study at any juncture and abstain from responding to any inquiries without facing adverse repercussions. Privacy preservation was upheld by acknowledging participants' entitlement to regulate the divulgence of personal or confidential information about themselves. The participants were granted autonomy in their disclosure decisions, and the researcher exerted no undue influence. This study did not implement deception, as the participants were adequately informed about the research's objectives, intentions, and methodology. They provided their informed consent by signing the consent form, indicating their willingness to participate.



Ensuring the well-being and security of the individuals involved in the research should be of utmost importance. Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) explained that researchers should contemplate their work's potential deleterious psychological ramifications, including the possibility of causing harm, being perceived as intrusive, addressing sensitive or distressing topics, or challenging beliefs. It is imperative to conduct a thorough assessment of the physical safety of the participants, considering potential hazards associated with the meeting venue, transportation to the location, and the possibility of retaliatory actions against participants. If interview content elicits distress among participants, it is essential to demonstrate empathy and promptly terminate the session. In addition, it is equally significant to protect the researcher's safety as it is to protect the safety of the participants. Strategies include ensuring that someone knows where the researcher is and when the research engagement should conclude, being reachable in an emergency, and establishing procedures in case of difficulties. During face-to-face interviews, researchers must consider the location and timing of the meetings, as well as the overall comfort level of the interviewee (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Hence, the question formulation during the interview facilitated a sense of comfort for the interviewee and was easy to understand and free of technical language. Furthermore, it is imperative to avoid causing feelings of inadequacy in respondents due to their inability to comprehend the underlying meaning of the questions asked (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Therefore, the questions were translated into the native language to understand Bangla-speaking participants better.

#### *Reflexivity:*

Reflexivity is crucial in achieving heightened methodological awareness (Seale, 2002). Incorporating critical thinking in the research process can augment its rigour and transparency. For example, I was aware of my positionality, encompassing factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, during the process of interpretation (Mukherji and Alban, 2018) to mitigate the effects of unconscious bias. As a researcher, I adopted a neutral stance regarding participants' identity markers, such as parental status, ethnicity, and gender, as they may potentially impact the interpretation of collected data. Moreover, I was concerned about my safety while visiting a participant's house for an interview. Therefore, as Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) mentioned, I formed a safety team with another student. I maintained emotional neutrality and refrained from expressing my personal feelings and opinions during interactions with participants, despite appearing friendly and courteous, as suggested by Fontana and Frey (2005).

## Findings and discussion

Thematic analysis was conducted to address questions about (1) mothers' challenges in raising their autistic children, (2) their mental health status, and (3) the techniques they employ to enhance their quality of life. Mothers encounter various obstacles, including financial constraints, discrimination, stigmatisation, isolation, language barriers, distracted sleeping, stress due to childcare duties, and lack of self-care. The following is a brief overview of the backgrounds of the six mothers interviewed to offer insight into their respective histories. The study interviewed six middle-aged biological mothers of South Asian descent from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. The individuals in question are immigrants who have resided in East London for a decade. Their offspring consists of both autistic and non-autistic children spanning various age groups. The offspring were delivered in England and subsequently enrolled at mainstream primary schools in a heterogeneous locality within the boroughs of East London. All children had been diagnosed with autism in reception class. Mothers with autistic children lacked awareness of autism before diagnosing their offspring. The mothers in question used digital tools to identify symptoms and learn how to support their affected children. The study's findings indicate three primary themes concerning the maternal responsibility of raising an autistic child: emotional, family, and social challenges.

### *Emotional challenges:*

The participants engaged in an in-depth discussion regarding the various challenges encountered by parents of autistic children. The mothers reported experiencing significant stress in response to their child's challenging behaviours. The predominant manifestation was outbursts of anger and frustration, which were attributed to the child's challenges in adjusting to modifications in established patterns and sensitivity-related concerns. It seems to be congruent with previous findings that primary carers of children exhibit heightened levels of stress and diminished physical health in comparison to carers of neurotypical children (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022; Alsharaydeh *et al.*, 2019; Brobst, Clopton and Hendrick, 2009; Catalano, Holloway and Mpofu, 2018; Hoffman *et al.*, 2009). All participants expressed the theme of emotional burden when queried about the overall impact of parenting a child with autism. Most of the interviewed mothers exhibited emotional distress while recounting their experiences, expressing intense emotional responses towards their child's diagnosis, daily caregiving challenges, and concerns regarding their child's future development. For example, participant One said:

*"When my son was diagnosed as autistic, I felt like someone was digging with the dragger in my chest; I was so shocked and couldn't talk some days; I cried 4/5 months continuously".*

Similarly, other participants reported experiencing sadness and emotional distress upon receiving their child's diagnosis. Additionally, mothers' struggles to accept the diagnosis of autism in their children were highlighted by some participants. This phenomenon can be attributed to the societal stigma associated with autism or disability, which seems to be highly prevalent, and often, it causes the family to deny the existence of autism in their children. Notwithstanding this, the mothers eventually undertook the task and tried to assist their offspring in surmounting their challenges. As faithful mothers, they adopted their child's condition, which involves wholeheartedly accepting that their offspring possess unique characteristics, as determined by God. This intervention facilitated the cultivation of a constructive and hopeful mindset, emphasising that individuals ought to take pride in the allocation of these exceptional children is not arbitrary but rather a deliberate act of divine providence.

Nevertheless, following the confirmation of an Autism diagnosis, all mothers in this study reported experiencing feelings of guilt and shame, which subsequently contributed to their emotional distress and psychological fatigue. Additionally, all participants in the study reported experiencing anxiety due to a lack of knowledge on effectively aiding their children and uncertainty regarding where to seek assistance. An overwhelming feeling of insecurity was expressed as a state of annoyance. Mothers were regularly worried about autism's long-term effects. All mothers worried about their children's transition to adolescence and adulthood. The child's education, employment prospects, housing situation, and capacity to adjust to maturity also caused considerable stress.

#### *Social challenges:*

Each mother who participated in the study responded with a high degree of similarity, indicating the presence of social stigma. For example, participant Five mentioned:

*"Once, I went to the local park with my autistic daughter, she wanted to play with other girls her age, but those kids ignored her, made a face like my daughter was disgusting, and moved away from her, which made me break down in tears. I was worried about where I could take her and where she'd be suite".*

Similarly, Fox *et al.* (2017) and Ijalba (2016) revealed that the societal rejection of the condition prompted families to confine their offspring to their residences and refrain from pursuing assistance. Some mothers had devised coping mechanisms to manage challenging behaviour in their children, while others had learned to accept their child's condition. However, confident parents found it particularly difficult to deal with the unsympathetic attitudes or critical judgements from others. Consequently, the mothers experienced reactions of criticism regarding inadequate parents or unsuccessful individuals. They reported a significant change in their lifestyle after the birth of their autistic child. Participant Three expressed feelings of loneliness and self-blame about having an autistic child resulting in substantial emotional distress and disturbance.

### *Family challenges:*

Following their child's diagnosis, all mothers in this study reported a shift in their married relationship. Most mothers in the analysed sample expressed a sense of neglect towards their spouse, resulting in emotional detachment and a decrease in the quality of their previously flourishing relationships. However, three mothers appreciated their husbands for helping them care for autistic children and other family responsibilities; one mother mentioned that her husband worked for a long-time to settle in a new country and could not help her with house chores. Another mother blamed herself and said:

*"This is my fault for having my child's condition. I let him use a mobile for a long time; even my mother blames me; she says I made him autistic".*

Some mothers wept throughout the interview, describing their overwhelming emotional reactions upon receiving their child's conditions. As soon as they heard the adverse reaction from their friends and family, they stopped socialising with them and isolated themselves. However, make acquaintances with parents of autistic children or others with personal experience with autism, and accept them as child-friendly individuals. The mothers faced distinct challenges in this investigation. It could be because fathers shared caregiving duties with their spouses, whereas mothers tended to provide most care independently for their families. In addition to the stress associated with caregiving, the mothers in the present study emphasised their struggle to manage their multiple responsibilities, which included being a carer to the autistic child for 24 hours, a mother to other children, a wife, and a daughter-in-law.

However, a study argued that the male parents of offspring with disabilities encounter informational and practical stressors (Samadi *et al.* 2014). For example, pursuing medical information to understand better their child's disability might be referred to as informative stress. At the same time, the challenge of managing familial responsibilities, occupational obligations, and routine daily activities is practical stress. Gender is strongly associated with these stressors, as Huang *et al.* (2012) and Khanlou *et al.* (2015) described. Furthermore, parental pressure, or struggle with the demands and conflicts of parenting and poor parental well-being are associated with negative consequences for children's growth and development (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2020; Mackler *et al.*, 2015; Turney, 2011). For example, during the transition to parenthood, mothers experience more significant work stress than fathers (Ruppner, Perales and Baxter, 2019). In addition, women face more parenting burden when partners work long hours than men (Craig and Brown, 2017), probably because mothers still serve their families even while working long hours.

Several studies have shown that parents of children diagnosed with autism exhibit higher stress levels than parents of typically developing or other impairments children (Al Ansari and Jahrami, 2018; Al-Farsi *et al.*, 2016; Al Mansour *et al.*, 2013; Hayes and Watson, 2013). Evidence from the research shows that mothers of children with autism have elevated rates of sadness, anxiety, and stress (Ansari *et al.*, 2021). Mothers of autistic children are more inclined to blame themselves for their child's condition. In addition, research has shown that the primary caregiver of autistic children had greater levels of stress and worse physical health than carers of typically developing children (Brobst, Clopton and Hendrick, 2009; Catalano, Holloway and

Mpofu, 2018; Hoffman *et al.*, 2009). A study on South Asian mothers reported higher stress levels and lower social support than other mothers (Ansari *et al.*, 2021). The study also found that cultural factors, such as the importance of family honour and the belief that past sins cause disability, increased stress levels and stigma (Ansari *et al.*, 2021; Nayak *et al.*, 2016). Traditionally, mothers are the primary carers for their children (Firat *et al.*, 2002). Other studies on father engagement have shown the same result (Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda, 2004), suggesting that mothers are still the primary carers in many households (Padden and James, 2017).

According to several studies, mothers are less joyful, anxious, and tired while spending time with children than fathers (Connelly and Kimmel, 2015; Musick *et al.*, 2016). Besides that, mothers and fathers have different mental health stresses from parenting (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2020). Fathers share caregiving duties with their partners (Davis and Carter, 2008). Notable is that father's support leads to a considerable increase in maternal well-being and reduced psychological discomfort (Al-Farsi *et al.*, 2016). Healthcare providers may be more aware if they get specialised training on these families' unique issues. Information assistance and support groups may enhance parental coping and reduce social isolation. Although, there is limited research recording the experiences of immigrant families of children with autism (Welterlin and LaRue, 2007) and their diverse experiences during diagnosis, getting appropriate assistance, and comprehension of the disability (Jegatheesan, Fowler and Miller, 2010).

Additionally, participants of this study reported that obtaining factual and precise information about autism could reduce their stress and anxiety levels. They suggested arranging workshops implementing stress management techniques consisting of practical approaches that could be applied within their residency and employed during challenging circumstances. The workshops might provide stress management techniques and problem-solving abilities while serving as a social support network. As a result, participants were able to cultivate and apply novel problem-solving approaches to their daily obstacles and gain insight from fellow group members regarding their own experiences and strategies. Furthermore, workshops may allow parents to break their routine from caregiving duties. Additionally, mothers suggested that designing support groups, counselling, respite care, and educational programs will be helpful for parents better understand and manage their child's autism. Furthermore, participants raised concerns over not having access to support activities with the affected child as they are the only carer. For example, participant four stated:

*"I want to attend autism workshop, but, uuum I can not do it because I have to take care (of) my son."*

Moreover, Leondari and Gialamas (2009) established a correlation between religiosity and psychological well-being. Similarly, Herbert *et al.* (2013) conceptualised resilience as an innate capacity to adjust successfully to severe adversities, traumas, challenges, and stressors. According to Karimirad *et al.* (2018), there is a significant correlation between resilience and one's personal life quality. According to Smith and Osborn (2015), resilient individuals can surmount stress and challenges, attaining an optimal and functional life. As viewed from a lifelong perspective, resilience results from a comprehensive process encompassing protective and diverse risk factors across different stages of individual development (Luthar *et al.*, 2015).

The study findings indicate that a significant proportion of participants exhibited a strong level of resilience, while mothers' psychological well-being was only moderately satisfactory. In addition, participants were thirty to forty aged women with higher than a secondary level of education. The findings suggest that these individuals have the potential to acquire knowledge from their life experiences and develop proficient problem-solving skills. These small maternal figures exhibited sufficient resilience to attain genuine satisfaction. Despite encountering challenging situations, specific individuals could effectively apply their functional skills to cultivate adaptability and flexibility.

According to Koenig's (2012) research findings, individuals with strong religious beliefs reported experiencing significant life satisfaction, adequate personal happiness and reduced adverse effects of traumatic events compared to the general population. Myers (2000) posited that religion significantly impacts human behaviour, as its practical observance will likely result in a better quality of life. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) conducted a study highlighting the importance of religious teachings in promoting positive emotions and psychological well-being. Nonetheless, the outcomes of this investigation were incongruent with the study, as most participants demonstrated a heightened degree of religiosity yet only lower levels of psychological well-being. On the contrary, Elosúa (2015) indicated that religiosity did not significantly impact psychological well-being. However, the study did reveal that the gratitude variable had a more significant influence on psychological well-being. Elosúa (2015) posited that expressing gratitude can make individuals more reconciled with unpleasant conditions. The present study shows that religiosity impacts an individual's psychological well-being, as mentioned by two participants. For example, they practice spiritual activities when they feel anxiety or loneliness. Religiosity pertains to the fundamental connection between human beings and deities, which leads to complete reliance on the capacity to fulfil daily needs, encompassing both the physical and spiritual aspects (Alsa *et al.*, 2021). Religious beliefs and parental resilience are linked in families with autistic children, according to Kavaliotis' (2017) research. He also found that strength is essential to handling autism, and mentally stable parents who can fulfil their children's specific requirements may prevent loneliness and isolation, which may harm families and affect emotional stability (Kavaliotis, 2017).

The study participants were observed to be cultivating a strong sense of religiosity and a close connection with God, which appeared to facilitate their acceptance of life's events with greater ease and grace. Therefore, endorsing the enhancement of resilience, characterised by exhibiting eagerness and refraining from succumbing to challenging circumstances, will likely foster heightened psychological welfare. While policymakers and the public highlight parents' responsibilities for managing dangers and possibilities for their children's future life chances, they tend to underestimate the significance of parental well-being for children's developmental outcomes (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2020). Parenthood, parenting, and well-being research are vital to understanding the immense effort and numerous obstacles of raising the next generation and informing policy on how to assist parents in balancing the financial, time, and emotional demands of parenting with other commitments like a paid job. During the last decade, cross-national research has shown that parents are happier in cultures with more significant policy and institutional support for raising the next generation of citizens. (Nomaguchi and Milkie, 2020).

This study has a few limitations, such as the viewpoints on parents' challenges and hurdles confined to the small sample of participants. It may not reflect the thoughts of all South Asian mothers with autistic children nationwide. Nonetheless, comprehensive insights were furnished by all study participants, who represented diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and life

experiences. The possibility of a bias in the data may arise due to participants' reluctance to reveal sensitive information. Consequently, the researcher employed various methodologies, including establishing trust and rapport with the participants, and guaranteeing confidentiality, to promote their willingness to disclose their experiences candidly. Potential avenues for future research may involve an exploration of the intersectionality of various identities, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex array of factors that influence the mental health and well-being of South Asian mothers who have autistic children. Interventions targeted at enhancing the mental well-being of South Asian mothers with autistic children, such as counselling, support groups, or respite care, could be devised and evaluated through experimental studies.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative study illuminates the difficulties mothers of autistic children encounter, which affect their mental health and personal lives. Thematic analysis revealed three themes regarding mothers' emotional, family, and social challenges. The study found that mothers' stress and burden originated from their children's disruptive behaviour, parenting responsibilities, and autistic stigma within the community. These issues seem to affect mothers, their families, and society, highlighting the need for mental health therapies for mothers of autistic children. The well-being of parents appears to be critical as it has far-reaching consequences on their children's growth and productivity, as well as the community's general well-being. Therefore, it is essential to support parents, particularly mothers, by providing local resources and services to assist them in their parenting journey.

The study's methodology was carefully designed by prioritising ethical considerations, obtaining informed consent from participants, and implementing measures to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's results. This paper recommends more research to investigate how gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic position for a fuller picture of the factors influencing the emotional well-being of South Asian mothers raising autistic children. Comparative and intervention studies on parental well-being and support programmes and policies could be conducted in the future. This study sheds light on mothers' experiences raising autistic children and underscores the need for more research and interventions to improve their mental health.



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# **THE IMPACT OF PUPIL PREMIUM ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT**

by Dee Cutts

ED6088 Independent Research Project

BA (Hons) Education Studies



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## Abstract

This research reviews the historical government interventions to support the education of economically disadvantaged children. The current political intervention is Free School Meals, aimed at increasing nutrition, and Pupil Premium, a specific band of funding available to schools through Free School Meals eligibility; this funding stays with a child for six years, even if they are no longer eligible. It has sought to discover the origins of Pupil Premium by investigating laws and policies related to poverty and education. Critiquing current assessments and Pupil Premium funding interventions found that whole-school approaches created higher aspirations for teachers and disadvantaged children. Moreover, it discovered there could be a reliance on funding to cover school support staff. However, national data on its success is yet to manifest. The impact of poverty and education has been well evidenced for over a century; Pupil Premium may give schools an economic boost to tailor support for disadvantaged children, but as they are at school for as little as fifteen per cent of their childhood, money must be invested into families too.

**Keywords:** Pupil Premium, Free School Meals, Disadvantage, Poverty.



# Introduction

This Literature review was influenced by research by Millard, *et al* (2018) which was based on Free School Meals and lower achievement in boys. It suggested Free Schools meals being a marker of disadvantage also attributed to lower attainment. Although focused on the experiences of Black Caribbean and white working-class boys, the links to poverty and achievement are connected to all children in these circumstances. Wilkinson and Pickett's (2010) research suggests that financially disadvantaged people are lower in a social hierarchy, which directly impacts a person's aspirations and social values. Boronski and Hassan (2015) add to this narrative in the form of where the blame lies for poor achievement by those in poverty: they argue that governments increasingly blame individuals for their circumstances rather than look at broader societal issues. This directed focus to Free School Meals and Pupil Premium, a set of government initiatives to support economically disadvantaged children in schools (DFE,2022). The terms economic disadvantage and poverty within the research refer to household incomes that are below the median household disposable income level, which in 2022 was £32,300 (ONS.Gov,2022); Trust for London (2023) explains that households experience poverty when after housing costs their income is 60% below the median level, meaning their income level is less than £19,380.

Upon enquiry, although there is a plethora of literature available about Pupil Premium, a comprehensive article that explained Pupil Premiums' implementation and its historical context was not readily available; of course, schools are obliged to give a brief explanation within their websites, and there are brief descriptions readily available online. This research also noted poverty's impact on children's development in conjunction with Pupil Premium; therefore, this piece intended to inform parents and families about Pupil Premium's uses and aims; as the research developed, it looked beyond Pupil Premium and at the impact of poverty that was not about material possessions but its effects on learning and self-image. Yuesti & Sumantra (2017) suggest that communities and, in this case, families and parents can be empowered through shared knowledge; moreover, this research arms parents with information and debates they may not have considered or knowledge of.

The specific research questions were designed to break down Pupil Premium into different spheres of knowledge; How does the government address economic disadvantages in schools? How can funding eligibility create challenges, and how can schools utilise Pupil Premium funding? How effective has it been in narrowing achievement, and who generates data to show its success? Morris & Dobbins (2017) reflect on small-scale research and its limitations and state that positionality can be challenging to maintain when researching important topics on a small scale.

By offering government and journal articles often juxtaposed in terms of Pupil Premiums' success and the justification for its implementation, a position of neutrality was maintained that allowed for objectivity.

# Method of Literature Review

Methods of conducting research within the field of education were defined by Kaplan (1973), cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2006 | pp 44-45), as explaining the process by which research is conducted rather than concerning itself with the fruits of its labour. Creswell & Creswell (2018 | pp 3-4) state that research can be approached in three ways: qualitative, based on human experience; quantitative, based on data analysis; mixed methods, which utilises experience and data.

As this research views opinion and data, it places itself within mixed methods for evidence collection; it is also secondary research that is non-empirical. Meaning in the juxtaposition of primary research that requires new data to be analysed (Punch,2013), this research is based on pre-existing data and opinions and searches for nuances to fulfil its line of interrogation.

Non-empirical research also strongly connects with philosophy and theoretical frameworks that govern its intention and focus. By focusing on the philosophical underpinning of pragmatism, this view gathers data from diverse sources and understands that truth is position and time dependant (Creswell & Creswell,2018| pp 9-10).

Bhat (2020) and Bouchrika (2021) both explore the definition of secondary research and the importance of sources of literature that is analysed; Bhat (2020) considered the strengths and limitations of secondary research to be the data itself, its strength being pre-existing data, this is also its limitation. Bouchrika (2021) explores this and explains that reliance on pre-existing data can be unreliable as it needs to be updated regularly, or the data capture can be weakly resourced itself. Internet sources are often a primary source within literature reviews; the credibility of a website can be called into question. Newby (2014)) proposes that researchers must be cautious when comparing data from different times and locations as social contexts are ever-evolving. Aveyard. Payne. & Preston (2021) notes that the relationship between literature reviews is closely entwined with the questions it seeks to answer.

The main area of interest lay in researching support for economically disadvantaged children in education and the impact of poverty on academic performance and achievement; governmental websites were the first point of call in data research as they are the body that introduced Pupil Premium in 2011 (GOV.2022). The Department for Education (2022) and The Education Endowment Foundation (EFF,2022) guide schools and teachers over Pupil Premium funding applications and resource materials and became a significant data capture source; the use of data that preceded Pupil Premiums introduction was carefully considered. Bell & Waters (2018) suggest that reviewing the literature requires critically examining sources; as these databases are government sourced or created by the government, the sources can be deemed trustworthy. This research has used what Bell & Waters (2018) describe as witting evidence to produce unwitting evidence; Craske's (2018) journal is an example of witting in action, the theme painted a negative perception of Pupil Premium, but a comment on voice for that disadvantaged created unwitting evidence that was discussed with a positive view with the literature review.

Literature reviews are organic by nature, meaning researchers are not bound by the empirical personal experiences of others to create data and meaning. This can become a limitation in a certain sense; the immense amount of resources that non-empirical allows also requires careful

planning. Restricted word count within the literature review required careful planning to ensure the line of questioning was addressed and a narrative flowed simultaneously. Punch (2013) questioned how selective literature should be and how comprehensive a review can be in limited words. When first conceptualising this research, the main objective was to cross-examine a London borough's Pupil Premium spending; this was disallowed as word count would have prevented the thorough data analysis. Reframing the subject criteria to certain areas of Pupil Premium was given ethical clearance by the university. Thomas (2017) considers literature reviews stories that weave information together to create new narratives; this review aimed to impart knowledge to parents and families through a literature review that analysed information and opinion to collate information that did not rely heavily upon statistical information to create its data. Creating a storyboard supported the collection of data; in creating a story, evidence can be compartmentalised into different parts to bring the story together (Thomas,2017). This supported the maintenance of records for different questions through a system of folders within each main line of questioning. Kara (2017) maintains that this research strategy supports literature reviews by creating smaller concepts within research lines that make their retrieval systematic. Contextualising research is an ethical decision Kara (2017) relates as pertinent when the subject matter is broad; therefore, the use of a storyboard not only supported the storage and collection of data for this research, it also supported the ethical decision of how and what was relevant to the research questions and its audience.

The theoretical positioning of pragmatism allows for great flexibility within educational research; this philosophy-based methodology combines qualitative and quantitative data to assert its findings. Its scope allows for individual interpretations of reality that view knowledge as objective; King (2022) defined pragmatism as embedded in its line of questioning; it does not seek to describe reality or represent full knowledge. This reflexive approach was applied when gathering evidence for the literature review. One of the questions first asked was similar to another, and so the data collected became challenging to separate; as pragmatism is grounded in practicality, more research was required to ascertain if resources were available to create content and by changing the question of how schools spend Pupil Premium? to why was Pupil Premium introduced? New resources were discovered that supported the storyboard method of data collection. Engaging in the literature on the success of Pupil Premium had limited resources, and other aspects of how poverty affects learning were introduced to create not a new question but to lead the reader through a narrative that weaved information together in an exciting way. As pragmatism is concerned with actionable knowledge, it became a natural fit for this research that does not propose to bombard an audience with numerical data; it relies on creating a story that leads a reader through the lines of questioning to meet its intention (Kelly & Cordeiro 2020).

Within researching Pupil Premium and discovering poverties wider impact that is not linked to material objects but the stressors poverty imparts. I wished to arm parents with information about these facts and opinions. Braun & Clarke ( 2013) suggest good quality researchers go beyond the knowledge they are addressing and look for deeper understandings from different perspectives; as this research looked beyond Pupil Premium and includes wider implications, the consideration it fits within this value is justified. The pragmatic approach supported not just the data collection but also the researcher; this flexible framework allows researchers to scrutinise the evidence to suit their narrative continuously and creates an environment that is not bound to specifics; this made the research process interesting and created an invigorated interest in relaying information in new ways.

# Literature Review

Pupil Premium was introduced as extra funding for Free School Meals children. It intends to narrow the achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children; As Free School Meals eligibility is also connected to low attainment, this government intervention attempts to address disadvantage through education. Support for those in poverty is not a new concept, intervention via economics in schools is. This raises the question: Why was Pupil Premium Developed?

## A Brief Overview of Pupil Premium

Pupil Premium is an additional fund attached to free school meal claimants, and funding is available for up to six years from claiming free school meals, even if they stop being eligible.

The intention is to support the achievement of economically disadvantaged children in schools through tailored support and intervention.

There is a framework and support available to schools to ensure appropriate spending. It does not explicitly have to be spent on individuals, but schools are responsible for ensuring it impacts those eligible.

It is suggested that it is best used to develop teaching staff, target academic support, and address other barriers to learning related to social-emotional well-being.

Schools are accountable for how their pupil premium spending has improved achievement by publishing an annual statement on their websites and through Ofsted inspections and local government league tables.

Current yearly funding 2023/24 (DFE,2022)

Eligible Pupil Criteria-	Funding available for primary school-aged children-	Funding available for secondary school-aged children-	Funding is paid to-
Eligible for free school meals or claimed in the last six years	£1,455	£1035	School
Pupils that are adopted from care or care leavers	£2530	£2530	School

Children looked after by a local authority	£2530	2530	Local authority
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This table shows that for an eligible free school meal child in primary school, additional pupil premium funding over a school year of 39 weeks and additional economic support works out to £37.30 per week. By secondary school, this equates to £26.53 in additional weekly funding per claimant. Broken down further by a five-day week, they equate to £7.46 and £5.03 per day per claimant. This can create inequality in funding as schools with higher Free School Meals claimants gain more money via the premium, allowing them to offer more support to disadvantaged students.

The criteria to claim free school meals and pupil premium are linked to a parent's economic status and social welfare claims, meaning those on income support, universal credit (restricted to those with a non-benefit income of under £7,400) and child tax credits (limited to those with an income under £16,190). This shows inequality in whom is eligible depending on the benefit claimed. It is plain to see that the financial eligibility marker differs depending on the means-tested help claimed. Government records suggest free school meals and pupil premium claimants stand at 1.9 million children (GOV,2022), yet the Child Poverty Action Group (2022) states that child poverty affects 4.2 million children. The number discrepancy demonstrates that Pupil Premium does not reach all disadvantaged children. The reliance on welfare eligibility as the marker for disadvantage does not reflect the actual number of those in economically strained households.

Inequalities and their impact on education is not a new narrative; neither is government policy to improve conditions. Philanthropy in the Victorian era gave rise to a veritable smorgasbord of charitable help for the impoverished; the agenda of supporting the economically disadvantaged became a national narrative as publications by Rowntree and Booth drew public attention to the plight of poverty and opportunity (Denham,2017). The Poor Laws of 1834 may have given people experiencing poverty the thinly veiled choice of workhouses or minimal wages. Still, neither of these choices offered the opportunity to improve an individual's economic situation (Tomlinson,2019).

By 1870 the Forster's Education Act (Finch,2019) was a first in terms of the introduction of mass education; the same act considered nutrition and the lack of it as a direct consequence of economic disadvantage and noted the inequality as influencing a child's education. In 1906 a new education act (Provision of Meals) was implemented to support disadvantaged children via hot lunchtime meals (Intriguing History,2017). From 1914 this provision also encompassed medical care, spectacles, and dentistry within a national care package for children's health and to improve their educational attainment; from 1944, laws were passed that protected school meals in schools, and they became accessible to those economically disadvantaged (Finch,2019).

The Plowden Report in 1967 (Gillard,2019) introduced concepts on child-centred learning that recognised children and their academic skills as distinct to each child; it also identified economic disadvantage as a barrier to prosperity and consistent quality teaching as a right for all children. By the 1980s, Tomlinson (2019) described the UK as a place of increased

inequality due to hostile policies led by former Prime Minister Thatcher (Conservative) (1979-1990), who removed universal free school meals and created the means testing for eligibility we see today (Finch,2019). Followed by Blair (Labor) (1997-2007), who introduced academies and promoted the privatisation of education (McLeod.2007), and more recently, Cameron and Cleggs Coalition party (Conservative and Liberal Democrat) (2010-2016), who carried on the privatisation of education by increasing academies that have greater control over their finances and internal policies and simultaneously decreased school budgets (BBC,2016).

The State of Nations report (2010) by the former coalition government of 2010-2016 drew attention to those marginalised by their economic status and the long-term impact on employment and health. The report made many claims and explanations into the effects of poverty and the relationship with poor educational attainment; the foreword by Iain Duncan Smith, former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, stated that economic inequality was not decreasing but instead replicated through generations. This report utilised previous data on free school meals for children and their attainment but still needed to intervene in their education (State of Nations,2010). Hallsworth, Parker, & Rutter (2011) claim that governments often need to pay more attention to past research and previous policies instead of focusing on creating new policies rather than reflecting on the success of their predecessors or past data. Meaning that generations had no further support within their schooling, even though the government had acquired and researched the influence that a person's economic status had on underachievement.

The State of Nations (2010) may have recognised the cycle of generational inequalities. However, their response to their findings in 2011 set the scene for the current pupil premium funding. A Strategy for Social Mobility (2011) by the former Coalition government (2010-2016) laid bare a set of provisions to increase social mobility, starting in early childhood education and creating specified funding for economically disadvantaged children. The pupil premium was positively promoted as the government's route to success for underprivileged children and asserted that this would benefit schools in many ways. It would provide funding for head teachers to deliver tailored support to its pupils; in turn, this would improve the diversity in schools and make free school meals more attractive to promote, as it would increase school funding. This strategy was to be supported by the newly formed Education Endowment Foundation (2023), an initiative focused on assisting disadvantaged children in raising their achievement via thoughtful and innovative planning of resources and in-school training. This report focused on increasing social mobility, breaking deprivation cycles through early economic intervention, and hopefully decreasing reliance on the welfare state. A disclaimer within the information notes that the power to incite its actions required devolved agencies to adopt policies. At the same time, this strategy had the best intentions; ultimately, policymakers had the control to create the change(State of Nations 2010).

Goldman Sachs (2022) define social mobility as a scale of success that either adds or diminishes through generations. Subsequently, the education offered and received often impacts the climb to improve a person's life opportunities. Copeland (2018) explains that Pupil Premium funding has one objective: increasing social mobility by raising the attainment gap and improving the outcomes of disadvantaged children; instead of ringfencing the grant, schools have some free reign in how they utilise pupil premium, but they must show accountability through published results on their websites, these results should demonstrate the gains in attainment that the funding has enabled, by comparing national data on disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children's academic achievement. Ofsted, through inspection, will scrutinise data from schools to ensure Pupil Premium spending is used appropriately and

effectively; this additional level of accountability places responsibility on school leaders to continuously monitor eligible children's progress and diversify intervention on their needs (Copeland,2018). An area of concern raised in the Social Mobility Report (2011) was increasing cultural capital for disadvantaged children; this is one of Bourdieu's theories of social structures; cultural capital refers to inequality within education and the resources available in the home. He reasoned that the different social classes could offer their children broadly diverse cultural capital reserves that could be advantageous or disadvantageous later in life (Routledge Soc, 2016).

Iris Young's (2004) oppression theory of marginalisation can be related to Bourdieu's cultural capital (Routledge Soc, 2016); the idea that we are successful through material possessions creates division and segregation in societies that marginalise those with less cultural capital and resources and views them as less worthy in terms of economics. The disparity of resources can be viewed in a report by the National Literacy Trust, which reported that one in five children do not have access to books in their homes to support their learning (Bookmark Reading,2022). Reay's opinion echoed this narrative as she called the introduction of Pupil Premium and cultural capital elitist. They are based on middle-class values and aspirations that she claims are inaccessible through state education and misaligned with working-class values (Mansell,2019). Viner (2018) conceded that schools might be better off spending resources on improving cognition rather than being concerned with social status and league tables.

As funding does not reach all disadvantaged students, school funding via the premium must be carefully considered to create comprehensive, evidence-based programmes that improve eligible students and those in need. Firstly, schools must identify disadvantaged students; this requires schools to collate and compare data such as NFER (2023) Tests to align academic support and track progress. The NFER (National Foundation for Education Research) tests collate data that allows teachers to map progress and identify students' strengths and weaknesses; this can then be used to create strategies to support disadvantaged children via Pupil Premium (NFER,2023). Other sources of disadvantage identification can be drawn from discussions with support staff, teachers, and parents.

There are many challenges in tackling underachievement; the free school meal marker used to gain pupil premium has stringent guidelines, meaning many children are not eligible for pupil premium, even though their families face economic disadvantages. Add the stigma of claiming free school meals, and its subsequent pupil premium, meaning schools may not receive the cash injection to support them.

Pupil Premium is interlinked with eligibility for Free School Meals; this relies on families claiming benefits, thus creating a barrier to Pupil Premium funding as a stigma is attached to claiming free school meals. Alderson (2022) states that Free School Meals create stigma; free school meal claimants are revealed via school trips and the subsequent school-packed lunch; this can create a feeling of shame, within secondary schools, where payment cards allow a limited budget for meals that again generates embarrassment for students.

As economic disadvantage tends to be generational, it is conceivable that their parents, having experienced these feelings, avoid claiming free school meals as a deliberate attempt to bypass negative emotions in their children. Levy (2022) suggests this can create higher levels of poverty and thus disadvantage; parents spend money on lunches they can ill afford, as their past experiences influence their claims. Research on socioeconomic status and specifically how poverty and free school meals affect self-identity by Eastbrook., et al. (2022) concedes that economic disadvantage is a factor in identity perception that impacts self-worth and academic

success. Furthermore, this creates a double-edged sword, as this demographic do not claim free school meals; it is possible to align them with the Child Poverty Action Group (2022) statistic that doubles the number of children facing economic disadvantage compared to free school meal claimants.

The Education Endowment Fund (2023), through their tiered model approach to Pupil Premium funding, advises that funding should be split into three primary areas, including broader school strategies, tailored support, and quality teaching. Wider school strategies can encompass breakfast clubs: extracurricular activities: attendance support, and offering to support parents through improved communication channels, i.e. apps, translators, and parent workshops: social, emotional and behavioural support.

The provision of breakfast clubs can benefit students in several ways, as well as increasing nutrition through the promotion of healthy eating; breakfast clubs offer space to develop social skills by mixing with different year groups than their own, and students can increase their confidence and foster positive peer relationships. Staff delivering the breakfast club are usually the first point of contact in schools for students, and breakfast clubs are an informal setting, so children may feel happy to share their worries. This programme can also improve punctuality; students are in school earlier for breakfast and so are earlier to class (Graham & Beadle,2017). This creates a positive opportunity for parents as breakfast clubs are often free or very low cost; they offer not just a meal at school but the opportunity to gain a childcare provision before school hours which working parents could use. These positive effects do not come without comment; this programme may improve behaviour, attendance, and increased social skills; research has shown that breakfast clubs do not have to adhere to the same nutritional guides that school lunchtime meals must adhere to (The School Food Standards,2014) and the food options can be repetitive and limited (Graham, Russo & Defeyter.2015).

Targeted academic support for children can include language development: differentiated resources and activities: peer tutoring: one-to-one and small group tuition: peer mentoring, and teaching assistants (TAs). TAs generally work as part of the classroom team along with teachers; they often work with specific classes and offer whole-class support or targeted interventions with small groups. Utilising Pupil Premium to deploy teaching assistants is common; statistically, they make up 3 in 10 fte (full-time equivalent) positions inside schools (Explore Education Statistics,2023). The Sutton Trust (2019) report that funding cuts have increased the reliance on Pupil Premium to fund teaching assistants; the Education Endowment Foundations (2023) research into the merits of teaching assistants and their support for disadvantaged children, propose their deployment can assist in raising the progress of children who receive this type of intervention by four months. Teaching assistants create reoccurring costs, and specified training may also be needed to equip teaching assistants with additional skills. The Education Endowment Foundation( 2023) recommendations noted that it is in what manner teaching assistants are deployed which adds the most value. Working with small groups consistently can create progress, but their work must be in class; separating children from their teachers and the classroom setting can lead to underachievement if teaching assistants are a primary source of support for disadvantaged children. If these interventions are out of the classroom environment, it can make it difficult for children to grasp what they have missed during the intervention (Education Endowment Foundation,2023). There is a reliance on teaching assistants to carry out interventions ranging from literacy and numeracy development to language support and resource management for disadvantaged children. There must be explicit instruction on their role in teaching and supporting the students, which also creates a reliance on unqualified teaching staff who, compared to teachers, are at very different pay



scales. Teachers currently attract a salary of between £28- 34,000 (Get into Teaching,2023), whereas teaching assistants' wages sit at £17-20,000 (NEU,2023), showing that this relatively low-paid job can come with as much responsibility as qualified teachers in terms of supporting disadvantaged students.

The main recommendation from the DFE around spending Pupil Premium is on quality teaching; the Education Endowment Foundation (2023) dissects quality teaching strategies into different strands, the development of a curriculum and assessments to meet students' needs, new pedagogical approaches, and high-quality materials: professional development using evidence-based methods, such as feedback, phonics, metacognition and comprehension and: mentoring and coaching: recruitment and staff retention: technology.

Both Jones & Smith (2018) and Dunford (2017) consider the school's aspirations for staff and students as creating the ideals for supporting disadvantaged children; Jones & Smith (2018) advocate for enquiry-based philosophies to be introduced, such as the Philosophy of Children or its more commonly used term P4C. This philosophy creates positive relationships between teachers and students by inciting critical thinking and rich dialogue; teachers gain skills in facilitating discussions and developing strategies to improve their practice, and their relationships with students are greatly expanded. This whole school approach intends to create a harmonious, caring community that utilises communication to impact relationships and teaching. It does not come without criticism, Lord., *et al.* (2021) explain that the Philosophy of children (P4C) may attribute to students' social and personal development, but there has been no marked difference in the achievement of disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged children. Therefore the benefits of P4C seem more advantageous in social development for students and improving teaching practices than raising achievement.

It would be impossible to mention all the available interventions Pupil Premium can be applied; instead, an overarching theme arises from this research: achievement is raised through positive relationships between students and teachers. Schools must understand the disadvantages held within their classrooms to apply Pupil Premium effectively. Sobel's (2016) recommendations reiterate that if Pupil Premium is to be effective at narrowing achievement gaps for disadvantaged children, schools must ensure teachers have received appropriate training in personalised learning plans to support differentiated learning. Their message is based on effective communication and support to create positive relations between parents, teachers, and students; through shared knowledge, change can be made.

If the Pupil Premium is supposed to support achievement, there should be considerable gains since the implementation. How successful has the programme been at narrowing the achievement gap? If at all? The Education Endowment Foundation (2023) may recommend evidence-based interventions to support disadvantaged students, and local authorities may be responsible for publishing their school's achievement rates; concerningly, the government has yet to disclose Pupil Premiums' success. Ofsted (2014) may require evidence of the strategies schools use to narrow attainment gaps, the level of funding received, and a school's record of spending the premium and its effectiveness. Still, they have not published any specific gains to the scheme. Their last publication on the impact of Pupil Premium was in 2014 when after two years of Pupil Premium, they announced that Pupil Premium was having a positive impact on disadvantaged children, the use of good and outstanding schools as a reference for its success should be viewed as a barrier to truth. Using schools that were already in good stead does not offer a whole perspective of impact; Ofsted (2014) has failed to publish research aimed explicitly at Pupil Premium since 2014; furthermore, there is plenty of evidence that the disadvantage gap has widened instead.

Government research by Roberts (2022) on Pupil Premium stated that data on key stage 2 and GCSE levels of disadvantaged students had widened due to the pandemic. Covid 19 highlighted inequality within homes regarding resources; during the lockdown, disadvantaged students faced many barriers to learning. The OECD reported that children from economically deprived households were more likely to be under-resourced and lacking in motivation to support their learning, as well as lower parental participation, meaning Pupil Premium interventions were null and void for home learners (Schleicher, 2020). Although Covid 19 exasperated the achievement gap, it also readdressed the issues of inequality in childhood due to financial circumstances. Research into poverty and parental support and the impact on brain function in children suggests that parental support is a dominant factor in cognitive and emotional development that can either negatively or positively affect achievement. Brody., *et al.* (2019) 's research advocates that poverty can be negated by parents' encouragement, communication, and involvement. The similarity between effective school communication and Brody ., *et al.* (2019) 's research on cognition shows that parental involvement catalyses learning and emotional skills. However, although Pupil Premium may improve parent and teacher communication, there must be evidence that supporting parental participation in a child's education is an agenda for the government via targeted funding.

On Education by Brighthouse (2006 ) was written seventeen years ago, yet the message remains the same today; there is an expectation that schools can bridge inequality gaps that other government policies still need to address or have caused. They explain that schools should be a place where children can gain skills to enable them to flourish in later life; in juxtaposition to flourishing, there is a pattern of poverty that has become generational. This can mean parents' educational achievements may hinder supporting their children's education and can become another inequality. Brighthouse (2006) theorises that governments incite human capital theory to grow economies. It is possible to align Pupil Premium with this theory as its interests lie in raising attainment that benefits both a person and the economy. Pupil Premium is a direct action to lower the reliance on state benefits later in life through targeted support. Attention should be paid to the broader societal inequalities that are the causality of poverty and lower attainment. Pupil Premium is plastering over cracks of deeper issues. To address disparities, other steps must be taken to improve the lives of disadvantaged families.

There is evidence that disadvantage starts to impact achievement from a young age; by three years old, children from deprived families have acquired fewer words than non-disadvantaged children and are more likely to have heard words associated with negative behaviour rather than praise. This means that children from disadvantaged families often have a lower self-image that affects their achievement (EYE 2016). This is also evidence of how research is available in the public domain and is therefore obviously known to the government to improve disadvantaged children's opportunities.

The real difficulty in finding evidence of Pupil Premiums' success lies in the students who are not Free School Meals subscribers or may earn just above the eligibility criteria for the support. Gorard, Siddiqui, N & Haut See (2012) claim that high-poverty areas can skew Pupil Premiums success rates, as these areas are generally populated by those not eligible for Free School Meals and are also economically disadvantaged. They also noted that areas of high deprivation have lower aspirations and educational participation.

There is also another aspect of Pupil Premiums' success that is rarely mentioned in publications. Brighthouse (2006) says the evolution of schools from more educators to social brokers, meaning Pupil Premium interventions aim to improve not only academic opportunities for disadvantaged children but also their economic worth. Hence, they should become less reliant

on state support. Pupil Premium's success will always be hard to measure nationally when schools tailor support to specific interventions within their schools, and it is not a one size fits all programme.

A more significant problem lies in the cycles of deprivation that persist in the UK and hold similar statistics since Free School Meals were introduced (Thane, 2018), meaning state interventions still need to raise opportunity via education for those at an economic disadvantage. Lareau (2003) wrote that poverty in parents creates an unequal childhood with limited access to external educational activities and shorter learning days than their non-disadvantaged peers. This creates a reliance on schools to fill the cultural capital void unavailable in their home lives. As children spend fifteen per cent of their childhood in school (Iqbal,2018), the impact a school, specifically Pupil Premium, can have is limited. This also draws focus to the time spent in parents' care and the opportunities available in their homes and local areas; if attainment is narrow, then the investment should include parents, not just children.

To impact the narrowed attainment gap, the focus needs to widen than that of in-school support; parents are the pinnacle of a child's educational resource, yet the support to encourage their involvement is often based on school interventions. Pupil Premium can never meet its intention if parents are not informed of their impact on achievement and have the skills to support their children. Therefore government spending may be better invested in parents; their influence directly impacts self-worth, language skills, and aspirations. Craske (2018) interrogated Pupil Premium and concluded that spending should be spent not just on academia but pastorally too, and what it created was a voice for those disadvantaged. Therefore if Pupil Premium gives a voice to disadvantaged students, there needs to be a voice for parents too. Poverty places unmanageable responsibility on schools to create well-rounded people that can contribute to the economy, but it needs to consider the little time children spend in schools. Interventions should be community-based to raise community aspirations and create support networks.

Raising the aspirations of parents would create positive change. Butler & Rutter (2016) reported that childcare could create barriers for a parent, limiting their work opportunities and thus stifling their economic growth. The creation of affordable state-run childcare would make the impact the government is trying to address, and parents would be able to access resources and out-of-school activities to create better positionality for themselves and their children. Better communication is where success lies, schools benefit by understanding the community they serve, and families feel better supported by the schools. If communication creates intervention in schools, understanding the needs of disadvantaged families through communication could change policies that support rather than perpetuate disadvantage.

# Ethical Considerations

Ethics can be considered professional morals that minimise risk to researchers and participants, whether they are people or documents. As this research is a non-empirical literature review, the principles that guide it differ from empirical research, which places importance on protecting harm to persons involved in the research process. Literature reviews are placed within secondary research that sources evidence from pre-existing articles and data to evidence a line of questioning; Smith (2008) distinguished this type of research as gathering multiple sources of data that reclassify information and search for nuances in data to create new meanings. In juxtaposition, empirical research data sources are based primarily on people and their experiences and insights; therefore, the ethical considerations differ considerably; researchers utilising this data method collection method must gain informed consent from participants and notify them of their right to withdraw at any time during the research process Thomas (2017). The ethical practices that align with both empirical and non-empirical research are the storage of data collated that is password protected and stored securely. Largan and Smith noted that the difference in approach in data collection of non-empirical research does not come without ethical responsibility; sharing the data of others must be carried out stringently and respectfully,

An ethical consideration within the research was the terminology used; as the intended audience is parents, they fall into the public realm category; Bera (2018) states that educational researchers should use clear, straightforward language that is appropriate to its audience. By utilising reflexivity, themes were carefully measured so that the positionality of disadvantaged parents was considered at all times; by deliberately offering evidence that did not blame them for their children's academic achievements, the intention was to minimise harm to readers. Reflexivity within research can be defined as critically reflecting on process and practice; the acknowledgement of the audience of this review shows how reflexivity assisted in guiding the research content and how reflecting on more than just the researchers' positionality can assist in conveying knowledge to others (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The choice of pragmatism as a theoretical framework was an ethical decision that specifies that truths can evolve through time; this became significant when sourcing journal articles to review (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2006) state that sensitive educational research is often linked to vulnerable and powerless people who may be unable to protect themselves; this literature review is about poverty and government intervention, so it was essential not to add to the disempowerment marginalised communities can feel. Although empirical research would advocate confidentiality within its evidence gathering to its participants, the data sources and readers require protection in secondary research to ensure that data is not skewed and its audience does not feel attacked or misrepresented.

The choice of data sources also brought positionality into question; many journal articles reflected a negative perception of Pupil Premium, which meant paying attention to the biases that were conveyed and sourcing alternative perspectives to create a discussion that noticed both arguments and created its debates that did not rely on their views to form the knowledge. Bell and Waters (2018) suggest that ethical issues can arise from biased articles designed to sway thought; the researcher's positionality should be reflected regularly to maintain a balanced data view. A neutral perspective was achievable by refocusing on other issues within the literature review; this supported the positionality that was wanted to remain neutral and empower readers rather than an article with a biased perspective.

## Conclusion

In Summary, this literature review discussed the reasonings and applications of Pupil Premium by evidencing the history of support in schools for disadvantaged children. It is intended to give parents a broader knowledge of its uses. The key points discussed included the Free School Meals Marker as eligibility for the premium and how this may not necessarily encompass all disadvantaged children. Another discussion focused on the interventions Pupil Premium can be applied to and the methods of data used to create these interventions. Finally, it criticised the programme's effectiveness and if funding should be directed at alleviating disadvantages held in families instead.

The questioning of why Pupil Premium was introduced examined the historical context and how different Prime Ministers had introduced support for disadvantaged students. Pupil Premium was enacted to support disadvantaged children in schools to narrow the attainment gap, and it intends to do this through economic interventions. What became apparent was the reasoning behind it; the agenda of economic disadvantage and state reliance is the biggest drive in Pupil Premiums' development. As Pupil Premium is means-tested and poverty in children is at twice the level of Free School Meal claimants, it is evident that not all children can benefit from this type of intervention. The question of how schools develop interventions proved the reliance on teaching assistants to deliver interventions, as they paid a relatively low amount compared to teachers, they too can be viewed as economically disadvantaged but hold significant responsibility for the success of interventions. This questioning also approached how schools can create higher aspirations for disadvantaged students by adopting a whole-school approach to increase attainment, utilising the premium to offer a breakfast club not only nourishes a child but also becomes a social space that also, as a first point of contact, can be a safe space for children to express concerns. This led to the last line of questioning, had Pupil Premium made a difference? The answer became complex when there was a realisation that the government still needed to release national data on its impact. This led to looking beyond Pupil Premium and the impact poverty can have on a child's self-image. Pupil Premium was created to address multiple areas of disadvantage that are a consequence of poverty, yet the government has been aware of the consequences since the 1870s; reports throughout the years have shown poverty's impact on education and cognition, yet government intervention should be considered minimal. Pupil Premium acts as a sticking plaster over a cut that is not healing.

This literature review has developed a discussion that may have yet to create abundant new knowledge. Instead, it relies on a narrative to engage parents in their children's education through the reasoning for existing policies and their application. The criticisms that Pupil Premium gives voice to disadvantaged children also brought the question of who listens to parents' disadvantage and supports them. If the government wanted to improve the attainment gap, then the lives of families must improve first; the notion that children spend a relatively small amount of time in schools should influence parents to address the support they offer to children in their homes regarding education.

Although positionality did not change through the literature review, the gained knowledge on poverties impact on cognition and self-image gave an insight into a previously unthought-of perspective that naturally guided the research. On reflection, the intended audience shaped the

literature review; intentionally omitting statistics and wordy jargon was a deliberate attempt to lure readers to this research. If the audience changed from parents to academics, statistics and other theories may have been utilised to explain attainment gaps based on geographics and exam grades. An area-based enquiry may have led to more statistical data and given new discussions, but this would require a longitudinal study that would not fit within this piece's timescale.

Pupil Premium may give schools extra funding to address financial inequality, but it feels too late. The stifled opportunities of intervention have led to generations living in realities they are ill-equipped to better without intervention, not just in children through pupil Premium, but support for families to better their situations.

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# **A SMALL-SCALE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL READINESS IN TWO EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE SETTINGS**

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BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies (Distance Learning)

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## Abstract:

School readiness continues to be a dominant discourse in early childhood policy and education in England. This small-scale qualitative study explores perspectives of practitioners, teachers and teaching assistants working within Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) contexts. Considering the research questions, themes emerged from the literature review and the data including early years contexts, equality, and the disparity between embedded understandings of school readiness and the EYFS. This dissertation discusses these central themes through a literature review and empirical data gathered from participants at a preschool and reception year in an infant school. A sample of ten participants completed an online questionnaire exploring the views, opinions, and experiences on the topic of school readiness. Participants were asked eight open-ended questions to support the inquiry and responses were thematically analysed. Shared perspectives of participants are observed to be a strength of the empirical research and the ways that this relates to theory and literature were further reflected upon. The paper suggests further inquiry into how equitable and holistic views of school readiness can support outcomes for children within early childhood education and improve practice.

**Key words:** School readiness; Early Years Foundation Stage; early childhood education; early years educators.



## Introduction

The rationale for this inquiry arises from my experiences within the context of early childhood, having worked within an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) context both in an early years setting and at an EYFS (DfE, 2021) reception year school environment. My own positionality around the topic of school readiness has shifted as I have changed roles and therefore, I was curious to learn from other practitioners, teachers, and teaching assistants about their views and how these align with my own positionality, current academic thinking and early childhood policy and debate. This study aims to explore practitioner views around the topic of school readiness, it further aims to examine the wider influence of policy and frameworks on the construction of views and opinions on a school readiness agenda in an early childhood care and education context in England.

The significance of the topic is explored by Neaum (2016) who observes that international discourse relates the school readiness agenda to wider global commitments to improve outcomes for children and address issues of inequality in education. Relevance to current discourse is further demonstrated by Kay (2022) who delivers an argument by Darbyshire et al. (2014 as cited in Kay, 2022) that from the view of practitioners working in the EYFS (DfE, 2021) there is a conflict between the pressure to ready children for their next stage in learning and providing age and developmentally appropriate experiences for those children who might not be at age expected levels of development. Significant to the research are arguments put forward by Shallwani (2009) who comments that focusing on children's micro level issues to improve school readiness misses the relevance of macro and system level factors. These issues confirm that school readiness is of continuing interest in the field of early childhood, and this forms the justification for the research. To support this inquiry the research questions are as follows:

What is understood by the term school readiness?

As a result of the term school readiness, what are the expectations placed on children in the early years?

From practitioner perspectives, how is the system adapting to the school readiness needs of children?

To begin the research process, I engaged with a literature review of relevant academic and grey literature. Within the literature review chapter, I provide an exploration of the key term of school readiness, however, here I briefly define the context of early years education in England relevant to this research inquiry. Delivery of early years education and care in England can include nurseries, childminders, day nurseries, maintained nurseries, preschools, kindergartens, and children can attend a combination of settings depending on their individual contexts. The same can be said for reception classes, these can vary; some schools have mixed provision for nursery and reception and/or reception and year one. However, this study considers the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) for children in a preschool setting and in a reception year at an infant school in England.

This research inquiry is positioned in the interpretative paradigm and empirical research is a valid methodology because I aim to explore the perspectives of different human participants and use the primary data to further inform the inquiry (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019). In writing up this inquiry, the intended audience are early years practitioners, leadership teams, academics, and policy makers as well as informing my own future practice working within the field of early childhood education and care.

# Literature Review

This literature review explores academic and grey literature related to the research topic of school readiness. Bell (2010, in Mukherji and Albon, 2018) argues for the importance of reading around the topic to gain wide perspectives on current thinking and discourse. In addition, Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy (2004) observe that reading widely can position the work within the relevant field and a wider context which support a richer view of the issues related to the topic. Therefore, this literature review encompasses an English early education context and where relevant international context literature to provide wider thinking around the topic. Its purpose is to investigate the term school readiness and what expectations are placed on children because of school readiness as well as practitioner perspectives on school readiness and the ways that the system adapts to the needs of children. This literature review provides a background on relevant and current literature for this small-scale qualitative research study which explores, analyses, and interprets practitioner views (Bell, 2010 in Mukerji and Albon, 2018).

## Key terms

Within this literature review the term practitioner is used to discuss an early years practitioner who works within a pre-school, a nursery, or as a childminder. In addition, the research also considers the reception year in primary school therefore the term teacher is used to describe an individual who works as a teacher in a reception year infant or primary school context. Finally, the term teaching assistant is used to describe a teaching assistant working within an infant or primary school context.

## Justification

School readiness has been a dominant discourse in early education for both academics and international and national policy makers for decades. Indeed, Carlton and Winsler in 1999 argued that school readiness is a current discourse and is linked to children's educational outcomes. More recently, Kay, (2022) argues that school readiness is a current issue in early education and places the context of early education at the heart of getting children ready for learning. The length of this discourse spans my own employment in early childhood, having worked in both a preschool, a primary context and now as an academic studying early childhood. This literature review has widened my own knowledge and offers the opportunity to reframe the term to support better outcomes for children and to improve practice and knowledge for other practitioners, teachers, and teaching assistants as well as the academic community of early childhood and care in England.

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## **International and national context around the term school readiness**

Current global interest in early years education and the relevance of children's development to their future outcomes has been prompted by the development of the United Nations Committee for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (OHCHR, 1989, article 28) who legislate that it is every child's right to an education (Theobald, 2019). Further, Brooks and Murray (2016) make the link to early childhood education through their argument that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) state that all children by 2030 should be able to attend early childhood education centres to enable readiness for primary education (United Nations, 2015 as cited in Brooks and Murray, 2016). From a national perspective Kay (2022) argues that United Kingdom (UK) government policy context places school readiness as being measured by the Early Learning Goals (ELG's) (DfE, 2021) at the end of the reception year and that the role of the early years is to get children a good start into the national curriculum. It could be argued that these perspectives focus on what children need to know and be able to do to be ready for school. However, Shallwani (2009, p.1) describes school readiness as

‘...the pit between the child and the school at the very beginning (at school entry)’.

This shift in perspective looking at the point between the child and the school led this literature review to consider potential differences in perspectives on the socially constructed views of school readiness (Shallwani, 2009; Neaum, 2016).

### **What is understood by the term school readiness?**

Within an English education context, the term school readiness holds multiple meanings and can vary on the perspective of the author. For example, it can be taken to mean a child being “ready” to start in a reception class at an infant or primary school (Grimmer, 2020; Whitebread, 2014). A further example of this definition is given by Ford (2014) who argues that a child who is leaving the early years should be ready for school. Similarly, Ofsted (2014) argue that most parents send their child to school at aged four, it could be argued therefore that this indicates it is a socially constructed perspective that this point in a child's learning journey relates to school readiness. A contrasting view is that school readiness encompasses the time of completion of the Early Years Foundation Stage of Learning at the end of reception year and the ELG's contribute to a summative assessment of a child's readiness for learning at key stage one (Kay, 2022). Of interest to this exploration of the socially constructed view of school readiness and different perspectives is the work by Grimmer (2020) who acknowledges that the term has multiple definitions. In addition, Ofsted (2014) state that from their research there was an absence of a comprehensive view on the term. Importantly Ofsted (2014) further argue that this ambiguity of the term highlights differing perspectives on the age of the child and the differences in development between a child aged 4 moving to school and a child who is 5 starting in year one. In addition, Neaum, (2016) whilst discussing the Ofsted 2014 paper ‘Are you Ready? Good Practice in School Readiness’ observes that although school readiness is an ambiguous term the clear role of the early years is to get children ready for school. Reflecting on this research and my own positionality having experienced school readiness from both

perspectives it could be argued that these differences could impact on the expectations that practitioners, teachers and teaching assistants have of children's development within the EYFS and the role that they play in supporting children's school readiness.

**As a result of the term school readiness, what are the expectations placed on children in the early years?**

The neoliberal education policies of recent years link improved outcomes in maths and literacy to improvements in social mobility (Flewitt and Roberts-Holmes, 2015 in Kay, 2022). Clark (2023, p. 4) agrees, arguing that this connects to a need for 'measurable outcomes'. In England the statutory framework for the EYFS (DfE, 2021) and the Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2021) provide a backdrop for the previously explored socially constructed views of school readiness and consider what children need to do to make good progress at early years settings and in the reception year at school. Teachers in the EYFS measure children's progress in the EYFS against the ELG's (DfE, 2021) as they come to the end of their EYFS learning journey and although guidance does not prescribe a curriculum based on these ELG's there is an expectation that it would not benefit the child if the curriculum is only based on what the child can currently do and not what they could do next to make progress (DfE, 2021). However, Darbyshire et al. (2014) argue that from the view of teachers and practitioners working in the EYFS there is a conflict between the pressure to ready children for their next stage in learning and providing age and developmentally appropriate experiences for those children who might not be at age expected levels of development. Therefore, it could be argued that to ensure best outcomes for all children in the EYFS, their individual contexts should be acknowledged and represented within a school readiness agenda.

Despite the ambiguity in the term school readiness and pressures on EYFS practitioners to measure children's outcomes, the unique child context is an embedded construct in early education and care in England. Brooks and Murray (2018) argue that the EYFS encourages the adoption of each child as being unique and that learns in their own way and at their own pace (DfE, 2021). They further argue that although getting children ready for school supports article 28 of the UNCRC,

'...it may prove counter-productive if it is coercive or inappropriate to a child's needs' (Brooks and Murray, 2018, p. 144).

Shallwani (2009) provides a further argument that children are measured against goals that are socially constructed and put onto the child, but these may not be culturally or socially relevant to every child's context. Arguing for inclusive education policies Hugo et al. (2018) state there should be a shift toward systems being ready as opposed to the readying of the unique child. This view away from the child is also reflected by Margetts and Kienig (2013) as well as Whitebread and Bingham (2014 as cited in Neaum, 2016) who state that good outcomes relating to school readiness are not only within the child but also in the diverse acceptance of all children by the systems that surround the child.

## **From practitioner perspectives, how is the system adapting to the school readiness needs of children?**

Children develop through ever shifting and complex relationships between their home, places of learning, local and wider community and within a local, national, and international landscape of policy and circumstance (Margetts and Kienig, 2013; Atilas et al., 2021). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can support connecting ideas of the socially constructed concept of school readiness and an equitable approach to school readiness (Dockett and Perry, 2007). Grimmer (2018) explains that the work of Bronfenbrenner (1989) can support a holistic view of school readiness that considers the multiplicity of truths that impact on a child's development and early years experiences (Formosinho, 2021). Lenz Taguchi (2010 as cited in Brooks and Murray, 2016) argues for an equitable approach to school readiness that embraces the complex multiplicity of the relationships between settings, families, provision, and curriculum. Further they suggest school readiness in an 'open-ended' context (Lenz Taguchi, 2010 as cited in Brooks and Murray, 2016, p. 3) which could be taken to mean that school readiness is looked at holistically through a social systems lens that considers the scope of the child, the family, any work with outside agencies, the provision and considers how these impact on the child's readiness for school, their readiness to learn, the providers readiness to accept the diversity of the child and the ways that wider systems and circumstances impact on children's school readiness.

Finally, this literature review considers the work of Moyle (2019) who argues for a strengths-based perspective from their work on indigenous contexts and school readiness. Moyle (2019) argues that equitable education opportunities rely on systems having flexibility to accommodate diversity and Shallwani (2009) promotes awareness of the nature of our own socially constructed views of child development and how these can be interlinked with our views of school readiness. However, Grimmer (2018) argues that an individualised approach to school readiness fits with the pedagogy of many practitioners, teachers, and teaching assistants in the early years it presents challenges when measuring developmental outcomes in children which are needed to monitor the effectiveness of policy, curriculum, and education.

This literature review has explored the term school readiness. As a researcher it illustrated to me that there are varying perspectives existing within both practice and academia related to school readiness. The term can be used within global equality agendas, national levelling up agendas and by academics arguing for a balanced, cyclical approach between systems readiness and child readiness. Reflecting on my own positionality it is pertinent to acknowledge these differences and engage in conversations to establish a cohesive and coordinated approach between early years education providers to support all children's readiness for school needs.

## Methodology

This research project aimed to explore the different views and opinions of early years practitioners, reception year teachers and teaching assistants working within the EYFS on school readiness. This interest in different perspectives on a phenomenon is indicative of research in the interpretivist paradigm (Thomas, 2017). By engaging with the perspectives of human participants Carter (2018) argues that the interpretivist paradigm offers the opportunity to interpret individual truths. With regards to the topic of school readiness I related to the argument by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017), that when participants attribute meaning to the topic, they will have their own set of social contexts, personal and/or professional experiences of the topic, therefore, each participant has multiple truths about one topic. This is reflected in my own positionality in which I have worked both as an early years practitioner and as a teaching assistant and hold perspectives of school readiness from both roles, additionally as a student of early childhood studies and academic researcher I explore the topic from a different perspective engaging with the literature review to widen knowledge and safeguard the inquiry from my own bias.

The literature review gave wide reading around the topic of school readiness from both national and international contexts. International contexts added a wider scope to understanding the term from diverse perspectives and as a qualitative researcher I wanted to find many versions of the truth (Nolan, Macfarlane, and Cartmel, 2013) from different authors to support the construction of various perspectives of the topic. However, on completion of the empirical research I reflected on the strengths and limitations of the process as a whole and discovered that although the literature review had widened my knowledge, a limitation was that the recruited sample was not diverse and the qualitative research tool that I used collected data that did not have as similar wide-ranging perspectives as the literature review.

### Research methods

The paradigmatic perspective influenced the ways that I approached collecting data for the inquiry. Empirical research required qualitative data that was interested in the multiple perspectives around the research questions related to the field of study (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Therefore, I used a non-probability sample (Bryman, 2016) to represent the population of the early years community. This purposive, systematic approach looked at two settings that are in the EYFS and selected potential participants from the early years practitioner team and the school teaching and teaching assistant reception year team.

I selected participants on a quota sample within the non-probability sample (Bryman, 2016 as cited in Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019). To ensure the relevance to the discipline of early

childhood studies and researching school readiness (Denscombe, 2010) I made decisions on the criteria and selected potential participants who could fit into the categories. I identified that I needed participants who were willing and able, who worked in the early years either in an early years setting context or a reception school context who would have relevant experience and knowledge around the topic of school readiness. This criterion was the most reliable and purposive way to recruit participants that were knowledgeable (Denscombe, 2010). On reflection two participants did not fully complete the questionnaire, one explanation of this could be that my own positionality (Thomas, 2017) and knowledge base led me to assume that early years practitioners, teachers and teaching assistants would have a similar working knowledge to myself. Here, this potentially impacted on the wide range of practitioner views and the representativeness (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019) of different views. If those with narrower experiences of an early years context did not feel able to contribute, then I potentially alienated them from the study. This potentially impacted the validity of the study if wasn't a true representation of the sample that included early years practitioners, teachers, and teaching assistants.

### **Data collection methods**

To protect all parties involved in the research, before starting on the data collection stage of the research project ethical approval was gained from the university of east London's (UEL) ethical department and my research supervisor at UEL (Denscombe, 2010). I then identified gatekeepers at both early years settings and gained approval to carry out the research (Denscombe, 2010). Each individual potential participant, identified from the sample was sent an information letter and consent form, I allocated one week for individuals to read the information sheet, ask any questions, and complete the consent forms.

The process of choosing a data collection tool was carefully considered, both regarding the nature of the enquiry but also considering my inexperience as a researcher. My chosen data collection tool was a remote internet type questionnaire which is less personal and does not have interactional factors (Denscombe, 2010). Denscombe (2010) further argues for the appropriateness of a questionnaire when the respondents can be expected to be able to read and understand the questions. To ensure that the data would be valid open-ended questions were used throughout, this relates to qualitative research where participants' own voices relate to their truth about the phenomena (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). However, a limitation could have been that too many open-ended questions required participants to think and consider their answers rather than offer spontaneous responses. This links to Denscombe's (2010) point about supporting validity through participants responding to questions without overthinking their answer in addition this could have contributed to the participants that did not respond to all the questions.

Denscombe (2010) importantly argues that researchers should establish the reliability of the data collection tool to ensure effective and safe collection of data. Therefore, one month before sending the questionnaire to participants the questionnaire was piloted on a fellow early childhood studies student (Denscombe, 2010). The individual did not report any issues with the questionnaire so after last edits it was emailed to the twelve individuals who had consented to participate. Within the questionnaire's description, I emphasised the anonymity of participants in line with ethics as well as the participants right to withdraw their answers (Nolan



et al., 2013). Participants were informed that the online link to the questionnaire would be open for one month. I found that after three weeks only two individuals had completed the questionnaire, therefore I felt it was necessary to email the participants with the link again. On reflection it was pertinent to remember that my research may not be a priority for participants therefore a gentle reminder is an acceptable method to promote participation. This was an effective strategy as then twelve participants engaged with the questionnaire. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) argue that qualitative research can be impacted by the robustness of the responses, therefore I decided not to include two of the respondents answers as they were incomplete and including them could affect the validity of the research.

This small-scale qualitative research study sought the views of participants. Carter (2018) argues that qualitative research can give specific and rich data. To support this thinking, participants came from the same discipline of early childhood but held different roles, practitioners, teachers, and teaching assistants. These three different potential perspectives would give the research greater depth and support the validity of the research. A data triangulation method was used to enable the comparison of the different perspectives of the three professional roles working with children in the EYFS (Denzin, 2012 in Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019). However, a limitation of this research and the potential benefits of the triangulation method was that the questionnaire did not ask respondents which early years context they worked at. This gave a broad view of opinions on school readiness but did not provide specific details on which context would have influenced their perspective and to enable further insight into the different ways that individuals socially construct their perspectives on school readiness.

During the planning phase of the research process, I made a choice to analyse the data using thematic analysis. This process involved getting to know the data well through reading and beginning to 'compare and contrast emergent codes and make interconnections between them' (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019, p. 280). Initially, repeating words and phrases were highlighted which helped me to notice common interests between participants responses (Bryman, 2016 as cited in Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019). Making notes supported the coding and annotation of the data and identify findings and themes. Bell and Waters (2018) argue that the process of coding supports making meaning from individual words or phrases that participants have contributed through the questionnaires. Further Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) argue that memo's help with critical reflection and enable the researcher to have a record of developing ideas and themes. Reflecting further on this I can see that by structuring the process through thematically analysing the data will support the validity of the research and provide links and connections to the literature review as well as enabling a process to recognise and record surprising and unexpected emergent themes.

## **Method limitations**

I found that initial reading provided background, but I needed to widen the reading to get a broader view, helpfully Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) outlines that the literature review can take an evolving approach which enabled me to revisit the literature review as both my positionality broadened, and the justification was further validated by the wider reading. However, when I began to analyse the data, I initially found that the literature review had a broader scope on the topic than the data. Thematic analysis and organising the data supported

viewing the data in a structured way (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019) that provided links back to the research questions and the literature review. This process supported a deeper appreciation of the data and participants contributions and prompted deeper thinking into the responses and linking unexpected answers to the topic and existing themes from the literature and empirical data.

The data collection tool used for the research was a questionnaire, there were eight open ended questions which aligned with arguments from research literature which state that open ended questions are relevant for qualitative studies as they provide detailed data (Thomas 2019; Mukherji and Albon 2015). On reflection I could have used a Likert scale (Thomas, 2017) and potentially the questionnaire would have appeared less daunting and not as long. This is reflected by Mukherji and Albon (2015) who argue that if the questions require a lot of thought the respondent may not provide in depth answers.

### **Using the research journal as a tool to explore positionality**

Throughout the research process I have used a research journal for both recording ideas and to track my positionality (Mukherji and Albon, 2015). Further, Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) argue that being evaluative of one's own process is part of the whole process, and it is evident that the reflective journey impacts on the quality of the project. I recognised the fluidity of working in the interpretivist paradigm, where interpreting reading and analysing data changed the researcher. Reflexivity argues Etherington (2004, p.47) can be 'a bridge between research and practice'. Similarly, Mukherji and Albon (2015) explain that reflexive practice can help track thoughts and ideas whilst organising data effectively. Finally, it is helpful to be reminded of the purpose of reflexivity in the validity of the research (Etherington, 2004), it can provide insight into the relationships between the context and the themes related to the phenomena.

## Ethics

For this empirical research study, I have considered ethical principles and practice that have underpinned my research study. Ethics concerns the practices that protect from harm (Denscombe, 2010), for this empirical research this includes the participants, the researcher, the wider community as well as the authors used in the literature review. It is important that research follows ethical practice to identify and manage risk, to uphold a balanced view of the topic and maintain a view to do good (Bassot, 2020) within the field of early childhood studies. Ethical practice was initially upheld by receiving ethical approval for the research project from the University of East London's (UEL) ethical department and from the research supervisor (Denscombe, 2010).

The research was carried out with ethics in mind to ensure that participants felt safe and protected (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019), the project was explained fully in the consent form and on the questionnaire and anonymity was emphasised. This was especially valid as I was aware as a teaching assistant that teachers might not want to be appear less knowledgeable than someone less qualified than themselves on a topic of school readiness that is ambiguous (Ofsted, 2014). There was some risk identified that I knew some of the participants in a professional context as current and former work colleagues. Nolan et al. (2013) argued that researchers should be aware of power relations and relationships that might impact on the ethics of the research. To ensure that everybody felt as though they had a choice whether to participate and to ensure that participants felt emotionally safe to contribute (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019), I clearly stated that participation was voluntary and allowed for enough time for participants to consider their options, ask questions and make an informed decision. In this the principle of non-maleficence (Bassot, 2020) underpinned the process of research.

The research process was guided by ethical considerations and Bassot (2020) importantly reminds that when answering the questionnaire participants shared their personal thoughts and opinions. To ensure that they felt safe to do so, the consent process was not rushed, initial consent was sought from the gatekeepers to carry out the research (Denscombe, 2010). This was both a headteacher and a manager who gave their permissions. After which, the consent forms which clearly explained the purpose of the research were made available to members of staff at both settings and two weeks were allowed for anyone to ask questions about the research (Denscombe 2010). Those that consented to participate were then sent a link to the questionnaire and had four weeks to complete it. To ensure ethical compliance with regards to data handling the questionnaire was devised on Microsoft Forms according to instructions from the university this complies with data regulations (BERA, 2018) as the data is held securely in one place. All other research findings were further anonymised and saved on the OneDrive; this securely stores all participant's data (Bassot, 2020) in compliance with university regulations of data handling (BERA, 2018).

When viewing and analysing the data I have followed ethical practices to avoid misrepresentation (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019) of participants voices and views by treating the information confidentially and anonymously and checking that my own positionality is not affecting the different perspectives that are offered (Nolan et al., 2013). Anonymised extracts from the participants questionnaires were used purposively to support discussion in the writing (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019) within the findings and discussions chapter.

Reading widely for the literature review and tracking my changing positionality using a research journal supported the ongoing ethical considerations of the research. In addition, by allowing the reading to inform and challenge my own bias toward the topic, along with making a choice not to use social media blogs and to use academic sources for my literature review has ensured the validity of the research. Furthermore by challenging and tracking the changes in my own thinking and ensuring the views and opinions are backed up with sound, unbiased and authentic evidence, this could be linked to Bassot's (2020) writing of justice, that the research has moved my thinking forward and in so doing upholds the value of beneficence (Bassot, 2020) of the research project to do good, challenging my own understandings and those inherent in the language around school readiness with the aim to create better outcomes for children.

## Findings and discussion

I start this chapter on the findings and discussions of the research by describing the two settings that were involved in the empirical research study. Members of staff at a preschool that educates two- to four-year-olds and an infant school that are close in geographical location were invited to participate. Several children each year will leave the preschool in July and start at the infant school in the reception year so there are established links between the settings. Leaders at both settings were approached for approval to approach staff members at the preschool and the reception staff at the infant school. After approval was gained, information and consent forms were sent to six members of staff at the preschool and 8 members of staff at the school who had one week to consider the research project, ask questions, and complete consent forms. In total 6 members of staff from each setting returned consent forms and agreed to participate so twelve in total. No potential participant asked further questions or requested further information about the research. Therefore, I could move to the data collection phase of the inquiry.

As stated in the methodology a questionnaire was considered the most appropriate research tool for this qualitative research. The questionnaire was sent out to twelve participants digitally, the responses were anonymous and there was no way of knowing at which setting the participant was working at. Participants had one month to complete the questionnaire, after two weeks there had only been two responses, so it was pertinent to send a reminder email in case people had forgotten. It is important to note that people have busy lives and although the research is pressing to me it is not the highest priority for the participants. After one month, eleven respondents out of twelve had completed the questionnaire, however two were incomplete and therefore could not be used for validity. Participants in the research study range from teachers, teaching assistants and early years practitioners. Other than the teachers who it can be assumed have a degree level qualification and a teaching qualification, the qualification level of teaching assistants and early years practitioners was unknown. On reflection the data could have been richer if I could have known from which context the participant was viewing the question from, this could have indicated the different ways that individuals contextualise school readiness. Also, the knowledge base of each participant is different and potentially I did not have enough variety within the questionnaire to enable participants with different knowledge sets to feel confident answering questions on the topic.

### Data Analysis

Mukherji and Albon (2018) argue that the researchers next step is to find a way to use the participants answers to gain new knowledge about the topic or to find out if the responses help answer the research questions. Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) remind the researcher to be aware of all the elements that will be influencing the interpretation, the literature review, and own personal experiences. Following the literature review, I was in a position where my thinking had widened to include international perspectives on school readiness as well as equitable and holistic approaches. To analyse the data without bias (Thomas, 2017) I had to

understand how my new thinking might impact on reading the data. The research journal supported this by tracking my positionality through the stages of the research process. It further supported me by reminding me of the research questions and to frame my exploration of themes and ideas.

During the planning phase of the research process, I made a choice of data analysis. The methodology chapter states that I had decided to analyse the data using thematic analysis (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019). This process involved getting to know the data well through reading and beginning to ‘compare and contrast emergent codes and make interconnections between them’ (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019, p.280). Initially, repeating words and phrases were highlighted which helped me to notice common interests between participants responses (Bryman, 2016 as cited in Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019). In addition, Bell, and Waters (2018) argue that the process of coding supports making meaning from individual words or phrases that participants have contributed through the questionnaires. Further Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) argue that memo’s help with critical reflection and enable the researcher to have a record of developing ideas and themes. Making notes supported the coding and annotation of the data which further helped identify findings and themes from the participants responses.

At this point of the research process my positionality, the data and the literature did not have a sense of cohesion, it became important to make connections between all the findings and I became aware that I was experiencing some conflicting emotions within the process. To support this, Mukherji and Albon (2018) importantly remind researchers to maintain a commitment to ethical procedures and to ensure that all the data and notes are kept secure protecting the identities of the participants. To support ethical practice and to gather all the data and my thinking in a safe and organised way I used Microsoft Publisher to gather all the anonymised findings and make links to the research questions and themes from the literature review. This also supported the identification of themes and enabled me to check against the supporting literature if the ideas extend, confirm or challenge what is already known. By doing this I provided myself with a record of the process of my data analysis that remained ethical (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019) but also provided me with a space to record my thinking and reflections (Mukherji and Albon, 2018).

The process of coding and memo writing and organising the data led to the themes gradually emerging (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019). It was observed that the nature of a qualitative questionnaire that was designed with open-ended questions revealed responses that at first seemed to go beyond the scope of the research project (Bell and Waters, 2018), which required systematic rereading and reflecting on the literature review. My experiences of data analysis are reflected in the argument by Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019, p. 289) that ‘qualitative analysis... can be a hugely rewarding process. It can also be intellectually stimulating because it involves thinking creatively in interpreting the data’. Thematic analysis revealed that the themes that emerged related to the topic and to the research questions with varying rates of success.

## Introduction of themes and discussion of findings

This section of the inquiry describes the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis and attempts a discussion of the findings. The first question in this study sought to determine different perspectives on the term school readiness, the literature review evidenced that there were multiple definitions (Grimmer, 2018) and some authors had the perspective of school readiness at the point of transition to school contrasting with other authors considering school readiness at the point of finishing the EYFS (DfE, 2021) and moving to year one. Further, from the literature review, Ofsted (2014) argue that there is no comprehensive view of the term school readiness. This contrasts with the data collected in this small-scale qualitative research study where all participants shared the same view, as evidenced in the following example from a participant,

“It is when we prepare the children, ready for when they start school...”.

In addition, another participant states,

“School readiness is all about the time that children leave their early years setting and begin at their new primary school”.

An interesting comment from a respondent argues that school readiness is

“How children present when they start at ‘big’ school”.

This comment and the inclusion of the word, ‘present’ reveals that the participant is considering the characteristics of a child at a point of school readiness.

With respect to the second research question which explored the expectations placed on children because of the term school readiness. It was found that themes emerged regarding children’s maturation and what practitioner’s perspectives was on the importance of children having expected skills and knowledge related to the EYFS (DfE, 2021) statutory framework and curriculums. One interesting finding was that when asked about the skills and knowledge that participants associate with school readiness, eighty percent of participants mention explicitly children’s ‘independent’ skills and the other twenty percent imply independence as evidenced in the following quotes from two participants,

“...manage their own toileting needs”.

“...taking themselves to the toilet”.

Most of the references to independence relate to children’s physical development, with others describing independence alongside characteristics of playing and exploring and asking for help. This research could suggest that expectations of independence should be researched more thoroughly as there could be questions around age appropriate, realistic expectations and wider social systems that might impact on children’s levels of independence.

Evidence from the literature review suggested some conflict between the socially constructed and socially accepted view of school readiness (Shallwani, 2009) and the recommendations

within the EYFS (DfE, 2021) that each child is ‘unique’ who learns and develops in their own ways and at their own time. Evidence from the responses appears to suggest that the ‘unique child’ (DfE, 2021) is embedded in thinking about school readiness as suggested by the following quotes from three participants:

“...getting to know the children, understanding their unique needs and interests”.

“...ensuring they are represented in the provision”.

“...depending on each child’s needs you have to adapt to each and every one”.

These contrast with the previous responses around the characteristics of children’s independence, which relates back to work from Shallwani (2009) who argues that socially constructed measurements of readiness may not be relevant to a child’s context. In addition, Darbyshire et al. (2014, in Kay, 2022) argues that from the view of practitioners working in the EYFS (DfE, 2021) there is a conflict between the pressure to ready children for their next stage in learning and providing age and development appropriate experiences for those children who might not be at age expected levels of development.

The third research question sought to understand different practitioner perspectives in the way that systems adapt to the changing needs of children in relation to school readiness. Although many of the participants provided evidence that there was wide knowledge of the different ways that children and their families receive support and guidance, there was a paucity of evidence that discussed the important role that systems play in the school readiness agenda. Lenz Taguchi (2010, in Brooks and Murray, 2016) argues for an equitable approach to school readiness that embraces the complex multiplicity of the relationships between settings and families. It could be argued that although three different practitioner roles were asked their perspectives, all participants shared similar ideas about outside agencies that support families indicating a good, shared understanding. On reflection however, this was a limitation of the questionnaire and that if this research were to continue, I would devise a different research tool that balanced the questions between child, setting, families and systems to gain further participant perspectives surrounding systemic influences on school readiness. This would support a wider balance of evidence and move the discussion away from the maturation of the child.

An unexpected outcome of the research relates to the final question of the data collection tool surrounding the impact of COVID19 on school readiness. This produced more information regarding awareness of how the wider systemic world can impact children, families and therefore school readiness as suggested by one participant,

“Some parents are still reluctant to come in... preferring non face to face contact”.

Further linking ideas of wider systems impacting school readiness another participant made this observation,

“Children and families are still having long waits for referrals for development check”.

Wider reaching issues of inequality are mentioned by one participant,

“There are more Pupil Premium children now... some of these children are at a lower level of development”.

whereas one participant held a child centred view of the ways that the circumstances around COVID19 have impacted school readiness,



“Children haven’t had as much experiences as they maybe should have because of the effect covid has had...”.

It is possible that this question gave context to the participants and consequently they provided richer answers than knowledge-based questions. This could be an interesting observation for future research.

## **Findings and theory**

Viewing the findings through a theoretical lens provides an opportunity to make sense of the findings in relation to the three research questions (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019). Firstly, in relation to research question one, evidence suggests that the participants had a shared perspective on the definition of school readiness. A possible reason for this is that the sample, although they work at different settings have an existing collaborative relationship. This could be seen as a strength as shared thinking could potentially create better outcomes for children. Viewing the findings through an ecological systems theory lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1989 as cited in Grimmer, 2018) where the participants views of school readiness will be constructed with their own experiences and knowledge, suggests to me that the similar perspectives of the participant sample lacked diversity which could also indicate a lack of depth in the research.

In relation to research question two, participants appeared to strongly reference levels of independence in relation to school readiness. This was a surprising outcome of the data but is perhaps indicative of participants focusing on the micro level as argues by Shallwani, (2009) and ignoring macro and systemic levels that may impact children’s development and display independent characteristics.

There was a paucity of data relating to the third research question regarding whether participants could discuss the ways that systems impact school readiness. A possible reason for this was a limitation in the questionnaire that focused more on child maturation and development reflecting my own positionality at the beginning of the research process. However, the unexpected data that participants shared around the impact of COVID19 on school readiness potentially demonstrates an understanding of the wider social systems (Grimmer, 2018; Dockett and Perry, 2007) that impact school readiness when contextualised for the participants.

## **Positionality**

Interpreting the responses of participants changed my perception of the term school readiness. At the beginning of this research my own positionality aligned with the perspectives of the participants in the questions relating to the EYFS and child skills and knowledge. In that, school readiness was related to children starting school and that preschools had a responsibility to offer opportunities for children to practice and rehearse skills and gain knowledge so that they were ready for the next stage of their learning. From reading widely and interpreting the data participants shared about relevant outside agencies and the impacts of COVID19 my positionality considers the wider systemic influences on views around school readiness and how they influence myself working within the EYFS and how they impact on school readiness.

Importantly the data has shown that practitioners have shared views around school readiness which could support good outcomes through effective collaboration between settings. However, the lack of evidence that links the different agencies and wider systemic factors to school readiness was potentially a limitation of the research tool and the questions asked as evidentially the respondents provided contextualised answers around COVID19 and school readiness. This impacted my positionality as a researcher to firstly consider more carefully the different practitioners, potential differences in knowledge bases and experiences within the context of early childhood but also the nature of the questions should vary between knowledge based and open-ended questions with added context.

### **Concluding remarks**

It could be concluded from the literature review and the research findings that current literature and practitioner perspectives focus on the child, the skills and knowledge, and preparation for either reception or year one learning. The data tool also focussed mostly on this which reflects my positionality as a researcher at the earlier stages of the research process. However, reflecting on my positionality, reading widely, and viewing the data through the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Dockett and Perry, 2007) gave the research further depth.

The concept of reframing school readiness with an equitable early years agenda, to support all children and make it culturally relevant has been informed by the literature review but is also present in the data, as one practitioner suggests 'ensure that all children are represented'. This research views school readiness away from some current research perspectives that relate to either children moving to reception years or to year one, and positions itself to promote a holistic and equitable view of school readiness that acknowledges the need for measurable outcomes but also seeks the recognition of all the work that goes on to support the holistic school readiness for children every day with a child rights agenda.

## Conclusion

This small-scale qualitative research study aimed to explore the term school readiness and how it related to the expectations on children. Practitioner views were sought to further explore the systems relating to school readiness and whether they adapt to the needs of children.

Revisiting research question one, the literature review evidenced that the term school readiness is known to have multiple definitions (Grimmer, 2018; Kay, 2022, Ofsted, 2014), this contrasted with the data analysis which revealed that all the participants held a shared perspective that school readiness in their experience relates to the time in a child's life when they leave early years settings and go to the reception year at school. This does reflect the view held by Ofsted (2014, p. 8) that

‘...this mutually agreed understanding of readiness reflected a collaborative approach...’.

In relation to research question two which explored expectations that practitioners have of children. The data showed that practitioners have expectations related to the skills and knowledge in the prime areas of learning and some expected level of independence in relation to children's play. This inquiry explored that literature suggests that the top-down influence of policy (Grimmer, 2018) and statutory framework puts pressure on practitioners to keep in mind the next stages of a child's learning which can contradict with the rhetoric in the framework that suggests the ‘unique child’ (DfE, 2021) (Brooks and Murray, 2018).

The study then asks about the systems and practitioner views. Practitioners had a comprehensive view of the different ways that children's school readiness can be supported by the settings, by communication and by outside professionals and agencies. The literature evidenced that discourse suggests that to improve outcomes then the agenda needs to move away from the child and onto the systems (Whitebread and Bingham, 2014 as cited in Neaum, 2016). A limitation of the data did not link evidence of practitioner awareness of wider systems to potential impact of these systems on school readiness. Surprisingly though, the question around COVID19 and the impact on school readiness appeared to provide the participants with the opportunity to contextualise their thinking and had some ideas of the wider systems that impact children's development and therefore school readiness.

On reflection I think that I pitched the questionnaire at a practitioner who has a similar level of knowledge as myself, and I think that was a limitation. If I was to do the research again, I could conduct semi-structured interviews to enable participants to listen to responses from others and potentially feel more confident to contribute. A semi-structured interview could allow for greater flexibility within the questions which could add more depth to the data.

At the beginning of this research process, I held the expectation that it would be a linear process however, the process was more creative and cyclical than I had anticipated, this is evident through writing in the research journal. This could relate to my personal growth as a researcher (Mukherji and Albon, 2015) as well as evidence of a strengths-based perspective (Moyle, 2019) and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2017). The research journal as a tool supported the creative

journey which drew on all my personal strengths and intellect (Clark, Foster, and Bryman 2019) as well as challenging me to balance these with systematic and organisational skills.

## **Recommendations**

It is my belief from this research that further investigation into the role that the school readiness agenda plays in national policy needs to be carried out. The term school readiness could be viewed further away from academic, skills and knowledge bases and consider the wider systems that impact a child's development (Hugo et al., 2018). An equitable and holistic approach to school readiness (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, in Brooks and Murray, 2016) that looks at the different ways systems can effectively support all children, to enable school readiness not just at transition points but every day.

Changes to practice could make Improvements to the representation of children's diverse contexts to enable all children's school readiness within the EYFS (DfE, 2021) or beyond. Assessment supports the enabling of knowledge around children's development (Grimmer, 2018) between settings, between staff members and between year groups. However, changes to policy and inspectorate policy could look at the wider contextual scope of all the work that does and needs to happen around school readiness for individuals and groups of children. This could ease the top-down pressure on practitioners to focus on skills and knowledge and enable a wider systems perspective and consider the holistic nature of school readiness.

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# **FAMILIES' STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER CHILDREN LEARNING, WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE, FOR THEIR HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AFTER COVID-19**

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## Abstract

Within secure attachment the caregiver is reliable, available and responsive, nurturing child's needs and interests, making him/her feel safe and secure when trying new things according to their developmental milestones. The early interactions between parent and child become the child's inner model of thinking and feeling, as a frame that models his/her future social interactions. The current study used 43 parents' self-reported online questionnaire, four semi-structured interviews and one focus group, about their children routine after Covid Pandemic and it was developed between February-March 2023. Even it is wintertime, children are encouraged by their parents to social interact with extended family and other children, in parks, fields, playgrounds, because going outside in nature it is now permitted with no rules. Furthermore, within self-determination theory principles, child is encouraged to become competent, autonomous and independent, in their learning journey, as socio-emotional competences and early literacy and mathematics knowledge. Moreover, relatedness offers to the child reassurance of love, nurture and safety, building on their self-esteem, wellbeing and resilience. In addition, the ecological theory approach enables parents to offer to their children's opportunities for a holistic development within extended family, close friends' relationships, and specific professional support. The children are attending various early years settings, moreover they participate in diversity of pre-paid activities offered by various private/council providers.

## Introduction

In 2021, the guidance in *Birth to 5 Matter* has been updated in concordance with the new researches regarding present issues in society in order to “meet the needs of children today and to lay a strong foundation for their futures” (DfE, 2021, p. 6), based on core principles as “the child’s connections within family, communities, cultures and the natural world” and “the need to consider the whole child: physical, social and emotional wellbeing, health, and learning” (DfE, 2021a, p. 6).

The National Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) affirms the children’s right to be heard and in the Article 12 is clearly states the right to express their views freely. When children have enough vocabulary and expressing language, they will be able to verbalise their feelings and their thoughts, to express feeling and thoughts verbally or non-verbally, as the children are trying to self-regulate emotions and they are learning that their behaviours are their modality to communicate with others and to get attention in ways that are socially acceptable (Asquith, 2020).

Within the secure attachment and play- a fundamental task for parenting, the parents provide for their children ‘adequate stimulation, social interactions and the containment of anxieties that allow children to play and ultimately to develop’ (Hughes and Golding, 2012, p. 51). Moss and Urban, (2020 quoted in Thomas and Lewis, (2023) states that the measures of social-emotional skills, self-regulation, early literacy skills and numeracy skills tend to be at a lower level for the disadvantaged families, therefore the higher significance of implication of parents in their child growth and development.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the parents views and strategies when promoting their children learning and holistic development, especially at the beginning of year 2022, after Covid Pandemic has finished and no rules are imposed in people social interactions.

## Literacy review

### 1. Children holistic development and theory of attachment

‘Children’s personal, social and emotional development is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives and is fundamental to their cognitive development, moreover, underpinning their personal development are the important attachments that shape their social world’ (Dfe (2021a, p.43), because children learn about their own feelings and those of others within supportive, strong and warm relationships with their caregivers (Dfe, 2021a). In agreement with this idea (Bowlby,1988, p. 130) argues that the child builds a model of himself within the day-to-day interactions with parents; moreover, the way the child is treated or talked to has, becomes a model that governs his feelings about his parents and towards himself/herself, furthermore ‘his own behaviour towards them’. The internal working model enables ‘development of two key, interconnected aspects of personality development: the emerging sense of self and the development of emotional self-regulation’ (Rolfe, 2004, p. 39), which agrees with the DfE (2022), which says that children’s personal, social, and emotional development is assessed within three early learning goals: managing self, building relationships and self-regulation. Moreover, in DfE(2021c), children’s learning and well-being are evaluated at age 5 based on their

individual characteristics, their early education experiences and home environment, as these factors seems to be interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The holistic picture of young children's development was measured within emergent literacy, emergent numeracy, self-regulation and social-emotional development. Three countries participated, England, Estonia and the United States. In England the sample consisted of 2,577 children aged 5 from 191 schools, and the fieldwork was conducted from October to December 2018. Firstly, children were assessed on tablet-based activities to measure emergent numeracy, emergent literacy, self-regulation, emotion identification and emotion attribution. Secondly the school staff and parents answered to questionnaire to indirectly measure social emotional outcomes (prosocial behaviour, non-disruptive behaviour and trust), physical development, child's family background, ECEC use and the home learning environment. The study assessed self-regulation (executive function -inhibition, mental flexibility and working memory), socio-emotional development (empathy, prosocial behaviour, non-disruptive behaviour and trust) and academic achievement, as emergent literacy and emergent numeracy.

### 1.1.Inner working model influence in managing self.

Firstly, for the developing sense of self, as Bowlby explains, the inner working model has implications in child perceptions of the facts, his expectations for the future event and then his reaction, in regards his plans for action. This depends on how the child has integrated his sense of self, acceptable/lovable or unlovable/unacceptable, because his/her emotions, social behaviour and cognition are profoundly internalised in their own unique attachment system (Rolfé, p. 44), depending on how the caregiver thought them within the secure attachments 'to show up for themselves when they need to feel more secure... as a mindsight that help them to feel safe, understand and see the essence of who they truly are, or sooth themselves' (Siegel and Bryson, 2020),.This 'mindsight- the capacity of the mind to create the representation of the mind of others, and of the self', is extended to the past and the future (Siegel, 2014, quoted in Joslyn, 2016, p. 47), 'our behaviour reinforces what we already believe' whether is true or not, with manifestation in our social live, our relationships, at work or in sleep (Gaynor, 2015), because 'it is through our feelings that how we are raised creates the trajectory for our future lives (Khazanov, quoted in Maté and Maté, 2022), and some beliefs, even not real, they seem real for our mind, as it is automatically set up by our feelings and thoughts (Chan, 2017).

### 1.2.Inner working model influence in building relationships/social competences

Secondly, the internal working model that shapes the expectations about the social world of relationships, the 'behaviour towards others and hence their reactions' and it has 'often automatic and unconscious influences on feelings, thoughts and behaviour (Goldberg 2000, p. 169), because it is 'a filter which focuses and organizes subsequent social experience' (Bowly, 1980, quoted in Goldberg 2000). Children able to regulate their own affect when their behaviour and feelings are being understood and well communicated, within a dialogue for an emotional openness and fluency, for understanding of one's own emotional situation (Erikson, 1968, quoted in Howe et al, 1999). The role of the nurturing caregiver is recognising the signals sent by the child (Siegel, 2014 quoted in Joslyn, 2016), being 'available and sensitive to the child signals and lovingly responsive when the child seek protection and comfort' (Bowlby, 2005a, p. 140), for the child's need of physical closeness and soothing words (Holmes, 2014). Future behavioural engagements are being shaped within the social relationships where the less skilled - the child relies on the more competent (Goldberg, 2000). This way the child attachment behaviour is formed, as a 'form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred, who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser' (Bowlby, 2005a, p.154), and is used as a launching pad from which can

explore further and return as needed (Siegel and Bryson, 2020), modelling the child's internal working model of the relationships and its participants (Goldberg, 2000). The positive responses from attachment figures enables coregulation, encouraging the child to learn new skills and behaviours that with time and experience will become cognitive representations of attachment figures, (Mikulincer, Shaver and Pereg, 2003), children learning to 'mentalise'-to understand their own mental state of feelings, and the others (Rae and Wood, 2019), offering empathy to others, as each person has thoughts and feelings that are different from our own (Grimmer, 2022). Within these mutually rewarding and reciprocal relationships, children move forward into social environment, becoming socially competent, developing new relationships (Kay, 2005).

### 1.3. Home learning environment in self-regulatory abilities

'Language development is central to self-regulation: children use language to guide their actions and plans' (DfE, 2021b). Reading at home with children is a key factor in establishing self-regulation abilities, as Gago Galvano et al. (2020) researched the influence of the home environment on the development of regulatory skills: emotional regulation abilities and executive functions, on 75 children aged 18 to 24 months. Results said that the habit of reading and the number of books at home promote greater regulation abilities, both executive function and emotion regulation. On the contrary, overcrowding homes promotes more emotion dysregulation behaviour, as well as the cell phone and internet. Furthermore Madigan et al. (2019) study looked at the influence of the types of parenting-sensitive responsiveness and warmth on child language skills. Their results reflected that the child's language learning is developed at a higher level within the attuned interactions between a parent and child, where parents' sensitive responsiveness offers to the child a contingent response to their developmental capacity, interests or focus of gaze.

On the other hand, digital devices are blocking the executive functions, making self-regulation difficult for children. (Cliff, 2018) low self-regulation abilities being associated with excessive media exposure, especially during early childhood. The results state that lower television viewing at 2 years of age is associated at 4 years of age with higher self-regulation; moreover, lower self-regulation at 4 years predicts higher television viewing and electronic game use at 6 years; yet media exposure at 4 years was not related to self-regulation at 6 years. In addition, (Danet et al. 2022) study's measured executive functioning, parenting stress and household chaos within children's screen time on mobile devices- smartphone or tablet were focused on the children's mobile usage to calm themselves, or playing educational apps (39.7%), streaming video and age-inappropriate apps (29.6% each). Results showed that, regardless of these contextual factors- parenting stress and household chaos, a third of the children that used mobile devices to calm themselves had poorer executive functioning, including working memory, low ability to pay attention, self-monitor and manage their behaviour. As well, the 39.7% of the children who used educational apps, maybe because the distraction produced by the extraneous enhancements or advertisements. However, executive functioning is not influenced by the streaming videos, age-inappropriate apps and the usage of more than 1 h per day. At age 5-7, in DfE (2021c) the usage of digital devices improved working memory development, with no inhibition in mental flexibility.

## 2. Wellbeing

### 2.1. Wellbeing and theory of attachment

Physical health has influence in child mental health and it is promoted by secure attachment figures, such as parents, grandparents or teacher. In relation to the Covid-Pandemic, Parrish et al. (2022) argues the importance of promoting the benefits of using the domestic space, such yards and private gardens for the purpose of improving quality of lifestyle in children, for their health and wellbeing outcomes. In their study, 49 caregivers from 16 families are promoting physical activities outside and inside the houses. The child's movement behaviour is dependent of the caregivers' engagement, which supervises and facilitating children's daily active play. As consequence, these playful activities are being interlinked with family's routine and can be diverse as outdoors or indoors, active or quiet play, even chores integrated in household activities. In addition to these playful activities, Sports (2019) Super Movers demonstrates that physical activities can be fun, but also promote children's ability to concentrate, enhancing their mood and behaviour. Physical exercise project improved firstly, children's mood, especially for boys; secondly improvement of the brain functioning by 77 per cent; thirdly, the brain speed was improved by up to 19 per cent.

### 2.2. Wellbeing and theory of attachment and ecological theory

In addition to the attachment theory, children wellbeing is embedded as well in the ecological theory, as it is reflected in the next research paper. Firstly, mothers of 12-24 months old children received support from health services in Wen et al. (2020) study within telephone support, SMS support or control, to measure child's screen time, outdoor and active play time and eating habits, Telephone support and SMS support brought to children less screen time, no dinner in front of TV, having family meals, drinking from a cup and no bottle at bedtime.

### 2.3. Wellbeing and attachment theory and self-determination theory and ecological theory

Waters, Dussert, and Loton (2022) study was for an understanding of the child's wellbeing literacy, listening to the voices of children aged 5 to 6 years old, using as research methods their drawings of and their explanations. It was demonstrated that wellbeing is an achievable and learnable state, fostered within their self (their emotional state, their body needs and their freedom for their preferred activities), between relationships (the family, friends and pets) and around their environment (nature context-beach, playgrounds, parks, and family environments context), therefore a socio-ecological perception of children's wellbeing. Furthermore, the mother, the father and the siblings as a family, have an important role in children's wellbeing, especially the attachment relationship with the mother, which outlines the child's attachment patterns. The mothers shape children's wellbeing, 'by hugging and making them laugh, by playing, cooking with them, putting them to bed, cheering them up, being silly, pulling funny faces, going to the beach, bringing them sticking plasters.

## 3. Resilience, wellbeing and learning

Firstly, Resilience, wellbeing and learning are interlinked with attachment theory in (Van Wyk, 2022a), as he developed a resilience index with three components: positive-affect (positive emotions and characteristics as a protective factor in the face of adversity), early-life-stability (secure attachment in infancy and childhood, based on a loving, supportive, and nurturing environment, where the child interacts with positive role models and forms



constructive relationships with adults and peers) and stress mastery component refers to the way of coping to overcome stressors, such as constructive cognitive and behavioural strategies, thus self-regulation. Furthermore Van Wyk (2022b) explains that The Stress Mastery and Positive Affect are positive factors for academic performance and furthermore, all three components of the resilience index are positively interrelated with the brain-body score (physical health, socio-emotional health), mental activities and learning (Learning, Abstraction and Executive function).

Secondly, Resilience, wellbeing and learning are interlinked with attachment theory and self-determination theory in Joussemet and Mageau (2021), as they studied the role of parental autonomy support in relation with the self-determination theory in early childhood. The children develop sense of agency and volitional functioning, but not their self-reliance or independence (McCurdy et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2006; Soenens et al., 2007, quoted in Joussemet and Mageau (2021)). The result of the study shows that the even the young children have limited verbal communication and limited emotional self-regulation, because of their language, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills are not fully developed, however their motivation is valuable, and the parents could be supportive, sensitive and extra patient their children, benefiting for their well-being by empowering them with autonomy, ‘paving the way for their healthy and flourishing life trajectories’. Furthermore, Roth, Vansteenkiste, and Ryan (2019) study is linking parental autonomy support with the emotion regulation. The basics of autonomy-supportive interaction -, reflective inquiry influence child’s behaviours, being internalized as healthy and integrative emotion and serving as a model for how to regulate one’s own emotions. Within self-determination theoretical approach, the caregiver promotes prosocial behaviour by offering empathic responding, respecting children’s pace of emotional expression with empathy, validation of feelings, and encouraging the child to reflect and make choices in regard with their actions. Furthermore, the child internalises these autonomy-supportive elements of parenting, using it as a model of self-regulation in future social experiences.

Thirdly, Resilience, wellbeing and learning are interlinked with attachment theory and self-determination theory and ecological theory, as Ettinger et al. (2021) is looking at the perspective of 91 community members, health care and social service professionals, in regards child/youth flourishing and thriving, as a goal of the paediatric community. As foundation for healthy children and their families, the community factors-‘Healthy Environments’ , ‘Vibrant Community’; the child individual factor: ‘Strong minds and bodies’ and ‘Positive identity and self-worth’; the child-environment relationships and interactions: ‘Safety’ ‘Fun and Happiness’ and ‘Caring Families and Relationships’. In their study in can be seen that the child is resilient, as in thriving within the ecological theory underpinned with the attachment theory, which develops self and others, and implies self-determination theory perspectives.

## Research methodology

Firstly, I face some challenges in regards my sample research. My proposal sample was the parents that attend Family and Children's Centre Walthamstow, with their children aged zero to five but the gatekeeper did not approve it, as (Bell and Waters, 2014, p. 166) states I was 'dependent on the goodwill and availability of respondents'. Therefore, the limitation of my sample was to find my participants on the social media parents' group, that I could not meet physically. I stated that my sample are parents of children aged zero to five. Moreover, two of these parents proposed themselves for the follow-up face-to-face interview questions. However, when I should have a face-to-face meeting in a public space with one of the parents, I was surprised that she did not come at the appointed location; the second mother agreed to meet on Microsoft Team, but in the last minute she said she has to go to a work meeting, with the proposal to redo our meeting on a Sunday, which made me think to refocus my sampling technique. Therefore, I refocused my face-to-face interview sample to the mothers I knew personally and within friends, using the snowball technique.

Secondly, I did the Piloting of my research in February 2023, with the purpose to build confidence as a researcher and to check if my research questions could be answered specifically and ethically within the research methods that I chose, so I can revise my study, as Roberts-Holmes (2018) suggests, to amend any misunderstandings. The trial was done with two of my main participants so I could find out the time to be completed, if the questions formatting are clear and if there were some difficulties in understanding the instruction, and also if I forgot to address some major topic (Bell and Waters, 2014). The piloting shows me that the questionnaire was confusing for the participates in regard the child gap age, but the participant proposal was not relevant for my research. Also, the piloting demonstrated that some questions need to allow multiple choices, which I did not think about it when I did the questionnaire. Moreover, after the piloting I decided to add the questions about if the family is living in London or outside London, as one of the participants told me about the participation of a friend of them living outside London.

### Sample

Within the sample techniques I use non-probability sample strategy. For the readability and validity of my research, as for the interviews I used convenience sample, and then for questionnaire the voluntary participation along with convenience and snowball sample techniques.

For the interviews I used convenience sample, as it was the only way I knew I will attract participants for my study, however I was aware of the sample bias (Roberts-Holmes, 2018), because I knew personally some of the parents and I did not want to cause them suffering or distress. For this reason, being reflective on my work, I changed the initial sample when I started the interviews, as one mother was verry stressed and busy with returning to work after maternity leave, thereby I did not insist with my invitation for the interview. Moreover, I have had a nice surprise from a mother who asked permission to participate, as she was sister with one of my participants. Even though I knew her, I did not ask her participation, not wanted to be intrusive in her parenting, as she was having a little baby and her oldest son was having some developmental and behavioural issues. Acting on my initial bias I was thinking not to ask the mother for the interview, because she would not have information to give to my research. However, after the interview, reflecting on the data, I understood that her data is even more valuable because, since I saw her last time, she has changed her approach towards her child's

education and care, the methods applied to help her child develop and to overcome the autism signs with the speech therapist interventions.

For the questionnaire I used the voluntary response combined with the convenience and snowball technique samples to meet the triangulation and the validity on my study. Firstly, I chose to upload my research proposal on one of the parent groups, highly recommended and active on the social media Facebook, thereby their anonymity was met, because I did not know them; I asked for participation only the representative sampling, as being parents of children aged 0 to 5. Moreover, the participation choice was voluntary choice for only the parents who felt confident and had good reasons to participate. Secondly, I asked the mothers that I knew personally, if they want to participate reassuring them about their confidentiality and their anonymity; moreover, I asked them to help me with the snowball technique to find more participants that meet the representative sample (Roberts-Holmes, 2018) of my research.

### **Methodology framework**

The theoretical framework in my research is the attachment theory and for the research approach I used the survey, because (Bell and Waters, 2014, p. 15) ‘Survey is a quick form of obtaining information, being well-structured and piloted’. A link was sent to the participants, to answer the same questions in, as far as possible, the same circumstances. I have done the pilot testing, because as (Bell and Waters, 2014, p.15) states, careful piloting is to ‘ensure that all the questions mean the same to all participants. My survey was done online on Microsoft forms, for a large number of participants to answer to the same questions, ‘What?’, ‘Where?’ and ‘How?’ so the researcher can compare, describe, relate certain characteristics within certain categories (Bell and Waters, 2014).

### **Data collection**

The data collection included quantitative methods, questionnaire and qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and focus group. The semi-structured interview was done with four participants, in the maternal language, Romanian, adding value to my research, as they understood better the questions. Two of them were audio recorded and another two were video-recorded interviews on Microsoft Teams, as it was easier for me to work on the data, for coding and summarising in identifying categories of content (Bell and Waters, 2014). The focus group, audio recorded as well, it just happened naturally, as I was meeting one of them for the interview. As they were both present in the same house, they chose to talk in a focus group along my semi-structured questions interview. It was ‘good at eliciting a large amount of information from a small group’ (Roberts-Holmes, 2018, p. 162), the participants’ real-life discussion implied confidently to listen, respond and expand their thinking ideas together.

The semi-structured interview schedule was flexible, as a researcher I facilitated and enabled the participant to talk freely about the topics’ questions. The five open-ended questions were more a guide for the interview, not strict structure of the interview, while the focus was on the research subject (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). My research schedule was a guidance to ‘explore the participants’ actions, views, beliefs and meanings’ (Carter, 2018, p.142) and for my best understanding of their point of view, I used probing questions (Carter, 2018), so the participants could confirm, elaborate and/or clarify their ideas, as well demonstrating my respect, empathy and sensitivity (Roberts-Holmes, 2018).

In my study I used mixed methods research approach, combining methods from the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Roberts-Holmes (2018, p. 82) suggests that the mixed method

paradigm embraces a range of perspectives and viewpoints using multiple sources', moreover, the findings are generalised from the quantitative data, while within the qualitative data the findings are examined in more depth with the content analysis. Furthermore, the mixed method research approach enabled the access to my topic from different perspectives and angles, ensuring therefore the triangulation of my study, using in good agreement, three different but complementary sources of data, the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and the focused group, which increased also the validity of my findings (Roberts-Holmes, 2018). My study acquires validity within the range of interpretation (Roberts-Holmes, 2018) that I have received from the semi-structured interviews.

My research has reliability, the consistency of a data-collection method, as well as validity (Carter, 2018, p.178), the truthfulness of the conclusions generated by my research, and measuring what is supposed to measure and is preceded by reliability (Davidson et al., 2000, cited in Carter, 2018).

## Ethics

Ethics are a very important part of the research, as for my research to gain integrity and credibility (Walliman, 2016; Bryman, 2015, quoted in Carter, 2018), and the ethical issues were considered throughout my research study, starting with from the stage of designing the research (Carter, 2018). Therefore, as a researcher I followed some 'rules that govern a researcher's conduct when planning and carrying out the research' (Carter, 2018, p. 48). I carefully was aware of my participants' needs, minimising their risk of harm, as Denscombe (2007, quoted in Carter, 2018) suggests, to protect their privacy and confidentiality, **thereby** avoiding using deceptive practices.

Before I started to do my research project, firstly I had the approval of the ethical committee from the university. Secondly, I used ethical practices with my participants by obtaining their informed consent. I informed the parents that their participation is voluntary, and they can refuse an answer if they feel uncomfortable with that question, because I am aware of the psychological and social harm, that can make them feel negative emotions such as anxiety, embarrassment, shame or stigma. Moreover, I gave to the parents the right to withdraw from my research at any time until I started analysing the data, in March 2023. My purpose was to build the trust in the relationships with the participants, being honest and reliable (Roberts-Holmes, 2018).

For the questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews and the group focus, I obtain an informed consent from my participants to voluntary participate in my study, informing them of all of the research aspects. For the focus group and the semi-structured interviews, the informed letter consent was signed before the interview, however, for the interviews that took place on Teams, I received them back signed on the email.

Online consent from parent on the social media-Facebook, was obtained, as I have uploaded my ethical considerations along with the questionnaire. They had to tick a box for yes in order to give their consent, and it was done under my promise of the confidentiality and anonymity (Sapsford and Abbott, 1996, quoted in Bell and Waters, 2014), so the participants could not be identified, even by myself. My positionality when I wrote the questionnaire was not to be too intrusive in their parenting style, but just to focus on the main things that are related to my topic.

Furthermore, for the anonymity reasons, when I transcribed the recordings, for the children's names I wrote different initial letter, and for the mothers I replace their name with the logo Mum1, Mum2, Mum3 and Mum4. Furthermore, for the confidentiality reasons, my books with the transcription are in safe place, where only me have access to them; the questionnaire' answers are saved on safe platforms-UEL OneDrive, being secured in my laptop, protected by password.

(Brown and Perkins, 2019) ethical consideration have been applied in the process of analysing and interpreting the results, as I am the representant of my participants. I demonstrated objectivity, credibility and trustworthiness for the research interpretation and validity, being assured that the data analysis is accurate and has no researcher bias.

## Findings and discussion

Research question 1: ‘What are the views of the families on mental health, wellbeing, and resilience after Covid Pandemic?’

### 1. Resilience and wellbeing

#### 1.1. Loving attachments promotes emotional wellbeing and resilience.

(Rae and Wood, 2019) children need love and physical nurture to develop resilience, thus parents should listen, talk and play with the child, helping him/her to self-soothe, self-regulate and participate in problem-solving solutions; also offer healthy diet and regular physical exercise, benefiting for emotions, by eliminating endorphins. Asquith (2020, pp. 55), argues that emotional wellbeing is related to ‘self-worth (the sense of our values), self-esteem (the confidence in our own abilities and self-respect)’, which in combination with sympathy and empathy for others enable us as social humans, to establish and maintain positive relationships with people.

*(Mum2) ‘Before we went at doctor for immunisation, I explained to L. with doctor toys about what it will happen there’.*

*(Mum2) ‘Before... he was screaming so he cannot hear me...he was pushing me away while I gave him cuddles... Now he is more attached with us, he comes for cuddles.’*

The enabling and loving environment will be the passport for children’s growth, flourish and thrive, as it is advocating for their own personalities and interests in environment, promoting an agency of child having a sense of control and feeling listened and cherished by nurturing people (Grimmer, 2021). Thereby it is promoted mental wellbeing as the child can handle difficult situations, peer pressure and setbacks (Nexus, 2023). Psychological resilience is modelled as children learn they can influence and control the environment and they can rely on themselves or in other if it needed, in this manner they build on their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Howe et al, 1999).

*Mum 2: ‘if you do not stop climbing on the chair, I will be putting it away!’*

Resilience is built in a secure base attachment, which offers physically, emotionally and relationally protection and safety, child feeling free to explore, take healthy risks and leaning from mistakes (Siegel and Bryson, 2020). By setting firm and consistent behavioural boundaries and limits is for the child’s need for a safe nest and real love (Lansbury, 2013), which underpinned with empathic connection (Siegel and Bryson (2016), and adding trust in their relationship, it will build the foundations of self-control and self-confidence (Erikson, 1963, quoted in Sroufe, 1982). Moreover, kids as decision makers, are in need of a predictable and structured environment to feel safe, with clear ground rules (Stixrud and Johnson, 2018), Being responsible for their feeling and actions, feeling valued for their own choices, they build on self-esteem (Rae and Wood, 2019), based on the values others place on he/her, moreover, mistakes and trying again could develop child’s self-knowledge and self-esteem when experiments competence, autonomy and independence Kay (2007). Thereby, they are motivated to reach their full potential, taking care of themselves and making good decision (Leicestershire County Council, 2023).

*Mum 2: ‘he has had some tics such as moving his head, biting nails, because it was his way to express himself; he wanted to get my attention.’*

‘Securely attached children openly express their emotions, both negative and positive’; insecure infants either minimise (avoidant strategy) or exaggerate (resistant strategy) their distress and needs for comfort’ (Rolfe, 2004, p. 49). (Sroufe, 1995, quoted in Rolfe, 2004) the caregiver must anticipate child frustration and help the child if losing control, however the caregiver assistance, tutelage and enforcement should allow the child as much self-direction as possible, child learning inhibitory impulses that develops skills of self-regulation.

## 1.2. Self-regulation

*(Mum 1) ‘just calm her down with cuddles, to feel comfortable, and I will explain wrong and right in the later when I know we can have a discussion together.’*

*(Mum 4) I learned to help her express her feelings, talking with her about it’. I let her to calm down first, then we are talking’.*

(Asquith, 2020) argues that the quality of the early relationships/attachments will have a great impact in how we form relationships and regulate ourselves in the future relationships, therefore good nurturing, secure and consistent early relationships will support children to develop better psychological outcomes and skills to be social. For a harmonious relationship, each of the participant must be ‘aware of the other’s point of view, goals, feelings, intentions’, thus each to have a model of self, allowing freedom of communication, adjusting and negotiating the behaviour (Bowlby, 2005a, p. 148). Siegel and Bryson (2016) argue, the loving and nurturing connection within talking and comforting the child is essential for reflection time about negative behaviour, developing skills to calm the storms inside, as (Sutherland and Mukadam, 2018), providing opportunities for the healthy expression of their feeling and emotions, to cope with stressful or frustrating situations. Thereby self-regulation was enabled (Conkbayir 2023), firstly giving the child the time and space to express his emotions, than building trust and meeting child’s emotional needs and thirdly the communication between child and caregiver makes the child feel relaxed, being able to express their feelings and thoughts. Alwaely (2020) argues that emotion knowledge in children needs to be developed from an early age, being positively associated with social competence and negatively with the measure of internalizing behaviour. By showing understanding and compassion of feelings and emotions the downstairs brain-emotional storm was connected with the upstairs brain-finding solutions being able to soothe themselves and to move forward on exploring courageously beyond their comfort zone (Siegel and Bryson, 2015). From the secure base of environment, the caregiver provides to the child with sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation and accessibility (Howe et al., 1999), as (Asquith, (2020, p. 49) children need to ‘feel physically and emotionally safe and secure, and with help from adults they will gain more understanding and control of their own behaviour, therefore building their skill on how to thrive, not just survive’, strengthening children’s resilience, independence and self-confidence (Siegel and Bryson, 2020). Resilience is built through emotional competence and social interaction. For self-regulation to happened, social interactions need to be put in place for the child, for the opportunities (Thompson, 1994) of emotional regulation, that is well integrated in the social relationships, within the demands, the expectations of support and understanding that the close relationships provide to the children. In this way children keep their emotions under control, and become capable for interpersonal relatedness and sociability, demonstrating sympathy, prosocial and assertive behaviour; emotion dysregulation being the opposite expression of

these behaviours, and happens when (Gaynor, 2015, p. 163) ‘our emotions take over and become overwhelmed’. (Grimmer, 2018) the child develops the freeze, fight or flight mode, because the amygdala-the emotions base, has received message for action from the cerebrum-the thinking brain base; as the thinking could not happened, then emotions have taken the lead in managing the distressed situation. (Siegel and Bryson, 2015) It is to engage the child’s upstairs brain-the cognition instead of enraging the downstairs brain- the emotions, so he can develop skills as communication, good-decision-making and compromise.

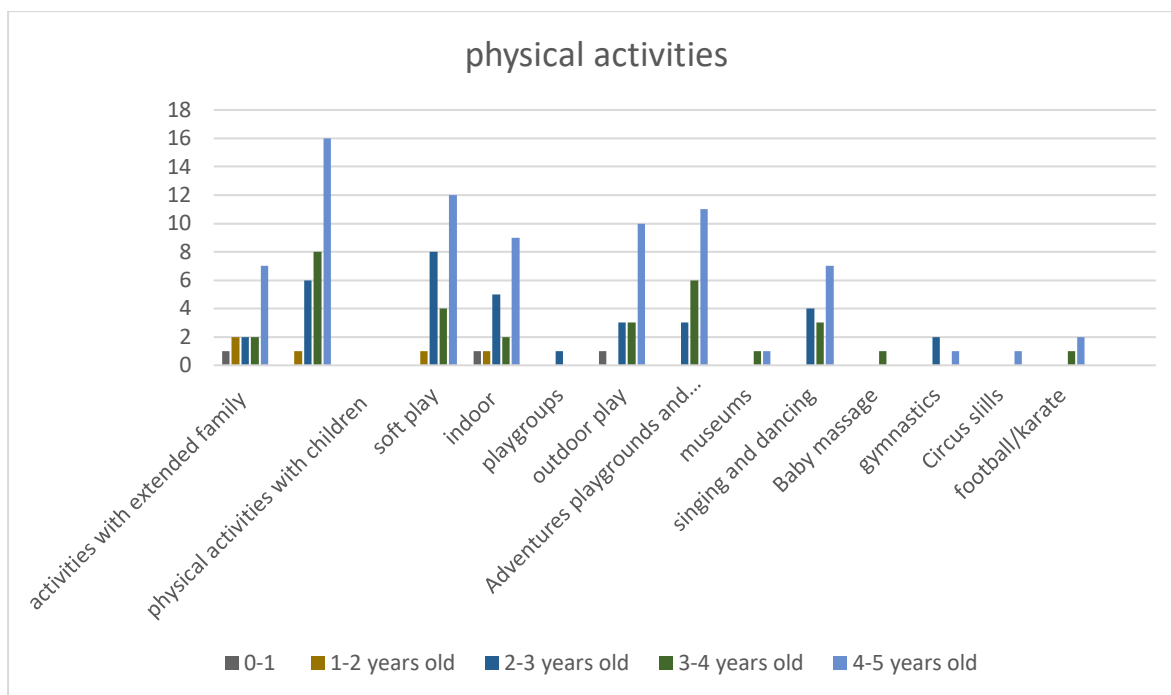
### 1.3. Physical and mental health

Physical activities enable physical health, with benefits on physical strength and medical conditions, as well as in mental wellbeing, reducing stress, anxiety and depression by improving self-esteem (England, 2022), enhancing leaning and social interaction within higher self-efficacy and social skills (UK CMO’s, 2023). Children are confident and competent decisions makers and with intrinsic reinforcement of self-confidence, they act as competent movers (Riggs, 1980), increasing their persistence and perseverance’ (England, 2022). Taylor and Butts-Wilmsmeyer (2020) uses a quasi-experimental design to approach the relationship between the green space of schoolyards and the children’s active curriculum-based learning activities during a semester. Results are positive for the children's self-regulation development, being demonstrated that the higher the frequency of lessons in the nature, the greater the outcomes of self-regulation, although it was better for girls than the boys.

Secondly the study looks at the children’s participation at different providers’ active formal/informal activities. These active physical activities enable children (Asquith, 2020, pp. 58) to ‘establishes healthy habits to take in adulthood, vital for children’s’ health and wellbeing, empowering them with self-confidence, helping regulate their bodies, mood and concentration, by realising dopamine and serotonin, improving the immune system, and off course building and strengthening muscles and bones.

In my research, children are physically active within various activities either in parks/field/playgrounds or at different providers pre-paid activities. Firstly, this research looked at children’s physical activities in nature with extended family and/or other children, because Weeland et al. (2019) argues its benefits in physical and mental health and probably the parental behaviours, also in communication and social cohesion. Also, Lanza et al (2023) expresses the positive influence of a psychological connectiveness with the nature for the development of the social-emotional competences: relationship skills, social and self-awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making. Secondly, the parents self-reported children participation at pre-paid activities, being important, as mental flexibility was greater in children who attended a special or paid for activity outside of the home between 1 and 4 days a week (DfE, 2021c).





#### 1.4. Resilience/ wellbeing and ecological theory

Parents' responses on the interview demonstrated extra support from different professionals in helping their children's health and wellbeing, such as (Mum2) 'I asked health visitor about autism...help from speech language specialist'; (Mum4) 'the special psychologist helped; (Mum 1) 'doctor for problem with a toe; regular appointments for glasses'.

Research question 2: How do parents manage learning opportunities for their children after Pandemic?

#### 2. Learning opportunities in secure home learning environment

Early learning and child wellbeing has three areas of learning: socio-emotional skills, cognitive skills (emergent literacy, emergent numeracy) and self-regulation, which is equally acting as mediator for academic learning, as for social-emotional development (Phair 2021).

(Mum 1) (Mum 2) (Mum 3) (Mum 4) 'Access to most of toys and books'

Grimmer (2021) children's outcomes are improved when the learning environment is enabling and easy reaching the resources, with no essential help from an available adult, opportunities are being employed for initiating their own learning, granting them independence to become self-assured and confident in their own potential and capacity of decisions. Moreover, the securely attached children can mentally see their parents' availability, thus they happily play on their own or with peers, with less and less involvement from their parents, being able to communicate their own thoughts, feelings and desires (Howe et al, 1999).

## 2.1. Language. Emergent literacy and emergent mathematics

*(Mum 2) 'When I ask him about his peers, he start to scream.'*

Speech, language and communication skills are vital underpinning skills, developing children's wellbeing, learning and self-regulation; language difficulties acting as barriers to self-regulation skills, because children cannot communication their basic needs (Asquith,2020). These difficulties are caused by a particular disability, poor parental care and lack of stimulation in the home; moreover, in the case of going to nursery, child cannot use language to interrelate with peers, because English is an additional language (Kay, 2005).

*(Mum 1) 'Maths games, writing games, special books activities, activity sheets games and reading books' at the library; reading everywhere: on the street, at the shop.'; (Mum4) 'Reading together'.; (Mum3) 'Writing in wipe and clean special books, colouring respecting the number attributed to the colour.'; (Mum 1) (Mum4) 'Puzzles'*

Sorariutta et al. (2017) explored how children's early age mathematical skills are influenced by their mothers' sensitivity in regards child's cognitive and emotional needs. The mothers' sensitivity in responding during semi-structured joint play interaction. Spatial and numerical tasks were measured along with vocabulary and pre-mathematical skills. The results suggested that children achieve better on spatial and numerical tasks when the sensitive and scaffolding action of mother is underpinned with autonomy support, which enables the child to set the goals for the activitie. Frequent reading with children improves children's cognitive and socioemotional competencies (Wirth, Ehmig and Niklas (2022), providing opportunities to identify and discuss feelings associated with child's experiences, emotional competence being developed within the language of discussion. By labelling the emoting, the child is able to make a cognitive sense of it, learning to regulate himself, to recognise, discriminate and understand emotional arousal, which is very important in social functioning. (Howe et al, 1999)

<i>Parent-child reading interactions</i>		Number of children	NEVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	VERY OFTEN	ALWAYS
How often does your child ask you to read to him/her?							
0-1		2	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
1 -2 YEARS		3	67%	0%	33%	0%	0%
2-3 YEARS		10	10%	0%	30%	10%	50%
3-4 YEARS		9	0%	44%	11%	33%	11%
4-5 YEARS		19	5%	5%	11%	21%	58%
How often do you name pictures in books and talk about pictures?							
		2					50%
0-1			50%				
1 -2 YEARS		0%	0%	33%	33%	33%	0%
2-3 YEARS	10		20%	20%	40%	20%	20%
3-4 YEARS		9	0%	0%	56%	22%	22%
4-5 YEARS		19	56%	16%	11%	26%	42%
How often do you ask questions to your child during story reading?							
		2					
0-1			50%	50%			
1 -2 YEARS		3	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
2-3 YEARS	10		10%	10%	50%	10%	20%
3-4 YEARS		9	0	44%	22%	33%	0
4-5 YEARS		19	0%	16%	11%	42%	32%
How often do you encourage your child to make his/her own story?							
		2	100%	0%			
0-1		2	100%	0%			
1 -2 YEARS		3	67%	0%	0%	0%	33%
2-3 YEARS		10	30%	50%	10%	10%	0%
3-4 YEARS		9	22%	33%	33%	11%	0%
4-5 YEARS		19	11%	26%	26%	32%	5%

### 2.3.Socio-emotional competences

In the secure and trustful base of the attachment figure, children see themselves lovable and worthy of care, as they are subject of interest and care and the caregiver value them and encourage them to explore their environment, making the children feel autonomous (Erikson, 1968, quoted in Howe et al, 1999) as their needs are met with sensitivity, consistency and responsiveness (Sroufe, 1990, 1995 in Rolfe, 2004), child feeling ‘secure, loved, building on his self-confidence, thus he/her is playful, smiling, exploratory and sociable’ (Holmes, 2014, p.62). The child develops an awareness of its separateness while he maintains the connection with the nurturing caregiver ‘through the affective sharing of play, while developing confidence in its own capacities for coping with tension’ (Sroufe, 1982, pp.587). Thereby, the child becomes confident and independent, achieving competence and autonomy, capable of functioning in the absence of the adult, as he builds peer relationships with self-responsibility for their actions and behaviour (Rolfe, 2004), demonstrating social competence as they understand own self and others in relationships, feeling autonomous, socially effective and competent (Howe et al, 1999). Resilience in early years is promoted secure attachment with a caring adult, opportunities to learn skills within meaningful activities (Rae and Wood, 2019).

*(Mum 2) ‘S. and M. do socialise together, but L. is not joining them in play’; Mum4: ‘I support D in everything, as she/he is very courageous and stubborn to do preferred activities.’; Mum2: ‘L. wants to the job; I am only explaining it to him’. M wants to eat by herself/himself, so I make for M balls from food’.*

Socio-emotional competence and self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2022) is a theory focused motivational basis of personality, social behaviour and wellbeing, promoting psychological flourish and within the basic needs: competence, relatedness and autonomy. The social environments which encourage these psychological needs advocate for self-regulation, social relationships and well-being, because children as independent individuals can take their leaning forward with no adult help (Grimmer, 2018).

Social interaction	Children in social interaction while in family care				
	Everyday	3-4 days/week	1-2 days/week	Less often	Never
How often does your child take part in social interaction with other children, while he/her is in family care?	30%	16%	37%	12%	5%
How often does your child takes part in interaction with other family members/extended family?	7%	12%	58%	19%	5%
How often does your child takes part in social interaction with close family friends?	12%	16%	35%	35%	2%

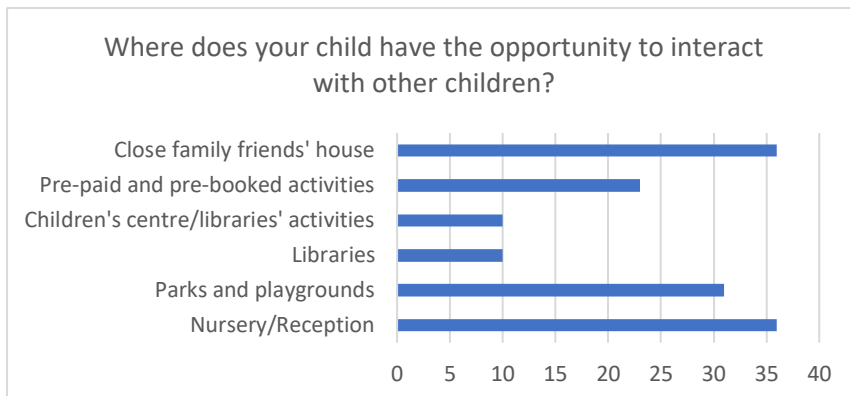


Figure 1 Places for social interaction with other children

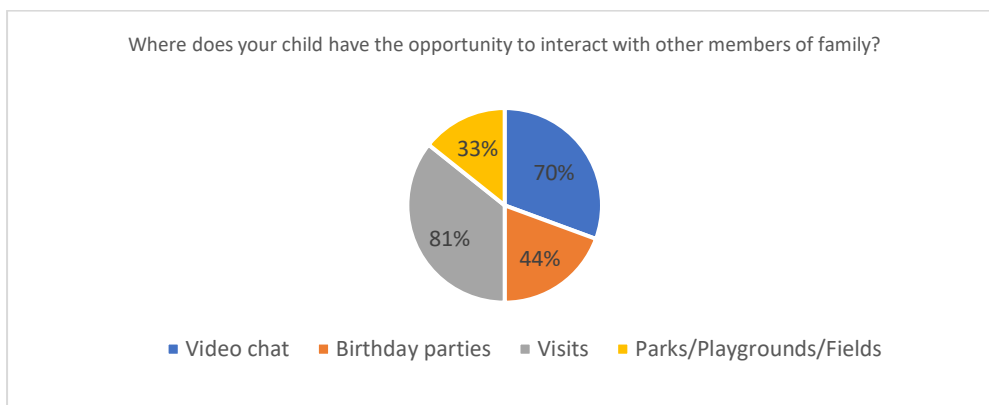


Figure 2 Places for social interaction with extended family

The results shows children interacting mostly 1-2 days per week with other children at different special activities and extended family, where video chat and visits being preferred modality of socialising.

Research question 3: What strategies are parent using in the home to support resilience, wellbeing, and learning?

Table 1. Strategies to develop leaning, wellbeing and resilience

Learning activities	Number of children	NEVER	EVERYDAY	3-5 days/week	1-2 days/week	LESS OFTEN
Writing/scribbling/drawing/playing with numbers and letters(magnets letters/numbers, games, writing notes/names, copying letters/numbers)?			0%	0%	0%	0%
0-1	2	100%				
1 -2 YEARS	3	0%	0%	33%		67%
2-3 YEARS	10	0%	50%	10%	10%	30%
3-4 YEARS	9	0%	44%	22%	33%	0%
4-5 YEARS	19	0%	63%	21%	16%	0%
Arts and crafts (painting, cutting and sticking, sewing, playing instruments) / messy play (playdough, sand, water, flour, pasta etc)						
0-1	2				0%	0%
1 -2 YEARS	3	100%	0%	0%	33%	33%
2-3 YEARS	10	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%
3-4 YEARS	9	0%	11%	11%	78%	0%
4-5 YEARS	19	0%	21%	32%	47%	0%
Puzzles, LEGO, construction blocks, combinable objects	2		50%	0%	0%	0%
0-1			50%	50%		
1 -2 YEARS	3	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%
2-3 YEARS	10	0%	50%	30%	20%	0%
3-4 YEARS	9	0%	78%	0%	22%	0%
4-5 YEARS	19	5%	21%	47%	21%	5%

Digital devices (tablets, smartphones, computers/laptops, television)			0%	0%	0%	0%
0-1		2	100%			
1 -2 YEARS		3	0%	33%	33%	0%
2-3 YEARS		10	10%	60%	0%	20%
3-4 YEARS		9	0%	67%	22%	11%
4-5 YEARS		19	0%	42%	26%	5%
Playground physical activities (climbing frames, sliding, and swinging, gym equipment)			0%	0%	0%	0%
0-1		2	100%			
1 -2 YEARS		3	0%	0%	67%	33%
2-3 YEARS		10	0%	10%	60%	20%
3-4 YEARS		9	0%	11%	44%	22%
4-5 YEARS		19	0%	5%	42%	5%
. Household activities (tidy up, cleaning, laundry, setting up the table for eating, washing dishes, cooking)						
0-1		2	100%	0%	0%	0%
1 -2 YEARS		3	67%	33%	0%	0%
2-3 YEARS		10	0%	20%	10%	40%
3-4 YEARS		9	0%	78%	11%	11%
4-5 YEARS		19	0%	11%	21%	47%
How often do you play with your child: sound games/singing rhymes/dancing/chasing games/reading books, posters, letters etc.						
0-1		2	0%	100%	0%	0%
1 -2 YEARS		3	0%	100%	0%	0%
2-3 YEARS		10	0%	70%	10%	20%
3-4 YEARS		9	0%	89%	11%	0%
4-5 YEARS		19	0%	79%	0%	21

The results as in questionnaire shows that emergent literacy and numeracy is done mostly everyday. The emergent literacy is higher for the 4-5 years old children, with external support from school, as (Mum3) explains ‘teachers gave us to do at home activity sheets during half term’.

Arts and crafts are very popular for 1-2 days per week group, moreover ecological theory is embedded, as (Mum2) and (Mum 3) states ‘we did together the art activities suggested by the teacher’.

Attachment theory is demonstrated firstly by the everyday interactive child-parent, activities and secondly by the help that children provide every day during household chores every day.



## Conclusions and suggestions

For Mum2, with a child suspected of autism and delayed language, the results demonstrate developmental theories are underpinned with health and wellbeing. Parents managed to improve their child whole development, with insights on language and interpersonal skills. The child overall health and wellbeing was embedded with attachment theory underpinned with self-determination theory and ecological theory. Firstly, the attachment theory is reflected within the time, genuine interest and attention that parents offer to their child who is behind his language development milestones, helps to build the attachment of the child with his parents, thereby improving child's language within role-play; moreover 'when L. is not feeling well, he doesn't make eye contact'. Secondly, self-determination theory, as for competence, relatedness and autonomy were demonstrated. Thirdly, for the ecological theory, mum asked for some the speech therapy help when the health visitor came for the new baby birth. These developmental theories are being applied for L. personal, socio-emotional and cognitive development, to help him become resilient in the face of adversity. They are underpinned with Mum2' health and wellbeing strategies: 'healthy cooked meals, and as for snacks and desserts, no sugary desserts, only cereals and fruits batons, as two children aged 3-5 from extended family have problems with eating sweets, such as diabetes'.

The data from this study add information to the previous research, as it brings detailed information about parents view on their children mental health, wellbeing, learning and resilience. The data demonstrates the implication of the families in promoting a holistic development, through various learning opportunities, such as parks, fields, playgrounds and different special activities provides by private sector or council.

Children acquisition of skill comprehend a holistic development is enabled by the regulation of their emotions, as child's full engagement in their learning and development, with effects on their holistic physical, mental health and wellbeing (Sutherland and Mukadam, 2018). Firstly, socio-emotional skills, as the parents help them to learn to self-regulate, so they can embrace healthy social interactions with adults and with other children, because 'social-emotional development in early childhood is known to be an important foundation for later life' (Dfe 2021c). Secondly, the learning environment from home enables the child to play independently with the adult support when it is needed. When 'children feel safe and happy and are supported to learn about themselves and their environment, they thrive' (OECD, 2020b, quoted in DfE, 2021c, p.22). Thirdly, children learn emergent literacy and mathematics, as letters, reading, numbers and colouring. Junko Takaoka, (conference, 2020) argues that the cognitive skills and social and emotional skills interact and cross-fertilize. Furthermore, the Centre on the Developing Child Harvard (2023) admits that the emotional well-being and the social competence consists together as the bricks and mortar of brain architecture for a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities.

Resilience is built within interrelation between theory of attachment and self-determination theory, when child is confident in his abilities, he faces challenges with resilience. The secure attachment with the caring relationships enables the child to explore joyfully and safely the environment, becoming motivated to master the becoming tasks, developing self-regulation and building their confidence. When exploring the environment, the adult encourages the child to keep trying, as the mistakes are natural part of the learning (Rae and Wood, 2019), offering

time and space to explore and experiment the environment, in fun and spontaneous way, with appropriate risk taking and challenges, and in accordance with his/her unique interests (Sutherland and Mukadam, 2018). Benefits are on building on their strengths and their interest that give them joy, improving their behaviour, motivation and confidence, developing flexible thinking and creative problem solving and building confidence (Rae and Jo Wood, 2019).

The interest of parent in child's development with the extra support received from teacher, therefore children learning, and development is supported by attachment theory and ecological theory. The learning activities are emergent literacy and emergent numeracy, combined with physical development, digital learning, arts and crafts and, singing, construction and combinable objects. Therefore, the academic leaning ins underpinned with learning activities that employ firstly children mindfulness/mental wellbeing: art and crafts, singing and dancing, household activities; secondly develops children's physical health within gross and fine motor skills (playground activities, puzzle, construction, writing, cutting and sticking-art and crafts).

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# **AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING PRACTITIONERS' USE OF VISUAL AIDS TO ENGAGE LEARNERS IDENTIFIED WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)**

by Claire Honour

BA (Hons): Special Education

ED6088-Independent Research Project



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## Acronyms/Abbreviations

AAC Augmentative and Alternative Communication

ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder

CYP Children and Young People

COP Code of Practice

DfE Department for Education

DoH Department of Health

EAL English as an Additional Language

ECA Electronic communication aids

FG Focus Group

MF Microsoft Forms

NAS National Autistic Society

PECS Picture Exchange System

RQ Research Question

SALT Speech and Language Therapist

SEND Special Educational Needs

TP Teaching practitioner

VA Visual Aids

VTT Visual Timetable

## Abstract

This study aims to explore how teaching practitioners (TP) perceive the efficacy of visual aids (VA) used as interventions to engage students who have been diagnosed with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This research study will provide TPs thoughts on employing VAs to advance communication and interaction development for children with SEND, as well as the potential to create chances to foster social relationships. Research questions (RQ) consist of: How confident do TPs feel using VAs to assist pupils with SEND? What are practitioners' experiences of working in partnership with parents to establish the use of VAs? And how do practitioners feel about the effectiveness of VAs to enhance children and young people (CYP) with SEND's learning and social relations?

Qualitative primary research is executed through an interpretivist paradigm as social research is subjective and findings are interpreted opposed to being numerical and quantifiable (Thomas, 2017; Mukherji & Albon, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2019; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Data collection methods include one focus group (FG) comprising of four participants, five semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire which collected twenty responses and was conducted using Microsoft Forms (MF). Sampling was implemented using purposive, criterion sampling methods as this correlates with requiring a particular cohort of the population (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Participants comprised of individuals with a background in education and were drawn upon from three different sources including an educational setting (S1), peers from higher education (HE) who study education and previous colleagues also within the field of education. Findings largely inferred that TPs consider that working in partnership with parents is essential for many reasons as outlined within the study. However, there are many obstacles faced to working in partnership with parents to implement VAs. Similarly, most TPs stipulate that there are numerous advantages to using VAs, although there are plentiful barriers to implementing and few short-term benefits. Most TPs conveyed that they were confident utilising and implementing VAs, however few denoted that lack of training and knowledge created barriers and reduced confidence.

***Key Words: Visual aids, Teaching practitioner, SEND, Communication and Interaction, Social relations, PECS, Visual Timetables, Working in Partnership***

## Introduction

This academic project explores the perspectives of TPs to discover more about how VAs may be used in an educational setting to enhance communication and social experiences for CYP with SEND. There is a wealth of research examining ways to support CYP with SEND by using various forms of visual support and intervention, alongside an array of legislation stipulating the requirement of interventions to support SEND (Equality Act, 2010; Hayes *et al.*, 2010; McCorkle, 2012; DfE & DoH, 2015; Alexander & Dille, 2018). McCorkle (2012) suggests additional studies of VAs would be beneficial for TPs as well as autistic children as the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) continues to rise which is also echoed within Wood (2018). Additional rationale for this research study is in alliance with Bond *et al.*, (2016) who states that further exploration is required to reinforce school and researcher relationships to ensure research relating to communication intervention is relevant. Furthermore, this research study aims to investigate teachers' perspectives regarding working in partnership with parents and carers to implement visual interventions, which can be regarded as important due to partnership working being a core principle of the SEND Code of Practice (COP) (2015).

Four broad areas of SEND stipulated within the SEND COP (2015) include communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional, and mental health, and sensory and physical needs (DfE & DoH, 2015, pp. 85; Hellowell, 2019). In line with the SEND COP (2015) and the Equality Act (2010), reasonable adjustments must be made to accommodate CYP with SEND within their educational setting (Alexander & Dille, 2018; DfE & DoH, 2015; Alexander & Dille, 2018; Hellowell, 2019). This research study will predominately focus on how VAs impact communication and interaction, yet it is noted that each broad area can impact each other (Hellowell, 2019). Therefore, this research is important for current and future TPs as a tool to generate further information regarding how VAs can be used to remove barriers for CYP with SEND, from a rights-based perspective.

VAs are seen and can assist with the understanding of something alongside remembering information and may comprise of pictures, maps, models, films and more (Collins English dictionary, 2019). VAs can be used to support CYP with SEND whose 'broad area of need' comprises of communication and interaction differences (DfE & DoH, 2015, pp. 97). The National Autistic Society (NAS, 2020) refer to visual supports as being tools to assist with communication for autistic people and abet to increase confidence, promote independence, reduce, and avoid frustration and anxiety, create structure and routine, and provide opportunities for autistic people to interact with others. Crowley and Heyer (2016) define communication as the act of swapping information and messages and therefore not purely spoken words. Wood (2019) also reiterate that communication may not contain verbal words and that a style of communication should be adopted that is relevant to CYP with SEND. Moreover, Wood (2019) highlights the importance of validating CYP with SEND's communication, however it is conveyed that communication should not be discarded if it does not fall in line with what TPs want to hear, also reiterated in Wood (2018). Therefore, it may be deduced that communication comes in different forms, is not purely spoken, and it is vital to consider all types of communication conveyed.

Having had previous experience and training to use VA, and VAs being an area that I am interested in, a reflexive approach is important to reduce bias and validity (Thomas, 2017; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). To ensure objectivity throughout, triangulation is implemented. This will ensure that themes

and findings are compared from three different sources reducing the chances of subjectivity as findings will be supported by one another (Golafshani, 2003; Letherby *et al.*, 2012; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Literature is sourced to include an evaluation of perspectives. As Clark *et al.*, (2019) stipulate, it is important to select an area of interest to focus a research dissertation on, however it is essential to remain objective.

## Literature Review: Introduction

The literature review will outline legislation and non-statutory guidance that promotes the use of auxiliary aids and VAs as methods to remove barriers to learning and make reasonable adjustments to learning environments. Several VAs and interventions will be detailed and discussed and published studies and literature will be explored to evaluate the use of VAs. Legislation relating to partnership working between parents and TPs will be discussed and evaluated. Discussions of social interaction and communication regarding how VAs foster or impede the development of CYP with SEND are threaded throughout the literature review.

### Theme one: Types of VAs

Objects of reference, coloured images, written words, photographs, visual timetables (VTT), Makaton, symbol picture cards, and picture exchange systems (PECS) are some VAs used to support communication and interaction for CYP with SEND (NCCCSS, 2004; Rao, 2006; Hume, 2008; Hayes *et al.*, 2010; McCorkle, 2012; Hume *et al.*, 2014; Harvey, 2018; Gomez-Mari *et al.*, 2021). PECS was developed to encourage reciprocal communication that promotes spontaneous interactions initiated by individuals with communication and interaction difficulties (Harvey, 2018). CYP who use PECS are encouraged to use picture exchanges to relay needs and wants (Harvey, 2018). VTTs may come in numerous forms including checklists, calendars, timers, and activity plans. VTT assist to recognise the amount of time passed. (McCorkle, 2012; Harvey, 2018). McCorkle (2012) relays the importance of having pictures or symbols attached to the schedule with Velcro to enable easy transportation and allow for students to move them from one activity to the next. VTT should show which activities are going to occur and in which order, alongside showing other significant aspects of the day such as lunch, playtime, and home time (McCorkle, 2012). In return VTT aid with transitions, reduce stress and anxiety, encourage CYP to try activities, promote well-being and provide clear start and finish time (McCorkle, 2012; Harvey, 2018). Harvey (2018) infers that some professionals may not believe that VTT are inductive for the promotion of communication and interaction for children with SEND, in particular ASD, yet most professionals, adults, and children in secondary school use visual timetable of some description such as telephone reminders and calendars (Hayes *et al.*, 2010).

### Theme 2: Legislations and Rights for CYP with SEND-Access to Education and Reasonable Adjustments

The SEND COP (DfE & DoH, 2015) provides statutory guidance as well as legal requirements that educational professionals, local governments, and health and social care organisations should follow (DfE & DoH, 2015; Hellawell, 2019). The SEND COP (2015) defines SEND as a CYP who has a learning disability or difficulty preventing them from using educational provision that CYP the same age can, or who has exponentially increased difficulty learning than most peers the same age (DfE & DoH, 2015; Hellawell, 2019). Moreover, the Equality Act (2010) stipulates that



auxiliary aids should be provided for children with SEND; however, the Equality Act (2010) also precludes that certain auxiliary aids can be expensive or difficult to attain for schools, and therefore an educational setting will not be reprimanded if auxiliary aids are unaffordable. The SEND COP (2015) ascertains that reasonable steps to ensure CYP with SEND have predictable structured days, therefore a reasonable adjustment could entail a VTT or PECS (DfE & DoH, 2015). It is also stipulated within the SEND COP (2015) that working in partnership with parents is paramount and can assist to ensure CYP with SEND reach their full potential (UN, 1989; DfE & DoH, 2015, Hellawell, 2019).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) (UN, 1989) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) (UN, 2006), unanimously denote the right to education as highlighted within article 28 (UN, 1989) alongside article 24 of the UNCRPD (UN, 2006). Stipulated within article 12 of the CRC (UN, 1989) is the requirement that children have the right to express their opinions relating to subjects that affect them which may correlate to article 13 which specifies that CYP may express how they feel by drawing, writing or any other way which they are able. The SEND COP (2015) also emphasises the requirement for CYP voices to be heard and implemented into decision making. As suggested, VAs may assist enable CYP with SEND to communicate their needs, therefore, ensuring adherence to article 13 and 12 of the CRC (UN, 1989). Article 23 of the CRC (UN, 1989) highlights the necessity for government to remove barriers for children with disabilities to help to achieve independence within society which is closely linked to a core principle within the SEND COP (2015) also highlighting removing barriers. O'Connor and McNabb (2021) denote that inclusion can be tokenistic within educational setting yet utilising the rights-based approach may help with implementation. Article 29 of the CRC (UN, 1989) conveys that education should equip CYP to develop their personalities, talents, and understand their rights, therefore, using VAs to promote communication may assist to ensure that this is carried out. It is reasonable to indicate that requirements within the CRC (UN, 1989), UNCRPD (UN, 2006), the SEND COP (2015), and the Equality Act (2010) share some desired outcomes. Therefore, providing tools to promote communication skills may equip CYP with SEND to develop the skills required to communicate thoughts, feelings, needs and desires.

### Theme three: Partnership Working Between TPs and Parents

Theme three of the literature review correlates to research question two and highlights some legislative requirements for partnership working, along with benefits and barriers. Hellawell (2019) suggests that the Warnock report (1978) led to the incorporation of the necessity for partnership working between parents and professionals and is stipulated within the SEND COP (2015). Educational outcomes for children in education can be increased with parental involvement (Barge & Loges, 2003; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). Hellawell (2019) argues that the requirement for partnership working in relation to CYP with SEND could be due to an interest in democratic participation within society opposed to increasing outcomes for CYP with SEND. Hellawell (2019) stipulates that there are power imbalances between professional and parental relationships, which could hinder how much a parent can be involved in decision making. In relation to children with communication and interaction difficulties, it is recognised that partnership working between parents, teachers, and students leads to greater outcomes (Schultz *et*

*al.*, 2016). Moreover, highlighted within Schultz *et al.*, (2016) is the predicament that may occur whereby parents do not feel they are listened to or that information is not communicated with them effectively. Schultz *et al.*, (2016) suggest that there is not enough research in relation to the barriers that prevent positive collaboration between parents and teaching professionals. It is noted that despite the requirement of parental involvement and partnership working between parents and teaching practitioners, there are different categories of parental involvement (Barge & Loges, 2003; Hellowell, 2019). Barge and Loges, (2003) depicts six types of parental involvement with the lowest level including parents creating a home environment to support children as students, up to type six which entails liaising with community agencies and integrating within school processes. Barge & Loges' (2003) research article precludes that barriers preventing equal parental and teacher partnerships include parents believing teachers assume they know more about CYP than parents which emphasises the importance of building relationships. Some hindrances experience by teachers preventing positive partnership working include parents talking negatively about school practices, a reluctance for motivating CYP to learn, and bad parenting skills (Barge & Loges, 2003). Barges and Loges' (2003) research article concluded that the most important elements of achieving high levels of parental involvement included building positive relationships with teachers and monitoring children's academic progress.

#### Theme four: The Use of VAs to Promote Communication and Interaction and Social Relations

Communication is vital in everyday life and facilitates individuals to share and express feelings and experiences, build sustainable relationships, and to understand others (Wearmouth, 2012). CYP facing communication and interaction difficulties often experience barriers to learning (Wearmouth *et al.*, 2018). According to Wearmouth (2012), some professionals and teachers may view children with SEND as a problem that has to be solved and feel obligated to improve their situation. Wood (2019) supports the notion that an individual's right to communicate and be supported is a legal requirement. Wood (2019) also expresses that providing efficient support is crucial to developing independence, confidence and giving CYP with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) agency and the tools to express themselves. Moreover, it is important to recognise that refusing to acknowledge CYP with SEND have their own styles of communication can be detrimental to self-esteem and well-being (Wood, 2018; Wood 2019). Furthermore, this may occur if communication does not represent the desired outcome of the TP (Wood, 2018; Wood, 2019). Additionally, it is important to note that VAs are often used in conjunction with the aim to prompt CYP with SEND to carry out activities that the TP has decided on, therefore, the ability to truly express wants and needs is limited (Wood, 2019). Wood (2019) states that interventions may be associated with enforcing CYP with ASD to accommodate societal expectations rather than be utilised to extend communication and interaction. This may contradict the opinion that VAs used as interventions are there to promote inclusivity. According to the social model of disability, obstacles are produced by society since the unique needs and talents of individuals are not considered (Bottema-Beutel *et al.*, 2021; Walker, 2022). In contrast, the medical model of disability coincides with the concept that disabilities result in individuals lacking and being deficit in skills sets. As Bottema-Beutel *et al.*, (2021) stipulate, treating disabilities through a social model lens would entail society valuing differences and may create opportunities for everyone. Therefore,

if communication derived from a VA is not meaningful and the true expression of the CYP with SEND, VAs may be detrimental to communication and interaction development and self-esteem and reduce the experiences of naturalistic, individual styles of communication that according to the social model of disability, is what TPs should be aiming for. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that a CYP's future quality of life may be impacted by their capacity for comprehending and interacting with others (Wearmouth, 2012). Educational environments may provide barriers or facilitate learning for CYP with SEND depending on resources, teaching approaches, and interests on the activities being undertaken (Wearmouth, 2012; Wood, 2018; Wood, 2019).

## Theme Five: Advantages and Disadvantages Implementing and Utilising VAs

### a. Disadvantages:

Theme five within the literature review aims to highlight further advantages and disadvantages that are faced by TPs regarding implementation of VAs and correlate with RQ three. Identified disadvantages for implementing VAs include being time consuming to create and implement within the educational setting, being moderately outdated, inconsistent with communication methods at home, expensive in relation to training staff, and difficult to adapt to individual CYP's needs (Hayes *et al.*, 2010; Alexander & Dille, 2018). Implementing PECS is time consuming and requires two TPs per CYP in initial implementation stages (Harvey, 2018). Moreover, PECS does not always result in the CYP being equipped to carry out functional communication and depends on levels of cognitive ability and the CYP SEND (Harvey, 2018). Monitoring outcomes of VAs may be challenging according to Alexander and Dille (2018) and Hayes *et al.*, (2010) largely due to lengthy times of implementation and varying TPs roles and responsibilities that result in inconsistency of implementation. Monitoring VAs is also deemed to be problematic according to Syriopoulou-Delli and Eleni (2021), who also recognize that VAs often change, and this can create confusion not only to CYP yet also TPs. Syriopoulou-Delli and Eleni (2021) also proclaim that training is time consuming and varying methods of VAs can result in an inadequate use of time. VAs may facilitate learning yet at a slow pace as explained within Hayes *et al.*, (2010) whereby a TP recorded progress that a student has made with the use of VAs, however had to document over a period of a year and a half. Moreover, this creates obstacles as the same amount of time is unable to be distributed to each CYP with SEND (Hayes *et al.*, 2010). Hayes *et al.*, (2010) infer that parents and carers of CYP with SEND are often lacking in sleep highlights a substantial amount of time is spent receiving a myriad of information from varying professionals, creating difficulties deciphering which strategies and advice is most beneficial.

Wood (2019) highlights problematic attributes regarding TPs use of VAs including the use of verbal labelling without ensuring the engagement of autistic children. Moreover, Wood (2019) also refers to TPs using VAs in a desultory way with low levels of engagement, alongside a dismissal of non-verbal communicative indications that the CYP does not want to partake. Therefore, it is reasonable to denote that VAs used to enhance communication and social skills may lead to demotivation if carried out incorrectly. Moreover, this contradicts CRC (UN, 1989) article twelve whereby children have the right to express their opinions and wants freely. VAs may be seen to be used to create compliance opposed to aiding children to express their own wants and may not reflect entirely on personal autonomy and agency (Wood, 2019).

Aided augmentative alternative communication (AAC) technology is developing and is expected to play a greater role within assisting communication and interaction opportunities for autistic children (Alexander & Dille, 2018). However, Light and Drager (2009) stipulate, a combination of low-tech systems, such as photos, cards and books alongside high-tech systems create greater

outcomes. Bond *et al.*, (2016) express educational psychologist (EP) can assist to identify the most appropriate interventions to use alongside training and supporting school staff to evaluate and implement visual interventions, which may be problematic as EPs are not always readily available and selecting which VAs to implement will primarily be decided by the SENCo or TP. Moreover, as Alexander and Dille (2018) highlighted within their study, most educational professionals who support children with ASD, needed further professional development to improve their comprehension of the use and implementation of VAs. Without the appropriate training and knowledge, VAs may be incorrectly implemented (Wearmouth, 2012).

## b. Advantages:

According to Wood (2019), if instructions and communication are comprehensible, the relationship dynamic between TP and CYP is likely to be more favourable as there is less negative repetitiveness and more positive feedback. Positive relationships between pupils and TPs beneficial to all involved and assist to create a more positive environment alongside increased emotional and academic outcomes for CYP (Ginott, 1972; Roffey, 2013). Alexander and Dille (2018) highlight VAs can increase functional communication and enable independent communication which also aligns with Harvey *et al.*, (2018) who denote that functional communication can be increased to enable the ability to express needs and wants using PECS. Alexander and Dille (2018) also emphasise how using pictures can remove language barriers for all CYP not only CYP with SEND. Moreover, picture symbols may be beneficial to create an inclusive classroom environment which would accommodate all communication requirements (Alexander & Dille, 2018).

Despite advantages to utilising VAs to support communication and Interaction, including the ability promote independence and increase expression skills, there appears to be a lack of short-term advantages regarding implementation. TP's experience and training ability to implement VAs and acknowledge non-verbal communication is also important to ensure that VAs are beneficial for CYP with SEND.

## Methodology

The research paradigm implemented in this small-scale research project is interpretivist since findings are based on subjective opinions and dependent on social events, yet also because no singular definitive conclusion is possible to draw from data (Creswell, 2009; Hughes, 2010; Thomas, 2017; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). In line with qualitative research, RQs are unmeasurable and rely on individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings rather than measurable outcomes (Thomas, 2017; Mukherji & Albon, 2018; Largan & Morris, 2019). A qualitative primary research approach is implemented as fresh data gathered and no existing statistics and figures are presented which have already been examined and presented within finding and discussions (Thomas, 2017; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Qualitative data is largely non-quantifiable and quantitative research requires large amounts of data; therefore, a qualitative primary research approach is appropriate for this research project (Thomas, 2017; Mukherji & Albon, 2018; Largan & Morris; 2019). Theoretical framework associated with this research investigation is children's rights-based approach as children with communication and interaction difficulties should be encouraged to communicate alongside being facilitated to communicate in a way that is suitable for their needs according to legislation and non-statutory guidance stipulating the requirement to incorporate reasonable adjustments, and the use of auxiliary aids (UN, 1989; UN, 2006; Equality Act, 2010; DfE & DoH, 2015). Applying theoretical framework also reinforces objectivity within the research process and children's rights-based approach closely links to the topic investigated (Cotrell, 2014; O'Connor and McNabb, 2021).

### Data Collection Methods:

Data collection methods employed include a questionnaire with twenty responses, five semi-structured interviews and one focus group, all of which are data collection method suitable for qualitative primary research (Thomas, 2017; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Power relations are reduced due to using Microsoft Teams to conduct FG and semi-structured interviews as the environment is impartial (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2019). Participants may have felt more able to respond honestly as the questionnaire's design ensures anonymity and reduces power imbalances, which in return enhances reliability and validity (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). The questionnaire was devised using Microsoft Forms (MF) as it is easily accessible and collects data accurately (Lee, 2021). Information gathered on MF is also anonymous therefore adhering to ethical consideration (Thomas, 2017; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). An educational setting (S1) was employed as gatekeeper as there were many participants that could potentially participate which would assist to improve validity by providing a large cohort to sample from (Clark *et al.*, 2019). Gatekeeper consent was not required from participants drawn upon outside of S1 as they were not belonging to an organisation and participated as personal contacts (Clark *et al.*, 2019). Peers from HE, alongside previous colleagues within the field of education were also drawn upon to complete questionnaires and invited to complete a semi-structured interview.

## Sampling:

Non-probability sampling, also known as purposive sampling (Cottrell, 2014) is employed as all respondents are required to have a professional background in education, therefore they were not chosen at random from the public (Cottrell, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Criterion purposive sampling enables participants with necessary characteristics to partake, such as having a professional background in education and an awareness of visual aids (Cottrell, 2014; Palinkas, *et al.*, 2015). The use of criterion purposive sampling is also compatible with the small sample size within the investigation and is also comparable with qualitative research (Palinkas, *et al.*, 2015; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Participants were requested to take part in a semi-structured interview within the questionnaire preliminary to also ensure semi-structured interview candidates were not collated using bias and opted in opposed to being selected (Clark *et al.*, 2019).

## Reliability, Validity and Credibility:

Reliability and validity are terms used to describe the trustworthiness, credibility, and applicability within qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Research validity depends upon cogency, competence, and the ability to fulfil research aims (Clark *et al.*, 2019). Reliability within qualitative research concerns the way that analysis and conclusions are drawn from data (Mukherji & Albon, 2018). Triangulation of data collection techniques and participant sources within this study aims to promote validity and reliability as purposive sampling may encourage an increase in bias leading to a misrepresentation of data (Rose & Grosvenor, 2001; Golafshani, 2003; Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Mukherji & Albon, 2018).

## Data Analysis:

Qualitative data with a small amount of quantitative data is included within analysis. Semi structured interviews and FG data have been analysed using thematic analysis which is suitable for qualitative research (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018; Mukherji & Albon, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2019). The MFs questionnaire generated a small amount of quantitative data and is presented within findings and discussions as this allowed for descriptive statistics to be implemented. Open-ended questions within the questionnaire required thematic analysis as common words, themes and phrases appeared. Semi-structured interviews and the FG are also analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis requires data to be read over several times to enable familiarity amongst themes and responses (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). One of the initial steps in thematic analysis, according to Clark *et al.*, (2019) is to transcribe FGs to have a brief understanding of the data. Thematic analysis steps consist of compiling data, disassembling and coding, reassembling codes and categories, and interpreting and making conclusions (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018). Thematic analysis is useful for dissertations as it can be linked to research questions and

encourages transparency (Braun & Clark, 2006). Direct quotations are used to provide transparency and increase dependability (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Despite an attempt to employ attrition to gather more questionnaire responses than required (Cohen *et al.*, 2018), it was problematic to achieve as respondents from S1 were not as forthcoming as anticipated. On reflection higher numbers of participants would have added higher credibility to the findings especially in relation to the FG as suggested by Clark *et al.*, (2019).



## Ethical considerations

### 1. What are Ethics and Why are they Important?

Ethical considerations are vitally important to research in relation to morality alongside ensuring credibility, reliability, and validity of research (Mukherji & Albon, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2019). According to Thomas (2017), ethics are rules of behaviour that relate to what is right and wrong. BERA (2018) stipulates ethical regard for educational research entails respecting participants' privacy and democratic ideals as well as ensuring high-quality research. Research ethics are also implemented to remove the potential risk of psychological and physical harm to participants and others (Thomas, 2017; Clark *et al.*, 2019). Permission from the ethics committee within the University of East London was obtained prior to commencing research which ensures the research proposal which suggests that ethical considerations have been considered and risk of harm is low. Participants from S1 were advised to refer to the well-being policy within the organisation if they felt distressed by any part of the research. Using pseudonyms for participants and educational settings, employing a gatekeeper, and upholding research integrity by being cordial, impartial, and objective ensured ethical conduct was adhered to (Thomas, 2017). No leading questions were asked, and data collected and analysed reflected the opinions, thoughts, and feelings of respondents.

### 2. Informed Consent:

Informed consent refers to participants permissibly engaging with the research process and must guarantee that participants are aware of what the study requires them to do alongside having knowledge of research goals (Mukherji & Albon, 2017; Thomas, 2017; Clark *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, participants must be aware of how their information will be used, the purpose of research, the right to withdraw, alongside how confidentiality will be maintained (Thomas, 2017; Mukherji & Albon, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2019). The right to withdraw at any point in the research process was conveyed within research participant consent forms which each participant signed and returned. Contact details of the researcher were included within the questionnaire and the participant consent forms to comply with ethical considerations in relation to informed consent. Research participants were sourced using an opt-in process which strengthens informed consent (Thomas, 2017).

### 3. Confidentiality:

Confidentiality is understood as keeping personal details and data collected from participants private (Thomas, 2017; Clark *et al.*, 2019). Confidentiality may be achieved by storing data privately from others and only using the collected data for the purpose proposed to participants (Thomas, 2017). Pseudonyms and coding can be utilised to maintain confidentiality and ensure

that personal details are not disclosed (Thomas, 2017; Clark *et al.*, 2019). Anonymity refers to the process of not disclosing any identifiable identification specifics such as name, place of work, or distinguishing characteristics (Clark *et al.*, 2019). Confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to by employing the use of pseudonyms for participants and settings, alongside keeping data on a password protected device. Confidentiality should always be upheld unless there is a safeguarding risk regarding a matter that a participant has disclosed (Wiles *et al.*, 2008; Bera, 2018).

#### 4. Reflexivity:

Reflexivity is embedded throughout the investigation to enable an increase of credibility and reduce bias (Cohen *et al.*, 2018; Mukherji & Albon, 2018; Clark *et al.*, 2019). Cohen *et al.*, (2019) regard reflexivity as vital within qualitative research as qualitative research is never entirely neutral as everyone has subjective beliefs and notions, therefore researchers should continually reflect, and challenge personal bias. Reflexivity is executed by reflecting on methodology and how the aim of the investigation is adhered to throughout the research process. Highlighting bias and positionality is also an essential component of ensuring reflexivity and increasing credibility (Thomas, 2017), therefore, potential bias and positionality may derive from the fact that I have had a positive experience using visual aids to assist children with SEND and it is an area that I am interested in learning more about. However as stated within Cotrell (2014), it is important to carry out research in an area that engaged the researcher. Personal bias is reduced by implementing triangulation within analysis to reinforce conclusions drawn. This included sampling from three different cohorts, including S1, peers at university and work colleagues, furthermore three different types of data collection methods were implemented to reinforce findings from data analysis.

## Findings and Discussions:

### 1. Theme one: Confidence of TPs in relation to using VAs

The first theme that transpired from data analysis is linked to research question one which aimed to investigate as follows:

“How confident do TPs feel using VAs to assist pupils with SEND?”

The questionnaire highlighted that five % percent of participants had not been trained to use VAs or were not aware of any visual interventions used to assist CYP with SEND. 80% of practitioners were trained to use PECS and visual timetables, 70% were trained to use now and next boards, 65% had training for Makaton, 60% of practitioners were trained to use rebus and picture cards, and 50% knew how to use transitional objects. The questionnaire offered the option for TPs to state any other VAs that they were trained to use. Colourful semantics, contingency maps, communication software, photographs, and videos were some other VAs that were mentioned. Data highlighted that a vast majority of teaching practitioners had used visual aids as an intervention. All participants responded to the statement:

“I feel as though visual interventions help children with SEND with communication and interaction needs”,

74% strongly agreed and 26% agreed.

Questionnaire participants also answered a question which asked if they feel confident reaching out to senior members of staff and colleagues and if support was needed. 45% selecting strongly agree, 40% agree and 15% selecting neutral.

FG participants were asked:

“How confident do you feel using VAs with CYP with SEND?”

P1 stipulated that they were confident using VAs, P2 also agreed that they felt confident and in addition stated the following:

“I’ve been taught by an educational psychologist how to specifically use them.”

P3 also stated that they had been trained by external professions such as speech and language therapists (SALT). P2 elaborated to include that once working in an educational environment with CYP with SEND, they can identify the individual needs of the child and learn what works and what does not.

As P2 and P3 stated that they feel confident and had both been trained by external professionals such as educational psychologists, this may denote that the additional support and partnership working between professionals may assist to reinforce confidence of implementation of VAs As

suggested within Bond *et al.*, (2016). P2's statement also supports Wearmouth (2012) who specify how finding ways of understanding individual's communication style is vital to then put in place interventions that are appropriate and tailored to the individual.

P4 raised that they felt as though they required further training alongside stating:

“You can just have a piece of cardboard on a line in front of you, you know. Sometimes if they are already set up for you, you don't know. Like what am I supposed to do? Sometimes there needs to be like specific learning tools on a regular basis to show all practitioners how to use them and incorporate it to all the other children.”

P4's comments reflect the notion that numerous TPs feel they require further training as suggested within Alexander and Dille's study (2018). P4 also provided an insight into beliefs that methods seem to change regularly, which was discussed within Syriopoulou-Delli and Eleni's (2021) research article. Variations in the methods of visual aids alongside how training is executed and measured were topics that were highlighted within Syriopoulou-Delli and Eleni's (2021) research article discussing the effectiveness of different types of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). This may preclude that the varying methods of visual aids are confusing to TPs, however as suggested in several research studies, further exploration of the effectiveness of using visual aids is paramount, which could also include which methods are most effective (McCorkle, 2012; Alexander & Dille, 2018; Syriopoulou-Delli & Eleni, 2021).

Findings collated from MF may supplement findings in Alsayedhassan *et al.*, (2021), whereby 80% of teachers and therapists who implemented PECS agreed that they were confident to implement it and agreed that the use of PECS was effective in enhancing communication for children with SEND, however also stipulated that PECS was time consuming.

## 2. Theme Two: Partnership Working Between Parents and TPs

Theme two of findings and discussions relates to research question two which is as follows:

“What are practitioners' experiences of working in partnership with parents to establish the use of VAs.”

Within the focus group, themes that arose as reasons for barriers to working in partnership with parents to establish the implementation of visual aids included English as an additional language (EAL), parents lack of time, personal issues, lack of information and knowledge of SEND and terminology, and cultural differences. P2 responded:

“Some people see school as a rest bite service, so they don't actually wanna take their time out to come into schools and participate with children.”

P1 answered:

“And there will be some, there will be some that just are not interested.”

P2 continued:

“If you had English as an additional language, you could be at the meeting, but you have not a clue what’s going on in the meeting. So how much can you participate?”

P3 highlighted the following:

“They might have just found out that their child has a special educational need, and they don’t know much about the field of special education.”

P4 agreed that cultural differences played a part in preventing partnership working between parents and teaching practitioners stating the following:

“When you have got different cultures, what does the word visual aid mean?”

Findings within the FG align with Hayes *et al.*, (2010) which suggests that visual interventions should be easy for parents and carers to implement as they are already heavily burdened with numerous appointments and demands and advice from multiple external professionals involved with their child's care. Hayes *et al.*, (2010) also reiterate how parents and carers find it challenging to create, use and evaluate the effectiveness of VAs.

Within the questionnaire respondents were asked:

“Have you had experience working with parents to implement visual interventions?”

79% of respondents had and 21% had not, however all participants within the questionnaire agreed that working in partnership with parents to implement visual aids would be beneficial to improve children’s communication and interaction. When asked to explain responses further to explain the answer provided the following statements were provided:

"Joint approach is more effective than using different approaches. ", “using visual interventions in partnership with parents is effective as children will get more opportunity to practice. If children get more support to practice, there is a high possibility to develop their communication and interaction. Practice is the key to develop.”, “If parents are also using them if reinforces the process.”

Data abstracted from semi-structured interviews was akin to responses from the MF and the FG with issues arising as barriers to partnership working consisting of lack of time for parents to implement VAs, EAL, lack of knowledge in relation to how to use visual aids and some parents having their own methods of communicating at home. Interview participants were asked:

“Are parents happy for their children to try different methods of communication at home and in the classroom?”

IP1 stated:

“Some parents are Compliant whilst some parents just do not want to know.”

IP4 mentioned:

“Initially there is a shock involved with parents if their children have a SEND diagnosis, however most are eager to find ways to support their children.”

IP5 expressed:

“In my experience they are happy for us as practitioners to implement interventions within the classroom, and in some instances, we have provided some of the same rebus cards and given parents advice about how we implement things, but how much of that is taken away, I would not know as I have never had a parent say that a certain VA has been useful at home.”

IP2’s response relayed:

“They may not have time to use them in the home environment, however in my experience some parents rely on them in the home to support with transitions.”

IP3’s response entailed the following:

“Parents may not know how. If routines and structures are already in place, any additional structures could be difficult to add. Parents sometimes think that it is the role of the teachers.”  
“Engaging parents takes time and building relationships is important and takes time.”

A mix of beliefs including how some parents are happy to work in partnership with TPs when they can, several barriers are highlighted including time constraints for TP and parents, different methods being used at home, and some parents believing that is the responsibility of the TP. As summarised from IP1’s response it is acceptable to deduce that they feel view some parents are not interested.

The requirement for working in partnership with parents is a core principle within the SEND COP (2015), and the responses from participants within the FG may constitute as knowledge of the requirement of teaching professionals to adhere to this principle as well as the understanding of the benefits of doing so. However, as Hellowell (2019) highlights, there are different models of partnership working with the least desirable the ‘Expert Model’ (Hellowell, 2019, pp. 98) and the most equally power balanced being the ‘Dual-Expert model’ (Hellowell, 2019, pp. 99). Despite high level of TPs believing partnership working is crucial and necessary, further exploration may be required to explore which model of partnership working is implicated.

### 3. Theme 3: Barriers and advantages regarding VAs

Theme three has been broken down into two sections. Firstly, barriers will be explored and secondly advantages will be explored. Theme three correlates to research question three:

“How do practitioners feel about the effectiveness of VAs to enhance children and young people (CYP) with SEND’s learning and social relations?”

#### 4. Barriers:

To evaluate the effectiveness of VAs to engage CYP with SEND in their learning and social development, respondents were asked the following in MF:

“Are there any barriers that prevent the use of visual interventions for children with SEND?”

Time constraints were mentioned as an obstacle by 47% within the MF survey. Other participants cited lack of training, inconsistency, lack of accountability, alongside:

"Lack of funding to purchase these visual aids"

"Sometimes the staff members are inconsistent with using resources," "Staff ratios are insufficient to give time to teaching the children to use," "The time it takes to make them and having all staff members on board," and "It might be challenging to carry visual interventions everywhere."

Responses that arose correlate to Harvey (2018), who also emphasises how time and money consuming it is for educational settings to implement PECS for CYP at the suggested 2:1 ratio.

Within the semi-structures interview participants were asked:

“What are the disadvantages that you have experienced whilst using VAs?”

IP3 expressed disadvantages incurred using VAs to be financial cost as advisory teams charge fees to provide strategies, resources and training to education settings and teaching practitioners. IP3 also highlighted how certain images use on VAs can be difficult for children to comprehend stating:

“A stickman and a ball may not be understood by a child as garden time.”

Alexander and Dille (2018) reinforce this opinion and state that visual representations should be universally recognised to reduce confusion as this may lead to frustration due to lack of comprehension and may result in negative behavioural outcomes.

IP2 responded:

“Sometimes VAs can take away from children’s verbal communication”

IP2’s response could have been further explored to provide details of how. McCorkle (2010) emphasise the importance of using verbal directions alongside implementing VAs to reinforce communication. As stipulated within multiple articles of the CRP (UN, 1989) and the UNCRP (UN, 2006), alongside the SEND COP (2015), CYP with SEND must be supported to communicate in ways that are suitable for individual needs. Therefore, if a CYP with SEND is pre-verbal, other means of communication are important.

IP1 stated:

“They are not beneficial if the child is not able to understand the process and what is being seen. Another disadvantage could be if the person using visual aids does not make the child aware of what the image is about such as what it is suggesting and saying, then the child will not know how to interpret what it means.”

This aligns with Wood (2019) again who suggests that sometimes TPs use VAs in a manner that refutes much engagement between them and the CYP.

IP5 responded:

“Some disadvantages are that not all practitioners are consistent, and some do not take them seriously or think that they will not work so do not persevere with them.”

IP4 responded:

“None really, the only thing I can think of is when we cannot find the object that is needed for transitional objects, and we have to rush around and try to find them.”

IP4 also stipulated how they found picture symbols “better” and “more universal”. It was also suggested by IP4 that transitional objects can change and may be confusing for the CYP if they change settings.

Syriopoulou-Delli and Eleni (2021) also highlight how the methods of VAs often change and this can be problematic.

## 5. Advantages:

P4 from the FG stipulated that VAs were “crucial” and “important” for children with SEND as they promote “independence” and provide a “clear understanding.” P4 also expressed that VAs in the form of visual timetables show children with SEND which subjects are upcoming which could enable higher levels of participation in learning.

IP3 was asked to state three main reasons for using VAs and responses were:

“To facilitate contact for children with SEND,” “reduce cognitive load,” and “reduces anxiety.”

IP5 also agreed that VAs can reduce stress and continued if a child is being requested to do something which they either do not understand or do not want to do. Wood (2019) contests that if an autistic person does not want to participate in an activity, that should not be expected to.

IP1 relayed three main reasons for using VAs as:

“To benefit the child and for them to attain more, to make their lives easier instead of challenging” and “to support them in terms of learning and development”.



IP4 highlighted three main advantages as follow:

“To help children communicate, to allow children to learn their routines” and “to allow them to transition smoothly from one activity to another and from room to room.”

IP2 highlighted three advantages as follows:

“Support transitions, know what to expect and understanding what they need to do.”

## 6. Theme four: Recommendations for how VAs may Support Social Relations

An unexpected response arose during the FG relating to RQ three and entailed participants of the FG discussing ideas regarding how to promote socialisation through the utilisation of VAs. The question was asked as follows:

FG participants were asked:

“How do practitioners feel about the effectiveness of VAs being used to enhance learning and also social interactions for children with SEND”?

This caused some confusion as inferred by P2’s response:

“Say that again.”

A further explanation was given and the suggested to break down the question into two parts, firstly how do VAs enhance learning and secondly, how do VAs support social interactions. P1 suggested that for VAs to enhance social interactions, there should be a secondary VA that could be used by peers and social groups who spend time with the child. P2 continued:

“If it's with the practitioner all the time, how would they be able to use it”?

P1 also suggested that the child with SEND should have visual cards to carry on their person to enable them to:

“Use it at will”.

As stated within Harvey (2018), PECS is a tool to enable children with communication and interaction difficulties to engage and initiate communication with others, therefore, P1’s recommendation coincides with the idea of using VAs to assist with enabling the expression of requirements, wishes and feelings independently and not only when required to do so by a teaching practitioner, creating more autonomy alongside complying with the Equality Act (2010) and SEND COP (2015).

P4 questioned:

“How feasible would it be for a social group”? “Because things like VAs are not something that I’ve focused across the whole school.” “How would it be implemented into the whole school?” “They’re in play, they want to talk, they don’t want to look at cards”. “You would have to put them in a way that is going to encourage children.”

P1 added:

“So interactive”?

P2 elaborated, adding:

“Say you have specific spots in the playground”, “different tables and things on the wall that would incorporate it into a game, then maybe it could be incorporated into social groups”.

P1 suggested to encourage other children to get involved to enhance social relations within peer groups using VAs for children with and without SEND to communicate, children could be educated on VAs during personal, social, health and economical (PSHE) lessons.

P3 inferred that VAs can be used to enhance social relations between teaching professionals and children with SEND, not merely SEND children and peers.

“If they can interact with their teachers and use visual aids to explain how they are feeling and explain what they need such as if they need the toilet, if they want a break, if they want to go outside, then this can be used as a tool to enhance social skills.”

P2 suggested that VAs should be used throughout the whole school and continued:

“Every person in the school should have VAs, even if you are not working with a child one on one, you need to have VAs.”

P2 continued:

“Nationwide, yeah.”

Other suggestions included how the use of technology may exceed the requirement of VAs and move towards electronic communication aids (ECA). This is also highlighted by Alexander and Dille (2018). Hayes *et al.*, (2010) add further weight to this argument and highlight that technological updates associated with ECA’s are less time consuming than updating paper-based VAs. P4’s appears to reflect the difficulties that can be faced implementing VAs to engage CYP with SENDs peer groups. Alexander and Dille (2018) also state that flash cards are not particularly helpful to promote social settings which correlates to P4’s response which alluded to complications that could be faced in a social setting with multiple CYP. P3 conveys that social relations refer to TP and CYP relationships not merely social interactions between CYP. P2’s response that the use of VAs are useful for all CYP and remove language barriers coincides with Alexander and Dille (2018).

## Conclusion:

Findings within this research study mostly align with current literature and generally highlight the opinion that VAs can support CYP with SEND to develop communication and interaction skills. This in return could create the opportunity to enhance learning experiences. However, legal requirements and international policies aimed at ensuring CYP with SENDs voices are heard, may contrast within educational settings when the requirement to follow structures of the school day are compulsory. This is also reflected within some of the outlined benefits within data findings, including smoother transitions, allowing children to learn routines, and knowing what to expect. TPs stipulated that they faced many barriers when individualising and implementing VAs such as time constraints, costs associated with training staff, other TPs being inconsistent. However, long term benefits were noted by most TPs and consisted of reducing anxiety, enabling higher levels of engagement in learning, and promoting independence. Therefore, in response to RQ three TPs perceive the use of VAs to be advantageous to engage CYP with SEND with their learning and social relations yet this is dependent many other tenants. Data collated in relation to RQ one highlights that TPs were more confident using VAs if they had received training and support from external professionals regarding use and implementation. Only a small number of TPs were unsure of how to use VAs.

In relation to RQ two, partnership working was declared as being vitally important in general yet was portrayed as being impractical to implement VAs at home. This was due to some TPs believing that parents did not have time or the inclination to implement VAs, EAL being a barrier to communication, alongside parents being confused with SEND terminology. It is fair to deduce that if TPs highlight training as being a barrier to implementing VAs, parents who as a majority do not have much experience or training in the field of SEND, will also find this problematic.

Limitations within this research study include the small number of participants within the FG. To improve validity, FG numbers could have been larger as inferred within Mukherji and Albon (2018), yet time constraints and challenges to recruit participants meant that this was not possible. Many responses referred to EAL as being a potential barrier to working in partnership with parents, however this was not explored within the literature review. If it had, this would have strengthened findings and answered RQ two more effectively.

My positionality regarding the topic of implementing VAs as has altered slightly in relation to how challenging it may be for parents to implement the same VAs into their homes. Moreover, it has been highlighted that VAs are somewhat impractical and time consuming in relation to training TPs and developing short-term benefits for CYP with SEND. To extend research, RQ could be further specified regarding how TP work in partnership with parents, alongside, further investigation of the impact EAL has on partnership working, alongside a further exploration of ECA.

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# **A CASE STUDY THAT EXPLORES PARENT'S EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE INCLUSION OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN INTO PRIMARY MAINSTREAM SETTINGS**

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ED6088 Independent Research Project

BA (Hons) Special Education



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## **Abstract**

Everyday more autistic children are going to mainstream schools, but the success of inclusive education is determined by various factors, including key stakeholders' perspectives (i.e., teachers, practitioners and parents). Current literature reveals that parents' views have received relatively little attention in recent Autism research (AE) research, most studies neglect parental views and mainly focus on teacher's experiences and training, among other inclusion factors. This study explored parent's knowledge about Autism, Inclusive education (IE) and experiences and perspectives about the inclusion of autistic children into primary mainstream education (PME). The study used an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach, a case study design, data was collected by a semi-structured interview from seven parents (two fathers and five mothers) and analysed using a thematic data analysis (TDA) measure (Braun & Clarke, 2006)., The lens is Neurodiversity, and the theoretical framework is social model of disability (SMD). Three themes were identified; 1) Importance of parent's knowledge about autism and inclusive education, 2) Positives and negatives of mainstream Inclusive primary education 3) Parent's suggestions to include autistic children in the mainstream inclusive classroom.

The findings revealed that parents like to send their autistic children (AC) into mainstream schools and live a normal life with both autistic and allistic children. Parents also face difficulties with inclusive education (IE) and current special educational need and disability (SEND) policies and that these experiences had a detrimental impact on their children's education and welfare. A neurodiversity lens is essential for shifting from deficit-based SEND rhetoric to facilitating education for autistic youth. The study features the need of understanding double empathy problem, personalised support plan, autism training for all (ATA), school-parent collaboration, implementing "Learning About Neurodiversity at School" (LEANS) and monotropism to intensify inclusion both academically and socially for AC.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, Parents perspectives, Autism, Mainstream education (ME), Parents-practitioner collaborative work, Monotropism, Double empathy problem, LEANS.

# **Chapter 1- Introduction**

## **1.1 Study Aims**

The study explored parents' experiences and perspectives about the inclusion of AC into primary mainstream education (PME). The study topic is essential because there is significantly less research conducted in this area, most of the autism education (AE) studies mainly focus on practitioners' views and pay less attention on parents' experiences and perspectives towards Autism and inclusive education. This is linked to promoting exclusive educational support to autistic children in PME. Moreover, parents are the key stakeholder among others and know their children more than anybody else (Chaidi and Drigas,2020), therefore, to ensure autistic children's development, parents play an important role alongside practitioners. Additionally, while parents may need guidance to support their children's education at home, they do play a vital role in terms of identifying IE gaps and best practices for AC.

This study was helpful as it explores parents' experiences about AC's educational development in mainstream educational settings through parents' lens, its positive and negative aspects, how inclusive and effective school activities are for AC since every autistic child is unique and may require individualised provision to learn effectively (Wood,2019).

## **1.2 Rationale**

The rationale for this study arises from the gaps within SEND policies and practices. Current policies and practices are very controversial, ambiguous, bureaucratic and often parents raise battles against the system (HM Government,2022), there are dilemmas associated with partnership working between the school and family, the child, and other professionals (Hellowell,2019). This study is relevant because every day more autistic students enrol in mainstream schools despite evidence of their persistent exclusion, poor test scores, and poorer long-term development results (Goodall,2018; Wood,2017; Waddington and Reed, 2017).

My findings may provide all stakeholders with accurate perceptions of parents' experiences with their autistic children in IE, and they may take those insights into account when formulating policies and provisions that could increase the effectiveness of the support and be more realistic.

## **1.3 Positionality**

I acknowledged my positionality as an academic of SEND and family member of multiple autistic people, and my bias to investigate this study topic, reflecting my prior personal, professional and academic knowledge and experience with autism. However, I tried to minimise my biases as much as possible by following the ethical guidelines, but a complete elimination may not be feasible (Bruce, 2018; UCLA Library,2021).

## 1.4 What is Autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized in the DSM-5 by difficulties in social communication and interaction, sensory processing (Robertson & Baron-Cohen, 2017), repetitive behaviour, and restricted interests as their brain functions differently than allistic people (McKinlay *et al.*, 2022; Azizi, 2015; NHS, 2022; AlAlmaei *et al.*, 2023). This definition is based on the medical model of disability (MMD); it focuses on impairments only and does not consider positive aspects (Waltz, 2008). MMD is a discriminatory approach towards disability; sees it as problematic and disease that needs to be cured if possible (Chown and Beardon, 2017). In addition, it is referred to as the "personal tragedy" model (Thomas & Woods 2003).

Contrastingly, the social model of disability (SMD) argues that systematic barriers, stigmatizing beliefs, and social exclusions make it difficult for disabled people to engage in their desired functionalities, but they can thrive if those barriers are removed (Chown and Beardon, 2017).

Since the majority of autistic persons and their families believe that Autism is an inseparable part of their identity and should be cherished rather than cured, they prefer to refer to it as "autistic" not "with autism". However, professionals prefer to say "people with autism." Some also found the word "with autism" objectionable since it isolates autism and treats it as a medical condition (Bury *et al.*, 2020; Kenny *et al.*, 2016;). Additionally, using ableist terminology in autism research can be problematic, pathologizing, stigmatizing and a "system of discrimination" (Bottema-Beutel *et al.*, 2021). Also, Autism is vague, contentious, and challenging to define (Wood, 2019). "I'm not sure it's possible to describe autism as one thing, and I'm not sure it's helpful either" (Wood, 2018, p.291).

### 1.5 Research Lens-Neurodiversity

According to the lens of neurodiversity, natural variations in the human brain affect how people think and act. For example, sensory processing, social comprehension, communication, and information processing are all fundamentally different in autistic brains. These neurological variations are known as neurodivergence, such as Autism and ADHD (Walker,2021). The neurodiversity paradigm is a fresh and focused view of neurodiversity that supports SMD and opposes the traditional special education’s deficit-based discourses and practices (Acevedo and Nusbaum, 2020) and a notion that autism is a dangerous condition (Chown & Beardon, 2017).



Figure 3 Neurodiversity, Murphy (2023)

Additionally, it refers to adequate support, positive teacher attitudes towards autism, peers' abilities to recognise AC's social cues, access to AAC, removing physical and social barriers and environmental factors in the classroom which affect autistic students' achievement. Lack of these support, challenge autistic students' attainment in classroom as well as viewing autism as a natural type of human variety that is inseparable from a person's identity and does not require treatment or normalisation (Walker,2022). Murphy (2023) argues that, “Neurodiversity in the early years embraces that some children will simply be different, not less than”, hence appropriate for this research.

### 1.6 Inclusive education ( IE)

IE is an education system where all children learn in the same school regardless of their background or ability. This system ensures that school settings, curriculum, play areas, toilets, transport, and other areas of concern are accessible and conducive to all children, including disabled children (UNICEF,2017; DfE,2015). However, Goodall (2020) argued that Inclusion is a feeling, not a place.



# Chapter 2-Literature review (LR)

## 2.1 Introduction

The LR is divided into three research themes exploring the knowledge gaps within this research area by addressing the following three research questions (RQ), hence contributing more to this field.

The three RQs,

1. What understanding do parents have about autism and inclusion?
2. What positive and negative experiences, do parents have about their autistic children and mainstream primary education?
3. What are parents' perspectives on the strategies to include and support autistic children in mainstream primary education?

Most national and international legislations acknowledge the significance of education for autistic children's development, for example, the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), the UNCRPD (2006), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (UNICEF, 2022). These regulations support the idea that every child has a right to education regardless of their ability (McKinlay *et al.*, 2022). So, the goal of inclusion is to improve the acceptance and involvement of all children (Florian, 2014; Goodall, 2019; Love & Horn, 2021) and to improve young people's wellbeing by helping them to excel in all significant areas of their lives: socially, emotionally, behaviourally, and educationally (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Reiter & Vitani, 2007). A sense of belonging to a schooling and social group (Barned, Knapp, & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2011), higher academic performance, and increased sociability (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2012; Sansour & Bernhard, 2018) can all be the results of successful inclusion (Freeman & Alkin, 2000).

Hence, inclusion can aid in the academic and social development of AC. Yet, despite this, some data reported that autistic children are more likely to face exclusion and discrimination than their neurotypical peers (Recio *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, exclusion has been connected to increased negative feelings, antisocial behaviour, and loneliness (Xiao, Bullock, Liu, & Coplan, 2020). Therefore, the role of major stakeholders in the school setting must be considered to guarantee that inclusion has a beneficial impact on the development of autistic children. Stakeholders' acceptance, support, and tolerance are necessary for successful inclusion (Paseka & Schwab, 2019; Salceanu, 2020).

## 2.2 Theme 1- (Parental Participation and conflict with practitioners)

Parents actively influence how their children regard themselves, their accomplishments, and the world around them. They also assist in the development of their beliefs and values (Knafo & Galansky, 2008; Osefo, 2017). Also, research indicates that parents may foster a supportive learning atmosphere in the classroom, which will facilitate inclusivity (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010). The Warnock Report (1978) stressed the need for parental involvement in SEND education; for example, early identification and finding practical support with the help of parents. Parents require three principal forms of cooperative support: - information, advice

and sensible help. Therefore, it is important to assess parents understanding of autism and inclusion to provide children better educational experience and outcome in PME.

Some writers contend that parents support inclusivity for their autistic children in PME (Majoko, 2019; Su, Guo, and Wang, 2020), while others claim that parents are less supportive since they and their children face stigma from educators (Falkmer *et al.*, 2015; Farrugia, 2009). Parents with autistic children experience rejection and judgement as a result of their child's condition (Broady, Stoyles, & Morse, 2017; Mitter, Ali, & Scior, 2019). Also, there is a need for qualitative research because much of this field's study favours quantitative measures; researchers stress the significance of obtaining a qualitative perspective from parents (Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014; Alinsunurin, 2020) to get deeper insights.

Parents' knowledge about autism and IE, and positive attitude toward the condition is valuable as parents are the first caregiver of children, and they learn from their significant adults. Parents of AC have better knowledge about this disorder and hold more favourable attitudes towards including AC than the other parents. However, families without AC also showed a positive attitude toward inclusive education, but these attitudes were less favourable than families with AC (Gómez-Marí, Tárraga-Mínguez and Pastor-Cerezuela, 2022).

AlAlmaei Asiri *et al.*, (2023) found that parents, particularly male parents with low levels of education, had little knowledge of autism and its clinical symptoms. Saad *et al.*, (2020) reported 70% of the parents had a positive attitude towards autism, even though parents' autism knowledge was poorer.

Preece & Trajkovski (2017) noted that parents education programmes help parents understand autism and AC's key areas of difficulties, such as social and communication issues, repetitive behaviour, sensory issues, restrictive interests, and behavioural concerns. According to NAS (2021) school report, approximately one in eight parents believe that their children SEND needs are being fully met at school and some feel they are seen as problematic.

Nevertheless, some parents worry about potential detrimental consequences on their children's ME, such as emulating inappropriate actions, lack of individualized instruction from the teacher in the inclusive classroom, poor grades, or poor classroom management, bullying (Goodall, 2020), that may impact on AC's mental health and behaviour (Mitchelson, Simpson and Adams, 2021). Autistic students are twice more likely to be excluded from school due to insufficient systems and budget shortages (University of Birmingham,2022); hence parental involvement and support are crucial (Azad and Mandell, 2016).

Parents are experts on their children and can contribute valuable information to health and education professionals. With parents' child expertise, professionals can meet needs. So, parents' training and education are essential since it allows them to engage in their children's intervention programmes to intensify children's learning, communication, and behaviour (Chaidi and Drigas, 2020). AET (2021) agreed with multi-agency work of all professionals with parents (DfE,2015) which may help provide a more consistent and enriching education to the learner (NAS,2023; Hellowell, 2019). However, Sproston, Sedgewick and Crane (2017) reported a lack of teachers' understanding of autistic pupils, inadequate schools support and raise of parents' battles.

Preece & Trajkovski (2017) emphasize parental AE, and various positive impacts were identified, including stress relief, improved child-parent communication, improved understanding of autism, efficacy, and confidence, and improved parental quality of life. Santiago, McIntyre, and Garbacz (2022) also mentioned that family–school partnerships are crucial for promoting positive outcomes and serve as a protective factor for children at-risk for poor school outcomes. Hellowell (2019) agreed with the idea of parent-professionals working relationship, however, she raised concern about the dilemma and power relationship of parent-practitioners' collaborative work (HM Government ,2022).

Moreover, DfE (2015) agreed that working in a partnership with parents is beneficial, but ambiguity of the guidelines created a gap in AE. Autistic students reported feeling unsupported and misunderstood (Brede *et al.*, 2017; Goodall 2019), feeling anxious at school (Adams, Simpson, and Keen, 2020) and experience bullying and social exclusion (Humphrey and Hebron, 2015) that lead to moving mainstream schools frequently (Mitchelson, Simpson and Adams, 2021).

### **2.3 Theme 2 (Autism and barriers)**

Access to mainstream schools (MS) is not restricted. Yet, access to effective MS support is hindered. Strategies of IE and resources that are outlined to be accommodating, needed to be easily accessible and fully utilised. However, some parents are disappointed and angered that these strategies have not been actioned. Lack of inclusive strategies, inadequate home-school communication, parents voice not heard (Mitchelson, Simpson and Adams, 2021), ambiguity of their day in the school, ineffectiveness of teaching assistant support, bureaucratic system (Vassallo, Dallos & Mckenzie,2020) can lead to distress and hinder autistic children's educational experience (McKinlay *et al.*, 2022). Despite these barriers, parents like the concept of IE in mainstream school and see the positive sides of it (Croydon *et al.*, 2019).

Moreover, Inclusion in MS can be unpleasant for AC, who may endure bullying, isolation, and anxiety (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Browning, Osborne,& Reed, 2009; Sproston *et al.*, 2017). There is a misperception that, because many AC have intellectual ability, they can immediately function in a mainstream setting (Morewood, Humphrey, and Symes Citation, 2011). AC often need adjustments in the MS, for example, smaller class size, one-on-one TA, quiet environment to work and other professionals(dietitian, OT, SALT) who can work with them alongside teachers for better educational and overall development (DfE,2015; 2021; AET, 2021). GPs are first place where parents go for the referral of therapies but there are obstacles and perceived flaws in the current healthcare system, such as a lack of clarity around referral pathways (Unigwe *et al.*, 2017)

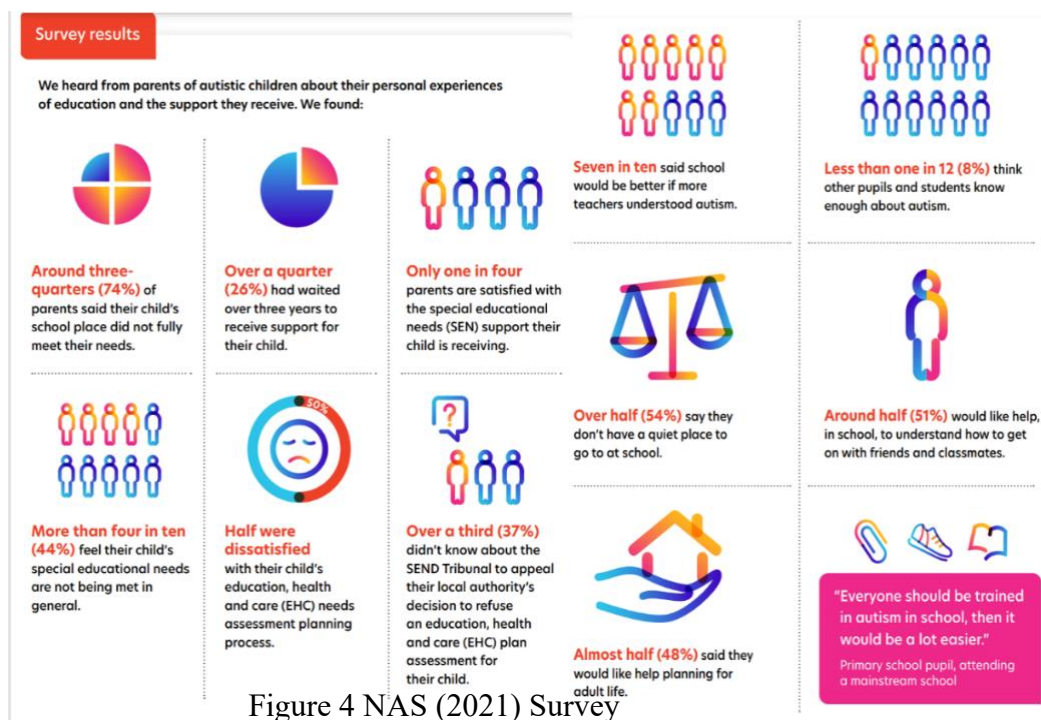


Figure 4 NAS (2021) Survey

According to Unigwe *et al.*, (2017) study, 39.5% of GP participants reported lack of formal training in autism. Moreover, psychiatrists reported that they were involved in diagnosing the process of autism; however, 30.8% said they received no training prior (Crane *et al.*, 2019). Autism diagnosis has drawn criticism because it relies on the often-biased views and experience of professionals (Milton, 2014) and does not use scientific evidence like blood tests (Rapin and Goldman, 2008) or scans.

In addition, Westaway (2023) reported parents' dissatisfaction with how healthcare professionals communicate with AC (NAS, 2021). Unigwe *et al.*, (2017) reported a lack of resources available for GPs to support autistic patients, a deepening workload crisis, and a falling number of GPs; families going through this process are lacking, buck-passing service delays and frustration all around. (Smith-Young, Chafe and Audas, 2020) agreed with this and emphasise the need for sufficient resources for GP to provide timely access to the autism diagnostic process. NAS (2023) recommended that early identification and autism diagnosis are vital (DfE, 2015) to get the proper support, and greater development chances, however it has long waiting. Crane *et al.* (2016) agreed with the long waiting times for the diagnosis, which is the key cause of family stress (Smith-Young, Chafe and Audas, 2020).

Hasson *et al.*, (2022) identified lack of teacher training in autism (Roberts and Simpson, 2016), lack of resources, unclear system, the mismatch between expertise and provision, system overwhelmed by unmet needs and restrictions in the system limiting their ability to support children (NAS, 2022). Parents reported mental stress, frustrations around the diagnosis process,

poor communication and lack of coordination with school, disparities in teachers' and parents' beliefs (Roberts and Simpson, 2016), and the incapacity of systems to provide for children's needs was widely seen by parents as harming their children's mental health. However, some parents found the home-school communication book helpful. (Hasson *et al.*,2022).

DfE (2018) reported long waiting times and a lack of accessible information and support to guide parents through the EHC process. A delay in the diagnosis process can lead to delay in EHCP, as its often not done without the autism diagnosis report. An EHCP will specifically outline a child's special educational requirements, planned outcomes for the child, and the special educational support needed to help the child reach those outcomes (DfE,2015). Ofsted (2021) agreed with this point; children do not get support without EHCP, even when they have SEND. Therefore, delays in the diagnosis process, EHCP and other professional support directly impact on autistic children's education which creates a gap as multi-agency collaboration is crucial for them in mainstream inclusive education in primary settings (MIEPS) (Hellowell,2018).

#### **2.4 Theme 3 (Best practice in mainstream classrooms)**

Autistic people often get the blame for lack of ability to understand people's thoughts or empathize (Rose,2022; Baron-Cohen Leslie & Frith,1985). The cognitive aspect of empathy is also known as 'mentalizing' ([Moseley, 2019](#); Baron-Cohen,2002). According to the extreme male brain theory, all autistic people share the "S > E" profile of hyper-systematizing and hypo-empathizing (Krahn & Fenton,2012). However, this theory is not universally supported (Moseley,2019).

If autistic persons lack understanding of non-autistic culture, it follows that allistic people would likewise lack understanding of autistic culture, autistic experiences, and autistic communication. This mutual lack of understanding creates an empathy gap between both groups and is called "double empathy problem" (Crompton *et al.*,2021; Milton, 2012; Baron-Cohen,2009). Extreme levels of isolation, poor mental health, limited access to healthcare, and high unemployment are all caused by allistic people's lack of empathy for autistic people (Rose,2022). Therefore, teachers and all other professionals require parents' involvement to understand AC and provide an effective learning experience.

AET (2021) identified guidelines, good practices, resources, and evidence-based practical strategies for SENCOs. Every school must have a SENCO who plays a vital role in supporting the education of autistic learners (DfE,2015).

Autistic students (AS) may have uneven educational profiles; for example, they excel in some subjects but struggle in others. So, the school SENCOs assess the child's needs, help staff comprehend the learner's uneven profile, and set up provision to meet learner's needs (AET,2021). The report also highlighted the importance of sensory audits and recommended sensory circuit programs such as the ALERT (2023) program and listening to learners to create equity. The way people learn is as unique as fingerprints (CAST,2023). Therefore, SENCOs, need to create a personalized individual educational plan (IEP) for each AC to meet their diverse needs (AET,2021).

SEND service providers and payers remain unclear and this is linked to power imbalance, bureaucratic system, delay in provisions, lack of funding, parents' mistrust in a MS to provide full support, poor outcomes of SEND children (22% achievement) in alternative provision, poor mental health, high absence rate, frustrated family, increased risk of crime, and high unemployment rate of SEND people (HM Government,2022). Therefore, Ofsted and Government should introduce an easy-to-understand inclusion measure within local services and schools to incentivize school leaders to be more inclusive (University of Birmingham, 2022).

AET (2021) reported that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) could improve access to education for all (UN,2023) children by removing barriers and creating an equitable and flexible education system to ensure that all students can access meaningful and challenging learning opportunities, as one size does not fit all (CAST, 2023;Zehner, Chen and Aladsani, 2017).

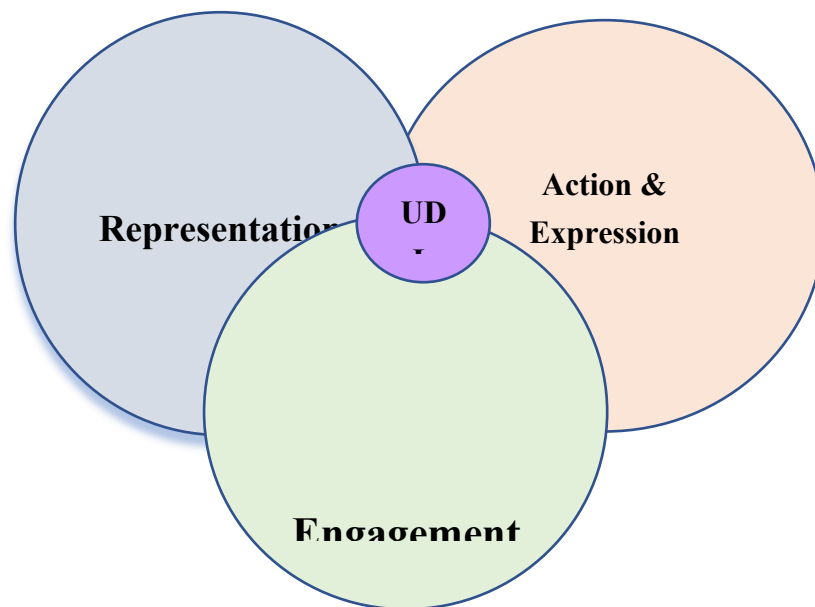


Figure 5 UDL Principles ,CAST (2023)

A school environment with a high sensory impact (high noise, light, clutter) can make it impossible to concentrate, cause meltdowns extremely excludable, as evidenced by examples, curriculum exclusions, and classroom activities (Wood ,2019). Therefore, teachers must understand sensory needs that may require to address and identity suitable sensory inputs to calm them down to refocus on classroom activities as AC may be unable to express their sensory needs (Education Scotland ,2019; see glossary; Wood, 2019). Hence, school need children's information from their parents.

# Chapter 3-Methodology

## 3.1 Paradigm, research approach, design, methods, sample and data analysis

This chapter will provide a comprehensive analysis of the research design adopted to address the study's RQs. Research approach is a small-scale qualitative investigation based on a combination of the Interpretivist paradigm and the neurodiversity lens perspective. "Paradigms are general framework or viewpoints: literally points from which to view. They provide ways of looking at life and are grounded in sets of assumptions about the nature of reality" (Babbie, 1998). This allowed me to obtain a deep insight of the perspectives and lived experiences of the participants, while framing the data within a socio-political and autism education context addressing the experiences and perspectives of parents towards the inclusion of autistic children in mainstream settings.

Research data was collected to investigate individuals experience and opinion rather than searching for an objective truth. Reality and knowledge are socially constructed by humans, and they may vary. Therefore, Interpretivist paradigm is suitable for this study as the intention is to explore parents' experiences and perspectives about the inclusion of AC into mainstream settings (Thomas,2017; Mukherji & Albon,2018). Primary qualitative research involves in-depth inquiry and direct data collection from samples rather than using secondary research data, which is more reliable, valid and timely. However, Interpretive studies are criticised for failing to generalise because personal views and opinions influence results (Thomas,2017).

The research design is a case study typically seen in social and life sciences, it is beneficial because it provides clear and better insights of a complex phenomenon, like this study topic (Heale and Twycross, 2018). Case studies are intensive investigations of specific locales, groups, or organizations that are particularly connected with qualitative research methodologies, particularly ethnography. However, it has some limitations like, sometimes a temptation to veer away from the research focus, researchers bias, summarising the findings from case research study is difficult at times and could be time consuming (Heale and Twycross, 2018; Thomas,2017).

## 3.2 Theoretical framework

The Theoretical framework of the study is the SMD. This model argues that society disables people rather than impairments. If such hurdles are removed, special needs people can succeed. The newer social model suggested changes in society, environmental control systems, material adjustments, social roles, and community views towards disability (Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2013; Bampi, Guilhem and Alves, 2010). However, this model is criticised for overlooking chronic disease or pain, and there is no mechanism to account for the heterogeneity of disability experiences (Owens, 2015) which is subject to debate.

This study used snowballing sampling which involves non-probability strategies that are not random in nature and commonly used in qualitative research but often feature in quantitative research (Clark *et al.*, 2021). It was used to recruit new research participants, which is ideal for this small-scale research (Mukherji & Albon, 2018) because it only needed a few people, and they'll find more, as a snowballing effect. It is also time-saving as I have a limited time to

complete my undergraduate dissertation. Furthermore, it is valuable when researchers have restricted access to research subjects (Clark *et al.*, 2021).

Yet, it requires less planning and labour than other sampling methods, making it simple, quick, and cost-effective. However, I am aware that this sampling approach has drawbacks. It may be biased because initial subjects nominate persons they know and may have comparable features (Cohen and Arieli, 2011; Sharma, 2017; Clark *et al.*, 2019; Question Pro Survey Software,2022).

This study used a semi-structured interview method to collect data from seven participants (parents), which is suitable for this small-scale qualitative research. Additionally, it asks questions within a predetermined thematic framework. It is a mixture of structured and unstructured predetermined questions. This method allowed parents to share their views, feelings, and beliefs about a controversial, personal and sensitive topic, which is vital for the study. Moreover, researchers can probe participants if needed. Therefore, it is an appropriate method for the study project as parents discuss their autistic children and inclusion, which can be sensitive and intimate (Thomas,2017). However, the semi-structured interview is time-consuming and can be affected by communication barriers where all the participants speak English as a second language (Kallio *et al.*, 2016).

A thematic data analysis method was used to analyse the data. It involves a six-stage process: familiarisation, Initial coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and evidencing themes (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). Furthermore, it enables the researcher to identify patterns in the data set. Such patterns allowed the researchers to relate their findings to the investigated phenomenon as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, its simple and flexible nature allowed a realistic comprehension of what participants thought about autism and inclusion and how inclusion, or lack of inclusion, has affected AC in mainstream primary education and strategies to include them. However, its subjectivity and openness to interpretations can lead to various conclusions which may lead to inaccurate results or inferences (Javadi and Zarea, 2016).

### **3.3 Participants ( Sample)**

The research sample consisted of seven parents of AC, two biological fathers and five mothers, whilst representing diverse collection of cultural background. This was to ensure some of the participants had prior expertise and knowledge of the subject, being my peer and more accessible due to time constraints for my study's completion. In terms of data validity, future studies on this topic may benefit from an emphasis on purposive participants. Prior to the study, I had a personal contact with some of the participants, which may have had an impact on their capacity to be completely forthright with their opinions. If the study was to be replicated, I would use a setting or participants with whom I had no past relationship (Clark *et al.*, 2019).



Table 2 Participants demographic information

Pseudonym of Participants/ Parents	Age of Child	Age of Diagnosis	Do they have EHCP	Years in Education	Gender of Child	Ethnicity
Jack (Father)	7	2	Yes	3	Male	Bangladeshi
Adam (Father)	11	3	Yes	6	Male	Bangladeshi
Megan	11	4	Yes	6	Male	Bangladeshi
Laura	11	3	Yes	5	Male	Bangladeshi
Lisa	5	Waiting	No	1	Female	Indian
Olivia	5	Waiting	No	1	Females	Pakistani
Emma	11	4	Yes	6	Male	Bangladeshi
Percentage		Have diagnosis (n-5)=71% No diagnosis (n-2)=29%	Yes(n-5)=71% No(n-5)=29%		Male(n-5)=71% Female(n-2)=29%	100% (n=7) South Asian participants

To ensure that participants felt comfortable and able to respond fully, time and place were chosen at the participants' convenience. Interviewees used their mother languages, Bangladeshi, Hindi and Urdu, the most comfortable way to communicate and express emotions. My research strength is understanding the four languages, including English. And transcription was written only for the quotes used in the study, which were translated into English. (Sürücü and Maslakçi, 2020; Clark *et al.*, 2019).

In qualitative research, reliability refers to exact replicability of the processes and the results refers to the consistency of responses to multiple coders of data sets. It can be improved by using recording devices and transcribing the digital files to include detailed field notes (Leung, 2015; Clark *et al.*, 2021; Cohen *et al.*, 2018). A pilot study (In, 2017) was conducted, and some minor amendments were done, for example, changes to some theoretical terms into easy understandable words in RQ and interview questions, reflecting reliability (Clark *et al.*, 2021; Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

Validity refers to the "appropriateness" of the instruments, procedures, and data, whether the research question is valid for the desired outcome, whether the methodology selected is appropriate for answering the research question, whether the design is valid for the methodology, whether the sampling and data analysis are valid, and whether the results and conclusions are valid for the sample and context (Leung, 2015; Clark *et al.*, 2021; Cohen *et al.*, 2018).

I am aware that triangulation is necessary for the validity of research, but due to the time limitation, I could not complete it as an undergraduate student. However, I might do it in my master's to make my future research valid. Therefore, I chose alternative criteria trustworthiness and used credibility, authenticity and conformability, to assess my research set out by Clark *et al.*, (2021).

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is gained by credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is a measure of the trustworthiness of qualitative research following the good practice, or whether the findings of the study are correct and precise. Authenticity is simply an assessment of the integrity of the document which refers to the extent to which researchers capture the diverse perspectives and values of study participants and promote change across participants and systems during analysis. Conformability refers to recognising personal bias and preventing personal values from influencing research findings (Leung, 2015; Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). However, all trustworthiness criteria may not be met due to time limitations, sensitiveness of the topic and limited sample among other factors.

## Chapter 4-Ethical Considerations

Regarding to educational research, the significance of ethics has grown continuously ; Haggerty (2004) refers to this growth as "ethics creep." Over time, ethics has become a highly regulated aspect of educational research, with governmental bodies, educational institutions, and those in the research sector shifting their focus to the ethical treatment of those who participate in research, as well as the requirement for high quality and valid results. In essence, ethics are a set of moral principles designed to prevent researchers from causing harm to those they study and following a code of ethics which ensures the integrity and credibility of research (UKRI,2023; Dickson-Swift, in Liamputtong, 2007). Moreover, it safeguards the researcher in case anything goes wrong (Carter, 2018; Brooks, Riele and Maguire, 2014). Ethical approval of my research was granted by UEL, and I have enhanced DBS.

### 4.1 Informed Consent (IC)

The principle of IC is an important principle for research across the social sciences and is addressed explicitly in ethical codes. It emphasizes the importance of gaining informed voluntary consent for all research involving human participants and articulates concerns about power relations in research relationships (Bruce, 2018). Westaway (2023) stated that IC offers protection to the powerless and can lead to more equal relationships between researcher and respondent. Crow *et al.*, (2006) suggest it can have a positive impact on data quality. Institutional pressures are also implicated, such as universities' need to protect themselves from legal consequences (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019).

I sought consent and explained to all participants the interview-related information over the phone, such as their right to withdraw consent anytime, voluntary participation, not obligated to answer all questions asked and explained again in person and distributed a consent form before starting. They were also informed of my status as a student at the UEL, my topic of study, the interview format, and what to expect, addressing my positionality and reflexivity (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019; Kellet, 2005). Participants were assumed to have signed the consent form understanding all this information (Bruce, 2018).

### 4.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Bassot (2020) emphasises the necessity of safe digital data throughout the research. I informed participants that the data would be saved in a secure cloud drive and erased after the research completion. In the IC form, I assured participants anonymity by using pseudonyms for their names and interviews conducted in a private room. This is crucial for assessing the inhibition risk of online communication like that used in this study. I reminded participants before the interview not to disclose children's identities to maintain their confidentiality and anonymity while preventing any bias within the study (Mukherji and Albon, 2018).

All data was saved in a safe Microsoft Cloud folder under my UEL account rather than mine. Moreover, my laptop is password protected. The data collected was coded using the participants' pseudonyms and saved in the same order as the interviews. This ensured that no participant data was misrepresented as the opinion of another. At the end of the investigation, all data, including consent forms, was erased from the one drive, and all hard copies were destroyed.

### 4.3 Power Relation (PR)

Before beginning a research study, the researcher must be aware of any potential power imbalances that may arise between themselves and the participants. As a mother of an autistic son, a sister of an autistic brother and a researcher at UEL, I reflected on the power disparity between my three roles. To mitigate this, I explained that participation is voluntary, no obligation to answer questions if feeling uncomfortable, right to withdraw participation anytime without explanation and I used a polite tone and avoided asking leading questions (Goodall, 2020; UCLA Library).

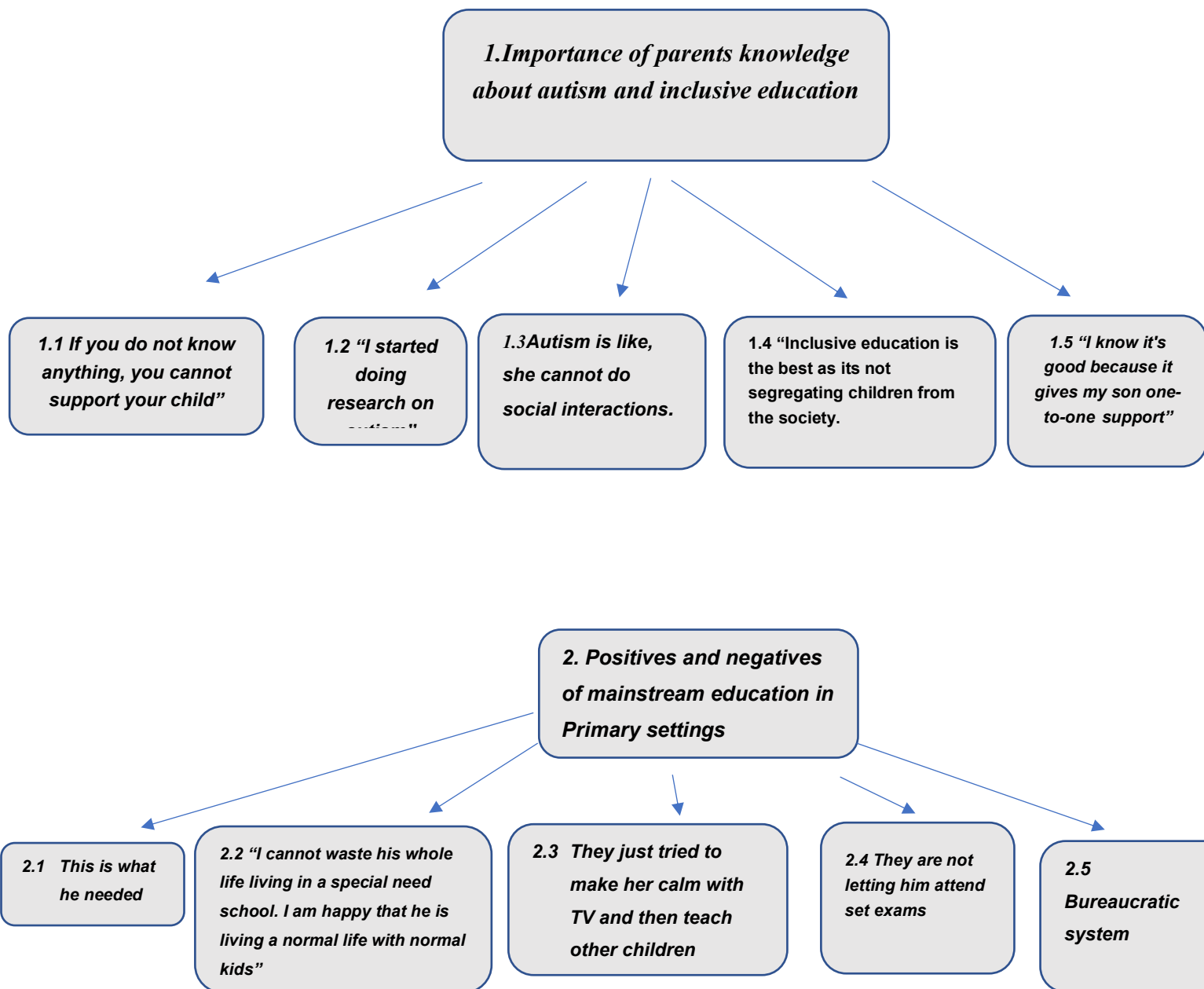
Another important ethical issue in PR is data ownership and management. According to Karnieli-Miller (cited in Brooks, te Riele, & Maguire, 2014), participants must understand their "enunciation of knowledge" when unexpected facts come from the study. My participants were asked again before data collection if they approved to their data being digitally recorded and retained until the study ended to ensure this.

Parents of AC may experience emotional outbursts when interviewed. For risk mitigation, interviews were undertaken in a quiet, private room, given extra time and moral support. Employing non-ableist terminology and their preferred manner to call their AC may show respect (Kenny *et al.*, 2016). Ableist language can distress autistic people and their families, pathologize autism, and produce discrimination (Bottema-Beutel *et al.*, 2021; Murphy, 2023). Moreover, parents may misinterpret the questions. To limit the risk, parents received extra guidance and time to analyse the RQs without prejudice. I was aware of misrepresentation, harm, discomfort, bias and misplaced loyalty. Additionally, the intention of the research was disclosed to participants, pseudonyms were used, and no misleading questions were asked; hence no deception was found (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019).

Having concluded my small-scale qualitative research in accordance with my ethical guidelines, the following chapter examines the findings using a neurodiversity lens and reflecting on the broader autism education in mainstream school's context enumerated in the literature review. This chapter will also examine potential data flaws and recommendations for additional research.

## Chapter 5-Findings and discussion (3 themes)

Research data was categorised according to each theme and subthemes and put under sections to answer the 3 main research questions following the order. Figure 4 depicts the three main themes and subthemes, which are numbered, presented in bold and italics, respectively below. There are also illustrative quotations provided.



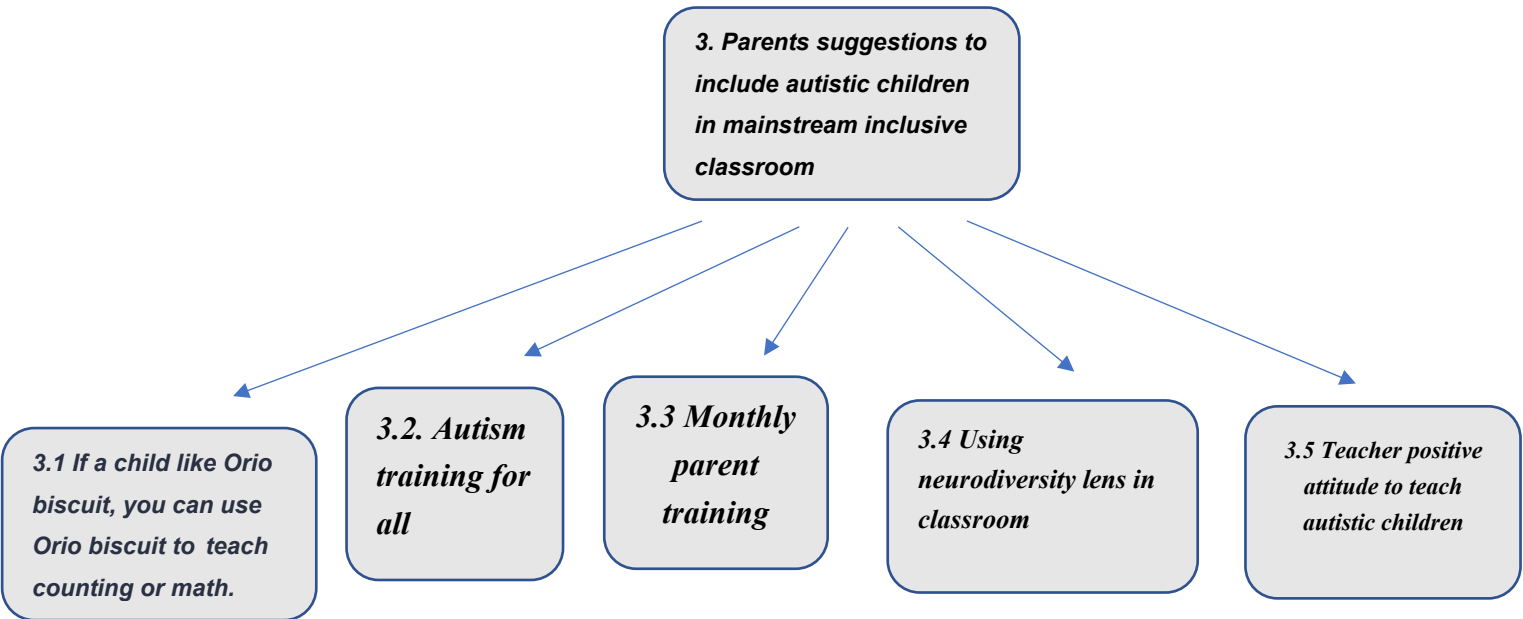


Figure 6 Research Themes & Subthemes (Croydon et al., 2019)

To answer the 1st research question (RQ), there was an analysis of the theme (1)

**The Importance of parents' knowledge about autism and inclusive education.**

Parents showed passion, knowledge and understanding about their children's development and doing the best in their power. They do believe that having positive views towards autism and better knowledge and understanding can have a significant impact on their children's educational development and vice-versa. For instance, some participants reported that;

*“I started doing research on autism, it's just that his brain is working differently, he is not disabled, he is learning but slowly” -Jack*

*“If you do not know anything, you cannot support your child”- Olivia*

Chaidi and Drigas (2020) argue that parents are co-therapists and can contribute information about their child's everyday life, growth, and course, participate actively in therapy, support the therapeutic-educational process, and advocate for their children's rights.

Table 3 Assessing participants knowledge about autism and IE

Participants Pseudonyms	Like mainstream primary schools over special need schools	Having knowledge about autism	Having Knowledge about IE	Have experience of both special school and IE in mainstream school	Mainstream or provision classroom	Have one-to-one TA	Reported bullying
Jack	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Provision	Yes	No
Adam	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Provision	Yes	No
Megan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Mainstream	No	No
Laura	Yes	Yes	No	No	Provision	Yes	No
Lisa	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Mainstream	Yes	Yes
Olivia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Mainstream	Yes	Yes
Emma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Provision	Yes	No
Percentage %	100%	Yes=100 % No=0 %	Yes=(n=6)86% No=(n=1)14 %	Yes=(n=1)14% No=(n=6)86 %	Provision=(n=4) 57% Mainstream=(n=3)43%	Yes=(n=6)86% No=(n=1)14%	Yes(n=2) =29% NO(n=5) =71%

86%(n=6) of participants had no experience with both special needs and PME. Only 14% (n=1) had experience of both and Emma mentioned, her son used to go to special need school and was developing, but at year three she moved him to mainstream provision school. She feels the necessity of him mixing up with regular children and building social relationships. Moreover, he is learning from his peers which is evident in Smith (2012) & Goodall (2015) reports. However, comparatively less support was available in MIEPS, such as less Speech and Language therapy (SALT). 29% reported peers bullied who attended mainstream classrooms with one-to-one TA support. Goodall (2015) also found bullying problems in mainstream schools.

Most participants have a basic understanding of IE. However, some knew it in different terminologies, like, provision school, special need section and satellite school. Some parents replied when asked about their knowledge and experience with IE,

*“Inclusive education is the best as its not segregating children from the society. ”-Olivia*

*“I know it's good because it gives my son one-to-one support”- Laura.*

Parents expressed that their social life is devastated, facing social stigma and depression, which can be linked with (Goodall, 2015;2020). Moreover, parents have different expectations from IE, for example, learning manners, getting independent, learning to read and write, basic life skills, making friends, living happy, healthy life, passing GCSE and getting a job in the future.

*“It is more important for him to learn day-to-day tasks” -Jack*

**To answer the 2<sup>nd</sup> RQ there was an investigation of *the theme* (2)**

*Positives and negatives of mainstream education in primary settings.*

Overall, all participants were overwhelmingly positive about IE and reported their happiness in being able to send their children to the neighbourhood schools, a sense of belonging; children are happy making friends and learning from mainstream peers. Some quotes as follows,

Emma said, *“I cannot waste his whole life living in a special need school. I am happy that he is living a normal life with normal kids”*

Jack said- *“This is what he needed”*



Smith (2012) & Crisman (2008) stated, AC can benefit from mainstream participation, as well as opportunities to learn from their peers for example, developing social skills (Reiter and Vitani, 2007) and having an advanced educational goal (Elder *et al.*, 2010; Lindsay *et al.*, 2013). AC exhibited less 'autistic' behaviour in the presence of mainstream children (Garrison-Harrell and Kamps, 1997) and learned coping skills for times of transition and changes (Elder *et al.*, 2010). However, masking is common for autistic people to fit in society and hide their true selves which can have a decremental impact on their well-being, such as depression and meltdown. Masking means the suppression of natural responses and adoption of alternatives in social contact, sensory experiences, movement, and behaviour. For example, AC's stimming or having intense interest helps them regulate their senses (Pearson and Rose, 2021; Attwood, 2007; Hull *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, participants reported struggling to get support at MIEPS. For example, lack of SEND-trained school staff, resources, and funding, waiting for one-to-one TA, Speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, not understanding children's needs, delayed EHCP, parents' voice not being heard, putting children in lower expectations, and lack of parent-school collaborative work. Hellewell (2018) and Sproston, Sedgewick and Crane (2017) found similar issues. The 29 % of participants reported having no EHCP and waiting for an autism diagnosis (Table 1), which proves that without a diagnosis, there is no EHCP even when the child has persistent symptoms of autism, which is discussed in Chapter -2.3.

Moreover, *Emma complained- "School has lower expectations for him, but he can do much better than that"*

Perhaps this explains why Howlin (2005) stresses how AC's academic outcomes fall short of their IQ (Goodall, 2015).

Participants complained about the ambiguity of SEND local offer, bureaucratic system, conflict with schools and teachers perceive AC as a problem and obstacle to other children's learning which is also evident in Goodall (2015).

*"When she cries, they do not try to engage her in school activities. They just tried to make her calm with TV and then teach other children"- Olivia*

Moreover, parents reported some teachers attitude toward autism is still negative and do not have empathy for them and mainstream peers and their parents have less awareness about autism. That can be linked to the double empathy problem (Crompton *et al.*, 2021; Milton, 2012; Baron-Cohen, 2009; Rose, 2021) which is discussed in chapter 2.4. Therefore, school should use LEANS that will discuss in the next theme.

To answer the 3<sup>rd</sup> RQ, there was an analysis of the theme (3)

## **Parents' suggestions to include autistic children in mainstream classroom.**

Some parents reported they have hired private special needs tutors and SALT at home. All parents said their children are developing in MIEPS, however some have slow or very slow development. Parents mentioned the importance of personalised learning system which is a dynamic, collaborative, and student-cantered process that aims to provide all students with high-quality, individualised education which can be linked to (Sharma & Salend, 2018) findings. Parents also mentioned that classroom environment can impact on academic performance and attentional patterns of AC that linked to the report of Banire *et al.*, (2021). Parents emphasised on paying attention to their children's interest and using those visual prompts in their learning which was working for them. Lee *et al.*, (2020) found that parents see a better future in strength-based education for their AC. Some quotes from data.

*"If a child like Orio biscuit, you can use Orio biscuit to teach counting or math"-Jack*

*"We used power ranger sticker to teach him counting"-Emma*

This can be linked to "Monotropism" an interest theory for autism which can be used as a motivator for learning. Participants reported that Interest-based learning is beneficial for AE which is evident in Murray (2018) Wood (2021) & Grove *et al.*,(2018). Therefore, teachers need information from parents to understand learners' interests and strengths and observe the learner's performance in various activities (AET,2021).

However, AC can be seen as inattentive in classroom activity due to their hyper-focused nature. They may show symptoms like aggression, discomfort, meltdown if not given enough time to return from their attention tunnel and process their sensory regulation (Murray, Lesser and Lawson, 2005). Hence, teachers must recognize Monotropism as a positive conception of autism because most AC engage in more specific interest activities than previously thought. They were also associated with subjective well-being and life domain satisfaction, as their interests are honoured (Grove *et al.*, 2018).

Parents described the necessity of parental training and guidance and suggested autism information sector, school-parent collaborative work, monthly training on classroom activities and information about lunchtime as diet is equally vital for children. They want to know if their children are eating correctly. AC often have restrictive eating disorders (Inoue *et al.*, 2021) that may affect their development. Then school can create a personalised plan with the help of parent's information's about children which will be used both at school and home. Some suggested not to put children in lower expectations but instead putting effort into understanding their level.

*“You need to have patience to understand what she wants”- Lisa*

To create autism friendly schools, it is necessary to recognise that children respond differently to the curriculum depending on their current social and sensory surroundings (Goodall, 2015). Parents suggested using personalised unconventional techniques to teach children and reported various needs of their children and strategies to meet those, For example, sensory needs, emotional support, quiet area to work, additional time with one-to-one backing after class, giving frequent breaks for movement opportunities to regulate their sensory needs, praise, and using a reward system, for example, letting them play with water and favourite toys.

*“My daughter likes water. If I teel her I will let you play with water, she will do anything”- Olivia*

*“If you praise him, he feels motivated to finish the activity”-Adam*

Consequently, teachers need to understand 4 board areas of SEND(DfE,2015) to understand children and use unconventional methods to teach them effectively, such as speaking slowly and putting pause and pace, avoiding ambiguous language, idioms, physical touching, and making instruction short and concise, giving extra time, not asking two questions, making it personal, such as "Liam, please come to the classroom now," and expressions of time, such as, instead of saying speak to you later, say we will discuss this on Tuesday morning (Gaynor, Alevizos and Butler,2020). All school staff should understand double empathy problem to create a conducive environment to learn (Rose,2022; Baron-Cohen Leslie & Frith,1985).

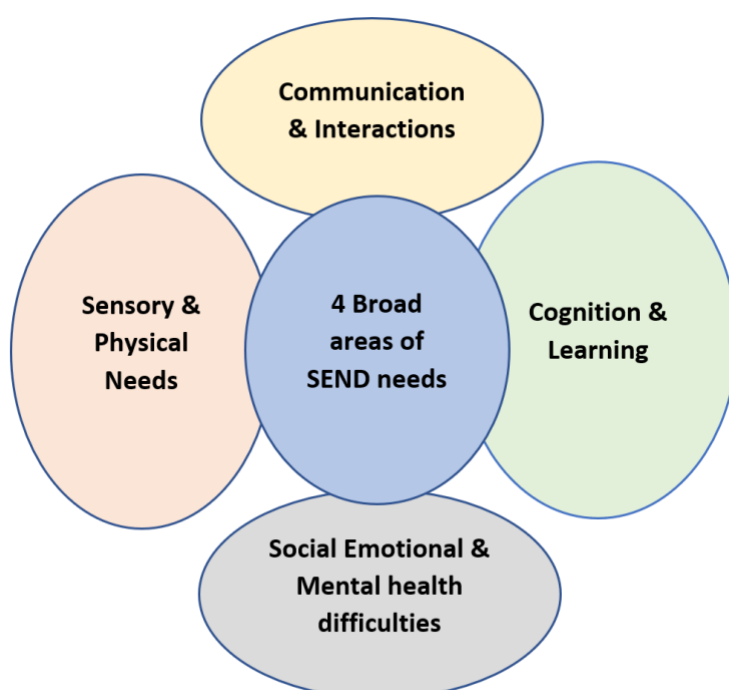


Figure 7, 4 Broad Areas of SEND Needs (DfE,2015)

Parents' concern about teachers' need to understand children's need can be linked to LEANS 4.3, educators must recognise students' different "needs" and "wants" in the classroom and see this from a neurodiversity lens. People do not choose their needs, which may be visible, such as the need for spectacles, or invisible, such as the need for a quiet place to work. Schools frequently plan classroom activities to suit neurotypical students, so allistic students may not need to think about their requirements in the classroom (The University of Edinburgh, 2022).

In contrast, the same procedure may not meet the needs of neurodivergent students, who may require alternative methods, such as one-on-one TA. The "wants" of students are distinct from their "needs," and "needs" are more important than "wants" because they enable students to access the learning. However, it can be difficult for teachers to identify these needs, and frequently autistic students have contradictory requirements, such as one child requiring a quiet space to learn while another requires body movement intervals. Therefore, teachers should do their best and may need to make concessions (U E, 2022).

*Jack said- "He needs frequent breaks and hugs during homework".*

Parents concern about AC's diverse need can be linked to LEANS 5.3, fairness in the classroom does not entail providing equal support and time to all students regardless of their requirements. Instead, it involves providing what people need or equity to make learning accessible. Fairness refers to teachers' positive attitudes towards neurodiversity, identifying and equipping children with diverse needs, such as providing additional support and lesson time to children who require it (U E, 2022).

Cutting cited in (NAS, 2022), teachers can overcome barriers to inclusion of AE by: getting to know the pupil's needs, collaborating with the autistic pupil, parents, and other professionals, addressing issues related to stress and anxiety, making reasonable adjustments to school policies and practises in accordance with the Equality Act of (2010). Similarly, The Warnock Report (1978) emphasises the importance of a child-centered pedagogy in inclusive classrooms (IC). Therefore, teachers must raise awareness of autism among all school personnel and students, implement UDL (Zehner, Chen and Aladsani, 2017) and receive cultural diversity training to understand and respect different cultural norms and standards in order to create a truly IC (Civitillo, Juang, & Schachner, 2018). Students in diverse classrooms demonstrated the highest levels of active thinking, intellectual engagement, motivation, and academic skill (Gurin *et al.*, 2002).

To link the parents' concerns about children sensory needs, teachers need to know about the eight senses, however most people are familiar with the five senses, but there are three others: proprioception, vestibular system, and interception (Education Scotland, 2019; see glossary). AC may be hypersensitive to many things (ES, 2019). Therefore, the first step for teachers is

to recognise their needs and ensure their comfort in order to prevent, support, and effectively manage meltdowns (ES, 2019) and practice UDL as this framework can be adapted and used to promote effective learning in all learners in a classroom (CAST, 2023). Goodall (2015) also emphasised on UDL to create autism-friendly schools. A school environment with a high sensory impact can make it impossible for AC to concentrate. As a result, it may cause distress, lower academic achievement, and highly exclusionary meltdowns, as evidenced by examples, curriculum exclusions, and classroom activities (Wood, 2019).

Parents reported using Makaton and sign language to communicate with their children and those methods are working on the children.

*“My son’s private speech therapist gave us pictures to communicate with him, she showed us how to use it and make him talk”-Jack*

In addition to sensory inputs, teachers need to provide students with the communication tools necessary to comprehend them. AC struggle to process language and frequently experience emotional meltdowns due to a lack of dependable tools of expression (Donaldson *et al.*, 2010). Every child has the right to education and freedom of expression (Children and Family Act, 2014; UNICEF, articles 13 and 28, 2022).

If children are provided with appropriate communication tools, such as AAC tools and devices, it may reduce their meltdowns (Donaldson *et al.*, 2021). However, this approach is associated with misconceptions such as, speech development will not occur when AAC is used and AAC should be implemented at a certain age. There is no scientific evidence to support these falsehoods (Ronski and Sevcik, 2005). Therefore, Neurodiversity lens is essential in early childhood policy and practice to understand AC better and promote a positive learning experience (Conkbayir, 2021; Murphy, 2023).

Most parents reported positive spiritual perspectives towards autism that can be seen as a coping mechanism of mental stress associated with autism. Jegatheesan *et al.* (2010) also found a similar report in their research.

*“Allah made him like this, I love my son.”-Megan*

### Dimond ranking activity

Seven parents were asked to answer questions by arranging the nine topics; the most important ones are at the top and the least important at the bottom (Clark, 2012).

Q. What is most important to include autistic children in the mainstream primary classroom?

The following four topics were most important for parents to include AC in MIEPS. (Appendix 3).

Table 4 Diamond Ranking Result

Ranking	Top 4 topics	Percentage
1	Interest -based learning	29% (n=2)
2	School -parent communication	29% (n=2)
3	Understanding children	29% (n=2)
4	Implementing UDL	14% (n=1)

This report answered the three RQs by reflecting the parent's comments and suggestions in the quotes.

## Chapter 6-Conclusion

Following the study's findings and discussion, this chapter concludes the research by highlighting the key findings. The chapter pays close attention to the research aim and questions, as well as the importance of the collected data. The study also examines how the data could be used for future research opportunities and the limitations that surfaced during the course of the investigation in an effort to advance future research that extended existing knowledge in the academic field.

Participants strongly believe that their AC should attend MIEPS and not segregated from the society. Children are learning from peers, socializing and developing in MIEPS. However, they reported challenges getting individual support and provide suggestions. The key findings of my study are understanding double empathy problem, personalised support plan, ATA, school-parent collaboration, implementing LEANS and monotropism to reduce those challenges in MIEPS. Moreover, parents provided personalised ideas to keep children motivated in mainstream classrooms, opinions for coping mechanism with diverse sensory needs and social stigma was significantly remarkable.

It is presumed that the information gathered during this investigation is accurate and provided voluntarily by the participants. However, all families are from South Asian background and all AC are going to MS in East London area and there is a possibility of parents from different ethnic background, locations having different experiences and opinions, which is not covered in this study. I can refer to it as a limitation of snow balling sampling techniques that is discussed in methodology chapter.

Moreover, the study's lack of sufficient male participants is a limitation because both father and mother play important roles in AC's education. The initial idea was to investigate both parents from diverse communities. However, due to the time limitation and scope, some fathers and mothers were chosen from different families of the same community as it was more accessible for me, being an undergraduate student. Furthermore, it is relatively a small-scale study and results may vary if research conducted in larger scale in different areas with diverse demographics.

Nevertheless, this is primary qualitative research on a small scale and the research aim was achieved. All seven participants actively answered my enquiries and completed the diamond ranking, which answered my main research questions using the TDA measure.

The poor arrangement of interviews compromised data quality. If similar research is done in the future, interviewing both parents with a larger sample size from different socio-economic backgrounds and keeping a good time gap between interviews may improve data quality and provide better understanding of the research topic since both parents play a vital role in their AC development. Additionally, parent's gender, identity, and social status could influence their perceptions and experiences.

Finally, my perception towards MIEPS for AC was quite negative being a mother and a sister of autistic persons facing many challenges. However, my findings surprisingly changed my view and seeing the positive sides of it. My recommendation for future research is to concentrate on AC experience in IE alongside parents, as it is essential to understand their voice for better which is evident in Gillespie-Smith *et al.*, (2021) report.

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## List of Glossary

Alter program- Occupational therapists teach that self-regulation is the ability to change how alert people feel. In the Alert Program<sup>®</sup>, we tell children and their parents, “your body is like a car engine, sometimes it runs on high, sometimes it runs on low, and sometimes it runs just right.”

Allistic- Not autistic

ACER- Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER) researched by University of Birmingham.

Monotropism- A tendency to concentrate deeply on an activity to the exclusion of other inputs as well as unwanted, repetitive behaviour and speech. It is a common characteristic of autism (Wood, 2021).

Eight senses- eyesight, hearing, taste, touch, smell and 3 additional senses are,

Proprioception: Body position, an awareness of body in space, meaning the sensories in body muscles, joints and where the body touches, like body touches the floor.

Vestibular system: The movement, the potential impacts on sense of balance, for example, balance organ dip inside people's ears.

Interoception: The sense of the internal body e.g., hunger, thirst, emotions like pain or illness, need to go toilet or sleep. (Education Scotland ,2019).

SENCO- SENCOs, who must be a qualified teacher in mainstream schools, oversee the strategic development of SEN policy and provision and as such is advised to form part of the leadership team. In addition, they ensure the implementation of the SEN policy on a day-to-day basis (NASEN,2020).

Sensory Input- Anything that help regulate sensory needs, like, quiet room, soothing light, soft toys, stress balls, jumping rope, bouncing a ball, trampoline, weighted blankets and fidget toys.

Reflexivity -Reflexivity is the undertaking by researchers to reflect on the process of research in order to consider how our decisions may shape our research findings. It is a "tool" that can be used to perceive and evaluate the political, social, and personal context within which research is conducted (Clark *et al.*,2019, p.54 ).

SEND code of practice 2015- The SEND Code of Practice is statutory guidance for organisations that work with and support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It is a set of guidelines that the DfE says local authorities and schools should follow.

## Acronyms

AS-Autistic Student

AE-Autism Education

AC-Autistic Children

ASD-Autism Spectrum Disorder

AAC - Augmentative and Alternative Communication are a range of strategies and tools to help people who struggle with speech.

AET-Autism Education Trust

ATA-Autism training for all

CYP- Children and young people

DSM-5-Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fifth edition

EHC-Education and Health Care

EHCP-Education & Health Care Plan

ES-Education Scotland

IC-Inform Consent

IE-Inclusive Education

IEP- Individual education plan

LEANS - Learning About Neurodiversity at School.

MMD- Medical model of disability

MS-Mainstream School

ME-Mainstream Education

MIE-Mainstream inclusive education

MIEPS-Mainstream inclusive education in primary settings

NAS -National Autistic Society

OC-Occupational Therapist

PE- physical exercise

PME- Primary Mainstream Education

RQ-Research Questions

SMD- Social model of disability

SENCO- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

SEND-Special Educational Need & Disabilities

SALT- Speech and Language Therapist

TDA- Thematic data analysis

TA- Teaching assistance

U E- University of Edinburgh

U E-The University of Edinburgh

UDL-Universal design of Learning

WHO-World Health Organisation





# **THE IMPACT OF PUPIL PREMIUM ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR CHILDREN FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS**

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to critically examine the impact of pupil premium on educational achievements. The research investigates the use of pupil premium by schools to address the educational achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. Furthermore, it will examine the impact of the pupil premium on children's educational performance and the effectiveness of the policy in narrowing the achievement gap. This study will also identify the challenges schools and headteachers face in using the pupil premium and establish strategies to support disadvantaged children. The research question includes how schools use pupil premium to address underachievement, the challenges of the policy in tackling underachievement, and how effective the policy is in narrowing the achievement gap.

The findings suggest that the policy has not effectively closed the educational achievement gap between the two groups of children. The research emphasises the need for a more targeted approach to addressing educational underachievement, focusing on individual school circumstances and the specific needs of disadvantaged children. Further research is needed to identify the most effective strategies for using the pupil premium and to provide more support to schools to employ targeted strategies to assist SEND pupils' learning. Policymakers should consider allocating the pupil premium based on schools' individual circumstances and need to implement tailored strategies that address barriers to learning.

**Keywords:** pupil premium, free school meals (FSM), disadvantaged children, underachievement, social class, special educational needs and disability (SEND)

## Introduction

The Coalition Government introduced the pupil premium in 2011 to address the educational achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, primarily based on FSM registration (Gorard, 2022 a). However, several policies were implemented before the pupil premium to address educational underachievement among disadvantaged children. These policies included the Education Action Zone in 1998, Excellence in Cities and the Challenge for London (Reid and Brain, 2003; West, 2009; Ofsted, 2010). These policies aimed to modernise education, address educational inequalities in areas of social deprivation and improve results in low-performing secondary schools.

This literature will investigate the use of pupil premium by schools and how it supports children's educational progress by answering the research questions. Furthermore, this is achieved through interrogating the primary literature of the principal authors in the field, such as Gorard, Siddiqui and See, and Demie. Additionally, it identifies the challenges schools and headteachers face in using the pupil premium to establish strategies that support disadvantaged children to enhance their educational achievements (Barrett, 2018; Morris and Dobson, 2020). Consequently, this is carried out by analysing the impact of pupil premium on children's educational performance and its effectiveness in narrowing the educational achievement gap (Allan, 2018 a., b; Gorard, 2022 b). The pupil premium is meant to address the educational underachievement of disadvantaged children; however, literature has shown that the educational achievement gap is widening (Copeland, 2019; Demie, 2023).

Additionally, since I found a disparity in educational achievement between those from deprived backgrounds and affluent peers with academic achievement. I chose to research pupil premiums to deepen my understanding of the topic. As someone who aspires to be a future educator, I would like to extend my understanding of this topic to support students' achievement. This research is essential to assess the use of pupil premium and the effective strategies the school leaders applied that helped improve disadvantaged pupils' educational outcomes. Gorard, Siddiqui, and Huat See (2021 a) illustrate that pupil premium is allocated to the schools based on children's FSM eligibility. Additionally, there are pupils living in poverty and not registered for FSM resulting in fewer funds for schools. Morris and Dobson (2021) argue that pupil premium spending falls under the school leaders' accountability, affecting the way policy is implemented.

This research will reinterrogate policy about the existing literature to inform my future practice. Furthermore, it contributes to the study area by informing future students who will read this research regarding pupil premium. Moreover, it can benefit trainee teachers, teachers and managers to gain further understanding of how the pupil premium was used and the challenges that leadership came across in implementing the policy. This research aims to critically examine the impact of pupil premium on educational achievements.

It aims to answer the following question:

1. How do schools use pupil premium to address underachievement?
2. What are the challenges of the pupil premium in tackling underachievement?
3. How effective is pupil premium in narrowing the achievement gap?

This research expects to suggest improvements in how the pupil premium policy, school leaders and practitioners utilise funds to address the underachievement of disadvantaged children; this will be done through a non-empirical research perspective. Moreover, I will concentrate on answering the question at hand, critically analysing the information, and not letting my bias influence the way I analyse my finding.

## Methods of literature review

This dissertation is an extended literature review exploring the impact of pupil premium on the educational achievement of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The literature review is defined as using already existing data gathered for a different purpose to answer a new question; this requires reading the literature available to ensure a good knowledge of the issues in the area of research (Carter, 2018; Manu and Akotia, 2021). Even though there has been robust research on pupil premium exploring different aspects of it in an educational context, as the topic was chosen and research started, it emerged that spending the grant between different pupil clusters is challenging for educational institutions. Furthermore, the preliminary literature review on pupil premium reinforces the topic's significance and understanding the use of the grant is essential for this dissertation (Gorard, Siddique and See, 2021 a; Gorard, 2022 a). Therefore, interrogating existing data to answer the question of a sensitive topic such as pupil premium and children's achievement is the most appropriate in this case.

Although a possible limitation is that data can be outdated and contextualised to answer a specific question. However, the strength is inobtrusive research that enhances critical thinking by analysing existing data to generate an answer to the new question using statistical data previously gathered (Largan and Morris, 2019). This research will be done through a thematic analysis by purposefully evaluating the data gathered by theme and relevance to the research question initiating codes, and incorporating theoretical concepts (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). Database and search engines such as UEL library, Google Scholar, Education Resources Information (ERIC), Science Direct, EBSCO, Taylor, and Francis were essential in the acquisition of relevant literature.

Furthermore, data were collected through Governmental documents, the Office of National Statistics, and policies in order to answer the questions (Ridley, 2012; Carter, 2019). Moreover, getting resources from British Library, such as primary research journals as well as books, ensures that the literature analysed comes from a wide range of sources. Likewise, verifying the end of the journals I am analysing in order to gather further references (Smith, 2008; Largan and Morris, 2019). The data gathered will be arranged into themes, colour coding each with a different colour to see the connection between them, providing an in-depth analysis of the findings. Furthermore, the data was structured into categories based on the three research questions with more than one theme per each question; however, some of the journals might overlap between questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

The data selected for my research will be done by using keywords such as pupil premium, FMS, disadvantaged children, underachievement, and social class to have relevant data and narrow the search (Smith, 2008). Moreover, the key authors used in the research are Gorard, Reay, Barrett, Kay and Ball. However, having a plethora of journals was challenging, so the data was selected in order to generate an answer to the research question. Therefore, some of the journals which informed my understanding of the topic had to be removed after the themes emerged (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019; Largan and Morris, 2019).

In research, the credibility of the data is essential to have accurate literature and analyses of the results (Thomas, 2017). Likewise, examining the data for quality and credibility by checking the research's relevance and accuracy in asking how, where, why, etc. questions (Largan and Morris, 2019). As a result, I will check all my sources to be peer-reviewed, ensuring credibility. Consequently, supporting critical reading by evaluating the data for keywords, colour coding each section, making notes on the journal, synthesising the main points, and analysing the data. Additionally, reviewing the reading in order to identify contradictions, agreements or disagreements to support my arguments (Clark, Foster and Foster, 2019). The journals I read were printed and saved in a file on the computer coded by themes. Also, the governmental documents were downloaded and saved in a separate folder on my computer. In addition, when analysing the data, notes were kept on a notepad and highlighted with different colours for each theme so results could be structured. Additionally, keeping the computer table with notes structured by themes to have a visual perspective when analysing the data (Largan and Morris, 2019).

The theoretical positioning in research can be defined as the position a researcher adopts when undertaking research and how this is shaped by their identity (Holmes, 2020). I sourced literature from a broad range of academic platforms as well as the governmental website, narrowing my search by the topic I was researching. Additionally, the data analysis was with participants from diverse backgrounds ensuring listening to all voices, such as headteachers, practitioners, and parents, developing a critical viewpoint. At the same time, being reflexive on how my working-class background motivated the choice of topic and impacted the way data was analysed (Holmes, 2020, Shepherd, Noble and Parkin, 2022). Moreover, reflexivity is how the beliefs and values of the researcher can affect objectivity in interpreting the results.

Therefore, when evaluating the data, I focused on the question that needs to be answered, looking from a critical perspective at both sides of the argument, such as the pro and cons (Ridley, 2012). Subsequently, I will structure my literature review through the theory of class by examining how different social classes shape educational outcomes and reproduce inequalities (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, 2002). This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which suggests that an individual's social class influences the type of capital they possess, such as skills, attitudes and knowledge (Eden, 2017, Smith, 2018).

Reflexivity is an essential part of the research in understanding how the data found can be influenced by the decision we make when looking for information (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, Olmos – Vegas et al., 2023). Throughout conducting my own literature review, I learned to select data according to my research topic and apply previous knowledge to analyse the findings. Likewise, choosing authors that substantially contribute to the area of study so I can expand my references and have pertinent data for the research (Largan and Morris, 2019). At the same time employing critical analyses and apply critical thinking in synthesising data from diverse sources through effective communication of the research findings. Additionally, implementing a plan to manage the time and keep the research to the schedule (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). For instance, allocating specific days and times to conduct the research and analyse the findings. Carrying out this research offered a more profound understanding of how resources are distributed to improve disadvantaged children's achievements and their school experience as a whole.



Every research has its limitation, and acknowledging this offers transparency to the study and creates an opportunity for further research to take place (Largan and Morris, 2019). Through undertaking this research, one of the limitations of the use of pupil premium is that it depends on the socio-economic status of the children and the strategies used by the institution to apply effective teaching practices. Due to these factors, it was challenging to generalise findings. However, I could make pertinent points to answer the research questions by applying critical thinking and analysing the data gathered through diverse sources (Carter, 2019). Furthermore, being such a broad topic, most of the studies about this research were on the pupil from a disadvantaged background; however, there is not enough data about SEN children and how resources are distributed to enhance their education. Given the lack of data on SEN children, it is essential that more research is carried out on their education experiences to improve practice. When answering the questions, one of the limitations was finding resources on the challenges of the pupil premium in tackling underachievement. This was overcome by rephrasing the keywords and searching through a variety of sources, including governmental documents (Carter, 2019).

## Literature review

This literature review will reflect the way in which arguments are developed linking to the themes of FSM, disadvantaged pupils, social class and educational underachievement. This literature review aims to investigate the effectiveness of the pupil premium in addressing the achievement gap. It will analyse the existing secondary research on the use of pupil premiums and what strategies were implemented in schools. Furthermore, considering the challenges of the policy in tackling the achievement gap. Finally, the findings of this literature will contribute to a deeper understanding of the pupil premium policies and what steps need to be implemented to improve the support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The literature review will be structured into three parts, with each section answering one of the research questions.

### The use of Pupil Premium to address educational underachievement

The Pupil Premium policy was introduced in 2011 by the Labour government in order to narrow the attainment gap, which was among disadvantaged children. According to National Audit Office (2015), cited in Copeland (2019), a child is considered disadvantaged if they are qualified for FSM or looked after by the local authorities. Furthermore, the new definition of disadvantage refers to any child recipient of FSMs in the last six years; any pupil in the care of local authority or is from a serving family (Julius and Glosch, 2022; Gorard, 2022a). However, for this assignment, I will concentrate on the disadvantaged pupils entitled to FSMs. Pupil premium is assessed based on children's registration for FSM funded to all mainstream schools (Craske, 2018; Brown, 2021; Riordan, 2022). The main concern for the fund is to address educational underachievement aiming to provide additional funds to schools to narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and affluent peers (Gov. UK, 2022).

Moreover, when introduced, the pupil premium was used to maintain the existing provision, for instance, an additional one-to-one intervention, without significantly impacting the progress of the target students (Hutchinson and Dunford, 2016). Furthermore, schools concentrate on spending the funds to improve children's outcomes by providing resources and activities which enhance pupils' social and cultural capital. Additionally, this can be developed by creating opportunities beyond classroom learning through trips and diverse activities that offer intellectual growth and engage children socially (Burn et al., 2016; Allan et al., 2021). Moreover, introduce programs for attendance, behaviour, personal development, parental involvement etc. (Gorard, Siddiqui, and See 2021 a). This aligns with Bourdieu's view that middle-class parents have the finances to provide children with broader life experiences to enhance their cultural capital (Smyth and Wrigley, 2013).

Pupil Premium should be 'closing the gap'; however, it only reproduces inequality and is widening the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers (Copeland, 2018). Furthermore, the most deprived schools had the highest funds cut, with a 14% decrease compared with 9% in better-off schools (Sibieta, 2021). Consequently, 33% of school leaders reporting use the funds to subsidise the cuts in the general budget, such as paying for teacher assistance and

equipment (The Sutton Trust, 2022). As a result, this can have a detrimental impact on disadvantaged pupils in need of extra support to increase their educational outcomes and undermine the purpose of the pupil premium (Gorard, Siddiqui, and See, 2021 a; Siddiqui and Gorard, 2022). Pupil Premium grant was used differently depending on each school and their understanding of the student's need for support, such as individual or small group tuition on literacy and math or whole school enrichment programs (Burn et al., 2016).

Although practitioners acknowledge that children on pupil premium face different difficulties, such as caring responsibility, the blame is put on parental attitude and their value of education which does not motivate students (Burn et al., 2016; Gorard, Siddiqui, See, 2021 a). Further analyses of pupil premium reveal that quality first teaching (QFT) will best support children from disadvantaged backgrounds even though it has not been clarified the strategies implemented to sustain their learning (Riordan, 2021). Even so, out of 285 schools, only seven had personalised teaching and small group intervention. This demonstrates that OFT disproportionately affects pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds compared with their prosperous peers, who have access to more resources that compensate for poor-quality teaching (Riordan, 2021).

Therefore, the high expectation for all children, irrespective of their background, is essential in raising attainments, not only in closing the gap between disadvantaged children and their counterparts (Copeland, 2018). Subsequently, some schools use the grant to subsidise pupils' uniforms and school trips to support children in building their cultural capital (Burn et al., 2016). Even though the pupil premium purpose is to raise educational achievements for disadvantaged pupils is not awarded based on academic achievements (DfE, 2022 a). Although FSM is widely used as a measure of poverty, numerous studies have raised concerns about its effectiveness as a proxy for poverty. One of the primary limitations of this measure is that it fails to capture children who are experiencing deprivation but are not eligible for additional support through FSM (Taylor, 2018; Morris and Dobson, 2021).

However, it is still linked to the pupil premium policy, which has been used as an overall strategy to address educational outcomes (Gordan, 2022 a). However, accountability is left in the hand of the school leaders in implementing the right strategies to close the attainment gap (Morris and Dobson, 2021). Nevertheless, the pupil premium depends on families registering students for FSM in order for schools to receive the funds. Considering the stigmatisation aimed at the children on FSM, parents are reluctant to disclose their economic status (Abbott, Middlewood and Robinson, 2015). Although academies are state-funded schools, they have more funds and flexibility in using them, as will be further developed in the following section.

Academies are publicly funded schools which belong to a not-for-profit independent trust with no obligation to follow the state education policy in the same manner as the state-funded schools (National Audit Office, 2018; West and Wolfe, 2019; Yaghi, 2021). However, they are still expected to offer an equilibrated and comprehensive curriculum focusing on at least one area of the curriculum, for instance, English and science (West and Wolfe, 2019). Since pupil premium policies have been implemented, academies have had a higher intake of pupil recipients of the grant (DfE, 2016; Yaghi, 2021). Furthermore, academies have higher funds per pupil than state schools due to the different contributors. They also receive funding from Pupil Premiums, which can subsidise improving their educational outcomes, for instance, enrichment programs (Reay, 2017; Ehren and Perryman, 2018; Yaghi, 2021).

Furthermore, besides emphasising English and maths focus groups for some pupils, the grant is used beyond the classroom to provide pupils with broader life experiences. Such as sailing, and theatrical performances, to develop children's self-confidence (Hutchinson and Dunford, 2016). Moreover, academies receive funds directly from the central government compared with mainstream schools, which have to go through local authorities to access their funds (Ehren and Perryman, 2018). The academies have more freedom in spending their pupil premium grant compared with the mainstream provision, which they are more constrained with their finances; therefore, their pupils could progress faster (Gorard, 2014). The government's responsibility has changed from the state to the private sector since schools were converted into academies (Keddie, 2019; Ofsted, 2019). Therefore, the responsibility rests with individual trust to raise their attainments gap and implement appropriate policies to have results (DfE, 2016; Keddie, 2019; Ofsted, 2019).

Educational outcomes for children known as disadvantaged performed better in academies compared with mainstream schools (Gorard, 2014; DfE, 2016; Andrew and Perera, 2017). Even though the performance for these students is higher in academies, it is an apparent disparity in performance between the pupil premium qualified children and the ones non-eligible, with a gap of 22.1% in 2019 increasing to 27.6% in 2021 (Education Policy Institute, 2022). However, the funding for Pupil Premium does not have to be used only on the eligible pupils; this is an entrenched inequality considering that the policy was implemented to close the attainments gap of disadvantaged pupils (DfE, 2022 a). This reproduces the upper classes in a position of influence because they have the means to support their children's education (Jones, 2020). The subsequent section will analyse how the pupil premium is used to support SEND pupils.

As mentioned above, the pupil premium is evaluated based on children's FSM eligibility and funded to all mainstream schools (Forest and Long, 2017). The children who are long-term, permanently disadvantaged, and are entitled to FSM are twice more likely to be recorded as having SEND (DfE, 2019 a; Gorard, Siddiqui, See, 2021 a). This means that the schools which receive the Pupil Premium should use the grant to support the learning and emotional development of children with SENDs (Butt and Ratti, 2020). However, it is challenging to find enough studies that specify how the pupil premium is used to support children with SEND and their education. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the OFT initiative was implemented to support disadvantaged children in raising school performance, but it plays a different role when it comes to SEND pupils, which is used to ensure that children stay in the classroom (Riordan, 2022).

Moreover, children with SEND have disproportionately lower educational attainments than their peers. Likewise, this demonstrates the need to use Pupil Premium for additional support in order for SEND pupils to access learning (Andrew, Robinson and Hutchinson, 2017). Moreover, due to schools already receiving extra funding for SEND students are not explicitly focused on the Pupil Premium. These funds are supposed to assist children who face long-term challenges in accessing the national curriculum. Nevertheless, the SEND funds are mainly attached to the individual and their specific needs. In contrast, the Pupil Premium grant does not have to be spent on eligible children (Gorard, Siddiqui and See, 2021 a).

Carpenter et al. (2013) state that they are additional facilities for children with SEND, but it is primarily implemented in schools with a higher percentage of pupils with additional needs than those with low SEND pupils. This can include specialist services, extra members of staff or parental support. Furthermore, SEND children to spend the majority of time on intervention outside of the classroom, missing significant amounts of the curriculum and depending on teaching assistance (TA). This highlights the importance of spending a certain proportion of the Pupil Premium grant on training TAs to acquire subject and curriculum knowledge to support SEND pupils' particular needs (Ofsted, 2021).

### **Challenges in using the pupil premium to tackle educational underachievement**

Schools welcomed the initiative of pupil premium to support disadvantaged children registering for FSM to narrow the attainments gap. However, evidence indicated challenges in spending the grant to address educational underachievement (Barrett, 2018; Morris and Dobson, 2021). School headteachers are under pressure from Ofsted to demonstrate performance, and therefore their distribution of funding often prioritises short-term strategies aimed at achieving immediate improvements in results rather than focusing on long-term goals (Morris and Dobson, 2021). In addition, schools with a high intake of children eligible for the grant have difficulty distinguishing the best approach to improve educational underachievement, manage behaviour, support families or on academic intervention (Morris and Dobson, 2021). Moreover, the pupil premium initiative comes with numerous challenges in allocating the funds best and if it is any strategy to improve outcomes for all disadvantaged pupils as it is not "one size fits all" (Rampton, 2014).

Furthermore, allocating pupil premiums is difficult for school leaders to distribute the funds between children who identify as FSM and not entitle to FSM but come from equally disadvantaged homes (Gorard, 2022 a). The headteacher of the schools is facing a dilemma between adhering to moral principles and fulfilling legal obligations with regard to the utilisation of Pupil Premium funds. Therefore, the challenge is if the children who are not entitled to the grant should get any support from Pupil Premium income (Barrett, 2018, Morris and Dobson, 2021). Hence, the issue for headteachers is that the pupils lying on the eligibility limit are on the edge of deprivation and should receive the needed support to improve their educational achievements (Barrett, 2018). The pupil premium was designed to promote social justice for deprived children with a high risk of underachievement by assigning additional resources, but it only reproduces inequalities (Bush, 2021; DfE, 2023 a). Additionally, as Jones (2020) illustrates, society's rules and policies are made by middle-class people who occupy the top jobs exercising their power in favour of their own class.

Although education is a way to overcome class disadvantage is more reproduced by school institutions in how power is exercised, such as decisions made on how to use pupil premium to overcome class differences (Smith, Wrigley and Mcinerney, 2018). However, the pressure placed by the government on schools to demonstrate measurable outcomes for children on pupil premium grants makes headteachers use the grant unethical to increase performance for all the children regardless of their pupil premium entitlement (Bush, 2021). Nevertheless, this questions the pupil premium eligible children's achievements and if they really improve their

performance or not because schools use their grant to enhance school performance as a whole rather than the target pupils (Gorard Siddique and See, 2021b).

Nonetheless, focusing on this policy to address children's educational underachievement is an inequality in itself due to the narrow focus on one type of disadvantage and completely missing the rest (Gorard, Siddiqui and See, 2018). Ofsted emphasises that headteachers demonstrate improvement in attainments and progress for pupil premium-eligible children so that the schools receive positive evaluations (Ofsted, 2014 a; Brown, 2020). Furthermore, the focus is to demonstrate the impact of literacy and math when it comes down to Ofsted and how pupil premium students' progress in their performance (Barrett, 2018; Ofsted, 2022). Subsequently, in order to demonstrate academic progress, schools first have to address behaviour issues, which is essential to narrow the achievement gap (Morris and Dobson, 2021).

The schools have a challenge in spending the grant to implement pastoral care strategies for supporting students eligible for Pupil Premium or for everyone needing the support. In other words, the provision of support should be universal and not dependent on a student's eligibility for FSM (Barett, 2018; Morris and Dobson, 2021). Even though the government leaves it to the discretion of schools to implement the proper support for the needs of their students, the premium policy relies on accountability of outcomes in the results (Ainscow et al., 2016; DfE, 2023 b). Therefore, the headteachers are aspected to address inequalities in education with pupil premium grants and create equity in outcomes between disadvantaged children and their peers (Potter and Chipin, 2021). Likewise, the problem to be addressed in education for disadvantaged pupils is much too broad, and the grant funds are insufficient to tackle all the issues to foster social justice and equity in education.

One significant barrier to implementing pupil premium is the lack of clarity around using the grant. Besides, allocating funds can be a complicated problem in understanding the level of support each pupil requires; it is a minefield (Rampton, 2014). According to Taylor (2018 b), the government's guidance results in schools being directed to the Teaching and Learning Toolkit on Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to inform regarding pupil premium funds. Furthermore, the majority of schools struggle to understand the best way to use pupil premium to have the most significant impact on disadvantaged children (National Audit Office, 2018). Additionally, headteachers have difficulties in measuring the impact that pupil premium has made on the entitled children due to lack of evaluation; this can pose a challenge to demonstrating the impact of strategies to external bodies (EEF, 2022). One of the challenges in implementing pupil premium is the FSM registration versus entitlement which will be extended into the below section.

The challenge in eligibility for FSM hence pupil premium is on two sides; one is for the parents who feel the stigma of their children being treated differently upon receiving the grant. On the other hand, institutions that are aware that children underperform and require additional support are constrained by insufficient money due to parents not applying for FSM (Ilie, Sutherland and Vignoles, 2017; Gorard, 2022 a). Furthermore, there is a notable variation in the proportion of eligible pupils who are not claiming FSMs across different schools, with over 30% of students not accessing these resources (House of Commons, 2015). Subsequently, the proportion of pupils registered for FSM decreased from 35% in 2011 to 11% in 2019; this can significantly impact school intake on Pupil Premium funds (Gorard, Siddiqui, and See 2021 b). Moreover, the eligibility for FSM has been extended during the pandemic to include pupils

who receive Universal Credit; under this threshold, an extra 50 thousand pupils become FSM-entitled (Roberts, 2022; DfE, 2023).

Consequently, on this basis, 22.5% of pupils are eligible for FSM under the new policy of Universal FSM; this is an increase of 11.5% compared with 2019 (Jessiman, 2023). However, 29% of children living in poverty live in the United Kingdom (UK), with more than 6% of pupils missing the support they need (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023). Likewise, one of the challenges of pupil premium for schools is being unable to access funding due to parents not claiming the FSM because of the concern about the stigma and prejudice related to it (Child Poverty Action Group, 2018; Gorard, Siddiqui, and See 2021 b). The pupil premium is supposed to narrow the achievement gap for disadvantaged children; however, it depends on children's registration for FSM and not their entitlement. Likewise, this stigmatises pupils and creates a barrier for schools to access extra funds to improve their student's achievements (Roberts, 2022). Social Mobility Commission (2019) states that one in ten children eligible for the FSM do not register, which is detrimental to pupil premium funds intake.

Furthermore, some secondary children feel stigmatised and left out from their peers by the school system for children who claim FSM, such as using a "Q- card" compared to cash by other students (Naven et al. 2019, p. 322). Since the introduction of pupil premium, schools have started to encourage parents to claim FSM, making them aware of the extra funding that this will attract for the school to support their children's educational performance (Carpenter et al., 2013; Social Mobility Commission, 2019). Hence why, parents have different reasons for not claiming the FSM, such as perceived stigma and lack of awareness. Additionally, the paperwork required to apply for FSM can make parents reluctant to request their entitlements and not understand the process, together with a sense of pride (Sahata et al., 2013; Gorard, 2022 a; DfE, 2023). Implementing the Universal Infant FSM policy, which awards FSM to all school children from reception to year two, is a further challenge for schools to access pupil premium funding (Education and Skill Funding Agency, 2022).

This is mainly because parents do not understand why they need to apply for FSM, as their children already receive the meals. Consequently, schools cannot access resources to support their pupils' educational needs due to a lack of funds affecting their educational achievements (Gorard, 2022 a). Therefore, this creates a loss in learning and support for deprived children in the first three years of schooling which can increase the underachievement gap (Education and Skill Funding Agency, 2022). This conflicts with the objective of the pupil premium to narrow the achievement gaps of disadvantaged pupils leading to children leaving schools with poorer qualifications (Gorard, 2012; Gorard, Siddique and See, 2021 b). Establishing a connection between the attainments and resources is difficult due to the range of factors that influence both, mainly because the level of disadvantage is measured by the register of FSM (DfE, 2017). Additionally, the funding loss makes it problematic for schools to show measurable outcomes when inspected and help their disadvantaged children improve their educational performance (Ofsted, 2022).

## The effectiveness of pupil premium in narrowing the achievement gap

Evidence has shown that the pupil premium policy can positively impact disadvantaged children when applied appropriately. However, not all schools implement successful strategies to support children who receive pupil premium (Ofsted, 2014 b, Ofsted, 2018). Furthermore, the inspection made by Ofsted in 2012 specifies that the school's pupil premium grants are spent ineffectively in most institutions on an intervention that shows little progress (Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson, 2015). For instance, focusing pupil premium spending separated from the school development plan or not monitoring the impact of an intervention on the educational progress of disadvantaged children (Ofsted, 2012; Ofsted, 2014 b). In addition, as mentioned by Ofsted (2012), schools do not separate the funding of pupil premiums and the general school budget; this can impact how pupil premium funds are used to enhance the educational achievement gap for pupil recipients of the grant.

Therefore, the spending of the grand is ineffective on the existing intervention and not targeted to the specific group of children for which pupil premium is intended to be used for (Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson, 2015). Craske (2018) argues that pressure from the local authorities to show an impact on the achievement of disadvantaged children and the number of staff turnovers made raising the attainment gap across the board difficult. One of the most effective ways to improve the educational achievement gap among disadvantaged children is through ambitious leadership that fosters an inclusive curriculum and supports high-quality teaching (Demie, 2023). Additionally, Demie (2021) highlights that where there are clear strategies and targeted interventions towards supporting disadvantaged children on pupil premiums, it shows evidence of improving the achievement gap. Additionally, as Demie (2020) mentioned, pupil premium strategies have a positive outcome when the teaching is concentrated on small-group learning or one-to-one intervention can significantly increase the educational achievements on entitle children.

Also, to support children from deprived backgrounds to enhance their educational achievement, schools need to maintain the quality of teaching to improve outcomes (Riordan, 2022). As mentioned previously, having a QFT and high aspirations for all students, regardless of their background, is an effective strategy for improving educational performance (Riordan, 2022). Likewise, Demie (2021) points out that an inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of children from diverse backgrounds will narrow the achievement gap. The National Audit Office (2015) asserted an increase in focus to improve the outcomes for pupils on FSM by headteachers through targeted support from 57 % before introducing pupil premium to 94% after the implementation of the policy. Despite the positive result from the strategies outlined above, not all schools look at outside sources, such as EEF, before implementing the pupil premium strategy.

Hence, this is an ineffective way to spend the pupil premium funds, which shows limited results in narrowing the educational achievement gap between pupil premium children and their peers (Fellow and Barton, 2018). Furthermore, employing methods that prove successful in narrowing the achievement gap should be the main priority for school leaders to create equity and equality in educational performance between pupil premium pupils and their peers. Moreover, teachers are pressured to monitor children eligible for pupil premium more closely compared with their peers, with 63% of teachers reporting this requirement (Allen, 2018 a).



This is an unproductive way of spending pupil premium funds instead of developing different strategies that address the broader issue of disadvantage, which impacts school performance for pupil premium pupils (Allen, 2018 a). Besides, the school's geographical location is an essential factor affecting the educational achievement of disadvantaged children and how pupil premium best can implement strategies to address barriers to learning (Fellow and Barton, 2018). For instance, a school in a rural area may face challenges related to access to resources and extracurricular activities.

Also, pupils may be travelling long distances to attend school, affecting their engagement with school (See et al., 2020; Gorard, 2022 b). Furthermore, in remote rural areas, it is difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers, and this can impact the quality of education and the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils in the recipient of pupil premium (See et al. 2020). In contrast, schools in urban areas have children from a diverse range of social and cultural backgrounds. Overall, it is essential to consider the challenges faced by disadvantaged pupils in different geographic locations and provide targeted support to help them achieve their full potential (Fellow and Barton, 2018; See et al., 2020; Gorard. 2022 b). Moreover, schools should not only focus on academic strategies but also employ pastoral care for disadvantaged children; this will be an effective use of the pupil premium grand.

This will address broader educational issues, such as access to resources and educational motivation, which can affect school performance for pupil premium children (Gorard, Siddiqui and See, 2021 a). Likewise, having qualified teachers across all schools regardless of the geographical location is essential to have QFT and one-to-one intervention to improve outcomes for pupil premium pupils (Riordan 2021, Demie 2021, Demie 2023). Consequently, concentrating the funds of pupil premium only on disadvantaged children registering for FSM and missing the other disadvantage is not an effective way to spend the grant and does not close the educational achievements gap (Demie, 2018, b; Gorard, Siddique and See, 2021 a). Therefore, the current strategy on pupil premium does not work and offers misleading results on the impact of the policy on disadvantaged pupils for schools locally and at the national level (Gorard, 2019). As a result, money should be allocated to the school's general fund to implement targeted support for all disadvantaged children who need the provision; only this will narrow the achievement gap (Allen, 2018, b). The following section will analyse the educational achievement gap between pupil premium children and their peers.

The achievement gap between the pupil premium children and their affluent peers is a persistent problem that still affects the UK education system. Research has consistently shown that disadvantaged children receiving pupil premiums are more likely to have educational underachievement (DfE, 2022 d). Moreover, the literature review indicates a significant educational achievement gap between children on pupil premium and their peers, despite the government's commitment to narrowing this gap (Demie and Mclean, 2016; DfE, 2022 d, Demie, 2023). For instance, National Audit Office (2015) emphasises that the attainment gap between pupil premium children and their peers is 4.7% in primary school and 1.6% in secondary school. Additionally, children who register for FSM respectively pupil premium achieved 38% on 5+A\*- C on GCSEs contrasting with 65% of their wealthier peers (Demie, 2018 a; DfE, 2019 b; Gazeley, 2022).

Furthermore, the persistently disadvantaged children recipient of FSM are 22 months behind their affluent peers, and this gap has stopped closing since 2011 (Hutchinson, Reader and Akhal, 2020). This is despite the extra funds' allocation for schools through the pupil premium

initiative, which expects to address the educational achievement gap (Ofsted, 2014 b; Demie, 2018 a). Moreover, several factors can contribute to the pupil educational achievement gap, such as family income COVID-19 pandemic, school closure, and the change in the economy and geographical location of the pupils. Furthermore, disadvantaged children are more likely to attend schools in deprived areas impacting their educational experience and the number of resources available to improve educational achievement (Gorard, 2022 b). Although efforts have been made to narrow the educational achievement gap between pupil premium children and their peers by introducing a pupil premium policy, the progress is minimal (Gov. UK, 2022).

Furthermore, the disadvantaged children not only have lower achievements but also higher absents compared with their peers, with a rate of five weeks for pupil premium respective three weeks for their peers (Sharp, 2022). Even though different strategies were implemented to address children's absence by removing barriers to attendance, such as close collaboration between school and parents and offering pastoral care, this is still a prevalent issue that has a negative impact on pupils' educational achievements (DfE, 2022 c; Sharp, 2022). Furthermore, this indicates that interventions should be targeted more broadly at the pupils falling behind in school rather than only for the children's recipient of pupil premium (Clifton and Cook, 2012; Allen, 2018 b; Demie, 2021). Therefore, quality teaching must be applied throughout schools to challenge poverty and inequality in education by closing the achievement gap (Demie, 2020).

Additionally, class division and class privilege directly affect education, significantly limiting children's learning and academic achievements (Jones, 2020). Essentially, this would enable schools to tackle the educational achievement gap between pupils irrespective of their socio-economic background, a problem that prevents its education system from being excellent and equitable (Demie, 2020; 2021). Crucially FSM eligible pupils not only have lower attainments compared with their peers but also are 15% more likely to not continue with further education or training, including higher education (Strand, 2014; Boliver, Gorard and Siddiqui, 2015; Gorard, Siddiqui, See, 2021a; Demie, 2023). Furthermore, the gap between long-term disadvantages in the recipient of pupil premium is widening compared with their peers; this depends on the intake of FSM-eligible children in the school (Gorard, Siddiqui and See, 2021a).

The pandemic exacerbates the gap in achievement between the disadvantaged group and their peers, and the pupil premium policy is not sufficient to address the loss of learning for this group of children during the pandemic (Twist, Jones and Treleaven, 2022). Therefore, the government should consider differentiated funding to support this cohort, especially after the 8% cuts faced by the schools and the divide between independent schools and government maintenance schools (Social Mobility Commission, 2019). Considering the existing educational gap between the pupil premium pupils and their peers, it demonstrates that introducing the pupil premium policy to address inequality in educational outcomes for deprived pupils proves ineffective.

This research will contribute to the body of knowledge by providing more data about the use, challenges and effectiveness of pupil premium. Although there is literature that proves that the pupil premium leads to progression in educational outcomes, there are gaps in the literature that needs further research. One of the significant areas that require consideration is the effectiveness and the use of pupil premium on specific groups of disadvantages, for example, SEND (Carpenter et al., 2013; Ofsted, 2019 a; Butt and Ratti, 2020). Also, more research is

necessary to understand the impact of pupil premium on long-term outcomes such as qualification and employment. Overall, my research will contribute to a deeper understanding of pupil premium and how this policy can inform practice to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children.

Holmes (2020) states that the positionality of the research is not static; it is shaped and influenced by the research finding. In particular, engagement with the literature on pupil premium has helped me to shape and improve my understanding of the best ways to support disadvantaged pupils and improve their educational outcomes. Furthermore, after engaging with the literature, my positionality has developed towards understanding the challenges schools face in implementing the proper support for disadvantaged children. Additionally, the pupil premium was introduced to support disadvantaged children, but the way it is used is reproducing inequality by not including a specific group of children, for instance, SEND.

## Ethical Consideration

I have reviewed all my journals to ensure ethical procedures, such as informed consent, anonymity and data protection, were followed. Although not all journals clearly specify their ethical consideration, I ensure to evaluate journals that were peer-reviewed before analysing the data (BERA, 2018). Ethics are important because they are a set of principles that guide the way the data is treated. This is supported by Largan and Morris (2019), who state that ethics are a set of beliefs and actions that inform how the research is conducted and how we behave with the data. I am aware that my bias as a white working-class researcher can influence how I interpret the findings. Furthermore, adhering to ethical principles should be a process that reflects throughout the research (Lewis, 2004). According to Largan and Morris (2019), three ethical principles guide secondary research: confidentiality, anonymity and protection from harm.

Protection from harm in secondary research refers to the way the data is depicted and what type of resources are employed to analyse the data for the research. Largan and Morgan (2019) iterate that in secondary research protecting from harm has to give regard to the type of sources that data is gathered from in order not to cause any harm to the individuals or organisation. I will have ethical considerations by treating the data with respect and not changing the meaning of the data for the purpose of this research. Moreover, I will use reputable sources such as the UEL library, Eric, Google Scholar, etc. Additionally, ensure that all the data used in this research meets ethical principles before examining the content of the findings (Manu and Akotia, 2019). This topic might be triggering for me because I know people with financial difficulties. I will take a reflexive approach by reminding myself that it is just research. I also have my supervisor to talk to if I need advice, or I can talk with the well-being team.

Confidentiality is the way the data in the research is kept taking care of maintaining the information confidential and secured with codes. Largan and Morris (2019) state that confidentiality refers to privacy and data protection; however, secondary research depends on the source of the data gathered. Moreover, confidentiality is essential to avoid misusing any data collected by the researcher (BERA, 2018). Furthermore, as a secondary researcher, I will use public data gathered by others. Although it is not a clear statement about confidentiality in the journals I have analysed, after critically examining the methods section, I can see that they kept the data safe so I can use these papers.

Anonymity is the way the name of the participant or institution is changed with a different one, so their identity is not recognised. Thomas (2017) indicates that anonymity is changing the name of participants and institutions by giving pseudonyms or applying for code numbers. BERA (2018) highlights that anonymity can be challenging to maintain when the research takes place in a close community or on online platforms. Therefore, I will ensure to conform with anonymity by using code numbers such as Participant A if any of the journals I examine uses the name of an institution or participants. Although informed consent, the right to withdraw from the research, is encountered in the journals I analyse, I am aware that these concepts are not part of my non-empirical research (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019).

Part of every research is reflexivity, which is self-awareness of the motivation that leads the researcher to choose the topic (Durdella, 2019). Also, to be mindful that it is impossible to be objective and aware of how our positionality influences the interpretation of the findings (Brown and Perkins, 2019). I know that my position as a working-class mother and a woman with friends from a disadvantaged background can influence how I interpret the findings. I will use a reflexive approach and focus on the question that needs to be answered, looking from a critical perspective at both sides of the argument, such as the pro and cons (Durdella, 2019). Moreover, acknowledge my reflexivity and how my bias can influence the analysis made on the finding. Also, my motivation to answer this research question is to inform my future practice and for a deeper understanding of the topic (Brown and Perkins, 2019).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the pupil premium policy should address educational underachievement and improve the outcomes of disadvantaged children by offering extra funds to schools based on pupils' registration for FSM. The funds are used to provide additional resources and activities to enhance children's educational performance and the program of attendance, and pastoral care. However, despite the policy's intention, some studies suggested that pupil premium has not effectively closed the educational achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers but has widened. Some schools have used the funds to subsidise the cuts in the general budget, which can harm disadvantaged pupils who need support to improve educational outcomes. Even though academies use the funds in a similar way to the state schools, the funds are used beyond the classroom, such as sailing and theatrical performances, to support children in broader life experiences.

Additionally, there are no clear strategies from the grant to support educational performance for SEND pupils. SEND pupils to spend much time outside the classroom on intervention missing significant amounts of the curriculum and depending on TA; therefore, it is essential to use the part of the grant on their training. Nevertheless, pupil premium was designed to support disadvantaged children underachieving. The pressure placed by the government to demonstrate measurable outcomes for pupils receiving the grant results in schools prioritising short-term strategies to improve outcomes rather than long-term goals. Additionally, the lack of clarity around utilising the grant creates a dilemma for headteachers to decide which strategies can most support disadvantaged children. Allocating pupil premiums is also challenging for headteachers to distribute the funds between children who identify as FSM and those who come from equally disadvantaged homes.

The effectiveness of using the pupil premium in narrowing the achievement gap varies among schools, and not all schools implement successful strategies to support disadvantaged children. Evidence has shown that the grant can positively impact disadvantaged pupils through clear strategies and interventions when applied appropriately. However, some schools spend the grant ineffectively, such as not separating the funding of the policy from the general school budget and focusing on pupil premium spending separated from the school development plan. Besides, the school's geographical location is an essential factor impacting the educational achievement of disadvantaged children and how the grant can best implement strategies to address barriers to learning.

The research critically evaluates the UK pupil premium policy, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses in addressing educational underachievement among disadvantaged children. The findings challenge the assumption that the policy effectively narrows the achievement gap between the disadvantaged and their peers, as some schools have used the funds ineffectively or to subsidise budget cuts. Also, the research highlights the importance of providing targeted support for SEND pupils, training TAs in subject knowledge and ensuring clarity around allocating the funds. After conducting non-empirical research, I was enthusiastic with what I had found and would like to have conducted primary research to gather first-hand data on the headteacher and teachers' perceptions of pupil premium.

Based on my analysing of the literature, my viewpoint has evolved to recognise the difficulties that schools encounter in providing appropriate assistance to underprivileged students. This research contributes to extending existing knowledge in the academic field by critically analysing the pupil premium policy and its impact on educational outcomes for disadvantaged children. The research emphasises the need for a more targeted approach to addressing educational underachievement, focusing on individual school circumstances and the specific needs of disadvantaged children. The findings suggest that providing extra funds to schools may not be enough to close the achievement gap and that more effective strategies are needed to support disadvantaged children's learning and academic achievement.

Further research should be conducted to identify the most effective strategies for using the pupil premium to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children, including those with SEND. Studies could also explore the impact of intervention beyond the classroom, such as extracurricular activities, on academic performance and broader life experiences. Policymakers should consider allocating the pupil premium based on schools' individual circumstances and need rather than using a blanket approach. This will allow schools to implement strategies tailored to their specific challenges and barriers to learning. Further research is required on the money allocated to schools and students according to need and deprivation. Finally, more support should be provided to schools so they can employ targeted strategies to assist SEND pupils' best learning.

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# **INVESTIGATION OF EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE OF WELLBEING IN THEIR PRACTICE**

by Kanchan Mala

ED6088 Independent Research Project

BA (Hons) Education Studies (Top-Up)



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## **Abstract**

Teacher wellbeing is a pressing concern in education due to the demanding nature of their job, leading to stress and exhaustion (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified these challenges, increased teacher stress levels and exacerbated wellbeing issues (García-Álvarez, Soler and Achard Braga, 2021). Moreover, high levels of job dissatisfaction and stress have resulted in elevated teacher turnover rates (Ansley, Houchins and Varjas, 2019). This research explored the experiences of educators' wellbeing in their professional practice. Four participants were purposively sampled and a further two were recruited through a snowballing technique. The research questions focused on the educators' understanding of wellbeing, the challenges they have experienced that affect their wellbeing and the identifiable factors that influence their wellbeing. The interpretive paradigm and phenomenological approach were employed to guide the research, and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The findings identified factors such as collegial support, participating in wellbeing activities and being equipped with coping mechanisms that contribute to positive educator wellbeing. However, most of the research indicates that time and workload and barriers to offering wellbeing activities have negative impacts on teacher wellbeing.

**Key words:** Teachers, workload, challenges, wellbeing, work-life balance, stress



## Introduction

The research investigated the perceptions, experiences, challenges, and obstacles that affect the wellbeing of educators in their practice. The study involved a small sample of educators from primary, secondary, and higher education settings in East London. The rationale to conduct research in an inner-city area arose from reports that highlighted schools across England face challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, with inner London being particularly affected, as only 57% of teachers who qualified in 2012 remained in the classroom by 2017 (Weale, 2018). In addition, London experiences a heightened rate of attrition among young teachers, coupled with a consistent departure of educators in their thirties and forties who seek employment opportunities in other locations (Worth *et al.*, 2018). A considerable body of research has been dedicated to investigating the wellbeing of teachers over the past four decades (Zee and Koomen, 2016). Scholars have conducted thorough investigations to examine various factors that impact stress and burnout within the teaching profession, with the aim of understanding individual experiences (Pillay and Goddard, 2005; Hultell, Daniel and Gustavsson, 2011; Agyapong *et al.*, 2022).

## Rationale

The decision to choose this area for research was influenced by personal career aspirations and an understanding of the challenges educators face in their profession. The motivation was further fuelled by previous work experience in a stressful educational environment, such as a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). This personal experience highlighted the significance of investigating teacher wellbeing across different education levels, including primary, secondary, and higher education. Literature on the topic supports the notion that teacher wellbeing is a critical aspect to address for the overall success and effectiveness of the educational system. I am interested in researching educators' wellbeing because a quarter of teachers who are 34 years old or younger are unlikely to be teaching in five years, and less than half of teachers would choose the profession again (Ibbetson, 2022).

In light of the pandemic-induced shift from in-person to remote instruction, recent studies have redirected their attention to exploring educators' self-perception and experiences during this transitional period (García-Álvarez, Soler and Achard Braga, 2021). Additionally, studies have examined the impact of inflation on teachers' mental wellbeing by investigating the relationship between their pay and the rising cost of living. (NEU, 2022). International studies have shown that teachers face a comparatively heightened vulnerability to common mental disorders and experience notable levels of work-related stress (Carod-Artal and Vázquez-Cabrera, 2013; Tang, Leka and MacLennan, 2013; Bogaert *et al.*, 2014). According to Dodge *et al.* (2012), wellbeing can be defined as "the balance point between an individual's (psychological, social, and physical) resource pool and the challenges faced" (p. 229).

This study utilised a qualitative research methodology incorporating thematic analysis as an approach to ensure the attainment of objectivity and impartiality. This methodological choice aimed to prevent the influence of personal experiences, value judgments, or preconceived notions on the findings and interpretations of the study (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews captured participants' experiences and perceptions in their own words, while a thematic approach identified patterns and themes in the data (Burton and Bartlett, 2005). The researcher demonstrated reflexivity to mitigate biases and assumptions (Punch, 2009).

This study aimed to enhance understanding of challenges that contribute to teacher difficulties, including burnout and stress, potentially leading to attrition. It seeks to identify and address these issues, providing insights for newly qualified educators and promoting work-life balance among the Head of the School or Department, Senior Leadership Team and university leaders (Roopavathi and Kishore, 2021). The findings of the research can be applied to improve educators' workplace productivity (Fapohunda, 2014; Aher, 2018; Baharuddin, 2021).

The research questions are as follows:

Q1. What are educators' experiences of their wellbeing in their practice?

Q2. What challenges, if any, have they experienced that may affect their wellbeing?

Q3. What are the identifiable factors that affect their wellbeing?

The following chapters will consist of literature reviews, methodology, ethical considerations, findings and discussions and a conclusion.

## Literature Review

### Q1. What are educators' experiences of their wellbeing in their practice?

This literature review will explore and combine research studies that have examined educators' experience of wellbeing in their workplace. However, I will also review literature conducted outside the United Kingdom (UK) as a comparison to see if this is a global issue. The term "wellbeing" "encompasses various dimensions and holds diverse meanings (McCallum, 2021). Keyes (2002) asserts that wellbeing is understood as a state of optimal mental and social health. The wellbeing of educators plays a crucial role in the success of their classrooms and their students. Chan *et al.* (2021) state when teachers are in good health, they are more likely to engage with students, establish strong connections with them, and foster productive learning environments. Therefore, Seligman's (2011) framework provides a valuable perspective on educators' experiences of their wellbeing in their practice. The framework identifies five key elements that contribute to overall flourishing, positive emotions, engagement, meaningful relationships, a sense of purpose and a sense of accomplishment. Conversely, concerns about maintaining a stable and effective workforce of teachers on a global scale have raised significant alarm (McCallum, 2021) when teachers' wellbeing is negatively impacted, they are prone to experience anxiety, exhaustion, and disengagement from their profession (IBID). Thus, this can have unfavourable consequences on their students' ability to learn. Moreover, Hwang (2019) conducted research to investigate the potential effects of mindfulness-based programs on teachers, with a focus on improving their mental health, student relationships, and teaching methods. The goal of the research was to examine how these interventions influenced the educational setting. As a result, Maslow's (1970) theory of self-actualisation offers valuable insights into the professional experiences of educators regarding their wellbeing. This concept encompasses the realisation of one's full potential, personal growth, and attainment of significant objectives. For educators, self-actualisation represents the journey towards fulfilment and contentment through aligning teaching practices with core values, passions, and professional aspirations.

Similarly, Schussler *et al.* (2016) investigated the effectiveness of the CARE program in promoting teacher awareness and wellbeing. The study utilised a mixed-methods approach and found that the CARE program had a positive impact on teacher awareness and wellbeing. These findings support the importance of interventions that foster teacher awareness and wellbeing. However, Hascher and Waber (2021) emphasise that educators who possess elevated levels of wellbeing are more inclined to encounter job satisfaction, engagement, commitment, and professional development. Conversely, diminished levels of wellbeing can result in burnout, stress, and adverse consequences for both teachers and students. Therefore, it is important to note that the article primarily concentrates on the conceptualisation and factors related to teacher wellbeing, rather than extensively exploring interventions or strategies aimed at enhancing wellbeing within educational contexts (IBID).

Additionally, the wellbeing of educators is not only crucial for their personal health and satisfaction but also for the academic achievement of their students. Cook's (2017) research on 44 secondary school teachers revealed that teachers expressed a desire to engage in mindful practices through professional development to enhance their ability to implement high-quality teaching methods. Therefore, an analysis of the factors influencing educators' wellbeing

indicates that it depends on their individual attributes, the contextual features of their workplace, and the administrative measures implemented by their educational institutions. Preserving educators' wellbeing is of utmost significance as it enhances their level of engagement in the teaching process, promotes positive student-teacher interactions, and contributes to the creation of an optimal learning environment. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) studied the impact of emotions on teaching practices. However, their research did not extensively explore the comprehensive experiences of educators' overall wellbeing in their practice, including aspects such as work-life balance, professional support, and organisational climate. Chan's (2021) study highlights the need for increased resources dedicated to improving teachers' mental health at work, specifically emphasising the importance of emotional support, student autonomy, and teacher effectiveness as areas deserving significant investment and attention.

## **Q2. What challenges, if any, have they experienced that may affect their wellbeing?**

Examining the difficulties encountered by teachers and their potential ramifications on overall wellbeing is essential in identifying areas that necessitate support and intervention to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. O'Brien and Dennis (2021) emphasise that the wellbeing of UK educators is declining, with anxiety, life satisfaction, and contentment being key factors highlighted in their findings. They discovered that teachers' lack of agency and diminishing respect have a negative influence on their health and wellbeing. In contrast, Turner, Hielking, and Prochazka (2022) utilised the PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011), encompassing positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, as a lens to comprehend the emergence and progression of these challenges. They found a strong correlation between teachers' subjective wellbeing, productivity, and social support in the workplace, particularly in non-educational settings. According to Yost (2006) equipping future educators with reflective and problem-solving skills during their preservice training can better prepare them to navigate the inevitable difficulties they will face in the classroom. In addition, Falecki, and Mann (2021) take an approach that addresses common challenges faced by pre-service teachers, such as effectively responding to and managing trauma-related or challenging behaviours. They aim to prepare pre-service teachers for real-life challenges and equip them to handle practical situations post-graduation. It is important to acknowledge that trauma and challenging behaviours are multifaceted issues with no one-size-fits-all solution. However, Babic *et al.* (2022) study of 15 participants from 13 different countries highlights the increasing global attention to well-being, emphasising that it is not solely an individual and subjective phenomenon but influenced by collective and social factors. Furthermore, teaching has been acknowledged as one of the most demanding professions globally (Ingersoll, 2011). Workplace culture significantly impacts teacher wellbeing. Elements such as the school environment, availability of resources, level of autonomy, hierarchy, and physical setting play a role in shaping teachers' experiences and wellbeing (Berger *et al.*, 2022). This aligns with the goals of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Theory Model for analysing factors influencing human development. In cases where a teacher is experiencing difficulties at school, administrators may work with them to identify and address the sources of stress (Carroll *et al.*, 2021).

Multiple research studies have indicated that educators are leaving the teaching profession prematurely due to factors such as stress, burnout, and workload (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2016;

Higton *et al.*, 2017; Ryan *et al.*, 2017; CooperGibson Research, 2018). Teachers experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to workload pressures (HSE, 2022), with workload remaining the primary cause of work-related stress (NASUWT, 2022). In addition, Hultell, Melin, and Gustavsson (2013) showed a potential relationship between teacher self-efficacy (TSE) and burnout. Their study found that preservice teachers who experienced decreases in TSE also reported high levels of burnout. Conversely, those with stable and high TSE exhibited consistently low levels of burnout. Preservice teachers with stable and moderate burnout displayed fluctuating levels of TSE over time. These findings suggest that higher TSE may act as a protective factor against burnout among preservice teachers. In contrast, Høigaard, Giske, and Sundsli (2012) conducted research indicating that this protective effect may not necessarily hold true during the initial years of teaching. However, Ansis (2017) found that teaching in the Philippines is highly stressful, primarily due to poor management and being behind schedule. Effective time management plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Felton and Sims (2009) define time management as consciously controlling and planning activities to enhance productivity. Similarly, Cottrell (2013) describes it as balancing various demands within a limited time. Strategies like scheduling, goal setting, and task prioritisation (Bilbao, 2009) help teachers meet job demands without compromising quality. Furthermore, Forsyth (2010) emphasises the importance of efficiently managing limited resources for maintaining a work-life balance.

Teachers often face extended working hours, both inside and outside the classroom, with 25 per cent exceeding 60 hours per week (Allen, Benhenda and Jerrim, 2020) resulting in strain, exhaustion, and disillusionment. Inadequate compensation adds economic strain and uncertainty (Sellen, 2016). Reports from Ofsted (2019) highlight a lack of support from school leaders, peers, and parents, leading to feelings of isolation, frustration, and resentment. Classroom aggression from students or adults can cause fear, unease, and potential post-traumatic stress disorder (Viac and Fraser, 2020; Frenzel, Daniels, and Burić, 2021). According to Miller and Fraser's (2000) perspective, stress among teachers is often regarded as an inevitable aspect of their professional journey, with long working hours and exhaustion being considered symbols of dedication and merit (Morris, 2015). The prior passage and literature suggest that educators inevitably face challenges, such as poor working conditions and high-stress levels, without adequate institutional or governmental support.

### **Q3 What are the identifiable factors that affect their wellbeing?**

The intention of this section is to thoroughly examine identifiable factors and emphasise their impact on the wellbeing of educators. The wellbeing of educators and teachers is of paramount importance for their professional contentment, efficacy, and holistic standard of living. There exist several identifiable factors that can exert a substantial influence on an individual's overall state of welfare. Wright, Cropanzano and Bonnet (2007) state that these factors include stress arising from work-related issues, apprehensions regarding workload, personal sacrifices, stress arising from interpersonal responsibilities, the efficacy of stress reduction techniques, and the ability to maintain a harmonious balance between work and personal life. However, Roopavathi and Kulothungan (2021) assert that work-related stress is a significant determinant of the welfare of educators and teachers. As per the study conducted by Kidger *et al.* (2016), a significant proportion of educators in educational institutions undergo stress because of the high standards associated with their profession. Therefore, the fulfilment of curriculum

requirements, effective management of classroom dynamics, and the completion of administrative duties can potentially lead to elevated levels of stress (Egan, Turner, and Blackman, 2017). Agyapong, (2022) emphasises the experience of stress has the potential to adversely impact an individual's mental and emotional state, ultimately resulting in feelings of exhaustion and burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). Thus, educational professionals frequently encounter difficulties related to substantial workloads (Viac and Fraser, 2020) and individuals might experience a sense of being overwhelmed and burdened by a multitude of obligations and duties. The burden of an overpowering workload may impede educators' capacity to provide high-quality instruction and have negative effects on their holistic health (Finlay, 2014). According to García-Álvarez (2021), the previously mentioned factor may also decrease an individual's opportunity for engaging in self-care, pursue personal growth, and participating in leisure activities. (Greenfield, 2015) emphasises that educators may make personal sacrifices to meet organisational targets and fulfil their professional duties. Therefore, individuals may exhibit a tendency to prioritise occupational responsibilities over their household duties or compromise their personal necessities and welfare (Wright, Cropanzano and Bonett, 2007). The act of sacrificing personal time and energy may result in heightened levels of stress and a diminished sense of contentment and gratification in an individual's life (Finlay, 2014). As a result, juggling occupational duties alongside personal and household commitments can result in notable levels of stress (Carod-Artal and Vázquez-Cabrera, 2013). Moreover, Fapohunda's (2014) research asserts the presence of competing obligations and constrained opportunities for familial engagements may give rise to emotions of guilt and unease. The maintenance of educators' wellbeing is contingent upon their ability to manage stress related to familial responsibilities. The implementation of stress reduction strategies within educational institutions can significantly impact the wellbeing of educators (Viac and Fraser, 2020). The perception of the effectiveness of these strategies by educators may have a positive impact on the work environment and lead to a reduction in stress levels (Fapohunda, 2014). On the contrary, in cases where attempts at reducing stress prove to be inadequate or ineffective, it may result in escalated stress levels and have an adverse effect on an individual's overall state of health (Aher, 2018). The preservation of a healthy balance between work and personal life is of paramount importance to the welfare of educators. The attainment of balance is reliant upon the effective implementation of self-management, time management, and leisure management (Ertürk, 2022). In addition, Aher, (2018) contends that the acknowledgement of self-care, sufficient rest, physical activity, and proper nourishment are fundamental components of self-regulation, that enhance an individual's general welfare. Furthermore, effective time management abilities enable educators to prioritise their tasks, establish attainable objectives, and efficiently allocate their time. Through efficient time management, educators can mitigate stress and foster prospects for personal and social interactions (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001).

## **Methodology**

This chapter will provide a rationale for the chosen research paradigm, research approach, sampling, data collection, method, pilot, reliability and validity.

The research adopted an interpretive paradigm rooted in the epistemological perspective known as the "theory of knowledge," which recognises the subjective and context-bound nature of knowledge, to explore individuals' perspectives and views on the world (Bell and Waters, 2014; Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison, 2018). This allowed me to focus on understanding the

meanings and interpretations underlying human behaviour and how individuals comprehend the world (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Through the utilisation of an interpretive approach, this study endeavoured to grasp the intricate meanings and interpretations individuals employ to make sense of the social reality at hand (Hughes, 2010). In contrast, quantitative researchers rely on numerical data and structured research questions to establish and validate "facts" (Punch, 2005). However, qualitative research, which delves into individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, was deemed more suitable for this study, as it aimed to explore educators' perspectives on wellbeing without testing specific theories or hypotheses (Punch, 2009; Bell and Waters, 2014). Consequently, ontology as a field of study, examines the nature of existence and reality and profoundly influences our perspectives on the world (Carter, 2018). Our individual ontologies shape our beliefs and assumptions about the fundamental nature of reality, affecting how we perceive and engage with our surroundings (Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison, 2018). Within this framework, the study aimed to uncover the experiences that shape educators' perceptions of wellbeing, providing interpretations that validate or challenge existing hypotheses about educators' wellbeing (Opie and Sikes, 2004).

In conducting this research, my focus was on exploring the lived experiences of educators and how they have personally interpreted their own life experiences within the context of society (Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison, 2018). Considering this, I deemed the interpretivist paradigm as the most suitable approach, as it allowed me to directly gain insights into how their lived experiences have influenced my research topic.

## **Research approach**

This study employed a phenomenological research approach to explore the subjective experiences and perspectives of educators from primary, secondary, and higher education settings regarding their wellbeing. Phenomenology, as a research methodology, seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon and centres on understanding consciousness and the contents of conscious experiences, including judgments, perceptions, and emotions from the perspective of those who have experienced them (Bevan, 2014; Teherani *et al.*, 2015). The benefits of phenomenology allow researchers to delve into the essence of the lived experience itself, rather than solely focusing on individuals' reactions to that experience (Munhall, 2007). By adopting this approach, I was able to delve deeply into participants' experiences and operate under the premise that these experiences are unique (Creswell, 2002; Biggam, 2008; Easterby *et al.*, 2008; Armour, Rivaux and Bell, 2009) and these findings could have real-life results that may have a positive impact on the subjects (Cotterell, 2014).

In phenomenological research, a key challenge is to investigate the lived experience of individuals pertaining to a phenomenon, emphasising its universal essence (Lopez and Willis, 2004). This necessitated my ability to temporarily set aside my own attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions, enabling me to centre on the participant's experience of the phenomenon and recognise its essential nature (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019). Maintaining rigour in research required me to be diligent in my bracketing efforts, ensuring that my personal subjectivity did not introduce bias into data analysis and interpretation, and did not interfere with the process of reduction (IBID). Phenomenological research typically focuses on small sample sizes and emphasises the unique experiences of participants (Denscombe, 2014). As a result, the findings may not be easily generalisable to broader populations (Carter, 2018).

Furthermore, conducting phenomenological research can be time-consuming due to the detailed and in-depth nature of the analysis (Cottrell, 2014).

## **Sampling**

In order to gather participants for the study, a combination of purposive and quota sampling methods was employed, involving a total of six educators. Purposive sampling focuses on selecting a small number of individuals deliberately based on their relevance and expertise (Carter, 2018), while quota sampling focuses on sampling from specific categories that align with the research objectives (Burton, Brundrett, and Jones, 2014). Both approaches were deemed beneficial in this study, as potential participants were contacted through phone calls, emails, and face-to-face interactions. For this study, individuals were selected on the criteria of being in primary, secondary and higher education settings in East London. Research in inner-city areas was prompted by challenges faced by schools across England in recruiting and retaining staff, particularly evident in inner London (Weale, 2018). Each setting entailed a male and female educator. Due to time constraints, this seemed the most appropriate style (Denscombe, 2010). Therefore, four interviews were arranged in person at a location that suited the participants (place of work) and two interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams.

Six originally identified participants met the criteria needed for the research. Two of the six participants changed their minds about being interviewed. I then undertook the snowballing technique which entailed asking current participants to identify potential individuals to participate in the study (Burton, Brundrett and Jones, 2014) which resulted in finding a further two participants for the study.

## **Data collection method**

The present study employed a data collection method involving semi-structured interviews. This approach was chosen due to its ability to elicit more comprehensive and flexible responses from participants (Denscombe, 2010; Opie and Brown, 2019). Semi-structured interviews also offer the advantage of adaptability, allowing for follow-up questions and the exploration of participants' feelings and motives (Bell, 2010; Burton, Brundett and Jones, 2014). Additionally, this method facilitates the establishment of rapport with individual participants, thereby yielding in-depth and qualitative data (O'Leary, 2014) that is both honest and detailed (Curtis, Murphy and Shields 2014). In contrast, structured and unstructured interviews were deemed unsuitable for this study due to their inability to provide the same advantages as semi-structured interviews (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). Individual interviews were chosen over group interviews or focus groups for a couple of reasons. Firstly, individual interviews ensured perspectives from a single source (Denscombe, 2010), avoiding dominance or hesitance in a group setting (Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison, 2018). Secondly, group interviews may foster groupthink, where individuals conform to the group's opinions, rather than expressing their individual opinions and feelings, contradicting the interpretivist approach (Louis et al., 2019). Therefore, four face-to-face and two online interviews were conducted (Burton, Brundett, and Jones, 2014), mitigating power dynamics and promoting open dialogue (Thomas, 2017). Semi-structured interviews have limitations. Interviewer bias can unintentionally influence respondents (Bell, 2010; Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2018). However, steps were taken to address this bias during data analysis. Asymmetric power dynamics can also affect the interview process and responses (Curtis, Murphy, & Shields, 2014). Granting participants



choice in interview location fosters a closer researcher-participant relationship (Elwood & Martin, 2000) and ensures a comfortable environment (Denscombe, 2007). Conducting and transcribing interviews can be time-consuming (Bryman, 2012).

## **Pilot**

A pilot study was conducted with different educators to assess the appropriateness of the questions and the duration of the study, as well as to identify any gaps that needed to be addressed (Opie and Brown, 2019). Following the pilot study, it became apparent that certain modifications were necessary. For instance, a working definition of wellbeing was required as participants were uncertain and confused about its meaning. Additionally, the questions were revised to align more closely with the research questions (Walliman, 2004).

## **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability in research refers to the ability of a study to be replicated with similar results (Alshenqeeti, 2014). In order to establish reliability in this study, the interview questions were carefully constructed to ensure clarity and comprehensibility for all participants (Coe *et al.*, 2017). To accomplish this, the questions were piloted with other educators prior to conducting the actual interviews for the research study. It is important to note that in academic research, reliability is often weighed against validity in terms of striking a balance.

Semi-structured interviews can enhance validity by enabling researchers to gather detailed information from a select group of individuals who possess significant expertise in a particular area of interest, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Ahlin, 2019). Similarly, Bell (2010) argues that reliability may not be suitable for interpretivist research as it places too much emphasis on standardised measurements.

In qualitative research, establishing trustworthiness with participants is crucial to ensure the credibility of the collected data (Opie, 2004). In the current study, rapport with participants was established by maintaining a respectful and friendly approach, while the interviews were conducted in a secure and familiar environment to ensure participants' comfort and safety.

The study involved six participants (three male and three female) from East London, therefore, cannot be generalised to England or globally. This limitation may challenge the reliability of the research (Curtis, Murphy and Shields, 2014). Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that this study centres on the unique first-hand experiences of the participants. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm that prioritises individual experiences over overarching generalisations, the emphasis is placed on the significance of validity rather than reliability in qualitative data collection for research studies (Bell, 2010).

## **Ethical considerations**

In this research, the application of ethical standards is crucial in ensuring the protection and wellbeing of participants and therefore following the guidelines provided by BERA (2018) serves as a foundation for ethical conduct. These guidelines encompass seeking informed consent, maintaining transparency, respecting the right to withdraw, minimising harm to both participants and researchers, securely storing data, and ensuring proper disclosure (BERA 2018; Carter, 2018).

The following ethical principles were applied in my research:

### **Informed consent**

This principle highlights the participants' entitlement to exercise informed decision-making and maintain authority over their involvement. Informed consent, an essential component of honouring autonomy, entails providing participants with detailed information regarding the research, its objectives, potential advantages and drawbacks, as well as their prerogative to withdraw from the study at any point (Manion and Morrison, 2011; Burton, Brundrett, and Jones, 2014). In the initial stage, ethical approval was granted by the University of East London (UEL) (Appendix A) which incorporated UEL's Ethical Framework (UEL, 2021). In addition, following this framework, the consent of the participants was obtained by emailing participants, an information sheet (Appendix C) and a consent form (Appendix B), clearly outlining the details of the study and providing them with the freedom to withdraw without explanation at any time (Denscombe, 2010; BERA, 2018).

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality refers to the protection of participants' personal information, ensuring that it remains private and is not shared with any third parties (Bell and Water, 2018; Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). Anonymity, on the other hand, ensures that participants' identities are completely unknown and cannot be revealed (Clark *et al*, 2019). In my research, I maintained confidentiality by ensuring that any identifiable information, recordings and transcripts of interviews were stored securely on a password-protected computer and accessible only to me (Carter, 2018; Opie and Brown, 2019). To safeguard anonymity, participants were assigned pseudonyms instead of using their real names, which were consistently referenced during data analysis and the write-up of the research (Walford, 2005; Sieber and Tolich, 2012).

## **Harm to participants**

Ethical research prioritises participant wellbeing, minimises harm, and promptly addresses any unexpected harm that may arise (BERA, 2018; Carter, 2018). In addition, adhering to ethical standards is essential for researchers engaged in studies involving human subjects, ensuring the protection of participants' rights, and fostering a responsible and respectful research environment (Bassegy, 1999). In this study, the principle of participant wellbeing was applied through careful assessment and minimisation of risks, informed consent procedures, implementation of safeguards for physical, psychological, and social wellbeing, and measures to ensure confidentiality and data security (BERA, 2018; Carter, 2018). In my research, to minimise harm, participants were given access to support resources (Appendix D) and informed of their right to withdraw and refuse to answer certain questions without repercussions (Carter, 2018). Proactive measures were taken to address emotional distress during the research process, including providing breaks, terminating sessions if needed, excluding participants from further involvement if necessary, and offering access to pastoral support services (Corbin & Morse, 2003). These steps aimed to safeguard the participant's wellbeing and uphold ethical considerations.

## **Power relations**

Power relations refer to imbalances of power that may exist between researchers and participants, potentially influencing the research process and outcomes (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009). To minimise power imbalances in my research, I approached participants I already knew without the need for gatekeepers. I strived to establish a collaborative and respectful relationship with participants, fostering open communication, active listening, sympathising, and acknowledging their expertise and experiences, whilst avoiding being domineering and powerful (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Participants were informed of their right to stop, pause, withdraw, or refuse to answer questions without repercussions (Carter, 2018).

In terms of the benefits and risks of my research, the possible benefits included generating new knowledge in the field, providing insights and perspectives from participants, and potentially informing practices or policies (Skelton, 2005; Burke, 2012). However, risks such as emotional discomfort or privacy breaches were considered (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019; Opie and Brown, 2019). To address these risks, I prioritised participant welfare and took measures to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and the option to withdraw from the study.

## **Reflexivity**

As a researcher, my identity and positioning can influence the data-gathering process and analysis through personal biases or preconceived notions (Gough, Oliver and Thomas, 2017; Opie and Brown, 2019). To mitigate personal bias, I maintained reflexivity by critically reflecting on my own perspectives and assumptions throughout the research process (Schon, 1983; Palaganas *et al.*, 2017). I aimed to approach the data with an open mind, engage in self-reflection, and consider alternative viewpoints to enhance the objectivity and credibility of the research (Symon, Cassell and Johnson, 2018).

## **Findings and discussion**

This chapter will analyse and discuss the findings obtained from the interviews which examined the experiences, challenges, and identifiable factors educators face in their workplaces. The data collection process involved conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews with six participants in different types of educational settings: primary, secondary, and higher education. The participants in the study were 3 males and 3 females, one of each gender from each educational setting. Their ages ranged from 24 to 58 years, with an average age of 42 years. They will be referred to as P1 - P6 to protect the participants' anonymity.

The process of data analysis involved three stages: data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development (Lacey and Luff, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the first stage, the data was translated and transcribed. In the second stage, keywords and concepts were identified from the perspective of educators. Finally, in the third stage, the identified concepts were condensed into relevant themes, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes identified were categorised under each research question.

A thematic approach was employed to analyse the data, following the method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79), which involves 'identifying and reporting patterns within the data'. This approach is commonly used for analysing qualitative data, particularly in interview studies, and typically involves a process of data familiarisation, coding, and theme development and revision (Lacey and Luff, 2001; Cresswell, 2009). The themes identified were categorised under each research question.

The first research question about educators' experiences of their wellbeing in their practice generated different conceptualisations of wellbeing. The participants' descriptions of these concepts revealed the two themes of 'work-life balance' and 'physical and mental health'.

## **Work-life balance**

Participants emphasised the importance of a satisfactory work-life balance, which involved separating work from personal and social activities. Some faced challenges in achieving this balance, struggling to distinguish between work and personal life as the following quotes demonstrate:

P3: "It means having a work-life balance (...) that's acceptable, making sure that actually, I can cope with the work that I'm given."

P5 greatly valued the time and energy they could use for social and family time. They referred to their self-esteem and self-identity as being dependent on a strong social network.

P5: "I have a very strong social network with regards to how I feel about myself outside of work and with my family (...) wellbeing is extremely important factor of who I am as a person."

P2 showed more dissatisfaction with balancing wellbeing during their day, both at work and at home. The emphasis on the amount of time available was particularly notable.

P2: “I just haven’t got the time to do it. It’s just that the role is very demanding and time to practise mental health wellbeing is rather difficult.”

This is in line with Schad and Johnsson’s (2019) study in Sweden, teachers exhibited elevated levels of stress and experienced sleeping difficulties compared to other professions. The research revealed that teachers struggled to maintain a healthy equilibrium between their work obligations and personal leisure time (IBID). Similarly, Forsyth (2010) emphasises the importance of efficiently managing limited resources for maintaining a work-life balance.

## **Mental and Physical Health**

Participants engaged in discussions regarding their mental state and emphasised the significance of maintaining wellbeing to effectively carry out their professional responsibilities. This is what their responses were:

P6: “wellbeing is to be in a good place both mentally and physically.”

P2 felt strongly about the collectiveness of physical and mental health.

P2: “[wellbeing] means being healthy in mind and body collectively.”

Then, P5 further supported these sentiments referring to their emotional health as being equally important.

P5: “[wellbeing is] having a good state of mind emotionally and physically.”

As mentioned earlier, the significance of mental and physical health aligns with the findings of Cook, Miller, and Fiat’s (2017) findings which emphasised that teacher wellbeing encompasses the holistic wellness of educators, covering their mental, emotional, and physical health.

Despite acknowledging significant mental pressure, certain participants demonstrated their ability to manage and cope with these pressures. For example, P5 emphasised the value of emotional support and stress management, while P6 shared personal relaxation techniques aimed at enhancing resilience and cultivating positive emotions.

P5: “I’m quite resilient in terms of mentally so, it takes a lot for me to be affected mentally. Physically I like to keep myself in good shape.”

P6: “We work on different ways of being mindful (...) I think that’s really enriching.”

The collected data aligns with Schussler (2016) who found teachers who are aware of their negative emotions and can regulate them are more likely to be well-adjusted. In addition, Hwang’s (2019) findings on mindfulness-based interventions were found to be successful in reducing stress levels among teachers and promoting self-compassion. This shows that mindfulness-based tools can be effective in overcoming the challenges educators encounter.

Participants were asked to elaborate on their experiences of various types of wellbeing, inspired by Seligman's theory (2011), including emotional, physical, social, workplace, and societal wellbeing. There was consistency within the data that underlined emotional wellbeing as the most significant type of wellbeing:

P5: "If I'm not doing my physical activities [football and gym], it affects my emotional wellbeing."

P6: "Work on different ways of being mindful as a means to improve my overall wellbeing."

The responses affiliate with the findings of Greenier, Derakhshan, and Fathi (2011), which indicate that psychological wellbeing has a positive impact on teachers' engagement in their work. This can be attributed to the notion that the ability to regulate emotions and improve interactions with colleagues, students, and the overall work environment.

The second research question asked about challenges impacting their well-being. Educators identified various themes encompassing challenges to their wellbeing, such as time and workload pressures, professional scrutiny, fear of discrimination, inadequate recognition of well-being, and limited coping mechanisms when addressing the second research question.

## **Time and Workload**

Participants highlighted challenges related to their wellbeing, specifically focusing on meeting deadlines and managing their workload within the available time as noted below:

P4: "Stress and work-load will have a negative impact on wellbeing (...) not enough time frame to meet the deadlines of the workload we have been given."

P3: "Workload is a big issue, like marking, assessment, planning. We're given a whole load of deadlines with very little time to do it."

Another participant articulated concern about the impact workload has on their personal life.

P2: "I neglect myself through the work and demands ...".

However, one diverged from the perspectives of the others stating the priority of the schools is to look after the students rather than staff, and lack resources to support educators:

P6: "Schools are there to look after the education of children, and they may try to look after their staff but they don't have the time, the capacity or the finances to do it."

Secondary school respondents mentioned students' behaviour as one of the challenges that impact their wellbeing.

P4: “Sometimes students behaviour has an impact on wellbeing, especially my own, if I’m really tired from work itself and like the stress of work, sometimes when children can be cruel and it’s overwhelming.”

P3: “Poor pupil behaviour is another factor [challenging wellbeing].”

Furthermore, half the respondents mentioned a shortage of staff that impacted their wellbeing.

P4: “If you’re having an emotionally bad day, they haven’t got anyone to cover. They’re like: You’re OK, you’re not crying right now, you can still teach.”

P5: “Finding cover teachers and they’ve raised how expensive a cover teacher is.”

The findings correlate with McCallum (2021) who found that teachers have a significant impact on student’s academic outcomes, as well as their social and emotional wellbeing. Moreover, the study revealed a positive correlation between teacher effectiveness and the support received from their schools and communities.

The following quotes highlight the challenging work dynamics and time constraints experienced by most educators. They emphasise the importance of efficient planning and working diligently during school hours to minimise the need for additional work at home.

P2: “When I’m working it doesn’t end, I carry it home with me (...) most of our Christmas break will be spent marking.”

P5: “Getting in at 7 am and leaving at 7 pm (...) you just about have enough time to eat your lunch.”

However, P4 adopts a strategy of sacrificing lunch breaks to maximise productivity during work hours, ensuring that they have more time for personal and family commitments after work.

P4: “I don’t really eat a lunch, I work through my lunchtime, get everything done so that at least when I go home I’ve got the time to myself and my family.”

The observed work dynamics and time limitations pose challenges for educators, as evident above, which aligns with the findings of Allen *et al.* (2020) that highlight that teachers' working hours do not fully represent their total workload.

### **Scrutinised profession**

To further compound the stress that educators are facing, respondents commented on the impact of the sense of scrutiny that they faced.

P3: “The constant monitoring and scrutiny of your teaching from line managers and the senior leadership, and inspections [Ofsted].”

P6: “Constantly monitored and evaluated (...) constantly being judged by different people [Ofsted] (...) there’s also the new demands, the curriculum could change or school routines.”

The constant monitoring and scrutiny of teaching practices, coupled with the judgment by Ofsted, align with the findings of Case, Case and Catling (2000) which noted that OFSTED has a significant and distressing impact on teachers, with inspections negatively affecting teaching practices in the post-inspection period. The exhaustion from preparation reduces teaching effectiveness for an extended duration after the evaluation.

## **Fear of discrimination**

The notion of discrimination is of concern to most of my participants. One expressed concern about the potential impact of revealing personal information on their professional career asserting:

P1: “Sometimes you worry (...) can I reveal something that’s going on in my personal life. Will that impact me professionally or will that go against me?”

P2: “Some staff are reluctant to use the [wellbeing] services or you don’t know what their illnesses are or what their wellbeing status is so you can’t support them in that area.”

P4: “I don’t feel as though I can always voice [how I’m feeling] because I don’t want to come across as a burden.”

One notable obstacle that educators encounter is the stigma associated with burnout (Bianchi, Schonfeld, and Laurent, 2016). The significance of stigma is underlined in mental health research, where it has been observed to engender feelings of uncertainty, insufficiency, subsidiarity, and weakness, while also fostering avoidance, prejudice, and rejection of individuals with mental health conditions (Lannin *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, stigma wields a formidable social influence that can impede the seeking of treatment and exacerbate the wellbeing challenges faced by stigmatised individuals (Jennings *et al.*, 2015; Pyle *et al.*, 2015).

## **Lack of wellbeing recognition**

Respondents reported a lack of recognition for their multi-faceted role as an educator and the impact this lack of recognition has on their wellbeing.

P1: “What’s important is the recognition of our work and how much we do, what we do, which is beyond our remit.”

P3: “Understanding of what we’re going through in terms of work-load, the difficulties with our job and doing something about it ...”.

O'Brien and Guiney’s (2021) systematic research emphasises years of reforms without proper consultation may contribute to teachers feeling that their wellbeing is qualitatively worse than other occupations.

## **Coping mechanisms**



The participants in the study all expressed speaking to colleagues for personal and professional support to cope with wellbeing challenges.

P1: “I’m really fortunate, I have colleagues and peers here who I’ve created professional relationships, but also personal relationships, so not only do we support each other professionally, but we also support each other personally as well.”

P2: “You just support each other, or you speak to management.”

P3: “Talking to my colleagues, talk about how my lessons are, make sure that I’ve prepped properly, getting ideas from other colleagues.”

P5: “If I am feeling really stressed, I talk to as many of my co-workers.”

P4: “I have a solid support network in regard to my family. Last year I really struggled with my wellbeing where I went to my line manager and HR ...”.

When participants described a positive and supportive atmosphere, it showed consistency with Babic (2022) who highlighted the significance of colleague motivation and mutual assistance in promoting wellbeing. Similarly, Turner, Thielking and Prochazka (2022) noted that teachers who actively engaged in social support with their colleagues experienced a reduction in feelings of loneliness and an increase in sensations of care and connection within their professional community.

Aside from collegial support, one respondent reported requiring high levels of resilience.

P5: “I’m quite mentally resilient (...) I tend to try and take a step back and look at it in a different perspective.”

This aligns with Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010), who advocate for a self-efficacy approach, shifting the focus from external support to self-belief in promoting wellbeing. The study discovered a positive correlation between job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy.

This final question asked participants about the wellbeing support offered in their workplace and what wellbeing services they would like to see offered. The first part of the questions asked participants about the wellbeing support offered in their workplace and two themes were identified: wellbeing activities accessed and barriers to providing wellbeing services. The second part of the questions asked participants what wellbeing services they would like to see offered which identified the two themes of collegial support and access to more wellbeing activities.

## **Wellbeing activities accessed**

The participants responded to the current support available to them in their workplace. These ranged from accessing: Occupational Health, Wellbeing Team, Counsellor, Mental Health Ambassadors, Wellbeing Wednesday, Coffee Mornings, Sports and Palates. Most participants mentioned the wellbeing activities that they have taken part in which entailed:

P4: “Wellbeing mornings every week on Wednesday.”

P3: “Wellbeing mornings every week on Wednesday, take part in the sports activities every Friday afternoon.”

P6: “I’ve been to the coffee afternoon, comedy club and bingo at work.”

The results of this study are consistent with earlier research, which indicates that effective school policies and practises for preventing and reducing staff stress and burnout should include offering access to specialised support and guidance, providing additional help to staff working with difficult students and planning development opportunities centred on staff developing emotional and social skills and wellness (Reinke *et al.*, 2011; Askill-Williams, Lawson and Skrzypiec, 2012; Lendrum, Humphrey and Wigelsworth, 2013).

### **Barriers to providing wellbeing services**

The participants commented on the financial cost of offering wellbeing to staff as being a key obstacle.

P1: “It would certainly require finances and an awareness of acceptance that there are issues that staff have (...) require external agencies.”

P4: “Services are expensive.”

The findings of Dunlop and Macdonald's (2004) study are consistent with the findings of this research which identified financial constraints to fund wellbeing activities as barriers to providing wellbeing services in schools.

### **Collegial support**

Fostering positive relationships amongst colleagues can strengthen job satisfaction and holistic welfare.

P1: “We need to know where to go to, the reminder of confidentiality and anonymity, regular emails to signpost where to access support.”

P2: “Provide the opportunity to talk to somebody to make sure they are managing.”

The present study aligns with Schad and Johnsson's (2019) research, indicating that teachers express concerns about the confidentiality of employer-provided support services. Furthermore, the study conducted by Edinger and Edinger (2018) determined a strong positive relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and their perceptions of organisational support and collegial trust.

### **Access to more wellbeing activities**

Participants suggested alternative wellbeing activities such as digital apps and staff-centred games to boost morale.

P4: “Having a school subscription to things like ‘Headspace’ and meditation apps.”

P5: “Team building exercises where you’re just having fun with the staff that you work with.”

The findings of the present study are congruent with the research conducted by Gearhart, Blayde, and McCarthy (2022), in which teachers proposed establishing collaborations with local businesses to enhance the affordability of community resources. Similarly, this study aligns with Montebello's (2022) research, emphasising the importance of school leaders' support for enhancing teachers' welfare. Strategies such as an open-door policy, shared decision-making, teambuilding activities, and curriculum time enforcement contribute to a holistic approach to teachers' wellbeing.

The preceding sections have highlighted the impact of various factors on educator wellbeing, including work-life balance and mental and physical health. The interviews consistently identified workload as a significant challenge. Additionally, my study uncovered novel aspects of educator wellbeing, such as the fear of stigma, scrutiny of teaching practice, the importance of positive relationships among colleagues, financial constraints, confidentiality concerns, and the use of digital apps and staff-centred games to enhance morale. These insights offer valuable guidance for future practitioners and institutions aiming to support educators, reduce burnout, and promote wellbeing.

## **Conclusion**

### **Key findings**

This research aimed to comprehensively analyse the experiences, challenges, and factors influencing educator well-being in the workplace. The key findings highlight the impact of work-life balance and mental and physical health on educators' well-being. Consistently, the interviews emphasised the significant challenges of time and workload, which hinder the implementation of wellbeing activities and have detrimental effects on educators' well-being. Additionally, factors such as the scrutinised nature of the profession, fear of discrimination, and lack of recognition for wellbeing further negatively affect educators' well-being. However, the study also identified positive contributors to educator wellbeing, including collegial support, engagement in wellbeing activities, and the utilisation of coping strategies.

### **Contribution of research**

The contribution of this research lies in delving deeply into the problems affecting teachers' wellbeing and by providing a nuanced understanding of their experiences. The present study has unveiled previously unexplored dimensions of educator wellbeing, encompassing the fear of stigma, scrutiny of teaching practice, and the significance of positive collegial relationships to enhance morale. These insights are valuable for informing and guiding future practitioners

and educational institutions seeking to effectively support educators, mitigate burnout, and foster overall wellbeing (McCallum, 2021). This research goes beyond surface-level understandings of teacher wellbeing and delves into the intricacies of their professional environment.

The current study stands out from previous research through its distinct participant selection from diverse ethnic backgrounds and educational levels, including higher education, secondary schools, and primary schools. In addition, the study included one participant of each gender from each sector. Furthermore, all participants were specifically selected from the East London region, providing a localised perspective that adds depth and relevance to the findings and could be replicated in inner-city localities with similar demographics.

## **Limitations**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The narrow geographic scope of the research may restrict the generalisability of the findings to teachers in different geographical areas or educational systems (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Additionally, the sample size employed in the study might limit the extent to which the results can be generalised (McGrath and Coles, 2013). However, it is feasible to replicate this study in a similar locality facing comparable challenges arising from socio-economic factors. Conducting such a replication study could yield similar characteristics and findings related to educators' wellbeing. It is worth noting that variations in findings may arise in well-resourced schools or regions due to the unique nature of the teaching profession in those contexts. To enhance future research in this area, it is recommended to include a larger and more diverse sample, encompassing educators from various settings and educational levels. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the dynamic nature of teacher wellbeing over time (McGrath and Coles, 2013). Additionally, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding teacher wellbeing (Punch, 2011).

## **Positionality**

Throughout the research process, the researcher's positionality in relation to the topic has possibly evolved and utilised a reflective approach to reduce bias (Rowe, 2014). My positionality has evolved prior to the research as I had a particular view about educators' wellbeing due to my positionality and previous experiences. Immersion in the data and analysis has likely deepened the understanding of the challenges faced by educators and the significance of wellbeing in their professional lives (Grix, 2019). After reading and conducting the research, my positionality has shifted due to the insights I have gained. I have developed greater empathy for the experiences of educators' and recognised the need for systemic support to enhance teacher wellbeing. Therefore, to shape one's positionality, it is crucial to engage in the process of reflexivity. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

## **Recommendations**

In terms of recommendations for policy and practice, the findings of this study emphasise the importance of creating a supportive school environment that fosters educator wellbeing. Implementing strategies such as professional development programs on wellbeing, promoting collegial support, and addressing workload issues can contribute to enhancing teacher wellbeing (NASUWT, 2022). Additionally, policymakers and school administrators should prioritise educator wellbeing in their decision-making processes to create sustainable and supportive work environments for educators (O'Brien and Guiney, 2021).

In conclusion, this research has provided valuable insights into the wellbeing of teachers in their workplace. By exploring their experiences, challenges, and identifiable factors, this study contributes to the existing knowledge on teacher wellbeing. The findings and conclusions of this research offer guidance for further research, policy development, and practical interventions aimed at promoting teacher wellbeing and, ultimately, improving the overall educational environment.

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# **ARE TEACHERS IN THE UK EQUIPPED TO TEACH AUTISTIC LEARNERS WITHIN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS?**

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## **Abstract**

Inclusive education has been a widely debated topic, with most countries across the world taking steps to move towards inclusive educational systems. But how much progress has the UK made towards inclusion within education?

This dissertation offers an opportunity for professionals and parents to obtain a greater understanding of how well-equipped teachers are to teach autistic learners in mainstream schools, by exploring autistic learners' feelings, achievement and their ability to access education. It also explores past and current Government legislation and policy, in relation to inclusive education and autism.

The findings from this study indicate that teachers are not well-equipped to teach autistic learners within mainstream schools, as there is a lack of teacher knowledge, understanding and training regarding autism and inclusive education. There were also indications that Government legislation is too vague in relation to teaching students with SEND, and non-existent when it comes to training and preparing teachers to teach SEND learners. This is contradictory and goes against much other existing legislation. Although the UK has long started its journey to develop and implement an inclusive educational system, as you will discover through reading this paper, there is still much more road to travel.

**Keywords:** Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder, SEND, mainstream education, inclusion, inclusive education

## Introduction

Education is thought to be at the core of our society and a tool to teach societal norms and values (Suggate & Reese,2012; DfE,2015a). Over the past few decades, the UK has taken steps to ensure their educational system is inclusive, by imposing legislation which allows learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to be taught within mainstream schools, alongside their allistic peers (DfES,2001; Obiakor *et al.*,2012; DfE,2015a). This is referred to as inclusion or inclusive education (DfES,2001; Obiakor *et al.*,2012; DfE,2015a). Allistic is the term used for an individual who is not autistic (McCracken,2021). A person is thought to have a SEND if they need specialist health or educational provision, due to a disability or learning difficulty (DfE,2015a). Autism is a type of SEND that is extremely difficult to define as it is viewed through different lenses and perspectives, so its definition vastly differs from person to person (Wood,2019). According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which is used to diagnose autism, autism is a neurological condition that impacts day to day functioning, particularly regarding social communication and interaction (Hollander *et al.*,2018; APA,2022). Autism is also associated with repetitive patterns of behaviour and is thought to have an impact on many aspects of a person's life, such as schooling (Hollander *et al.*,2018; APA,2022; WHO,2022).

An ongoing global debate which argues for and against the inclusion of SEND pupils within mainstream schools (UNICEF,N.D; Booth & Ainscow,1998; Rose,2001), has resulted in the UK providing mandatory guidance for schools regarding inclusion (DfE,2015a; DoHSC,2021) and developing and expanding on legislation in a bid to promote inclusive education (DfES,2001; Children and Families Act 2014). A mainstream school is described as a school which is not a specialist school or alternative educational provision (DfE,2014). Although much research has been undertaken to investigate how SEND pupils access education within mainstream environments (Peetsma *et al.*,2001; Whitaker,2007; Kurth & Mastergeorge,2010; Reed *et al.*,2011), research exploring the inclusion of autistic learners is limited, as most of the statistics and information regarding individuals with any type of SEND is typically generalised, rather than categorised according to diagnosis (Waddington & Reed,2017). This is surprising and problematic, as there is thought to be over one-hundred and ten thousand autistic learners within mainstream schools across England (NAS,2021), in need of adequate provision to access education and develop vital skills in preparation for adult life (Suggate & Reese,2012; DfE,2015a). Accessing education and being able to learn amongst others is a child's right, regardless of any need or disposition, and this is outlined within two of the biggest human rights conventions in the world, which are the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF,1989) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (UN,2006). The Articles within these conventions and a brief history of legislation regarding inclusion and SEND, will be explored later within the literature review section of this dissertation.

Upon exploring the realm of SEND education, a pressing question kept reoccurring. How can teachers be well-equipped to teach autistic learners and create an inclusive environment, if there is no clear indication of whether autistic learners are thriving or struggling within current mainstream schools? This has led to me carrying out my own investigation and reviewing literature to explore how equipped mainstream teachers are to teach autistic pupils, teachers' knowledge of autism and how to create inclusive classrooms, as well as the training educators receive during initial teacher training (ITT) regarding autism. It would be beneficial for educators, policy makers and guardians of autistic individuals to read this dissertation, as it is informative

and highlights several pressing issues with current UK legislation and mainstream education, regarding autistic learners.

## **Method for the Literature Review**

A literature review is an in-depth, evidence-based analysis of academic literature on a specific topic placed in context (Thomas,2017; Kay,2018; Mukherji & Albon,2018; Clark *et al.*,2019). It involves extensively researching literature which has been previously published, to obtain knowledge and present an argument from several perspectives (Kay,2018; Mukherji & Albon,2018). A literature review should draw on key issues within the literature and elaborate on them, by comparing the results within the studies (Kay,2018; Mukherji & Albon,2018). It also entails summarising the views of authors within the field and organising the information into subtopics, so it is easier to compare and consider the different sources against each other (Kay,2018; Clark *et al.*,2019). The ability to raise relevant questions and identify limitations are signs of a good quality literature review (Kay,2018; Clark *et al.*,2019). Other elements of a good quality literature review include the ability to highlight any gaps within research and relate findings to theories which are relevant to the topic of interest (Thomas,2017; Kay,2018, Clark *et al.*,2019).

A non-empirical research approach to this literature review seemed the most suitable, as it would be necessary to delve into the experiences of autistic individuals within mainstream schools. Researching about personal experiences, especially when children are involved is a difficult task, as it is a sensitive topic that could potentially cause harm to participants, if not conducted ethically (Mukherji & Albon,2018; Denscombe,2021). Ethical considerations within research are explained later within the ethics section of this dissertation. Conducting empirical research that surrounds a sensitive topic or involves children, in my own opinion, should be the task of experienced researchers with extensive knowledge of the research process. This should limit any potential risks of conducting the research and as an undergraduate with limited experience, conducting non-empirical research was the best ethical consideration made for this dissertation.

To investigate how well-equipped teachers are to teach autistic learners within mainstream schools, it was necessary to explore a variety of subtopics regarding the research question, to determine a conclusion. The three main research questions that underpin this dissertation, concern the provision provided for autistic students, as well as teachers knowledge and training regarding SEND learners. This, along with subtopics which explore educational attainment in mainstream school and parental viewpoints, assisted to draw upon a conclusion of the main pressing issues within the research. Several perspectives of any argument or opinion that was presented were included, along with related theories and legislation to ensure the research is credible and unbiased (Bell & Waters,2018). The data collection method used within this research consisted of searching online databases, such as Google Scholar and EBSCOhost to find journals and gathering books from the library. Online research platforms allow researchers to access a wide variety of literature in a fast and cost-effective manner (Matthews & Ross,2010). On the contrary, online databases can be difficult to navigate (Mukherji & Albon,2018).

## Qualitative research methods

The studies included within this research have used qualitative methods of data collection. Qualitative data collection concerns exploring and analysing human emotions, experiences, concepts and social phenomena (Flick,2018; Billups,2020). To experience a sense of the participants reality, qualitative researchers tend to immerse themselves within the environment they are studying, which allows them to identify and empathise with participants (Taylor & Bogdan,1998; Flick,2018; Billups,2020). Qualitative research is usually conducted within a setting that is familiar to participants, such as a school like the studies within this dissertation used, to make natural observations without being disturbed by outside influence (Mukherji & Albon,2018; Billups,2020). This approach to research collects data in the form of words, pictures and feelings, unlike the quantitative approach that concerns numerical data only (Thomas,2017; Flick,2018). Qualitative data is inductive, which means that it identifies patterns of data, rather than using existing data and theories to conclude research findings (Mukherji & Albon,2018; Billups,2020). The data collection methods used within qualitative research include semi-structured interviews, observations, research diaries, focus groups and surveys (Thomas,2017; Bell & Waters,2018; Billups,2020).

A benefit of using a qualitative approach is that is more cost effective and less time consuming than other methods, due to using smaller samples of participants (Queiros *et al.*,2017; Bolshaw & Josephidou,2019). Qualitative data can be analysed in greater depth than quantitative data, presenting researchers with the opportunity to gain more of an insight into their topic of interest (Flick,2018; Mukherji & Albon,2018). This is another benefit of this approach, as it allows researchers to focus on the subtleties within the data and identify the gaps, inspiring future research within scarcely or unresearched fields (Flick,2018; Mukherji & Albon,2018; Billups,2020). Having said this, there are also limitations of using this approach, such as the data collected being less verifiable than quantitative data, as it is non-numerical (Queiros *et al.*,2017; Flick,2018). Identifying patterns in data can be a difficult task, which is more difficult when data can be interpreted like quantitative data can, so this could be deemed as a limitation of qualitative research (Taylor & Bogdan,1998; Mukherji & Albon,2018). Lastly, qualitative research methods such as face to face interviews, present the opportunity for potential bias and inaccurate answers to be given, due to participants answers not being anonymous, which is a significant limitation of this approach to research (Taylor & Bogdan,1998; Queiros *et al.*,2017).



## Challenges

A challenge that was encountered during the research process of this dissertation, was that it was difficult to find research and studies that were relevant for the literature review. To overcome this challenge, I used outdated terminology to describe autism, which will not be repeated within this dissertation, due to it being ableist. This solved the problem and led to finding relevant literature, but it also forced reflection as a researcher. Reading literature which describes autistic individuals in a discriminative manner was unpleasant. Having said this, many terms that were used are unacceptable to use today, which indicates that society is becoming more inclusive and less discriminative. A further challenge that was encountered when researching, was that only studies which were dated within the last decade, were intended to be used within this research. Due to research on autistic learners within mainstream environments being limited, it was extremely difficult to do so. To overcome this issue, all studies that were relevant, regardless of the date they were published, were included within this research. This could be considered as a limitation of this study, as the information within some of the studies is more than likely to be unapplicable, due to being outdated.

To support the task of critical thinking when reading literature, which is an imperative part of any research, the development of skills such as becoming self-aware, weighing up viewpoints and drawing upon conclusions with integrity were adopted (Cottrell,2014; Cottrell,2019). Critical thinking requires individuals to look past the reasons on the surface of information, and delve deeper into the reasons behind the surface, which are often unexplored (Cottrell,2014; Cottrell,2019). Being able to identify reasons below surface level is referred to as the gap in literature (Kay,2018; Clark *et al.*,2019). Another strategy adopted to support the research process, was keeping a record of literature in the form of a spreadsheet, which was listed, colour-coded and annotated to ensure efficiency (Cottrell,2014; Cottrell,2019).

## Reflexivity

Reflexivity, which is the ability to reflect on your own thoughts and feelings is another skill that was developed during this research process (Mukherji & Albon,2018). Reflexivity is beneficial as it has improved my ability to engage with literature in an unbiased and honest manner. Reflecting on my positionality was a learning experience, as it highlighted and forced me to acknowledge that due to my personal experiences, my thoughts and feelings regarding this topic were slightly biased. To address this issue, I explored any preconceived ideas that I had regarding this topic, then put these aside and made a conscious effort to have an open mind throughout the research process. This enabled me to present all aspects and perspectives of each argument which is fair and ethical. Researcher positionality can influence their choice of processes, interpretations and conclusions regarding their study, which ultimately dictates the way in which the research is presented and perceived (Cohen *et al.*,2011; Clark *et al.*,2019). It is imperative and beneficial for researchers to acknowledge and reflect on their positionality, as it allows for accountability to be taken and aids in producing rich, trustworthy and ethical literature (Cohen *et al.*,2011; Clark *et al.*,2019).

## Literature review

### What provision is available for autistic students within mainstream schools?

The intention of this literature review is to explore relevant literature relating to three research questions, that were composed to determine whether teachers within mainstream schools are well equipped to teach autistic learners. It will be investigating the type of provision available to assist autistic learners within the classroom, as well as teachers understanding of teaching autistic learners and the training they have received, if any, to support learners who are on the autistic spectrum. It will explore legislation and whether this is adhered to by educators in mainstream schools, within the UK.

### A brief history of UK legislation

The 1944 Education Act was focused on educating SEND learners separately from learners without SEND. This changed when the Education Act 1981 was introduced, due to the Warnock Report (1978) which drastically shifted the conceptualisation of SEND and argued the need for an inclusive approach to education. This was the first step the UK took towards creating inclusive educational environments and providing provision for SEND learners, as statements were introduced to outline the provision each SEND student must receive (Education Act 1981; Warnock Report 1978). In 2001, as an amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 was created to establish a SEND students' right to access provision in the form of services and aids. This enabled education to become more accessible and in the same year, the Government took more steps towards inclusion by publishing guidance for inclusive schooling (DfES,2001).

In 2004, Ofsted investigated how well-prepared mainstream schools were to teach SEND students for the first time (Ofsted,2004). By 2009, the Government had introduced a strategy entitled the Inclusion Development Programme: supporting pupils on the autism spectrum, to instil confidence and support educators regarding teaching autistic students (DfE,2009). This strategy also aimed to share good practice and prompt mainstream schools to adjust their procedures and policies, which will enable mainstream education to become more accessible to SEND students' (DfE,2009). Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills and this organisation is responsible for inspecting and regulating, any service that provides education within the UK (Ofsted,2022). The year 2009 was pivotal in addressing issues related to autistic provision, as the Autism Act 2009 was also introduced, but this only concerned autistic adults and excluded children and young people (UK Parliament,2022). It was not until 2019, that the Government reviewed their autism strategy and amended it in 2021 to include young people and children, as well as adults (HM Government,2021).

This brief overview of policies and legislation, regarding provision and access to education for SEND pupils, suggests that the UK has tried to take steps over the past two decades to provide inclusive education. But there are many years in-between policies, whereby issues regarding the inclusion of autistic individuals within society and education, are not being addressed. The questions remain, are current policies and guidelines being adhered to by mainstream schools within the UK? And are mainstream teachers adequately trained to teach autistic learners?

## **ASD resource bases**

There has been much research conducted in relation to the provision available for autistic learners within mainstream schools (Whitaker,2007). An autistic learners' provision within mainstream school is usually provided by either placing them within a school that can offer extra hours of additional support, given by a teaching assistant (TA) and/or a type of therapy from a health professional (Jones,2002; Pearlman & Michaels,2019). Alternatively, autistic learners could attend a mainstream school which has an autism resource base or specialist unit, and be provided with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which outlines a person's needs (Jones,2002). Autism resource bases provide students within mainstream schools with extra support, tailored to their individual needs (DfE,2015b; Frederickson *et al.*,2010). Resource bases can be beneficial as they offer inclusive experiences to suit individual needs and offer support from adequately trained mainstream staff members (Hesmondhalgh & Breakey,2001; Jordan,2005). On the contrary, resources bases have been criticised as students are segregated from their peers and isolated when learning (Alderson & Goodey,1999; Jones,2007; Mcallister & Hadjri,2013). According to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognitive development, human development is reliant on social interaction and learning is a social process (Pathan *et al.*,2018). This suggests that an ASD resource base could be an unsuitable environment to learn in. This also contradicts current legislation, as within the UNCRPD Article 24, it states disabled individuals should not be excluded from mainstream classrooms (UN,2006).

## **ASD resource bases - parental viewpoints**

A few similar studies were conducted with the aim of comparing the provision available in mainstream schools, with and without a specialist ASD resource base (Alderson & Goodey,1999; Barnard *et al.*,2000; Hesmondhalgh & Breakey,2001; Batten *et al.*,2006; Frederickson *et al.*,2010). They all resulted in parental viewpoints being consistently more positive when a school has a specialist resource base for autistic students (Alderson & Goodey,1999; Barnard *et al.*,2000; Hesmondhalgh & Breakey,2001; Batten *et al.*,2006; Frederickson *et al.*,2010). Another study was undertaken to gain parental viewpoints on the provision provided for autistic students within mainstream schools (Whitaker,2007). Sixty-one percent of parents were satisfied with the provision being provided for their child and believed school staff were empathetic and flexible in their teaching pedagogy (Whitaker,2007). Like Whitaker's (2007) study, other studies found that parents and educators held positive viewpoints regarding the inclusion of autistic learners within mainstream schools (Humphrey & Symes,2011; Segall & Campbell,2012). Similarly, in older studies focused on parental viewpoints, it was discovered that the carers of children with severe disabilities were more likely to have a positive viewpoint of inclusion (McDonnell,1987; Ryndak *et al.*,1995). However, more recently it has been suggested that children with mild disabilities receive higher levels of support (Leyser & Kirk,2004).

Although the studies undertaken by Barnard *et al.* (2000), Batten *et al.* (2006) and the West Midlands Autistic Society (1993) produced positive results regarding parental viewpoints of mainstream education for autistic students, this was only the case when the school had a specialist resource base. They highlighted serious concerns regarding inclusion in mainstream schools without specialist provision, such as inadequately trained staff members and parents struggling to obtain suitable provision for their children (West Midlands Autistic Society,1993; Barnard *et al.*,2000; Batten *et al.*,2006). Having said this, a limitation of all three of these studies is that the participants are existing members of the organisations that conducted the surveys (Whitaker,2007). This suggests that the participants could potentially be biased, whether it be conscious or unconscious. In addition to this, a survey taken by over four thousand parents, autistic children and young people, portrayed a negative viewpoint of mainstream school provision for SEND learners (NAS,2021). Three quarters of the parents felt as though their child's needs were not fully being met within school and it took more than three years for a quarter of the parents to receive any provision whatsoever for their child (NAS,2021). Moreover, less than half of the autistic children that participated within this survey said they were happy within school (NAS,2021).

Parental satisfaction regarding provision within mainstream schools may also differ depending on a child's diagnosis, as a study conducted by Kasari *et al.* (1999) resulted in parents of learners with Down's syndrome being much more likely to endorse inclusion within mainstream schools, than parents of autistic learners. This could be due to the autism spectrum being vast and the differing needs of autistic individuals. This could also be due to a lack of understanding on the teacher's behalf, regarding teaching individuals with complex disabilities such as autism. A limitation of the study conducted by Kasari *et al.* (1999) is that although parents were asked to identify what they perceived suitable provision to be, they were not asked to explore their personal experiences in detail, regarding their child's current educational provision (Whitaker,2007). A common factor for high parental satisfaction in Leyser and Kirk's (2004) study was that the satisfied parents had only been receiving specialist provision for their child, for a short period of time. This could suggest that parents were temporarily satisfied when provision was first received, but as time passed, became unsatisfied as the provision may not have been as suitable as they initially thought. If this is the case, this suggests that statistics of parental satisfaction could potentially be inaccurate, and I suggest that a longitudinal study should take place to examine viewpoints from when the provision is initially provided and repeated some years later, to see if parental satisfaction changes. Parental viewpoints are particularly important as the Children and Families Act 2014, Section 19 states the need for local authorities to support parents in facilitating the development of their child, to achieve the best possible educational outcomes regarding children and young people with SEND. In addition to that, the SEND Code of Practice (DfE,2015a) has a huge emphasis on parental input and states that professionals must have regard to the viewpoints of the child's parents. It also states parents must be provided with enough information to enable their full participation in decision making, regarding provision (Hellawell,2017). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE,2015a) is statutory guidance which outlines policies, duties and procedures that must be adhered to by organisations that encounter and support children and young people with SEND.

## Mainstream school vs special school attainment

Although some parents seem to be satisfied with the provision being made for their children within mainstream schools, how well do children with SEND perform within mainstream classrooms compared to specialist schools? A longitudinal study focusing on the educational attainment of SEND students within mainstream and specialist schools was undertaken (Peetsma *et al.*,2001). It concluded that SEND learners achieved higher attainment within mainstream schools, than their matched peers within specialist schools (Peetsma *et al.*,2001). This was also the case in another study, which also concluded that autistic learners achieved higher academic attainment in mainstream schools, than autistic learners within specialist education (Kurth & Mastergeorge,2010). In addition, Schleien *et al.* (1994) and Saint-Laurent *et al.* (1998) undertook studies which suggest that educating SEND students within mainstream schools has a positive effect on their peers without SEND. This is due to learners which are educated alongside SEND students, outperforming learners who do not have any SEND students within their class (Schleien *et al.*,1994; Saint-Laurent *et al.*,1998).

The reason for SEND students making great progress within mainstream schools may be able to be explained using Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognitive development (Purwanti & Hatmanto,2019). This theory suggests that learning takes place through interaction with a more knowledgeable other (Purwanti & Hatmanto,2019), which could be their peers within the classroom. Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) also agree with this theory, as they stated SEND students may achieve higher attainment in mainstream schools, due to being able to learn from more able students. Cole *et al.* (2004) and Myklebust (2007) also added that SEND learners may be more motivated to obtain higher grades in mainstream schools, as there is more of an emphasis on academic achievement. However, SEND learners may become less motivated in mainstream schools, as they are more likely to achieve less than learners without SEND (Ruijs & Peetsma,2009). It is also important for a child to feel a sense of belonging at school, as there is substantial evidence to suggest that this is linked to positive academic achievement and the ability to complete school (Bond *et al.*,2007; Goodenow,1993). According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, you must feel a sense of belonging before you can be motivated and engage, so it is imperative that all educational institutions foster a sense of belonging amongst all students, regardless of any need or disposition.

An extensive search for studies which result in autistic students achieving high attainment in mainstream schools was undertaken, and I was unable to find any except from the studies conducted by Peetsma *et al.* (2001) and Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010). The reason for this could be that those autistic students achieving high attainment in mainstream schools, may have slipped under the radar due to masking, and therefore, are undiagnosed and perceived to be allistic. Masking is when an autistic person suppresses behaviour associated with autism, in a bid to appear allistic (Cook *et al.*,2017; Pearson & Rose,2021). On the other hand, another reason for a lack of attainment regarding autistic students in mainstream schools, could be that a mainstream environment is not suitable, and education is inaccessible, which results in autistic students being unable to thrive and achieve academically.

Some studies suggest that mainstream school environments are not suitable for autistic students, as they result in the learner, their families and educators becoming distressed and experiencing high stress levels (Humphrey & Lewis,2008; Roberts & Webster,2020). Autistic individuals are also said to experience significantly higher levels of anger, depression and anxiety, than their peers without SEND within mainstream schools (Ashburner *et al.*,2009; Hebron & Humphrey,2014). Additionally, educational attainment for autistic students is disproportionately lower in comparison to other disability groups in mainstream education (Roberts & Webster,2020). Government statistics have revealed that autistic learners do not achieve the same level of attainment as their allistic peers (DfE,2018). Key stage two SATs results in England produced worrying figures, only 25% of autistic learners achieved expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics, as opposed to 70% of allistic learners (DfE,2018). GCSE results produced the same outcome as only 32.5% of autistic students achieved five grade four or above GCSEs, compared to 63.9% of allistic learners (DfE,2018).

These statistics support claims that mainstream schools may not be the best suited educational environment for autistic students (Hebron & Humphrey,2014; Humphrey & Lewis,2008; Roberts & Webster,2020). It also suggests that the UK's educational system may not be as inclusive as it is thought to be.

Although there is evidence to suggest that autistic students perform better within mainstream schools, there is also evidence to suggest that special schools produce higher attainment results than mainstream schools, regarding autistic learners (Reed *et al.*,2011). Reed *et al.* (2011) conducted a study to examine the impact of mainstream and special school environments on the educational attainment of autistic learners. The study concluded that learners made progress in both settings, but made greater improvements in special schools, especially regarding behavioural issues and social interaction (Reed *et al.*,2011). Similarly, studies conducted by Dillenburger *et al.* (2016), Panerai *et al.* (2009), Rogers and Thiery (2003) and Smith and Matson (2010), also concluded that students made greater progress regarding educational attainment, within special schools rather than mainstream schools. The main argument for placing a SEND pupil within a mainstream school, is usually for the opportunity to build upon social skills, which autistic children tend to have difficulties with (Boutot & Bryant,2005; Knight *et al.*,2009). This being said, greater improvements regarding the ability to interact socially were made within special schools, rather than mainstream schools (Reed *et al.*,2011). This reoccurring pattern of results suggests that mainstream schools may not always be the best educational setting for an autistic learner (Reed *et al.*,2011; Reed & Osborne,2014). In support of this statement, a study exploring inclusion resulted in autistic learners being twice more likely to be very satisfied within special schools, than those within mainstream schools (NAS,2000).

The reason that autistic learners are performing better and making more progress in special schools, could be due to reasons outlined in Milton's double empathy theory (Milton,2012). This theory argues that due to autistic individuals experiencing the world and expressing their emotions differently to allistic individuals, there is difficulty in understanding one another (Chown,2014; Milton,2012). If there is a lack of understanding between allistic and autistic individuals and the inability to relate to one other, peer learning may not be able to take place and therefore, individual learning would not be possible either (Pathan *et al.*,2018). This would explain why mainstream school attainment is lower than specialist school attainment, regarding autistic learners. Waddington and Reed's (2017) study suggests that neither specialist nor mainstream school pupils have greater educational attainment due to their setting, but success depends on the specialist provision provided by the school, such as Speech and Language Therapy and Learning Support Assistants.

## What do teachers understand about supporting autistic learners within mainstream classrooms?

### Teachers' perspectives

There is extensive research which indicates that mainstream teachers lack understanding, regarding how to teach students with autism and about autism in general (Frederickson *et al.*,2010; Pellicano *et al.*,2018; Roberts & Webster,2020). Within many studies, teachers' have stated that they do not feel equipped to teach autistic learners, resulting in high levels of anxiety and stress about meeting the needs of autistic pupils within their classroom. (Glashan *et al.*,2004; Emam & Farrell,2009; Beauchamp,2012; Syriopoulou-Delli *et al.*,2012; Roberts & Simpson,2016). In addition, Lindsay *et al.* (2013), Mulholland & O'Connor (2016), Hsiao and Peterson (2019) and Van Der Steen *et al.* (2020), found within their studies that mainstream educators felt they needed more resources in class to support autistic learners, more opportunities to collaborate with SEND specialists and more knowledge of autism and autistic needs in general. In contrast, a similar study conducted by Humphrey and Symes (2011) produced positive results, with thirty-eight out of fifty-three participants stating that they felt well equipped to teach autistic students. Having said that, 86.8% of participants stated that they would attend training regarding autism if it was available (Humphrey & Symes,2011). This suggests that even though educators may feel prepared to teach autistic students, they may not be as confident as they should be in their ability, which could be due to a lack of SEND knowledge and training.

There is also thought to be differences in the attitudes of mainstream and special school staff members, regarding the inclusion of SEND learners (McGregor & Campbell,2001). A study examining educators' attitudes towards inclusion, resulted in 47% of specialist staff members agreeing that inclusion is best, whereas only 27% of inexperienced staff members agreed that mainstream schools should be inclusive (McGregor & Campbell,2001). Similar studies undertaken by Yeung (2012), MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) and Shaw (2017), also resulted in educators agreeing that an inclusive educational environment is best within mainstream schools. McGregor & Campbell (2001), Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat (2013) and Cassimos *et al.* (2013) discovered within their studies, that teachers who had received training regarding SEND, or had previous experience of working with SEND students, are more likely to create an inclusive classroom environment. Having said this, Horrocks *et al.* (2008) and Su *et al.* (2020) have opposing arguments and found within their studies that educators with experience had more of a negative attitude towards inclusion, than those without experience.



From the perspective of autistic students, flexible teachers were imperative in creating a successful inclusive environment (Roberts & Simpson,2016). In addition to this, autistic learners felt that friendships, interesting work and teachers that are patient and empathetic, are the main factors that support them within school (Saggers *et al.*,2018). In a similar study, seven out of ten autistic students felt that school would be better if teachers had a greater understanding of autism (NAS,2021). Much research has also suggested that educators' knowledge regarding specific characteristics of autism, how to address autistic learner needs and suitable pedagogical knowledge is lacking (Frederickson *et al.*,2010; Pellicano *et al.*,2018; Roberts & Webster,2020). Therefore, these educators will be unable to create an inclusive environment, and this will make education inaccessible, resulting in the exclusion of autistic learners. Not being inclusive as an educator goes against many recommendations, guidance and legislation set out by the Government and conventions, to ensure education is accessible for all, regardless of any need or disposition you may have (UNICEF,1989; UN,2006; DfE,2015a; DoHSC,2021).

## **Legislation**

Within the UNCRC, Article 28 states every child has the right to an education (UNICEF,1989). Article 29 expands further on this, as it states education must develop a person's abilities and encourage respect for human rights and other cultures (UNICEF,1989). Within the UNCRPD Article 24, it states that all educational systems must be inclusive at all levels and enable SEND individuals to participate effectively within society (UN,2006). The SEND Code of Practice (DfE,2015a) also has many principles designed to promote inclusive practice and remove barriers to learning within mainstream schools. Section 6.1 states that mainstream schools must do all they can to meet the needs of all SEND students' (DfE,2015a). It also states that there must be an appointed teacher who is responsible for coordinating SEND provision and ensuring all SEND students can participate in activities, alongside students without SEND (DfE,2015a). Lastly, the national autism strategy, which was last revised in 2021 to include children and young people for the first time, states that by the year 2026, all educational settings should be inclusive for SEND learners and suitable provision should be provided within and outside of school (DoHSC,2021). Having said this, being inclusive can be a daunting task for mainstream teachers, as even though there are guidelines stating inclusion is a must, there are no clear or detailed legislation on how to do so (Simpson *et al.*,2003; Van Der Steen *et al.*,2020; Jaffal,2022).

## Improving an autistic learner's experience within mainstream school

Teachers' need to understand the challenges faced by autistic learners and recognise their individual intrinsic characteristics, which contribute to their struggle within mainstream education (Roberts & Simpson,2016; Pellicano *et al.*,2018). This will enable teachers to meet the needs of individual students and allow autistic learners to be effectively included (Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Pellicano *et al.*,2018). But not all autistic individuals are the same or require the same provision, which can cause additional challenges for mainstream teachers (Hodges *et al.*,2020; Leonard & Smyth,2020; Finlay *et al.*,2022). Autistic students face many different challenges within school regarding communicating, interacting socially and having the inability to be flexible regarding their behaviour and thought process, therefore they experience situations in a different way to allistic individuals (Jordan & Powell,1995; DfE,2015a; Pellicano *et al.*,2018; Jaffal,2022). This results in the need to learn certain skills and qualities which are not taught as part of the national curriculum, and teachers' may need to adapt their pedagogy to suit individual needs, which will enable inclusive learning to take place (Whitaker,2007). Other obstacles faced by autistic learners which can have an adverse effect are the noise levels, the demands of the curriculum, changes in daily routine and being overloaded by sensory experiences (Roberts & Simpson,2016; Pellicano *et al.*,2018).

There are ways in which you can improve an autistic learner's experience within a mainstream school, such as providing regular breaks for students to be able to move around, minimising clutter within the classroom, using natural lighting, having carpet rather than wooden floor to minimise noise and having a dedicated quiet space within the room, just in case the environment becomes too overwhelming (Holmes,2015). Being allowed to listen to white noise, minimising any exposure to strong smells and being able to explore and experience new things such as food or different textures, are also thought to be beneficial for autistic students' (Holmes,2015). There are also many organisations such as the Autism Education Trust (AET,2023) which provide information, advice and training on autism (DfE,2015a). Seeking advice from organisations like this one can be beneficial for autistic individuals or teachers working with autistic learners, as you can obtain valuable information on how to learn as an autistic individual or how to teach autistic pupils.

The fact that mainstream teachers are responsible for addressing the needs of all children within their classroom, including those with SEND (Boyle *et al.*,2022), combined with the Government legislation which calls for inclusion within education, why is there still so much evidence to suggest that teachers are not equipped to teach SEND students? This leads on to the final investigation of how well-trained teachers are, regarding teaching autistic students within mainstream schools.

## **What training is provided to teachers regarding teaching SEND students?**

### **A lack of teacher training**

Much research has been conducted to explore teacher training regarding SEND pupils and to obtain an insight into teacher's perspectives on how equipped they feel regarding teaching autistic learners (Avramidis *et al.*,2000; Humphrey & Symes,2011; Gomez-Mari *et al.*,2022). There are many studies which suggest that there is a lack of SEND training during initial teacher training (ITT), which leaves educators feeling ill-equipped regarding teaching autistic learners or creating an inclusive classroom environment (Avramidis *et al.*,2000; Forlin & Nguyet,2010; Gomez-Mari *et al.*,2021; Gomez-Mari *et al.*,2022). In a study conducted by Robertson *et al.* (2003), which examined the relationship between mainstream teachers and autistic pupils, discovered that teachers were not adequately trained or have enough support to provide a good quality education for autistic learners.

There is also a lack of training for teaching assistants who support autistic learners, as suggested within a study undertaken by Humphrey and Symes (2011). This study consisted of fifteen teaching assistants, who support autistic learners across four mainstream secondary schools within the UK, being interviewed about the training they had received for their role (Humphrey & Symes,2011). Most of the participants had no prior knowledge or experience of autism yet received limited training upon starting their role (Humphrey & Symes,2011). The different types of autism training received by the participants included being given an autism fact sheet to read, a brief chat about the child they would be supporting, and workshops delivered by external agencies (Humphrey & Symes,2011). Many participants also stated that they had trained themselves by independently researching autism (Humphrey & Symes,2011). The participants felt that the training they had received was generic and unhelpful, leaving them feeling ill-equipped regarding teaching autistic learners (Humphrey & Symes,2011). This was also the case in many other studies, whereby teaching assistants lacked training or the training provided was not beneficial or relevant to their role (Glashan *et al.*,2004; Groom & Rose,2005; Russell *et al.*,2005).

## **Perspectives of teachers' with SEND training**

On the other hand, there are studies that suggest teachers' have received training regarding SEND and autism (Leonard & Smyth,2020). Leonard and Smyth (2020) coordinated a study which investigated how seventy-eight mainstream primary school teachers', across one-hundred and eight primary schools', felt about inclusive education. It resulted in only 10% of teachers' having a positive attitude, whilst 54% had a negative attitude and 36% had a neutral attitude towards the inclusion of autistic students within mainstream schools (Leonard & Smyth,2020). This study then went on to explore the type of training the participants had received and the responses included completing a module on SEND or inclusion during ITT and undertaking SEND courses to continue professional development (Leonard & Smyth,2020). Most participants stated that although they had received training regarding SEND and inclusion, the training received was not relevant (Leonard & Smyth,2020). In addition to this, 66% of participants believe they do not have adequate resources to facilitate autistic students within their classroom (Leonard & Smyth,2020). This is alarming considering all participants within this study are working within a school that has an ASD resource base. This also suggests that although most educators received training regarding SEND and inclusion, the training provided was not sufficient in preparing educators to teach SEND learners or create an inclusive environment. Additionally, a study analysing eight-hundred and sixty-six pre-service teachers' knowledge regarding autism in their first and final years of training at university, resulted in final year students having more knowledge, but just as many misconceptions about autism (Sanz-Cervera *et al.*,2017). This suggests that university course content may not adequately train all future teachers regarding how to be inclusive and teach autistic learners. Training regarding autism is not only beneficial for teachers but also for students, as a study which consisted of college students partaking in online training to expand autism knowledge, resulted in participants increasing their understanding and being more accepting of their autistic peers (Gillespie-Lynch *et al.*,2015).

## **ITT within the UK**

As previously evidenced, regardless of whether educators have received training regarding inclusion or autism, they still feel unprepared and unsupported when it comes to teaching autistic learners. A reason for this could be that there is a lack of relevant SEND training during ITT, resulting in teachers becoming qualified with irrelevant or no knowledge regarding autism, SEND and inclusion. In the UK, to become a teacher within a mainstream school you need to have a degree in any subject, grade four or above GCSEs in English and Mathematics, also Science if you want to teach at primary level and complete an ITT course to obtain qualified teaching status (QTS) (UK Government,N.D). Typically, QTS is obtained through undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), which consists of working within schools and submitting assignments to expand knowledge of teaching practices, academic research and theories surrounding education (DfE,N.D).

There are many different types of PGCE courses which specialise in specific subjects, as well as different levels of education but these do not include any training on SEND (UEL,N.Da; UEL,N.Db). Having said that, there are a few PGCE courses that focus on inclusion and how to

teach SEND students within a mainstream or special school environment (UEL,N.Dc). So, to become a teacher within the UK you do not have to partake in any SEND training. Taking this into consideration, how can a teacher who has undertaken a PGCE which does not include training regarding SEND or inclusive education, be expected to teach SEND students?

### **The role of a teacher**

There are several policies and legislation, as previously mentioned, which outline what is expected of schools within the UK, regarding inclusivity and the role of a teacher (DfE,2011; DfE,2015a; DoHSC,2021). In addition, the SEND code of practice (DfE,2015a), states that all teachers are responsible and accountable for all SEND students' progress within their classrooms. Teachers' Standards, which is also mandatory guidance for educators, outlines the importance of adapting teaching strategies to respond to the strengths of all pupils (DfE,2011). It also states that all teachers should understand clearly the needs of all pupils within their class, including those with SEND and be able to adapt their pedagogy to engage and support them effectively (DfE,2011). The Children and Families Act 2014, Section 27 states that the local authority must regularly review education and training provision for children and young people with SEND (DfE,2015a). Lastly, an aspect of your role as a teacher is to understand how the Ofsted inspection process works (Ofsted,2022). Ofsted inspectors expect all teachers to explain how the individual needs of SEND students within their class are being met, describe how their lessons are inclusive and how to safeguard SEND learners (Ofsted,2022). Having said this, none of the policies, guidance or legislation include mandatory teacher training regarding SEND or inclusion. So again, how is it possible for any teacher to adhere to legislation regarding inclusive education, if no ITT is given on how to teach SEND students' or create an inclusive environment? In a bid to ensure all new teachers are well-equipped to teach autistic learners', the National Autistic Society has launched the Every Teacher campaign, which calls upon the Government to include autism training as part of ITT for all new teachers within England, as most autistic learners within the UK attend mainstream schools (NAS,N.D).

This Literature review suggests that although on the surface, the UK appears to have an inclusive educational system due to legislation, when you delve deeper into policy and guidance, it becomes apparent that there are flaws and contradictions. This has ultimately led to teachers within the UK, being ill-equipped regarding how to teach SEND students' or create a fully inclusive classroom.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethics within research are often described as a set of moral tenets which underpin the way in which research is conducted (Nolan *et al.*,2013; Bell & Waters,2018). Ethics are an imperative part of research, especially when children are partaking, and you must minimise the risk of harm to any participants, ensure the children's voices are heard and there must be clear benefits regarding conducting the study (NIH,2016; NSPCC,2023). Conducting ethical research also promotes moral values, such as not harming others and autonomy, which requires the child to make their own decisions (Hammersley & Traianou,2012; Greig *et al.*,2017). Ethics are important as they ensure research is trustworthy, promote the aims of the research, encourage embracement of essential values such as mutual respect and fairness, and allow researchers to be held accountable for their conduct if need be (NIH,2020).

The main tenets within ethical research include explaining to participants that have the right to withdraw from participating at any time, gaining informed consent and anonymity, which can be achieved using pseudonyms (Hammersley,1998; Thorne,1998; Hammersley & Traianou,2012; Mukherji & Albon,2018). A pseudonym is a false name which is used to conceal the identity and respect the privacy of participants within research (Gregory,2003; Thomas,2017). Gaining informed consent consists of fully informing the participants of the nature of the research, the process of how they will give their contributions to the research, any potential risks involved, along with their right to withdraw from participating (Coady,2010 as cited in Mac Naughton *et al.*,2010; Nolan *et al.*,2013; Bell & Waters,2018). Legally, a child is not allowed to give consent, only permission, so this must be obtained from a legal guardian (Kellett,2005). Gaining permission from the child enables their participation, encourages autonomy and reduces power imbalance, which is another tenet of ethical research (Hammersley & Traianou,2012; Horgan,2017). This tenet also adheres to Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC, which aims to promote and improve children's participation within society (UNICEF,1989; Hammersley & Traianou,2012). Using credible sources and Government legislation to conduct research is also an ethical consideration which is used within secondary research (Largan & Morris,2019).

Disparities in power between adult researchers' and child participants' is thought to be one of the greatest ethical challenges within research (Thomas & O'Kane,1998). This was considered in-depth before any research started for this dissertation and I ensured that the studies included took this factor into consideration also. A way to address power imbalance is to design research in a way that will allow children to participate on their own terms (Thomas & O'Kane,1998). Conducting research with children as participants can be a difficult task, even more so if a participant has a SEND (Ellis & Beauchamp,2012 as cited in Brown & Perkins,2019). Having said that, inclusion within research can be achieved by adapting research tools to meet individual needs and designing the research in a way that is accessible, such as using appropriate language (Scott *et al.*,2006; NSPCC,2023).

This will ensure that a broad range of participants across different social and cultural backgrounds, are able to participate within research and this will also improve the quality of the study (Scott *et al.*,2006; NSPCC,2023). Whilst conducting research for this paper, I was aware that it would not be possible to directly apply and adhere to these principles, as it is non-empirical research (Long-Sutthall *et al.*,2010). Instead, all the studies used within this literature review adhered to as many ethical principles as possible, which is an imperative part of non-empirical research (Long-Sutthall *et al.*,2010).

The main benefit of researching a topic such as autism, as I have in this dissertation, is that you can acquire knowledge which can be used to solve problems or influence change in legislation. This could potentially improve society and the lives of individuals with additional needs or from certain demographics (Nolan *et al.*,2013; Mukherji & Albon,2018). One of the main risks of researching about experiences, as this dissertation has, is the potential to trigger or cause emotional or psychological distress to participants (Hammersley & Traianou,2012; NSPCC,2023).

An example of this is if participating in research is stressful or reawakens negative feelings or memories (Hammersley & Traianou,2012; NSPCC,2023). To minimise this potential risk, the use of an ethics committee which has a rigorous ethics review process (Farrell *et al.*,2005; Brown *et al.*,2020), would be beneficial and is a process that I would have undertaken if I conducted empirical research.

Reflexivity, as stated previously, is another element of good quality research, which consists of reflecting on your positionality and stating how it can influence the research process (Frost,2016; Thomas,2017; Mukherji & Albon,2018). As I am passionate about inclusion and feel as though society is not very inclusive, upon reflection, I became aware that this may have an impact on how I would gather studies and write this dissertation. To ensure that this dissertation was as unbiased as possible, I reflected on all potential bias, assumptions and beliefs that I may have on the topic (Mukherji & Albon,2018). I then proceeded to explore and present all possible sides of each argument, to enable the readers to be adequately informed and form their own conclusions fairly. I was also honest when presenting data and made a conscious effort to not misrepresent or fabricate any information that was included within this dissertation, which is another principle of ethical research (NIH,2020).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, to determine whether teachers are well-equipped to teach autistic learners within mainstream schools is a difficult task, as all learners on the spectrum have varying needs and require specialist provision and support which is tailored to suit their individual needs (DfE,2015a). This would make it extremely difficult for any teacher, as they would need to continuously adapt their teaching pedagogy to be able to support autistic learners, as well as allistic learners within their classroom (DfE,2015a). Having said this, included within the role of being a teacher is having the ability to differentiate work and adapt your pedagogy to ensure education is accessible to all, including those with SEND (DfE,2011; DfE,2015a; DoHSC,2021). So how well-equipped are teachers within the UK to teach autistic learners within mainstream schools?

Upon researching this topic, many concerns arose such as how ill-equipped, unsupported and anxious most mainstream teachers felt, regarding teaching autistic students (Glashan *et al.*,2004; Emam & Farrell,2009; Beauchamp,2012; Syriopoulou-Delli *et al.*,2012; Lindsay *et al.*,2013; Roberts and Simpson,2016; Van Der Steen *et al.*,2020). Autistic learners also felt that they would have a better experience in school if teachers understood autism (NAS,2021). It also became apparent that parents seemed to be happy with provision provided in mainstream schools which have a specialist resource base, but they were extremely concerned and unhappy with the provision which is provided in schools without a specialist resource base and felt as though educators were inadequately trained (West Midlands Autistic Society,1993; Bernard *et al.*,2000; Batten *et al.*,2006; Whitaker,2007, Humphrey & Symes,2011; Segall & Campbell,2012). This is a major concern due to most schools within the UK not having a resource base and the Government putting emphasis on the importance of parental input regarding their child's education, through legislation such as the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE,2015a). If parents are unhappy, this can cause a breakdown in the ideal collaborative relationship which should have formed between them, school staff and any outside agencies that support their child and have a negative impact on their child's ability to learn. The fact that parents feel as though teachers are not adequately trained, could create a sense of uncertainty regarding the teacher's ability to provide a good quality education, which again, goes against current UK legislation and guidance (UNICEF,1989; UN,2006; DfE,2015a).

Another emerging theme across the literature that was reviewed, was that within many studies autistic learners achieved higher attainment in special schools, rather than mainstream schools (Rogers & Thiery,2003; Panerai *et al.*,2009; Smith & Matson,2010; Reed *et al.*,2011; Dillenburger *et al.*,2016). Many hours were spent researching studies which result in autistic students obtaining higher attainment in mainstream schools, but only two could be found (Peetsma *et al.*,2001; Kurth & Mastergeorge,2010). The reason that autistic students achieve higher attainment in specialist schools, rather than mainstream, could be due to more provision being provided to aid students in the process of learning. This, together with a lack of training and knowledge regarding autism, which were also common themes across the literature which was reviewed (Frederickson *et al.*,2010; Pellicano *et al.*,2018; Roberts & Simpson,2016; Roberts & Webster,2020), could be the reasons why mainstream schools are not the best learning environment for autistic students.

Lastly, after extensively researching the history of UK legislation regarding inclusive education and autism, I feel as though this dissertation could contribute to future research within the special education field. It could also influence potential changes to legislation, as it highlights the weaknesses within current UK policy and guidance regarding SEND learners and the fact that



a substantial number of autistic pupils are unhappy within mainstream schools in the UK. It also highlights the fact that autistic students are not achieving academically within mainstream schools, which is another pressing matter. Although it is evident that the UK has taken steps to create an inclusive educational system, by implementing policies regarding inclusive education and ratifying conventions such as the UNCRPD (UN,2006), there is still such a long way to go. All current legislation, policy and guidance set out by the Government is too vague and does not include mandatory teacher training regarding SEND. It can also be contradictory as the SEND Code of Practice (DfE,2015a) states all teachers are teachers of learners with SEND and are accountable for their development and progress within the classroom. How can this be a legal requirement that must be adhered to, if no mandatory training is provided regarding SEND or inclusive education, and teachers can become fully qualified without partaking in any SEND training?

After conducting this research, my positionality has stayed the same and I still feel as though teachers are not well-equipped to teach autistic students in mainstream schools, due to a lack of knowledge and training provided during initial teacher training. To establish uniformity across the UK educational system, I recommend that the Government updates current UK legislation, policy and guidance to ensure training regarding inclusive education and SEND is included within all initial teacher training courses. In addition to this, all current teachers with no prior knowledge or experience of working with SEND learners, should undergo mandatory SEND training to ensure they are well equipped to teach SEND pupils. I would also recommend that more research is conducted regarding autistic learners within mainstream schools and what provision is best to support autistic learners within this setting. This will enable schools and the Government to implement strategies to raise student attainment, which should improve parents' opinions and autistic students' experience within mainstream schools. This should also create more acceptance and understanding of autistic individuals, resulting in mainstream schools becoming more inclusive and an environment in which all students can thrive, regardless of any need they may have.

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# ISSUES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR BLACK CARIBBEAN GIRLS

by Natalie Ann Morgan

Independent Research Project – ED6088

BA (Hons) Education Studies



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I would like to express my sincere gratitude, starting with a heartfelt thanks to God for granting me the unwavering strength and determination to relentlessly pursue my dreams. Secondly, I am grateful for the ongoing support and encouragement I have received from my loving family. Their constant presence and unconditional belief in me have been instrumental in my journey, providing the necessary foundation for me to navigate through life's challenges and grow into the person I am today.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation investigates the educational support for black Caribbean girls, focusing on the intersectionality of race and gender. The research questions guiding this study are: (1) What are some of the issues black Caribbean girls are facing in secondary education? (2) What steps are educators taking to help black Caribbean girls who might feel under-supported? (3) What pedagogical expertise are educators required to have to offer black girls a productive learning environment?

The study utilised qualitative research methods employing an interpretivist paradigm. Convenience sampling selected two secondary school teachers and two higher education students from a black Caribbean background. Semi-structured interviews explored themes such as the lack of support, support mechanisms, and pedagogical practices, following ethical guidelines.

The findings indicate that several factors significantly impact the educational experiences of black Caribbean girls, including discrimination, underrepresentation, and a lack of cultural awareness (Patton et al., 2016). These factors contribute to a decrease in academic achievement, reduced motivation, and limited opportunities for positive social interactions (Ricks, 2014). Culturally responsive pedagogy and anti-racist pedagogy emerged as crucial approaches to creating an empowering learning environment and fostering the academic success and well-being of black Caribbean girls (Paris, 2017). The study, through its limited sample size and specific demographics, offers insights for future research and targeted interventions.

Implications suggest the need for educators to possess pedagogical expertise that promotes inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, and anti-racist pedagogy. Additionally, educational institutions should consider implementing supportive programmes that address the specific needs of black Caribbean girls (Love, 2019).

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This study aims to address the gap in understanding by providing insight into the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls in secondary education and examining the educational support provided to them. The experiences of black Caribbean girls have been relatively understudied, resulting in a limited understanding of their unique needs and challenges in fostering an empowering and inclusive learning environment (Crenshaw et al., 2015). By drawing upon the concepts of intersectionality, this research seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and support systems of black Caribbean girls (Smooth, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to define key terms and concepts used throughout the study that allow for a deeper understanding of black Caribbean girls' diverse experiences.

### Terminology:

1. Educational support refers to the range of resources, interventions, and strategies provided to students to enhance their learning experience and promote their academic success (Pelissier, 2020).
2. Intersectionality: A theoretical framework that acknowledges how different social identities interact and shape individuals' experiences and opportunities (Kelly et al., 2021).
3. Bias: Preconceived notions or prejudices that can lead to unfair treatment or disadvantage based on race, gender, and other social factors (Hodson et al., 2021).
4. Stereotypes: Commonly held assumptions or generalisations about people or groups based on attributes like race, gender, age, or nationality that can result in unjust treatment or encourage social inequality (Bordalo et al., 2016).
5. Culturally relevant pedagogy: An educational approach that recognises and incorporates students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives into teaching and learning to promote engagement, inclusivity, and academic success (Young, 2010).
6. Anti-racist pedagogy: An educational approach that actively challenges and combats racism by creating inclusive learning environments that foster equity, social justice, and a critical understanding of systemic racism (Kubota, 2021).

The underrepresentation of black Caribbean girls in educational research highlights the importance of this study. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that marginalised students are often overlooked in educational research, resulting in a limited understanding of their unique challenges and perspectives. By acknowledging the interplay of race and gender, we recognise that the experiences of black Caribbean girls are distinct and require special consideration.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of two secondary school teachers and two students in higher education from black Caribbean backgrounds. The study aims to explore their perspectives regarding the educational support offered to black Caribbean girls in secondary schools.

**Research questions:**

1. What are some of the issues black Caribbean girls are facing in secondary education?
2. What steps are educators taking to help black Caribbean girls who might feel under-supported?
3. What pedagogical expertise are educators required to have to offer black girls a productive learning environment?

To ensure objectivity, this research will strive to employ rigorous research methods. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to allow participants to freely express their experiences and perspectives (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Four participants will be included to capture a range of viewpoints. Additionally, I will employ reflexivity by acknowledging my own biases and preconceptions and making efforts to mitigate their influence on data collection and analysis (Dodgson, 2019). The findings will be triangulated with existing literature to ensure a comprehensive and objective interpretation of the data (Fusch et al., 2018).

The findings of this study may be useful to educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in equity and inclusion in education. Additionally, the findings of this research provide insight into the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls and the factors that affect their support of education. This knowledge can aid in the development of more effective strategies and interventions to increase their academic success.

# Chapter 2

## Literature review

### Introduction

Extensive literature has examined the underachievement of black Caribbean students, indicating that both boys and girls from this background may face challenges such as lower attainment levels and higher exclusion rates than other ethnic groups (Demie, 2019). However, limited attention has been given to the interplay of race, gender, and other factors that contribute to a marginalised experience for black Caribbean girls in the education system (Gillborn, 2008). This research gap underscores the importance of examining the educational support for black Caribbean girls from an intersectional perspective to understand and address their specific challenges and promote educational equity (Besic, 2020).

A systematic search of secondary sources was conducted as part of this literature review, identifying three main themes: the impact of stereotypes on educational experiences, the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, and strategies for creating safe and empowering learning environments. This study aims to explore these issues comprehensively, shedding light on the difficulties faced by black Caribbean girls and suggesting practical solutions to improve their educational experience.

#### 2.1 Impact of stereotypes and bias

Research demonstrates that negative stereotypes and bias negatively impact the lived experiences and academic outcomes of black Caribbean girls. For instance, Steele and Aronson's (1995) experimental study examined the effects of "stereotype threat" on educational achievement among black students, revealing its detrimental impact on the academic progression of black Caribbean girls and other marginalised groups. This burden hinders their learning process, leading to self-doubt, anxiety, and decreased motivation, ultimately affecting their academic progression (Fogliati and Bussey, 2013).

Additionally, Dweck's (2006) theory of mindset highlights the impact of negative stereotypes on students' perceptions of their own abilities. This theory suggests that black Caribbean girls who are subjected to stereotypes about their intellectual abilities may develop a fixed mindset, believing that their abilities are fixed traits rather than skills that can be developed. Consequently, a fixed mindset can hinder motivation and resilience, as black girls may fear confirming negative stereotypes and avoid academic challenges as a result. On the other hand, cultivating a growth mindset, which emphasises learning and improvement, can contribute to academic success and resilience in the face of adversity (Limeri et al., 2020). Therefore, fostering a growth mindset among black Caribbean girls is crucial for overcoming the negative effects of stereotypes and promoting their academic achievement.

In addition to the detrimental effects of negative stereotypes and bias, it is important to explore how stereotypes related to culture and identity contribute to the marginalised experience of black girls in educational settings. An empirical study by Leath et al. (2019) examined how stereotypes about culture and identity contribute to the marginalisation of black girls in educational settings. Through interviews and observations, the study unveiled the pervasive nature of negative stereotypes that black girls encounter from both peers and teachers, including labels such as "loud," disruptive, and "aggressive." These stereotypes resulted in unfavourable perceptions, leading to reduced academic engagement and limited prospects for positive social relationships. Consequently, the educational experiences of black girls may be marked by feelings of exclusion, lower self-esteem, and diminished motivation to actively participate in the learning process (Epstein et al., 2017). One limitation of Leath et al.'s (2019) study is that it specifically examines African American adolescents in two demographically distinct school districts. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to other racial and ethnic groups in diverse school districts.

Furthermore, it is vital to consider the intersection of race and gender as well as feminism when examining the experiences of black Caribbean girls in educational settings. Hooks (1981) and Collins (2002) highlight the importance of understanding the unique challenges faced by black women and the way in which gendered racism affects their lives. These theoretical perspectives are consistent with Burnett et al.'s (2022), study which utilised a mixed-methods approach to explore the complexities of black girls' lived experiences and the impact of racialised and gender stereotypes on their education journal. However, it is critical to recognise that the study has some limitations. First, the study was conducted within a specific school district in the United States, which limits its generalisability. Moreover, self-reported data raises the possibility of bias and social desirability effects, which can affect the validity of the study (Rosenman et al., 2011). To further enrich our understanding of black Caribbean girls' educational experiences, future research should replicate and expand on these findings, taking diverse contexts into account and using multiple data sources. By addressing this limitation, researchers can advance their knowledge and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of black girls' educational experiences.

To improve the educational experiences of black Caribbean girls, it is crucial to adopt an intersectional approach that recognises and values diversity within their culture. Edwards (2019) emphasises the importance of understanding and validating intersecting identities and other factors. By acknowledging and addressing the specific challenges faced by black Caribbean girls, educators can create an inclusive learning environment that promotes academic engagement and success. Billups et al. (2022) also underscore the significance of an intersectional approach, advocating for culturally responsive pedagogy to make the learning environment more supportive and inclusive. This approach involves incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into the curriculum, fostering positive teacher-student relationships, and providing opportunities for students to explore and celebrate their cultural identities (Byrd, 2016).

To summarise, negative stereotypes and racial identity significantly impact the educational experiences of black Caribbean girls. The literature highlights the detrimental effects of stereotypes on academic performance, mindset development, and the marginalisation experienced within educational settings. To enhance their learning experience, it is essential to adopt an intersectional approach that recognises and addresses the intersecting identities and challenges faced by black Caribbean girls. By promoting inclusivity and culturally responsive pedagogy, educators can create supportive environments that empower black Caribbean girls to thrive academically and beyond. Future research and intervention should continue to explore and address the complex interactions between stereotypes, educational experiences, and the holistic development of black Caribbean girls to promote equity and social justice.

## **2.2 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges and values the cultural background of students by creating a safe and inclusive learning environment (Paris, 2017). This approach is particularly relevant to black Caribbean girls due to the interplay of race and gender, resulting in distinctive educational experiences (Taylor and Sobel, 2011). These girls often face challenges of racial bias, cultural stereotypes, and limited curriculum representation (Patton et al., 2016). In this context, culturally relevant pedagogy becomes crucial in meeting their specific needs and strengths, fostering belonging, and contributing to their academic achievement (Galloway et al., 2019).

Additionally, culturally relevant pedagogy facilitates educators in making connections with students lived experiences and incorporating their knowledge into the curriculum (Eick and McCormick, 2010). In line with this approach, Silva's (2017) study explored the perspectives of high school students on culturally responsive pedagogy, revealing positive views on student-centred learning and the incorporation of students cultural backgrounds into the curriculum. These findings provide further support for the notion that integrating students' cultural identities enhances engagement, motivation, and knowledge among culturally diverse learners, thus aligning with the theoretical principles of culturally responsive education (Brown and Cooper, 2011).

One strength of this study is the emphasis on student perspectives, which offers a deeper understanding of how this form of teaching can be beneficial for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, one of the limitations of Silva's (2017) study is the same sample size of 20 research participants, which may limit the extent to which the results can be applied to other culturally diverse students. Moreover, the study focused solely on the perspectives of students, which may overlook the viewpoints of other stakeholders such as teachers, who play a crucial role in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy (Karatas, 2020). For future researchers, it would be beneficial to include a broader and more diverse sample. Additionally, examining the perspectives of various stakeholders would contribute to gaining a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy and challenges associated with culturally responsive pedagogy.

Despite the potential of culturally responsive pedagogy to foster a secure and welcoming environment by valuing students' cultural backgrounds, it is crucial to critically assess its effectiveness. This assessment should consider the unique needs of black Caribbean girls, considering how race and gender intersect to produce distinctive educational experiences (Burnett et al., 2022). Therefore, while culturally responsive pedagogy aims to meet student's unique needs, build on their strengths, and promote a sense of belonging, it still faces obstacles when it comes to implementation (Young, 2010). Researchers suggest that teachers may lack the necessary support and training to implement culturally appropriate practices in the classroom (Mette et al., 2016). Considering these challenges, comprehensive teacher training programmes and an increase in resources are necessary for black Caribbean girls to fully benefit from culturally responsive pedagogy. To provide a more equitable and empowering educational experience for this specific population, educators must address these limitations and provide the necessary support (Brown et al., 2021).

Building upon the challenges identified by Mette et al. (2016), the study conducted by Samuels (2018) investigated the perspectives of teachers regarding culturally responsive pedagogy. The findings of Samuel's (2018) study highlighted significant hurdles faced by teachers in implementing this approach in the classroom. These challenges included limited resources, time constraints, and a lack of support and training within the education system. The study revealed that teachers acknowledge the importance of creating an inclusive classroom environment that upholds students' cultural identity and is aware of their own biases to create a more equitable learning environment. However, the study highlighted the challenges that teachers faced while trying to implement culturally responsive pedagogy. One potential limitation of Samuels (2018) study is the over-reliance on self-reported data. While the study included a relatively large sample size of 200 teachers, it is important to note that self-reported data may be subject to biases and may not capture the complexities and nuances of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. Future research should consider complementing self-reported data sources or using mixed methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by teachers in implementing culturally responsive pedagogy.

Lastly, incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy into classrooms holds considerable potential for creating inclusive and equitable environments, especially for black Caribbean girls (Gay, 2010). The insights gained from studies such as Silva (2017) and Samuels (2018) underscore the importance of incorporating students' cultural identities to enhance engagement, motivation, and knowledge. However, further research is needed to address the limitations identified in these studies, such as continued efforts and support to expand knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, teachers may foster a supportive and empowering learning environment that promotes the academic performance and general well-being of black Caribbean girls by acknowledging and appreciating their cultural identities. Continued research and improvement of culturally responsive pedagogy may promote educational experiences that support equity, inclusion, and cultural awareness.



### 2.3 Empowerment and Agency

Within educational settings, empowerment and agency are important components for fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments (Dobson and Dobson, 2021). This becomes especially evident when examining the experiences of black Caribbean girls, who face a variety of challenges and barriers that negatively impact their educational opportunities (Ricks, 2014). To support the academic success and personal development of these students, educators should explore strategies that empower their voices and enhance their sense of agency (Addington, 2021). Studies have shown that black Caribbean girls often encounter higher rates of school exclusion, lower academic achievement, and invisibility within the education system. These inequalities not only impede their educational progress but also perpetuate a cycle of inequality and limited opportunities (Annamma et al., 2016; Demie, 2019).

To support the academic success and personal development of these students, educators should explore strategies that empower their voices and enhance their sense of agency (Addington, 2021). The Empowerment Theory (1995) provides a valuable framework for understanding how oppressive structures and power dynamics can limit an individual's decision-making abilities. It also offers important insights into promoting self-efficacy, self-determination, and empowerment. However, one challenge of the empowerment theory is the potential for overlooking systematic barriers and solely focusing on individual agency (Goodkind et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to recognise that empowering marginalised students requires addressing and dismantling the larger structural inequalities that contribute to their educational challenges. Educators need to apply empowerment theory to create interventions and methods that improve the self-efficacy of black Caribbean girls and strongly encourage their active participation in decision-making (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995).

Empirical research conducted by Opara et al. (2020) sheds light on the relationship between intrapersonal psychological empowerment and ethnic identity in urban black girls. Their research examined measures such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, mastery, assertion of ethnic identity, and belonging in urban settings. The study provides valuable insights into the experiences of black girls and emphasises the importance of considering the intersectional nature of socio-political control, including racial and gender stereotypes, when creating productive learning environments.

Opara et al. (2020) have made a substantial contribution by emphasising the resilience and capabilities of urban black girls, leading to an asset-based approach to their experiences. However, one limitation of this study is the absence of specific strategies for empowering black girls in educational settings. Although the study provides valuable insights into the relationship between intrapersonal psychological empowerment and ethnic identity among urban black girls, it does not address the practical application of these findings for educators. As a result, future research is necessary to bridge the gap between empirical findings and practical strategies that empower black girls in educational settings (Burnett et al., 2022).

A study by MacMaoilir and McGillicuddy (2022) indicated that critical pedagogy is essential for empowering marginalised female students. Through the implementation of a critical pedagogy approach, educators can create learning environments that empower and engage all students, including black Caribbean girls (Freire, 1985). Through this approach, students are encouraged to critically examine social structures and power dynamics that reinforce oppression based on race and gender. Educators can support black girls in developing a critical lens for understanding societal disparities by fostering critical consciousness and providing opportunities for dialogue and reflection (Giroux et al., 2011).

While the study by MacMaoilir and McGillicuddy (2022) may not directly address the experiences of black Caribbean girls, it highlights the importance of incorporating critical pedagogy to empower marginalised female students. To fully understand the empowerment needs of black girls, further research is needed that specifically focuses on their unique experiences in educational contexts. Such research can help identify effective strategies and interventions that empower black girls to develop agency, challenge systemic barriers, and thrive academically and personally (Morris et al., 2018).

To summarise, Opara et al. (2020) shed light on the relationship between intrapersonal psychological empowerment and ethnic identity among urban black girls. Their findings highlight the importance of factors such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, mastery, and a sense of belonging in fostering the strengths and well-being of black girls. However, the study lacks specific strategies for empowering black girls in educational settings, emphasising the need for future research to bridge the gap between empirical findings and actionable strategies.

Although MacMaoilir and McGillicuddy's study (2022) does not specifically focus on black Caribbean girls, it underscores the significance of incorporating critical pedagogy to empower marginalised female students. By encouraging critical analysis of social structures and power dynamics, educators can help black girls develop a critical lens to understand and challenge societal inequalities.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this literature review highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the specific challenges faced by black Caribbean girls in the education system. By exploring stereotypes, the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy, and promoting empowerment and agency, educators can create inclusive and empowering learning environments that contribute to the academic success and well-being of black Caribbean girls. To promote equity and social justice, future research and interventions should explore and address the complex interactions between stereotypes, educational experiences, and the holistic development of black Caribbean girls.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

This section provides an overview of the research methodology employed in this study to investigate the educational support provided to black Caribbean girls. It analyses the research methods, sampling technique, data collection methods, data analysis, paradigm, and any limitations encountered during the research process. By examining these aspects in greater detail, a clearer understanding of the methodology used for gathering and analysing data can be acquired. Understanding these aspects is crucial for achieving the research objectives effectively.

#### 3.1 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used throughout this study to identify, examine, and report recurring themes within the dataset (Dawadi, 2020). It enables data description and interpretation by identifying codes and developing themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is adaptable and can be applied to different frameworks, study designs, and sample sizes (Kiger and Varpio, 2020).

However, the limitation of thematic analysis is the potential for subjectivity and bias introduced by the researcher's interpretation of the data (Mackieson et al., 2018). In this study, the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, which could introduce the possibility of individual bias (Pannucci and Wilkins, 2011). To address this limitation, the researcher adopted a reflexive approach to enhance the validity and credibility of the analysis (Jamieson et al., 2023).

To explore the underlying themes and patterns further, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the research participants. These interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure an accurate representation of each participant's voice (McMullin, 2021). Thematic analysis was utilised to identify and explore the emerging themes and patterns in the data (Mashuri et al., 2022). This process entailed coding the data and organising it into a cohesive structure, which helped to gain a deeper understanding of the data and its implications (Campbell et al., 2013). Participants quotes from the interviews were used to support and identify themes, thereby strengthening the analysis (Lingard, 2019).

By employing thematic analysis, this study aimed to provide a thorough and in-depth analysis of the collected data, specifically focusing on the experiences, challenges, and support needs of black Caribbean girls in secondary education settings (Lochmiller, 2021). The analysis aimed to shed light on their educational journeys and contribute to the development of strategies for improving opportunities to help them succeed.

Through the rigorous and comprehensive application of thematic analysis, this study achieved a thorough exploration of the data. As a result, meaningful insights and a deeper understanding of the educational support received by black Caribbean girls were obtained (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

#### 3.2 Research Paradigm

An interpretivist paradigm guided the construction of this research, emphasising subjectivity, meaning creating, and the social construction of reality (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). This paradigm was well-suited for understanding the lived experiences of black Caribbean girls (Cohen et al., 2018; Mukherji and Albon, 2018). It helps researchers comprehend how people perceive and give meaning to their experiences on a deeper level. Moreover, the interpretivist paradigm is frequently employed in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and communication studies, and it is closely linked to qualitative research techniques such as focus groups, interviews, and ethnography (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the interpretivist approach, particularly in terms of verifying the study findings in comparison to statistical results (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The use of semi-structured interviews, which is common in interpretivist studies, can pose challenges for analysis and interpretation (Alborough and Hansen, 2022). Furthermore, the interpretivist approach is more complex and time-consuming compared to the positivist approach (Pham, 2018). Despite these challenges, I found that the interpretivist paradigm was the most appropriate approach for my research due to its ability to help me gain a greater understanding of diverse insights, naturally interact with participants, and interpret findings. As Berryman (2019) points out, interpretive researchers should construct their research questions in a manner that emphasises the importance of understanding the phenomena under investigation. The interpretations are based on the philosophical perspective of idealism and incorporate various techniques, such as social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. In addition, they reject the idea that meaning exists independently in the world (Levers, 2013; Chowdhury, 2014).

### **3.3 Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique that was used to select research participants for this study is non-probability sampling. This technique was employed because it selects individuals from a group without using random selection (Stratton, 2023). I selected my research subjects based on my research questions to explore the factors contributing to black Caribbean girls feeling marginalised and unsupported in the education system. Additionally, I aimed to examine the impact of similar lived experiences on black Caribbean girls' well-being (Dudovskiy, 2012). To address these objectives, black Caribbean teachers in a secondary school setting and black females in higher education were selected as participants. Convenience was used for its ease of participation selection (Etikan et al., 2016).

However, the limitation of convenience sampling is sample bias and self-selection bias, as readily available participants may not represent the diverse population of black Caribbean girls in secondary education settings. This may raise concerns about the generalisability of the findings (Andrade, 2021). Probability sampling methods, such as stratified sampling, could have enhanced the samples representativeness, but due to time constraints, convenience sampling was deemed appropriate (Berndt, 2020).

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods

To collect data, I gathered secondary literature to form my literature review chapter, which provided valuable insights, ideas, and arguments from reputable academic sources (Dunn et al., 2015). This secondary research helped to establish a solid foundation for knowledge on my topic (Allen, 2017). However, I found that the research was not specific to my research questions, and a lot of the data focused on the underachievement of black girls. Cheng and Phillips (2014) argue that the data collected from secondary research is not specifically obtained to address particular research questions or test a specific hypothesis.

For primary research, I employed semi-structured interviews as a qualitative data collection method. The interviews involved in-depth discussions with participants using open-ended questions and allowed for exploration of emergent topics (Mashuri et al., 2022). Semi-structured interviews provided standardisation, facilitated comparison of responses, and enabled data interpretation and identification of themes (Leavy, 2020). During the interviews, I maintained a reflexive approach to enhance rigour and credibility and to address potential biases (Jamieson et al., 2023).

The use of both primary and secondary research contributed to the validity of the study (Guion et al., 2011). I employed triangulation as a qualitative research technique to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Flick, 2018). Furthermore, triangulation can be viewed as a qualitative research technique for testing validity by bringing together data from a variety of sources (Carter et al., 2014).

## Chapter 4

### Ethical considerations chapter

The research was conducted with ethical approval from the University of East London, following procedures in accordance with established ethical guidelines and safeguarding the rights of participants (Miller et al., 2012). Ethical consideration in research refers to a set of principles that guide the development of research designs and methods, including voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and assessing potential risks to participants (Iltis, 2018; Vanclay et al., 2013).

Prior to collecting data or contacting research participants, the required ethical approval was obtained, which demonstrated the commitment to protect participants from potential harm (Gelling, 2016). A comprehensive overview of the research, its purpose, and possible risks was provided to participants in the study before informed consent was obtained. Informed consent refers to the process of providing prospective participants with information about study aims, methods, risks, and benefits and obtaining their voluntary consent to participate (Hammond, 2016).

To maintain confidentiality, participants were informed that their data would be securely stored in a database that could only be accessed by authorised personnel (World Health Organisation, 2021). Confidentiality refers to preventing the unauthorised disclosure of participants data. To safeguard the identity of participants, the researcher took precautions by preserving the data securely and only sharing it with authorised parties (Bos, 2020). The ethical considerations were carefully addressed by a hierarchy of gatekeepers throughout the research process, acknowledging the inherent power dynamics. The study gained ethical approval from the University of East London, which highlighted the steps taken to ensure participants were protected from any potential harm (Fitzgerald et al., 2006). In addition to this, the ethical review process included the evaluation of the research design and methods by experts in the field. They assessed the potential risks and benefits associated with the study, considering the power relations between the researcher and participants (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009).

The anonymity of the research participants was upheld by not collecting any personal information that could be used to identify them (Allen, 2017). Anonymity refers to the practice of protecting the identities of research participants by ensuring that their personal information is not disclosed or linked to the information or responses they provide (Dougherty, 2021). To protect the participants' identities, all participants were referred to by pseudonyms (e.g., Participants A, B, C, and D) throughout the study (Heaton, 2021). As part of the research process, steps were taken to ensure that participants could not be identified during or after the research process. By maintaining anonymity, participants were able to respond truthfully and without fear of being judged or adversely affected (Moore, 2017). Moreover, it aligns with the ethical principle of nonmaleficence by minimising the possibility of harm caused by the disclosure of participants' personal information (Wiles, 2013).

The researcher aimed to conduct the study in a morally responsible manner. This involved protecting the rights and welfare of all individuals involved, including participants, researchers, and other stakeholders (BERA, 2018). The benefits of carrying out this research included gaining further insight into the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls in secondary education settings and recognising the particular difficulties they face. The study sought to incorporate a variety of viewpoints from participants, ensuring a reflexive approach throughout the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

To minimise bias, I kept a reflective journal where I explored my own struggles and experiences related to the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls (Ortlipp, 2015). Additionally, by maintaining a reflexive approach throughout the study, I was able to be mindful of my own positionality as someone who is half Caribbean and how this may influence my interpretation of the data, thereby reducing the likelihood of bias (Gary and Holmes, 2020).

# Chapter 5

## Findings and Discussions

### 5.1 Research Question 1: What are some of the problems black girls are facing in secondary education?

To answer the first question about the issues black girls encounter in education, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two secondary school teachers and two higher education students from black Caribbean backgrounds. Their perspectives provided insight into the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls in secondary education settings. Based on the findings of these interviews, the main themes that emerged were the lack of representation and cultural understanding and the impact of stereotypes and bias. In this section, key findings are presented, and their implications are discussed in greater detail for a deeper understanding of the issues.

Participants pointed out the significant effects associated with a lack of representation and cultural knowledge within the education system. It is crucial to recognise that the lack of representation extends beyond the mere presence of black Caribbean girls in school (Warner, 2022). Applying an intersectional lens helps educators recognise how the lack of representation has a significant impact on black Caribbean girls. It considers the various intersecting aspects of their identity that shape their experiences (Tefera et al., 2018). According to student participant A, "black girls often struggle with both racial and gender dynamics within the education system". This highlights the need for more diverse role models and educators who can relate to their experiences (Maylor, 2009).

However, it is necessary to examine the underlying causes and consequences of this lack of representation in more detail. Bourdieu (1986) asserts that cultural capital contributes to a better understanding of how the educational system is affected by cultural knowledge. According to student participant C, "black girls do not often see teachers who look like them or who share similar experiences to them." Therefore, this may result in a failure to address their knowledge and experiences, perpetuate a sense of alienation, and hinder meaningful connections between black Caribbean girls and their teachers (Demie, 2019).



Moreover, a lack of representation not only affects the sense of belonging of black Caribbean girls but also impedes their educational progress (Redding, 2019). Teacher participant B further emphasises *“the value of having teachers who are aware of the cultural backgrounds of black Caribbean girls and can offer support according to their individual needs”* (Galloway and Harris, 2021). This is consistent with the study conducted by Samuels (2018), who highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive teaching strategies to enhance marginalised students' educational experiences. Research suggests that when students can see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in the diversity of their teachers, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and engage more actively in the learning process (Booker, 2016; Ladson- Billings, 2009).

In addition to the lack of representation and cultural understanding, the participants shed light on the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls due to stereotypes and biases from their peers and teachers (Carter and Vavrus, 2018). Critical race theory provides a useful framework for understanding these complex issues. It examines how racism is systematic and how race and other social identities shape individuals' experiences (Lawrence and Hylton, 2022). Within the context of critical race theory, it emphasises how maintaining preconceptions and prejudices inhibits the academic progress of black Caribbean girls. Stereotypes are often rooted in racial and gender biases, which can shape perceptions, expectations, and opportunities within the education system (Billups et al., 2022). Participants consistently reported that stereotypes have a negative impact on academic expectations (Porter and Byrd, 2021). Teacher participant D, for example, discussed how *“prevalent stereotypes undermine black girls' intellectual ability, resulting in lower expectations from teachers”* (Demie, 2022). As a result of this stereotype-driven bias, students experience a hostile learning environment, which negatively impacts their motivation, self-esteem, and overall performance. A similar finding was revealed by Leath et al. (2019), which demonstrates that negative stereotypes adversely affect the academic progression of black girls.

Furthermore, it is necessary to understand that stereotypes and biases are not limited to the classroom. Teacher B highlights that *“there are stereotypes about black Caribbean girls that portray them as cognitively inferior or better suited to non-academic occupations, which adversely impact their access to higher education and limit their employment prospects”* (Epstein et al., 2017). Moreover, preconceptions may contribute to the institutional barriers that hinder black girls' progression in academia and their careers, as well as their perceptions of their own abilities (Andrews et al., 2019). By amplifying these stereotypes and biases, the cycle of marginalisation is sustained, posing significant challenges to promoting equality and diversity in education and work settings (Collins, 2000).

The findings highlight the challenges that black Caribbean girls confront while in school because of stereotypes and biases, a lack of representation, and a lack of cultural understanding (Burnett et al., 2022). It is crucial for educational institutions to increase representation by recruiting diverse educators and putting in place extensive teacher training programmes that encourage cultural competency and prejudice awareness to help alleviate these concerns (Bican, 2021). Additionally, for black Caribbean girls to succeed academically and to feel supported and encouraged, it is important to foster an atmosphere that values diversity (Moreu et al., 2021).

Lastly, these findings suggest the need for concerted efforts from various stakeholders to address the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls in secondary education settings. To foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment, it is imperative to increase representation and implement comprehensive teaching training programmes. Collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, and society can contribute to dismantling barriers, challenging stereotypes, and ensuring equal opportunities for all students.

## **5.2 Research Question 2: What steps are educators taking to help black girls who may feel under supported.**

To address the second research question about the steps educators are taking to support black girls in secondary school settings, a thematic analysis was conducted. This involved analysing the data and responses obtained through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The findings highlight the importance of teachers tailoring support based on their students' individual needs. Moreover, two different themes emerged from the analysis: the importance of individualised support, collaboration, and partnership. These themes provide valuable insights into the steps educators are taking to address the challenges faced by black girls in secondary education settings.

A prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of individual support from teachers. For instance, teacher participant B highlighted the importance of routine check-ins and goal setting for supporting and recognising the academic accomplishments of black Caribbean girls" (Howard, 2019; Milner, 2010). Teacher B stated, "*Regular check-ins allow teachers to understand the challenges black girls face and provide necessary one-to-one support to address their specific needs*". This finding aligns with existing research on individualised support, which emphasises active interaction between teachers and students, understanding challenges, and providing one-to-one support to address their needs (Murphy et al., 2016). By establishing meaningful relationships and addressing specific needs, teachers can create an environment that supports black Caribbean girls' academic progression (Legette et al., 2020).

Additionally, goal setting has specifically been identified by teacher participants as being beneficial for recognising and supporting the academic endeavours of black Caribbean girls (Howard, 2019). As a result of engaging black girls in the goal-setting process, educators empower them to take ownership of their academic journeys and to develop agency (Rall, 2021).

Furthermore, teachers who consider black girls' unique experiences, interests, and aspirations facilitate their ability to set realistic and achievable goals (Schippers et al., 2015). Teacher participant D highlighted that "An environment that is supportive requires regular progress monitoring and providing additional support through reviews and feedback sessions" (King, 2017). Furthermore, compassion, empathy, and understanding are essential elements to fostering a sense of belonging, building relationships, and cultivating trust within the educational environment (Newhouse, 2022).

However, it is important to acknowledge the difficulties that teachers face when trying to implement inclusive practises, such as a lack of resources, time constraints, and a high workload (Florian and Beaton, 2018). To overcome these barriers, participants highlighted the importance of teamwork and partnership to provide comprehensive educational support (Morris et al., 2018). Teacher participant B highlighted that "the collaboration with other stakeholders, including parents, community organisations, and educational institutions, creates an integrated approach that addresses the diverse needs and challenges faced by black Caribbean girls" (Cook-Sather and Seay, 2021). In this way, it may be possible to develop a network of resources to assist black Caribbean girls by utilising the knowledge and support of other organisations. Furthermore, partnership and collaboration help to develop a sense of community within the educational environment (Brown et al., 2021). In addition to this, implementing inclusive practices in the classroom, such as group activities that foster a sense of belonging and shared success, will help educators encourage participation from black Caribbean girls (Same et al., 2018).

It is also crucial to acknowledge the systemic factors that contribute to black Caribbean girls' feeling under-supported in secondary education settings (Anderson, 2020). Research highlights that structural inequalities and biases within the educational system may disproportionately impact black Caribbean girls. This can lead to limited access to resources, low expectations, and negative stereotyping (Porter and Byrd, 2021). Teacher participant B highlighted that "it is essential to recognise that black Caribbean girls face unique challenges due to systemic factors within the education system". Therefore, while individualised support, collaboration, and partnership are essential steps taken by educators, it is equally important to challenge systemic barriers that perpetuate under support and inequalities (Ricks, 2014).

The findings indicate that educators are making efforts to address the lack of support for black Caribbean girls in secondary school. These actions concentrate on putting into effect tailored support plans made to meet the requirements of black Caribbean girls (Newhouse, 2022). Teachers establish an atmosphere that acknowledges and tackles specific challenges experienced by black Caribbean girls by performing regular check-ins, establishing academic targets, and offering individualised support. This aligns with Burnett et al.'s (2022) study, which emphasises the importance of cultivating a supportive learning environment. This strategy places a strong emphasis on participation and tailored support. It enables black girls to achieve academic success while fostering the sense of self-worth and encouragement they need throughout their educational journeys (Crenshaw et al., 2015). As a result, black girls can overcome barriers and reach their full potential when educators acknowledge and cater to their individual needs (Love, 2019).

In conclusion, the findings indicate that efforts are being made by educators to provide equal educational opportunities to black Caribbean girls. It is evident from the results of this study how important it is to provide individual support for black Caribbean girls to create a welcoming environment where they can thrive. The need for ongoing reflection and development is essential to overcome structural impediments, increase cultural competence among educators, and further solidify cooperative relationships with parents and community organisations. This can be accomplished if educators consistently improve and extend these initiatives to promote the long-term success and well-being of black Caribbean girls in school.

### **5.3 Research Question 3: What pedagogical expertise are educators required to have to offer black Caribbean girls a productive learning environment.**

To answer the following question on the pedagogical expertise required to offer black Caribbean girls a productive learning environment, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two secondary school teachers and two higher education students from black Caribbean backgrounds. This provided valuable insight into the specific pedagogical approaches that can support the educational experiences of black Caribbean girls. The themes that emerged from these interviews were culturally responsive teaching strategies and anti-racist pedagogy. To create an inclusive and empowering learning environment, participants emphasised the value of incorporating the cultural background, life experiences, and identities of students into the teaching and learning process (Hernandez, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching strategies were seen as essential to engaging black Caribbean girls and fostering their academic success (Bazini, 2022; Gay, 2010).

One of the main components of culturally responsive teaching mentioned was recognising and affirming students' cultural identities. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of including other viewpoints and cultural allusions in the curriculum (Abacioglu et al., 2020). Teacher participant b suggests that "by including literature, historical events, and real-life examples that pertain to the lives of black Caribbean women, we can engage students and make learning more relevant to them" (Whynot, 2019). This approach enhances motivation and engagement by incorporating culturally relevant information into the lesson (Gay, 2010). Additionally, teacher participants stressed the need to establish strong relationships between teachers and students to foster a positive learning environment (Brian, 2016). Student participant C shared, "When teachers actively listen to us, value our contributions, and incorporate our viewpoint into class discussions, it creates a positive learning environment where we feel heard and valued." The importance of teachers establishing a strong relationship with their students to gain a better understanding of how to include their perspectives in the teaching and learning process was crucial (Duane and Mims, 2022). By doing so, teachers can promote a positive and inclusive learning environment that fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment among black Caribbean girls (Murdoch et al., 2020).

Furthermore, teacher participants indicated that anti-racist pedagogy has the potential to provide a framework for addressing structural obstacles and pervasive disparities that hinder the academic success of black Caribbean girls (Kishimoto, 2016). They highlighted the limitations of relying solely on culturally responsive teaching to tackle the multifaceted challenges faced by black

Caribbean girls (Evans et al., 2020). As teacher participant D expressed, "We need to go beyond cultural sensitivity and actively address discriminatory practices and institutional barriers." This involves challenging biases and stereotypes, promoting inclusivity through curriculum choices, and advocating for systematic change within the education system. Adopting anti-racist practices enables educators to create a supportive environment for black Caribbean girls while removing structural obstacles that affect them (Patel, 2022).

To ensure a truly fair educational experience for black Caribbean girls, it is crucial to supplement culturally responsive pedagogy with broader initiatives aimed at dismantling structural barriers and unfair resource distribution (Demie, 2019). By integrating culturally relevant teaching strategies and anti-racist pedagogy within a comprehensive reform framework, educators can provide black Caribbean girls with the support and opportunities they need to thrive academically. The findings of Blake et al. (2010) highlight the challenges faced by black girls, including limited access to culturally responsive resources, inadequate professional development, and systemic resistance. These obstacles hinder the implementation of effective educational practices. For instance, student participant C highlighted that "there is a scarcity of diverse literature accurately representing black girls experiences, hampering efforts to incorporate relevant material". This underscores the need for systemic change that ensures equitable access to a wide range of resources that reflect the cultural diversity of students (Katz and Acquah, 2022).

The findings suggest that incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies and anti-racist pedagogy is essential to producing a productive learning environment for black Caribbean girls (Galloway et al., 2019). By recognising and affirming their cultural identities, including culturally relevant information in the curriculum, and establishing strong relationships with them, educators can engage and empower them (Byrd, 2016). However, it is important to go beyond culturally relevant pedagogy to address discriminatory practices and institutional barriers through anti-racist pedagogy (Lopez and Jean-Marie, 2021). The participants highlighted the need for collaborative efforts, ongoing dialogue, and systemic change to ensure equitable access to resources and professional development. By embracing these approaches, educators can provide the necessary support and opportunities for black Caribbean girls to thrive academically and overcome the barriers they face (King, 2022).

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions and suggestions

This chapter presents the research findings and suggestions that emerged from the study on the educational support for black Caribbean girls. It includes an overview of the research, key findings, and key points to enhance understanding of the study's contribution and implications. Furthermore, it evaluates the limitations of the study, discusses the researcher's positionality, and offers recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the specific challenges encountered by black Caribbean girls in their educational journeys. To achieve this, an extensive literature review was conducted, along with semi-structured interviews. The aim was to comprehensively examine the factors that contribute to the lack of support, perpetuation of stereotypes, underrepresentation, and intersectionality issues experienced by this particular demographic group.

### Key findings:

1. The research findings highlighted a persistent lack of culturally relevant resources and educational support available for black Caribbean girls. This contributed to cultural biases and limited access to resources (Morris et al., 2018).
2. The study revealed the impact of negative stereotypes and biases on the self-perception, confidence, and academic performance of black Caribbean girls. These factors are attributed to a hostile learning environment that hinders their educational progress (Ricks, 2014).
3. The research identified the underrepresentation of black Caribbean teachers and a culturally inclusive curriculum as factors exacerbating the challenges faced by Black Caribbean girls. This contributed to a lack of motivation, engagement, and a sense of belonging within the educational system (Demie and Huat-See, 2022).
4. The study highlights the intersection of race, gender, and other social identities that contribute to the challenges faced by black Caribbean girls in education and further marginalise them (Edwards, 2019).

The present study contributes to the existing knowledge in the field of educational support for Black Caribbean girls. A comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by this specific demographic group. It highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions and systemic change to promote equity and inclusivity in educational settings. The study is helpful in understanding the complex interactions between race, gender, and other intersecting identities that affect Black Caribbean girls' educational experiences.

## Limitations

Upon reflection, as someone with a mixed heritage, including a Caribbean background, I initially approached the research topic with a certain level of familiarity and personal connection (Wilson et al., 2022). However, engaging in this research process has deepened my understanding and my awareness of the specific challenges faced by black Caribbean girls in accessing equitable educational support (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Through this process, my perspective has broadened, and I have been able to critically examine my biases and preconceptions. As a result, there has been a shift in my positionality, and I now have a stronger commitment to advocating for change in education policies and practices (Cassell et al., 2018).

One notable limitation of this study was the small sample size of four participants due to time constraints and the specific demographic focus of black Caribbean girls (Creswell, 2013). While the sample size was small, it is important to acknowledge the impact this may have on the generalisability of the findings to broader populations (Patton, 2015). The experiences and perspectives of black Caribbean girls may vary, and due to the limited sample size and specific participants involved, the findings may not capture the full range of experiences (Guest et al., 2006). Therefore, future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to acquire a deeper understanding of their experiences and to ensure a greater generalisability of the findings (Morse, 2015).

Based on the findings of this study, it is essential to create focused programmes and pedagogical practices that address the difficulties black Caribbean girls have in receiving adequate educational support (Morris et al., 2018). To support the academic success and general wellbeing of black Caribbean girls, more studies should investigate the efficacy of specific interventions. These may include mentoring programmes, culturally sensitive teaching methods, and inclusive curricula. Understanding the unique needs and experiences of black Caribbean girls requires examining their perspectives across different educational settings and stages (Banks, 2016). Moreover, it is important to prioritise professional development that fosters cultural competency among educators, policy makers, and education institutions. Increasing the participation of black Caribbean teachers should be a high priority in this regard (Gay, 2010). Additionally, addressing the systematic barriers faced by black Caribbean girls necessitates community engagement and collaboration among schools, families, and community organisations. This can help establish support networks and create an inclusive environment (Warren and Goodman, 2018).

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# **PERSPECTIVES FROM PARENTS ON WHAT POTENTIAL IMPACT COVID- 19 HAD ON EAL CHILDREN’S EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOW THIS AFFECTED THEIR TRANSITION FROM RECEPTION INTO YEAR 1**

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## Abstract

This research explored parents perspective about if Covid- 19 affected their EAL children's socio- emotional development, on what potential impact this might have had on these children, and on what they think of the possible socio- emotional support their children might have received from school during their transition from Reception to Year1. Also, this research aimed to find out strategies and activities the parents have used during Covid-19 to develop their children socio- emotional development to promote their children's resilience. Triangulation approach was used to collect the data from the perspectives of twenty- one parents through a developed questionnaire with open- closed- ended questions and through audio- recorded unstructured interviews conducted with only two of these parents. Through a thematic analysis of the findings seven themes were identified: lack of interaction, lack of peer interaction and attachment, sharing closer bond with family, behaviour difficulties, anxieties, transition, and activities. The results imply that Covid- 19 both negatively and positively affected EAL' s children socio- emotional development, that there was not enough socio- emotional school support to ensure these children have a smooth transition from Reception to Year 1. Concludingly, this research project stresses the need for school policies to be changed, for more teacher training in order for them to identify children's emotional distress and anxieties.

*Keywords: parents, children, social and emotional development, Covid- 19, emotional literacy, transition*

## Introduction

This research project from the perspectives of thirty parents whose Year 1 children are currently attending a primary school in East of London, intends to point out the social and emotional support their children might have or not have received during and after the Covid- 19 pandemic and this further might have had consequences on their transition from Reception to Year 1. During the Covid- 19 pandemic many three to four years old children attending nurseries lost and had their learning and their development impacted. And as a result of this, these children when have started Reception in 2021 might have lost necessary basic skills, that further might have had effects on their well-being, learning and confidence in themselves.

Ofsted, (2022) presents a series of briefings that are displaying what early years settings and schools have done to help children develop holistically. These briefings are saying that children are behind in developing socially and emotionally more than anticipated. However, these briefings further are also saying that the majority of early years providers and primary schools focused more on children catching up intellectually, but not too much on children's personal emotional needs.

The focus of this project starts from the grounds that early positive emotional approaches towards life are connected with more interest, flexibility, and openness towards learning and positive thinking. Further, these will develop skills that can increase young children's resilience to stress and to mental disorders stimulating well-being in future lifetime (Beddington *et al.*, 2008). Further, Progression through life evidence on childhood learning difficulties shows that if left unconsidered small differences in the sensory formations processed and used by the brain in learning can create major problems in future life (Goswami, 2008 in Beddington *et al.*, 2008). The support offered so far during and after Covid- 19 to EAL children from homes where English language was not spoken might not be enough. Bilingual children are experiencing challenges in meeting linguistics requirements of the learning classroom (Cummins, 2021). Therefore, their socio- emotional development can negatively affect their learning, their behaviour, and their thinking creating consequences on their well- being, damaging their confidence in themselves and they might not be able to handle difficulties in their coming life.

This research project intends to find answers to these questions:

1. Did Covid- 19 impact EAL children's social- emotional development?
2. What are parents perspectives on the potential impact of Covid- 19 on EAL children and what they think about the possible support their child's or children's school might have offered during their children's transition from Reception to Year 1?
3. What strategies and activities have parents used to develop EAL children's social and emotional development in order for them to become more resilient?

This research project might be for the interest of early years professionals, primary teachers, school leaders when designing support intervention, and for policies makers with regards to both children's mental health and well- being which are closely linked. At the moment there are no

mandatory governmental policies that are asking schools to take actions in helping children catching up in developing emotionally reason why some school have not taken any actions in doing so.

## Literature Review

Educational settings all around the globe had their doors closed in the spring of 2020 (Linnavalli and Kalland, 2021) because of the appearance of Covid- 19 virus. As a result of this over 1.5 billion students in over 180 countries, from which 155 million children at pre-school level (UNESCO, 2022a) were deprived of two- thirds of their school year education and deprived of early bilingual language experiences. In the spring of 2020 in England during Covid- 19 restrictions only 1 out of 20 children was attending childcare or education despite they were eligible to attend (Department of Education, 2020 in Chambers *et al.*, 2022) because their families were afraid of their children getting infected with Covid- 19 virus. The lack of early education during 2020 created an educational gap for children with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Over 1.6 million EAL children (National Statistics, 2022) are currently recorded in England alone who are not receiving enough support in learning English (BBC News, 2020).

Children learning a new language can bring up a whole palette of emotions as: pleasure, anxiety, dullness, irritation, confidence, optimism, pride, or inhibition (Pishghadam *et al.*, 2016 in Kliueva and Tzagari, 2018). This is also agreed by (Quenzer-Alfred *et al.*, 2021) who says that EAL children not only that they might have socialisation problems where they might not be able to integrate and adjust socially at school because of the language barrier, but they will also be having emotional problems showing symptoms of stress, anger or depression. The lack of prior experiences in a shared language with other peers in an educational setting will make their participation to the setting's activities difficult, this might lead to their unwillingness' to interact with others preventing the setting's objectives in developing children's self- motivation (Conteh, 2019).

Demie, (2021) states that the area of EAL in United Kingdom (UK) is under- researched and more insights in how bilingual children are being assessed, how schools help these children access the curriculum, and what might be the benefits of using the first language in classrooms are needed. The findings of Demie's, (2021) research showed that the disadvantaged EAL children during Covid- 19 pandemic in 2020 have lost subjected learning experiences and language learning when the schools have closed. These losses had a great negative impact on EAL children in comparison with their peers widening the achievement gap between them. This has mostly happened because of the lack of support in improving English proficiency during school closures, lack of one-to- one support in schools, lack of access for learning online, lack of learning support English language at home, and lack of governmental funding to support EAL children Demie, (2021). Agreeing with Demie, (2021) and taking this further in saying that the lack of care provided by educational settings during the Covid- 19 pandemic had an impact on children's social and emotional developments also affected their achievements. So far research shows that children's social, personal, emotional, cognitive, and physical development are interconnected. In agreement further with David, (2009 cited in Wall, 2011, p. 96) the emotional well-being of a child is the 'bedrock' on which the whole later development relays on. Hawkins (2017 cited in Kim, Wee and Meacham, 2021) believes that feelings and emotions are fundamental to reasoning and learning. He argues that through created situations that encourage emotional and physical feelings, children can be stimulated to discover and re- construct their knowledge. Children acquiring more motionless knowledge is not sufficient for them to succeed in their futures and to live a happier life, therefore cognitive and emotional learning should not be individualised. School's curriculums incline to be designed to teach subjects like maths, language arts or science to find out how well children can achieve independently through assessments.

According to Conteh, (2019) children new to English in comparison with their monolingual peers of same age can take more longer in developing understanding and making use of academical language. In a classroom where English is the central mean of communication and learning can be seen as these children be behind with their learning because their acquisition of English is not as advanced of their peers, this might result in children being identified as having learning difficulties when in reality they have language needs, and they need more language support.

## Social interactions and play

Wijaya, Bunga and Kiling, (2022) argue that during Covid- 19 pandemic the stay-at-home regulations, closure of educational settings, and playgrounds socially isolated children depriving them of interactions and play opportunities with peers and friends leaving them with social-emotional struggles. Play offers children opportunities of exploring their own feelings. Through play children can learn deal with fears, anxieties, they can learn empathise with others, develop awareness of how others feel, and how they can manage their emotions (Pound, 2005). Play promotes and helps children in developing social- emotional skills in their first years of life in early childhood settings through a play-based curriculum. The lack of play and interactions could have affected children's social- emotional development and more research on this is needed. Vygotsky viewed children's play and interactions between themselves very important. He believed that learning does not happen in isolation and recognised the contribution to learning that others are having. In his view, a child would benefit in working in collaboration with a more competent and experienced child at a task would transform these interactions in conversations, play, and opportunities for learning (Pound, 2005).

Research shows that social- emotional skills can have various positive outcomes later in children's lives as greater wellbeing and regulation, better mental health, better performance in their careers, and improved academic achievements (Blair & Razza, 2007; Durlak et al., 2011; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Geldhof & Little, 2011; McClelland et al., 2007 in Cosso *et al.*, 2022). Further, research indicates that social-emotional engagements have positive impacts on children's math and reading achievement (Jones et al., 2011 in Cosso *et al.*, 2022).

Views over how children develop have changed over the years and children's development changes as they are growing. Children are going through different developmental periods through which from interactions with parents, teachers, caregivers, and with the wider community they acquire knowledge, physical abilities, intellectual abilities, and social and emotional abilities. Through these interactions one can understand and get deep knowledge how children think and feel. Children's social- emotional skills are seen as a critical predictor of a successful future life (David, 2009; Dowling, 2014). These important skills will allow children to manage their own emotions and stress, they will be able to join in, and participate in the learning process within the educational settings. Once acquired these will enable children to create and keep positive interactions with their peers, teachers, and adults (Blair, 2002; Ursache et al., 2012 mentioned in Kim, Wee and Meacham, 2021). Interactions on different levels between peers and teachers are the basis of children's learning and development and they transfer into expanding children's cognitive development.

## Socially and emotionally nurturing environment

Their emotional and social developments are impacted by the surrounding environment, by how good and positive their relationships within this environment are, and by their abilities to socialise. All these usually happen in educational settings where children are spending the most of their time and where children can learn from experiences and relationships. Children's holistic development is profoundly affected by their relationships and emotions. They make progress in learning English through social language with their friends and within educational settings during their formal learning, here their early language experiences, play an important role of children becoming bilingual. Arnold (2011 cited in Kim, Wee and Meacham, 2021) believes that children who are learning a new language and the way they will be learning to manage their wide range of emotions is determined by their classroom environment. Educational settings are playing critical roles into society, they are 'living centres of open and democratic culture, enriched, and informed by social encounters' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 180 cited in Kim, Wee and Meacham, 2021). Within these educational setting teachers can act as facilitators by enabling EAL children to learning control their emotions through promoting emotional literacy (Kliueva and Tsagari, 2018). Furthermore, literature shows that if children are given opportunities to reflect on their emotional experiences within the classroom environment, these experiences will be transformed into beneficial learning (Lopez & Gardenas, 2014; Aragao, 2011 in Kliueva and Tsagari, 2018).

## Transition issues

Quenzer-Alfred *et al.* (2021) research project shows transition tends to be an educational issue that can happen in every school around the globe and can affect children who are moving from nursery to primary school. When transitioning from a play- based child- centred approach to paper- based activities where experiences are more teacher- led, knowledge content, and skills are more emphasised, expectations of children are changed.

According to Sylva et al. (2003) and Moyles et al. (2002 in Quenzer-Alfred *et al.*, 2021) children that show basic skills predict success and achievements in their future learning. Further, Im-Bolter and Cohen (2007 in Quenzer-Alfred *et al.*, 2021) are saying that children who are having good language and communication skills are establishing more easier good relationships with their colleagues. The lack of these factors might result in an unsuccessful transition and children might develop special educational needs in school (Quenzer-Alfred *et al.*, 2021).

## Emotional Literacy

The emotional development is viewed as being a social process, this being named emotional literacy (EL). For this research project based on Bocchino's (1999; Haddon et al., 2005 in Kliueva and Tsagari, 2018) and on Mathews et al., (2002 cited in Bruce, 2010, p. 5) EL could be described as being a set of nurtured intelligence skills developed through a daily practice of interactions with others in social settings that allow children to recognise their own and other's emotions, to have control, to empathetically understand that emotions are felt in different ways by each person, and to incorporate them intellectually. Emotional literacy approach has an impressive legacy with origins in brain, neurology, psychoneuroimmunology, educational, psychotherapeutic, psychiatric, social and cognitive researches (Bruce, 2010). Emotional literacy places an individual within a social context and includes justice and fairness for those at disadvantage like EAL children allowing them to deal and cope with real- life challenges.

School closures and learning online made promoting emotional literacy more difficult and more desperately needed due to Covid- 19 pandemic. During the pandemic families had financial difficulties, they have lost family members, and these have affected their children's mental health and early actions to help these children recover need to be taken in order for them to have a smooth and warm transition. Further, the fact that schools are constantly required to show evidence of children's attainment leaves little room for developing social and emotional skills. Implementing emotional literacy in children's learning can have various benefits and programmes that can help heal develop children's social and emotional development and learning should be followed. Research shows that different programs like Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), Social Emotional Learning (SEL) proven better classroom behaviours and developed abilities to control stress and depression (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017 mentioned in Kim, Wee and Meacham, 2021). Though, such programs showed improvements in children's achievement a small number of schools are participating (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2013, 2015; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Yoder, 2013 in Kim, Wee and Meacham, 2021).

The need for psycho- social and mental- wellbeing support for both students and teachers is highlighted by over half the countries (57%) that submitted their National Statement of Commitment at Transforming Education Summit (TES) in October 2022 (UNESCO, 2022b). However, very few stated particular measures that will be implemented for recovery after Covid-19. Very less or no policies are mentioning how EAL children will be supported.

## Methodology

This small-scale research project was framed within a mixed methods paradigm. The purpose for a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches being used for this research project was to get a richer, a more deeper, and a more reliable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) understanding of the multiple ontologies and the multiple epistemologies from parents. Their perspectives on what potential impact Covid- 19 might have had on their children's social and emotional development. Further, on how they and their school support these children develop socially and emotionally during and after Covid in order to discover the parents knowledge and the truth of how these might have affected young children's transition from Reception to Year 1 primary school.

Triangulation between methods were qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, and combined data analysis strategies were used. Using triangulation methodology allowed the research project to be motivated by its aims, objectives, and its research questions and it also strengthen and validate the research findings (Biesta, 2017 in Coe *et al.*, 2018). Through triangulation, the collected data was checked for credibility when the information from participants were compared (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The findings of the collected data from two or more resources and exploring the chosen research topic from the combination of different methods helped see the different and similar identified themes from different perspectives making these findings more consistent (Bell and Waters, 2018). Through, triangulation methodology the problems of having different sizes of sample and part of the sample gave information for both methods of the data collection were minimised; it also helped minimise the weaknesses of the research project.

Early January 2023 links with a questionnaire form that included open- closed- ended questions started to be sent to fifty-five parents via WhatsApp. Out of these fifty- five parents only a number of twenty- seven have filled in the questionnaire form with valuable, detailed information of their real experiences lived by their families and their children during Covid- 19. From these twenty-seven questionnaires six had missing information and had not been taken in consideration. Questionnaires with open- closed- ended questions were used to collect data because it was a quicker way to reach the knowledge of the parents and because they helped collect rich information, even if not in great depth (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Before the questionnaire form link was sent out to parents, the researcher gained expertise help from the research Supervisor, who pre- tested the questions. As a result of this some of the questions had been changed in order to be more relevant for research's concerns and more sensitive for participants. This increased the questionnaire's reliability, validity, and its feasibility (Cohen et al., 2018). Desimone (2006 cited in Mertens, 2015) indicates that a questionnaire's quality can be improved to determine the relevance of the questions in the research. This quantitative numerical technique allowed that parents written answers to be analytically described (Mukherji and Albon, 2018).

Recorded unstructured interviews with prompts about children transition from Reception to Year 1, and Covid- 19 effects, started to be conducted towards end of January 2023. The conversations initially were planned to be conducted with six, but two of the parents changed their minds just before the data started to be collected and other two decided to withdraw their participation from this research project. The conversations with only two parents were therefore conducted for more consistent and helpful information, the interviews duration varied between twenty- five minutes



and thirty minutes. One of the interviews was conducted face- to- face and the other one was conducted on a video recorded meeting on the Zoom app because it better suited the interviewee who had a busy schedule and could not meet for a face-to-face interview. The Zoom meeting allowed the participant to explain sensitive problems without feeling uncomfortable by the researcher's physical presence. Unstructured interviews were used because their flexibility and because deeper understanding of the participant's ontologies and epistemologies were gained. The unstructured interviews gave participants the freedom to respond and lead the discussions in the direction they wanted exposing themes from the different meaningful experiences that they and their children had during and after Covid- 19. This was particularly useful because it sought out an equal power between the researcher and the participant (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Both interviews were recorded because they allowed the researcher to go back to participants statements from which quotes were used making the writing more accurate (Bell and Waters, 2018). Though, the unstructured interviews provided rich information made the responses from the participants in being difficult to compare and the results could not to be generalised. Data collected through recorded unstructured interviews with parents was analysed through thematic analysis where seven themes from data were identified (Mukherji and Albon, 2018).

## **Sample**

The sampling for this research project consisted in twenty- seven parents from three primary schools situated in East London. A non- probability sample of participants for this research project was accessed using the snowball strategy where seven parents were selected from personal contacts, these parents further had put me in contact with rest of the parents.

## **Challenges encountered**

Originally this research project was designed and received ethical approval to obtain perspectives from teachers and parents on what potential impact Covid- 19 had on EAL children's emotional and social development and how this affected their transition from Reception into Year 1. Emails were sent for gatekeepers consent and teachers participation to twenty- four primary schools, but just one school replayed back saying that 'unfortunately they are currently undertaking a large review of their Early Years Scheme of work, and they cannot commit any further time'. As a result of this the initial plan of the research project was altered. It was decided to continue with only gathering perspectives from parents and permission to go ahead with the actual project was obtained through the supervisor of this project from the UEL's senior leader of the Independent Research Project module.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for this research to be conducted was given by the University of East London. In educational research, ethics term is being described as researcher's reflective process of moral principles of sensitivity and responsibilities to respect the rights of participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2017; Bassot, 2022). Throughout the entire research process the researcher needs to reflect over their research process, over the issues that might evolve from it, and to consider their research effects on the participants. Therefore, during the research process

the researcher took the obligation to follow legal, professional, and ethical principles. This was done to ensure that during the research process participants were not harmed, that their safety, privacy, and confidentiality were valued. Throughout this research process all participants were treated honestly, with sensitivity, with dignity, with respect, and the transparency of the research process is shown throughout this written work. The lastly was done as it is outlined by the (British Educational Research Association, 2019). In order to conduct this research ethically the researcher followed key ethical terms as stated by (BERA, 2019).

Firstly, based on the feedback received from the supervisor of this research the research questions were altered in order for them to be more logical, answerable, clear enough, and sensible. The wellbeing, and safety of the participants were of main importance for this research project and before the data started to be collected from participants information were given to them regarding the research topic and process.

Secondly, opted- in consent and written informed consent were both requested from participants. Opted- in consent involved in asking participants through written messages send on WhatsApp for their willingness to participate in this research by filling in a questionnaire form (Thomas, 2017). In these messages the possible participants were made aware of their right to withdraw their consent anytime during the research process. Information about the research topic were written at the beginning of the questionnaire form and it was entirely participant's decision whether willing to continue filling the form or not. Further, informed consent for participation to this project and for the unstructured interviews to be audio- recorded were signed by six participants. Participant Information Sheet were given to participants. Through these, they were informed about the research project that participation to it is entirely voluntarily, and they have the right to withdraw their consent anytime during the research project just before the audio-recorded unstructured interviews started (; Thomas, 2017; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Mukherji and Albon, 2018). 'Voluntarism' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.122) ensured that participants freely have chosen to participate in the research and ensured that the exposure to risks was accepted consciously and voluntarily.

Thirdly, in order to insure, respect, and address participant's privacy and protection from harm, anonymity and confidentiality methods were used. Participant's identities were kept confidential at all times throughout the whole research project, no names were used. Participants anonymity was kept through using pseudonyms throughout the process of this research and numbers were used to show how many participants have filled in the questionnaire from, no names or email addresses were collected throughout the process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Fourthly, the collected data from participants was kept under protected anonymised files (Thomas, 2017) on researcher's personal computer saved on UEL's drive also password protected.

## **Findings and discussions**

### **Data collection and analysis**

This research project was inspired by my own family's experience during the Covid- 19 pandemic. For reader's interests be aware that the content of this research project might be influenced by my own non- nativist position and by my parental responsibilities of a five-year-old child who's first spoken language is not English. Being a nursery practitioner and mother of two girls, having some academic knowledge about the majority of the issues raised within this research, and with a great interest in psychology I have tried as much as I could through a reflexive approach to be as subjective I could. Throughout this project I tried to be self- aware about my own believes and about my own personal lived experiences during Covid in order to detach myself from my own feelings and to sensitively communicate participants views, emotions, and experiences objectively.

The analysis of quantitative data involves descriptive statistics created in Excel sheets from parents answers from the questionnaires, enumerating and comparison between the collected information. These will be descriptive and will be stating accurately the information gathered (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

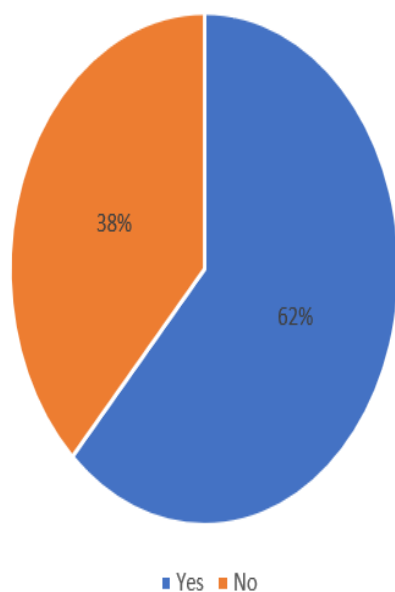
The data collected for this research project was organised, analysed, and presented by research questions because it kept the consistency of the material gathered and because it pulled together all the relevant data for the same issues that were of concern for this project (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). All the relevant data from questionnaires and unstructured interviews were brought together in order to deliver a combined answer to each research questions. Quantitative data followed by qualitative data will be presented for each research question because it enabled patterns, relationships, comparisons, across data groupings to be exposed correctly and clearly (Cohen et al., 2018).

The conversations between researcher and participants were audio- recorded and verbatim transcribed. The transcripts were anonymised, and they have captured every word from the audio- recordings. The audio- recordings were listened again while reading the transcripts for more accuracy. The results from both data collection tools were brought together and analysed through thematic analysis. Through a closer examination and engagement into the data the researcher was able to identify words and phrases that seemed significant to the research questions (Thomas, 2017). These were then compared and checked for similarities, relationships, and differences and presented by research question through seven key themes identified from parents statements. The themes were presented based on the connection found between them.

## First research question

The results to answer the 1<sup>st</sup> research question 'Did Covid- 19 impact EAL children's social and emotional development?' of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed and showed as noted by parents that EAL children's social and emotional development were negatively and positively affected by the Covid- 19 pandemic.

As, it can be seen in *Fig. 1* sixty- two percent of the participants said that their children's socio-emotional development was affected whilst other thirty- eight percent have said that their children were not affected by Covid- 19.



*Fig. 1* Did Covid- 19 impact EAL children's social and emotional development?

Some parents have stated that their children were negatively affected mostly by 'lack of interaction'.

## Lack of interaction

Interaction is seen as an essential factor in acquiring a second language (Loewen and Sato, 2018 in Sharples, 2021). When children are acquiring two languages, they need to hear enough of both of the languages talked directly to them in order for them to learn. However, during Covid-19 this was not possible to happen for all children due to family's own English proficiency level. During interviews statements such as from participant D 'we did a lot of interacting we talked English with him, but also in Turkish' and from participant B 'we have spoken English language in the house during Covid' indicated that children's English learning was not entirely disrupted by Covid- 19. In this case the quantity and the quality of the language can be questionable due to possible low English proficiency level of the family. The 'quantity and quality of the language input are important' when acquiring school's mainstream language (Cunningham, 2020, p. 122). This is best learned by children within the educational setting with proficient speakers.

However, spending more time at home with family during Covid children have deepened their roots of their native languages vocabulary and grammar, which as stated by (Conteh, 2019) can form and make their understanding about their own cultural identities more clearer.

### **Lack of peer interaction and attachment**

Though, there is a need for more research on school- age learners for EAL to show what forms of teacher and peer interactions encourage language acquisition and learning there is enough evidence which arguments that meaningful peer interactions can support learner's vocabulary and grammar learning (Sharples, 2021). Statements from parents such as *'missing their school friends'* or *'could not mingle with other children and felt very lonely'* indicated that lack of interaction had an impact on children's socio- emotional development. Covid- 19 prevented children to create peer attachments within the classrooms. Positive peer attachments are associated with increased self- esteem, with children's development and adjustments, and with resilience were children can learn about conflict resolutions and betrayal, friendship, play, help and guidance (Parker and Asher, 1993; Allen, 2008; Gallarin and Alonso- Arbiol, 2012 in Balluerka *et al.*, 2016). EAL children interacting and involving in group activities can receive emotional and psychological support from their peers and this in return leaves positive footprints on their happiness and wellbeing (Lerner and Steinberg, 2004 in Balluerka *et al.*, 2016). Further, Balluerka *et al.*, (2016) are confirming that their study on peer attachment and class emotional intelligence are associated with psychological adjustments.

### **Sharing closer positive bond with family**

Further, staying home during Covid- 19 based on participant B statement *'we are a big family and for her was a nice period to be home with all of us which I believe emotionally was fine'* indicated that Covid had a positive impact on her child's emotional development and on their family relationships. Similar statement is given by participant B *'emotionally she was fine we spent lots of time together during Covid, but mostly of the time she was with her sister playing together'*. Everyday interactions and siblings attachments can accelerate the development of theory of mind (Cowie, 2019). Through, play, possible conflicts with siblings children can learn about being empathetic, fairness, turn- taking and sharing toys, and rules lessons about property (Cowie, 2019).

## Behaviour difficulties

Participant D recalls how her son used to externalize difficult behaviour before him started speaking English in Reception *'he was a boy who liked hitting...we tried to make him stop hitting. We played with him, told him kindly to stop, we have told him hitting is not nice, we sat next to him and showing gentle hands and it helped. He had the classroom teacher that was also Turkish, and she actually helped him she was always trying to speak English and Turkish with him at some points where he did not understand the meaning in English... but when he started understanding and speaking English his behaviour changed, he started to feel more calmly. The Turkish teacher helped him a lot with talking'*.

## Anxieties

Participant B recalls how her daughter before Covid- 19 was very socially *'she was attending different after clubs activities, she was going to drama, ballet, swimming, and gymnastics but when the pandemic started, she fell in depression because she missed visiting other family members, she missed her friends, and her daily routines... eventually her language speaking regressed in both languages. She would not speak with us in the house or at school when they started with anyone. We have been guided to consult a language specialist she was suspect of mutism.'*

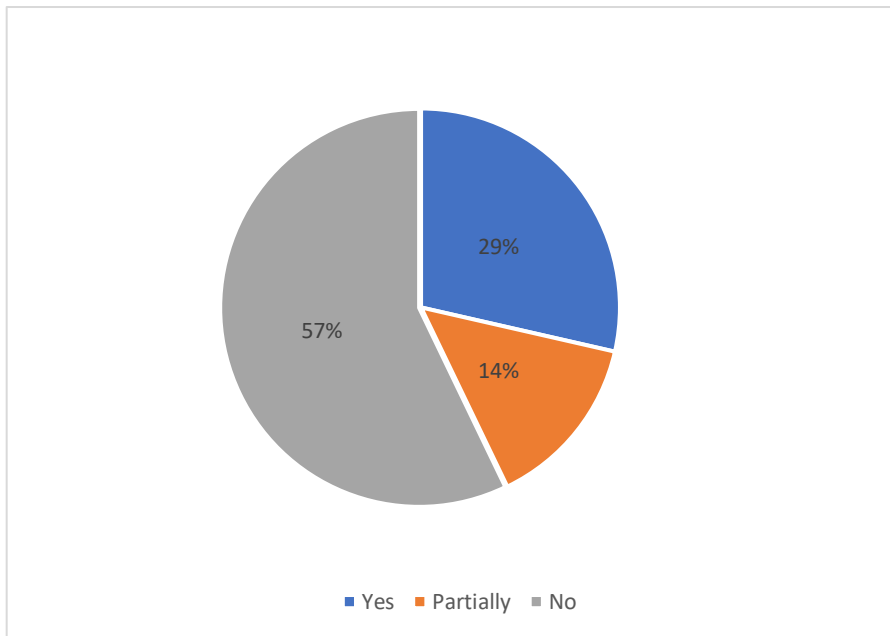
Children who suffer of mutism are quiet and do not usually attract attention upon themselves (Johnson & Wintgen, 2016). Mutism is defined as being an anxiety disorder that can considerably inhibit one's capacity to communicate in certain circumstances or settings, such as schools (Pampa, 2018). So far, research shows that mutism is more likely to affect bilingual children because is often confused with the six month 'silent period' in language acquisition (Elizur and Perednik, 2003 in Pampa, 2018). Girls are more likely to be affected than boys because girls are more known to not externalise their emotions (Krysanski, 2003; Busse and Downey, 2011; Alyanak et al., 2013; Busse & Downey, 2011 in Pampa, 2018). Due to a larger percentage of children suffering of mutism within the ethnic linguistic minority and migrant communities studies hint that children who experience separation, the loss of a family member, isolation, or transition periods when uncomfortable with the language of the recently adopted country are usually misdiagnosed (Busse & Downey, 2011; Smith & Sluckin, 2014 in Pampa, 2018). Language extra support needs to be offered for these children.

White, Bond and Carroll, (2022) are saying that school practioners have insufficient understanding on how to detect and support children who might have mutism unless they had previous direct involvement in a case. Anxiety (2020 in White, Bond and Carroll, 2022) estimates that one out of six young children experience anxiety and concerning is that school staff do not feel equipped to recognise the symptoms of emotional distress or mental health that might be presented at school in quiet and silent children (Mental Health Foundation, 2018 in White, Bond and Carroll, 2022).

According to participant B her daughter after receiving professional help feels *'very good now, happy, and excited to go to school, and spend time with her friends'*.

## Second research question

To answer the second research question, namely on ‘what are parents perspectives on the potential impact of Covid- 19 on EAL children and what they think about the possible support their child’s or children’s school might have offered during their children’s transition from Reception to Year 1?’ it was found out that fifty- seven percent of participants stated that the educational setting their children were attending during Covid did not support their children socially or emotionally. Other twenty- nine percent stated that the educational setting did support their children and fourteen percent stated that their children were only partially supported by their educational setting to develop socially and emotionally during Covid- 19 pandemic. These results suggest that extra support for EAL children to develop socially and emotionally is needed.



*Fig. 2 Did the educational setting your child was attending during Covid- 19 support them to develop socially and emotionally?*

## Transition

Though, by the time this research project started the majority of EAL children whose parents were participants to this project, have already settled into their new Y1 classroom. The pie chart below describes parents information on how schools supported their children during transition from Reception to year 1.

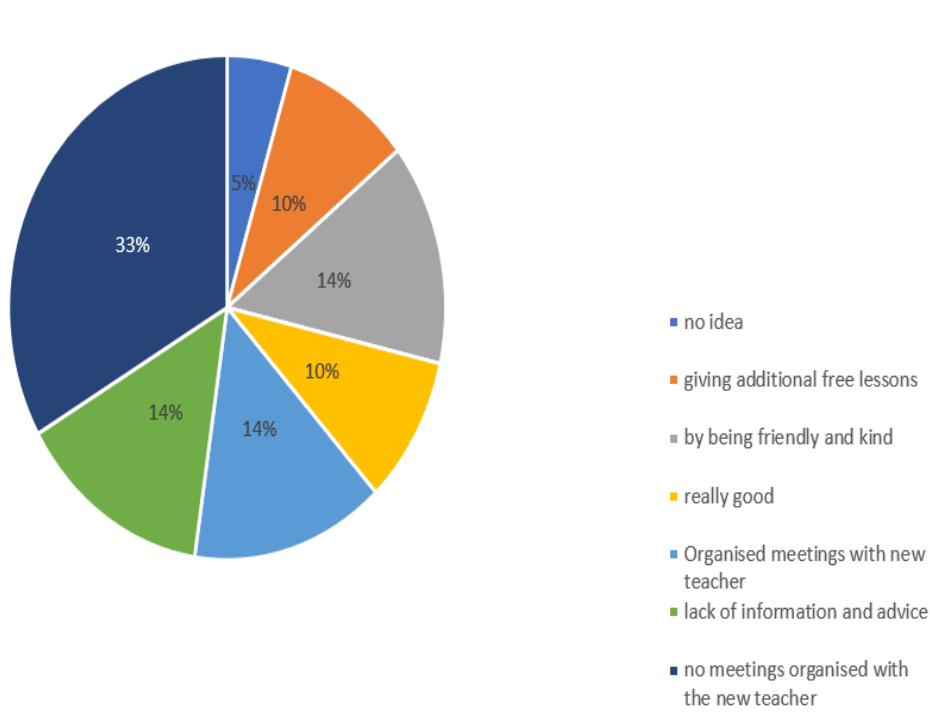


Fig.3 School transition support

Participants recalled only receiving emails letter informing them that their children had met their new Y1 teacher before summer holidays. This raised concerns between some of the parents for their five-year-old children. Parents attending the interviews have stated that the only information given regarding their children’s transition from Reception to Year 1 was an email informing them that ‘children have met their new teacher close to the end of Reception year’ (parent B). The ‘email also informed us in which class our children will be, with their new teacher’s name and photo. No other details, information, or advice were given’ (parent D).

Concerns that the focus on social and emotional development was limited were raised during the interviews and that ‘not much help during transition was offered’ (parent D). Participant D stated, ‘that meeting the new teacher would have made children’s transition process much more easier, but because of Covid- 19 policies the schools had put up in place, we have not been able to meet the new teacher before the summer holiday’ (parent D). Parents could have been offered some guidance and support on how to make their children’s transition more easier, which it might have reduced children’s anxieties. Lack of information and guidance regarding children’s transition can make a smooth transition process to be more difficult to achieve.



### Third research question

#### Art, play, and resilience

To answer the third research question, namely ‘What strategies and activities have parents used to develop EAL children’s social and emotional development in order for them to become more resilient?’ it was found out that play and painting were the activities that were the most used by parents to help their children become more resilient (see fig.4 below).

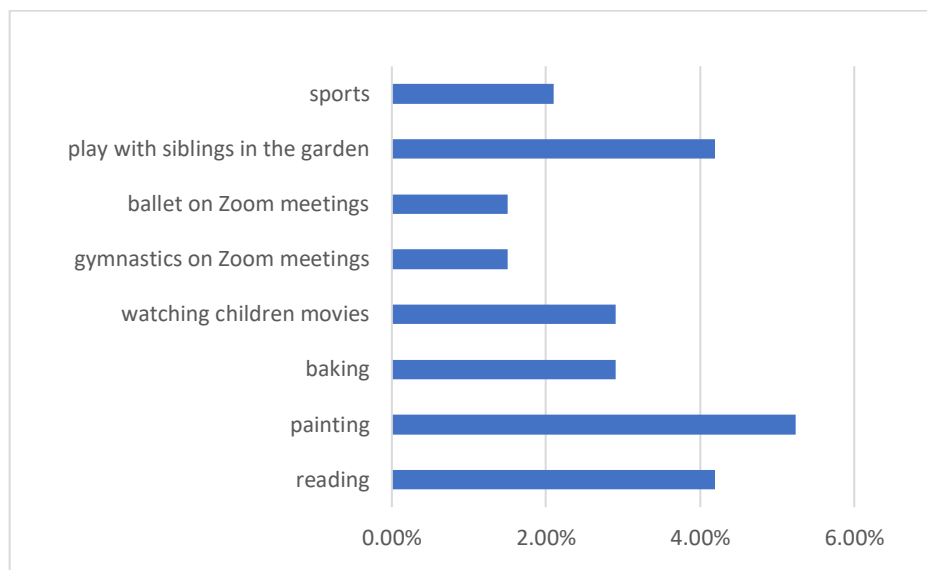


Fig. 4 Activities used by parents to increase their children resilience

Low levels of resilience are associated with psychological disorders and vulnerabilities (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006 in Roghanchi *et al.*, 2013) and families are essential factors in raising their children resilience. Building up resilience in children is important because can decrease levels of anxiety, stress, and depression (Hjemdal et al., 2011 in Yamamoto, Nishinaka and Matsumoto, 2023). More than one quarter of the participants have stated that they have used painting and play to help their children becoming resilient.

Atkins and Williams (2007 in Roghanchi *et al.*, 2013) are describing art as being a connection between the inner world and outside reality, the connection between one’s past, present, and future developments. Art is being used in therapies because it facilitates self- expression allowing one to become more united with itself, more autonomous, feel more valued, and to increase his self- esteem (Case & Dalley, 1992; Payne, 1992; Reynolds, 2000, 2002; Langner, 2009; Mahmoudi, et al., 2010 in Roghanchi *et al.*, 2013). Art is a needed characteristic of culture that has a key role in psychological functioning (Sato, 2011 in Roghanchi *et al.*, 2013) and helps one increase their wellbeing and heal (Malchiodi, 2005 Roghanchi *et al.*, 2013).

Statements from participant D such as *'We got him lots of toys that he liked. We got him colourful Legos, he liked Paw Patrol, he still is a big fun of Paw Patrol, so we used to buy him Paw Patrol puzzles, so we could do puzzles together. We were reading books, play with water and sand...we tried to do activities that we knew he liked and enjoyed'*. Participant B stated that *'we did lots of painting, Lego building, fashion modelling she really takes her time in changing her outfits, reading. She weekly had gymnastics and ballet online through Zoom and we spent lots of time outside in the garden with the entire family and she played with her sister a lot'*.

This study noticed that the lack of interaction, lack of peer attachment during Covid- 19 had negative effects over EAL children's socio- emotional development and these led to difficulties in acquiring English language, behaviour difficulties, loneliness, and anxiety. These findings agree and are in line with (Wijaya, Bunga and Kiling, 2022) who are saying that peer relationships can develop social- emotional competencies like self- management, social and self- awareness, and responsible decision making that can be the base of healthy relationships and well-being in adult life. The findings of this research also supplement (Balluerka *et al.*, 2016) findings on peer attachment and class emotional literacy that can positively affect children's psychological well- being and demonstrates that classroom's emotional literacy applies an increased effect to it. The findings of this project are showing the significant role that psychological factors like anxiety and resilience have when teaching EAL children. Based on the statements of participants of this project, these psychological factors can hinder or facilitate language acquisition that drives language proficiency. Further, this enables EAL children's cognitive and learning. Further, the findings of this project are also in corroboration with White's, Bond, and Carroll, (2022) findings which are indicating that some of the strategies and activities such as, art and play presented in the above chapters, used by school staff to support children with anxieties would both benefit to EAL children and to the rest of the class. In line with Quenzer-Alfred *et al.*, (2021) statement

Though, the process of learning English as an additional language is much broader than it could possibly have been captured in this project the findings of this project are showing that there is a need in according more consideration to EAL children's social- emotional development.

## Conclusion

Though, not to many researchers debated EAL's children socio- emotional developments there are several researchers that already displayed issues presented in this project. The findings presented through the themes above are just an extension and a supplement to the already existing knowledge in the academic field about if and how Covid- 19 affected children's socio- emotional development. Emotional literate approaches in schools due to the missing support during these children transition from Reception to Year 1 are missing. Schools need to take actions to support these children develop socially and emotionally and they can do that best through emotional literacy programmes. These can support children in developing and building self- esteem, confidence in themselves in order to raise both EAL and other children academical achievements and smoothing their transition from Reception to Year 1. Resilience is built through emotional literacy programs in schools help children understand and deal with their own and other emotions. The findings of this research showed that play and art are two key factors that if implemented by teachers through emotional literacy approach in their pedagogies children promote their resilience. Opportunities through socio- emotional learning will help children bounce back from intense emotional situations by decreasing the anger level and avoid altercations, and by decreasing the anxiety level.

Overall, this project's findings attempted to display both positive and negative effects of Covid-19 on Year 1 school EAL children's socio- emotional developments, how schools supported or not supported EAL children develop socially and emotionally and why this is a necessary factor that needs to change in order to increase EAL children's mental health, to achieve in their learning, and in their future lives.

## Limitations

This was a small-scale research project the views, perceptions, and experiences of twenty- one participants around their EAL children's social and emotional development may not be generalised to a larger number of people. Opinions from a larger number of parents might have been even more useful. Three years have passed since the Covid- 19 pandemic started and some parents might have had difficulties in remembering events that affected their children's social and emotional development.

Unfortunately, for this research project it was not possible to recruit teaching professionals or practitioners, therefore this project could not analyse the perspectives of educational staff. If, done differently this research project will have had included perspectives from a larger number of parents and as initially planned would also have had included teaching staff perspectives from schools in different boroughs in East London.

## **Recommendations**

This research project, hopefully it will contribute to possible governmental policies changes through which schools in United Kingdom mandatory will have to revise their own school policies and take actions to help children in developing socially and emotionally. At the moment there are no mandatory governmental policies that asks schools to take actions in helping children catching up developing socially and emotionally it is entirely left to schools decision on what their focus should be on in helping children recover lost learning. Reason, why some schools have only focused in catching up with subjects like mathematics or literacy. There is a need in implementing emotional literacy programmes in school's curriculum.

Moreover, there is also a need for teachers to understand the role of emotional literacy in their pedagogy and to use strategies that promote social- emotional skills to be efficient. Further, more educational campaigns on this and more efficient ITT programmes for teachers regarding SEN and psychology knowledge studies that can provide deeper understanding of emotional difficulties like anxiety of communication and other forms of disabilities should be implemented in their studies and training to make children's identification more easily.

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# **SCHOOL EXPERIENCES FOR AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE:**

## **A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION ON PRACTITIONERS' VIEWS REGARDING AUTISTIC YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCHOOL EXPERIENCES SURROUNDING PEER PRESSURE AND BULLYING.**

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## List of Abbreviations:

- ❖ Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- ❖ Neurotypical (NT)
- ❖ Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- ❖ Young People (YP)

## Abstract

The goal of this investigation is to investigate peer pressure and the connections to bullying using a qualitative and interpretivist approach, the investigation will examine the difficulties that YP with ASD between the ages of 12 and 18 experience because of peer pressure and bullying affects them with their peers and teachers, within school settings and their social friend groups. The study will use a small participant sample of eleven practitioners to examine their experiences supporting autistic YP's, and their interactions within their school surroundings through the views of education practitioners. This study is significant because it will back up the views of practitioners on bullying, peer pressure, and strategies for educating students and staff about anti-bullying and safety measures. In this study, academics use the microsystem model to evaluate how societal, peer and parental interactions, and cultural factors affect the challenges faced by young individuals with autism. The research aim is to explore practitioners' perspectives on how peer pressure and bullying can affect autistic YP's lives, the researcher will conduct the study, using semi-structured interviews with eight specific questions linked to the research aim. The following research questions within the dissertation are: 1) What are practitioners' views on peer pressure and bullying about autistic young people aged 12-18 years old? 2) What measures can be implemented to promote anti-bullying ethos within the school by autistic young peoples' peers? 3) What measures can be implemented to promote anti-bullying ethos within the school by teachers? The results showed how the practitioners perceived peer pressure and how it can result in bullying. They also presented how the practitioners believed safeguarding important and schools should implement safe spaces for autistic YP, which should be readily available to use in case of negative peer pressure and bullying. The practitioners also discussed how to properly support YP with autism by adhering to relevant laws and policies in the school setting and also recognising the characteristics of autism, with each individual YP's own personality.

**Key Words:** *Anti-Bullying, Bullying, Inclusion, Peer Pressure, Qualitative, Safeguarding*

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Professionals do not understand the principles of peer pressure and how it manifested, despite the fact that academics recognise peer pressure as a real phenomenon that occurs everywhere. For this reason, this investigation is crucial to advancing knowledge and information in education (Murugesan and Augustus, 2019). Considering the autistic characteristics that YP's exhibit, and the challenges of whether peer pressure influences bullying, including the various forms of bullying and peer pressure features that affect young autistic individuals are explored by the researcher within this study. Peer pressure is a crucial component of socialising and examines the influence a peer group has on an individual to persuade them to modify their opinions and values, adhere to group norms, or be liked and respected by others (Burns *et al.*, 2009; Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). Moreover, it may be tempting to assume that positive peer pressure will be advantageous and negative peer pressure detrimental, the reality is more nuanced, according to Calvo-Armengol and Jackson (2008). The motivation behind this study is the unfavourable peer pressure that YP with autism experience in their social networks. It is surprising that NT YP, especially those with ASD, have not received more attention in research on bullying and peer pressure in adolescence. Up until now, the focus has been on autistic YP attending general education settings, even though academics examined peer victimisation and recognised prevalence in adolescents and children with SEND (Van Cleave and Davis, 2006). Granting they have not been the focus of recent studies on bullying and victimisation, YP with autism may be more vulnerable to bullying behaviour. However, there has not been a thorough examination within any of the studies on SEND and autistic YP. Autistic YP are frequently bullied and victimised by their classmates (Martlew and Hodson, 1991) as have fewer skills socialising (Whitney *et al.*, 1992) and have limited friends. In this situation, educators need to understand the intricate nature of peer pressure.

Peer pressure research is therefore crucial to maximising the concept's benefits and avoiding any potential harm to children's psychological development (Toraman and Aycicek, 2019). This study also makes it easier for academics to understand the research jargon employed in this investigative study. The written content will be supported and improved by the precise and consistent use of keywords, which will stand for and retrieve the literature that knowledgeable and professional readers are aware of and where many of the phrases used in the study whilst using any research approach is specified (Grant, 2010; Noori, 2021). The terms are arranged alphabetically, and when choosing the key terms and abbreviations, I considered the short abbreviations that would make it easier to identify each word (Reinert, 2001). Additionally, the key words in this study include the following: Developmental disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) impact social interactions and interest that are impacted by anomalies in the brain. Neurotypical (NT) individuals are those whose brain functions are like those of their peers and achieve mastering skills by attaining developmental milestones at the same pace as people their age, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) refer to a child or young person who need assistance in special education and has a learning disability and/or other disability. Additionally, the term "young people" (YPs) refers to kids and teens between the ages of 12 and 18. By ensuring the research on this topic is objective, I can prevent any power disparities from tainting my position or exerting pressure on the opinions of the participants (Mukherji and Albon, 2018).

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

#### *An Examination of Peer Pressure and the Connection to Bullying*

It is a well-known fact that Bronfenbrenner, (1974) was a Russian psychologist who contributed a number of developmental psychology theories. He developed five ecological systems, the first of which will be discussed in this essay. According to this system, the "microsystem" is the ecology's foundational level, or the context in which people develop, and it includes things like families, schools, peer groups, and cultures, all of which are significant peer pressure factors for adolescents (Levitan and Verhulst, 2016; Oswald and Suss, 1988; Rodkin, 2004). According to Manzoni *et al.*, (2011) suggest the forms of peer pressures that influences YP, directly involves YP using peer pressure to make requests, suggestions, or encouraging others to take part, and giving instructions. Indirect, where peers' nonverbal behaviours cause autistic YP to behave or act differently than they normally would. This might manifest in close relationships, clothing choices, or joining cliques and teams (Kiran-Esan, 2003; McIntosh *et al.*, 2003; Sim and Koh, 2003). Whereas positive acts as a mechanism to support age and wellbeing, socially acceptable behaviours. For instance, YP are encouraged and influenced to study and work towards academic success when they are a member of encouraging peer groups. Peer pressure in its most negative form is what drives bullying in FYP . This is clear when autistic YP's act contrary to their moral code or family beliefs after seeing the behaviour of their classmates with dominating personalities or when the autistic YP's are influenced to decide whether to follow the leader or disobey them (Kaplan, 2004; Manzoni, Lotar., and Ricijas, 2008). Similarly to the above, indirect and direct peer pressure is defined in Merriam-Webster, (2023) as the most susceptible period to peer impact, where YP are choosing their identity among their peers and creating new acquaintances.

Given the definitions of peer pressure presented above, it is clear that environments where YP develop friendships and become part of social groups such as school, are also where peer pressure is the most prevalent. Keane and Loades, (2017), propose peer pressure occurs when adolescents are proving their friendship groups and fulfilling their vital need for acceptance, which will so encourage a variety of outcomes (Brown *et al.*, 1986), for instance, strong or weak academic performances, substance usage, and poor mental health. Additionally, other researchers have concluded these consequences are not exclusive to YP but materialise in the lives of people of all ages (Nickerson, 2023; Salmivalli, Lappalainen., and Lagerspetz, 1998). According to Owens, Shute, and Slee, (2000) and Stauffacher and DeHart, (2006), peer pressure is the internal or external experiences that cause YP to behave in particular ways, both good and negative, throughout secondary school. Understanding how peer pressure and bullying can cause victims and their families to withdraw emotionally and interpersonally, which can lead to major mental health concerns as well as an increase in psychiatric referrals to external practitioners (Waseem *et al.*, 2013). According to Nickerson, (2023), peer pressure challenges between YP and their parent's values, can cause friction within the family, which is due to the conflict between parents and their children, and disobedience (Steinberg and Monahan, 2007). Ungar (2000), however, describes adolescents' destructive behaviours through the concept of peer pressure in the research, but the participants saw this as a fallacy and believed that copying peers' behaviour was a deliberate strategy used to increase one's own and



other people's authority as well as used to resist the stigmatising labels that others had placed on them. According to statistics, bullying is a widespread problem in schools (Smith et al., 1999), and peer pressure is rated as a problem for 1.85% of secondary school students, with an overall prevalence of 85% showing that most students encountered it at some point during their education (Reed, 2021). Additionally, the majority of recent research has emphasized the negative effects of peer pressure on YP's progression (Berndt, 1979; Brown, 1999; Klarin, 2006; Santor, Messervey, and Kusumakar, 2000). In a similar vein, academics are incredibly ignorant of the traits that predispose YP to peer pressure (Allen, Porter, and McFarland, 2006).

## What are the Characteristics Prevalent to Autism

With the strength of negative peer pressure, how peer pressure can develop into bullying through its numerous manifestations, and the statistics on how bullying of autistic students is prevalent in schools. This theme will emphasise how critical it is to comprehend how these crucial elements influence autistic YP as a result of their impairment by first knowing the traits and prevalence of autism (Toraman and Aycicek, 2019). The Autism Act, (2009), which increased the support required for autistic persons countrywide, was the first legislation in England to address disabilities. Professionals are aware that there is still much to be done to enhance the lives of YP with autism. Furthermore, due to how frequently both the general public and professionals misunderstood autism, there were far too many autistic people who faced significant obstacles to living full and satisfying lives in the community before the Autism Act (GOV.UK, 2022). However, a comparable UK study found that 1.54 percent of children between the adolescent ages of 5 and 9, will have autism (Baron-Cohen *et al.*, 2009b), with studies estimating that 1.16 percent of children and YP in the South Thames region of the UK have autism (Baird *et al.*, 2006).

Given the estimations of the prevalence of autism, it is in everyone's best interest to understand the traits that autistic persons might own, which will support how NT people and various practitioners to understand autism. According to Wood, (2019), it can be difficult to define autism, due to specialists contact with autistic YP and their individual diagnoses, specialist who can explain autism are constantly changing the autism definitions. Also, according to the National Autism Society, (2022), autism is considered a spectrum disorder with distinctive abilities and flaws, much like NT people, and varying effects on individuals for instance, repetitive and constricting behaviour, excessive or excessively low sensitivity to light, sound, taste, or touch, intensely focused interests or hobbies, acute anxiety, as well as meltdowns and shutdowns that are all exacerbated by verbal or nonverbal social interaction and communication Park *et al.*, (2016). Similarly, Perepa, (2019) and the Equality Act, (2010) disorder that affects a person's capacity for communication, social interaction, and critical thought, which is clear in their daily activities and difficulties adjusting to novel circumstances. National Health Service (NHS, 2022) mentions autistic people having a unique brain process which sets them apart from their counterparts. However, according to (Lawson, 2011; Wood, 2019), rather than being a condition that will go away on its own, autism is an illness that will always exist and have an impact on each YP's life.

## Examining the Signs of Bullying Towards Autistic Young People by Their Peers and Professionals.

In light of the claims made in earlier studies about the distinctive traits of autistic people and the various forms of peer pressure, such as positive and negative peer pressure, that ultimately affect autistic YP's behaviour in secondary school, such as their defiant behaviours towards others that lead to them being socially excluded and bullied by their classmates (Brotherson *et al.*, 2017; Horgan *et al.*, 2023; Makinde *et al.*, 2020). According to the Anti-Bullying Alliance, a 2023 organisation, bullying is pervasive in the United Kingdom. The Department for Education (DfE, 2013) research on year 10 students found that forty percent of YP have experienced bullying, with six percent of YP reporting their experiences with bullying. On the other hand, just 9% of student participants reported experiencing bullying on a weekly or monthly basis. Derogatory and personal insults are a main type of bullying, occurring 26% of the time, according to the Anti-Bullying Alliance (2023), followed by segregation from social groups, which occurred 18% of the time. An increasing body of data indicates that these individuals frequently have difficult and complicated experiences in typical schools, despite the fact that it is obvious that certain autistic kids and teens can benefit from attending a conventional school. In its study, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC, 2023) discusses the distinct types of bullying those students with autistic challenges (YP) encounter at school, for instance. Physical acts include punching, slapping, and pushing; verbal abuse such as libel and threats; nonverbal acts like texts or hand signals; and exclusion like ignoring or isolating someone; emotional: making abusive, threatening, or defamatory phone calls; spreading rumours; undermining; unrelenting criticism; controlling or manipulating. According to the NSPCC, bullying behaviours that target a person due to a disability or their sexual orientation are also hate crimes, as are bullying behaviours that are racially, sexually, or transphobic. A person (the victim) is subjected to unpleasant behaviours over time, generally from a range of peers, according to Smith and Sharp's (1994) definition of bullying (Olweus, 1993).

In addition to the different forms of bullying, Humphrey and Hebron, (2015) and Locke *et al.*, (2010) research on autistic YP highlighted the signs of bullying, such as having fewer friends, feeling excluded and less accepted, physical injuries with bruises, being afraid to go to school or skipping school, poor educational attainment, being nervous, lacking confidence, withdrawn and distressed, eating disorders, and bullying (Chamberlain *et al.*, 2003; NSPCC, 2023; Symes and Humphrey, 2010). Moreover, Due *et al.*, (2005) discovered that bullying and victimisation affected children globally at rates of five–41% for boys and five–38% for girls. Bullying is commonly conducted through several difficult contacts, which can have serious repercussions and is connected to later behavioural and emotional issues in both bullies and victims (Scholte *et al.*, 2007). One intriguing finding from these scholarly examinations, nevertheless, was the social experiences of some girls as compared to those of their male contemporaries. For instance, in four research (Cook *et al.*, 2018, Halsall *et al.*, 2021, Myles *et al.*, 2019, and Whitlow *et al.*, 2019), autistic females confessed that they concealed, disguised, or veiled their quirks to be aligned with their peers or minimise bullying. Contrary to what other YP have experienced, discrimination does not disappear as children age. Additionally, when compared to NT YP, those with SEND were more likely to report being the target of bullying of any kind and having their property or money taken away (DfE, 2010; Frith and Hill, 2004). Keeping in mind both the negative effects of bullying and peer pressure as well as the characteristics of autism, it is important for YP with autism to understand how connections can deteriorate within

the larger peer group. According to Goodall (2018a), being a member of the core group and having a disability can demonstrate that the core group does not want association with the autistic young person. Moreover, this reveals that within their social groupings, NT YP do not relate to their classmates who have disabilities. Horgan *et al.*, (2023) research describes their discussion with autistic girls on the difficulties they had finding friends and how concealing their disabilities in mainstream classes, and the demands of covering up typically hampered their ability to study, as well as frequently leaving them feeling alone and isolated in mainstream schools (Goodall and MacKenzie, 2018; Myles *et al.*, 2019; National Autistic Society, 2023; O'Hagan and Hebron, 2017).

YP with autism sometimes feel excluded while learning and interacting with peers and professionals, and various autistic girls decide to hide their challenges. This issue will also discuss autistic children's experiences. These youngsters could be taught by unkind teachers who treat them poorly or have minimal contact with adaptable and understanding adults (Goodall, 2018a, p. 9-10). Students in Hummerstone and Parsons, (2021) article also discussed how unfavourable emotions were brought on by autistic students' lack of comprehension and support. According to Dillon *et al.* (2016) and Woodfield and Ashby (2016) investigations, the academic success of their students was greatly influenced by the support staff at their schools. For example, when students needed assistance with the curriculum or with sensitive subjects, the support staff was available to assist (Hill, 2014; Saggars *et al.*, 2011). So, it could be challenging to fully understand the social mechanics of bullying, let alone act appropriately when it does (Jenkins and Nickerson, 2017).

## Preventive Steps to Assist Schools Anti-Bullying Programs and Laws.

This final theme will reflect on earlier topics raised such as, peer pressure, bullying and traits that affect autistic YP and will cogitate how schools implement anti-bullying strategies, inside the school's ethos and infrastructure, actioned by relevant legislations authorized through the government. Additionally, the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994) and other international agreements, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), and others have influenced how different nations have started developing their paths to inclusive practices (Buchner *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, UNESCO emphasised the concept of inclusive education as an active strategy for responding favourably to diversity and respecting individual attributes, not as barriers but as prospects for enhancing learning (UNESCO, 2005, p.12). The cornerstone of inclusive education is the right to a high-quality education, both in terms of its subject matter and methodology. According to the Equal Opportunity Act of 2010 and the Human Rights Act of 1998, as well as Tomasevski (2004) and the UNCRC, 1989, articles 24, 28, and 29, all adolescents have the right to receive free and obligatory schooling as well as equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination.

However, countless scholars claim that regulations favouring the inclusion of autistic kids in ordinary classes are progressing more quickly than reforms in teacher preparation programs that encourage increased student diversity and empirical evidence that supports the practicality of such an approach (Horan and Merrigan, 2021; NCSE, 2016).

In many nations, like the United Kingdom and Ireland, autistic children are taught in conventional classes (Jones, 2002; NCSE, 2016), however there are still special schools for people who require more extensive and sophisticated special education services. However, studies had contradictory findings; some claimed that knowledge and attitudes had improved as a result of accepting

informative and descriptive information (Campbell et al., 2004), whereas others claimed that behavioural intentions had not been changed, suggesting that information interventions are ineffective and may even harm intergroup attitudes because they draw attention to stereotypical behaviours (Bigler, 1999; Staniland and Byrne, 2013). Additionally, another approach is to tutor students in specific lessons about human differences, including autism, to encourage acceptance of change and promote diversity within the educational system (Cook *et al.*, 2020). Societal attitudes towards autism can be influenced by schools, especially those that have developed an educational philosophy that values diversity and respects the unique characteristics of each school (Morewood *et al.*, 2011). Also, easing interactions with external representatives from autism societies might help advance healthier inclusive attitudes (Killen and Rutland, 2011). Furthermore, programs are provided in schools to reduce bullying, thorough investigations, and reviews of comprehensive anti-bullying programs within schools have yielded mixed results, with many pointing to a lack of significant benefit (Baldry and Farrington, 2007; Ferguson *et al.*, 2007; Merrell *et al.*, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2004).

Moreover, Hewstone and Brown (1986) and Ochs *et al.*, (2001), diagnostic disclosure and comprehension of autism can also improve NT adults' first impressions of autistic people and the social aid they provide in the classroom (Sasson and Morrison, 2019). According to Ochs *et al.*, (2001), it is unreasonable to predict that NT YP will be able to lose their self-consciousness, conventionality, and see the world through the perspective of autistic people, this is because autism is rooted in biology and culture. However, giving autistic YP more voice in the classroom may help them grow in their capacity for understanding the perspectives of others and encourage their creative potential (UNCRC, 1989, article 23).

Parents can request these predetermined actions through their children's school or an accessible version on the school website. Government-run schools are required by law to have a behaviour policy in place that defines the steps they will take to address bullying. Additionally, anti-bullying actions such as, ensuring the capability of the teachers with educating NT peers about autism, whilst applying a sensitive manner towards discussions by designing a course that supports and describes autism can further the understanding on the disability. Also, schools need to be aware that autistic children may choose not to discuss bullying with teachers in person, by supplying a bullying box can support students to anonymously report bullying incidences' (GOV.UK, 2022; National Autistic Society, 2022).

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### *Research Paradigms*

Qualitative research is the philosophy that investigates the nature of participants' experiences, perspectives, and actions that are gathered and examined. Furthermore, qualitative research does not address the amount or how much, it addresses the how and why within research. Additionally, qualitative studies can be created as standalone research which solely uses qualitative data or a part in research formed of mixed methods such as, qualitative and quantitative data, or aid improvement in the hypothesis for further research (Tenny *et al.*, 2022). Usually, the researcher's interpretation of these occurrences is expressed from an emic standpoint. Theoretical frameworks and belief systems known as paradigms form the basis for the assumptions underlying ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methodological practises. Or, to put it another way, it's how we discover and comprehend the truths of the universe, per Rehman & Alharthi (2016). Additionally, it emphasises nature and how information about it can be acquired and then shared with others (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007; Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003, p. 13). Additionally, interpretivism is a paradigm used in qualitative research; it holds that reality and truth are created, not discovered, and that different realities merge socially.

The microsystem framework, which focuses on the elements similar nature such as, family, school, peer groups, and society, and the environmental factors which play a significant part in regard to peer pressure, bullying, and influence on autistic YP, considering their neurobiological differences versus the good and reactive behaviours autistic YP have, for instance, poor social interactions, and not comprehending their peers' behaviours (American Psychiatric Society, 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Frye, 2018).

Moreover, the paradigm used will be an interpretivist strategy that will generate a transparent insight and examine practitioners' everyday experiences, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and interactions using a humanistic approach. Where the participants can express their individual opinions that will support the information gathered on the impact of peer pressure towards autistic YP and how negative peer pressure can lead NT YP to bullying autistic YP. Additionally, the research will further examine the strategies that can be introduced and implemented within school ethos, classrooms, and exercised to the students, which encourages anti-bullying practices alongside mandated legislations, and policies (Mukherji and Albon, 2018; SEND Code, 2015).

## Data Collection Tools

Methodology is a theoretical outlook, research tradition, or area (Ellen, 1984, p. 9; Lochmiller and Lester, 2017) describes the exploration and evaluation of data gathering procedures. It is a well-articulated, theory-informed approach to data collection. One's decision about the investigative approach is influenced by the strategy, plan of action, technique, or design (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The same may be said about methodologies, which include survey-based data gathering and analysis, open-ended interviews, and other methods. The methodology to be employed will be determined by the design of the study and the researcher's theoretical point of view (Kumar, 2014). The design of the study problem and the researcher's theoretical viewpoint will determine the methodologies to be used. Observations, note-taking, personal notes, documents, open-ended interviews with various steps of construction (standardised open-ended interviews, accommodates-standardised open-ended interviews, and informally conversant interviews), are instances of data collection methods that offer qualitative data, according to (Anfara et al., 2002; Rehman and Alharthi, 2016). Interpretive researchers also employ these methods to collect data. Based on the study's goals, the researcher creates qualitative sample strategies, where peer review, validation, and judgement are all factors that could affect the sample size's suitability (Patton, 2002). It is common practise to use the snowball or chain sampling method to find significant individuals who can offer a plethora of information. By asking the respondents who they should speak with in added information-rich scenarios, the size of the snowball increases. Participants who recommended new participants to be employed as new practitioners in the study (Shaheen *et al.*, 2019) giving the names of proposed individuals.

The first three participants were chosen from the researchers' former co-workers who are educational practitioners tutoring YP aged (12–18) in key stage 3 (KS3) secondary schools. The remaining eight participants, who were similarly employed as KS3 education practitioners and introduced to the research through the first three, took part using a purposeful sampling (non-probability) snowball approach (Shaheen et al., 2019). By signing the consent form, they acknowledged their agreement to take part in the study (Thomas, 2017). Additionally, a scheduled time and date were agreed upon by all participants. During this semi-structured interview, the participants will respond to open-ended questions created by the researcher on subjects connected to the study's research question (McLeod, 2014). However, eleven out of the twelve participants continued through with the investigation, where ten out of eleven, were female and one was male contributed their personal perspectives, where no prejudice, ambiguity, offensive or leading questions presented towards the participants (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Walliman, 2001). The method used to collect data for this study, focuses on open-ended and casual communication (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). In general, research helps the researcher gain an immersed insight of the issues at hand. The research's outcomes can take a variety of shapes, such as creating results to further guide practise (Lochmiller, 2016), delivering in-depth accounts of specific practise issue (Honig, 2006), or offering insights into professional practises (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Eleven face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each participant were performed regarding the study's subject. These interviews were conducted over casual chat in order to make the participant and the researcher feel at ease. The other eight participant interviews were booked as the research was being put together, while three participant interviews had to be scheduled for online interviews (Mukherji and Albon, 2018; Thomas, 2017). The interviews with eight

participants were conducted at a coffee shop in an ethical manner. Moreover, the semi-structured interviews offer the researchers more latitude for adapting the questions, based on the responses of the participants to supply a more flexible question format, which supported the researcher to understand how a participant perceives certain circumstances. The researcher can also evaluate the accuracy of the research responses using semi-structured interviews by following up with the interviewee participants for additional explanation (McLeod, 2014). Furthermore, Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Outlook platforms supplied smoother access, to collect the remaining data from the three participants who were not available for face-to-face semi structured interview. However, all participants were sent a relative information through the participant pack and informed consent form via Microsoft Outlook, and sent to their individual email addresses, this supplies an easier access to share any other information and participant responses (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). Whereas the face-to-face interview conducted utilised paper format with written questions that was recorded using an audio recorder (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019).

## Data Analysis

Due to its broad and adaptable scope, thematic analysis is frequently employed in a range of domains (Braun *et al.*, 2019; Cassol *et al.*, 2018; Frith and Gleeson, 2004; Halverson *et al.*, 2014; Norris *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, thematic analysis offers significant "theoretical flexibility" and the capability to be used as an analytical technique instead of a method, as most other qualitative styles are, according to Clarke and Braun (2013), who state that it also provides the possibility of being used as a simple procedure. By doing a theme analysis, researchers from diverse disciplines can engage multidisciplinary principles and perspectives, managing an extra insight and useful analysis for a certain issue. Thematic analysis can also offer solutions to a mixture of research problems and produce a group of endings that are either concept- or figures and are explained inside the study using a themed analysis technique (Lester *et al.*, 2020; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## CHAPTER 4

### Ethical Considerations

Ethics is the foundation and core principles that underpin all research investigations, such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, data analysis, and data protection, (Aubrey *et al.*, 2000: 156). The terms ethics and decency are often commonly changeable; however ethics discusses the examination of morality, whereas morality describes a set of intricate rules and regulations meant to control people's behaviour. Additionally, researchers must undertake ethical regulations to conduct proper investigation within any study, where participant's willingness to share his or her experience is a prerequisite for partaking within the investigation. Equally, investigative research challenges the dichotomy between participants' rights to privacy and goals of the research, where generalisations is beneficial for effective application (Orb *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, exploring people and their natural contexts is the focal point of qualitative research, therefore it is crucial to be aware of ethical concerns when organising, data, and employing research-related findings. Additionally, relationships and power dynamics between researchers and participants are fundamental to researchers, funding agencies, central and institutional ethical committees, and participants (Arifin, 2018).

### Ethical Approval, Informed consent & Interview Sessions

It is crucial that approval is secured before the study is launched since the University of East London's ethics committee must approve the research topic, aims, and research questions (Thomas, 2017). Bearing in mind the ethical standards ingrained in the research, such as informed consent, which is the process of gaining consent consisting of clear knowledge, direction, and instructions participants must follow and be competent to the assent. Equally, all research participants were informed of the relevant core points that safeguards their rights during the investigation, including the investigation's purpose, how they will be used as participants in the research, and the methods that will be used. They were notified of their freedom rights to choose whether to take part or not (Robson, 2011a). Also, clarification towards their voluntary involvement was highlighted, were explanations clarifying no consequences towards their employment would occur, if they declined to take part or withdrew during the study (Conelly, 2005). Before reporting their choice to the researcher, participants had a week to consider the information sheet and form an opinion. They were asked to sign the consent form indicating their agreement prior to the interview, and their signature was then validated before the interview. In addition, it was reiterated to the participants that they were free to leave the study at any time after completing the permission form (Arifin, 2018). Additionally, since each interview was conducted in a public library that offered a section where privacy was possible and away from the public, verbal consent was obtained in order to audio record the interviews. The names of the participants should not be discernible from the audio recordings by anybody other than the researcher (Polit and Beck, 2014).



## Anonymity and Confidentiality, Data Analysis, Findings & Data Protection

By withholding their names and identities during the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the investigation's transcription outcomes, and additionally by employing participant pseudonyms when quoting them, the names of the participants and any other information that could be used to identify them was removed, protecting the participants' anonymity and confidentiality (Freedom of Information Act, 2002). Also, all records including participant information were kept on the researchers' external hard drive, encrypted, and password protected, where only the researcher has access, and they will be removed following guidelines and timeframes (Data Protection Act, 2018; Gerrish and Lacey, 2010). Furthermore, participants will be made aware of this, but they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, in which case any relevant data will be deleted (Mukherji and Albon, 2018; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

## Interview Challenges, Bias

The interviewing process was executed smoothly using my observation while listening towards all the participants discussing their experiences in-depth, no factors of deception from the participant or researcher was clear (McKechnie, 2008; Smit and Onwuegbuzie, 2018). Additionally, I can ensure that my opinions are put aside during the interviewing process, which could present challenges for the rigour, credibility, and validity of the research by being open and self-reflective during the development of the research questions, data and recruitment sampling collection, and location choice (Galdas, 2017; Polit and Beck, 2014; Thirst and Clark, 2017). Being mindful whilst interviewing the practitioners' can prevent elevated stress, discomfort or anxiety regarding their teaching abilities whilst disclosing their experiences on safeguarding autistic YP, as a precaution I prepared the necessary information from organisations that provide support for adults affected with anxiety or mental health difficulties and information on support organisations on SEND such as, Mind, Young Minds and the National Autistic Society, on bullying and peer pressure and mental health support (Mind, 2023; National Autistic Society, 2022; Ramasubramanian and Landmark, 2015; Young Minds, 2022). Additionally, protecting the setting of the participants and ensuring that the semi-structured interviews were done in an accessible area also helped to shield us from vulnerability (Robson, 2011a; Warren, 2002).

## CHAPTER 5

### Findings And Discussions

Identifying, examining, and evaluating themes is a technique used in thematic analysis patterns, usually referred to as "themes," in a qualitative data finding. Thematic analysis provides easy-to-use, well-organized tools and structure for gathering and presenting the researcher's analytical findings. Thematic analysis is used to illustrate and understand significant, but not necessarily all, data aspects, guided by the flexible and ever-evolving study topic (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Its goal is not simply to summarise the substance of the data. Moreover, the findings within this dissertation were constructed around eight interview questions, which were analysed to present how eleven educational professionals, with various job roles, interpret peer pressure's effects on autistic YP and how it can lead certain practitioners and autistic YP's NT peers inside school surroundings to negatively bully autistic YP. The findings will also outline the safeguarding and anti-bullying methods that educators might use per their policies and the learning frameworks at their schools. Additionally, to support the discussion of the findings, the interviews were analysed and focused on the characteristics of the data, concentrating on similar opinions, and organised within themes conceptually.

#### Theme 1: What is Peer pressure and bullying

The educational participants' findings indicated that bullying of autistic YP is exacerbated by their autistic qualities because they are more likely to succumb to peer pressure. Peer pressure has a negative impact on YP and is the main cause of bullying. The participants who expressed similar views, on autistic YP's experience statements:

“Young people are more prone to bullying and peer pressure as they have a desire to fit in with their peers and not want to be identified as different. I believe they may be subjected to bullying as they view the world around them in a unique way to others, they may do things that others may see as strange and be singled out” [Practitioner 2]

“Peer pressure is a major concern, especially if a young person struggles to understand social cues, they can be easily led astray” [Practitioner 4]

“I believe peer pressure and bullying can be a concern if not identified by the adults around autistic young person, as they understand things literally, which can lead to being encouraged to take part in activities, they may know are wrong” [Practitioner 7]

“One of the biggest challenges for an autistic person is social interaction and understanding other people's perception or reading a situation” [Practitioner 11]

These claims support the findings of the literature review that bullying is a widespread issue in schools and that peer pressure occurs as YP develop their social networks and satisfy their need for inclusion (Keane and Loades, 2017); practitioners 2 and 11 support this. Furthermore, bullying is described as a systematic misuse of power perpetrated against the victim by their NT counterparts, who then cause problems in the educational setting (Smith and Sharp, 1994). Development of social relationships and interactions as well as understanding other people's behaviours are further influenced by this aspect of autism (Frith and Hill, 2004) and according to participants 4 and 7. The findings are guided to the next theme on how peer pressure and bullying impact autistic YP's emotional wellbeing through the ongoing effects of being bullied by their peers and practitioners within their school surroundings because these findings directly relate to the literature review and the research questions formulated for the study.

## Theme 2: The Effects of Bullying on Autistic Young People

The educational participants understood but had their personal views on what peer pressure was and bullying consisted of, they also understood through knowledge and experience the characteristic of autism. And considered how negative peer pressure and bullying will affect autistic YP's emotional wellbeing when faced with regular elements of bullying from their peers and how their teachers bully them through elements of not understanding or being overlooked. All the participants agreed that these factors could cause detrimental challenges to autistic YP's mindset, which is why safeguarding is always crucial part of ensuring a positive school environment. The participant statements were:

“Yes, by not paying attention to their change in behaviour and may lead to further mental health issues, isolation, depression and anxiety and non-attendance” [Participants 2]

“Being bullied would isolate them, could fall into sadness and depression, feeling unloved, alone, and believe that everyone hates you” [Participant 5]

“I think it can make some of them become a bit more withdrawn in terms of interacting with other people, when they are not considered or overlooked in lessons” [Participant 6]

“This will lead to them falling behind in lessons or not being able to concentrate to attain in school. They will feel unloved, undervalued, demoralized and alone” [Participant 8]

“If a child is being bullied or not fully understood, there is a chance that they will shut off and become quieter and more nonverbal or alternatively be self-destructive in the classroom or school environment” [Participant 10]

In connection with the literature review discussed above, this theme highlighted the understanding of all participants that any form of bullying, from peers or professionals can have a significant negative impact on how an autistic YP feels towards their learning and school, or the procedure of going to school throughout the United Kingdom. This could lead to the autistic YP avoiding going to school or socialising with their peers, which could lead to them being disruptive in class or being withdrawn, lacking in confidence, and upset among other difficulties like behavioural, social, and emotional disorders towards everyone. This brings this theme finding to a close and points the research in the direction of the next theme, which is about safeguarding autistic YP from bullying and peer pressure.

### Theme 3: Safeguarding Measures Supporting Autistic Young People Against Peer Pressure and Bullying

The study of this theme emphasised how all the practitioners agreed that using a variety of safeguarding and inclusive techniques through reinforced strategies will help to support and combat bullying, or harmful peer pressure inside schools, helping to support autistic YP's social and emotional abilities. The participant statements were:

“I think that additional support with social and emotional skills, including programs that enhance confidence and support to build boundaries can help, and ensuring that autistic children have an advocate within their educational environment who they have built a good relationship with, who will be able to identify if there are any changes in behaviour or concerns ” [Practitioner 3]

“Could lead to missing days at school and falling behind, making sure there are safeguarding leads and point of contact, could make some children within the school as safeguarding or anti-bully ambassadors ” [Practitioner 5]

“Staff safeguarding should be aware of the friendship groups they are part of, collaborate closely with parents/families and meet regularly with the young person to check on them, it could make schools feel unsafe and a place of anxiety” [Participant 7]

“Having their voices heard, creating safe spaces and safe people to which they can talk. Involving them within this strategy is imperative” [Practitioner 11]

“Effective safeguarding measures must be implemented and adhered to, where laws must be located for everyone to see, and penalties for bullying must also be legible for all to see” [Practitioner 9]

The educational participants statements presented comparable opinions on safeguarding towards autistic YP from the effects of peer pressure and bullying. Additionally, the assembled information resonates to the research within the literature review on signs of bullying that autistic YP face by peers and practitioners. The participants statements underlined that schools must ensure that stipulated policies are accessible for practitioners and families supporting autistic

YP's affected with bullying, according to National Autistic Society, (2022) and participant 9's statement. The findings also demonstrated that those who practise are responsible for making sure that autistic YP's voices continue to be heard, as it will enhance their abilities to understand about personal feelings towards their pee. In addition, the UNCRC, (1989) articles 2, 12, and article 28, as well as the UNCRPD, (2006) articles 5, 7, which state in brief that autistic YP possess the liberty to communicate their opinions all through their educational experiences with equal rights and without discrimination while they are learning. Furthermore, the results indicated that participants 3 and 5 thought that safeguarding should be mandatory, as the effects of being bullied on autistic YP's can lead to low attendance within schools', due to skipping lessons and protecting their wellbeing and mindset is important when understanding the teachers, who may mistreat them. Additionally, being able to openly discuss the issues to a supportive point of contact, an advocate, who are considered as essential support in school environments for autistic YP's (Dillon et al., 2016; Goodall, 2018a, p. 9–10; Hill, 2014; Sagers et al., 2011; Woodfield and Ashby, 2016) as stated within the literature review. Considering the data shown on how autistic YP feel when bullying occurs from their peers and practitioners which leads to the final findings, on anti-bullying measure can be applied within schools to further protect autistic YP' education, social, emotional wellbeing.

#### Theme 4: Strategies to Promote Anti-Bullying Towards Autistic Young People, Practitioners and Neurotypical Young People

The findings presented that the participants had the same views on best practice for anti-bullying strategies, which should be applied inside school, using different methods and ensuring that regular lessons are taught to all students within the school. Additionally, participants 9 and 10 statements relayed, that strategies for promoting anti-bullying consisted of the government adding embedding anti-bullying criteria into the core of the curriculum, whereas participant 8, added that Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) was already implemented within the curriculum and tackled topics such as, relationships, discrimination and bullying, but also supported YP's with their social emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, participants 1 and 7 views were to use PSHE lessons as a method, which is currently used within schools but suggested that educators use more lessons and often, to teach and discuss topics bullying and peer pressure which can combat the lack of knowledge. However, the consensus throughout the results is to use PSHE or RSHE in schools and ensure to apply the teachings in assemblies and lessons. Which can be made possible through practitioners and classmates discussing or using external agencies to raise awareness. The participant statements were:

“There are PSHE lesson within main-stream schools,’ but they do not go far enough, having regular assembles and more in-depth PSHE lessons, could remedy the lack of education on the topic” [Participant 1]

“Anti-bullying methods need to be discussed regularly within the school context. There needs to be a universal approach to anti bullying usually PSHE, assemblies and tutorials although it could be incorporated within anything subject that allows for discussions” [Practitioner 7]

“Events such as ‘Anti Bullying Week’ should be promoted and celebrated. Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) is part of the curriculum since September 2020. RSHE is fundamental for children and young people’s social and emotional development. RSHE covers topics, including personal safety, relationships and bullying and discrimination” [Practitioner 8]

“Implement bullying criteria in the curriculum and invite experts to come in and speak with children frequently” [Practitioner 9]

“Embedding anti bullying into the curriculum is vital, classes that include building awareness to autistic young people’s well-being and safety against peer pressure and bullying is extremely limited” [Practitioner 10]

The findings from the educational practitioners’ statements coincide with the study literature reviews fourth theme, on strategies to promote anti-bullying towards autistic YP’s against peer pressure and bullying, from their peers and practitioners as the literature review presented that autism courses can increase the understanding of the disability (GOV.UK, 2022; National Autistic Society, 2022). A number of academics, including Baldry and Farrington (2007), Ferguson et al. (2007), Merrell et al. (2008), and Smith et al. (2004), concur that in order to lessen bullying, schools should focus on subjects that affect how others perceive autistic people, especially those that have adopted an educational philosophy that values diversity and respects the distinctive features of each school (Morewood et al., 2011). This is in line with what the participants mentioned. Additionally, schools offer programmes to lessen bullying. However, thorough analyses and reviews of comprehensive anti-bullying programmes within schools, have produced conflicting findings with people pointing to a lack of discernible benefit. Another option is to tutor students in specific lessons addressing human differences, including autism, in order to foster acceptance of change and promote diversity throughout the educational system (Cook et al., 2020). My positionality has not faltered during this research investigation, as the investigator by remaining adamant on the challenges autistic YP face whilst they endure the effects of negative peer pressure and bullying within their school social groups. Additionally, the research showed that there is information on peer pressure and bullying but more needs to be uncovered on how the impacts of peer pressure and bullying affects autistic YP’s, but taking consideration on their ASD characteristic, which varies from each individual, then conducting another research may discover greater data findings.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This dissertation offers a place to start for academics and teaching professionals who are interested in peer pressure, bullying, and social research in general to further their analysis of the prejudice autistic YP encounter on a regular basis. Professionals who support autistic YP understand the various forms of peer pressure, how the various forms of peer pressure result in autistic YP being bullied by their NT peers and understanding the potential characteristic reasons, why autistic YP experience bullying is all discussed within the findings. Additionally, this makes it crucial to ensure that schools often educate autistic YP in areas such as, within the curriculum and PSHE, as well as how to recognise signs of bullying and negative peer pressure. Additionally, the exponential growth of bullying inside the school can be prevented by ensuring that all professionals are taught on the tell-tell indications of an autistic young person being bullied. To ensure that general secondary schools are using similar measures to those offered by SEND schools in support for autistic YPs, it is imperative to use added preventative strategies for peer pressure and bullying by using outside sources to show new alternative methods to implement within schools. The limitations that presented itself within the research was managing the time to conduct all the semi structured interviews face-to-face, especially as three of the participants had to be interviewed using Microsoft Teams. Although, this was the best method possible to continue with the research process, it does not have the same ambience a face-to-face interview will. Further limitations were not having autistic YP's viewpoints within the research to balance or counteract the viewpoints of the educational participants.

Overall, by staying true to my first positionality throughout this research, supporting YP with autism to ensure they have a welcoming and better experience in school and with their peers while learning. As a result, future research needs to be conducted using the recommendations made, which will improve our understanding of peer pressure in all its forms and expand the research to investigate outside the scope of secondary schools. Little attention has, to my knowledge, been paid to how to educate autistic YP with in-depth knowledge to protect themselves from being bullied or dealing with negative peer pressure.

Despite the fact that the results are accurate for the research's sample, the study's sample size was too tiny to permit drawing any firm conclusions on the phenomenon. However, this study has added to the understanding of the issues at hand and opened new avenues for future research including a larger group of autistic children and YP, alongside more practitioner participants. A longer timeline for the research's execution is advised, as is the possibility of adopting an action research methodology, which will provide researchers the chance to observe problems first hand. Working with a group of vulnerable YP will also help the inquiry by allowing for flexibility throughout the interview process and considering the culture of the participants while speaking with people who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. The research being conducted will add to the existing wealth of literature on the aforementioned subjects through examining whether autistic YP's respond to bullying and peer pressure on an ongoing basis within the surroundings of their educational environment.

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INVOLVEMENT IN KEY STAGE  
TWO ENGLISH PRIMARY  
SCHOOLS: HOW EDUCATORS  
CAN SUPPORT EQUITABLE  
MODELS OF PARENTAL  
INVOLVEMENT**

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## Abstract

This research project explores the Parental Involvement (PI) model and what measures could be implemented to make it equitable for parents and educators within English primary schools. Barriers subject to previous research were acknowledged, and this essay seeks to reflect on whether there are issues of power relations which prevent the development of an equitable relationship between parents and educators. This empirical research uses a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, gathering data using a questionnaire aimed at educators and a focus group of parents with children within Key Stage Two (KS2) education, providing a voice to both parties while seeking equitable strategies. Findings highlight the lack of prior research aimed explicitly at KS2 educators despite an abundance of evidence highlighting the additive effects of PI within the early years of education. Despite social class being identified as a potential barrier for parents, findings within this research highlight that a lack of time due to work commitments was a specific reason for low levels of PI, which is a policy-making decision directly impacting parents. Recommendations from this study include ensuring that parents are given holistic opportunities to meet with educators to ensure an equitable experience for all parties involved.

**Keywords:** Parental Involvement; barriers; power relations; equitable models; Key Stage Two.

# Introduction

Since the 1980s, educational learning has been increasingly outsourced to the home, with parents becoming progressively responsible for supporting the reversal of educational inequality in English schools (Reay, 2017). This outsourcing of education can significantly influence children's educational outcomes as greater Parental Involvement (PI) correlates to high aspirations for pupils, according to the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) (2022), while also encouraging them to become responsible members of society (Sapungan and Sapungan, 2014). Despite the additive effects of PI, conceptualised barriers have prevented evident gaps in this level of support from being bridged (Hornby, 2011). With the rise in power given to parents, this involvement places increasing demands on families to support academic success (Raey, 2017), which raises the question of whether PI can be equitable, given that families from a lower social class may lack the resources to engage with the ideal notion of 'good' levels of PI (Lareau, 2011). Epstein (2018) claimed that the three overlapping factors influencing the barriers to PI are family, school and community. However, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) claim that parents and teachers hold varying definitions of a good level of PI while understanding that the relationship between schooling and education can be subjective. Within English state schools, while government policy pursues the neoliberal notion of pushing competition between schools rather than supporting an agenda of cooperation (Maisuria, 2014), evidence suggests that it is teachers who possess the skills and expertise to meet these goals, not the parents (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). As a result, this essay seeks to question how educators perceive the influence of Conservative education policy and whether this supports the concept of PI.

Limitations of PI were identified by seeking educators' experiences within Key Stage Two (KS2) English primary schools and members of a focus group of parents with children also in KS2. This research will then reflect on how educators could support the design of an equitable and multi-dimensional model of parental engagement, which challenges power relations in education at all social class levels (Rapp and Duncan, 2012). Prior work around PI highlights a need for more research that recognises power dynamics between educators and parents within KS2 in English primary schools. This understanding builds on barriers previously identified, such as gender, language and class (Faltis, 1993). In this regard, I seek to argue whether an acceptable level of PI is achievable and whether it factors in barriers such as social class and the influence this has on participation (Bourdieu, 1977). This essay aims to highlight potential power imbalances concerning engagement between schools and their parents within KS2 and contemplate how government policy influences this by exploring the following questions:

1. From an educator's perspective, how does government policy influence and support the concept of parental involvement?
2. What are your experiences of parental engagement in English state primary schools at KS2; have you observed any limitations faced by parents?
3. How might educators support the design of an equitable model of parental engagement, which challenges power relations in education at all social class levels?

By acknowledging the disparity of equity in the model of PI (Rapp and Duncan, 2012), this essay will provide beneficence as it seeks to encourage stakeholders to take a reflective stance and put measures in place to develop a model which is supportive to all, regardless of social class. Furthermore, understanding how political and social influences can hinder or enhance transformation for pupils and parents will be observed, enabling me to remain impartial throughout the process.



# Literature Review

The perceptions of PI and how it is defined vary significantly due to issues of equity (Baquedano-López, Alexander and Hernandez, 2013). Hidalgo (1998) defines PI as ensuring parents can intervene and advocate for their children – becoming agents who can make changes and recognise educational barriers. In juxtaposition, research has shown that educators have defined PI as being involved in the education process by helping with standard school practices such as homework and understanding requirements (Young, Austin and Groue, 2013). In contrast, parents have an alternative view which involves ensuring that children are at school and support is given at home with issues that involve them (Young, Austin and Groue, 2013). As a result of these conflicting views, it leaves the model open for interpretation, requiring further research regarding the need for an equitable model of PI that recognises barriers and challenges power relations (Epstein, 2018). Consequently, this literature review will analyse previous research regarding PI in KS2 classrooms and how educators can support the development of an equitable model of PI which addresses power relations.

## Policy and Parental Involvement

Conteh and Kawashima (2008) identify that education in England has profoundly changed under successive governments. This change is a crucial component in shaping models of PI due to the culture of target setting permeating all levels of classroom learning (Conteh and Kawashima, 2008). As a result, they claim that this is beginning to change the nature of the relationships between educators and the families in their care (Conteh and Kawashima, 2008). Since 1988, following legislative changes and the introduction of the Education Reform Act (1988), greater power was gifted to parents or consumers. The neoliberalist transformation gave parents new rights as education consumers and gave parents greater autonomy over school choice (Sinclair, Grimshaw and Garnett, 1994). Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher implemented this policy change. Conservative deregulation of markets would result in the commodification and privatisation of education services (Maisuria, 2014). The introduction of the Education Reform Act highlighted that the education system could be subjected to neo-liberalisation under the party's reign (Hill *et al.*, 2016). This resulted in the construction of an education system which Hill *et al.*, (2016) claim was divisive and elitist, taking the management of schools out of the hands of the teachers and local authorities (Edwards and Whitty, 1992). Conteh and Kawashima (2008) argue that the Department for Education's Every Parent Matters report under the succeeding party, Tony Blair's New Labour, set out a model of what it deemed to be a responsible parent. After the dismantling of trust in professionals, the re-birth of parents as consumers continued under Blair's leadership which sought to capture the middle-class vote while vilifying parents of economic disadvantage (Gibson and Simon, 2010).

Conteh and Kawashima (2008) argued that this policy paper demonstrated a threatening view of PI, While Gibson and Simon (2010) highlighted that there was little evidence of practical strategies to enhance parent and educator partnerships which addressed an equitable balance of power. Reinforcing this, Graham (2006), argued that by giving parents the right of choice – a move which previously had been experienced by only the privileged – it assumed that parents knew best, regardless of social class. Graham (2006) argued that this common sense

approach must account for unrecognised limitations and that these new rights force parents to compete for places at desired schools on their child's behalf (Graham, 2006). The parent power ideology within this legislative change suggests that children who are already advantaged would be able to gain access to establishments more likely to increase their advantage, demonstrating a power imbalance for parents from different social classes (Sinclair, Grimshaw and Garnett, 1994).

Considering the political party positions that underpin policy reforms has facilitated the consideration of how ideology produces the layers of contexts that influence parents' expectations (Tight, 2019). A key concept arising from this research is that policymakers must acknowledge the ideology of constructing a typology of those deemed responsible, aspirational or hard to reach (Conteh and Kawashima, 2008, pp. 115). Ainscow *et al.*, (2007) support this, recognising that a typology of those, such as educators, who can be counted on, informs how schools view and communicate with their families, leading to negative expectations of groups of parents. An acknowledgement of this, in turn, would help inform policy and support schools to challenge how they view their pupils' families and any negative expectations of groups of parents (Conteh and Kawashima, 2008; Ainscow *et al.*, 2007).

## **Power Relations and Barriers**

In undertaking critical reading around power relations and barriers to forming equitable relations between teachers and parents, Reay (1996) found that educational choices only occur in specific social and economic structural contexts. Utilising Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, the different educational fields and opportunities led to different possibilities and options (Bourdieu, 1977). She highlighted the complex relationship between the social power of parents and teachers. This notion is supported by Todd and Higgins (1998), who argue that the partnership between parents and professionals cannot be equal due to the differing stakes in the relationship, with the class teacher being in loco parentis for less than a third of a child's life. Within her research, Reay (1996) argued that the mix of teacher expectations of children, parental expectations of school, differential relationships of power between parents, teachers and children and the layering of discourse which informs parents and teachers' understandings of PI are all factored in when attempting to complete a picture of parental choice and involvement.

Lareau (2011) reinforced this in her study on unequal childhoods and the effects of child-raising using concerted cultivation versus natural growth dependent on social class. She highlighted that central institutions such as schools promote strategies of concerted cultivation in child rearing, which is in line with the middle-class families within her study. For working-class and low-income families, she found that the cultural logic of raising children is out of sync with the standards of institutions, which thus benefits the parents of middle-class parents who adopt strategies more in line with these institutions (Lareau, 2011). For the parents of those from working-class families, these standards appear to gain distrust and distance (Lareau, 2011). While this study took place in America, it highlights the differences among families and gaps in research within England. In support, it demonstrates the adoption of a cultural logic of child rearing by middle-class parents who comply with current professional standards to engage and deliberately stimulate their child's development (Lareau, 2011). In comparison, working-class parents' accomplishments stop short of the deliberate cultivation of children and view the sustainability of natural growth as enough (Lareau, 2011). Lightfoot (2004) supported this, claiming that a simple and democratic term such as PI actually separates

and divides, and professionals should carefully examine the language used to challenge any deficit discourse.

## **Social class**

Reflecting on the barriers previously highlighted, Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw (2020) found that many schools operated on white middle-class norms and highlighted that not all forms of parent communication and involvement are equal within their United States research. While teachers in the study repeatedly stated that communication with parents was vital if students were to be successful and the gap was to be bridged between teachers and home, the educators agreed that poor communication with parents was identified as a critical characteristic of poor parental engagement. The teachers in this research identified that positive value to parental communication was only present when parental participation aligned with their values and expectations (Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw, 2020). However, according to Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw (2020), a significant barrier to an equitable model of PI has been identified as communication. They stated that parents from working-class backgrounds were often the subject of contentious parent-teacher consultations, and senior leaders were required to be present in situations where the teachers thought the parents should agree with them. This barrier highlights that communication held a different value than when the parent was receptive to the teacher's opinion (Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw, 2020). Therefore, they argued that communication is often speculated to contribute to lower academic success when intersections such as social class are not acknowledged, which can lead to judgement and conflict. The researchers argued that power differences existed between parents and teachers, particularly for parents from marginalised backgrounds (Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw, 2020). Moreover, the academics identified that further research with a larger representative sample would continue to explore the differential impact of PI when recognising intersections such as race, social and economic status and gender. This research finding is supported by Kim (2009), whose empirical study noted that PI is a complex model and is only sometimes equitable as the rewards for groups of children vary and discrepancies exist between rhetoric and reality within educational establishments.

Hornby and Blackwell (2018) reinforce the apparent gap between the rhetoric and reality of PI and highlight four specific barriers to developing effective PI in education within their updated study. This United Kingdom (UK) study supported Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw's (2020) findings but delved deeper into parental experiences in school. Participants suggested that negative experiences were the biggest challenge for teachers, who commented that while they can be flexible, the unbendable rules proved difficult for some parents (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). Consequently, they highlight that teachers must be trained efficiently to deal with parents and often find it hard to understand a family situation unlike their own (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). However, there are contrasting perspectives within this study, as several schools in this UK study highlighted no issues and commented that senior leaders in schools were actively recruiting people with positive attitudes to PI, ensuring that the ethos of building relationships is a high priority, with high expectations in multi-partnership working (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Undertaking a critical approach to reading around the themes of PI has facilitated a deeper understanding of the lack of equity surrounding the ideal model of parental engagement, which enabled a thoughtful consideration of the questions I would include in my methodology.

Much of the research focused on the barriers from an educator's point of view, highlighting the significance of the absent parent's voice, which should be present in research when considering equity and power relations. In line with Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) findings, the parental voice was critical for understanding barriers. Accordingly, it was vital to ensure that I sought the voice of the parents in order to understand factors from both parents and educators, giving me a critical view. Raey (2008) underpinned her research with Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus and cultural capital. This research enabled me to acknowledge and reflect on the importance of framing my research through a critical theoretical lens. As a result, Bourdieu's (1977) Theory of Practice would prepare me to ruminate on the practical logic of everyday life and allow me to factor in power relations while remaining reflexive in my research (Power, 1999). The social class issues raised in this literature review require considering whether encouraging PI is equitable for both parties, particularly when combined with factors such as habitus and social class.

In summary, further research specific to PI in KS2 English schools should be conducted. While research has been undertaken around the globe, evidence needs to be included regarding the reflection of equity when implementing ideas to encourage parental engagement within English schools. I highlighted the educational policy changes that gave parents greater power of choice. Moreover, as this research has highlighted, expectations of academic success are higher than ever. Along with this comes the expectation that parents can meet these demands at home. The research demonstrated an assumption that parents have the cultural capital and habitus to access this support (Reay, 2017). One of the main barriers to this is having a low socio-economic status or previous negative experiences. I have acknowledged that while low social class creates these barriers, the gap between rhetoric and remedy needs addressing (Kim, 2009). Equity is challenging when teachers must respect various intersections, creating communication issues (Reay, 2017). Nonetheless, there are positive experiences within the English education system, and the active recruitment of teachers who recognise the power of equity imbalance has been observed by Hornby and Blackwell (2018).

## Methodology

Empirical education research seeks to recognise experiences as a source of knowledge (Audi, 2011). This study utilised an interpretivist paradigm as the nature of the ontological view of the research question is subjective, and there may be varying outcomes from participants (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Using a small-scale qualitative survey and focus group, I gained the respondent's perspectives and perceptions of the purpose of PI (Bell and Waters, 2014). As interpretivist research perceives and considers the language that creates our social world (MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford, 2010), I sought to clarify whether government policy reforms have altered the power relations between parents and educators – highlighting the politisation of education within my social research (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Consequently, I will apply Bourdieu's (1997) Theory of Practice as a theoretical framework. Bourdieu (1977) assumes that specific ways of thinking, perceiving and acting within the family, school and workplace are learnt from childhood. This theory enables one to respond to situations and determine action options (Joas and Knobl, 2011). This lens enabled me to frame the research, acknowledging the practical common sense approach to situations in everyday life. As a result, I could remain reflexive on power relations surrounding models of PI and my positionality as a researcher when exploring habitus and social class (Power, 1999).

## Data Collection Methods

I selected two methods to study this potential imbalance of inequity: a questionnaire and a focus group (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). This method enabled me to remain reflective when analysing the perceptions of power relations regarding engagement from an educator and parental position and explore how the potential barriers are constructed (Bell and Waters, 2018). Recognising my positionality as a researcher and educator was necessary, as it allowed me to consciously acknowledge any potential bias (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). Therefore, I did not include myself in the data collection process. Remaining reflective and utilising these research models enabled me to consider the researcher experience while using a small number of participants to explore ideas such as how teachers' perceptions are constructed (Bell and Waters, 2018). This process also allowed me to address researcher bias. By keeping a journal, I was able to address any key concepts or feelings that may influence my approach to the research (Bell and Waters, 2018). My removal from the process ensured that my view on likely answers did not shape the data collected, and I recognised that the reading within this area of research would not shape or affect how I asked questions (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). The selection of a small-scale qualitative questionnaire ensured ease of administration and the possibility of a reasonable response rate (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). The information collected would differ from that of in-depth interviews. Hence, preparing the questionnaire in advance was essential to ensure that questions were structured to ensure clarity and a clear opportunity to respond (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010).

One aspect of my research addresses power relations, so for this reason, it was crucial to confirm that, as a researcher, a method of data analysis was chosen that ensured power differences could be reduced and permitted me to reflect on the notion that data analysis is subjective and there is no right or wrong way (Creswell, 2007).

Due to the nature of my qualitative study, a thematic analysis of the collated data was necessary for revealing reoccurring themes and patterns, further enabling a constructed analysis of the research question (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). The Data Findings chapter features a further

discussion regarding this approach.

## **Sampling, Participants and Data Analysis**

In order to interrogate the power relations within models of PI, it was essential to ensure I obtained complementary data on the same topic, concurrently collecting data for analysis via more than one means, giving both equal weight (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Therefore, a small-scale qualitative questionnaire and a focus group were adopted. Using a qualitative questionnaire would allow me to gather data from KS2 educators discussing whether government, policy and expectations could affect parental engagement and whether more equitable models of involvement could be developed with relevant training and understanding (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013). I used a non-probability, volunteer sample approach to recruiting participants for my questionnaire and focus group, ensuring that respondents were reflective of a purposive sample (Bryman, 2016). Using a quota sample allowed me to define the categories and select those who fit into these categories (Bryman, 2016). Ensuring my sample was relevant and directly linked to my topic, I clarified that the participants had relevant experience (Denscombe, 2017). Initially, I sought permission from the gatekeeper of an English primary school, who consented to distribute my questionnaire. The school is a local authority-controlled Church of England school, which allowed me to reflect on how the state schooling system in England was established (Gillard, 2011). Observing the viability and reliability of the respondents was vital because, should any problems arise, snowball sampling was considered an alternative method of research (Denscombe, 2017). This non-probability method – an approach which denotes the absence of the mechanism of probability sampling (Vehovar, Toepoel and Steinmetz, 2016) - was vital as it was imperative to my research that they are or have taught in the KS2 sector; otherwise, the data would not reflect my research question (Denscombe, 2017). Given that this is an undergraduate research paper, time constraints were recognised. As a result, a questionnaire distributed to school gatekeepers reduced the time it took to organise, collect and interpret the data. This method also reduced the potential for human error when collecting data, ensuring the reliability of the data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013). A limitation of this research project was the inability to dive deeper into questioning should someone make a point of interest within the questionnaire.

In keeping with the ethical considerations of the University of East London (UEL), the design of this questionnaire was completed on Microsoft Forms, as the data could be stored securely within UEL's One Drive database (Mukherji and Albon, 2018) and destroyed upon completion of the research paper. Full contact details of my research supervisor, Lisa Taylor and myself, whom they could contact at any stage in the research process, were provided to all participants. Due to the anonymised data collection method, I sought participants' consent before proceeding. However, I highlighted that withdrawing consent after data submission was not possible due to the anonymous data format (Punch and Oancea, 2014).

Equally, the focus group also took a non-probability approach, as ensuring the respondents have or had children within the KS2 English state school system was necessary to facilitate a relevant conversation around the topic and ensure that those being interviewed had relevant experience in this area (Denscombe, 2017). The gatekeeper of my chosen school sought to inform parents that volunteers were required to take part in a small-scale study. However, this was unsuccessful, so a snowball sampling approach was adopted. The focus group approach allowed me to discuss the topic in question in an informal, unstructured interview to gather the participants' understandings, beliefs and values, permitting them to lead and steer the direction

of the discussion (Punch and Oancea, 2014). A successful focus group requires trust between participants and the researcher (Sinner *et al.*, 2013).

Therefore, full research details were distributed to participants before the scheduled date, highlighting contact details of myself and my supervisor and the right to withdraw data. Starting the focus group with time to answer any of their questions was also provided, with reassurance that they, as participants, were the experts and would be treated with respect, which addressed any potential power imbalances in the process (Sinner *et al.*, 2013). As the moderator, it was essential to stimulate discussion and use prompts to help the group focus on the topic of interest (Thomas, 2017). The design of pre-prepared questions to prompt conversation and allow one to interject to confirm what is being discussed periodically was undertaken (Bell and Waters, 2014). Therefore, addressing researcher positionality and ensuring that a marginal role was taken rather than a pivotal role in the discussion was critical (Punch and Oancea, 2014). While professionally conducted research often uses an observer to record information about context, environment and body language, my small-scale research used Microsoft Teams to record and transcribe participants' discussions. This transcription was stored securely on UEL's OneDrive, until the data was reviewed and then destroyed. Due to transcription, participants of the focus group were informed that they could withdraw at any part of the research process up to submission as – while participants were anonymised – as a researcher, I would be able to identify and withdraw their data (Thomas, 2017).

Conducting semi-structured interviews was deliberated as research demonstrated this is a typical arrangement in most small-scale research projects due to its ethnographic nature and freedom to follow up points of interest (Thomas, 2017). However, I decided against this due to concerns regarding time constraints and the need for an interview schedule (Thomas, 2017). Upon reflection, this would have provided an opportunity to apply triangulation and build on interesting points which arose during the data collection process (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). I reflected on this within my research journal after a colleague discussed my enquiry questions. In particular, the idea of social class and previous parental experience. Using Bourdieu's (1977) Theory of Practice would have allowed a deeper dive into this data, adding depth to my analysis.

## Ethics

Ethically conducting research requires all social academics to protect the public from exploitation and advance knowledge on a given topic (Denscombe, 2017). As I used a qualitative approach with educators and parents, I observed ethical practice – a study of what is good, right and virtuous – in all aspects of my research (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Consequently, I noted the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) guidance that we, as educators, should operate with an ethic of respect, not just for those taking part, but myself – ensuring that participation is fair and free from prejudice (2011). This research project was submitted to UEL's Ethics Committee following the university's guidance that all research was conducted via Microsoft Teams and data stored securely, accessible only with a password, on UEL's One Drive as stipulated by the university's Code of Ethics. This data would be destroyed upon receipt of grading ensuring that I have complied with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (Bassot, 2020). Finally, my research supervisor piloted and checked all data collection tools.

Gaining informed consent ensured that all parties reached an agreement about the research question, the use of data, how it would be analysed and how the findings would be disseminated (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). So, I sought informed consent from the head teacher, which detailed the research aims and questions (Punch and Oancea, 2014) and confirmation that I had received ethical approval from UEL's Ethics Committee. Assurance was given to the head teacher that the school would remain anonymous at all times. I confirmed that any questions would not require respondents to reveal the location or details of the educational establishment – ensuring schools are not easily traceable and identifiable (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Due to the nature of this research, the issue of equity and PI could raise questions about an imbalance of power relations between educators and parents, leading to potential negative connotations if the school were identified (Gibson, 2012), signifying the importance of confidentiality and anonymity for all participants. Once I had received consent, the circulated questionnaire informed participants of the potential risks when answering questions as they have professional reputations to uphold. These respondents answered questions about their professional practice and disclosed opinions and thoughts about their experiences. Therefore, they needed to do so out of trust, knowing they would not be identifiable (Bassot, 2020). Confidentiality and anonymity are two different things, and I believe that ensuring anonymity demonstrated that even I, as the researcher, could not identify the participant (Bell and Waters, 2014). I recognised that if gaps were identified regarding building relationships between teachers and parents, it could negatively impact the school (Bell and Waters, 2014). Informed consent was also sought from the parents of my focus group, who were notified that the data collected would remain anonymous and pseudonyms would be used. Due to the transcribed discussion, they could withdraw their consent up until the research project was submitted. These measures ensured confidentiality and anonymity (Bell and Waters, 2014).

Recognising my positionality allowed me to address potential power relations, mainly when facilitating my focus group (Gibson, 2012). I recognised that potentially varying levels of inequity might arise between myself as a researcher and them as participants, but also when discussing relationships with teaching staff (Thomas, 2017). Acknowledging these power relations shaped how I interpreted interactions with the focus group members, allowing me to be conscious that I did not regress to this imbalance of power as a researcher (Thomas, 2017).



As the facilitator and moderator of the research and focus group, thinking reflexively was essential to ensure that I recognised that their participation was voluntary and ensure that different values and views were respected (Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel, 2022).

Considering my positionality also reduced the risk to my participants as I acknowledged that my characteristics and low socio-economic background could play a part in how the focus group discussions were interpreted and illustrated (Frost, 2016). Remaining reflexive and keeping a research journal ensured that personal circumstances did not influence my research design and questioning (Frost, 2016). Being aware of the theoretical underpinning of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977) also allowed me to remain reflexive when gathering my data.

## Findings and discussion

Following the distribution of my qualitative questionnaire from the gatekeeper of my research setting, out of twenty-six potential teaching staff respondents, ten KS2 teachers replied, along with two members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and two Learning Support Assistants (LSA) who work with KS2, specifically year six pupils. The school is based in a deprived city, with twenty-eight percent of residents living in twenty percent of the most deprived areas in England, having a higher deprivation index than both Essex and England as a whole (*SmartSouthend*, 2019). Meanwhile, the focus group offered an opportunity to provide equity within this research study as it was essential to ensure parents were also given a voice to offer insights into their experiences with the development of PI with teachers and educators. After distributing consent letters, the initial number of focus group participants dropped from six parents to four. All parents had children within the KS2 school system. The four participants had children who attended a local authority- controlled school.

The data collected was coded and organised into themes using the questionnaire and focus group findings. The complexity of analysing social life and multiple perspectives required me to apply an analytical strategy to illuminate different aspects of the findings (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Accordingly, I undertook a thematic analysis approach as it can be applied to various paradigms to understand experiences or thoughts (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). Following the six-step approach, I could summarise, highlight and interpret both sets of data (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). However, when using this approach, it was essential to remain reflexive due to the potential of inadequately describing assumptions which underlie my analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As a result, I took a deductive approach to my thematic analysis, using the themes which arose in the literature review. This approach allowed me to align the research foundations with the data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This deductive approach identified four themes that align with this study's research questions: Accountability and Policy, Existing Barriers, Power Relations and Communication, and Equitable Impactful Measures. This chapter will identify the themes and link the data analysis with the previous research in the literature review and the research questions. The undertaking of this approach allowed one to analyse it with a deductive, theory-driven approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### Accountability and Policy

In answer to the first research question, there was an analysis of how educators perceive policy-making decisions to impact the development of good relations with parents. Having a shared best interest approach was raised by the questionnaire respondents, and being aware of policy factors such as governmental requirements and an understanding of the curriculum was highlighted. The focus on standardised testing within schools highlighted a perspective that raised the question of whether PI models factor in educational and social policy changes, which allows parents to involve themselves in their child's education actively and how they can reach out to do so. Discussing the shared endeavour of education, one participant in the questionnaire noted:

'If a child is not taught to value education by the parent, then they will be unlikely to want to learn as much as the others. Children need support at home. They need to be brought to school on time and access before or after school interventions if necessary,

and this can only be possible with parental engagement.'

Respondents to the questionnaire discussed that some parents view testing as the only way to see how their child is progressing and how the school is performing, despite the Teachers' Standards (2021) stating the importance of parental engagement for academic success. This notion, another argued, places pressure on parents to ensure that they are aware of methods to support their children. Sixty-four percent of respondents believe that the Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) have placed an expectation on parents to support their child at home as there is a greater expectation for parents to support their child with homework when they may be unsure of the curriculum content. Educators who responded to the questionnaire noted that ensuring parents are given topic plans, aims, and resources that can be used at home are all measures that can be used to bridge this accountability barrier.

This suggestion supports the research from Tight (2019), who claimed that the ideology of parent power is dictated by those from advantaged backgrounds, using establishments to increase their advantage further. This meritocratic narrative (Young, 2017) supports the neoliberal ideology supported by the serving Conservative party (Maisuria, 2014). Conteh and Kawashima (2008) suggest that understanding the position that policymakers take allows schools to challenge this view of expectations of children's performances in testing and family approaches to support. One respondent within the focus group highlighted this, noting that there is an over-emphasis on academic achievement, grades and meeting designated thresholds set out by policymakers within the Department for Education (DfE).

'Some parent's priorities are not about that at all. I know the pressures on the teachers are somewhat different, and you have to juggle all these sorts of things, but I think that relationships would improve if the onus was not always on the fact that your child is here, but academically they need to be there.'

## **Existing Barriers**

Relating to the second research question, which sought to review what issues educators and parents perceive to create a barrier to PI, seventy-one percent of respondents believe that PI is 'extremely important' regarding academic success. In contrast, twenty-nine percent believe it is somewhat essential. While a generalised notion of social class was raised as a barrier by Raey (2017) in her existing research, data findings allowed this research to highlight the complexities of the barriers which prevent equitable relationships from being developed between parents and teachers. When discussing factors which create a barrier between the parents and teachers and an equitable model of PI, seventy-one percent of respondents stated that time poverty was a significant barrier. The agreement among respondents of the questionnaire acknowledged that parents working patterns and added financial pressures of the current economic climate dictating working hours was a factor in low levels of PI. In particular, it was highlighted that parents' working hours are different to that of educators, and those who use wrap-around care are only able to be contacted by teachers if they drop off their children or collect them at the end of the day. This data reinforces Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) research findings which identified practical barriers such as school opening hours.

Time poverty, along with previous negative experiences, was suggested as a barrier to building

relationships by questionnaire respondents. All respondents of the focus group agreed that face-to-face communication increased feelings of equity between themselves as teachers, raising the fact that if face-to-face communication is not available, the digital platforms of communication sometimes create further barriers, with one member of the focus group stating:

'It is much easier to bring something up in conversation if the teacher is meeting you at the door, this happens a lot in Reception, but it does not mean we should not get this just because they are going up a school year. It is more formal if you get a message on a platform. A general chat after school is quite relaxed.'

The research also highlighted the previous experiences of parents and educators alike. One focus group respondent noted that many parents have a pre-determined opinion of schooling and education, reflecting factors influencing home life.

'We do not know what is going on at home. Maybe the parents did not finish their education or were not in school much themselves, meaning that they may be too embarrassed or awkward to ask for help from the teacher. I did not like school, and I and my husband both wish we were pushed a bit more by our parents. We are not pushy parents, but we do perhaps get more involved than my parents did because we both wish our parents had got more involved.'

While the acknowledgement that low social class was a barrier within the literature review, the data revealed that previous experiences of education and time poverty all relate to social class. The value of education was also highlighted by educators within the questionnaire, with respondents stating that the parents' experiences of education influence how they engage with their child's education and how much the parent values the education system, as opposed to it being about class. A lack of subject knowledge highlighted the need to be 'good enough' to engage with teachers and their children's experiences. At the same time, several respondents noted that these negative experiences result in a lack of trust and an under appreciation for education. This notion of trust was discussed by Lareau (2011), who found that the cultural logic of raising children is unaligned with the standards of education establishments, particularly for those from working-class families, which foster distrust and distance. The greater power of choice being handed to parents was discussed as a benefit to parents regarding educational choices (Sinclair, Grimshaw and Garnett, 1994). Nevertheless, data findings highlight that while social class was not a factor in itself, the disadvantages to families from a lower socio-economic class highlighted a potential dissonance that would require further research (Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw, 2020).

## **Power Relations and Communication**

Continuing with a deep dive into research question two, when asked how much of an impact PI has on academic success, respondents to the questionnaire acknowledged the shared role required from all parties and the results of these positive relationships. However, as previous research demonstrated, this is not always an equitable experience (Baquedano-López, Alexander and Hernandez, 2013). One respondent of the questionnaire highlighted this importance, stating:

'The biggest influence in any child's life is their parents and carers; therefore, if

teachers can work with parents towards a shared goal, the child will benefit both pastorally and academically.'

While one professional respondent to the questionnaire stated that parents seem less engaged now, as it is the school's job and not theirs to do the work, a barrier highlighted by Lightfoot (2004), time poverty emerged as a reoccurring theme.

During the focus group, participants highlighted the power of communication when understanding how to work towards and maintain equitable relationships between parents and educators. While all respondents noted that teachers had tried to communicate and build relationships with families, ensuring a consistent message across the school is vital. The focus group participants noted that varying levels of communication have created challenges in providing support for their children, acknowledging that quick discussions on the playground at collection are suitable and valued by parents. Another benefit of this communication method was a lower risk concerning miscommunication, as all four contributors noted that communication via platforms and quick messaging could leave room for misinterpretation and hostility. This issue, one stated, resulted in formal letters needing to be written to the senior leadership team to resolve.

Furthermore, this method of communication was praised by respondents of the questionnaire, with fifty percent of participants highlighting purposive that face to face communication encourages better communication. This finding, the data showed, allowed teachers to be approachable and non-judgemental and allowed the teacher to ensure that parents are aware of what support they can give while avoiding exclusionary technical vocabulary. Technology development was also highlighted as a means to bridge any potential barriers. By utilising platforms such as Facebook, Microsoft Teams and Class DoJo and sending out 'Shout Out' style newsletters, it was noted that the new head teacher's approach fostered a more friendly and inclusive environment for parents, which removed jargon and feelings of inadequacy when communicating. This data supports the previous research findings, highlighting the complex relationship between parents and educators regarding social power and empowerment (Reay, 1996). Reay (1996) argued that the assumed needs of parents and educators shape education provisions. However, as Lightfoot (2004) stated, the language used is vital in addressing dissonance and deficit due to the portfolio of meanings attached to language.

### **Equitable Impactful Measures**

From a teacher's perspective, when asked what strategies currently work to build good relationships with parents, all respondents agreed that communication and regular conversations about child progression were vital. Parents' evenings, reports, telephone calls home, and email or Class DoJo messages are strategies that work for this school to ensure parents are actively involved in their child's learning.

Participants of the focus group also highlighted this. Even if it is as simple as writing in a reading record or communication log so that both teacher and parent are aware of events that could impact the day's learning, all four participants noted that this measure had dwindled since their child joined KS2. One participant stated that she felt that this was due to the assumption that children are no longer learning phonemes and learning to read and that parents may feel like their input is no longer required once the child is an independent reader.

From an educator's perspective, when asked what strategies could be used to create an equitable relationship, strategies such as having simplified curriculum guides and sharing reasoning

behind learning opportunities were highlighted. Moreover, fifty percent of respondents believed that parent workshops and community events could be utilised to break down an ‘us and them’ approach. Educators felt that coffee mornings would allow parents to sit and listen without obligation to join in and suggest the introduction of parent lunches with no financial requirement. One respondent noted that opportunities for staff to engage with parents in an informal setting might open a more casual conversation, which takes on a holistic approach, thus strengthening the parent-educator relationship.

The focus group supported this informal method of relationship building. One participant suggested that an opportunity more open to a natural conversation would remove the feeling of inequality and break down power relations and barriers. A personalised approach was also suggested within the focus group that afforded more than ten minutes twice a year, moving away from a structured conversation led by the teacher and allowing it to be parent led. However, it was suggested that it would be equitable to have this at a time that worked for the parents instead of ten minutes at set times within the school calendar. This structure, they stated, would allow it to be personalised and fair to the parents. The data from the qualitative survey revealed that while fifty-seven percent of respondents felt confident in understanding the development of equitable relationships, a further forty-three percent would like to seek further support to develop strategies. Therefore, the questionnaire respondents’ suggestions included having a clear plan of strategies guided by theory and research, which state the intentions at the start of the school year. Using evidence and statistical data to demonstrate the value of PI was suggested, along with creating a charter to be signed by parents and educators. This suggestion supports the evidence from Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw (2020), who highlighted those contentious parent-teacher consultations occurred when a breakdown in understanding and expectations had occurred and where communication held different values. The importance of recognising barriers and intersecting issues, they found, was essential to theorise whether judgements and disagreements resulted from power imbalance between educators and parents (Henderson, Williams and Bradshaw, 2020).

## **Positionality and Theoretical Lenses**

Bourdieu’s (1977) Theory of Practice provided a relevant theoretical lens to view these findings due to his primary concern with overcoming dichotomies in social theory, such as structure and agency. Using this lens has allowed me to explore the practical logic of the parents involved in this research and the relations of power (Power, 1999). While the teachers did not outwardly mention social class as being a barrier to developing equitable relationships, the reoccurring theme was time poverty and parents being unavailable to take part in face-to-face discussions on the playground at collection time. This point was highlighted by the focus group respondents, with one mentioning that she could not speak to her child's teacher due to her commitment to work. One strategy to improve PI, which formed the majority of responses, was to host more workshops and community events. However, this practice would be a result of the educator's perspective and does not acknowledge the individual's habitus (Power, 1999). This acknowledgement led me to reflect on whether this is a contradictory strategy given that time poverty was a significant barrier. The time poverty in question could result from low income and the requirement to work (Powell and Sánchez, 2013). The suggestion from all four respondents within the focus group was to ensure that opportunities to meet with educators were more tailored, building on the concept of equity and overcoming the dichotomies of policy structures and giving parents greater agency (Powell and Sánchez, 2013).

## Conclusion

This empirical research aimed to explore the concept of PI within English primary schools at KS2 and discussed how educators could support the development of an equitable model that addresses potential power relations between teachers and parents. Data was collected from educators and parents with experience with the KS2 model to analyse the nuanced power relations between parents and educators. From an educator's perspective, participants in the qualitative questionnaire did not believe policy decision-making creates barriers, noting that despite parents being afforded greater choice following the Education Reform Act (1988), they are less engaged with their child's education. Nevertheless, while this was not directly reflected in the focus group, participants noted that having time to converse with teachers was an issue. However, time poverty emerged as a policy issue due to rising living costs and, as highlighted in the data, the need to work.

This understanding reinforces research question one and highlights that policy-making is an issue to be factored into planning. While social class was not directly highlighted as a primary barrier, once again, being time-poor was identified by teachers as one of the main barriers. Similarly, this was underpinned by the focus group. This theme of time deprivation is significant because prior research discussed social class as a barrier from a policy level (Reay, 1996; Lareau, 1997), but this generalised view did not mention the pressures on working parents today and how it has a sacrificial effect on the time spent being involved in their child's education (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). The development of an equitable model of PI highlighted contradictory measures which, through the Theory of Practice lens (Bourdieu, 1977), raised issues of equity. Acknowledging the working patterns of parents was recognised by educators. However, the participants in the focus group suggested that PI equity could be gained by changing the structure of parent consultations to ensure that they take a more holistic approach and are scheduled at a time that is suitable for the parent. This understanding is significant as the focus group recommendations speculate that working parents experience inequitable opportunities.

Applying a reflexive lens and using Gibbs's (1988) model of reflection, I would propose changing my methodology moving forward. Adding a semi-structured interview would have allowed me to revisit research questions that needed further questioning while remaining flexible (Denscombe, 2017). This development would allow me to apply methodological triangulation (Denscombe, 2017), strengthening evidenced data and allowing the opportunity to revisit points of interest. Between-methods triangulation would have allowed me to review the data from various perspectives, allowing further probing into the suggested ideas from educators such as parent workshops, challenging the contradictory data from parents that time deprivation is a significant issue (Denscombe, 2017).

The first recommendation following this research project relates to practice. My findings suggest that schools should consider offering ad hoc or informal opportunities for parental consultations. This suggestion emerged following data analysis of the focus group and is consistent with a social justice perspective, challenging power relations. This approach could promote dialogue from outside a formal structure, and opportunities could be tailored to working parents who would otherwise miss this opportunity. The implication is that teachers would need time to accommodate this practice change, and adjustments to after-school planning must be deliberated to ensure this remains an equitable experience for all. This

recommendation is valid and links to the conclusions of this research project (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019) as it sought to explore how equity could be developed following participants' reflection on what creates a barrier.

My second recommendation relates to practice which is underpinned by policy. The review of literature and data collected suggests that the definition of PI needs to acknowledge parental status (Baquedano-López, Alexander and Hernandez, 2013), but while forty-three percent of questionnaire respondents were unsure of their confidence in understanding how to develop equitable relationships with parents, awareness and training needs to be implemented. Respondents to the questionnaire suggested that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training opportunities could be provided – focusing on the importance of developing relationships with parents. However, this should have a specific focus on how barriers such as time poverty and previous experiences in education have an impact on the outcome for the child. By understanding inequalities in socio-economic experiences, educators can look beyond the generalisation of low social class as a barrier and recognise the intricacies of the economic pressure on parents on a macro level to work and live under a neoliberal government (Edwards and Whitty, 1992). As suggested by focus group participants, this awareness could create a holistic and solicitous relationship between teachers and parents – ultimately supporting the pupil's needs (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). This small-scale research complements and supports previous research that considers social class a significant barrier to PI. Moreover, it has drawn attention to the lack of research within the KS2 age group, highlighting that further research can be conducted. Seeking funding to conduct further research into the impact of time poverty on academic achievement would complement prior research. Subsequently, this could be afforded in policy planning within schools, sociological and educational research.



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**A SMALL-SCALE QUALITATIVE  
STUDY EXPLORING HOW  
PARENTS FROM MINORITY  
ETHNIC GROUPS WHO HAVE  
MIGRATED TO THE UK  
EXPERIENCE THE EDUCATION,  
HEALTH AND CARE PLAN  
(EHCP) PROCESS**

by Laura Shanks

EMPIRICAL STUDY

Independent Research Project – ED6088

BA (Hons) Special Education



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## **Abstract:**

Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP) were introduced in 2014 as part of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms led by the Children and Families Act (2014). This legislation places a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure the views of children and their families are central to decision making. Furthermore, information and support should be provided to ensure their participation. Despite this, current research on parental perspectives suggests multiple barriers to participation remain, creating a social justice issue for those who are marginalised. This qualitative study aims to explore how minority ethnic parents who have migrated to the United Kingdom (UK) experience both the initial EHCP assessment and annual review processes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six parents based in one local authority (LA) in England. Thematic analysis identified four key themes: differences between initial assessment and annual review; the need for independent support and advice; language barriers; and parental empowerment. The significance of these findings is discussed in relation to children's rights and social justice, leading to recommendations that call for accessible and impartial support for these families.

### Key words:

Special educational needs; parents' experiences; minority ethnic heritage, social justice, children's rights.

# 1. Introduction

Professionals are expected to work in partnership with parents during the process to obtain an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which is a legal document outlining the special educational provision local authorities have a duty to provide. The requirement to support children and their families to participate fully in decision making is a central principle underpinning the Children and Families act (2014). The associated SEND Code of Practice (CoP, 2015, p. 21) places a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure this support includes accessible information on rights and entitlements. However, there is ongoing debate about the barriers to participation faced by many families, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds (Akbar and Woods, 2020; Marku et al., 2022). Power imbalances, language difficulties and unequal access to information and support can converge to marginalise minority ethnic families, impacting on their access to rights and entitlements (Akbar and Woods, 2019, p. 294). Therefore, this paper seeks to explore how minority ethnic parents who have migrated to the UK experience the EHCP process, and what support and information are provided by professionals to ensure their participation. A qualitative approach is a valid methodology for this research project because it enables an in-depth analysis of participant's views and attempts to understand the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Thomas, 2017, pp. 110-111). Furthermore, an understanding of the experiences of parents navigating the EHCP process is important for shifting the concept of parental partnership working from policy into reality (Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2018, p. 538).

My rationale for this topic arises from my interest in social justice and disabled children's rights. Social justice used within this study refers to equal access to participation and resources for all groups (Bell, 2016, p. 3). References to rights and entitlements are specifically concerned with children's educational rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Children and Families Act (2014). This study is influenced by my previous experience of providing advice and support on SEND to a diverse range of families when volunteering for a national charity. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge how my personal experiences of the EHCP process as a parent of a child with SEND has impacted all aspects of my study. These experiences coupled with my academic studies created my initial assumptions about the difficulties minority ethnic parents may face and influenced my choice of topic.

The research questions are:

- 1) To what extent has information been provided to parents to ensure full participation in decisions?
- 2) What are parents' perspectives of the EHCP process?
- 3) How do practitioners support parents to navigate the EHCP process?

In writing up this enquiry the intended audience is professionals working with families during the EHCP process, and other undergraduate students seeking to explore how SEND policy is experienced in practice by minority ethnic families who have migrated to the UK.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review aims to explore what is currently known about parental experiences of the EHCP system and more specifically, what research has been conducted in this area on the experiences of minority ethnic parents who have migrated to the UK. A range of literature has been sourced to address the issue of selection bias and to ensure multiple perspectives are considered.

### **2.2 Background and legal context**

The SEND reforms of 2014 aimed to put children and their families at the centre of a new SEND system that would be less stressful and offer more choice and control (DfE, 2011). Despite these ambitions, the House of Commons Education Select Committee (2019) report found that the system remains confrontational and difficult for many families to navigate. This is despite Part 3 of the Children and Families Act (2014) placing a statutory duty on Local Authorities (LAs) to ensure the views of children and their families are central to decision making. To facilitate this, there is an obligation to provide children and their families with support and information to ensure their participation (Broach and Clements, 2020, p. 167). This principle is important during the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, when parents are expected to work in partnership with multiple professionals. This coordinated assessment replaced the previous SEN statement, and if drafted accurately can result in a statutory document containing legally enforceable rights for the child (Broach and Clements, 2020, p. 181). However, research suggests that the quality of EHCPs can be poor (Cochrane and Soni, 2020) and adherence to processes and timescales can vary between local authorities, with many breaching the statutory duties called for under the current legislation (House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2019, pp. 54-55; Office for national statistics, 2022, p. 20).

### **2.3 Partnership working**

Partnership working is complex and there is ongoing debate as to how practitioners can achieve this when working with a diverse range of families (Hellowell, 2019, p. 106). To understand the context of parent professional relationships to answer the research questions posed in this study, the importance of positive relationships was considered using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that interrelated environmental systems and the relationships within them influence child development (Ettetal and Mahoney,

2017). Bronfenbrenner situates the parent-practitioner relationships within the mesosystem and suggests that the development of 'mutual trust' will lead to better outcomes for the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 209-212). However, as demonstrated in a study by Marku et al. (2022, p. 310), how these relationships function is impacted by the policy and funding decisions made within the external exosystem. Consequently, tension may arise as practitioners attempt to manage relationships with parents whilst having to adhere to conflicting policy and funding pressures (Boddison and Soan, 2022, p. 99). Therefore, an understanding of this issue is important when gathering data on parental experiences in relation to research question two.

## **2.4 Experiences of the EHCP process**

Evidence from several studies in this area indicates that some parents consider the EHCP process to be positive. Research from Skipp and Hopwood (2016) and Adams et al. (2017) report that parents were satisfied with the process and felt they had been able to participate. However, both studies were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and reflect experiences during the first year of the reforms. A small-scale study by Sales and Vincent (2018) also found that some parents were happy with the EHCP process, although this focused on participants who were comparing the new system to the old system 18 months into the reforms. These findings suggest that the positive views gathered relate to early experiences of reforms and comparisons with the previous statementing process.

In contrast to earlier studies, more recent literature suggests parental experiences of the process are largely negative (Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2022). This is consistent with the continued growth in appeals about EHCPs to the SEND tribunal, which suggests the partnership working promised to families under the 2014 reforms is lacking (Boddison and Soan, 2022, p. 101; Marsh, 2022, p. 805). Despite the intentions of the new legislation to enable better participation for parents, several studies suggest barriers remain. The power imbalance between parents and professionals emerges as a key theme within the literature, with research indicating that professionals' opinions still lead decision making, and parental input holds less value (Hodge and Runswick- Cole, 2018, p. 540; Hellawell, Smith and Wharton, 2022, p. 152). These factors can cause feelings of anger, overwhelm and powerlessness among parents (Green and Edwards, 2021, p. 141). In their study based on the old statementing process, Jones and Swain (2001) found that power imbalances during the annual review meeting were a significant barrier to true parental participation in decision making, yet there is limited current research that focuses specifically on the annual review process.

## **2.5 Perceptions of local authority SEND Officers**

In a study that focused on parents who had been through the disagreement resolution process, Cullen and Lindsay (2019) found that LA SEND officers were perceived by parents to lack understanding of the legislation and lacked the ability to draft EHCP's accurately. This last point was also highlighted in a study by Palikara et al. (2019, p. 90) where professionals reported concerns that plans were drafted by staff with limited SEND knowledge and training.

However, Hellowell (2015) argues that LA SEN officers face a conflict between advocating for what a child needs within the constraints of what is available, leading to stress, high turnover of staff and long-term sick leave. This suggests the ability of LA SEND officers to develop good relationships with parents in the mesosystem is directly impacted by policy and funding decisions within the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Taken together, these findings provide a context for research question three by highlighting the conflicts practitioners face when working with families during the EHCP process. In addition, these findings identify multiple factors which may impact on parents' experiences, which is pertinent to research question two.

## **2.6 Access to information and knowledge**

Unequal access to the information and knowledge required to navigate the system is attracting considerable critical attention. To address research question one, an analysis was undertaken to explore emerging themes relating to the information provided to parents in previous studies. This highlighted a growing concern that not all families are able to participate in the same way (Akbar and Woods, 2020, p. 663-664). The recent House of Commons Education Select Committee (2019) report found that parents require significant legal understanding and social capital to participate. The report noted that even knowing where to go for help requires an understanding of where to find organisations that provide support, placing many families at a significant disadvantage. These findings are evident in research on parental views, as parents report that a lack of knowledge and information reduces their ability to meaningfully participate in decision making (Skip and Hopwood, 2016, p. 19; Akbar and Woods, 2019, p. 294). Conversely, this issue has also been shown to create challenges for professionals working with families. Research by Boesley and Crane (2018, pp. 39- 40) into Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) perspectives reported that parents were often unaware an application for an EHCP may not be successful, causing difficulties for SENCOs in managing expectations.

Further research points to a link between the quality of the final EHCP and the cultural capital of parents, leading the authors to conclude that the experiences of parents differ based on socio-economic background, race and ethnicity (Castro-Kemp, Palikara and Grande, 2019). Whilst the Children and Families Act (2014) places a duty on local authorities to provide Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS), these are often underfunded and unsustainable in practice (Council for Disabled Children, 2018, p. 22). Ahad, Thompson and Hall (2022, p. 20) call for greater information and support for parents to understand their rights, highlighting that this is currently managed by small scale charities with limited capacity. Focusing specifically on minority ethnic families, Frederickson and Cline (2015, p. 5) note that many parents are unable to understand the information they are given. To address this, Perepa (2019, p. 120) suggests these families require information in an accessible format. Akbar and Woods (2020, p. 674) also identify this issue and argue that it is the responsibility of school staff to carefully explain the EHCP process to parents from minority ethnic backgrounds.

## 2.7 Language Barriers and cultural considerations

The literature on the experiences of minority ethnic families is limited but suggests they face similar barriers to participation found within more general parental studies, such as power imbalances and conflicting interests. However, there are some significant differences, and to answer research questions one and two an analysis of the literature found that language barriers emerged as a key theme. Akbar and Wood (2020) reported that limited English language ability created significant difficulties for minority ethnic parents, a finding corroborated by Marku et al. (2022) in their study of Eastern European parents. Both studies highlight that whilst stress is commonly reported by parents when navigating the SEND system, language barriers compound the issue and create difficulties for minority ethnic parents. Consequently, this issue can cause delays to children accessing support, with families in one study unaware of what an EHCP was or if their child had one (Akbar and Woods, 2020, pp. 671-672). In their earlier study, Akbar and Woods (2019) identified a link between language, the ability to participate in decision making and the impact this has on children's access to their educational rights under the UNCRPD and the UNCRC. This suggests that children from families marginalised by the complexity and technical language of the SEND system are being denied their rights. This is further evident in the House of Commons Education Select Committee (2019, p. 22) report that goes as far as to suggest that for some families '...the law may not even appear to exist.'

A broader perspective has been proposed by Frederickson and Cline (2015, p. 5), who argue that the difficulties these families face cannot be attributed to language difficulties alone. It has been suggested that cultural considerations need to be understood by practitioners working with these families if true partnership working is to be achieved (Hellewell, 2019, p. 99). In the case of autistic children, Perepa (2019, pp. 87-90) highlights that when and how parents access services and interventions may be due to multiple cultural factors, such as a differing perception of developmental milestones and religious understandings of SEND. Marku et al. (2022, p. 305) also argue that consideration must be given to cultural differences. For example, a parent who has migrated to the UK may fear diagnosis based on how this would restrict educational opportunities in a home country. Therefore, it could be argued that an understanding of cultural and linguistic considerations is key for practitioners working with families during the EHCP process, providing insight relevant to research question three.

## 2.8 Positionality

The studies presented thus far have confirmed my understanding that the EHCP process is complex and difficult to navigate, although the positive reports have challenged my assumptions on parental experiences being consistently poor. The literature has drawn my attention to the connection between language barriers and access to legal rights for minority ethnic families, broadening my views on the importance of accessible information and support. The range of literature included has assisted my understanding of the context of parent professional relationships, highlighting tensions faced by practitioners when seeking to work in partnership with families.

## 2.9 Conclusion

This study aims to build upon the limited existing research on how minority ethnic parents who have migrated to the UK experience the EHCP process. It will extend on the work of Akbar and Woods (2020) who position access to information and support as a rights and social justice issue. Furthermore, this study aligns with the work of Akbar and Woods (2019) and Marku et al. (2022) in the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). However, this study specifically applies this theoretical lens to understand the interactions families have with professionals during the EHCP process. In doing so, I attempt to understand how the constraints of policy and funding at an exosystem level influence relationships between parents and practitioners at a mesosystem level.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research approach**

Studies of parental experiences of the SEND system have traditionally based their approaches on gathering qualitative data. Opie and Brown (2019, pp. 13-15) suggest that the ontological stance that reality is subjective and individually constructed leads to an epistemological viewpoint that knowledge can be measured by interpreting the perspectives and experiences of individuals. Therefore, it was decided that this study would be conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, employing a qualitative methodology to gain detailed information into how parents from minority ethnic backgrounds experience the EHCP process (Thomas, 2017, pp. 110-111). A key risk to this approach is the bias of the researcher influencing the results (Bell and Waters, 2018, p. 26). However, Mukherji and Albon (2018, p. 355) suggest that the presence of a researcher's influence in a qualitative study is inevitable and should be acknowledged. One benefit of a qualitative approach is that it facilitates a deeper insight into a range of experiences and explores the meanings each individual attributes to them (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, pp. 92-93). This was important for obtaining data pertinent to research question two, which aimed to explore parental views on the EHCP process in depth and to understand how they made sense of their experiences. The support offered to parents was a focus of research questions one and three, therefore, to analyse how relationships with professionals were experienced this study utilised Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Applying this theory supported an understanding of how the context of SEND policy and funding within the exosystem influenced parent-professional relationships within the mesosystem. As this theory distinguishes between different levels of interconnected systems, it can also be used to consider whether the concept of children's rights within the macrosystem plays a role in how minority ethnic families experience the EHCP process.

### **3.2 Sample**

Six participants were recruited for this study using convenience sampling, which is one of the most commonly used techniques by students working within short timeframes (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 29). The criteria for selection were that participants were from a minority ethnic group, had migrated to the UK and had a child with an EHCP. Families known to the researcher were asked if they would like to participate and those who expressed an interest were sent the research information sheet and given the opportunity to ask any questions. Selection bias was considered when using this approach, and I was careful not to select participants based on their ability to answer the questions (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 116). This sampling method is not valid for studies requiring generalisation, and this sample is not representative of any one group as it only includes people from a limited number of ethnicities and backgrounds, all living within one local area. However, as this study employs a qualitative approach, findings that can be generalised on a large scale was not an intended outcome. A further limitation of this sample is that it does not include participants who require translation or an interpreter



because they cannot be interviewed in English, which is a significant gap when considering the views of minority ethnic families who have migrated to the UK.

Most participants were women, with only one male participant who was interviewed with his wife. The participants had migrated to the UK from four different countries: Poland, Latvia, Hungary, and Pakistan. Identified SEND included Autism, ADHD, and Learning disabilities, therefore this sample represents only a small section of possible SEND. Face to face or virtual Microsoft teams interviews were offered, ensuring that participants could choose which method they felt more comfortable with (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 252), whilst ensuring that those who might struggle to access technology were not excluded from participating (Roberts, Pavlakis and Richards, 2021, p. 7). Four participants chose to be interviewed using a team's meeting whilst two participants requested the researcher visit them in their own homes.

### **3.3 Data collection methods**

The data collection method chosen for this study was semi-structured interviews, which is a well-established tool for the collection of data in qualitative studies (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 243). This method benefits from using a framework for topics to be discussed which provides structure, whilst allowing flexibility to probe further into specific points raised by participants (Thomas, 2017, p. 206). An advantage of this method is that it can be used for exploring peoples' views, feelings, and opinions on sensitive topics in detail (Denscombe, 2010, p. 174). However, there is a risk that participants move onto topics outside of the scope of the study (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, p. 211). Questionnaires were not used for this study due to their inability to gain any depth of views (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 281) and the language barrier they could create when asking for responses in written English.

The success of semi-structured interviews can depend on the personal characteristics of the interviewer, for example, their ability to build rapport and put participants at ease. As a parent of a child with an EHCP myself, I was able to build trust with the participants although acknowledge this shared characteristic may have caused participants to be less guarded (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, pp. 94-95). In contrast, my outsider position as a white British student researcher could have impacted on how participants answered the questions, perhaps answering in a way they felt better suited my expectations (Denscombe, 2010, p. 179). Furthermore, the reliability of the method could be impacted by my involvement as the researcher leading to data that reflects my own bias (Carter, 2018, pp. 138-139). Therefore, being receptive and non-leading during interviews was important for ensuring the quality of the data, a skill I developed by piloting my questions with a fellow student who was a parent of a child with an EHCP (Denscombe, 2010, p. 183).

Whilst it is important to acknowledge how the researcher themselves can influence the study, the study can also influence the researcher. During this process I was not an observer, but an active and constantly changing presence within the study responding to interviewees perspectives that challenged my own assumptions (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 93). Although timescales did not allow for triangulation of the data via various sources to check its validity, the interview data was checked against current literature and the other interviews to ensure

consistency (Denscombe, 2010, p. 189). In addition, using this data collection method provided the opportunity to check my understanding of participant's views during the interview, therefore enhancing the validity of my data and ensuring it was a trustworthy representation of their experiences (Carter, 2018, p. 143).

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The collection of qualitative data led to the decision to choose a thematic approach to data analysis (Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel, 2013, p. 99). A distinct advantage of using this approach is that it allows researchers to construct meaning from the data by focusing on the themes that emerge from the interviews (Opie and Brown, 2019, p. 225). This analysis was conducted following the six-stage process provided by Braun and Clark (2006, cited in Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, pp. 280-281), beginning with familiarisation during the transcription phase. This process identified initial themes that were then reviewed to select overarching themes and sub themes in the data, and to make links to the wider literature. Reflexivity applied when interpreting the findings helped pinpoint areas where my influence was present, such as the selection of data and how my position as a parent of a child with SEND influenced my understanding of the data (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 355).

## 4. Ethics

Prior to commencing the study, ethical approval was obtained from the School of Education and Communities Ethics Board at the University of East London. Ethical practice is a constant process in empirical research and needs to be applied at all stages, from initial research design and ethical approval, through to data collection, analysis, and reporting (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, pp. 121-123). Adherence to ethical guidelines minimises the potential of the research to cause harm to the individuals involved and the University (Opie and Brown, 2019, p. 78).

One of the key principles important in this research is non-maleficence (Bassot, 2020, p. 84). It was possible that discussions around experiences of the EHCP process could elicit strong emotions from myself and my participants, requiring careful consideration (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, p. 131). Therefore, protecting against potential emotional harm was prioritised in my research design to ensure my questions did not cause distress or feelings of embarrassment (Desncombe, 2017, p. 332; Rumrill, Cook and Stevenson, 2020, p. 79). Piloting my questions with a fellow student ahead of the first interview helped me to understand any potential issues (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 153). In addition, details of support organisations and information sheets were ready to hand to participants after the interview if needed. Furthermore, during the interview process if it became evident the participant was distressed, the interview would have been terminated, although this was not required (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, p. 131). A possible benefit of this research is that it may provide a helpful insight for practitioners on how the current EHCP family engagement approaches are perceived by migrant minority ethnic parents.

The autonomy of participants was an important consideration within this study, to ensure that they did not feel coerced into taking part (Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel, 2013, p. 5). Whilst many of these families knew me as a parent to a child with SEND, my identity as a researcher could cause a potential power imbalance. To address this, informed consent was obtained by using a participant information form, which explained the details of the project. Ideally this would have been translated into a participant's home language, although this was not feasible for my undergraduate study (Nolan, Macfarlan and Cartmel, 2013, p.4). Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions prior to signing, which supported their understanding of what was required and built trust (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, p. 127). It was made clear to participants that they could withdraw at any point without having to explain why (BERA, 2018, p. 9). Furthermore, verbal consent was sought to commence recording, and the boundaries of the interview were made clear at the start (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p. 210).

Several steps were taken to address privacy and confidentiality. Firstly, to avoid unnecessary intrusion into their home or work life when conducting interviews via Microsoft teams, participants were guided to blur their background and use headphones (Roberts, Pavlakis and Richards, 2021, p. 9). Secondly, it was explained that interviews were recorded, and data anonymised and stored securely on the university drive to comply with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel, 2013, p. 77). Finally, it was explained that the data would be deleted on completion of the project.

Personal bias is acknowledged within this research due to my positionality as a parent of a child with an EHCP. Consequently, researcher neutrality was untenable as I bring my experiences to the research process and my interactions with participants (Opie and Brown, 2019, p. 33). Using a reflective approach to consider my positionality and initial assumptions I was able to bring transparency to the decisions made throughout the process, enhancing the quality of my study (Frost, 2016, p. 168).

## **5. Findings and discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Four main themes emerged from the analysis: differences between initial assessment and annual review; the need for independent support and advice; language barriers; and parental empowerment.

### **5.2 Differences between initial assessment and annual review.**

The majority of participants in this study reported that their experiences of support offered during the initial assessment and annual review were significantly different. These findings relate to research questions two and three by providing an insight into how parents experience the partnership working proposed in government policy.

#### **5.2.1 Perception of professionals during the initial assessment**

A common view expressed by five participants was the importance of one key professional who helped them during the initial EHCP process. However, the type of professional varied, and in one case a parent with two children with SEND was supported by a different professional each time. Two participants reported being supported by a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT), one of whom was also supported by a paediatric nurse and an advocate from a charity for her first child. Two parents were guided by a school SENCO and one by an assistant Educational Psychologist (EP). A common view among these interviewees was that the initial experience was positive, but without the support of this key individual, they would not have been able to understand or participate in the process. As one participant put it:

'Why I understand? Because I have someone who was helping me, pointing me and saying me where to go.'

Whilst the role of the SENCO guiding parents was expected to be prominent in the data, the range of professionals who offered support and information on how the EHCP process worked was unexpected. A common factor between these professionals that parents reported was that they offered help and support during a time of stress and uncertainty, acting as a guide. One parent commenting on how a SALT had supported her said:

‘She was lovely, and she helped...at the beginning’.

This could suggest that practitioners such as SALT’s and assistant EP’s are supporting families in understanding the EHCP process beyond the boundaries of their professional roles. Furthermore, when considering this finding in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979), these professionals were able to build the trusting relationships required to ensure better outcomes for these children. To address research questions two and three which seek to understand parental experiences and the support practitioners give, these findings may suggest that ensuring there is one key individual who can guide parents and help them to understand the process could ensure better participation for these families.

These findings correlate with the study by Akbar and Woods (2020, p. 672) which highlights the importance of professional support to ensure positive experiences for ethnic minority families. However, this finding contradicts previous studies that suggest parental experiences of the process are largely negative (Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2022). Whilst most parents felt the support of this key individual helped them to understand the process and successfully navigate it, two participants commented that the professional took over. Although this supported the successful outcome of obtaining an EHCP, it resulted in parents not fully understanding how this happened. One commented:

‘ She just done it and that was ok we still, I think, we didn’t understand completely.’

In contrast to the positive experiences, one participant reported that she had no support for the first EHCP when her son was in a nursery setting and had never seen a draft of the plan. Another participant also reported initial difficulties, as she had not been made aware by nursery staff that her child would need an EHCP to attend a specialist primary setting. This could suggest that support with applying for EHCP’s in early years settings is inconsistent for migrant families and requires further investigation.

### **5.2.2 Perception of professionals during the annual review**

Several issues were raised by parents in relation to the annual review, and most found the experience to be less positive than the process for the initial plan. These findings offer an insight into the debate on power imbalances within partnership working, as three participants identified that professional’s views dominated decision making (Hodge and Runswick-Cole, 2018, p. 540; Hellowell, Smith and Wharton, 2022, p. 152). When discussing giving her views in the meeting, one participant said:

‘So, they were just like trying to maybe change our opinion’.

This parent also felt their presence at the meeting was tokenistic, and commented that:

‘So sometimes we just have a feeling that we are like just a guest during that meeting’.

A similar experience was mentioned by another participant who compared the meeting to an annual ‘ritual’. For this participant, it was only when she attended with a representative from the local SENDIASS service that she felt she could participate, she explained:

‘They become my voice there...there are things I can’t understand or...say so they support me’.

In contrast, two parents felt that their participation in the meeting was facilitated well by the school staff present. One parent praised the class teacher’s input and knowledge of her child, and another commented:

‘...I was listened to for sure’.

### 5.2.3 Perceptions of SEND officers

In all cases, participants reported that their interaction with the local authority after the annual review caused them feelings of stress and powerlessness. SEN officers almost never attended the annual review meeting, and staff turnover was raised as an issue by three participants, as one parent put it:

‘...then you’ve got another person dealing with it and she hasn’t got a clue.’

This perception of the SEN officer lacking credibility was raised by four participants, with two specifically mentioning how they only copy and paste from professional reports with limited understanding of the child. Statutory processes and timescales following the annual review were frequently breached, with four parents reporting that there was no decision letter or updated draft following the review meeting. One parent explained:

‘Every single time when we had an annual review that local authority did not send me a draft and I didn’t know it had to be happened.’

Another parent realised after years of attending annual reviews that she should have been sent a revised plan, she said:

‘I kind of just thought that it’s gonna be done by school. So, I was involved in what to put in there but it was never really put in there’.

Whilst there is limited research on the annual review process, these findings are in line with previous studies exploring the role of the SEN officer that indicate high staff turnover, limited training, and a perceived lack of understanding (Hellowell, 2015; Cullen and Lindsay, 2019; Palikara et al., 2019, p. 90). Furthermore, this data may suggest that the impact of exosystem policy and funding constraints on relationships within the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is most prominent in the relationships between parents and LA SEND officers.

In relation to research questions one and three, these findings demonstrate that the statutory requirement on the LA to send a decision letter four weeks after the annual review meeting must be explicitly explained to parents. This is significant because this data may indicate that although school staff are attempting to ensure parents participate in the annual review process, the parents are unaware that the views expressed in that meeting are not incorporated into an updated EHCP. Furthermore, from a children’s rights perspective, if parents are not receiving a decision letter, they are being denied their right of appeal. A note of caution is due here since this data refers to one local authority area only. However, these findings are evident within the grey literature on this topic, whereby it was found that many LAs are not meeting basic statutory obligations (House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2019, pp. 54-55; ONS,

2021, p. 20). This raises questions as to how these families can enforce their legal rights if they are not made aware of them.

### **5.3 The need for independent advice and support**

The topic of challenging decisions or raising complaints emerged when discussing difficulties with the process. One participant had raised a formal complaint in relation to a delayed draft, and another parent had raised an appeal against a refusal to assess after school staff suggested she wait and reapply for an EHCP later. She felt this delay would cause a negative impact on her child and raised the appeal after attending training offered by the local parent carer forum. The parent carer forum is a local group run by parents of children with SEND which is funded by the Department for Education and the LA. When commenting on the process, she suggested the lack of information on how to appeal would stop many parents from attempting it and stated that:

‘They live in the decision because where are we going to find information?’

This finding correlates with the literature that argues for better information and support for families to understand their rights (Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2022, p. 20). However, whilst Akbar and Woods (2020, p. 674) argue that school staff should carefully explain the process, some parents in this study would be challenging decisions made by the school, calling into question how impartial the advice given by school staff could be. In this study, three parents raised concerns that their children would be excluded from mainstream, with one parent reporting how she felt pressure from school staff to move her child from a mainstream to a specialist setting, and that her concerns were not being listened to. This caused considerable stress, she explained:

‘(I) am not comfortable in sending him to a special school. Yeah, I have paid two visits to the special school and like I am not comfortable. I really feel that my child cannot survive. It’s not going to support him.’

This might indicate that a children’s rights perspective is missing when professionals and parents hold differing views. For example, the right to mainstream education is a fundamental human right under Article 24 of the UNCRPD, reflected in the Children and families act in section 33-35, a right that no one from the LA or school highlighted to this parent during this meeting. As such, whilst school staff could be responsible for explaining the initial steps of the EHCP process when they support the application, they may not be best placed to explain how to challenge decisions and raise an appeal. As another parent put it:

‘we’re trying to get as much as we can for our child, but then the local authority and the school...it’s kind of like on the different side...’

This perception of being on different sides seemed to suggest that parents are aware of the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) policy and funding pressures professionals face, and how this may influence their relationships with parents. Therefore, it could be argued that the conflict created when parents disagree with decisions makes the case for an independent route for information and support for these families. Whilst this independent route does exist in the form of LA funded SENDIASS services and independent charities, the literature suggests these



lack funding and capacity (Council for Disabled Children, 2018, p. 22; Ahad, Thompson and Hall (2022, p. 20)

## **5.4 Language barriers**

When asked about whether accessible information had been provided, half of the participants indicated that they faced language barriers in this area, and all commented on a lack of information causing difficulty with understanding the process. One individual found it difficult to understand the steps in the process, whilst two commented on professional reports and draft EHCP plans being difficult to understand. One participant stated that:

‘...because...of the names of the different language and how the report was described, I think, if I had it in polish that will be better’.

Concerns were also expressed in relation to how parental views were gathered during the process, with one parent discussing an EP assessment which was conducted over the telephone in English which she felt able to do but commented that others may not. The issue of language also emerged in relation to understanding the roles of professionals, with one participant commenting:

‘English is not my first language so I could never understand what is this occupational therapist? What would he do?’

Language barriers have been identified as a significant challenge for minority ethnic parents in previous studies, creating difficulties with participating in the process (Akbar and Woods, 2020; Marku et al., 2022). Importantly, this has been argued to be a contributory factor in a parent’s ability to ensure their child’s access to education, creating a children’s rights and social justice issue (Akbar and Woods, 2020, pp. 671-672). In relation to research question one, these findings suggest that if information is only provided in English, this may not be enough to support the parental participation expected under the statutory guidance (SEND CoP, DfE, 2015).

## **5.5 Parental Empowerment**

Research question two aimed to explore a range of parental experiences and the analysis found areas where parents were empowered to successfully advocate for their children. One key finding was the extent to which other parents were identified as a source of information and support, an important consideration when addressing research question one. The analysis identified two sub-themes, early empowerment and peer empowerment.

### 5.5.1 Early empowerment

During the interviews many parents began to discuss initial diagnosis when asked about the EHCP assessment, combining the two processes as one experience. On reflection, my interview questions may have been too narrow and could have allowed for more discussion on diagnosis, particularly as for many this was the trigger for the initial referral for an EHCP assessment. What was clear was that many parents felt the requirement to navigate the EHCP process at the same time they were attempting to understand the diagnosis was challenging. Parents reported feelings of stress and overwhelm, with one parent commenting that she didn't understand why an application for an EHCP could be refused and why she needed to be so involved in the process:

'I can't get this why we have yes or no and why we have to see the draft, it have to be filled out by professionals without parents to be so much involved'

What is interesting in the data is how some parents empowered themselves to become advocates for their children very early on. Surprisingly, three of the parents had been able to flag to professionals how their child's behaviour matched specific diagnostic criteria or demonstrated the need for an EHCP. One parent had tracked her child's development using the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2021) framework during the covid lockdown when his nursery was closed, and two parents had both identified that their children presented with behaviours consistent with ADHD. In contrast to the literature review, no participants directly mentioned cultural considerations and its influence on how they interpret their child's SEND. These findings highlight that the EHCP process is often experienced as a continuation of the diagnostic process, by which point many parents have already realised the benefits of seeking out their own information and the need to advocate for their children.

### 5.5.2 Peer empowerment

Most parents in this study identified other parents as a significant source of support and advice, whether that was formally via the local parent carer forum, or informally by talking with other parents who have children with SEND. Two areas of support emerged from the data: five participants commented on how other parents had signposted them to support and information services, whilst three outlined how other parents on Facebook groups had provided them with information to support their understanding of the process. One parent reported:

'I had to ask a few times in the parents' group, so actually I got more information I think from the other parents, than the school'.

Only one parent had taken advantage of training offered by the local parent carer forum, suggesting further research into how to make training more accessible for these families is required.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to contribute to the under researched area of how minority ethnic parents who have migrated to the UK experience the EHCP process. A key focus was to understand what support and information are provided to ensure their participation in decision making, and how the policy of partnership working is experienced by these families in practice. Consistent with the literature, this research has identified the impact that power imbalances and unequal access to information have on parents' experiences. The importance of one individual offering guidance during the initial assessment emerged as a key theme, although inconsistencies were evident and the type of professional providing this support varied. This study extends existing knowledge on parental experiences by highlighting the differences between the initial assessment and the annual review, demonstrating a decline in ongoing support and information once the initial EHCP is in place. Consistent with the findings of Hellawell, (2015), Palikara et al., (2019, p. 90) and Cullen and Lindsay, (2019), perceptions of LA SEND officers were poor, pinpointing where policy and funding pressures within the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) have the greatest impact on relationships. The most significant finding pertinent to all three research questions was that limited information and support combined with breaches of statutory processes may mean parents are unable to challenge decisions made about their children's educational provision. Situated within my interest in social justice and children's rights, these findings have challenged my views on how legislation works in practice for minority ethnic families who have migrated to the UK. This study may demonstrate that despite what the legislation demands from practitioners and local authorities, current practice may not always reflect these obligations. This leaves many families unable to enforce their rights and entitlements, impacting on their child's access to education. More positively, it was found that parents are empowered by finding other formal and informal networks of support and information, often via other parents.

A number of limitations need to be noted regarding the present study. Firstly, it is possible that the results in this study are impacted by the selection of a small number of parents from one local authority area, none of whom required translation to participate. Any future study should select a broader range of participants and offer translation for those who require it. Secondly, this study is unable to encompass the entire range of possible SEND and the focus on children with 'hidden disabilities' such as autism and ADHD may produce findings that are not generalisable to other areas of SEND. Finally, although the study has successfully demonstrated areas where parents felt supported, the study could be improved by including a range of professionals in the participant group. This would enable a better understanding of the approaches used by professionals when working with these families.

Based on the findings and discussion within this study I propose two recommendations for future policy and practice. Firstly, the allocation of a key individual to guide parents would be beneficial in supporting parents' understanding and participation during the EHCP process. However, mesosystem relationships with school and LA staff can be influenced by policy and funding decisions within the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), particularly when parents are challenging decisions. Therefore, an argument emerges for this support to be independent of the school or local authority. Within this study parents identified both local parent carer forums and SENDIASS services as helpful sources of support, suggesting a role could be funded by local authorities in either of these organisations with the specific remit of working with minority ethnic families who have migrated to the UK. Secondly, this study has corroborated

previous research that identified language barriers as a significant factor in parental participation. Therefore, an assessment of language requirements should be made early in the process to ensure documentation produced by the LA can be translated. Of particular importance will be the decision letters sent out at various points during the EHCP process and the final EHCP. Whilst this recommendation presents a funding implication for local authorities, without translated materials it is questionable how LAs are meeting their legal obligation to ensure all parents can fully participate in decisions made about their children.

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# **SUPPORTING BILINGUALISM IN EARLY YEARS: PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF RAISING A CHILD BILINGUALLY**

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Independent Research Project – ED6088

BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies

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## **Abstract**

The study identifies the parents' experiences of raising 18 months–3-year-old child children bilingually and explore how different aspects of home lives and the setting can be brought together to work supportively to develop bilingualism. Literature showed it is under researched and there is more literature on the support in primary than in early years. This study finds answers to the following research questions: what concerns are commonly encountered by parents' raising bilingual children in the early years? How early years setting can contribute to an environment that is conducive to the development of strong and balanced bilingualism in children? What are the ways the early years professionals can work with parents to support their efforts to raise bilingual children? Data was collected using semi-structured interview with 5 parents which was conducted face to face and online.

Participants responses were limited but developing understanding of the conditions that are necessary for effective bilingual development. The findings shows that parents highlighting positive experiences in raising a child bilingually like future job opportunities and understanding their cultural heritage. However, parents also expressed negative perspective like confusion of children mixing languages causing language delays. These responses informed my recommendation that more support is required in early years and further research needs to be done but there are very promising aspects of the parents supporting their children to maintain the languages that they speak which a solid foundation on which the setting can build on.

### **Key words**

**Bilingual, Parents experiences, Early years, Conducive bilingual environment.**

# Introduction

In the UK, the population of bilingual people increased as it has become increasingly diverse, and a great part of the world speaks more than one language (Conteh, 2015). The aim of this research project is to explore the parents' experiences of raising children bilingually in early years and identifying the support early years setting can provide to assist parents. This was achieved by gaining the experiences of parents in a nursery in the London borough, where there are bilingual speakers.

I would like to do this research because I have a personal motivation and I struggled learning multiple languages in different countries. Being a bilingual allows people to switch between different languages in their everyday interaction with others (Ceurstemont, 2021) and this can have a positive influence to develop skills like problem solving, multitasking, and listening skills.

Lee *et al.*, (2015) argues that bilingualism potentially cause language confusion for children. This indicates the separate ways of processing language information may impact the confusion of verbal communication and thinking (Translations, 2017). However, Heinlein and Williams (2013) explain that scientific studies shows that bilingual children have increased focus and can make decisions. This indicates that the research in this field is limited, and it needs greater attention.

The study will be critiquing early years framework and the extent that it provides the children's whose parents are wishing to promote bilingualism and multilingualism. A gap in the literature highlighted the lack of literature on the topic of parent's school partnerships about the ways that parents and early years work together to support bilingualism. There are lot of literature about parents and teachers working together like homework to develop literacy and numeracy. However, there is not a great deal about language development.

There are many definitions and researchers who has attempted to define bilingualism; however, first definition of bilingualism was introduced by Bloomfield (1993, in Akgul *et al.*, 2017) who defines bilinguals as being able to speak and understand two languages at native like levels. Similarly, Grosjean (2012, in Baker and Wright, 2017) proposes that bilinguals should be able to regularly use languages than be fluent in them.

This research used an interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative data collecting method. I have chosen to use an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative method because interpretivist paradigm focuses on words and multiple explanations of an issue (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). This will gain a deeper understanding of the participants experiences of raising a child bilingually and look at different perspectives of individuals (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019).

The potential users are bilingual parents from an early year setting in the London borough. The five parents that participated spoke a different first language and were interviewed at the setting using a semi structured interview method.

This research is beneficial for parents raising a child bilingually to ensure there is the right support from early years. The setting will benefit from this research to understand what training are required for practitioners. The practitioners may benefit by building partnership with parents to support bilingual children with their home language and English. Moreover, the government may reconsider the policies when understanding the experiences of parents raising a bilingual child and ensure that children's home languages are encouraged as much as possible.

To ensure that the research is objective and to avoid bias, the research is reliable and gathered through the participants and primary research.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What concerns are commonly encountered by parents' raising bilingual children in the early years?
2. How early years setting can contribute to an environment that is conducive to the development of strong and balanced bilingualism in children?
3. What are the ways the early years professionals can work with parents to support their efforts to raise bilingual children?

# Literature review

## Introduction

This chapter will review the literature relevant to bilingualism and education in early years. This chapter will mainly reflect on these questions: What concerns are commonly encountered by parents' raising bilingual children in the early years? How early years setting can contribute to an environment that is conducive to the development of strong and balanced bilingualism in children? What are the ways the early years professionals can work with parents to support their efforts to raise bilingual children?

To answer these questions, I will briefly define bilingualism. Next, explore the positive and negative experiences encountered by parents raising a bilingual child. An insight of what a conducive bilingual learning environment looks like. Lastly, a critique of the early year's framework. This research will demonstrate the importance of home languages in early years setting in ways that it ensures that children do not lose their mother tongue. This study will consider the kinds of relationships that are appropriate for early years practitioners to have with parents in ways that it can encourage the maintenance of first languages.

## Defining bilingualism

The definition of being a bilingual as highlighted by Lee *et al.*, (2015) is when children are exposed to more than one language. A bilingual speaker who can communicate with some proficiency in two languages. There are different definitions of bilingualism, for example, active and passive bilingualism. Active bilingual is a person who speak and uses both languages, whereas a passive bilingual is a person who can speak in one and only understand the other (Vera, 2011, cited in Lee *et al.*, 2015). However, some bilinguals are not proficient in both language and may clearly speak the dominant language (Gottardo and Grant, 2008). In the next paragraph, there is a discussion regarding parent's experiences of raising a bilingual child and negative perspectives of bilingualism.

## Parents experiences

A lot of parents experienced raising a bilingual child in early years through a positive attitude and allowing children to create a positive perception of their home language. It is noticeable that there is a gap in parents and early years partnership to support and develop bilingualism. Although, parents highlight that early years are the golden ages for learning as children learn faster which causes no difficulties in learning two languages (Pratama and Artini, 2017). There are also discussions from parents that believes that children growing up with two languages may result the child to learn a dominant language and leaving the other language in risk of not being spoken (Houwer, 2007). However, Mayer and Wells (1996) argued that L1 can be positively transferred into L2.

Linguistic interdependence was published in 1978 by Cummins who highlighted that L1 can have a positive influence on the development of L2. Cummins (2021) mentioned that bilinguals learn two different languages, however, they share similar process of learning them. King and Fogle (2006) agrees as research show that children can switch between the two languages and this method is called ‘code switching’. Code switching is being able to use elements from L1 and L2 in the same conversation to express themselves (Akgul *et al.*, 2017). Although, there is a strength of code switching, parents highlight disadvantages of mixing languages in a single sentence as it can have an impact on the learning of the languages (Akgul *et al.*, 2017), for example, leading to language delay and confusions for young children.

Muller *et al.*, (2020) indicates that the importance of balanced bilingualism on the children’s wellbeing. A balanced bilingual is a person who has equal proficiency in home language and English (Yow and Li, 2015). This supports the children to strengthen their cognitive abilities which allows them to be more creative with their solving skills. King and Fogle (2006) emphasised that parents feel the benefits of bringing their children up bilingually as it develops their cognitive skills. On the other hand, parents highlight the lack of support from the community for bilingual development and inter-cultural skills (Pratama and Artini, 2017).

### **Negative perspectives of bilingualism**

There are many negative perspectives of bilingualism which reports that bilingualism leads children to mixing the home language and English which can cause delays in lexical acquisition (Marian *et al.*, 2009). Baker and Wright (2021) highlight that early research on bilingualism and cognition highlight negative viewpoints and research in 1960s gave bilinguals and monolinguals intelligence quotient (IQ) test. Saer (1923, in Baker and Wright, 2021), early research concluded that bilinguals are confused and are at a disadvantage. This is because bilinguals are less likely to speak in their home languages and in English, whereas monolinguals are exposed to word through several languages. However, Peal and Lambert (1962, in Baker and Wright, 2021) research emphasised that bilingualism could lead to cognitive advantages over monolingualism. The IQ measured that there were no differences between the bilingual and monolingual groups and pointed the advantages of being a bilingual, for example, flexibility, thinking skills and bicultural environment benefits. Bialystok *et al.*, (2008, in Baker and Wright, 2021) discusses the age effect of bilingualism as it is measured by cognitive and behavioural tasks. However, other studies found that other cognitive tasks measure with verbal stimuli are disadvantaged for bilinguals (Baker and Wright, 2021).

### **Conducive learning environment**

Conducive learning environment is referred to an environment where children can easily learn and share ideas to meet their learning needs. Ping *et al.*, (2003) highlights that conducive environment is task oriented and the children have expected goals and understand how to meet them. Practitioners are encouraged to ensure that children’s first language are used in the setting and at home. Ali *et al.*, (2020) recognised the importance of having an interactive classroom environment as bilingual children acquire a language through the different experiences in their environment (Darmawati,



2022). This is to ensure that all children can interact with other children to develop their language skills within the classroom (Toohey, 2001, in Clarke, 2000).

## **Conducive bilingual environment**

### **Dual language books**

Bilingual learning environment at home shares languages through songs and stories. Dual language books have been highlighted to be an effective resource to support language development at home. Wagley *et al.*, (2022) highlights the significance of reading for bilingual children for their language proficiency and to recognise word identifications through phonological awareness. Dual language books can support the child to get exposed to new vocabulary which can help the child to develop linguistic interdependence. However, children who come from a low-income family, they may have lack of access as they struggle to maintain on minimum wages (Cummins, 1989). This may lead to slower language development in L1 and L2.

In an early year setting, a bilingual conducive environment can be created through a language rich environment through displays, key words, songs, and dual language books. They recognise the significance of reading books to understand the emphasis on the social and psychological value of bilingualism (Lucas and Villegas, 2011, in Lucas, 2011). Gibbons (2015) explains that the reading can help children to excise from any meaningful context with a challenge that includes high levels of thinking and literacy development. Vygotsky's (1978, in Gibbons, 2015) zone of proximal development argued that children only learn when they are supported as that is when learning takes place. This theoretical framework can be used by the setting to identify and support what the child can do with and without guidance. Dual language books are an important part in the development of the interdependence hypostasis because they can mobilise both elements of their linguistic repertoire.

### **Other resources**

The early years statutory framework (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) states that children learn by leading their own play and guided play by adults. The resources that are highlighted to help support the communication in bilingual children are: flashcards, dolls, legos and building blocks. These types of items are used to engage bilingual children with their communication to talk about what they are doing. At home, parents can engage in learning to talk that can support the development of L1. Irene (1973) highlights that different educational materials that can be used at home can mirror what the child learns in the setting that supports them to hear language repeated to them within the same play.

Creating a bilingual environment with the resources at the setting, parents and practitioners may communicate with each other to understand what is being done at home to ensure that the setting is mirroring the language forms to develop the child's L1 and L2. Practitioners may work in partnership to learn a little bit of the languages of the children that they are working with to code switch and support in the nursery setting.

## **Home language forms**

Home languages can have a positive influence on another language. DfE (2021) stated that setting must provide opportunities for children to use their home language in their learning. Home language forms are used in early years setting to support the practitioners to help children speak in their first language. Practitioners can use those forms to get an understanding of what word the child understand and signs in their first language. Although, there is no literature that recognised the home language forms. Home language forms can be used to help practitioners to understand the child's communication and literacy skills and identify if there are any concerns for language delay.

The setting may use written communication to acknowledge that parents themselves are bilingual or multilingual so therefore they might be better able to understand what is expected of them if those communication were made available in more than one language other than English. Satchwell (no date) emphasised that communication is the centre of language development. However, a limitation to this approach is that some parents may ask for English, even if they are better with their own languages. Practitioners needs to acknowledge this challenge and communicate and keep channels of communication open with parents constantly.

## **Bilingual displays**

Bilingual displays are major when supporting bilingual children in the nursery. Visual cues are supportive as it provides children with different forms of explanations of where children can form meanings with reference. When children see bilingual displays, they will start to understand and recognise this is a space where all aspects of my culture are welcomed. Displays that include the wider range of children's linguistic repertoire are very supporting with bilingual children.

Shabiralyani *et al.*, (2015) explains that visual aids help it easier for children to understand, for example, visuals can be used through whiteboards, flashcards, pictures and more. Using clear peg pictures with children's names in their home language and in English which can be taught to children to create a bilingual or multilingual learning environment. This will accommodate all the languages of the children, although it is not stated in the national curriculum, it is showing and teaching the children the letters and word they can read in their own language other than English.

## **Critique of Early Years framework stage**

EYFS is a statutory framework which provides a guidance for early years settings that sets standards for learning and development of children aged between 0-5 years old. The EYFS is important because it helps children get ready for school and develop each area of their early learning goals (ELG). The purpose of this chapter is to critique from a language perspective and why this framework does not go far enough to support bilingual children.

In the EYFS (DfE, 2021), communication and language are a part of the ELG's. The framework highlights that developing language and extending children's vocabulary plays a vital role in helping them understand and communicate their needs and wants. For children that do not speak English as their home language, the EYFS (DfE, 2021) states early years setting must provide opportunities for those children to develop their home languages in their play and learning. It is clear, therefore, that home languages are encouraged for children to use within the classroom. I agree with the approach of home language being encouraged in classroom because it allows children to learn and connect with their culture and learn to learn a different language other than English. EYFS (DfE, 2021) mentions when assessing a child's language skills, practitioners should assess the English skills. This implies that setting is assessing bilingual children based on their English skills first even if they do not understand the English language. That is an interesting point, however, a bilingual child who speaks a different language as their first language will not be able to give an accurate assessment of their abilities and development. As Cummins (2021) explained L1 and L2 are interdependent which suggests that increase cognitive ability in one language can have a positive influence on the other languages. This would suggest that practitioners need to assess children's language ability in their L1 first to understand their abilities before assessing them in English as they are more proficient in that language. A practical challenge in assessing a bilingual child's language is finding someone who speaks those language to assess the children's communication abilities. However, it is difficult for early years setting to recruit staff that are fluent in all those languages.

### **Gap in research**

Taking all the literature into account this is how I would conceptualise an ideal partnership between of bilingual parent and early years nursery settings or practitioners. Epstein (2011, in Bergroth and Palviainen, 2016) highlights partnership as a model of overlapping family which suggest that the family, school and the community share responsibility of supporting the bilingual child at the centre. Early childhood education and care partnership are positively viewed because this allows parents, school, and the community to work together to share information and observe the child's interests. Although, parent partnership is important, it is highlighted that parents are already under pressure with their daily lives which leads to parents failing to provide time for the school to work together to support the child.

# Methodology

## Research paradigm

This chapter of the research project provides a rationale of the chosen methods and design used in the project. The paradigm used for this research is an interpretivist paradigm as qualitative data was gathered through semi structured interviews. Interpretivist paradigm looks at the understanding of an individual and their understanding of the world around them (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). As mentioned by Clark, Foster and Bryman (2019) qualitative research is led by wider aims of interpretivism which includes looking and understanding the perspectives and experiences of individuals. This is a strength because various explanations will focus on the quality of the individuals' feelings and opinions and for this reason the use of interpretivist paradigm is more suitable.

Positionality affects the research process entirely (Holmes, 2020). Reflecting on my positionality is important because it has helped me shape the methodology and interpret the findings. My positionality has changed throughout the research process because I was able to identify my characteristics and my life experiences of the topic of the research. My positionality might affect the research because positionality comes from my experiences and perspectives of being raised bilingually which might have an insight on the research. This can have an influence about the resources that are used and what is considered as 'good' source and how I present the data (UCLA, 2021). I have made sure throughout the research process that the research is objective and neutral and identifies where the biases are in the research. I was mindful about my positionality and did not make any assumptions about the participants' experiences to ensure the research is inclusive.

## Approach/methodology

This research approach was based on a case study. Case study is in-depth research of a complex issue (Thomas, 2017). Case study is aimed to gain an in-depth view on a small-scale project to understand the issues in real life context. This approach was applied through the semi structured interviews to explore the range of experiences of participants (Salmon, 2017). A limitation of this approach is that it is hard to find a case study, for example, gaining permission (Denscombe, 2014). This implies that participants may struggle to give permission due to confidentiality. However, a strength of this approach as highlighted by Adelman *et al.*, (1980, in Cohen *et al.*, 2017) is it will focus on the experiences which may provide rich data sources. Therefore, the use of case study method is beneficial as there will be in depth qualitative responses.

## Participant sampling

The participants were selected through a non-probability sampling technique and a convenience sampling. Non-probability means selecting part of the population through a non-random method. Bryman (2016) highlighted that convenience sampling is what is available to the researcher, for example, I recruited the participants that were available to me. The early years setting was selected because it is where I worked and through consent, I was able to use the setting to gain participants. This was an advantage because I was able to get quicker responses as they were easily accessible. There was a face-to-face meeting with the manager and exchanges of emails explaining the purpose of the study and they agreed to this study. The information and consent form were sent to the manager to be sent through emails to participants.

A limitation was that there was a low response rate from the emails. This could be due to lack of knowledge of technology (Denscombe, 2010). Therefore, I printed the information and consent forms which was useful because the participant was more approachable. Altogether seven participants accepted to take part, one participant changed due to busy schedule and one participant did not respond. I was able to interview 5 participants. I was confident with the response that I have received from the participants on their experiences.

## Data collection method

I will be using semi structured interviews to collect my data from my participants. Semi structured interviews will give me the opportunity to better understand and to have an in-depth information from the participants experiences (*Research Methods Guide: Interview Research*, 2018). The interview consisted of questions to answer my research questions, the platform that I will be using to create the interview on is word document. All participants received an information letter and consent forms to fill out before the interview.

I will be doing face to face and online interviews. The face-to-face interviews will be conducted in a small office that I have gained permission from the manager. This is beneficial because they will be no disruptions. Through semi structured interview, I will be able to adapt the questioning to suit the needs of the participants, such as their level of understanding (Fielding and Thomas, 2008 in Mukherji & Albon, 2018). I considered doing questionnaire; however, I have chosen to do face to face interview because my participants are bilingual, and they might struggle to understand the question through a questionnaire or survey and may need extra clarification to fully understand what the questions are asking to ensure that quality data is being collected.

A challenge of face-to-face interviews was finding time to do interviews. It can be time consuming for parents to do an open-ended interview who have a busy work schedule. However, I was able to give participants the option to do face to face or online interview through University of East London (UEL) Teams meeting. This gave parents flexibility to attend in their convenient time. Other limitations of the interview process were the participant that respond with minimal answers despite my encouragement. This may influence the research as Bell (2010) emphasised that interviewers are humans, and their manners can influence respondents through personal bias. To ensure that the research was objective and to avoid personal biases, I acknowledged and was mindful when analysing the data.

A strength of semi structured interview was being able to refine questions that I was asking. This was useful because it allowed me to elaborate on questions that required more detail and get an in-depth explanation of the experiences (Denscombe, 2010). However, there was a bilingual parent who did not understand questions which I had to rephrase or repeat and give example. This was challenging due to the language barrier. I ensured to stay calm and relax and not put pressure to answer every question. A benefit of interviewing through UEL team's meetings as highlighted by Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) is that hearing transcripts can help develop familiarity with data. I was getting familiar with the data as I was rechecking the transcripts.

### Data analysis

I will be using a thematic analysis to analyse my data. Thematic data is looking for themes to code on analysis (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). This will help the researcher look for repeated patterns through identifying and analysing data. Thematic analysis is suitable method to analyse interview data because the research uses an interpretivist paradigm that focuses on words and meaning through an in depth understanding of the topic (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). I will use the different steps to fully understand and code the themes into sections, so it is easier to identify and develop a deeper understanding of each individual codes to adjust and revise.

It is important to be aware that the interview questions may fall into themes. For this reason, the interview questions for the research are open ended to ensure that the interviews and conversation can be elaborated on from the semi structured interview questions to highlight key points for the research questions.

### Reliability and validity

Reliability refers to how much a method is measured, like the consistency of a measure. Punch (2009: 244) highlights that reliability relates to consistency to identify if the method is reliable to measure. I will ensure that the interview questions are clear for the participants. I did this through piloting my interview questions on a parent who volunteered to support my research process. This helped me to understand if the questions are clear and concise while identifying problems that need to be changed. Piloting has supported my practise as a researcher. The amendments that I made with the interview questions were that during the interviews, I skipped a few questions that were repetitive. This has allowed me to measure the questions and ensure that they are valid for the interview and that the questions are focusing on the information that is intended to measure (Cleave, 2021).

# Ethical considerations

Ethics guides the researcher to make ethical decisions through positive decisions and actions. It is important to undergo ethical considerations to protect the participants and researchers' wellbeing during the life of the project and minimize any potential risks. Farrel (2005) highlighted that ethics is a crucial of every part of the project. Ethical consideration sets principles to make sure that all participants are informed of the research and have volunteered to participate (Bhandari, 2021). Ethical clearance was granted from the University to make sure all ethical considerations were followed.

The three main ethical considerations are: informed consent, confidentiality, and research bias. These are meaningful because it protects the privacy of the participants and maintain ethical standards (Baez, 2002 in Kaiser, 2009). Informed consent is a procedure where participants give their consent to all the information about the research project. Clark, Foster, and Bryman (2019) highlighted that informed consent involves method of research, benefits, and potential risks during the research. Informed consent was gained, and participants were informed that participation is voluntary.

Gatekeepers in research is someone who grants permission for the research (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). I gained consent through my gatekeeper, who is the manager, by a face-to-face meeting to discuss my research and requested permission to access participants. When access was granted, I printed information letter with consent form which included the details of the research. I spoke to the participants face to face and informed them about withdraw of research (BERA, 2011). The consent forms requested the permission to audio record the interviews. The participants that agreed to take part in the research, signed, dated, and returned the consent form to the office as requested.

Confidentiality involves maintaining the anonymity of the participants and keeping their data stored safely (Thomas, 2017). Clark, Foster and Bryman (2019) describe anonymity as protecting the participants identity and any information that may identify them, for example, a place, name, organization etc. Participants were made aware of their rights through the research. This built a sense of trust for the participant. As discussed by Thomas (2017) having responsibility of keeping the data about people secure. This was guaranteed by anonymising the participants with the use of pseudonyms as 'P1', 'P2' and so on. Some identifiers were used such as, the language spoken by participants. However, I ensured to not gender the child or mention any age to protect their anonymity.

A potential risk in my research may be audio recording not stored in a secure place as it was recorded on a mobile device as it is a sensitive topic of research. This is a risk of harm as it is a breach of privacy (No author, 2015). However, I ensured that all data gathered were not shared with anyone and stored for data analysis purposes by ensuring that the audio recording are safely stored in password protected files that I only have access to and has restricting access to data from others.

A benefit of the research may be identifying the potential gap to put in the right support for those bilingual children. This will benefit the setting and the governments that re do policies while working in partnership with settings that has bilingual children so that effective policies and procedures are out into place to improve the practices.

Power relation refers to the power researcher has over the participants of the information of research. This could be problematic due to collaborative nature between the researcher and participants (McDonald, 2021). Power relation were minimised as all participants were valued, respected and comfortable during the interview process. I ensured to have a positive and warm attitude towards the participants during the research project to ensure that participants can trust the research project and maintain a good flow of conversation with the participants.

Research bias may cause the research to result to bias conclusions. Simundic (2013) mentioned, bias may potentially mislead the research results and conducting research with bias is unethical. My personal bias and positionality could influence the research as I come from a bilingual background with different experiences. I ensured my personal views were not in the way and the questions were not leading by getting approval from my supervisor and the interview process was audio recorded.



# Findings and discussion

## Introduction

This chapter will focus on the data that is collected from the semi structured interview with literature and relevant quotes from the data. There are two sections, these are: parents experiences and concerns and conducive bilingual environment at home and at nursery which will focus on answering the main aim of the study. Each research question will be answered through the themes that has been identified through a thematic analysis method. As Braun and Clark (2006, in Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019) highlighted thematic analysis is used to analyse qualitative data and helps researcher to identify, code and review themes with patterns of the data.

By way of reminder, 5 parents were interviewed through a face to face and online semi structured interview process through a list of interview questions. The interview questions focused on addressing the parent's experiences of raising a child bilingually and what a conducive bilingual environment looked like at home and at nursery to support bilingual children. The interview process lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed and coded in thematic analysis.

## Parents positive experiences

This section will engage with the 1<sup>st</sup> research questions that explores parent's experiences of raising bilingual child in the early years. One of the participants that was interviewed was raising their child multilingually and this meant that the child was learning two or more languages at the same time. Baker and Wright (2021) explained that bilingualism means that you speak two languages, likewise multilingualism means that you speak two or more languages. When discussing what it is meant by parents raising a bilingual child, it implies that parents are raising bilingual or multilingual children by inputting L1 and L2 during the period of communication from birth (Kohnert, 2010). However, the approaches used by parents raising a bilingual child varied, for example, both parents mixing L1, 2 and 3 by making links with each language (P2) and both parents code switching between L1 and L2 (P3). P2 stated:

*"I think how it would help develop is making links between one language to another and could develop a language to one another."*

Whereas P3 emphasised on code switching between the two languages:

*"It's switching, you have the ability to switch at the moment because like I say, it's not speaking French as is speaking English, but it has the ability to switch his understanding."*

The data suggests that making links to all the different languages can help multilingual and bilingual children to make connections to enhance the brain development into learning to develop each language. Little (2019) approves that using different languages together and code switching creates a multilingual and inclusive learning environment in classrooms. However, based on the findings of similar studies, Gasior (2022) explanation, highlights that code switching for young children can be indicative of language loss. While previous research has focused on code switching with L1 and L2 that can lead to possible language delay, the results demonstrate that it can help children to make connections in classrooms by expressing themselves in all languages and developing their communication and language skills.

A recurring theme is parents positive experiences of raising a child bilingually and this included the parents past experiences and the impact of raising a bilingual child for their future. Three out of five participants highlighted positive impacts of raising a bilingual child. A quote from the data is as follows from P2:

*“Extra additional 2 languages is going to help him succeed in life”*

This was supported by P3 who highlighted that:

*“Children’s learning more than one language she has the memory is great.”*

The data suggest that raising bilingual children in early years can support children to get better future job opportunities as it is considered as high priority skill to know different languages. This correlates with the study by Bright and Filippi (2019), that highlights being multilingual, and bilingual speakers can help children to communicate with different people and have more job opportunities around the world. This shows the recognition of the importance of raising bilingual and multilingual children to understand their cultural heritage as P4 commented:

*“Able to understand into 2 languages with grandparents and knowing her community.”*

P5 also emphasised that being bilingual can help children have:

*“Inclusivity with regards to family, allowing her to identify with her culture.”*

And they carried on saying:

*“To be able to identify with where you come from and to have that sense of identity when you go back to the country that your ancestors are from.”*

### **Negative perspectives of bilingualism**

To answer the 1<sup>st</sup> research question, there was an analysis of parents negative perspectives of bilingualism. Although, parents highlight that they are very proud to be raising their children bilingually, however, P1 stressed that they do not want their children to ‘learn to read and write in Portuguese’ because they think that it will confuse the child and mix the languages. Three out of five participants all highlighted concerns in raising their child bilingually as it is difficult and mixing L1 and L2 will confuse the child. However, based on the study by Peal and Lambert (1962, in Baker and Wright, 2021) it emphasised that bilingualism could lead to cognitive advantages and the IQ measured there were no differences between the bilingual and monolingual groups. My research shows the parents negative attitude of raising bilingual child as P1 states:

*“I don't like my child to read Portuguese because I think that is going to mix them.”*

This was supported by P2 who stressed about the difficulties of raising monolingual child:

*“So that difficult be trying to teach get the three languages spoken in the household.”*

Other participants stated their fear of children having a speech delay, as P4 comment that using L1 and L2 may result in ‘small speech delay.’ There was no literature that supports this (King and Fogle, 2006). The results contradict the claims of Bialystok *et al.*, (2012) who explains the significance of bilingual children having the ability to solve linguistic problems on understanding, for example, differences between form and meaning. This suggests that bilingualism strengthens children’s ability to use their higher-level of cognitive skills that helps children to solve problems.

Lack of knowledge of supporting bilingualism in early years was another factor that parents highlighted as a concern. P2 mentioned that there is a lack of knowledge from practitioners on ‘different cultures and languages in early years.’ The results indicate that practitioners have lack of support for the children who speaks no English. However, based on Heinlein and Williams (2013) study, it emphasised that teachers play an important role in supporting early bilingualism and practitioners have a clear guide and training to support the L1 and L2 development of meeting children’s individual needs and developments (DfE, 2021). Yet, P2 argues on the lack of support for bilingual children to develop their language skills. A quote from the data (P2) are as follows:

*“She’s physically being taught at school to say that I am from Turkey but in their teaching him the wrong thing about her own identity.”*

*“There is not enough support 100% especially now working with EAL (English as an additional language) are not supported by the national curriculum it does not promote inclusion.”*

There are some aspects of negative perspective of bilingualism, however, this relates to a period of detrimental effects of bilingualism (Baker and Wright, 2017), this could imply the participants lack understanding and knowledge on how to support bilingual children resulting in creating myths about bilingualism.

### **Conducive bilingual environment in the early years setting.**

To answer the 2nd research question, there was an analysis of the parents expectations of what a conducive bilingual environment should look like in early years setting for a bilingual child. A conducive environment is created by testing ideas of methods of teaching to identify the efficiency of learning and how children can become active participators in the teaching learning process of L1 and L2 as a second language in children (Nyoni and Mufanechiya, 2013). It was unexpected that many parents did not recognise other aspects of the environment that could make it more welcoming to children. However, three out of five participants identified that the use of flash cards in L1 and L2 has been found to be effective in supporting children’s language development in both languages. This correlates with the study by Wulandari and Musfiroh (2020) which highlighted the benefits of flashcards to get children’s attention by using extract pictures and allow children to get familiar with few and many concepts. Parents identified that the early years setting use flashcards in L1 and L2 that encourages children to learn new words. A quote from the data (P2) is as follows:

*“Flash cards in the language saying hello and goodbye.”*

This was supported by P3 who recognised that a conducive bilingual environment should use visual stimuli to help contextualise activities. P3 commented:

*“So, everything that needed to be done with her, you need to be practical in a way like as you’re saying it, you’re showing her.”*

The data show that all participants agree with the advantages of visually teaching languages using pictures and actions followed by it. This links to Conteh and Brock (2010) who emphasised using resources with visual stimuli can gain children's curiosity and enthusiasm.

P2 explained she is 'frustrated' about the false identity that the setting has given her child and practitioners lack of knowledge on different cultures and backgrounds. A quote from the data (P2) is as follows:

*"I'm a bit annoyed with her school because they know she is from Cyprus, but they told her she is from Turkey."*

However, Birth to 5 matters (2021, p.44) contradicts this result as it highlights the importance of encouraging home languages in early years settings to strengthen and support children's language proficiency in new environments. This has only been mentioned by one participant out of five, this result would not be generalised as a significant factor as one individual just mentioned it.

### **Conducive bilingual environment at home**

To answer the 2nd research question, there was an analysis of parents reflection of what a conducive bilingual environment look like at home to support raising a bilingual child. Dolean (2022) study highlights that with support from home, children can quickly develop their language and literacy skills. Five out of five participants highlighted that flash cards are an effective method for children who are not speaking. Based on the findings of a study by Tirtayani *et al.*, (2017) which discussed the use of flashcards are a helpful tool for improving children's vocabulary. P1 particularly emphasised that the flashcards used at home include both L1 and L2 to support help children learn new words in different languages. A quote from the data (P1) is as follows:

*"Its pictures and English at the bottom and at the back it is only the (Portuguese) words."*

The data contributes a clear understanding of the linguistic interdependence theory by Cummins (1979) which argued that children's L1 knowledge can have a positive influence on the learning L2 acquisitions. Additionally, Cummins (1993, cited in Oliver and Purdie, 1998) suggests that families attitude towards the new language can influence the success in that language. P2 highlighted the positive impacts of one-to-one support for development and encouragement of L1. A quote from the data (P2) is as follows:

*"I did a lot of one to one like games we did a lot of creative stuff I got a lot of pictures, and they really supported her."*

This was supported by P5 who explained the activities that are done at home:

*“A lot of like role play stuff with her. And, you know, when we're reading books, we all have books where it's just kind of like objects on the page.”*

They go on to say that:

*“You kind of have to create a narrative around that and see, we just try and speak. Talk to her as much as possible, just to kind of just develop her language.”*

This correlates to the literature reviewed that states that children learn one language at one and effective interactions with children can support the linguistic knowledge and children can use this knowledge to communicate effectively in L1 and L2 (Pena, 2016). Three out of five participants agree on creating a fun and creative learning environment to fully engage the children with their L1 and L2 at home. P2 stated:

*“If I put in something on YouTube on, I will do it with in a song instead of being like sat down and write it out etc make it fun.”*

This was emphasised by P4, who commented:

*“Something like a puzzle or reading a book or even playing with the toys.”*

And P5 supported this by highlighting the positive influence of visual representations and communication as an important factor in supporting bilingual children to learn L1 and L2 at home:

*“We do a lot of flash cards, we read a lot. He watches shows, education shows, children's shows. We do role play stuff with her.”*

This correlates with the literature that emphasised on the significance of role play to motivate children to start a conversation (Aldhanhani, 2020) which allows children to practice their L1 and L2 and build their confidence. This is beneficial in developing L1 and L2 as they use their imagination and use the linguistic knowledge to communicate as well as develop new words.

### **Reviewing early years framework**

To answer the 3rd research question, there was a review of the early years framework to identify the support that is available from a language perspective in helping to raise bilingual children. Early years foundation stage (EYFS) is a statutory framework that is used as a guidance by early years settings to ensure that all children are learning and developing to have the knowledge to be ready for school. From a language perspective, even though, communication and language are recognised as a prime ELG's in the EYFS (DfE, 2021), there is insufficient support for bilingual children in early years. For children whose first language is not English, practitioners are required to assess the child's communication and language skill in English. This indicates that the EYFS have a lack of value for children's L1. P3 participant expresses that English is 'used internationally.' This correlates to the literature by Mertuk (2008) who discussed that young children whose first language is not English are often overlooked in school settings due to the assumptions that English can be usually picked up. As a result, there is an absence of guidance for early years practitioners to support bilingual children in the setting as assessments are done in English and children are not supported with their home language.

In the EYFS, there is a lack of emphasis on the importance of home languages. Based on the EYFS, there is one line of the framework which highlights that providers should set opportunities and use home language in children's play and learning (DfE, 2021, p.16). However, there is no further discussion or guidance in the EYFS on how early years practitioners can adopt an effective strategy to cater to the different language needs. This proves that bilingualism is less important in early years. This links to the gap in literature on how parents and early years practitioners can work in partnership to raise a bilingual child as bilingualism is not recognised to be significantly important by the EYFS. P2 commented on the insufficient support for children who have English as an additional language (EAL) from the national curriculum, as:

*"There is not enough support 100%."*

They carried onto say:

*"EAL are not supported by the national curriculum so you gotta learn in a mainstream setting and that's that."*

The results indicate that there is no specific curriculum to support those children whose first language is not English, and this is not an inclusive practice in early years. Therefore, the results challenge the EYFS on the needs of support for bilingual children. These results should be taken into account when considering how to provide effective support for bilingual children to develop their L1 in the setting and use the knowledge to support the development of L2 as L1 can help the learning process to be faster for L2.

It is highlighted in the EYFS that RBA is a short assessment that children undergo six weeks into reception (DfE, 2021). It discusses that assessments are designed to be inclusive to all pupils including EAL children. However, the assessments are not a fair assessment as children did not receive the support to develop their L1 and L2 in early years. This is due to the lack of recognition on the importance of home languages (L1) to support the development of English (L2) by the EYFS and the national curriculum designed by the government. Therefore, schools are likely to identify bilingual children to have a language delay due to the child's language skills in English (L2). Although, in the EYFS (DfE, 2021) it mentions that home languages should not be discouraged in the settings, however, assessments are getting done in English. This implications of being assessed in English (L2) means that children are missing out on the opportunities to enhance their L1 properly to develop L2 and practitioners have a lack of knowledge on how to support parents raising bilingual children due to inadequate guidance from government and local authorities.



## Conclusion

To summarise, this research project has met the aim of the study through answering the three research questions to find out how bilingual children can be supported in early years and the parents experiences of raising a child bilingually.

The results indicated that parents had positive experiences of raising a child bilingually as three out of five parents expressed raising a child bilingually can support children's future job opportunities as it is recognised as a high priority skill. Parents recognised that raising bilingual and multilingual children is important to understand their cultural heritage. However, three out of five parents stressed concerns in raising their child bilingually as participants emphasised that using L1 and L2 together may result in speech delay and confuse the child, however, there are no literature to support this. This research clearly illustrates that bilingualism have positive impacts on the child's social life with their community and future job opportunities. A recommendation that settings can do for parents on supporting bilingual children is through, events like cultural language day or leaflets on specific topic to work closely to promote bilingualism.

The findings show flashcards are beneficial as five out of five parents identified that flashcards were an effective method to develop L1 and L2. All five participants agreed that creating a visual, fun, and creative learning environment engaged the child to learn language more effectively at home and at the setting. However, one participant explained the frustrations of practitioners giving their child false identity of the child's cultural background. While this data limits the generalisability, it would not be a significant factor as one out of five participants mention it. Parents did not recognise others forms of resources and this looks like a gap that setting can address on the confusion and the detrimental effects of bilingualism as mentioned earlier in the study. This shows how prevalent such views can be on raising a bilingual child as even with a small participant sample size as one parent expressed these views. A recommendation on creating a conducive learning environment could be through developing effective policies on how practitioners can work in partnership to cater to different bilingual family's needs.

The finding also confirmed that there is insufficient support for bilingual children in early years. The early years framework does not emphasis on the importance of supporting home languages during assessments of the child's communication and language skills. All five participants mentioned that there are 'unsure' about the support provided in settings. Therefore, a recommendation to promote bilingualism would be the setting to work in partnership with parents to talk about parents understanding of their current thinking and highlight the importance of using mother tongue with their children.

The research cannot be generalised, and it would not prove anything as the sample size is small and it only provides the experiences of five participants. Ethical guidelines were followed to make the research with reliability and validity; however, the qualitative research data contains different perspectives of parent's experiences. Therefore, there are difference in reliability of results. To get a generalised result, further research could be done with wider populations and larger sample size. This would be more suitable to see if the data findings are consistent to improve the reliability of results from interviewing wide range of participants.

Before I started this research project, I knew on some levels the importance of bilingualism; however, I did not fully appreciate that there was a whole body of research. Throughout the process of carrying out the research project, I have developed and gained a deeper knowledge on how to support bilingual children. Having completed this research, it has informed aspects of my decision to do a PGCE course at UEL as I am determined to make it a part of my life and ensure that children, I teach will never feel that their language is holding them down to enhance their abilities.

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# PAPERWORK AND PROGRES:

Parent's Experiences Obtaining an Adolescent Diagnosis  
of Developmental Coordination Disorder/DCD and/or an  
Educational Health Care assessment

by Coralie Wright



A Qualitative Non-Empirical Literature Study

ED6088 Independent Research Project

BA (Hons) Special Education



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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study explores UK parents' experiences acquiring a developmental coordination disorder/DCD diagnosis and, or Education Health Care assessment for their adolescent. DCD is considered primarily a disorder of motor dysfunction; however, evidence shows it presents with other symptoms into adulthood. The study aims to understand the barriers UK parents/carers face and the facilitators that enable parents/carers to receive a diagnosis. A non-empirical critical literature review was carried out with inductive thematic analysis. The study uses the internationally accepted term developmental coordination disorder (DCD) rather than dyspraxia.

The findings resulted in three key themes: personal factors, environmental barriers and strengths. The findings demonstrate the need for a diagnostic tool for adolescent DCD incorporating women and girls within the design. Furthermore, the findings suggest an alternative theoretical framework for policy to address the need for diagnosis versus the availability of support debate. Thereby moving away from the medical model of disability towards a holistic strengths-based approach.

**Keywords:** parents; experiences; diagnosis; developmental coordination disorder; education health care

## Introduction

This non-empirical study aims to explore parents' experiences of acquiring a DCD diagnosis and Educational Health Care (EHC) assessment for their adolescents. The study examines the barriers and facilitators to obtaining a DCD diagnosis and uses the term DCD, as dyspraxia is not internationally recognised (Tamplain, 2014). Adolescence is between childhood and adulthood, ages 10-19 (World Health Organisation, 2022). DCD is a lifelong condition impacting education and daily living (Harrowell, 2018) and is perceived as a hidden disability (O'Dea *et al.*, 2021; Peer and Reid, 2021). Adolescents with DCD experience motor and cognitive impairments, internalising symptoms of depression and anxiety (Li *et al.*, 2018; Omer, Jijon and Leonard, 2019; Omer and Leonard, 2021). DCD has a prevalence rate of 5-6% in 5-11 yrs children, according to the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM V (American Psychiatric Association, APA 2013). Moreover, other areas of motor coordination can affect speech, resulting in verbal dyspraxia, an inability to make speech sounds (APA, 2013).

According to some UK parents seeking a DCD diagnosis is stressful and disempowering (Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane, 2015, Jijon and Leonard, 2020). However, diagnosis is often asserted as the way to obtain support (Sales and Vincent, 2018; Christmas and Van de Weyer, 2020; Edmonds, 2021). This study is crucial to understanding the diagnostic pathway since a late DCD diagnosis can worsen teen outcomes (Dyspraxia Foundation, 2018). Information will be added to policy-makers' and practitioners' knowledge base of adolescent diagnosis, as there is little research on adolescent DCD (Harrowell *et al.*, 2018; Kane and Farrants, 2018; Tal Saban and Kirby, 2018), also extending parents' awareness.

Furthermore, the topic is significant because support for teens with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic 2019 (Engel-Yeger and Engel, 2022; Independent Provider of Special Education (IPSEA), 2022; Sideropoulos *et al.*, 2022). Previous UK DCD research has not included the impact of Covid and the EHC assessment process (Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane, 2015; Dyspraxia Foundation, 2018; Jijon and Leonard, 2020). Moreover, the Government's SEND consultation proposed putting SEND support within high-need tariffs (Department for Education and Department of Health & Social Care, 2022) (DfE&DfH&SC). Since the launch of the Government's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (Department for Education, 2023), whilst there are no instant changes in legislation, funding tariffs are still on the agenda with tailored lists of educational settings, curtailing parent choice, additionally, mandating mediation before a family can take their case to a tribunal (DfE&DfH&SC 2022; IPSEA, 2023).

### **3.1 Positionality and Reflexivity**

Family experience informs my 'brought-self' (Reinhartz, 1997, p.31 in Mukherji and Albon, 2018) assumptions about parents and young people battling SEND system delays and failure. The medical model of disability (Retief and Letšosa 2018) reaffirms my belief that DCD is fixable, creating ableism (Bogart and Dunn, 2019).

(Ableism implies prejudice against people with disabilities). However, my situational self has developed through research over time (Holmes, 2020), and my beliefs have been challenged by my critical lens, affecting my positionality.

### **3.2 Key meanings of terminology**

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM V; American Psychiatric Association APA (2013) requires four criteria to diagnose DCD:

Coordination motor skills are substantially lower than expected given age and skill development; motor skills persistently affect age-appropriate daily living tasks; symptoms appear early, and intellectual disability, visual impairment, and neurological conditions impacting movement do not create deficiencies in motor function. DCD is a developmental motor coordination condition in the ICD-11 - International Classification of Diseases for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics (World Health Organisation, 2018).

## **4. Method for the Literature Review**

### **4.0 The Theoretical Framework of the Study**

Experience, academic engagement and reading shape my theoretical lens (Largan and Morris, 2019). Theory triangulation of two or more methods promotes research validity (Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel, 2013). The medical or biomedical model of disability views disability within an individual to be addressed by skilled professionals (Retief and Letšosa, 2018). A medical DCD diagnosis is encouraged for further higher education support Peer and Reid (2021). Alternatively, the social model of disability highlights environmental and attitudinal barriers that disable people (Retief and Letšosa, 2018). Resources and support affect individual outcomes (Rutherford *et al.*, 2021); therefore, DCD diagnosis should consider cultural constraints and deprivation (Peer and Reid, 2021). Critical disability theory combines medical and social models, balancing social, environmental and attitudinal factors, also considering class, gender, and race (Devlin and Pothier, 2006).

However, 'Neurodiversity' coined by Judy Singer in the 1990s (Singer, 2017) challenges the medical paradigm of disability, continues the social model with a rights-based perspective, and adds further diversity with neuro minorities. Neurodiversity opposes the medical model; natural variations in human cognitive brain functioning exist, contesting the concept of 'normal' (Walker, 2021, cited in Glenn, 2022). Neurodivergent (ND) minds operate differently from Neurotypical (NT) minds (Fletcher-Watson *et al.*, 2021). Originally linked to autism advocacy, neurodiversity is relevant to this study's aims. Neurodiversity is an umbrella term that recognises neuro minorities, including DCD (Clouder *et al.*, 2020), acknowledging power inequalities (Singer, 1999 in Chapman, 2020). Furthermore, despite being debated (Runswick-Cole, 2014), neurodiversity contributes to research from a lived experience (Chapman, 2020; Doyle, 2020), such as the parents' perceptions.

#### **4.1 Relevance of the approach to the research questions**

Qualitative, secondary research with a critical review was chosen (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Largan and Morris, 2019). The secondary research provides easier access to parents' concerns: DCD diagnosis (Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane, 2015; Jijon and Leonard, 2020). The medical and social model helps answer the barriers to DCD diagnosis. Neurodiversity as a critical lens proposes identifying and accepting needs, providing support and accommodations, but shifting away from separating diagnostic groups to shared dimensions of experience (Fletcher-Watson, 2022). The approach is 'epistemically useful' by generating new knowledge, allowing us to see the world differently (Chapman, 2020a p.219).

#### **4.2 Definition of an extended literature review**

Denscombe (2021) defines a literature review as a study of published and unpublished resources on a topic (Primary source data is raw evidence, whereas secondary data provides information second-hand). A 'systematic, explicit, and reproducible' method identifies, evaluates, and synthesises work (Fink, 2019, p.5), contextualising the research goals (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). It questions assumptions, identifies experts, and reflects current debates (Largan and Morris, 2019), summarising themes, inconsistencies, agreements, and knowledge gaps that need further research to inform policy and practice (Tight, 2019).

#### **4.3 Reflection and evaluation before research**

Previously an empirical research design was approved. However, the Dyspraxia Foundation (2023) modified its access to participants from three to six weeks; academic deadlines could not be met. It controlled access to gatekeepers, limiting my backup strategy. Reflection brought disappointment but facilitated change (Bryman, 2015), altering my research plan and positionality. Since Covid-19, online data collection has accelerated (Roberts, Pavlakis and Richards, 2021). I learnt to create QR codes for posting online, so participants can participate in the research, and findings from the study can be accessed within data protection guidelines.

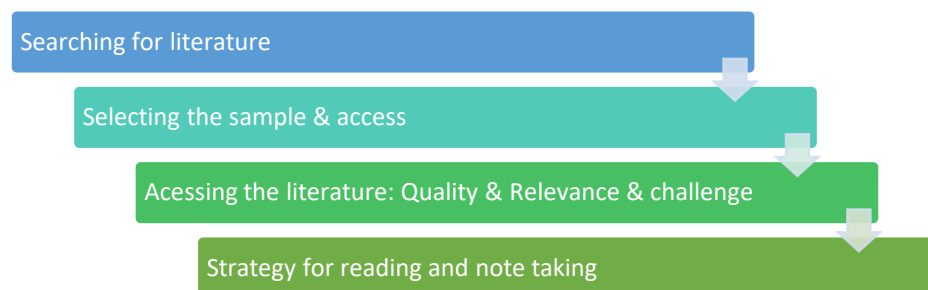
Furthermore, I will use separate gatekeepers in my primary research next time.

My evaluation showed secondary desk research offered more assessable information (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Largan and Morris, 2019) since the study's questions require contemporary reactions to policy, like the EHC process. Furthermore, secondary research is time-flexible (Largan and Morris, 2019); I could evaluate research from other countries since adolescent DCD research has been scarce (Payne *et al.*, 2013; Lingam *et al.*, 2014). A critical review was chosen, as a systematic review is not recommended for undergraduate study (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019).

#### 4.4. Starting the critical review for the research:

A research diary recorded my positionality and reflexivity (Bassot, 2022), highlighted the benefit of librarian research advice (Bryman, 2015), and legitimate use of UEL's library and catalogue. Training sessions with an experienced librarian improved my critical thinking (Largan and Morris, 2019), which involves analysing, and judging (Punch and Oancea, 2014). The process also minimised the use of grey literature – which has not been peer-reviewed (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, p.353), and identified fake news (Hewitt, 2017). I reduced the risk of bias and found diverse viewpoints.

Diagram One - A step-by-step method for research was utilised (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019)



#### 4.5 The Method: keyword criteria and databases used – the process

For the credibility of sources, I chose journals peer-reviewed by academics that demonstrate their research methods, such as ethically engaging participants. As advised to select two journal articles, convenience sampling was used, making selection easier (Largan and Morris, 2019); providing key terms for locating information (Tripathi *et al.*, 2018). Dyspraxia, Developmental Coordination Disorder, adolescent diagnosis, and DCD within the last five years were searched in English peer-reviewed databases. Section 4.13 explains why the five words were insufficient.

Boolean search criteria determine inclusion/exclusion using three functional terms: 'and' 'or' 'not' (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019).

An academic librarian advised eligibility search terms below:



Criteria two: ("developmental coordination disorder" or DCD or dyspraxia) and diagnosis and (teenagers, adolescents, or young people) expanded to include parents and experiences. Three: "EHCP" with the above criteria but without parents and experiences. Four: (Educational Health Care Plan in full, as above). Five as above plus (dyspraxia, or DCD or developmental coordination disorder). Six: Using the word juvenile, and seven: including the criteria Covid to the above.

#### **4.6 Process & Evaluation of sources:**

Multiple full-text databases: EBSCO, Proquest Central and Scopus, were searched to minimise bias in late October 2022. EBSCO databases were chosen on the advice of a librarian; Scopus provides an abstract and citation database. Ninety-six papers were identified regarding criteria 2. EBSCO = (n=38), Scopus (n=28), and Proquest Central (n=30). After the screening, duplicates and non-English articles, the (n=14). After adding parents and experiences criteria search terms, five more papers were found. However, when the Boolean search criteria were applied to criteria 5 and 6, only one paper was relevant (n=1) from EBSCO, and after screening n=0, 19 papers were selected.

#### **4.7 Alternative searches:**

Internet-manual checks included using Google Scholar (n=28) digital media and utilising the ancestry method. An academic author's references lead to other authors' work using this method (Blank *et al.*, 2019) (n=15). Five EHCP research journals were chosen. Documents aid cross-referencing and elucidation (n= 4). Not relevant/duplication (n= 11). As a member of the Dyspraxia Foundation, I accessed other professional publications. However, as a member, I remember that the Foundation includes grey material. I accessed the Dyspraxia Life Magazine, which provided a podcast (opinion) (Guest and Kirby, 2020) and a blog post by Kirby (2020) with some references, public domain, but neither was peer-reviewed (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019).

#### **4.8 Strategies for critical literature reading**

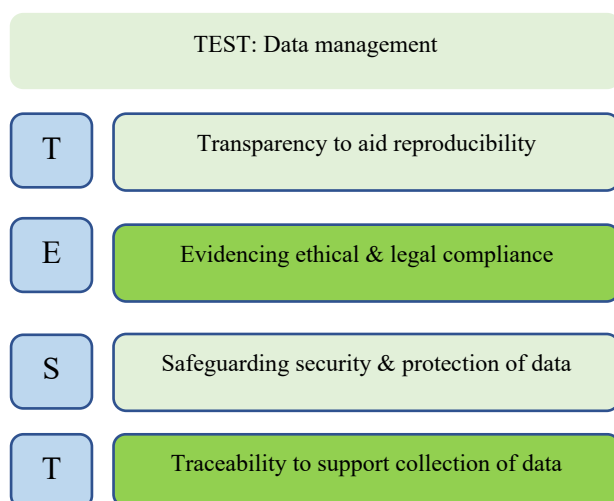
Academic peer-reviewed accountability matters (Bryman, 2015). Annotated reading challenges one-sided arguments and promotes reflection-in-action (Schon, 2016), mindful of my researcher bias. Reading was targeted and linked to the research questions. Information was cross-examined for age, whether it was relevant, its authority, accuracy, and intent, and documents tested questioning legitimacy, meaning and representativeness (Denscombe, 2021). My research journal recorded challenging grey literature selection, reflection-on-action (Schon, 2016).

## 4.9 Creation of a research pre-forma

Transparency and plagiarism were considered by documenting results in an Excel Pro-forma. **Filters:** author, date, title, research question (Q1, Q2, Q3), keywords, quotations, country, document type, publication setting, type of research, positioning, methodology, ethics, and theories. Filters sort, select and track data. Each valid information piece is allocated a number based on the module, category, and description, such as tag ed6075 8(2)7 for motor function weakness. To eliminate database self-selection, Zotero referencing software was used.

## 4.10 Maintaining reading records and notetaking

To be transparent, reading logs were kept online within Cloud storage at UEL. This allowed availability for filtering, and the ability to manage several data types, demonstrating security and management as shown in diagram two (Largan and Morris, 2019, p.213). Diagram two: TEST



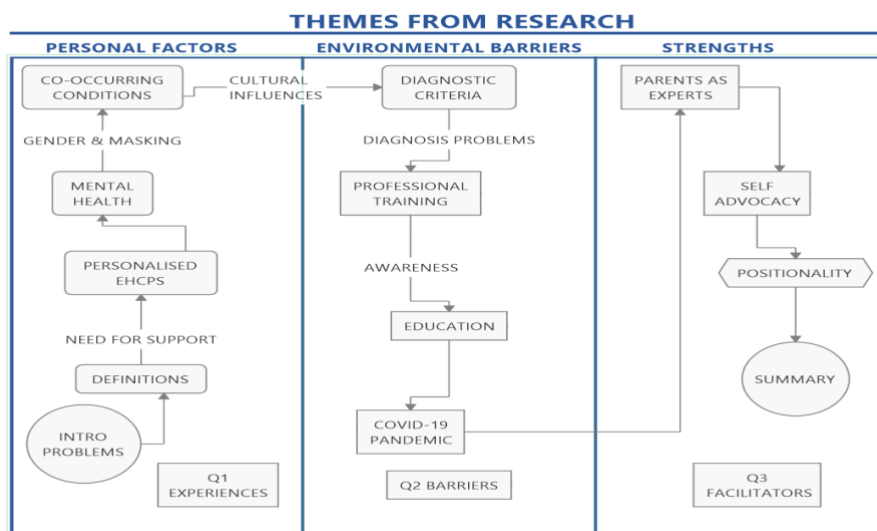
Pdf annotations were colour-coded: yellow positive, blue negative, green methodology, red summative, and purple contradictions and recommendations. However, the system is subject to data entry bias, so I remembered not to favour one author by checking my positionality.

## 4.11 Validity, transparency and conducting reflexive thematic analysis

Validity is measured by the study's trustworthiness (Mishler, 1990 in Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel, 2013). My research methodologies (section 4.10) demonstrate transparency (Yardley, 2000 in Bryman, 2015). Shared vocabulary (DCD) Blank *et al.* (2019) reduces ambiguity and provides clarity Bolshaw and Josephidou (2018). Thematic analysis demonstrates 'rigour', and inductive thematic analysis was

semantically coded (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.54). All articles were read to identify themes providing answers to the research questions (Bryman, 2015; Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). Codes were collated to see which themes predominated and, after review, which findings could be grouped into key definitions synthesising the results: 1) Personal factors (red) 2) Environmental Barriers (blue) 3) Strengths (yellow) – diagram three.

Diagram 3 illustrates themes and their relation to the research question



#### 4.12 Rationale and justification of two research paper choices

Blank et al. (2019) provide the first global guidelines for adolescent DCD assessment. The study involved two UK DCD experts (Barnett and Kirby) and recognised that no standard for adolescent diagnosis existed (Blank *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, the scoping review highlighted the problem of defining ‘adolescent’, as no research included participants under 16, linking to the research criteria problem (section 4.13). Research amongst UK parents of children diagnosed with DCD showed dissatisfaction and stress (Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane, 2015; Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby, 2019; Jijon and Leonard, 2020). Outside the UK, Lust et al. (2022) acknowledged the diagnostic pathway as stressful; however, most participating mothers were highly satisfied with it. The research prompts questions about how the Dutch process may enhance UK's future practice.

#### 4.13 Challenges, limitations and solutions

My research journal recorded the difficulty of adolescent terminology within academic research; everyday language causes problems (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). Adolescents are also called teenagers, young adults, and juveniles with no apparent age boundaries. Multiple search terms and databases were used to resolve this. Since secondary research is not purpose-built for my study, crucial information was sometimes hidden among publications with different journal titles (Denscombe, 2021).

I had to avoid confirmation bias (only selecting data confirming my assumptions) by seeking and recording contradictory perspectives (Bolshaw and Josephidou, 2018). A medical lens of positionality could veer towards medically based research; however, being mindful of the research questions and my research diary kept me balanced while searching alternative viewpoints (Bassot, 2022). The methodology's limitations demonstrated that whilst research books are supportive, none focused on researchers learning differences/difficulties. However, Largan and Morris (2019) did alter their research book to be more visual after student feedback.

#### **4.14 Reflexivity and Positionality**

I enjoyed analysing research logically and in detail; colour aided my visual learning (Raiyn, 2016). I realised I am socially privileged to attend university but marginalised by being female and neurodivergent, affecting my view of disability as a struggle and membership of the Dyspraxia Foundation (2023), which promotes DCD as needing awareness and support. As an insider researcher (a member of the group I am studying) (Braun and Clarke, 2022), I found that my viewpoint shifted to a different perspective, seeing diagnosis as only part of a larger picture affecting DCD and questioning its medicalised standpoint.

#### **4.15 Applying reflexivity as a tool**

My research diary helps to manage discomfort and change (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Researching DCD adolescents can produce emotions affecting the outcome (Loughran and Mannay, 2018). Being conscious that researchers often work in partnerships or groups, aiding reflexivity, I shared some of my feelings during supervision. Secondary research improves my critical searching skills (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). Thus, it is important to note that both my perspective and that of prior social actors are biased (Holmes, 2020).

## 5. The Extended Literature Review

### 5.1 Theme 1: DCD Personal factors – research question one

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2013), DCD affects many personal aspects of an individual's life, from simple tasks (eating with a knife and fork, tying shoelaces, brushing teeth) to studies (handwriting, planning and organising) to vocational and recreational issues. Older children display problems with typing, driving and self-care, resulting in poor self-esteem and mental health issues. Consequently, Christmas and Van de Weyer (2020) argue that diagnosis supports those unable to help their offspring and contributes to the research by illustrating that diagnosis helps parents to understand DCD.

However, Kirby (2008) states that historically, until 2013, there was no formal recognition of DCD into adulthood. Emerging adulthood often means those of 16-25 years (Tal Saban and Kirby, 2018); traditionally, there was a belief that children would outgrow DCD. This is significant as it provides a probable answer to why there is less adolescent research. However, it does not explain why, collectively, Harrowell et al. 2018; Kane and Farrants, 2018; Tal Saban and Kirby, 2018's studies state DCD research was lacking post-2013.

#### Definition, History and Influence

Difficulty describing a term for the condition may have added to the issue. Considering the historical context as far back as 1949, the term 'minimal brain dysfunction' was used, followed by multiple other descriptors (Kirby 2021 in Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 2021), establishing DCD within the medical model of disability. Professor Kirby explained in the 1960s, DCD was called "minimal cerebral palsy" (Bax & Mackeith 1963) and viewed as less severe than cerebral palsy but harder to differentiate. Later in the 1960s, more descriptive terms such as 'Perceptual-motor dysfunction' Ayres (1965) and 'Visuo-motor disability' Brenner (1967) appeared. The term 'clumsy child syndrome' was defined by Illingworth (1968) to recognise motor coordination difficulties. Similar to the pathology paradigm, implying a lack of 'normality' (Chapman, 2020, p.58).

Furthermore, the 1970s significance to the research shows the continuation of the medical model positioning with the term apraxia from brain injury literature and the term developmental apraxia 'to be born' with Gubbay (1975) cited in (Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 2021). However, in 1978, a landmark report by Warnock proposed replacing general deficit-laden terminology; subsequently, the term 'special educational needs' (SEN) followed. In the 1980s, the term developmental dyspraxia was born (Denckla 1982, cited in Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 2021).

The Warnock report formed the basis of legislation, such as *The Education Act (1981)*, which brought in statementing and the integration of children with SEN into

mainstream education. Thus unpinning the *Children and Families Act, Part 3* (2014) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (Department of Health and Education and Health and Social Care, 2015). Legislation can be viewed as grey material from a sociopolitical context. However, its relevance to the study is that parents are consulted on educational provisions and can appeal against local authorities' decisions. Furthermore, Warnock's report's significance highlighted the need for several professionals to create assessments, replacing an exclusive medical diagnosis (Hellowell, 2018). In contrast, however, it is argued that SEN categories are still defined from the medical model of within-child deficits (Fox, 2015 in Hellowell, 2018).

A UK study by Novak et al. (2012) finds parents prefer the term dyspraxia. Parents believe the term DCD conveys that poor coordination is the only problem rather than the condition's broader issues. In contributing to research question one, this illustrates how parents' perspectives are culturally strongly formed, grounded by a sense of 'self-diagnosis' of their child's dyspraxia (Bauskis *et al.*, 2022, p.6). In addition, many young people identify with the term dyspraxia (Edmonds, 2021), which adds to the research by highlighting the strength of their self-advocacy. Young people move away from the medical model as 'developmental' implies that they should have 'grown out' of the condition, viewing themselves as different rather than 'disordered' (Dyspraxia Foundation, 2023).

However, the National Health Service (NHS) (2019) uses the term DCD since dyspraxia is linked to poor motor function after a head injury and stroke. Furthermore, it can also be called a specific developmental disorder of motor function. The NHS website presents three layers of meaning: definitions, government positionality, and local and national ideology (Abbott, Shaw and Elston, 2004 in Tight, 2019). The NHS position sits within the medical model; DCD is a condition that therapies can manage. O'Dea and Connell (2016) and Barnett and Hill (2019) state that both terms, dyspraxia and DCD, are applicable because they are widely used interchangeably.

Nevertheless, Blank et al. (2019) argue that just because they are interchanged does not necessarily mean that awareness of the condition is universally understood, suggesting that the International standard of the term DCD should be used. Such disparity contributes to barriers - research question two, as current parental experiences confirm that professionals do not understand the condition (Harrowell *et al.*, 2018; Kane and Farrants, 2018; Barnett and Hill, 2019). A historical report in 2001 highlighted that professionals' views on distinctions between dyspraxia and DCD lead to inter-professional differences (Peters, Barnett and Henderson, 2001).

Gibbs, Appleton and Appleton (2007, p.234) argue that 'dyspraxia' should not be characterised against what is considered normal, as young people's functional abilities may be interpreted differently due to their family background and expectations. Whitmore and Bax (1999, cited in Peer and Reid, 2021) propose that there is falsity in using such labels. A label cannot confirm what causes the difficulty and what arises from it; they summarise that a learning difficulty may be nothing more than a descriptor.

Gibbs, Appleton and Appleton (2007, p.234) further raise that a young person may be inappropriately medicalised because dyspraxia is a 'social disorder.' Thereby linking to the social model of disability, which creates physical and attitudinal impediments;

what constitutes 'normal' is hard to define. Neurodiversity also relates to the social model of disability; however, it proposes using the term neurodivergent when minds perform differently than expected (Kirby, 2021). Labelling wastes resources as too many children are referred to diagnosis pathways according to Gibbs, Appleton and Appleton (2007), but later balanced by them to state that labels benefit family communication and planning. Neurodiversity offers an umbrella term that covers multiple conditions accepting variation (Clouder *et al.*, 2020).

The alternative suggestion challenges the literature in two ways: neurodiversity provides an alternative way of categorising needs and challenges the assumption that diagnosis is a prerequisite to obtaining support, endorsing the view that support should not depend on diagnosis (Dyspraxia Foundation, 2023).

The APA's (2013) terms to describe DCD, such as dysfunction, disorder, inaccuracy and deficits, illustrate the medical model's influence. The manual emphasises the diagnosis in negative language, not strengths. Negative language stigmatises: parents can feel a need to acquire a label to explain the condition creating a feeling of relief at an explanation (Edmonds, 2021). I consider parents' and adolescents' needs and ableism in this research. However, since dyspraxia is not internationally recognised (Tamplin, 2014), this study uses the recommended international term DCD.

This study acknowledges the new SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023) that proposes various changes to the SEND system affecting parents of offspring with DCD. In addition to new national standards, three of the aims are to provide testing for a tailored list of specialised schools, a digitalised EHCP template for 2025 and national inclusion boards to monitor service working with local authority partnerships (DfE, 2023). There are no changes to legislation, EHCP criteria, right to appeal or mediation (DfE, 2023).

However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2023) warns that the new national standards must not undermine SEND students' entitlements or raise the assessment threshold. The plans are criticised as moving away from an individualistic approach to SEND; it is assessed that it will be harder to access specialist educational provisions and to seek to redress (IPSEA, 2023). Whilst such views are subject to opinion, they highlight the barriers parents face in seeking a diagnosis, which falls into the controversy over the necessity for identification versus the current economic climate's availability of support (Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby, 2019).

### Experiences of obtaining a diagnosis

Evidence suggests that parents are personally affected when trying to obtain a DCD diagnosis for their adolescents. Dissatisfaction and stress were reported by

Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane (2015). Adding to research question two, the authors state that there is frustration, tensions between health and social care and educational systems, problems with professional attitudes, the follow-up process and the waiting time. Additionally, contributing as a barrier to diagnosis is a lack of homogeneity in the diagnostic approach for adolescents aged 12-18, with 43% of parents not being offered practical help during the process.

Correspondingly, the Dyspraxia Foundation's (2018) survey of parents'/carers' perspectives on the emotional support of adolescents (11-18 years) found parents frustrated with long waits, with additional high thresholds for obtaining mental health assistance and age-restricted pathways. Blank et al. (2019) recommended a clearer diagnostic route. Moreover, Jijon and Leonard's (2020 p.1) survey of parental stress with children aged 5-12, which included the diagnostic pathway, found 'clinically significant' strains and worries. Parents commonly voice frustration, also reported in the SEND Review (DfE&DfH&SC, 2022). These studies contribute to research question one by suggesting that parental stress is a multi-dimensional, common experience linked to distinct pathways.

In contrast, a Dutch report by (Lust et al., 2022) found mothers very satisfied with the diagnostic pathway, although they acknowledge that the process is stressful. There was a higher appreciation of the diagnosing professional manner and increased post-diagnostic support satisfaction, suggesting that DCD in Holland is more within a social model of disability. Professionals were found to be sympathetic and approachable; cost was not mentioned. Current research indicates that the Dutch pathway is better resourced with fewer environmental barriers.

Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby (2020) highlight that the financial burden of DCD in the UK affects parents. Parents seek to terminate employment, reduce their hours, or purchase therapy equipment to support their children. Parents often pay for older children's occupational or physical therapy. The Dyspraxia Foundation (2018) add that many parents privately fund counselling because their adolescent does not meet the threshold for accessing Child Adolescent and Mental Health (CAMHS) services. Such experiences answer research question two, showing that finances and lack of mental health access are more barriers to DCD diagnosis for parents.

To guarantee help for adolescents' DCD in school, Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby (2020) recommend personalised Educational Healthcare assessments to establish an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP). Kirby (2008) claims further and higher education establishments promote the medical model of disability by demanding a DCD diagnosis for Disability Student's Allowance (DSA). Ahad, Thompson and Hall (2022) emphasise that there is a medical diagnosis in most special educational needs categories with an EHCP. There is little question of DCD not being under the medical model of disability state Kane and Farrants (2018). Diagnosis is needed to obtain resources.

Moreover, Ahad, Thompson and Hall (2022) report that some parents are confused by the EHCP procedure and frustrated (DfE&DfH&SC, 2022). They are involved early on but don't feel listened to: their views are not included in the final EHCP, and some parents feel that professionals determined the process (Bentley, 2017, Eccleston 2016, House of Commons, 2019 in Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2020). Parents in the recent SEND consultation (DfE&DfH&SC, 2022) expressed the experience of the diagnostic pathway as being difficult to navigate. Answering research question one in summary, multiagency tensions and long wait times are factors causing barriers for parents.



## Educational Health Care Plans

However, Adams et al. (2017), with a Government published report on parents' experiences with EHCPs, found parents' requests and opinions included in the plan, as two-thirds of parents of 16-25 year-olds were satisfied with the process. The pathway was better than previous systems, but regional areas diverged. Cochrane and Soni (2020) report that an overall positive picture has been found regarding parents' involvement in the EHCP needs assessment process. Moreover, Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby (2020) found that more than 25% of children aged 6-18 with DCD had EHCPs. (The 2018 national average was 2.9% of children with SEND). The relevance of such findings to research question three is that an EHC assessment's diagnostic pathway can function effectively for some parents, acting as a facilitator.

My research title mentions parents' paperwork as a factor in obtaining the diagnosis. However, only Richings (2022, p.112) referred to hours of unpaid 'emotional' paperwork. Moreover, the SEND consultation and the AP Improvement Plan proposed a common digitalised EHCP template (Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2022; DfE, 2023). Regarding research question three, the template may help parents obtain a quicker diagnosis, thereby acting as a facilitator. Such requirement for standardisation reflects the importance of national standards (Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2022; DfE, & DfH&SC, 2022, DfE, 2023). Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2022 note that some parents experience failure by the local authority or the school; therefore, remediation has many gaps and does not repair the damage of not receiving support. The authors propose holding individuals and the system accountable for service failure to avoid unintentional rewarding of poor practice. The House of Commons Education Committee (2019) conceded severe accountability gaps. The research implies that professionals and local authorities within the diagnostic pathway should be held accountable for service failure, but the current SEND and AP Improvement Plan (DfE, 2023) lacks accountability for unlawful decision-making for SEND (IPSEA, 2023) so, thereby acting as a barrier to diagnosis. The significance of this to research question one is that, as indicated by Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane (2015), parents' discontent persists and is still relevant today in addition to other factors.

## Mental Health Impact and Gender

Certain factors affect young people's mental health; their voices are limited (Cochrane and Soni, 2020). Young people should have their wishes, views, and opinions considered under the SEND Code of Practice (DfE&H&SC, 2015). Research suggests parents worry about their adolescents' mental health, whereas young people are more optimistic (Lingam *et al.*, 2014; Timler, McIntyre and Hands, 2018; Payne and Ward, 2020). Therefore, future diagnosis studies should include more of the young person's point of view.

DCD-related psychological difficulties are often overlooked in diagnosis, and individuals with DCD experience greater depths of internalised symptoms (Blank *et al.*, 2019; Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby, 2019; Omer and Leonard, 2021), since poor executive functioning increases higher levels of anxiety and depression (Omer and Leonard, 2021). Gender is an important factor in the process; women and girls are less likely to be diagnosed (Harrowell *et al.*, 2017; Kirby, 2020; Cleaton *et al.*, 2021); their

masking hides DCD symptoms (Richings, 2022). According to the Dyspraxia Foundation (2015), cited in (Green and Payne, 2018), some girls were not diagnosed with DCD until they were twenty-two. However, Meachon, Zemp and Alpers, 2022 argue that gender differences are not universal in non-UK countries. They point out that gender differences may result from gender bias in diagnosis or referrals; these are additional barriers. DCD psychosocial research for women and girls is needed to improve diagnosis.

### Cooccurring Issues

DCD is commonly linked to other cooccurring neuro-developmental conditions, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Blank *et al.*, 2019; Jijon and Leonard, 2020; Payne and Ward, 2020). Since each disorder has unique characteristics, overlapping conditions are called cooccurring (Gourlardins *et al.*, 2015, cited in Barnett and Hill, 2019). However, Whatt and Craig 2012, cited in Barnett and Hill (2019), argue that motor deficits should not be a separate diagnosis as they found children with ASD had major motor impairments specific to autism. The concept of neurodiversity, however, recognises all conditions and all diagnoses (Honeybourne, 2018). Despite the medical premise of learning difficulties, neurodiversity emphasises personal learning differences and strengths associated with various conditions (Sewell, 2022). The implications for practice suggest that diagnosis should simultaneously recognise cooccurring conditions, using neurodiversity as an umbrella term (Ellis, Kirby and Osbourne, 2023).

## 5.2 Theme 2: Environmental Barriers – research question two

### Cultural Influences

Blank *et al.*'s (2019) research created DCD international guidelines, acknowledging no gold standard for assessment for diagnosis exists, which is a major barrier. The study recognises that cooccurring conditions can be problematic to discern and that younger children may do poorly in tests, reducing validity. Blank *et al.* (2019) further define limitations due to culture, reporting that a child from a culture that does not encourage physical activity may present like a child with DCD. Culturally, parents of children from ethnic minorities fear stigma from labelling, acting as a barrier to diagnosis, Papanastasiou, (2018). Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane, 2015; Lust *et al.*, 2022 all found a lack of ethnic minority participation in DCD research, implying a gap. Rutherford *et al.* (2021) state Black and minority ethnic individuals belong to groups where diagnosis is overlooked.

### The Diagnostic Criteria

Barnett and Hill (2019) highlight unseen barriers to diagnosis for parents. They believe that research reveals DCD diagnostic criteria are not properly implemented; multiple motor tests are not done, making it hard to compare results. Furthermore, test scores

can conceal aspects of motor function. Some adolescents/young adults have used tests meant for children, which are inappropriate for diagnosis.

Previously in 2018, Tai Saban and Kirby reviewed the literature on adulthood DCD. Most new research on young adults (16+) focused on motor functioning but should include executive functioning and social and emotional wellness. Blank et al. (2019) argue that psychometric tests, such as the Adult DCD Checklist (ADC) and Adolescents and Adult Coordination Questionnaires (AAC-Q) to measure criteria for diagnosis need further study for validity. The authors recommend cautious use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Bruininks-Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency test (BOT-2) (Bruininks and Bruininks, 2005) for 4-21 year-olds and the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Movement Assessment Battery (MABC-2) designed for 3-6 years (Henderson, Sugden and Barnett, 2007 cited in Barnett and Hill, 2019). Moreover, the Developmental Coordination Disorder Questionnaire (DCDQ'07) (Wilson et al. 2009, in Timler, McIntyre and Hands (2018) for 5-15-year-olds also caused problems because it was not optimal for adolescents. Implications for research shows that the DCD diagnostic tools act as barriers for adolescents. Additionally, Meachon, Zemp and Alpers (2022) note that parents' views are less than accurate in identifying motor competencies, so parent reports should be used cautiously and accompanied by in-depth assessment by the adolescent individual.

Furthermore, the significance of all these guidelines demonstrates that medical professionals must understand DCD to diagnose it: Licari et al. (2022), reporting from an Australian DCD survey, found that despite Blank et al.'s (2019) international study, many practitioners, including family physicians and paediatricians, have limited knowledge about DCD. UK research indicates poor professional training as a barrier to diagnosis (Wilmer, Neil, Kamps and Babcock, 2013, cited in Omer, 2018).

### Professional Training

Guest and Kirby (2020) explain that General Practitioners lack DCD awareness and training. DCD diagnosis is available for emerging adults but is sporadic and inconsistent. In Caçola and Lage's (2019) UK, US and Canadian survey, just 41% of practitioners and 23% of general practitioners are educated about the condition. The contribution to research question two is that professional training and different geographical pathways act as diagnostic barriers (Peer and Reid, 2021).

Christmas and Van de Weyer (2020) highlight the number of professionals who may assess an individual with DCD: general practitioners, paediatricians, physiotherapists, and educational psychologists, may be involved. These authors advise parents or carers to ensure professionals supporting their children are qualified health or allied health practitioners with DCD experience. Yet research from

Caçola and Lage (2019) and Omer (2018) suggest that this is impossible for parents to ascertain. Furthermore, the number of pathways (practitioners' assessments) through which DCD may be diagnosed may impact the individual (Mancini et al., 2016, cited in Omer, 2018). Omer (2018) contributes to research question three, by suggesting that closer professional collaboration is needed for an integrated approach (Peer & Reid, 2021).

Blank et al. (2019) also state there is a need for more recognition of the responsibilities of medical professionals for accountability. Earlier research (Novak et al., 2012; Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane, 2015) highlighted the need for parents to be heard, as some professionals' manners created dissatisfaction. Such barriers from working professionals suggest a hole in their training and an area to be developed. These barriers are reflected in global research by Caçola and Lage (2019), who states that there are multiple gaps in clinical practice, research and education for DCD.

#### Educational barriers to diagnosis for parents

Educational barriers prevent parents from obtaining an adolescent DCD diagnosis.

Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby (2019) confirm a lack of academic support as teachers do not recognise DCD. However, for teachers that recognise learning needs, Blank et al. (2019) state that a therapist/education psychologist may assess an individual for DCD after a school referral. Some parents work with the school and professionals to secure a diagnosis and implement support. The UK Specific Learning Difficulty Assessment Standards Committee (Holden, 2021), with Kirby, Barnett and Hill as consultants, updated DCD assessment guidance for teacher assessors and psychologists. DCD cannot be diagnosed without a motor evaluation to rule out other conditions; hence children under 16 should be referred to a GP or multi-disciplinary team, and post-16 only if symptoms worsen. Tal Saban and Kirby (2019) point out that education professionals who confirm a diagnosis without an individual having established motor function issues of DCD make mistakes; misdiagnosis is a barrier. The medical model of disability influences education (Kirby, 2004; Kirby et al., 2008; Peer and Reid, 2021). All authors concur that obtaining support requires a diagnosis.

According to Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Chown and Stenning (2020), neurodiversity accepts the importance that individuals receive support; however, a 'universal design' for society would mean that disclosure or diagnosis may not be necessary. Reasonable adjustments would be automatic, reducing stigma (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Chown and Stenning, 2020). Neurodiversity teaching creates the expectation that practice and policies embrace all styles of neurocognitive functioning (Honeybourne, 2018). Furthermore, neurodiversity teaching improves educational outcomes and school inclusion (Honeybourne, 2018).

#### The Covid-19 Pandemic

School inclusion was affected by further barriers for parents to obtain a diagnosis, historical events, such as the impact of Covid-19, which added to anxiety for families with SEND. A scarcity of information about UK parents' experiences of their adolescents with DCD during the pandemic suggests a gap in research; however, a report by Sideropoulos et al. (2022) which included parents of two children with DCD, contributes to research by showing that parents had a spectrum of worries but that the school closure was a major physical barrier.

Ofsted (2021) acknowledged school closures and delays to statutory assessments that identify and diagnose children with SEND further hampered parents seeking a diagnosis. Inconsistencies in identifying young people's needs happened due to inadequate evaluations by many public health authorities. Ofsted (2021) stated that

common threads were a lack of cooperation and unclear professional roles. The Disabled Children's Partnership (2021) cited in the report found that parents felt fatigued, stressed and abandoned. However, collective data from earlier studies, specifically on DCD, Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby, (2019); Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane (2015), in answer to research question two, suggest barriers of unclear professional duties, inconsistencies in diagnosis and experiences of stress were experienced well before the pandemic.

The Disabled Children's Partnership (2021) reported fewer occupational therapists were available to support young people with SEND, affecting diagnosis and EHC applications. As cited in the report, Ashton JJ (2020) stated that diagnosis and monitoring investigations were mainly employed for emergencies – which they believe has continued. Thomas and Woods (2003), cited in Retief and Letšosa (2018), place power in medical professionals who diagnose. Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane (2015) allude to the concept of power by parents experiencing disempowerment. Kirby (2020) refers to parents fighting for services to obtain support. Individuals with DCD are at the mercy of what the practitioners think, which creates barriers (Richings, 2022).

According to (Jurgens, 2020), discussing power the opportunity of alternative social practice and interactions is essential for understanding the relationships the neurodivergent have with neurotypical institutions. Institutional social hierarchies affect the evolution of social practice and deeply influence cognition and identity, which can be harmful. Asymmetric power affects the person in a subordinate position to another person, resulting in a 'detrimental' effect on the neurodivergent (Jurgens, 2020, p.85). Neurodiversity aims to 'see and look back' and 'talk back' to power questioning epistemic norms and practices, developing new methodologies to help deliver a society capable of accommodating everyone (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Chown and Stenning, 2020, p.226). Studies on DCD currently do not directly focus on the imbalance of power within the diagnosis pathway, suggesting another possible area for research.

The Dyspraxia Foundation (2018) found that the time to achieve diagnosis is a barrier; according to Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane (2015), the time was 2.5 years. Additionally, Adams et al. (2017); Rutherford *et al.* (2021); Ahad, Thompson and Hall (2022) evidence that EHC assessment waiting times are long. According to Ogundele and Ayyash (2021), during the pandemic, whilst child community health services (CCH) experienced large increases in waiting lists, many consultations were conducted online, which developed rapidly, and phone calls became the commonest method of remote contact (98%). Such an increase in online consultation would warrant research to determine whether online DCD diagnosis could reduce waiting times, improve pathways, and increase practitioner training, lowering the barrier to accessing multiple professionals.

### **5.3 Theme 3: Strengths and self-efficacy – research question three**

In seeing multiple professionals, parents often act as experts. They are the first to notice their children's difficulties, such as self-care or being behind academically (Lingam *et al.*, 2014; Barnett and Hill, 2019; National Health Service, 2019). Parents act as advocates, organising work, arranging extra help in school lessons, paying for extra tuition (Lingham 2014), and providing support beyond adolescence (Tal Saban and Kirby, 2018). They act as agents for change, navigating the system along with managing their daily life (Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby, 2020).

Charities are key facilitators providing free legal advice (IPSEA, 2023; SOS!SEN the Independent Helpline for Special Education Needs, 2021). Charities support parents, while local authorities provide local website information. Of parents and carers, 33% had used charities for their young persons' mental health, with 44% accessing online support (Dyspraxia Foundation, 2018). Positive school and teaching interactions and a supportive environment were also noted (Hitchcock, Hocking and Jones, 2020). Another facilitator for diagnosis is parents' self-help groups. In New Zealand, parents share information and lobby for change (Miyahara and Baxter, 2011). However, the scarcity of information on facilitators highlights that barriers far outweigh facilitators for parents in obtaining a diagnosis.

### **5.4 Reflection on my positionality**

Neurodiversity as a critical lens and my research findings have changed my positionality on diagnosis for DCD. Firstly, my positionality was influenced by my insider bias of personal experiences of DCD, bringing my brought-self and beliefs, section 3.1. As a researcher, I am conscious of how my class, gender, age, disabilities, and cultural and political perspectives affect my positionality. In my research, I refer to section 4.3, the change of the research design and sections 4.4, 4.7, 4.8 and 4.14 to demonstrate reflexivity. Based on evidence from the research, I am transitioning from a medicalised view to a neurodiversity position. Labels should not be a prerequisite for support or determinant descriptors of an individual; the concept of what constitutes 'normal' should be redefined.

### **5.5 Summary**

Research has shown that policy is not implemented as intended by being needs-led. Singular diagnosis ignores the reality of cooccurring conditions that overlap. My study contributes to the controversy over the economic availability of resources versus need. What is apparent is the complex number of barriers resulting from different systems, the lack of interconnectedness, and the various diagnostic tools with validity, gender and ethnicity issues. Findings have shown that new research areas should focus on designing tools for adolescents that can help identify DCD in women and girls, which takes into account female masking. Future research should emphasise ethnic diversity and involve adolescents' voices.

## **6.0 Ethics**

### **6.1 Definition and importance**

Ethics are value-based principles and practices (Bolshaw and Josephidou, 2018; Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019; Largan and Morris, 2019). Ethical procedures include getting approval for research; the University of East London approved my empirical study - subsequent secondary research, and planning for ethical practice. Ethics are important as they guide appropriate researcher behaviour (Largan and Morris, 2019). Ethical principles inform the integrity and quality of the research by being open, transparent, honest, trustworthy and acknowledging influence (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, British Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, (2018) (BERA). In addition to other principles, secondary research must adhere to the original research's informed consent, deliver confidentiality and anonymity and cause no harm (non-maleficence) (Largan and Morris, 2019). Furthermore, secondary research is underpinned by doing good (beneficence) (Bassot, 2022).

### **6.2 Practice of Ethical Principles, Reflexivity and Positionality**

Research should do no harm, which includes writing the research (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019). In empirical research, participants give informed consent; children need parental consent (MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel, 2013). Payne and Ward's (2020) research had Coventry University's ethical approval, but importantly, written parents/carers and participants' informed consent. For empirical research, voluntary consent means participants can withdraw from the study and any point until data analysis (BERA, 2018, MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

However, secondary research raises ethical questions about the prior researcher's ethical practises and the data's future use if only generic informed consent is given (Largan and Morris 2019). Furthermore, secondary research risks include using private information from personal documents causing reputational damage, emotional harm through accessing sensitive topics, and abusing copyright or terms and conditions (Largan and Morris, 2019). Ethical practice reduces researcher error and misrepresentation/deception, allowing my research accountability to benefit parents, policy-makers and practitioners. The research benefits policy-makers' understanding of parents' experiences, the barriers and facilitators of adolescent DCD diagnosis, and the rethinking of service provision and cooperation. Adolescent DCD is emphasised, contributing to further awareness in the field. Moreover, the study highlights the context post-Covid-19 and the suggestive changes from the recent SEND and Alternative Provision Plan (DfE,2023). Therefore the principle of beneficence is delivered. An academic librarian and supervisor clarified any doubt while I researched, and data was kept securely (section 4.10).

DCD researchers in my study delivered confidentiality and anonymity; (BERA, 2018 privacy was respected (Bassot, 2022). Kane-Hamer, (2018, p.216) empirical research highlights that pseudonyms are used for anonymity, and confidentiality is maintained except for safeguarding issues. Within secondary research, accessing documents' authenticity enables the researcher to address resource identification and verification (Scott 1990 p.19 in Tight, 2019). I carefully selected and analysed data and considered the studies' presumed intent and sensitivity (Tight, 2019) with a series of tests limiting grey literature. Awareness of main issues and debates enhances the credibility of the research (Denscombe, 2021). To avoid judgmental reading, processes considered the ethical principle of meaning (BERA, 2018, p.10). Critical reading strategies were applied (section 4.8), examining inferences such as the Government positioning and historical, sociopolitical, economic and cultural contexts (p.14,15,18,21). Therefore my interpretation and presentation of data are to be fair and true, honest and open, demonstrating transparency (BERA, 2018).

An ethical practice prevents research bias from misplaced loyalties (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019) and holds the researcher to account in all stages. Power within the study affects the researcher and the study itself (BERA, 2018). I acknowledged my dual or insider role in influencing research section 5.4. Maintaining an ethical position also considers the researchers' positionality, medical model, and power. The research diary enabled me to reprocess information, question assumptions and query any concerns before speaking to an academic librarian or during supervision. It was important to minimise personal bias to views already held (p.10,12,13) with my identity section 5.4. Researchers must know their actions (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019).



## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 Key Summary of Research

The focus of this inquiry explores parents' experiences of obtaining a DCD diagnosis and EHC assessment for their adolescent. It centred on the barriers and facilitators to acquiring a diagnosis in the UK. From the findings of this study, in answering research question one, parents' experiences suggest that acquiring a diagnosis of DCD for their young person is stressful, time-consuming, and costly with little practical help. These experiences have not changed significantly since Alonso Soriano, Hill and Crane's (2015) research. The experience is mirrored across different pathways and from other locations in the UK. DCD is still positioned within a medical model contributing to parents' need to seek a diagnosis.

Research question two addresses environmental and invisible barriers to DCD diagnosis. A lack of awareness of DCD and professional training can lead to missed and misdiagnoses. Some diagnostic tools have validity problems and are not suited for adolescents. Furthermore, women and girls can be overlooked due to their ability to mask their symptoms. Due to the need for identification, some parents pay for support. Multiagency working highlights a need for closer collaboration between professionals; thus, future research may examine power inequalities in the diagnostic pathway. Parents' lack of understanding of their adolescents' condition can add to the problem of obtaining a diagnosis.

Research from the experience of Covid-19 and the EHCP process enhances the study. Acting as a facilitator to diagnosis (research question three), parents welcome the digitalised EHCP template suggested by the SEND and AP Improvement Plan. (DfE, 2023). Surprisingly, some parents of 6-18-year-olds with DCD who complete the EHCP process receive more mainstream school resources than the average child (Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby, 2020). Self-advocacy, self-help groups, and charities facilitate obtaining a diagnosis for some parents. Moreover, phone and online consultation methods acted as facilitators during Covid-19 for multiagency working, expanding future practice. However, overall, diagnosis and post-diagnosis need improvement (Cleaton, Lorgelly and Kirby, 2020).

The research highlighted that my methodology for an empirical review needed the cooperation of multiple gatekeepers to access parent research participants; this will be implemented in my future research studies; and include QR codes for parent support information. Alternative software will be investigated for future secondary research. The need to use some grey literature highlighted the problem of the lack of adolescent DCD research. The study altered my positionality from a medical model to a neurodiversity viewpoint (section 4.14, 5.4). The perspective of my own learning difficulties changed from limiting beliefs to a strengths-based position, altering my sense of identity constructed from medical labels. My worldview of 'disabilities' changed. Through continuous reflexive practice, I aim to be a competent researcher.

The study's findings suggest two policy and practice recommendations linked to the research questions. First, policy-makers should determine needs based on the umbrella terminology of neurodiversity, recognising individuals' cooccurring conditions other than DCD. Accepting that brains process information differently will challenge the concept of 'normal' and help reduce stigma and prejudice. Second, in practice, a

singular multi-disciplinary neurodevelopment assessment and diagnosis pathway for people, including adolescents (defined by the World Health Organisation), should be set up across the UK, as provided by the School of Health Sciences, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh (Rutherford *et al.*, 2021).

Online multi-disciplinary group consultations can reduce diagnostic waiting times, inconsistent practices and increase practitioner training and collaboration.

Third, neurodiversity should be adopted within school policies, teaching training and practice. Primary schools can benefit from neurodiversity programmes like LEANS (Learning About Neurodiversity at School, 2022). Neurodiversity accepts that diagnosis is not just a prerequisite for support but also minimises barriers to diagnosis and promotes a strengths-based approach. Finally, women and girls should be included in the research for a tool to recognise adolescent DCD and its mental health implications. Under the umbrella of neurodiversity, young people's voices will facilitate diagnosis by reducing gender biases that act as a barrier, providing self-empowerment. Furthermore, future research should include ethnic minority representation. A shift to a neurodiversity perspective is necessary as SEND resides within a medical model, adding to the marginalisation of individuals and groups. Moreover, the current cost of the existing pathway is unsustainable (Honeybourne, 2018).

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# THIRD YEAR ESSAYS





# **HOW WAS THE POST-WAR EXPLANATION OF THE NAZI HOLOCAUST LINKED TO ATTEMPTS TO PREVENT IT HAPPENING AGAIN?**

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SY6008: Constructions of 'Race' in Culture and Politics

BA (Hons): International Development with NGO Management/Sustainable  
Development and Social Change

## Introduction

This essay interrogates retrospective conceptualisations of the Holocaust as they are connected to later struggles towards a normative ‘genocide prevention’ agenda. It will be examined whether subsequent, often highly visible, depictions of genocide or its preparation, despite the triumphalist declaration of ‘Never Again’ in the wake of sweeping post-Holocaust human rights legislation (see Khan, 2021), stem directly from this suggestion as to the Holocaust’s incontrovertible and reified ‘singularity’ (Cousin and Fine, 2022, p. 396; Fernández, 2014, p. 85), which has potentially straitjacketed pursuits to identify commonalities and (pre-)genocidal ‘social facts’ as they are replicated in disparate cultural circumstances and discredited previously dominant explanations of ethnic violence as it has materialised “in frameworks divorced from either totalitarianism or ‘modernity’” (Cesarani, 2004, p. 357). Further, the essay will debate the notion that characterisations of Nazi ‘genocidaires’ (see below) as gripped by a culturally specific – and similarly singular – inherently evil psychology (Feierstein, 2014, pp. 71-72), manifesting in virulent ethnic hatred, has legitimised political and multinational ‘handwringing’ in the face of group persecution justified by spurious racial ‘theories’, and which display significant commonalities with those of the Holocaust.

The essay will not, in any conception, make claims as to the Holocaust’s ‘banality’ or to an analytical hyperbole within Holocaust studies, but will instead examine the teleological assumptions of ‘finality’ associated – but not universally so – with post-Holocaust discourses in the context of progress towards a comprehensive anti-genocide socio-political system.

This essay will henceforth refer to the ‘Shoah’, “the Hebrew word for “catastrophe”” (Mémorial de la Shoah, 2022), despite the ubiquity in Western social and cultural circles of ‘Holocaust’, the latter term referring somewhat controversially in the original “ancient Greek ... [to a] ‘burnt offering’” (Smilde, 2022). Similarly, the essay’s reference to ‘genocidaires’, which David Cesarani (2004, p. 357) identifies as a “French neologism ... [which] identifies the actor with the crime”, derives from the term’s greater accuracy compared to synonyms such as ‘culprit(s)’, which fail to centre genocide as the recurrent offence carried out “in Kigali ... and throughout the former Yugoslavia” (Cesarani, 2004, p. 357).

### **‘Post-Shoah’: repetition, applicability, and didactic geopolitics**

Despite Steve Garner’s identifying of the Shoah as one of three twentieth-century contexts which reiterated that “racial discrimination [lies] very obviously at the heart of ... everyday life” (2017, p. 14) and which ultimately resulted in seismic political and legislative transition, Zachary Karazsia (2019, p. 22) refers to Rwanda to dismiss the notion that the United Nations’ (UN) Genocide Convention, commissioned in the face of burgeoning concerns that the inviolability of ‘state sovereignty’ risked further inaction by extraterritorial powers to halt immoral political practices (Maddox, 2015, p. 59), has fulfilled its role of sensitising the global community to its set of universal



signals, given “the ... failure to recogni[s]e genocide from ... ethnic conflict [in 1990s Rwanda]” (Karaszia, 2019, p. 22). He identifies a discrepancy between idealistic expectations of the Convention’s efficacy in disrupt states’ plans to enact genocide and political stasis in spite of “the knowledge of ... [Rwanda’s] unfolding terror” (Schimmel, 2020, p. 350).

A more contemporary narrative is provided by Nurul Islam (2021, p. 18), whose contribution to the motif of ‘systematic non-intervention’ in analyses of twentieth- and twenty-first century genocides exists as a chronological examination of the Rohingya ethnicity, whose unambiguous brutalisation by the Burmese state constitutes “one of the gravest genocides of the modern era” (Islam, 2021, p. 18). Islam alleges that the Rohingya have faced a protracted and racialised process of marginalisation, listed examples of which bear an unequivocal similarity to those which prefaced the Shoah, such as what Islam terms “de-legitimi[s]ation” (2021, p. 18) – that is, the refusal to recognise the Rohingya’s entitlement to elemental rights – and a distancing of the Rohingya from a participation in the construction of a Burmese national identity.

In the hopes of scrutinising the inaction taken to alleviate later instances of genocide despite the presence of multinational agreements stipulating an obligation to arbitrate in observed instances of genocide, the essay now turns to discourses surrounding the Shoah as a ‘singular’, to some extent ahistorical occurrence as it is framed in a global political ‘consciousness’. Francisco Fernández (2014) is intrigued by the emphatic and exhaustive pronouncements of the Shoah as decisively ‘individual’ in its nature, given his assessment (Fernández, 2014, p. 85) that historical events, as ‘social facts’, are automatically unique to themselves, highlighting the theoretical redundancy of a relentless affirmation of ‘particularity’. The consequent positioning of the Shoah as an exclusive and isolated strain of genocide counter-intuitively within the linear catalogue of ‘historical events’ results in: hierarchisation, whereby the Shoah, by extension, becomes represented as an unattainable extremity never to be approached by any later genocidal behaviours; the pernicious suggestion to the Shoah as merely a troublesome ‘aberration’ rather than emblematic of prevailing social and political processes; and the simplistic, similarly elusive portrayal of the racial animosity demonstrated by genocide as “exceptional, the product of extraordinary hostility ... [and which becomes] a template of what constitutes racism” (Sayyid, 2022, p. 257). Glynis Cousin and Robert Fine (2022, p. 396), however, positioning themselves against a purported ‘singularising’ of the Shoah, write that the assertion that the Shoah has allowed for the ‘Jewish identity’ to be placed above and exterior to relativistic standards of social accountability, and that this provokes the diversion of attention rightfully provided to “other racisms” (Cousin and Fine, 2022, p. 396), arises from deliberately myopic and “highly particularistic way[s] of memorialising the [Shoah]” (Cousin and Fine, 2022, p. 396).

Equally false, by extension, would be the claim that politically salient messages discerned by the global attention provided to the Shoah cannot inform responses to similarly urgent geopolitical and ethno-social contexts, as Sascha Becker, Sharun Mukand, and Ivan Yotzov (2022, p. 2) inspect. They identify a common element amongst accounts of ethnic cleansing across disparate historical periods and geographical contexts when determining that discrimination as galvanised by ethnic or racial cleavages is broadly historically accompanied by instances of mass cultural and physical “emigration” (Becker, Mukand, and Yotzov, 2022, p. 2). While a central element of the cultural ‘shape’ of modern Europe, their allusion to the “existential

consequences” of attempts at mid-twentieth-century European migration (Becker, Mukand, and Yotzov, 2022, p. 2) references the concentration of European Jews who, having been denied the authority to cross national borders, found themselves at the mercy of the virulent policies of the German remit. Describing the Global North’s contemporary advocacy for compassion towards the subjugated (see also Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2022) as founded in a political recognition of the immense losses instigated by the trappings of the nation-state, Becker, Mukand, and Yotzov aspire to a further valorisation of physical movement of peoples – not performed in the aim of simply ‘displacing’ ethnic violence, but “as a safety valve” (Becker, Mukand, and Yotzov, 2022, p. 2) – central to lowering the proportion of persecuted groups victimised by a belligerent state’s genocidal behaviours, such as in Rakhine State (Becker, Mukand, and Yotzov, 2022, p. 2).

### **'Post-Nazi': colonial oppression, situationism, and contemporary awareness**

““[I]f you were ignorant of what went on, you were a fool; if you knew, but looked the other way, you were a coward; if you knew, and took part, you were a criminal” ...”

(Buruma, 2017, cited in Stevick, 2020, p. 41)

Recent studies from Dan Stone (2010, pp. 455-456) depict a fledgling – and potentially profound – theoretical ‘turn’ within Northern analyses of the Shoah, arguing that while the ritualistic murder of – predominantly – Jews and Roma communities remains “the most urgent and most complete” symbolic indication of the Nazi establishment (Stone, 2010, p. 456), what he terms “projects of genocide” (Stone, 2010, p. 456) encompasses broader practices and traditions, among them systems of extraction, which belie the predominant classification of the Nazi *Reich* as an incongruous ‘rogue state’. Given his conclusion that nebulous Nazi conceptions of anti-Jewish sentiment, despite their virulence, cannot account for genocidaires’ “participati[ng] in the killing process” (Stone, 2010, p. 456), Stone locates the Shoah ‘project’ in patterns of subjugation intrinsic to “Nazi empire-building” (Stone, 2010, p. 456), and ponders the value of acknowledging correlations with the previous activities of Western European colonial structures and alludes to the contemporary Western European discourse on the Shoah as an unprecedented ‘historical anomaly’ as conceivably seeking to limit too great of a coherence being established with continental imperial histories (see also Sayyid, 2022, p. 256). This is a model of ‘Western hypocrisy’ corroborated by Daniel Feierstein (2014), who writes that the characterisation of Nazi genocidaires as “manifestations of pure evil” (Feierstein, 2014, p. 72) aimed to foster a collective cultural ‘amnesia’ whereby the Second World War’s victors have taught a hegemonic narrative of German ‘savagery’ despite both the case for “genocide [being] a constitutive force in modern societies” (Feierstein, 2014, p. 72) and the tradition of potent racial discrimination in the very same societies lambasting its appearance in German-speaking communities.

A comprehensive chronology of the protracted struggle amongst scholars of the Shoah between proponents of an “authoritarian personality” argument (Bilewicz, Halabi, Hanke, Henkel- Guembel, Hirschberger, Imhoff, Kahn, and Sherman, 2017, p. 908)

and those who perceive the ‘genocidaire’ as a product of “situationist factors” (Bilewicz *et al.*, 2017, p. 908) is provided by Michał Bilewicz *et al.* (2017). Generating a synthesis of the preliminary writings of Hannah Arendt, whom we can feasibly credit for the expansion of an anti-essentialist interpretation of the Shoah, unconvinced as she was by reductive interpretations of Shoah genocidaires as fortuitous collections of immoral, ethically perverse ‘personalities’, and who instead asserted that those committing ‘unconscionable’ acts of malice were “regular people ... [circumstantially transformed into] ruthless killers” (Bilewicz *et al.*, 2017, p. 908). Where the ‘situationist’ analogy of Shoah human rights abuses may encounter continuing, potentially vociferous resistance, it seems, is in its definitive non-compliance with binary interpretations of ‘the persecutor’ and ‘the persecuted’, akin to Mahmood Mamdani’s teachings that “[b]efore ... eliminat[ing] an enemy, you must first... define [it]” (2001, p. 9), and which undermines an unfettered and retributive path post-Shoah towards punitive justice. The implications of post-genocide situationism – that to acknowledge the falsity of passively typecasting ‘the German’ as ‘the fanatical anti-Semite’ (see Goldhagen, 1996) and dispensing with binaries is not analogous with disregarding the atrocities perpetrated within then-German territories – may rightfully prove challenging given the post-Cold War Western recognition of the Shoah as the “[new?] embodiment of radical evil” (Stein, 1998, p. 522).

As an instructive, cautionary selection of maxims published amidst a resurgence of fascist, anti-democratic, conspiratorial, and neo-Nazi sentiments heralded by the American political right (Adams, 2017), Timothy Snyder’s *On Tyranny* (2017) is structured through advisory pre-Shoah and contemporary anecdotes aimed at averting a global “trajectory of tyranny” (Adams, 2017). Snyder’s aphorisms include:

- that those complicit in the enactment of the Shoah also comprises those whose naïveté prompted them into “wish[ing] that Jews might disappear” (Snyder, 2017, p. 27), and that by partaking in procedures of Jewish stigmatisation and forced displacement, fulfilled the prophecy of a Jewish ‘expulsion’ that they had been instructed to endorse;
- that public and civil servants ostensibly committed to human dignity and an inherent sense of prevailing justice capitalised on distortions of these messages as a means of justifying “[genocidal] projects of conquest and destruction” (Snyder, 2017, p. 32);
- and that the pervasive image of the Shoah as exclusively synonymous with “mechani[s]ed impersonal death [within concentration camps]” (Snyder, 2017, p. 42), and thus worthy of being extricated from German ‘social lives’, implicitly serves to sanitise and absolve German communities of a consuming communal guilt, a correlation as prevalent in contemporary post-Shoah imaginaries as was its manifestation during the 1945-6 ‘Nuremberg trials’, whose meagre proportion of prosecutions for murder came to serve as a synecdochical “minimi[s]ation of the scale” (Snyder, 2017, p. 42)

Categorising Snyder’s *On Tyranny* (2017) as an accessible and yet incisive portrayal, as framed by stark commentaries on Nazi brutality, of the ‘enforced separations’ central to despotic regimes, which culminate in the advocating for a conscious elimination of ‘peripheral identities’ as a compromise for national ‘coherence’ (see Law, 2010, p. 7) – and which was knowingly aimed at widespread public consumption – hints at a modern alteration in conceptualisations of ‘genocide prevention’ whereby

principles of ‘consciousness-raising’ have been orientated away from multinational ‘elites’ and towards strategies of “combat[ting] ... authoritarianism *at home*” (Bormes and Mouly, 2021, emphasis added).

## Conclusion

This essay has attempted to associate theoretical efforts made to 'come to terms with' the Shoah to subsequent endeavours to decidedly forbid the reproduction of ethnic wrongdoing, through analyses of the significance of post-Shoah collective law-making and the validity of allegations encompassing the Shoah's ‘ineligibility’ to have its historical components transposed onto those of ‘separate’ ethnic crises. Notwithstanding Salman Sayyid's statement that the 1945 Allied victory triggered a distancing in European societies away from anti-Jewish hostility, and upheld the historically factual insistence that, far from representing an anachronistic ‘imposition’, the participation of European Jews in mechanisms of ‘historical progress’ remains “intrinsic rather than alien” (Sayyid, 2022, p. 258) – and Ian Law's declaration that genocidal systems' delusions of “a ‘global racial order’” (2010, p. 14) have encountered extensive and assorted methods of anti-racist opposition – the outlook for a de-hierarchised, Shoah-inclusive ‘anti-genocide’ paradigm remains uncertain.

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# HOW FAR DO YOU AGREE WITH MALIK'S CRITIQUE OF MULTICULTURALISM?

by Lyall Lester

SY6008: Constructions of 'Race' in Culture and Politics

BA (Hons): International Development with NGO Management/Sustainable  
Development and Social Change

This essay seeks to critically appraise Kenan Malik's *Multiculturalism and its Discontents* (2013b) by arguing that, although Malik rationally criticises and justifies his misgivings towards the legitimate shortcomings and pitfalls of multicultural 'schemes' as they have evolved in western Europe, his assertions would be enhanced by greater specificity when discussing multiculturalism as reproduced in various European regional circumstances, associated as multiculturalism is with an intricate "re-positioning of national and geopolitical identities" (Catterall, 2011, p. 330). The essay will question the value of Malik's development of potentially unrealistic linkages between anti-multicultural 'outbreaks', both tangible and abstract, as they have materialised within multiple European contexts. There will also be an examination of the optimistic expectations on Malik's part of the handling of his

"left[-]wing and progressive critiques of multiculturalism ..." (Malik, 2013a).

The compelling aspiration of separating the potential of a progressive 'post'-multicultural future from impractical and apocryphal 'anti'-multicultural narratives hints at a delicate and laborious theoretical separation between left-wing and right-wing scepticism towards multicultural policy – the two being incompatible in their respective philosophical reasoning, but the sensationalistic rhetoric of the right having taken on an alluring journalistic and persuasive 'power' (see Castelli Gattinara, Della Porta, Eleftheriadis, and Felicetti, 2020) – which appears somewhat constrained in its socio-political feasibility.

Malik (2013a, 2013b) juxtaposes the degree of social endorsement of multicultural practices between the 1990s and the 2010s, the former an era during which 'tolerant' and inclusive multicultural policy decisions orientated around "the avowal of identity politics" (Malik, 2013a)

and the communal advantages owed to 'coexistence' enjoyed broad recognition as a means for the

normative betterment of multi-ethnic Northern societies. Emphasising at great lengths his distaste for the simplistic rationale from the political right for a decisive termination of multiculturalism's political 'schemes', he describes heavy-handed, yet pervasive negative depictions of multiculturalism as predicated on accommodating contemptuous conceptions of 'foreign' belief systems, political incompetence, and a feebly constructed interpretation of threatened primordial "Western values" (Malik, 2013a). Malik alludes to a sorrow for the previous political salience of influential and well-established rhetoric from the political left questioning the underlying presumptions characterising multicultural identities, depicted as inadvertently subsumed into the unrefined monocultural pursuit which constitutes "the right[-]wing assault" (Malik, 2013a). This intensity which typifies right-wing hesitancy towards multiculturalism, beyond minimising the visibility of earlier left-wing critiques and their legitimacy as a relevant political perspective, has culminated in an effective trend of apprehension on behalf of left-wing political scholars to intervene in disputes over the political value of multicultural discourse, consumed as they are by the

"fear of being associated with the ... [dehumanising 'anti'-



multicultural belligerence of] Wilders and Le Pen ...” (Malik, 2013a).

The significance of this suppression, whether incidental or directly pursued, of attempts at a multifocal promotion of efforts to establish a ‘post’-multicultural paradigm, it can be deduced, is the growth of an exaggerated image of the political left’s indulgence of unfettered multicultural ‘chaos’, at the expense of what Malik himself (2013a) labels “classic notions of liberty”, and as exemplified by the crude instrumentalisation of “woke culture” (Rose, 2020). Malik applies this fraught context to the central pivot of his argument, seemingly a plea to his readers’ capacity for political nuance, that a left-wing pursuit of alternatives to multiculturalism’s affirmation of the immutability of social traits (Malik, 2013a) must also inherently accompany a devaluing of right-wing nostalgic fantasies of ‘homogeneity’.

Locating many of the semantic difficulties and subsequent alleged social ‘fallout’ in multicultural frameworks to the implicit division between a physical state of

“liv[ing] in a diverse[, that is, a ‘multicultural’] world ...” (Malik, 2007)

and the verbalised political notion of multiculturalism – whose execution seeks to legitimise, represent, and politically situate the former – Malik sympathises with the seductive, yet torturously ambitious, vision of a community whose sense of ‘cohesion’ is strengthened by intercultural dialogue. Such a civilisation, Malik theorises, would invigorate interrogations of similarly controversial imagery of a “post-national, post-racial world” (Law, 2010, p. 217; see also Malik, 2022). The unfortunate futility, however, of this illusory ‘endpoint’ within a linear multicultural model, as Malik declares, is the authoritative and unchanging compartmentalisation of individuals and pre-designated social groups as dictated by tenuous or illogical historical affiliations, and which then inform overwrought political attempts at engagement with cultural ‘communities’. Malik’s (2013a) two examples of intangible social boundaries, whether “cultural or imaginative”, are united by their reification and reinstatement into the political ‘world’ precisely via paradoxical efforts under a dysfunctional ‘multicultural’ banner to “ensure a tolerant and democratic polity” (Malik, 2007). Malik’s impression of multiculturalism as interminably straining for finality and permanence when categorising “social beings, and hence ... [by definition] transformative beings” (Malik, 2007), he argues, risks a startling inversion of multicultural ‘objectives’, whereby – following Malik’s (2013a) example – far from inspiring sincere discussions on geopolitical borders as fabricated ‘cultural barriers’, Malik argues that the inflexibility of multiculturalism’s social ‘categories’ contribute to reactive “policing of borders” (Malik, 2013a) as well as to “criteria ... [designating] who can belong and who cannot” (Cassidy, Wemyss, and Yuval-Davis, 2019, p. 163).

Malik positions himself against what he considers multicultural politics’ odious and shallow false convergence of the social occurrence of living within and being a witness to an observably ‘diverse’ population, what he defines imprecisely as “lived experience” (Malik, 2013a), and structural endeavours aimed at firmly institutionalising this ethnic and cultural diversity. His critique of this affiliation lies

in the fact that multiculturalism – furthering Malik’s interpretation of a recurrent juxtaposition of its decontextualised, visionary aspirations and the observable unintended consequences of contextual multicultural ‘interventions’ – so tied as it is to popular ‘prehistoric’ “notions of liberty” (Malik, 2013a), instead serves to constrain the autonomy which it so strenuously tries to champion. Malik concludes that the unfaltering equivalence constructed by the political right – between a rejection of multicultural ideals and a vehement derision towards, and disdain for, the presence of social diversity itself, a ‘diversity’ upon which multiculturalism is founded (Malik, 2013b) – is certainly not the singular and irreversible destiny to which ‘multiculturalist’ political societies are fixed. Malik argues alternatively that an appreciation of factual social ‘diversity’, considered by multiculturalism’s proponents, according to Malik, as “a public good to be *enforced*” (Malik, 2014, emphasis added), can be replicated, and more rewardingly so, within anti-multiculturalist political and academic communities. Malik asserts that an impression of uncertainty towards multiculturalism as a political strategy fulfilling its commitment to upholding “individual freedom[s]” (Malik, 2014) should not supplement broader mistrust of the capabilities of ethnically diverse communities; thus, an important distinction must be voiced and thoughtfully articulated between the functioning of the social world and theoretical conceptions of this social reality, that is,

“celebrat[ing] diversity while opposing multiculturalism” (Malik, 2013a).

What can also be simultaneous, Malik writes, are: a dissociation from protracted and contrived attempts at a multiculturalist political system, which devalues humanity’s ‘transcultural’ potential (Malik, 2007; Correa and Inamdar, 2021); and a continued dismissal and scrutiny of the lurid melodrama instigated against multicultural societies themselves by the political right – whose motivations lie “in a completely different vision” to Malik, which he emphasises doggedly (Malik, 2013a) – who conceal their intolerance and prejudices (Malik, 2007) beneath ‘political’ accounts attributing, in Malik’s example, societal disunity to the indistinct menace of “mass immigration” (Malik, 2014).

Malik, in similar writings (Malik, 2011), has identified as one of the most socially and politically prescient landscapes within recent British reactions against a multicultural ‘agenda’ the highly charged correlation in political and social circles to be identified between British multicultural policies of the late twentieth century and the subsequent panicked “groping for answers” (Malik, 2011) to interpret the advent of British “*homegrown* Islamic terrorists” (Altunbas and Thornton,

2011, p. 262, emphasis added) after investigations of the attacks on the London transport system by suicide bombers in the summer of 2005. These accompanied indirect concerns through the 2000s and 2010s – and instigated by the political right (Gentleman, 2010) – of widespread British community regression and “a sense that community-spirit ha[d] withered” (Gentleman, 2010), symbolised in 2006 by the Labour Party’s own unease towards the Muslim niqab and its impact – which Malik would surely consider ironic – for “the development of [isolated] “parallel communities”” (BBC News, 2006). It would be highly interesting to discover Malik’s perspective on the shift in understandings of “homegrown ... terrorists” (Altunbas and

Thornton, 2011, p. 262) since his examination of Anders Breivik's 2011 hateful assault on Norway (Malik, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), given the increasingly alarming recognition that the fanatical racist violence such as that associated with an

“extreme right[-]wing ideology ...” (Dodd, 2022)

now constitutes one of the most legitimate concerns for antiterrorist legislation within the wide banner of terrorist practices in the UK. An intriguing prediction of Malik's potential centring of the 'far-right' within multiculturalism is supplied by his exploration of Breivik himself, where he ascribes to multiculturalism the cultivation of a “language ... of victimhood” (Malik, 2011).

Malik's line of reasoning as traced within *Multiculturalism and its Discontents* (Malik, 2013b) can be linked in various fashions to two of Malik's earlier fundamental pieces unpacking contemporary processes of 'ethnicisation'. His claim in the more classically sociological publication *The Meaning of Race* (Malik, 1996) – that the endurance of 'races' as a symbolic 'emblem' of individuals' social position is anchored in endemic discrepancies between

“an ideological commitment to equality and the persistence of inequality as a political reality ...” (Malik, 1996, p. 6) –

places *Multiculturalism and its Discontents* (Malik, 2013b) in the role of a continuation of Malik's overarching assertion that social tensions and political and theoretical attempts at 'mitigation' arise primarily from the insurmountably disheartening realisation that optimistic, ostensibly achievable social goals, illustrated in captivating promises of social justice and everlasting communal wellbeing, continually fails to materialise despite the struggles undertaken within political schemes committed to social 'betterment' (see Malik, 2013b). Malik's assessment of changes in academic forecasts of multiculturalism, from the multiculturalism as cemented in the public imagination (Glazer, 1998, cited in Malik, 2013b), and the subsequent weariness which he observes fifteen years on (Malik, 2013b), can be placed within a geopolitical context by using Malik's own claim that the seismic political shift instigated by the global political upheaval of the late 1980s led to

“the repoliticisation of the notion of racial difference” (Malik, 1996, p. 7).

Further, Malik's belief that multiculturalism's “[c]elebration of difference” (2013a) has become the guiding principle of modern struggles against racism and ignorance – what Malik considers alarming given its basis on the inherent permanence of social 'traits' – is advanced on within *Strange Fruit* (Malik, 2008), where the concept of 'racial thinking', the indelicate separation of societies into supposedly culturally 'logical' groups imbued with pre-ordained, unchanging characteristics, is a social process which Malik claims is inversely supported by both bigoted conceptions of human racial 'variety' and voraciously anti-racist strategies for inter-ethnic 'tolerance'.

This essay has hoped to fittingly assess the allegation made by Malik (2013*b*) that multiculturalism, as a political mindset, falters in its commendable strive towards proportionate and communal prosperity for all observable social ‘groups’ through its loyalty to a construction and affirmation of trite, unsound social groupings, a trait which Malik notes as also present in derisory claims of ‘separate but equal’ (see Laughland, 2022) professed by proponents of racial hierarchies. Malik argues in an articulate and persuasive manner for his impression of multiculturalism as an unfortunate obstacle for the formulation of a “post-ethnic” society (Law, 2010, p. 236). Despite this, while he goes to great lengths to differentiate his

“left[-]wing ... critiques of multiculturalism ...” (Malik, 2013*a*)

from the voracious *anti*-multiculturalism employed by the political right, Malik still appears captivated by a puzzlingly romantic, but inconceivable conviction that his cynicism towards multiculturalism, as emblematic as such a position has become for the political right, will be

separated, without difficulty, from right-wing *anti-multiculturalist* dogma by his readers and by the contemporary British political setting with as much nuance and sound judgment as he seems to anticipate.

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***IS DEVELOPMENT AND NGO  
PRACTICE  
'(UN)TRANSLATABLE'?***

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SY6007: Mental Wealth 3: Placement Reflections

BA (Hons): International Development with NGO Management/Sustainable  
Development and Social Change

This essay will use a combination of Pierre Bourdieu's contributions to understandings of dominant methods of expression as symbolised by "social operations of *naming*" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 105, emphasis in original), "mediated communication" in NGO practice (Enghel, 2018, p. 22), and 'translation studies' (see Chen and Du, 2022) to critically examine the way in which development NGOs become trapped by the meanings surrounding 'development' and 'progress' which they ascribe to the 'work' that they undertake. Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton's example of development studies' trend towards providing fledgling development students with facile and evasive attempts at diverse conceptions of development – namely,

“that development means different things to different people ...” –

(Cowen and Shenton, 1995, p. 27)

is rooted in development work's trivial engagement with the observable dominance of certain interpretations of development, which become symbolic of a universalistic linear development 'tradition' as it is reproduced by development NGOs themselves reliant upon this exact dominance (Beaudet, Haslam, and Schafer, 2020, p. 8).

The essay is based on experiences as a natively English-speaking undergraduate charged with translating accounts of development intervention by a South American 'local development' NGO (on 'local' development see Marques De Oliveira, 2020) *from English into Spanish*, which encouraged reflections on the consequences of translating *out of* one's first language, that is, in the 'wrong' direction (Jiménez Gutiérrez, 2022), as well as the politics of "communicat[ing] do- gooding" (Enghel, 2018, p. 25, emphasis removed).

As an attempt at contributing to a fledgling, if still rudimentary school of thought on the theoretical basis of NGO development as it is refracted through spoken and written language (Crack, 2019), the essay will argue that the development sector's reticence thus far to value translation as an inexact approximation of cultural and discursive interaction, despite this inevitably being the central medium through which much '*international*' development and charity work in the non- English-speaking world is enacted, has the effect of undermining the celebration of distinct cultures that contemporary 'decolonial development' (see Ziai, 2020, p. 79) goes to such great lengths to emphasise. While considering development 'valuably untranslatable', as opposed to tortuously so, should not be positioned as the main obstacle to a new 'multilingual' development, approaches championed by Bourdieu (1991), as well as those which are integral to debates on translation, could contribute very effectively to reflections on the 'language' of development which emphasise the individual character, though not inevitably the irreconcilability, of culturally specific conceptions of 'good change' (Chambers, 1997).

In what has become an influential perspective into communication as a pernicious method of social production and into the intricacies surrounding its instrumentalisation as a means of humiliation and indignity, Bourdieu (1991) writes of language as the enduring product of repeated exercises of dominance, and declares, in the context of the social prowess of the most powerful 'speakers', that our conception of language is thus transformed away from unemotional strategies of verbalising "socioeconomic processes" (Thompson, 1991, p. 29) and more



threateningly towards becoming merely a further confirmation of an apparent and universally assumed distinction between the powerful and the powerless. Far from recognising a normative and beneficial linguistic value to transfers of information and views, Bourdieu asserts that overarching and oppressive socio-cultural power dynamics have the effect of simplifying any attempt at a critical or representative 'discourse' into a fruitless confrontation between self-serving representations of individuals' internal preoccupations. In an analysis of sociolinguistic 'hegemony', Bourdieu stresses the total importance of recognising that ostensibly neutral linguistic connections are inevitably, and in every instance, manoeuvred to suit the position of those who control a language's 'movements', whose possession over the direction of language systems is integral to the reinforcing of a pre-existing "linguistic habitus" (Thompson, 1991, p. 17). Bourdieu describes the typical language user as unknowingly dependent on the certainty of prevailing rhetorical systems, but who is rendered anguished by their unspoken impotence when attempting to rebel in the face of the fixed social mechanisms that language presupposes and reconstitutes.

Bourdieu's impassioned declaration of sympathy for the socially and structurally 'silenced' helps to situate the spectre of unrepresentative sociolinguistic practices within the 'development' sphere. *Whose Development?* (Crewe and Harrison, 1998) pointedly analyses continually resurfacing "mental constructs" (Crewe and Harrison, 1998, p. 44) governing development workers' attitudes towards unfamiliar cultural traditions, where superficially liberating interpretations of the means of community 'improvement' only materialise as they are theorised along pre-ordained and advantageous presumptions of Northern supremacy, where

"the value of knowledge is predetermined by ... the innovator ...".

(Crewe and Harrison, 1998, p. 96)

By targeting what they perceive as the unearned pre-eminence of unimaginative and haphazard Northern development attitudes, Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison analyse the entrenched and authoritative influence of NGO and development staff's categorisation as "developers" (Crewe and Harrison, 1998, p. 1) and interrogate the ways in which neat divisions between those who 'do development' and those who are thus 'developed' allow for the perpetuation of narrow and imposing visions of development models of societal 'improvement' whose basis in "ideologies and material conditions" (Crewe and Harrison, 1998, p. 49) is deliberately understated. Crewe and Harrison insinuate that the overzealous characterisation of NGO and development practitioners as ingenious harbingers of 'modernity' contributes to the strengthening of the Northern NGO discourse, which fundamentally and regressively alters the NGO sector's recognition of the value of 'domestic' community practices, among them the African principle of *ubuntu* (see Watene, 2022) and the indigenous South American notion of *buen vivir* (literally 'to live well'; see Escribano, Esparcia, and Mendieta Vicuña, 2017).

Tackling the politics and presumptions of NGO dialogues, Karin Gwinn Wilkins (2018) perceives the prospect of an inclusive development NGO landscape as complicated by a competition between uses of NGOs' 'expressive power' to advertise

their own benevolence to as much of an extent as they incorporate positive communication strategies into the “good work” which they supposedly complete (Gwinn Wilkins, 2018, p. 76, emphasis removed). While Gwinn Wilkins’ findings seemingly relate only tangentially to the concerns of theories of discourse, her investigation of approaches to development as related to visibility culminates in a juxtaposition between NGOs

“*looking good* ... and *doing well* [the former frequently preventing the latter] ...”. (Gwinn Wilkins, 2018, p. 76, emphasis in original)

Gwinn Wilkins’ writings on the tension faced by development NGOs – between outward expressions of impact and the resulting forfeit of an ‘actual’ NGO-beneficiary partnership – seems to reflect the ambiguities inherent to translation, a practice itself afflicted by a struggle between the translator’s duty to unite and synthesise styles of articulating social phenomena across disparate linguistic cultures in a manner which “giv[es] back ... [a] theme unaltered” (Venuti, 2019, p. 44).

Alongside Gwinn Wilkins’ (2018) account of the distorted self-representations of development NGOs, Tiina Kontinen’s examination (2016) of the incoherence and instability of NGO “vocabularies of practice” (Thorton *et al.*, 2012, cited in Kontinen, 2016, p. 30), typified by

“[development workers] us[ing] the same words while ... meaning something different ...” (Kontinen, 2016, p. 29),

is orientated around how development NGOs employ pre-existing frames of ‘knowledge’ which inform the ways in which development projects are appraised and evaluated. Not only does Kontinen’s listing of a total of “[e]ight organi[s]ational vocabularies” (Kontinen, 2016, p. 33) hint at the overall confusion central to the semantics of development, Kontinen rightly appears to suggest that development NGOs’ rationale for the use of specific development ‘vocabularies’ can serve to further obscure the *reality* of charitable projects. Kontinen usefully explains ambiguity – on whether certain vocabularies have been selected constructively, to accurately mirror the aspirations of beneficiaries, or as a means of perniciously disguising the harm perpetrated by unsuitable development schemes that would otherwise be blatantly visible – with the claim that NGO projects falling short in efforts to ‘empower’ were often put down by NGO staff to

“the irrationality ... of [inflexible] community practices ...”

(Kontinen, 2016, p. 37) –

as opposed to inadequacies within the development projects themselves – while purported successes often conformed neatly to “the kinds of intervention” advocated for by selected ‘vocabularies’ (Kontinen, 2016, p. 37). Kontinen’s primary debate – whether development NGOs based and overseeing community projects in the ‘majority world’ should have their efficacy and importance logically or ethically assessed via, or expected to absorb and re-emit, prescribed and presumably incongruous totalising narratives dictating the means of development – hints at concerns surrounding contested meanings and cultural ‘relevance’ which surround development ‘in translation’.

Expanding on Kontinen's (2016) connection between development NGOs' *a priori* patterns of communication and the resultant shaping of observable social realities to fit easily ratified and disseminated development agendas, Linje Manyozo (2017) asserts that development thinking is reproduced for development students in a manner that deliberately seeks to de-historicise and de-spatialise, transforming even good-intentioned NGO action into components of a

“spectacle of development ...” (Manyozo, 2017, p. 4) –

the lurid performance of a simplistic “aspirational idea” (Manyozo, 2017, p. 4). This exaggerated strive for discernible transcultural ‘prosperity’ requires that, even before development interventions materialise, they are overtaken by received principles dictating how development ought to be imagined, a tragedy which befalls even those development NGOs doggedly committed to “radical and liberating development interventions” (Manyozo, 2017, p. 10). Totalising, yet often implicit discourses of finality and concomitant global ‘progress’, that of ‘moving forwards *together*’, are central to the persistent influence of “the single story” (Adichie, cited in Manyozo, 2017, p. 8), which serves to eliminate the productive potential of *internally* theorised conceptions of existence – the consequences of these for the ‘language’ of development being a journeying away from laborious attempts at an objective cultural and social translation of ‘development’, and instead towards perspectives on ‘good change’ (Chambers, 1997) which are intrinsic to self-defined linguistic and cultural landscapes. Manyozo thus advocates for the mainstreaming of collaborative traditions much like those of *ubuntu* and *buen vivir* (Watene, 2022; Escribano, Esparcia, and Mendieta Vicuña, 2017) centred around “local ontologies” applied outwards (Manyozo, 2017, p. 7), and which language is responsible for ‘making real’.

Manyozo, by reference to a Bourdeusian “dominant syntax” underlying development theory (2017, p. 4; see also Bourdieu, 1991), reiterates how the idea of ‘development’, despite its alleged commitment to *global* solidarity, continually reinforces methods of “speaking development” (Manyozo, 2017, p. 5), and asserts not only that development is as much a linguistic as it is a political phenomenon, but also that methods of expressing and ‘signifying’ development at all (on semiotics see Fadda and Velmezova, 2022) as depicted by academics and ‘developers’ (Crewe and Harrison, 1998) prove as arbitrary as later explanations for the validity of development assistance.

Potentially the most intriguing aspect of Manyozo's (2017) contribution to the relationship between development and language is his application of “[a] pedagogy of listening” (Manyozo, 2017, pp. 129-157) to the functioning of development NGOs. The concept of a ‘pedagogy of listening’, which originated in theories of education and child social development (Low and Sonntag, 2013), celebrates pupils establishing for themselves the reasoning which they believe dictates their reactions to “lived experience” (Low and Sonntag, 2013, p. 783), which allows peers and teachers, themselves governed by individual

“relationships to the world outside [of] the self ...”,

(Low and Sonntag, 2013, p. 776)

to empathise effectively with the social and emotional processes which dictate individual and communal lives. The development arena's potential adherence to a 'pedagogy of listening' in the aim of productive collaboration with communities, Manyozo alleges, would necessitate the discipline "humbl[ing itself]" (2016, p. 957). Distancing development from the distraction of 'spectacle' and towards a 'pedagogy of listening', Manyozo writes, would allow for the cultivation of a social field within which development NGOs assume the role not of a 'director' of development, but rather of a catalyst fully indebted to a community's culturally and linguistically unique vision – which may not lend itself comfortably to being culturally or linguistically 'translated'.

Angela Crack (2019) professes less optimism than Manyozo (2016, 2017) towards the productive and collaborative potential of a 'pedagogy of listening' by hastening to add that it would be unwise to blindly assume that NGOs fulfilling the action of 'listening' to its beneficiaries can occur efficiently, given the often

“poor translation/interpretation capacity in local languages ...”.

(Crack, 2019, p. 159)

Crack analyses the ways in which development NGOs who are unfamiliar with the intricacies and implicit social conventions encapsulated within beneficiaries' language use have their goals and potential for fruitful interaction affected by a dependence on, and understating of, what Crack terms “language intermediaries” (2019, p. 163) – generally conversational interpreters whose role it is to effectively convey abstract and ill-defined development ‘concepts’ between English, whose omnipresence in ‘international’ development Crack identifies as a remnant of colonial policy (2019, p. 160), and ethnically and culturally specific dialects employed ‘in the field’. Crack is unimpressed by the disregard within NGO and development scholarship for systems of translation and interpretation – processes, albeit approximative, of cultural transference – epitomised by development institutions' reverence for “technical expertise” (Crack, 2019, p. 165) as a productive substitute for an understanding of the highly particular ways in which all communities employ language. Crack concludes that development and NGO work's alleged ‘objective’ of “*responding to the ... furthest behind*” (DFID, 2017c, cited in Crack, 2019, p. 166, emphasis in original), an ambition which characterises contemporary development, will remain unattainable so long as the languages within which development is conveyed to those encountering it remain an afterthought, and not the fundamental mechanism through which ‘development’ is given meaning.

Crack has reiterated her findings in collaborations with Hilary Footitt (Crack and Footitt, 2018; see also Crack and Tesseur, 2020). Crack and Footitt (2018) resign themselves to

“the inevitable ‘foreign’ dimension ...” (Crack and Footitt, 2018)

of inter-lingual collaboration between beneficiary societies and development NGOs – the latter, conversely, often considering themselves apt and considerate cross-cultural organisations – but approach with anticipation an analysis of the neglected role of language cultures exterior to Anglophone discourses of development, and of

translation as a system of imperfect approximations of linguistic traditions and assumptions, and which complicate the romantic binary of “local communities speak[ing ...] and NGOs hear[ing]” (Crack and Footitt, 2018). Central to the writings of Crack and Footitt is the assertion that languages are both political instruments and traditions in flux, and so their role as upholders of dominant ideologies or discourses, as well as shifting representations of cultural wealth, needs to be further examined so that development NGOs can assess with greater introspection and profundity the tangible impact of how development ‘representations’ across linguistic lines, and the resulting significance for global and multilingual understandings of what development truly ‘is’ and should be.

Robert Ahearne’s (2016) conversations with villagers in rural east Africa are adopted as the frame for an examination of cultural and linguistic imagination as a crucial constituent of reactions to development, which Ahearne approximates in Swahili as

“*maendeleo* ... [, broadly translatable as] to go forward ...” (2016, p. 80).

The inevitable linguistic and cultural gap between ‘development’ and *maendeleo*, the latter being a central tenet of the vocabulary of social ‘evolution’ for contemporary Tanzania, is a suggestion made by Ahearne that translating ‘development’ across linguistic communities often proves “notoriously difficult” (2016, p. 80). Not only does ‘development’ prove a challenge to translate in the present, Ahearne claims that social change, as it manifests through time and across social communities, impedes further a universal comprehension of ‘development’ as it undergoes processes of “reinterpretation and appropriation” (Mercer, 2002, p. 111, cited in Ahearne, 2016, p. 81). Dismissing mainstream development approaches which aspire to broad societal improvement ‘to come’, Ahearne writes that many of his interviewees’ perceptions of development ‘meanings’, in a complete inversion of what Manyozo (2017) identifies as the keenly forward-facing ‘spectacle of development’, were illustrated via intergenerational perceptions of what had *preceded* them, a narrative which Anglophone ‘development’, whose closest equivalent in Swahili refers only “to go[ing] *forward*” (Ahearne, 2016, p. 80, emphasis added), would surely struggle to incorporate into its lexicon.

Adaptations by development NGOs to the constantly shifting and unstable groundings of contested meanings, as investigated in later discussions by Tiina Kontinen (2020), often prove deceptively circular. Designating development NGOs “learning organisation[s]” (Kontinen, 2020, p. 1) – as fallible, yet ostensibly self-aware, and open to changes in practice – allows for a cycle of development ‘vocabularies’ being exhausted and then continuously reinvigorated within a cycle of ‘false innovation’. By being seen as actively distancing themselves from earlier instances of harm perpetrated in their name (Kontinen, 2020, p. 105), development NGOs make a case for being absolved from liability for continual inefficacy, but, despite their eager self-definition as ‘learning organisations’, Kontinen concludes that development NGOs seem more inclined to *perform* ‘learning’ than they are to “*really learn*” (cited in Kontinen, 2020, p. 1). The depiction by development NGOs of hackneyed notions of as seemingly unearthing revolutionary strategies for ‘social improvement’ – so-called “development amnesia” (Kontinen, 2010, p. 104) – has led to a superficial redressing of development’s original meanings represented as progressive and socially radical ‘paradigm shifts’, a procedure akin in Kontinen’s view to

development NGOs tirelessly striving to “reinvent the wheel” (Kontinen, 2020, p. i, half title).

From within the field of ‘translation studies’ (see Chen and Du, 2022), Lawrence Venuti (2019) successfully orientates himself around radically progressive notions of translation, and away from its distinction as a dispassionate generation of ‘alternative versions’ of original texts, creations which efficiently and effortlessly reproduce the cultural mosaic imprinted upon the structure of the ‘original’ text. Venuti’s view (2019) that attitudes to translation which seek to maximise ‘usability’ and ease of ‘consumption’ for users of the ‘output’ language reinforce a misleading fantasy promising “immediate access to the source text” (Venuti, 2019, p. 5) and strengthen false conceptions that translation, far from being above all an artistic endeavour forming “texts in their own right” (Venuti, 2019, p. 176), is caricatured as an automated and prescriptive practice, capable of effortlessly harnessing the cultural and creative power of various linguistic settings. Venuti’s (2019) proposal for a translation praxis anchored less to the myth of ‘timelessness’ and more so to a validating of translations as inexact interpretations of similarly diverse language societies could enable development NGOs perplexed at their beneficiaries’ disillusionment with the abstract tenets of English-language ‘development’ to further Manyozo’s (2016, 2017) aspirations for development being verbalised, dictated, and instituted “endogenous[ly]” (Manyozo, 2017, p. 7) by formalising approaches to ‘development’ which emphasise its function in intercultural *resemblance* in the place of social and cultural *reflection*.

This essay has looked at the potential contribution of ideas commonly found within ‘translation studies’ (see Chen and Du, 2022), the scholarship of Bourdieu (1991), and recent linkages between languages and development when applied to NGO and development theories, and how they may help to clarify difficulties encountered with development ‘vocabularies’ (Kontinen, 2016) as they are altered and transmitted between ethno-linguistic societies. Eduardo Gudynas’ poignant illustration of scholarly attitudes to development, that of it being both

“defunct[,] and yet ... the only way *forward* ...”

(2011, p. 442; see also Ahearne, 2016)

highlights the critical juncture at which development, as a monolithic theory which idealistically would transcend culture and language, has stalled. While Bourdieu’s (1991) emphasis on the reproduction of dominance and lexical superiority and Venuti’s (2019) assertion of translations as mere conceptual ‘estimations’ of cultural reality aligned more with interpretation than objectivity risks fragmenting development via linguistic lines, development NGOs’ valuing of translation as an inexact utensil for broadcasting development ‘messages’ may help to dismantle contrived, universalistic assumptions of “good change [for all]” (Chambers, 1997) – as would the development field’s reassessment of expectations of cross-cultural – that is, interlingual – replicability. In any case, the disorientation apparent in the work of many development NGOs attempting to bridge linguistic boundaries hints at the need for a new perspective on the ‘language’ of development for NGOs failing in their aim of

“centrali[sing] ... the subaltern voice ...” (Manyozo, 2017, p. 59) and the languages which it brings to life.

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