Exploring experiences of Eastern Europeans parenting a child with SEN in the UK and perspectives from school staff

Luiza Salciuc
Registration number: 100360615

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Summary

This doctoral thesis is divided into three key chapters: a literature review, an empirical chapter and a reflective account. The first chapter provides a thematic literature review that explores relevant themes, theory and discourses in relation to migrants parenting a child with SEN and their relationships with schools. Literature around the impact of migration, cultural capital, the impact of social discourse, home-school communication and school practice is also explored within this chapter. Secondly, the empirical chapter presents a qualitative study which employed semi-structured interviews and the use of participant-chosen visuals to explore the experiences of Eastern European parents and school staff. Following a reflexive thematic analysis of the data, the chapter discusses the findings in relation to previous research, as well as considerations for future research and implications for Educational Psychology and school practice. Lastly, the reflective chapter provides a first-person critical account of the researcher's journey whilst conducting this study, with consideration to the researcher's experiences, personal biases and professional development. This chapter also outlines plans for dissemination.

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List of acronyms

ASC: Autism spectrum condition

BPS: British Psychological Society

CoP: Code of Practice

CPD: Continuous personal/professional development

CYP: Children and young people

DCSF: Department for children, schools and families

DECP: Division of Educational and Child Psychology

DfE: Department for Education

EAL: English as an additional language

EE: Eastern Europe or Eastern European(s)

EHCP: Education, Health, and Care Plan

EP: Educational Psychologist

EPS: Educational Psychology Service

HCPC: Health and Care Professions Council

IR: Integrated resource

OECD: The Organisation for economic co-operation and development

ONS: Office for national statistics

LA: Local authority

RTA: Reflexive thematic analysis

SEN: Special education needs

SENCo: Special educational needs co-oordinator

SEND: Special education needs and disabilities

TA: Teaching assistant

TEP: Trainee Educational Psychologist

UEA: University of East Anglia

UK: United Kingdom

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Chapter 1: Literature review

1.1 Introduction

In 1967, the Plowden Report (Blackstone, 1967) identified parent and teacher partnerships as being one of the key factors for improved academic attainment and overall progress. The Plowden Report and following legislation granted families increased rights to be involved in their children's education. Following on from this, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the development of parents' charters and new legislation led to an increase in the expectations of parental responsibilities in supporting their children's academic progress, behavioural management and school attendance (Maguire, Woolridge and Pratt-Adams, 2006). Current policy and legislature such as the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Statutory Framework for Early Years (EYFS) (DfE, 2021) set the expectation that learning and well-being should exist in tandem. The EYFS standards, for example, state that settings have to 'ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe'. This has led to the requirement for a holistic approach to individualised support and learning in education, which highlights the importance of forming and maintaining a significant relationship between practitioners, schools and families (Epstein, 2018). Such demands require schools to make increased efforts to develop bonds with particular families, such as addressing difficulties arising from the migratory experience.

There are currently 1.6 million EAL pupils in England (DfE, 2021) and the percentage of EAL learners has more than trebled since 1997. The Department for Education (DfE) describes students as EAL if they are exposed to a language in the home environment that is different than English. UK schools have more than a million EAL students between five and sixteen years old, who speak more than 360 languages between them (NALDIC, 2014). The 2023 school census found that 20.2% of all pupils were recorded as EAL. There are 22% primary aged EAL pupils and 18.1% in secondary schools (DfE, 2023). As of the most recent ONS report (ONS, 2021), the first largest group of migrants in the UK is from South Asia, namely India, and the second largest are Eastern Europeans making up a group of 2.2 million individuals, with the largest groups being Polish, Romanian and Lithuanians. Whilst there is no internationally accepted legal definition of the term 'migrant', Amnesty International (2024) defines migrants as 'people staying outside their

country of origin, who are not asylum seekers or refugees'. This particular term and definition were chosen for the current research to make a clear distinction between those making a choice to move countries and those having to do so due to war or civil unrest.

The start of EAL provision in the UK can be traced back to the mid-1960s when Local Governments allocated finances to support the education of EAL learners of Commonwealth origin (The Bell Foundation, 2023). However, as the support was only offered in language centers, it meant the withdrawal of learners from classrooms. This practice was deemed discriminatory in the late 1980s, with funds being reallocated to provide additional specialist staff in schools (The Commission for Racial Equality, 1992). This was then followed by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), which was given directly to schools and was intended to narrow gaps for minority ethnic groups who are struggling academically and meet individual needs for EAL pupils (The Bell Foundation, 2023). In 2011, this grant was added to the Direct Schools Grant, and consequently, led to Local Authorities (LAs) no longer providing free services for EAL support. This meant that schools could decide how much they want to invest in EAL provision for students and their families, as they needed to purchase these services (Adcock and Bate, 2015).

The SEND Code of Practice (2014) provides guidance on several legislations that place the parent as a partner in all aspects of their child's life, education included. The CoP states that parents should be involved in planning support, contributing to their child's progress and reinforcing provision in the home when required to. The Children and Families Act (2014) also states that it is a legal requirement for parents to be involved in developing legal documentation, such as Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs). Although the importance of forming partnerships and encouraging parental involvement is highlighted by statutory guidance, in their review of best practice in parental engagement, Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) discussed the need for strategies to be tailored to individual families' needs, acknowledging their cultural background and social environment.

Studies have shown that parental involvement has a significant impact on positive outcomes for families and children and academic achievement (BEMIS, 2015; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011). Research has also found a positive impact on attendance and behaviour e.g. noted by Fan and Chen (2001) in their meta-analysis of parental involvement and its impact on students' academic achievement, whilst

Campbell's (2011) report on 'how to involve hard-to-reach parents' in schools, highlights an improvement in parent and child attitudes to learning, higher levels of parental satisfaction and better morale. This is supported by government policies released by the Department for children, schools and families (DCSF) (2008), concluding that parental involvement is crucial for educational achievement and that parental aspirations can be predictive of a child's outcomes.

The following paper will first provide a brief context surrounding the past and present challenges of migrant EAL (English as an Additional Language) pupils and their families and issues arising from schools working with this population. Following on, a review of the literature related to the impact of migration, alongside cultural considerations and cultural capital will be presented, to build an understanding of the impact of culture on the experience of migrant families and its importance within school settings. A review of literature investigating education offered in the home environment and the effect of negative perceptions and cultural biases will also be explored. Then, it will outline a review of research into home-school communication, its importance and its impact. Subsequently, the literature review will explore studies investigating inclusionary and equitable practice in schools with regard to SEN. Finally, research looking at how different facets such as inclusion, home-school relationships and adequate support impact home-school relationships and levels of support for children and young people (CYP) will be summarized.

1.2 Literature review methodology

A thematic approach was undertaken for the purpose of this literature review, to allow the researcher to understand the existing knowledge surrounding the topic. As the topic of investigation can be considered niche, due to its specificity, a thematic review of the literature allowed for wider exploration of topics around the subject. Researchers suggest that literature reviews organized by themes or conceptual categories can be helpful in identifying gaps in the literature and in pointing out areas where future research is needed, as well as allowing the author to exercise creativity in organizing and interpreting the diversity of studies that have previously investigated similar factors (Badley, 2018; Pagliarussi, 2020). The literature review was carried out following literature searches on the following databases (Academic Search Ultimate, ERIC, APA PsychInfo, Complementary

Index, Scopus, British Education Index, JSTOR Journals and Social Sciences Citation Index), using the search terms presented in the table below.

Table 1. *Boolean Operators and search terms*

Boolean Operator	Search terms
	Immigrant **OR** migrant **OR** emigrant **OR** foreigner **OR** East* Europ*
AND	Parent* **OR** caregiv* **OR** mother **OR** father **OR** famil*
AND	SEN **OR** special educational needs **OR** additional needs
AND	School* **OR** education* **OR** learn* **OR** student* **OR** pupil* **OR** child*

The inclusion criteria for the literature is shown in the table below:

Table 2. *Inclusion criteria for literature search*

Criteria	Justification
Study type: empirical only	To specifically research practice within the field.
Publication language: English only	To aid accessibility for the researcher.
Publication quality: peer-reviewed	To ensure quality of research.
Geographical location: UK and Europe	To ensure applicability of findings to UK schools and British EPS practice. Only studies from Eastern Europe were chosen from the European sample, to ensure similarity of settings and experiences; other parts of Europe may differ in their approach to the schooling system.
Population: centred on Eastern European migrant families/pupils, SEN and school staff/practice	To answer the research questions.

Publication dates: 1992 - present	Prior to 1992, migrant/EAL students were being offered support in specialised 'language centres', outside of the classroom. In 1992, the Committee for Racial Equality deemed this to be discriminatory practice and funds were allocated to offer support for this group of pupils within the classroom. This emulates current practice.

The search yielded 102 articles, out of which 30 were deemed relevant. The papers excluded from the literature review were due to being deemed irrelevant after reading the abstract. For example, one paper focused on the relationship between migrant mothers and their children with SEN, another focused on Romanian children studying in Bruxelles, several were investigating the medical field focused on the experiences of black minority ethnic individuals and issues of racial segregation.

Due to the limited number of relevant papers found during the extended search aforementioned, references were followed from the 30 chosen papers, yielding the inclusion of a further 80 journal articles and 20 books. A scoping search was also conducted on the UK government and Department for Education (DfE) website, using the terms '*EAL', 'migrant/immigrant'* and *'SEN'.* Various government legislation, guidance and reports were also included in the literature review (e.g., SEND code of practice, DfE reports). As the identified literature based in a UK context was limited, there was a further scoping search of studies conducted outside of the UK. Due consideration was given to relevance (e.g. similar methodology, researching the same topic, etc.).

1.3 Eastern Europeans in the UK and related studies

As aforementioned during the introductory paragraphs, when consulting the most recent ONS survey (ONS, 2021), Indian nationals were identified as the largest population of migrants in the UK, followed by nationals from several Eastern European countries (Poland, Romania and Bulgaria). As justification for studying the experiences of EE migrants as opposed to other prominent migrant groups, a search of the literature revealed extensive studies investigating the experiences of Indian and South Asian families within a UK context (Qureshi, 2014; Bhattacharji and Kingdon, 2015; Theara and Abott, 2015; Mishra, 2018; Mukherjee and Barn, 2021).

However, the literature search into studies exploring the experiences of EE parents within a UK context has revealed a very limited number of studies.

Whilst Eastern Europeans (EEs) are not recognised as a specific minority ethnic group (UK Government, 2021), EEs have a long-standing shared history, common experiences of a society under communism, a shared world view and similar education systems within their countries (Mincu, 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2018; Wojdon, 2021). Studies investigating the experiences of migrant parents in the UK have also grouped EEs as a homogenous group (Tereshchenko and Asher, 2016; Moskal and Sime, 2016; Marku et al., 2022), due to these nationals being identified as ‘the new other’ in British schools, both by other well-established minority groups and the white majority. A study conducted by Blachnicka-Ciacek and Budginaite-Mackine (2022) also discussed how EE migrants can be considered a homogenous group, because they can ‘pass as white’ with the ‘right’ cultural capital, however their acceptance in ‘the community of value’ is conditional. EEs have been subject to racialisation not for their skin colour, but for being considered as coming from ‘European backwaters’ – places that have been deemed, according to Makdisi (2014), less civilised and less modern. Therefore, the current study will consider the experiences of EE parents as a homogenous group for the purpose of exploring how they have navigated SEND systems in the UK, a country vastly different to theirs. The following literature review will first outline research specifically investigating the experiences of EE parents, followed by wider literature focusing on the experiences of migrants parenting children with SEN in the UK education system.

The literature investigating the experiences of EE parents in relation to the UK education system covers a variety of topics, such as racialization and ‘othering’, EAL school practice, parent perspectives and school involvement, as well as differences between UK and EE education. Literature has shown that ethnic minorities, such as EEs, have long been racialised due to their immigrant status (Fox, Morosanu and Szilassy, 2012). A study examining the impact of sociopolitical changes within Polish families in post-Brexit Britain, found that changes caused by Brexit have led to the ‘othering’ of EE migrants, creating new hierarchies of exclusion and inclusion, within society, and subsequently in establishments such as schools (Kozminska and Zhu, 2020).

One key study within the literature focused on the relationship between UK schools and migrant EE parents from the parents’ perspective (Chrstie and Szoreniy,

2015). A number of parents expressed their frustrations with the UK education system, stating that school staff have lower expectations for immigrant, working-class children and their families. A parent that had two higher education degrees, for example, described feeling offended by a mandatory questionnaire he was offered when he moved his children to the UK, asking what he wanted to get from his child's British education. He felt it was preposterous to assume that he would have different expectations than any other parent and questioned whether the school would ask a non-migrant the same thing. The findings continued to outline that only 2 out of 10 parents felt that schools had an interest in their culture and home life. The families interpreted this lack of knowledge as a lack of respect, leading to a lack of interest for parental involvement.

Other research has focused on exploring the differences between UK and EE schooling, with the aim of exploring the differences in perspectives between EE parents and school staff, often highlighting the impact of cultural differences and expectations based on the type of education parents experienced in their home countries. In one such study Manzoni and Rolfe (2019), in interviews with EE migrant parents investigated how schools integrate migrant pupils and their families. They found that parents struggled with understanding systems that meant that children are rarely 'held back' in the UK, and even if they move up with the rest of their class, it does not necessarily mean they are showing progress. Similarly, other parents did not comprehend the extent of collaboration expected between school and home. The Christie and Szorenyi (2015) study also found that parental expectations of schooling clashed with those of the British school system. It identified that barriers arising from understanding the education system and difficulties communicating led to parents feeling disempowered. Other differences were identified in terms of compulsory education (up to the age of 18 in the UK, shorter in other European countries), rules on attendance and the structure of the school year. A 1994 study by Graves and Gargiulo, investigating early childhood education in Russia, Poland and the Czech Republic, identified how the notion of inclusion was not present in the mid-90s in those countries. 'Special kindergartens' for children with SEN offered a highly differentiated and segregated schooling process compared to mainstream settings. Experiences of education in their home countries could be an explanation of why differences in perceptions arise (Pew Research Centre, 2018).

Manzoni and Rolfe (2019) also highlighted differences in attitudes to SEN and how EEs are often reluctant to seek and accept support, even when it is offered by schools or other professionals. School staff in their study reported that parents who had their children assessed in their country of origin sometimes withhold this information, due to fears of segregation and exclusion (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). The same study also discussed reports from migrant parents of how SEN children in their participant schools were excluded from education in their country of origin because they were ‘different’ or hadn’t met the required grades. The parents that were open about their children’s needs or diagnoses reported feeling positively overwhelmed with the provision offered by schools, but comforted by knowing their children will not be excluded and isolated.

A prominent topic within the literature exploring the experiences of migrants is the concept of ‘cultural capital’. In the 1970s, the sociologist Bourdieu developed the notion of ‘cultural capital’ to explain how social classes were maintained and how power in society was transferred. Bourdieu defined it as ‘familiarity with the legitimate culture within a society’ (Bordieu, 1984). Bourdieu believed that cultural capital played an important role and the more capital you have, the more powerful you can be, whilst also highlighting that cultural capital serves to reinforce social inequity within educational systems (Cairns, 2019). This concept has been particularly influential in the literature relating to migrant families’ experience in the UK education system. Writers in the area have argued that migrant students and families may lack the types of cultural capital valued by educational settings, which can lead to marginalization and under-representation (Harvey and Mallman, 2019). Cultural capital has been deemed a factor of value in school settings too. In the UK, Ofsted recognises the importance of cultural capital in schools. The most recent school inspection handbook (2024) states that inspectors make judgements about the quality of education in a school by considering ‘the extent to which schools are equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life’. However, there has been criticism of this ‘new duty’ being introduced by Ofsted, as some believe that it will drive ‘entrenchment of only one type of culture’, namely the more dominant culture (Cairns, 2019).

There are several studies investigating this topic in relation to EE families. EEs who have the ability to develop the ‘right’ social and cultural capital can have access to the same benefits and privileges as nationals (Ryan et al., 2008; Hayes

and Shain, 2021). However, the majority lack this ability due to constraints such as language barriers, social class and difficulties assimilating to the host country (Ryan et al., 2008). According to EE nationals, association to EE has limited them from accessing privileged social networks in the UK and have therefore struggled for social acceptance as found by Moskal and Sime's (2016) study of the transcultural lives of Polish migrant children. This can lead to some parents pushing their children to succeed academically, to compensate for their own feelings of social stigmatization, as pointed out by Polish migrant mothers in a study exploring their quest for 'normalcy' in the UK (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010).

There are a small number of studies that have found that cultural capital and the value placed upon it can further impact a child's entire experience of schooling, by leading to them making a distinction between those 'like me' and those 'not like me' (e.g. Hayes and Shain, 2021). An example highlighted by the study was a Polish child expressing feelings of not belonging amongst English peers, which led to him seeking out only Polish peers, in turn, creating a cultural divide. One study has shown that when EAL students do not have a sense of belonging in school, this can often lead to negative stereotypes and assumptions (Tereshchenko and Archer, 2014). The same study highlighted student concerns regarding cultural stereotypes and their impact. Some of the CYP interviewed believe that positive stereotypes of EE nationals such as being 'hard-working', but associating this with working-class jobs such as construction, may influence teacher expectations of student career pathways.

Regardless of cultural differences and stereotypes, there is a small amount of literature that suggests that parents appear to place their trust in schools. EE parents participants in the Tereshchenko and Archer (2014) study exploring the challenges of migration, said that they hold their children responsible for their academic performance, rather than the school. EE families interviewed in this study (Tereshchenko and Archer, 2014) believed that England could offer their children a myriad of opportunities and spoke about a willingness to ensure their children learn English, at the expense of literacy in their mother tongue. Teachers reported that the aforementioned factors appeared to underpin parents' positive engagement with the British education system and their trust of school staff. However, some of the teachers still perceived parents as disengaged. The researchers posited that school

staff may benefit from exploring and understanding factors which may hinder parents from engaging.

The literature review found a significant gap in the literature related to research into EE migrants parenting children with SEN. The only study that researched the experiences of EE parents of SEN in the UK is by Marku et al. (2022). Their findings, from interviews with migrant parents, highlighted two key themes: difficulties faced by parents when embarking on an unpredicted journey when their child is identified with SEN and navigating these challenges pre- and post- identification (e.g., accessing support, going through the EHCP process). The research also identified inconsistencies in the partnership between school staff and parents and the advice offered by professionals, potentially negatively impacting the support accessed and offered to children and their families. Whilst their findings are highly valuable and significant, the study only investigated the experiences of families from A8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). The other Eastern European countries were not considered (Romania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and small parts of Russia). Considering that Eastern Europeans are the second largest population in the UK (ONS, 2021), the gap in literature has emphasised the necessity to investigate the experiences of the wider Eastern European population raising children with SEN in Britain. Furthermore, the multitude of research into the impact of home-school relationships and migrant parental involvement that will be presented in the following sections will highlight the importance of investigating relationships with schools and levels of support received by parents.

A number of studies explored factors behind parental anxiety when navigating British schooling systems. Parents and carers of EAL children expressed anxieties related to their limited knowledge of the UK school system, low English language proficiency and their understanding of the testing culture, as highlighted by findings in a study investigating the challenges experienced by Polish pupils and their families in London schools (Sales et al, 2008). In a more recent study exploring the experiences of Polish children and their families in Scottish schools by Moskal (2014), a Polish mother, discusses uncertainties about addressing issues at school, saying she feels ‘disabled’ because she is unable to speak English well, even though she understands most things. Therefore, it is crucial to establish effective and mutually acceptable strategies for the successful inclusion of migrant students and

their families in the British education system. Researchers have found that schools can be a powerful mediating factors between migrant children, their families and the political and social context of the country they relocate to (Moskal, 2014).

A study by Dyson (2022) exploring the experiences of Romanian parents and schools staff in their communication together, as well as EP contributions in this field, highlighted the importance of other professionals taking on a supportive role, as another mediating factor. The participants in Dyson's (2022) study believed EPs can support EE parents of SEN children and schools to foster reciprocal dialogues and build stronger links between the school and wider EE community. When discussing issues of SEN, one participant in Dyson's (2022) study believed that EP presence at school events could offer parents and schools direct access to EP support, which may reduce stigma surrounding SEN in certain communities and break down staff biases. Cultural views of SEN, as well as discourses of cultural differences between the UK and EE are issues that permeated throughout the literature exploring the experiences of EE parents. As the needs of EAL children and their families are identified and addressed within the school setting, EPs can facilitate equal participation within society through the support they offer (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019).

1.4 The impact of migration

The majority of literature into EAL students and families explores the impact of migration. Research across disciplines (e.g.,social sciences, medicine, geography, economy) has found that migration and displacement affect family structures and lead to changing roles within the family unit (Dreby, 2015; Mazzucato, 2015; Scholten, 2022). Unsurprisingly the impact of migration has been a key area of focus in the education and psychology literature with researchers finding that a vast majority of individuals are stripped of their support systems and social networks during the migration process, which have been found to be key factors in coping with major life changes (Barn, 2007). Research has identified a protective effect for those migrants who are able to recreate social support structures in their new home country. For example, in a 3-year qualitative-interpretive study which explored the experiences of EE migrant children entering schools which had limited exposure to cultural diversity, Polish families relied on religious affiliations with the Catholic church and the large Polish community in the area they lived in for support (Hamilton, 2013). However, other minority ethnic groups in the same study did not

have access to either, being at risk of social isolation. When looking within the family unit, migration also disrupts normal patterns, interactions and relationships. Some research has found that parents who leave children behind in their home country have to deal with rekindling relationships with their children at a later stage (Lam and Yeoh, 2019). However, the pressures of providing for the family, resettling and potentially working jobs with long hours have been found in some cases to lead to disconnection and detachment (Hamilton, 2012). Furthermore, dealing with post-migratory adjustment can have a detrimental impact on parental emotional well-being, potentially leading to parents being unable to priorities building relationships with schools or focusing on their child's overall well-being (Hamilton, 2013).

The impact of migration has also been an area of focus for government. The Welsh government (2020) for example, conducted research with EU citizens living in Wales and outlined several reasons why the mental health of migrant parents could be affected. Firstly, mental health was found to be impacted by a large number of migrants being unable to utilise their skills and qualifications due to them not being recognised in Wales or being required to undergo lengthy conversions. This was found to lead to living in conditions of poverty, below the level of those experienced in their home country. As highlighted by Underdown's book (2007) exploring factors impacting young children's health and wellbeing, socio-economic status can be a significant risk factor, leading to maladaptive school adjustment and underachievement.

EAL parents and children do not solely move from one location to another but engage in, what some writers have termed, a process of transnalisation, defined as maintaining social relations and identities linked to their 'societies of origin and settlement' (Sime and Pietka-Nykaza, 2015). Literature discusses notions of individuals simultaneously experiencing the 'here and there', being British and 'something else' and having a 'home away from home', as found in Schneider's (2016) analysis of the impact of the transnationalisation process on individuals. Within a school context, transnalisation may focus on the countries of origin of pupils, exploring previous education systems, family cultural values and their language, with the intent of creating transnational networks with the countries present within the school community (ibid.). The literature suggests that teachers and school staff should build an awareness of transnational living, as an increasing number of children and families have lived in several countries, speak multiple

languages and have experiences of multiple education systems. Schneider (2016), for example, has described this phenomenon as having social, emotional and educational consequences that should be acknowledged by educators. Additionally, in her study of migrant children acclimating to Irish schools and the impact of identifying as an 'ethnic other', Devine (2009) pointed out that EAL students do not come from homogenous communities; they are individually shaped by gender, ethnic values and social class, suggesting that school staff should aim to develop an awareness of how concepts such as the 'here and there' affect their students and their families. For example, being aware of specific learning experiences in their home countries compared to the UK, the impact of bi- or multi-lingualism or differences in day-to-day living.

Several studies have utilised the idea of transnationalism to provide a more holistic understanding. Guerra (2012) for example, discussed 'transcultural repositioning' and defined it as an individual self-consciously regulating the movement back and forth between different languages, cultural norms, ways of thinking about things and potentially even different social classes. According to Hornberger and Link (2012), interactions between the school and transnational individuals are characterized by social mechanisms such as stereotyping, conflict and comparisons to 'the majority'. In their study exploring the barriers that limit access to support post-migration, Sime and Fox (2014) discuss the disruptive effect of migration on children and families which can result in interrupted schooling, experiencing hostility in their new environment and the loss of family and friendships. Researchers have suggested that integrative practice within the school setting can ameliorate these effects by supporting migrant children and families to enjoy all aspects of school life and reduce potential conflict within the community.

1.5 Cultural considerations

Another key area of need identified within literature and strongly linked to the impact of migration on children and their families, is the importance of cultural considerations and awareness. The majority of research has focused both on looking at migrant families in general, with a smaller number of studies exploring specific ethnic minority groups. Disparities in culture, language proficiency and known educational systems could mean parents require a considerable period of time before they become familiar and comfortable with routines, expectations and rules

for their new role in the country they migrated to. When discussing transitions in the Early Years for migrant children, in their book aimed at the development of professional practice when working with families, Fabian (2002) identified that the success of an effective home-school relationship relies on clear and transparent information sharing, to exchange knowledge between staff and families. Although his book only considers transition in and out of pre-school education, the findings are useful as they highlight the important factors of effective home-school relationships.

One more specific example of why there should be considerable consideration of an individual's culture is from research into the Bangladeshi community. In many families, the father is considered the 'head of the family' and is tasked with ensuring the child promotes 'izzat' (family honour), which also includes academic success (Ansari, 2004). This role and its importance in the child's life and education is not often recognised or understood by school staff, leading to conflict and differences of opinion in home-school relationships (Crozier and Davies, 2007). In their study exploring home-school relations of Bangladeshi/Pakistani parents, Crozier and Davies found that schools reported trying to bridge the diversity gap by holding Eid parties, having a 'cultural' stall during fairs, holding assemblies to celebrate different festivals and using multi-lingual signage around the school. However, such attempts have been criticised as being tokenistic (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Hess, 2015) and that more needs to be put in place to bridge the diversity gap. Critics have also argued that the British education system is framed by attitudes and values belonging to western, middle class, monolingual individuals (Brooker, 2005). Whilst discussing ethical dilemmas that arise from inclusive versus individualised education, Dadds (2005) added that a 'hurry along culture' in schools primarily focused on academic achievement, leaves little time for staff to address the needs of students and their families, especially when these individuals require extra support due to language difficulties or similar factors.

1.6 Cultural capital

The majority of literature in the area has highlighted the impact of cultural capital on those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Academics researching this area have found that there has been a deficit narrative created around the education of migrant families. Tabloid newspapers in the UK have consistently reported that there is a growing number of EE pupils, who are impacting the education of the 'majority'

because they use up the already limited school resources (see example Sabey, 2017). Vincent et al. (2018), for example, in a study exploring the UK educational experiences of three generations of middle-class Black Caribbean-heritage individuals, identified that the media neglects to discuss issues around community cohesion and belonging which are major drivers in 'othering' ethnic minorities. Researchers have also found that a family's cultural, social and economic capital has a significant weight on a child's school performance and educational outcomes, as pointed out in a study exploring the reasons behind inequalities in educational attainment in eight European countries (Breen et al., 2009). When choosing a school for a child, different social groups are impacted by class, level of education and racial identity, placing a minority ethnic group at a significant disadvantage (Glaesser and Cooper, 2014; Winterton and Irwin, 2012). Following on, these factors also have a considerable impact on 'at home' involvement in education and relationships built with schools (McNeal, 1999). Research has shown that families belonging to disadvantaged social classes and migrant communities, experience feelings of being rejected when dealing with school staff, leading to a sense of inadequacy and a lack of self-confidence (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). These findings are also echoed by an Italian study conducted by Bonnizoni, Romito and Cavallo (2014) exploring the educational disadvantages of immigrant students.

There has been a significant amount of literature exploring the cultural capital of ethnic minorities groups internationally. There is an expectation on schools to prepare students to become culturally competent and globally conscious citizens as pointed out by an American study exploring the difficulties of schools educating culturally, racially and linguistically diverse children (Suarez-Orozco and Sattin-Bajaj, 2010). Whilst this study took place in the US, the findings are useful to consider in the UK context because, as mentioned in the introduction, there are 360 languages spoken in the UK by over 1.6 million EAL pupils. The USA is equally diverse, with the latest census revealing that there are between 350-430 languages spoken in the US (Share America, 2023). The literature suggests that transition to a new country is difficult for children and families alike, particularly when cultural capital such as language or traditions may be devalued by the host society or their education system (e.g. Leopold and Shavit, 2011). In her study exploring the social and cultural capital of migrant children, Devine (2009) argued that recognition is the 'central element for the mobilisation of cultural capital' and only those with 'recognised' cultural capital

are seen as capable of generating benefit from their investment in education. She further discussed that recognition and acknowledgement of cultural capital affects the distribution of power amongst social groups (school staff versus migrant families), which can, in turn, affect their relationship and how they perceive one another. For example, the study by Leopold and Shavit (2011) exploring whether Israeli teachers distinguish between the cultural capital of immigrant students, found that schools favour students who are perceived as being ‘culturally endowed’ (more emphasis on reading within the culture versus others), assigning them higher grades compared to those that were not considered so, but had a similar level of reading comprehension. Regardless of this literature being conducted in a different country with a different educational system, the findings are likely to be applicable in a UK context, because they exemplify how only valuing the cultural capital of certain ethnic minorities can create cultural prejudices and have a ‘domino effect’ on an individual’s educational experiences.

1.7 The impact of negative perceptions

One emerging theme in the literature around this topic is the effect of negative perceptions and stereotypes when building relationships between school and home. In multiple parts of the world, exclusionary politics have become more prevalent in recent years. One such example in Britain is the Brexit vote, which radically altered the rights of both EU and British citizens (Kozminska and Zhu, 2020). Whilst various reasons have been cited for the outcome of the referendum, it has been noted that the ‘leave’ campaign focused heavily on migration, with the media coverage of the topic tripling pre-referendum and portraying largely negative representations of migrants (Moore and Ramsay, 2017). Findings from a 2018 study conducted by Schneider and Arnot are reflective of Brexit attitudes. In their study exploring school communication approaches for newly arrived EAL students in a school in the East of England (Schneider and Arnot, 2018), some teachers made assumptions about the educational level of parents, based on their children’s performance or their job title, specifically those working in service industries or agriculture. However, teachers were not aware that a vast majority of migrant parents downgraded their employment status when moving to the UK due to language barriers and starting life ‘from zero’ in a new country, in spite of having high levels of education (Migration Watch UK, 2015).

Beliefs relating to raising and educating children and the role of systems around the child (role of the parent or the teacher) vary across cultures, as highlighted in an ethnographic study exploring how four-year-old Bangladeshi children learn at home, in comparison to in school (Brooker, 2005). Interviews revealed that the parents felt uncomfortable questioning the teachers due to limited knowledge of the UK education system. Misunderstandings can occur during the relationship-building stage when parent and teacher assumptions of their role in educating children differ significantly, reducing its effectiveness. It has been found that parents who have sociocultural values aligned with staff and settings are more likely to develop successful, effective home-school relationships (Smidt, 2008). Differences in behaviour management, teaching and learning strategies used in British schools, compared to codes of discipline and teaching methods used in other countries, can result in parents developing negative perceptions of the education system. Migrant parents in Hamilton's (2013) study reported that they felt levels of homework were inadequate and a focus on subjects such as art and PE as opposed to English or Maths could hinder their children from accessing successful careers, which the researcher posited was linked to parents holding different socio-cultural values. Some families were also concerned that if they returned to their home country, their children would not fit in and be 'left behind'.

Another implication of the widespread anti-immigration discourse perpetuated by some political parties and the media, has been found to be how staffs' and non-migrant parents' attitudes to EAL affect migrants. In a study conducted by Gill (2013), exploring practitioners' and parents' perceptions and attitudes about bilingual education in schools, it was found that in schools where teachers or TAs are bilingual themselves, they are able to facilitate better school adjustment for children and allow for easier communication with migrant parents. However, non-migrant parents and non-EAL staff criticised this approach, deeming it counterproductive to helping EAL children assimilate, claiming that it undermines social cohesion. It can be seen from their findings how school staff, and indeed other parents, could alienate migrant parents due to factors such as those mentioned above. An earlier study by McLaren and Johnson (2007) exploring anti-immigration hostility in Britain exemplifies the impact of negative perceptions. The researchers found that experiencing discrimination led their participants, migrant parents and children, to perceive their mother tongue as a 'lesser' language and express that they wanted to

distance themselves from the ‘immigrant’ label due to stereotypes associated with the word. In the literature, there are also instances of parents describing being ‘talked down to’ by school staff and feeling disempowered due to cultural and linguistic differences (Maguire, Woolridge and Pratt-Adams, 2006).

It is worth noting that there are no distinctions made in Gill’s or McLaren and Johnson’s studies when discussing migrant groups; they refer to participants as a homogenous group of students/parents for whom English is a second language. This is in line with school practice. Research has maintained that educational institutions often operate from a homogenous perspective, when working with EAL families (Pascal and Bertram, 2009). The thinking behind migrant groups being homogenous is rooted in the past; migration flows used to often follow paths that determined the characteristics of immigrant communities, such as geographical and linguistic proximity (OECD, 2018). This resulted in immigrant communities in many countries being relatively homogenous. However, it’s been identified that today’s migrant populations are highly heterogeneous (OECD, 2019). Homogeneity can lead to negative perceptions and stereotypes (Katwala, Ballinger and Rhodes, 2014) that can impact an individual’s sense of self, as exemplified McLaren and Johnson’s (2007) study by migrants perceiving their native language as ‘lesser’ due to societal perceptions.

Hamilton (2013) in their study exploring sustainable home-school relationships with migrant worker parents, encourages schools to reflect on the experiences of ethnic minorities critically and proactively, in order to remove discriminatory barriers. Several studies in the literature exploring school approaches to the education of EAL students have highlighted the need for a more sensitive approach to communication, based on factual information, as opposed to stereotypical assumptions (Arnot et al., 2014). When considering appropriate approaches to the use of home languages in schools and classrooms, Evans et al. (2016) highlighted that school staff should not assume a parents’ English level proficiency on the basis of their nationality or the length of time they have lived in the UK. It should not be presumed that a parent with a good level of English or that has been in the country for a long time has a definitive understanding of the school system.

1.8 Education offered in the home environment

Another important aspect of the experiences of migrant learners and their families that have been explored by a large number of studies is the differences in home country education versus school education. In 2018, the DfE introduced the Proficiency scales, which require schools to identify and report the language profile of all EAL pupils. According to Hutchinson's (2018) report exploring the educational outcomes of EAL children nationwide, this mandatory assessment was considered by teachers and parents to be a control mechanism for migrant status which led to parents being reluctant to provide information about languages used at home. Sutton (2017) concluded that due to public understanding claiming that 'mother tongues lower UK standards of education', families in his study did not think positively of their native languages. Mixed images of positive and negative linguistic diversity and home languages can therefore impact teacher-parent relationships.

Research has found that teacher expectations of parental involvement is often based on UK educational culture, which can be incompatible with the educational values parents have experienced in their home countries. In a study of Chinese students and their families attending a UK school, it was found that communication breakdowns happened due to school staff believing that parents hindered their children's education if they tried to support them at home, because they spoke a different language and had not experienced the British school system. On the other hand, parents strongly believed that this criticism was a 'denial of their acculturation into the British educational system', as evidenced by a study investigating migrant children's language and educational practices in home and school environments (Curdt-Christiansen, 2020). Intercultural miscommunication caused anxieties in children, their parents and school staff, which could potentially harm a child's educational and cultural experiences in a school.

In Ashraf's study (2019) exploring the relationships of Pakistani parents with schools, she identified that parents did not think schools felt positively about their involvement, because they believed schools did not encourage active involvement and labelled staff as 'disinterested'. However, staff thought parents lacked commitment and awareness of the importance of their involvement. When explored further, it was discovered that parents were hesitant to be more involved due to feeling unwelcome in the school due to several factors such as specialist language used by teachers during meetings they struggled to understand . This is in line with

findings from previously discussed literature (Campbell, 2011; BEMIS, 2015), which also highlighted the disparity between parental and staff perceptions, and how it can lead to negative home-school relationships.

International literature has also explored factors impacting education offered in the home environment versus formal education. A study of Turkish migrants in the Netherlands, investigating relationships between families and classroom teachers, showed that some teachers believed parents were negatively impacting their children's education by teaching them Turkish at home (Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur, 2018). Based on this conviction, they recommended that parents refrain from using their home language, as it can slow down their child's academic development. Further studies show that due to the influence of some teacher's attitudes towards migration, education and linguistic diversity, some parents are led to believe that their home language could hinder a child's learning, since the teaching and all aspects of school are conducted in the dominant language (Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia, 2018; Weekly, 2018). This is applicable in a UK context as communication and curriculum delivery in schools are all in the dominant language.

As newcomers to a country, migrant parents often make decisions about their child's early childhood education and care, based on incomplete information and their 'best guess' (Crosnoe, 2007). If this information is combined with experiences of education they had in their home country, they could potentially not be applicable in their new environment. It has also been found that parents see their children as starting out behind their peers and place the responsibility of closing this gap onto the school, expecting them to potentially compensate for their own difficulties in terms of language proficiency and understanding of the school system, as evidenced in a study exploring the needs of migrant and refugee children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centers (Tobin, 2019). Whilst the study was conducted investigating ECECs in the UK and 4 other countries (France, Germany, Italy and USA), the findings are relevant to the current context as it takes into consideration both the voices of children and their families, and considers the UK, as well as other countries.

1.9 Home-school communication

One of the most extensively researched topics surrounding the research topic is home-school communication. This is potentially due to previous research showing a strong relationship between effective communication between all individuals around a child (parents, teachers, TAs) and good outcomes for children. The impact of external influences on communication systems needs to be considered, according to Harris and Nelson (2019), who developed organisation communication theory. Their book '*Applied organizational communication'* provides the most current and in-depth analysis of theory and practice in understanding communication, in a global environment. Harris and Nelson discuss diversity in relation to businesses and diversified workforces and its significant impact on communication systems. Their theory can be applied to school environments and communication between school staff and families from diverse backgrounds. Migration has a major impact on school communication structures since it requires organisations to use 'different communication and distribution systems and devote more attention to diversity' (page 7). Secondly, Harris and Nelson discuss the speed of change. School demographics are changing rapidly due to current migration patterns, and it can pose a challenge to schools that are newly encountering language diversity amongst their population (Schneider and Arnot, 2018). Many teachers have been found to lack confidence and knowledge when faced with working with EAL students and families (Hamilton, 2013). However, in spite of the arrival of families with diverse cultural backgrounds and varying languages challenging traditional school systems, it should also be considered an opportunity. EAL families can provide potential resources and assets that can be beneficial to schools in preparing students for a culturally diverse and globalised world outside of the educational environment (Arnot et al., 2014).

In the context of cross-cultural communication, research has suggested that correct and in-depth information must be provided to ensure effective communication and avoid stereotyping and assumptions (Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2016). An example highlighted by Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti's (2005) book theorizing practices in homes, communities and classroom, is that gaining information from EAL families about their values and aspirations are as important as providing support and accessible information to families with low levels of English or newly arrived in the country. However, this creates a false assumption, as the evidence-base shows

that migrant parents are significantly involved in their child's schooling and have high levels of educational motivation (Tomlinson, 2000; Evans et al., 2016). A definition by Levitas (1998), describes 'hard to reach parents' as individuals who inhabit the fringes of school or society, are socially excluded and need to be re-engaged as stakeholders. Some schools describe entire ethnic communities as 'impenetrable' (Goodall, 2019) but the research suggests instead that parents are not indifferent or difficult as implied but cited cultural differences as the reason for their lack of involvement in their child's academia (Crozier and Davies, 2007). The same study pointed out that, according to schools, parental involvement has to fit certain criteria, therefore pathologising them as 'hard to reach', points the blame towards them, allowing schools to take a less proactive approach.

Researchers have also looked at the way migrant families have attempted to overcome language barriers in their relationships with schools. Some families rely on unofficial translators to support them in communicating with schools such as their own children, friends or family members with higher levels of proficiency, in the absence of accessible information or professional-school interpreters (Hamilton, 2013). Caldin (2014) and Paniagua (2017) described how migrant families can struggle to understand support and interventions suggested for their children, which can lead to further feelings of being disenfranchised. Smidt's (2008) research into supporting multilingual learners in the early years found that parents from a minority ethnic background rely on translations provided through the 'community grapevine'. This can lead to barriers due to the information they receive being prone to inaccuracy, potentially resulting in families being ill-informed and unaware of what information they fail to receive. Gardner's book about multiple intelligences (2006) found that differences in language, intonation and accents can lead to further misunderstandings, hindering effective home-school bonding. Difficulties communicating and misleading information could result in parents developing negative perceptions of schools and their staff. One other factor that plays a part in effective home-school communication and relationships is trust. Previous studies discussed how working-class parents have more trust in schools than middle class parents (Crozier, 2007). A more recent study by Ashraf (2019) exploring Pakistani parent and school staff perspectives on parental involvement at the foundation stage, refers to Crozier's study when outlining that migrant parents don't have an alternative to trusting their child's school due to the difficulties they encounter when

they do try to get involved. Whilst teaching staff were unhappy about this and felt that migrant parents rely solely on staff to improve their child's education, one head teacher viewed it as a significantly positive aspect of the home-school relationship. She believed that these parents were not 'uninvolved' due to not caring, but due to having complete trust in the school and its staff.

International literature has also highlighted that collaboration between schools and migrant communities can lead to better initial teacher training and development of practice (Naidoo, 2013), during her investigation of interventionist pedagogy for refugee African students in Australia. Although the study took place in an Australian setting, the findings are useful to consider in relation to teacher training and continuous professional development in a UK context, as the UK also receives a high number of refugee learners every year (Refugee Education UK, 2024).

1.10 Equality and integration within school practice

Notions of integration and inclusion within the school are ever-present in social, political and educational landscapes within the literature, mirroring SEND literature as a whole. When considering the theoretical underpinnings, historically, the term 'integration' was associated with placing SEN children in mainstream settings, however more recently, it has been replaced with the concept of inclusion (Armstrong, 2009; Hodkinson, 2016). The previous model of integration was largely based on providing learners with individualised support so they could 'fit in'. Inclusive education strives to give equal and equitable rights to all, regardless of differences or needs (Faas, Sokolowska and Darmody, 2015). Inclusive schools significantly contribute to the emotional wellbeing of children and families alike, through participation and empowerment (Konu and Rimpela, 2002). Successful participation in school life and feelings of belonging are directly related to improved outcomes, as highlighted by a study exploring multiethnic schools and youth in Europe (Faas, 2010). According to Barg's (2012) investigation of student's social background and parental involvement in school decisions, schools are increasingly shifting their focus on reaching out to EAL parents, by providing language support, to promote involvement in different aspects of school life, such as parent associations.

Schools in the UK are required to respond to the growing linguistic and cultural diversity in their population and the increasing pressure to work with students and their families more effectively. The arrival of EAL communities represents the

‘litmus test for school’s commitment and delivery of inclusion’ (Pinson, Arnot and Candappa, 2010). However, whilst a rhetoric of equality and inclusion permeates policy documents, research suggests that the reality of school practice appears to show a lack of engagement with the perspectives of minority communities and surface treatment of cultural diversity (Crozier and Davies, 2008; Gomez-Hurtado, 2021; Guo, 2021). Adaptations made to school policies and practice are meant to engage families in active school involvement and improve a child’s educational experience but can potentially lead to conflicts due to differences in language, culture, ethnicity, views on school responsibilities and perceptions of how children should be educated, according to a study exploring the education of refugees by Dryden-Peterson (2017).

Research shows that schools differ in how they support EAL pupils, in catering to their educational and emotional needs (Devine, Fahie and McGillicuddy, 2013; Kitching, 2012). It has been argued that in their attempt to cater for pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and with varying levels of English proficiency, schools have faced a number of challenges in achieving true inclusivity (Faas, Sokolowska and Darmody, 2015). Some of the identified factors in the aforementioned study exploring religious and ethnic diversity in Irish primary schools were inadequate pre-service teacher training, unavailability of resources and a lack of in-service training on providing intercultural education. When talking to school staff, they revealed that they are content to make accommodations for religious diets, use words in a child’s home language, provide a wide variety of culturally relevant books to the class and celebrate various holidays, but not change their teaching practices. A study by Tobin, Adair and Arzubiaga (2013), where staff were being asked by migrant parents to take a more academic approach in preschool, teachers were unwilling to do so. The commitment to what is considered best practice appears to trump cultural responsiveness. The aforementioned factors can cause significant tensions between the home and school environment.

Literature has shown that migrants are disadvantaged across areas such as the types of school they can access and overall educational outcomes, as pointed out by Darmody, Byrne and McGinnity (2012) in their study of a small, diverse group of migrant students from an almost exclusively White Irish school. There are extensive studies on effective, inclusive education and its impact on academic and social outcomes. The most effective factors in creating carting and supportive

schools have been identified as student-centred learning practices, supportive staff, linguistic support, positive teacher-student interactions and parental involvement (Gorard, 2013; Kitching, 2012; Lizzio, Wilson and Simmons, 2002).

It is worth noting that in the current social and political climate, schools are facing challenges in meeting the needs of migrant students and their families due to a number of factors outside of their control, such as inadequate teacher training, a lack of resources and limited funding (Faas, Sokolowska and Darmody, 2015). Austerity and diminishing public services funding had led to schools losing access to resources such as LA school support services and children's centres (DECP, 2024). The DECP also outlines how reduced funding impact a school's ability to provide flexible approaches to the curriculum and extra support for migrant families, therefore leading to a segregation within the educational system for those with additional needs. Scarce access to specialists such as EPs who can provide early intervention and additional support, coupled with increasingly long waiting times for other specialist referrals have led to additional difficulties in building and maintaining positive relationships with migrant parents (ibid.).

1.11 SEN

As presented in this literature review, there is research investigating a wide variety of factors regarding migrant families, their children and schools. Family and school are the two most significant systems around a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). However, there is very limited literature considering the experiences of migrant families with SEN children and how schools support them with this added layer of complexity. Parenting a child with SEN involves various distinctive social and psychological challenges to families, as highlighted by an extensive study exploring the experiences of parents caring for a child with a diagnosis of Autism (DePape and Lindsay, 2015). As pointed out by Hughes's (2021) study of the rights to education of child migrants in London academies, there is a lack of guidance or policies in the UK for how the needs of SEN EAL pupils should be catered for, leading to variations in practice across the country.

A large scale, longitudinal study exploring effective provision in pre-school education conducted by Sylva et al. (2004), found that the quality of parental interaction with the child is much more significant than their background. In a literature review of the impact of parental involvement, support and family education

in pupil achievement and adjustment by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), it was found that input from the family benefits children across all ethnic groups and social classes. It is even more essential for school staff and EAL families parenting a SEN child to form and maintain a good connection, as they need to collaborate in providing individualised, tailored support as highlighted by a British study exploring pedagogy for ethnic minority pupils with SEN (Tan, Ware and Norwich, 2017). All the aforementioned research states that effective home-school relationships benefit all involved and supports a child on their journey to academic success and enhanced socio-emotional wellbeing, especially SEN children.

According to Niolaki, Terzopolous and Masterson's (2021) exploration of resources and interventions used in schools for bilingual learners with spelling difficulties, there is a lack of school resources for the assessment of EAL learners, due to the complexity of the intertwinement between EAL and SEN. Tan, Ware and Norwich (2017) also highlighted the inconsistencies within teaching strategies in schools across the North-West of England. Literature has also found that some school staff and other professionals (speech and language therapists) do not feel confident working with migrant students who have a diagnosis of SEN, yet they feel that forming partnerships with parents is essential in bridging the gaps created by linguistic and cultural differences (Howard, Katsos and Gibson, 2021). SENCos and special needs support teachers in UK schools in a study by Jorgensen, Dobson and Perry (2021) discussed challenges in gathering relevant information about a child's first language, education records and previous interventions, which has an impact on how they support EAL children with SEN difficulties. Furthermore, children in some Eastern European countries do not start formal schooling until they are 7 years old, which is different to the UK as they start at the age of 5 (Mazoni and Rolfe, 2019). This creates a challenge in educating younger children when they migrate to the UK, as they will be unfamiliar with formal schooling and there would be a lack of information due to previously not attending formal schooling.

A case study of a special school in the East of England and the intersection between migration, disability and education by Oliver and Singal (2017) identified how the families' interactions with schools are shaped by their previous educational experiences and other factors related to the process of integrating in their host country. The findings of their study highlighted how regardless of schools taking an empathetic and supportive approach, tensions can still arise. The shortage of

resources, lack of confidence, cultural differences and dissimilarities in education systems can lead to struggles between parents and schools to work together effectively to support these pupils.

1.12 Conclusion

Researchers have argued that the majority of studies are likely to take an essentialist approach to understanding intercultural factors (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019; Kilkey and Ryan, 2020). This is evident in studies exploring minority ethnic cultures, portraying assumptions that all ethnic minority groups share the same core cultural values. Some example studies are Sam and Virta (2003) and Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver (2008), who explored family relationships across several minority groups, but treated their participants as a homogeneous group. Individualised, qualitative approaches can lead to an understanding of the diverse and flexible nature of migratory experiences, whilst challenging marginalizing assumptions about immigrants, as exemplified by a handful of more recent studies (Tanyas, 2012; Marku et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies such as Sales et al. (2008) and Christie and Szorenyi (2015) have identified that there are differences between UK and EE schooling, such as homework expectations and behavioural guidelines, which emphasize the need to look at cultures individually, as opposed to studying all minority ethnic cultures as homogenous.

Despite the multitude of educational policies aimed at supporting migrant learners and some evidence from national statistics outlining that average attainment for EAL pupils is rising, children from certain groups continue to underperform (The Bell Foundation, 2023). The majority of research undertaken in the UK exploring the educational experiences of minority ethnic groups has focused traditionally on families of Asian or Black heritage (Hamilton, 2013). There is an identified need and a literature gap, which shows the importance of researching factors which impact the way in which diverse groups of white, European, migrant children and families acclimate to British school culture. Additionally, there is a lack of literature exploring the experiences of migrant children with SEN and their parents, as well as a broader 'invisibility of migrants with disabilities in the field of migration studies' (Oliver and Singal, 2017).

As pointed out by Theara and Abbott (2015) in their study of South Asian parents who have a child with a diagnosis of autism, raising a child with SEN is

particularly difficult for immigrant parents, as they often have limited knowledge of the host country's language and educational system. Siddiqua and Janus (2017), in their study of the experiences of parents of children with SEN, pointed out that difficulties such as those aforementioned can have significant implications on the educational support and quality of care that is provided to children. The literature published highlights how minority ethnic groups are often reluctant to seek and accept support, even when it offered (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). A systematic literature review investigating the experiences of the EHCP process identified numerous challenges faced by parents when accessing support, such as feelings of guilt, anger and anxiety when attempting to come to terms with their child's SEN diagnosis (Ahad, Thompson and Hall, 2022), which can be amplified by factors such as English not being their first language. Echoed by Theara and Abbott (2015), migrant parents felt secluded and disempowered to engage with educational professionals. The findings from Jorgensen, Dobson and Perry's (2021) exploratory review of current issues and approaches concerning migrant children with SEN in European schools further highlighted the importance of professionals needing to acknowledge diversity both at a cultural and individual level. Their findings underlined the need for schools to critically evaluate their cultural framework and its application in practice, not just factors such as the cultural background of migrants. Therefore, it is likely beneficial to explore and understand the experiences of migrant parents who have a child with a diagnosis of SEN and the level of support schools are offering, in order to provide an understanding that considers the impact of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors.

Previous research has typically examined the education of migrant pupils and the education of those with SEN separately (Soriano, Grunberger and Kyriazopoulou, 2009). The current study will explore the combination of these two factors, alongside parental views and staff perceptions, by applying Bronfenbrenner's systems theory (1992), which was considered as the most suitable framework to encapsulate the complexity of SEN education and immigration. The theory highlights the importance of expected and unexpected occurrences and the impact these can have on a person's life; therefore it was deemed as an appropriate lens to investigate parental experiences of being confronted with life challenges such as SEN diagnoses and seeking support from schools and professionals (Swick and Williams, 2006).

Chapter 2: Empirical chapter

2.1 Abstract

Parenting a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) poses significant challenges for families. The challenges encountered when navigating the complex educational and SEN systems that exist within British society, are amplified for immigrant parents, as they are also facing cultural, linguistic and societal barriers. Literature has identified schools as playing a significant role in positively mediating the experiences of migrant children and their families, within the political and social context of their new country. This study explored the experiences of Eastern Europeans families parenting a child with SEN, giving the opportunity for parents to voice their opinions and discuss their experiences of school support with reference to the impact of social and cultural factors. It further explored the point of view of school staff, giving them the opportunity to discuss their experiences of working specifically with these underrepresented individuals and express their views on wider school practice. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and subsequently analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The findings highlighted that parents felt they were impacted by their background and culture, experienced inconsistencies in schools supporting them and expressed a need to 'fight the system'. Findings from the second participant group highlighted that school staff experienced significant language barriers when communicating with parents and had varying experiences of receiving support from their schools, to enable them to support parents. Staff also discussed cultural differences and considerations, such as parental attitudes to SEN and perceived parental lack of knowledge. Recommendations for future research are discussed, as well as implications for Educational Psychology (EP) practice and other professionals working with Eastern European migrants parenting a child with SEN.

2.2 Introduction

With a growing population of 1.6 million English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils in England (DfE, 2021), there is a growing need to address these CYPs' educational needs and the needs of their wider support systems. The second largest population of migrants in the UK, as of the most recent ONS report (ONS, 2021) are Eastern Europeans, following Indian nationals, making up a group of 2.2 million

individuals. As a result, the decision to study the experiences of Eastern Europeans was made for the following reasons: (a) there is currently academic literature on exploring the experiences of Indian parents (Theara and Abbott, 2015; Battacharji and Kingdon, 2016; Strand and Lindorff, 2018; Mukherjee and Barn, 2021) (b) there is currently no academic literature on exploring the experiences of nationals from all Eastern European countries of parenting children with SEN and (c) the researcher is a Romanian national, therefore, having a shared understanding of the views expressed by participants and their cultural provenance, as well as aiding in reducing a potential language barrier with a percentage of the participants.

Findings by the DfE (2023) show that 17% of all children are identified as having SEN, with research suggesting that children from migrant backgrounds are over-represented in the figures. Research from Strand and Lindorff (2021), for example, found that bilingual children from minority groups are twice as likely to be diagnosed as having a special educational need versus monolingual children. Despite high levels of SEN, migrants are also underrepresented in research exploring parents accessing support from schools and services (Marku et al., 2022). For any parent, raising a child with SEN presents particular social, psychological and emotional difficulties (DePape and Lindsay, 2015). Researchers have found that these are further amplified for migrant parents, when they could have limited knowledge of the host country's language, education and SEN systems (Theara and Abbott, 2015). This shows the need for research to explore and strive to understand the experiences of migrant parents raising a child with SEN in British schools, to provide individualised support that encompasses all the factors that impact this, such as socio-cultural factors.

Legislation such as the Code of Practice (2014) emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in a child's academic journey, whilst research also underscores the positive impact of parental engagement on academic outcomes (Campbell report, 2011; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; BEMIS, 2015). However, work needs to be done to further engage parents from under-represented groups. Previous findings from the literature have highlighted instances of schools placing the blame on parents who are less engaged, leading to the coining of terms such as 'hard to reach parents' (Levitas, 1998; Crozier and Davies, 2007). Following on, more recent research has highlighted how crucial it is for schools to consider wider factors that may affect parental involvement such as cultural background or parental

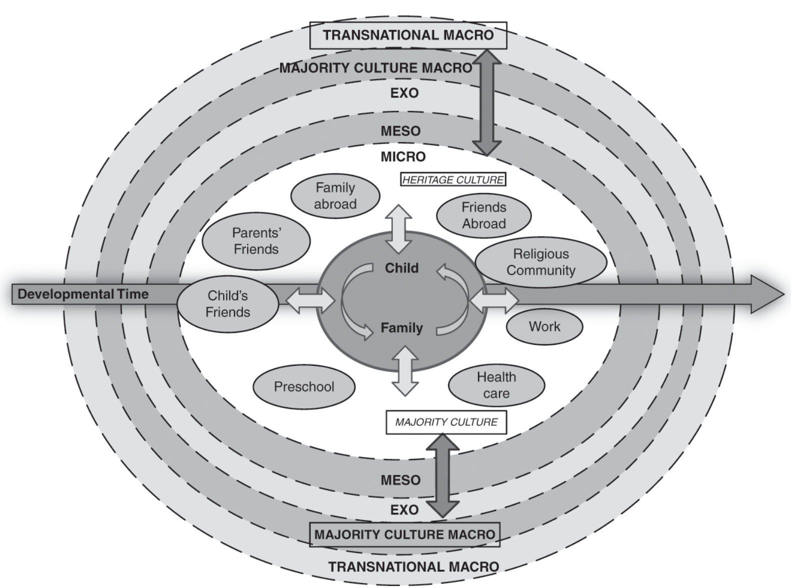
experiences of education (Christie and Szoreniy, 2015; Dryden-Peterson, 2017; Marku et al., 2022). These factors are arguably amplified when the child has additional needs; Hughes (2021) highlighted that there is a lack of guidance or policies in the UK for how the needs of EAL SEN pupils should be catered for, leading to significant variations in practice across the country.

The literature has investigated the topic of the study through various lenses, and often separately. Research topics can be separated in three distinct categories: cultural factors and considerations, schools and education, and SEN. There is a lack of research exploring the impact of all these factors at the same time.

2.2.1 Cultural factors and considerations

Migration significantly impacts EAL students and their families, affecting family structures and roles (Hamilton, 2012; Lam and Yeoh, 2018), parental mental health (Hamilton, 2013), socio-economic status (Underdown, 2007) and has been found to cause individuals to question their cultural identity (Schneider, 2016). A family joining an existing community may feel the pressure to acculturate (Berry, 2008), rather than overtly demonstrate their own ethnic and cultural practices, such as celebrating their culture or speaking their native language. Following Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model (1992), Berry developed his model of acculturation (1997) by encompassing aspects of culture (e.g., religious community) within the micro system. The model also takes into consideration cultural differences between the micro and macro systems, as well as the process of transnationalisation that migrants undergo (see Figure 1 below). Acculturation refers to a cultural change within a minority group following the exposure to individuals from a majority group. Migrant families could subsequently be more accepted by the existing community if they undergo the process of acculturation.

Figure 1. *Acculturation development model from 'Acculturation development and the acquisition of culture competence', p.73 (Oppendal and Toppelberg, 2016)*



As schools in the UK are facing the challenge of educating a growing number of EAL pupils, issues surrounding value placed on cultural capital have been explored by various researchers. Research suggests that schools play a crucial role in mediating the experiences of migrant children and their families, within the political and social context of their new country (Moskal, 2014). The term cultural capital refers to the social and cultural aptitudes of an individual or group and it comprises of factors such as knowledge and behaviours that demonstrate cultural competence (Holden, 2010). Recognition of the influence of cultural capital within a school is essential for children and families to receiving adequate, equitable support (Devine, 2009). However, schools may favour individuals perceived as culturally endowed, leading to unequitable treatment based on their background (Leopold and Shavit, 2011; Vincent et al., 2018).

In a UK context, societal changes such as Brexit, have intensified exclusionary politics, contributing to the 'othering' of some ethnic minorities (Moore and Ramsay, 2017; Kozminska and Zhu, 2020). Devaluing the influence of differing levels of cultural capital and the holding of societal stereotypes can significantly impact relationships between schools and migrant families (Bonnizoni, Romito and Cavallo, 2014; Glaesser and Cooper, 2014). Differences in cultural beliefs and values in educational settings can create barriers between parents and schools,

leading to specific ethnic groups facing unique challenges in navigating the UK education system. One example from the literature is a study by Tereshchenko and Archer (2014) that highlighted the experiences of EE families. Participants in the study (Tereshchenko and Archer, 2014) expressed anxieties regarding their language proficiency, a lack of understanding of the UK school system, alongside facing judgemental stereotypes regarding their choice of employment.

Attempts by schools to bridge cultural gaps can be perceived as tokenistic by families (Crozier, 2016; Hess, 2015) highlighting the need for genuine engagement and equal participation (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). Critics argue that the British education system often reflects only the values of Western, middle-class, monolingual individuals (Brooker, 2005), leaving little room for accommodating the needs of diverse students and their families. Alongside this, a ‘hurry along culture’ that prioritises academic achievement, addressing the needs of students and families that require extra support are often neglected (Dadds, 2005).

2.2.2 Schools and education

Inclusive education, which strives to give equal rights to all regardless of their differences, is essential for the emotional well-being of children and families (Faas, Sokolowska and Darmody, 2015). Successful participation in school life and feelings of belonging are directly related to improved outcomes for migrant students (Kon and Rimpela, 2002; Faas, 2010). However, research suggests that while there is a rhetoric of equality and inclusion in policy documents, the reality of school practice often shows a lack of engagement with the perspectives of ethnic minorities and surface treatment of cultural diversity (Baraldi, 2005; Crozier and Davies, 2008).

The differences between home and school education for migrant learners have been explored by various researchers. Teacher attitudes towards migration and linguistic diversity can influence parental beliefs about specific factors, such as the perceived negative impact of home languages on education (Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia, 2018; Weekly, 2018). Equally, parental attitudes towards education, based on experiences from their home countries can impact their sense of belonging, as well as their level of involvement in their child’s education (Tobin, 2019). In some cases, parents may perceive a lack of encouragement from schools for their involvement (BEMIS, 2015; Ashraf, 2019), whilst staff may believe parents lack commitment (Bezcioglu-Goktolga and Yagmur, 2018). Further barriers

impacting the development of positive home-school relationships include language barriers (Naidoo, 2013) and difficulties in parents understanding the education system (Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2016). Some families rely on unofficial translators or others in their community to navigate the education system, which can lead to misunderstandings (Smidt, 2008; Hamilton, 2013).

Schools face challenges in achieving true inclusivity for EAL students and their support systems, due to inadequate teacher training, a lack of resources and resistance to changing teaching practices (Faas, Sokolowkska and Darmody, 2015). Creating caring and supportive school environments with supportive staff, linguistic support, cultural awareness and increased parental involvement can improve outcomes for migrant students and their families (Vandenbroeck, Roets and Snoeck, 2009; Gorard, 2013). As schools identify and address the needs of EAL children and families, they can facilitate their equal participation within society (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). It is worth considering the wider systemic issues that may be impacting schools in achieving true inclusivity and providing migrant families and SEN children with the right levels of support. At present, in the UK, austerity and diminishing funds for public services have led to schools losing access to services such as Children's Centres or LA school support services, which offered local support to all families (DECP, 2024). Financial constraints have also affected the schools' ability to offer a flexible approach to the curriculum, which is required for inclusive education, therefore leading to a segregation within the educational system for those with additional needs (ibid.). Financial difficulties coupled with a lack of specialists (e.g., EPs, OTs) who provide early intervention and support services, have had an adverse impact on children and their families, as well as schools and their staff (ibid.).

2.2.3 SEN

There is an identified significant gap in research regarding the experiences of migrant families with children who have a special educational need (SEN), and the specific support they receive from schools. While there is extensive literature on migrant families, school practice, parents of SEN children, there is limited focus on the intersection, which is crucial. Culture, family and school all play significant roles in a child's development, as exhibited by Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model (1992). Challenges identified within the literature include difficulties in identifying SEN in migrant children, concerns expressed by parents about disclosing the needs

of their children due to fears of segregation and the lack of resources and training in schools for assessing EAL learners with SEN. The intersection between migration, disability and education can lead to tensions between parents and schools. The implication of this gap in the literature underlines the need for further research to understand the experiences of migrant families with SEN children, and how schools can effectively support them. The current research project aims to build upon the research conducted by Marku et al. (2022) and Dyson (2022) interview nationals from all EE countries. Using an ecological lens, the study aims to focus upon not only the interaction between EE migrants parenting a child with SEN and schools staff, but also on the impact of culture, equitable school practice and wider systemic issues.

2.2.4 Why Eastern Europeans?

In the 18th century, Europe was divided into 'Western' and 'Eastern' Europe, from the previously accepted 'Northern' and 'Southern', with the deliberate intention to portray EE as backward and the Western side as more progressive and affluent (Larry Wolff, 2010). The word 'Eastern' was deemed to suggest lesser due to the area being commonly framed as undemocratic and underdeveloped, when compared to the Western area (Lewicki, 2023). Social conditions in EE also differed substantially, as it was dominated by peasantry and urbanisation was at a far earlier stage than Western Europe (Kalmar, 2022) This was further enforced in the 19th century by German nationalists and other powerful WW2 influences, who classed EE as 'Slavic Europe', to divide it from the Western side, which was considered 'Germanic Europe' (Popowycz, 2022). Following on, in the 20th century, this had an effect on the countries that were part of the region, as they were all part of the Soviet 'sphere of influence' (Roberts, 1999). Following the fall of Communism in Europe, the grouping of EE countries continued, as 'Eastern Europe' now represented countries that have been under communist influences for significant periods of time (Kramer, 2003). There has been an unequal, longstanding hierarchy within Europe, resulting in EEs needing to navigate issues of 'othering' and feeling 'less civilised' and 'more backward' (Boatca, 2013).

Countries in the EE region have a long-standing shared history that has shaped the values and beliefs of many, as they shared similar experiences growing up under similar influences. According to current research and reports exploring

various aspects of society and culture, nationals from EE countries have a more shared view of the world than Europe as a whole. For example, religious beliefs; for many EE being Christian is an important component of their national identity (Pew Research Centre, 2017). The same report touches on the fact that Western countries such as the UK and France believe that it is not important to be Christian to be a true national, which in the context of the current study, highlights cultural differences that can be encountered when EE migrate and access British services, such as education. A 2018 report investigating views on religious minorities, national identity and cultural superiority in Eastern vs. Western Europe indicated a divide, with high levels of nationalism identified in the East and more openness towards multiculturalism in the West (Pew Research Centre, 2018). The report also pointed to a divide in values when investigating social issues such as legal abortion and same-sex marriage.

In terms of education systems, there is a shared educational history with EE countries under a communist regime following a system of rote learning across all subjects. This enforced the teaching of ideological and political views and encouraged student segregation based on merit, with the intention to encourage the top 10% to go to University, whilst the others to go down vocational routes (Mincu, 2016; Wojdon, 2021). Considering the current state of education, a report from UNICEF considered the education of students in EE countries and what similarities are present in the region. It found that teaching practices are largely traditional and centred around the teacher, with little to no emphasis on adaptive, individualised instruction and provision (UNICEF, 2021). The report further concluded that issues of student segregation based on levels of achievement, a lack of equitable schooling and matters of socio-economic disparity are significant factors that affect high quality teaching and provision in the majority of EE countries.

The literature on the experiences of EE parents within the UK education system covers various themes such as racialisation, educational differences, and cultural capital. Studies indicate that EE migrants often face racialization and 'othering' (Fox, Morosanu and Szilassy, 2012) which affect their interactions with schools. Societal and contextual factors in the UK, such as the post-Brexit aftermath have highlighted hierarchies of exclusion and inclusion within society, and subsequently in school settings, leading to further feelings of discrimination as highlighted by Polish families in a study by Kozminska and Zhu (2020).

Key studies within the literature found that EE parents express frustrations with perceived low expectations for their children when compared to non-EE children, and an overall lack of cultural understanding and appreciation of their cultural capital (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015; Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). Researchers have highlighted that whilst some EEs may have the ability to develop the 'right' social and cultural capital to access the same privileges as nationals (Hayes and Shain, 2021), the majority struggle due to language barriers and difficulties assimilating to the host country (Ryan et al., 2008). Some EE parents feel that associations to being an EE migrant has limited them from accessing privileges and social acceptance in the UK (Moskal and Sime, 2016; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010).

Differences between UK and EE schooling systems, including attitudes toward SEN, further complicate matters, as research has highlighted that EE parents are often reluctant to seek and accept support due to SEN being considered taboo in their culture (Graves and Gargiulo, 1994; Pew Research Centre, 2018). Parents also expressed anxieties about navigating education in the UK due to limited knowledge of the educational system and low English proficiency (Moskal, 2014). Anxieties expressed by EE parents about navigating the UK school system underscores the importance of effective inclusion strategies. Studies suggest that schools can act as mediators between migrant families and their broader societal context (Moskal, 2014; Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019). Addressing cultural views of SEN and fostering dialogue between schools and EE communities can enhance inclusivity and support for migrant families (Dyson, 2022).

Considering the shared history and world view, experiences of a society under communism and similarities present within the current education system in their countries of origin, EEs can be viewed as a distinct group when considering other migrants the UK. Studies have grouped together EEs and findings have identified these nationals as 'the new other' in British schools, both by well-established minority groups and the white majority (Tereshchenko and Archer, 2014; Moskal, 2014; Moskal and Sime, 2016; Marku et al., 2022). A recent longitudinal study by Blachnicka-Ciacek and Budginaite-Mackine (2022) discussed how EE migrants, as a homogenous group, can 'pass as white' with the 'right' cultural capital; but many felt that they constantly needed to prove their 'good immigrant' status, which impacted their sense of belonging. Therefore, the current study will consider the experiences

of EE parents as a homogenous group for the purpose of exploring how they have navigate SEND systems in the UK, a country vastly different to theirs.

2.3 Research aims and questions

As aforementioned, while there is extensive literature on migrant families, school practice and parents of SEN children, there is no research focusing on the intersections, for families from all countries within EE. Current research has focused on the experiences of EE migrants from the A8 EE countries parenting children with SEN and the journey to diagnosis (Marku et al., 2022), the experiences of Romanian parents and school staff in their communication together, alongside EP views (Dyson, 2022), differences in UK and EE education (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015) and experiences of migration, disability and education of wider migrant populations (Oliver and Singal, 2015). The current research hopes to build on the Marku et al., (2022) study by focusing on parent views and school support post-diagnosis, as well as building on Dyson's (2022) study by exploring wider factors impacting parent-school relationships, such as cultural factors and understanding of UK school and SEN systems. The current study does not restrict access to participants from any of the 12 EE countries , as previous studies have either focused on one particular EE country or have restricted participation only to EEs from the A8 countries.

This study seeks to address this gap by putting EE families parenting a child with SEN at the forefront of the research, giving them a space in which to voice their opinions and discuss their experiences of school support, whilst considering the impact of social and cultural factors on their lives. It will also consider the point of view of school staff, allowing them to discuss how they have developed relationships with these underrepresented individuals, encouraged parental involvement and engaged in home-school communication. Ascertaining parental views can help professionals and educators working with these families, in addition to identifying directions for future research. As the current research will take a qualitative approach, it is hoped that in-depth accounts of parents navigating SEND systems as a migrant, alongside educator experiences of providing support will outline potential challenges, current good practice and pave the way for future practice in education.

The research questions were guided by reviewing the existing literature, alongside the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance. The following two research questions will be examined:

- What are the experiences of EE migrant parents in receiving support and guidance from schools in parenting a child with SEN?
- How do schools develop and maintain relationships with EE migrant families parenting a child with SEN?

2.4 Methodology

The following section outlines the methodology utilised for the current research, including a discussion of the researcher's ontological and epistemological position and its impact on the chosen study design. Data collection and analysis processes will also be discussed.

2.4.1 Ontological and epistemological stance

The research project will be underpinned by a pragmatic epistemology. Pragmatic researchers accept that there can be single or multiple realities that are open to empirical analysis (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Pragmatists agree that there is an objective reality that exists separate from the human experience, however reality is grounded in the environment and can only be encountered through the human experience (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2008). A pragmatic researcher's choice of one version of reality over another is governed by how well that choice results in the desired outcomes, meaning that research designs incorporate operational decisions based on 'what will work best' in finding answers. This enables pragmatists to conduct research that is dynamic and solution-driven (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism allows for the exploration of a combination of 'best bits' from other philosophies, enabling data collection and subsequent analysis to be less restrictive. For example, a positivist approach that requires measurable data, restricts opportunities for interpretation, pushing the researcher to only consider things through the narrow view of a more rigid philosophical standpoint. In comparison, pragmatism pursues a 'meaningful consensus' in varied contexts (Parker, 2006).

One of the key philosophies behind pragmatism is that human actions cannot be separated from past experiences and any thoughts or beliefs that resulted from those experiences (Morgan, 2014). A well-published qualitative social researcher, Morgan, in his 2014 article exploring pragmatism as a paradigm for social research, also highlighted that pragmatists place value on the nature of experience, unlike other paradigms that focus on the nature of reality. Pragmatist research posits that

no two individuals have identical experiences, which means they cannot have identical worldviews. However, when considering two individuals living with the same societal context, there can be various degrees of shared experiences, which can, in turn, lead to shared beliefs. In conclusion, worldviews can be both socially shared and individually unique, depending on the extent of the shared beliefs in particular situations (Morgan 2014; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019).

Pragmatism rejects philosophical dualisms such as interpretivism versus positivism, as it claims that they can both be integrated in practice. However, this can imply that pragmatism lacks robustness due to being a mixed version of philosophies and not having clear corresponding conceptual frameworks and methodological principles (Ulrich, 2007). Some critics have described pragmatism as an 'anti-philosophy', as they believe it lacks the rigour and credibility of other theoretical designs (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, researchers employing a pragmatic approach to their work do not disregard philosophical arguments but believe that broader philosophical arguments cannot be solved due to meaning being inseparable from human experience and needs, as well as being dependent on context (Dillon, O'Brien and Heilman, 2000).

This epistemology fits well with the purpose of this study, as it recognises the existence of multiple realities and social constructions derived from an individual's experience, when investigating the same phenomenon, as well as having an orientation to improving practice. Migrant parents of SEN children and school staff share the objective 'reality' of being part of the UK school system, however they possess individual realities based on their own experiences intertwined with the varying cultural and societal factors that affect these. Pragmatists believe that as well as investigating multiple facets of a problem, the inquiry should always progress towards a 'solution for everyday problems' (Briggs, 2019). In line with Briggs' statement, the current study is aiming to improve school approaches to working with EE families, as well as inform the practice of educational professionals (including EPs).

Critical realism was also considered as an appropriate ontological and epistemological stance for this research project. Critical realism is a philosophical approach that seeks to uncover the underlying structures that shape social constructs (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). Whilst acknowledging the existence of an external reality that exists independently of human perception, it argues that

our understanding of reality is mediated by social constructs and processes. Critical realist researchers aim to identify causal mechanisms behind observed events, often drawing from theories from various other disciplines (such as sociology) (Morgan and Smircich, 2014) and a heavier focus on ontological and epistemological considerations rather than practical applications (Zhang, 2022).

However, pragmatism was chosen due to the nature of the research and the need to consider practical implications for EP and wider educational practice. Research such as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie's (2004), highlights how pragmatism allows for the use of multiple methods to provide better ways of answering research questions. A pragmatic approach in social sciences offers an alternative, reflexive and flexible guide to research design than traditional research epistemologies (Feilzer, 2009). This aligns with the current study, as the use of visual stimuli was used alongside a more traditional qualitative method (semi-structured interviews).

2.4.2 Participants

The participants for this study were recruited using purposive sampling. As described by Palinkas et al. (2013), purposive sampling is an approach widely used for the selection of information-rich cases when conducting qualitative research and wanting to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific inquiry. The participants in the study included two separate groups.

The first group was made up of EE migrants who were parenting school-aged children with SEN. The inclusion criteria required parents to have lived in the UK for a minimum of 2 years. The minimum requirement of UK residency was included due to the need for parents to have had time to experience a certain level of support offered by schools and to develop an understanding, however limited, of the British educational system. A second selection criterion was for their child to have a SEN diagnosis (ASD, dyslexia, ADHD, etc.) A third selection criterion was for the participants to be able to undertake the interview in English, as translators could not be provided. The second group of participants consisted of school staff from both mainstream and special schools, working with children aged 0-18. The inclusion criterion for school staff required them to have been in post for a minimum of 2 years and through their role, have experience of working with EAL families, more specifically with EE families.

There is existing research exploring home-school relationships in a school context, looking at various aspects such as home-school communication, cultural assimilation, levels of school support for migrant parents and others identified within the literature review. However, the majority of research does not distinguish between migrant groups and investigates wider EAL communities such as 'Asian' or 'European'. Even studies that investigate SEN support within the EE community specifically, exclude a portion of individuals. For example, Marku et al.'s (2022) study of the lived experiences of EE immigrants parenting a child with SEN in England, investigated only the experiences of families from A8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). The other EE countries were not considered (Romania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and small parts of Russia). It was therefore intended that this research be inclusive of all EE migrants and aim to interview participants from as many EE countries as possible. Participants were recruited using several avenues listed below:

1. Researcher contacted The Romanian and Eastern European Hub to request support with contacting **parent** participants. The Hub is a London-based charity that provides services designed to support EE communities both in London and more widely, across the UK. They offer free, tailored support to those needing help due to language and cultural barriers.
2. Researcher conducted a website search of schools within Central Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire for email addresses. Recruitment email sent to schools to ask if researcher could visit schools to present research during a staff meeting. The research poster was also shared in the recruitment email to be shared by schools with both staff and parent participants.
3. Recruitment poster advertised on social media via Facebook and LinkedIn to recruit both staff and parent participants (Appendix 1).
4. Researcher asked EPs within placement LA to share recruitment poster, to recruit both staff and parent participants.

If individuals were interested in participating in the study, they were sent a consent form outlining all the information required. A subsequent interview date was scheduled for data collection. The recruitment process resulted in the recruitment of 8 participants. Initial interview questions aimed to gather background information from each participant. A summary of this information is presented below in Table 3.

Table 3. *Participant information*

Parent participants

Participant descriptor	Nationality	Child	Other relevant information
P1	Romanian	• 15-year-old boy attending a special school • ADHD diagnosis and EHCP	Child was born in the UK and mum has lived in the UK for over 16 years.
P2	Romanian	• 9-year-old boy attending mainstream school • Dyslexia diagnosis, no EHCP	Child was born in the UK and mum has lived in the UK for over 10 years.
P3	Romanian	• 5-year-old boy attending mainstream school with an ASD diagnosis, no EHCP • 12-year-old boy attending special school with an ASD diagnosis and an EHCP	Children were born in the UK and mum has lived in the UK for over 15 years. Mum is the creator and admin of a Facebook group aimed at supporting parents from the Romanian community parenting children with SEN.
PS*	Polish	• 13-year-old boy attending integrated resource base for children with ASD • Diagnosis of ASD and EHCP	****Dual participant*** *(EE mother and SEN teacher)* Child was born in the UK and mum has lived in the UK for over 15 years.

School staff participants

Participant descriptor	Role	Other relevant information
S1	Teacher working in an infant school outside of London	Is English.
S2	Teaching assistant working in a primary mainstream school in London	No longer works in the primary school, now works in further education. Is English.
S3	Pastoral lead in a SEMH ARP in London	Has previously worked as an infant and nursery teacher. Is also EE (Serbian).
S4	HLTA in a mainstream primary school in London	Has previously worked as head of year 13 in a sixth form in London. Is Turkish.

Considering sample size, Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) discuss the concept of information power as a guiding principle for determining sample size in qualitative research. Instead of relying on predetermined sample size numbers, they argue that the adequacy of a sample size depends on the amount of information the sample can provide relevant to the study's aim. Considering the concept of information power, which suggests that the more information a sample holds relevant to the research question, the smaller the sample size required. Conversely, if the sample provides less information, a larger sample size might be needed. The sample size of this study is discussed further in the limitations section.

2.4.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both participant groups, to delve deeper into their experiences of navigating SEND system in British schools. The interviews were essential for tapping into human thought, meaning and experience and offered the opportunity to gather 'rich and highly illuminating material' (Robson and McCartan, 2015). A primary benefit of semi-structured interviews is that they allow interviews to be focused, while still giving the researcher the autonomy to 'explore pertinent ideas that may come up in course of the interview' (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021), which can further enhance understanding of the subject being explored. By following a general structure that is devised prior to the interview, which is focused on the core topic, it also allows for discovery and space to pursue trajectories as the conversations unfold (Magaldi and Berler, 2020).

The participants were also encouraged to bring a visual (image or object), that represented their experiences of being a parent or member of staff navigating SEND systems in Britain, in relation to working with or being EE. Visuals that are meaningful to respondents can encourage engagement, generate projective comments and deepen exploration of meaning in relation to the individual's views, whilst revealing insights into the way they make sense of the world (Glegg, 2019). If the participants brought a meaningful object, a picture was taken of the visual and used during the write-up. This was detailed in the consent form sent to participants prior to agreeing to partake in the study.

The researcher devised two interview schedules (one for each participant group), as detailed in Appendices 2 and 3, guided by a thorough examination of the literature on schools supporting migrant parents and EAL parents navigating British

SEND systems. The context of the questions was informed by identified gaps in the literature and aligned with the research aims and questions. The initial questions inquired about participants' roles in schools for the school staff group and about ethnicity, or their children's ages, for the parent participant group. This aimed to encourage rapport building, establish a comfortable environment for self-expression, provide insights into important context, all whilst prioritising a person-centred approach during the process.

Throughout the interview, the majority of questions asked were open-ended, to elicit unstructured responses, fostering an environment for participants to express themselves freely and descriptively regarding their experiences of navigating SEND systems. The researcher also employed the use of probes, strategically integrating them during all interviews, to follow up on participant statements and offer them a chance to elaborate on their responses. This further aligned with the improvisational nature of the dialogue between the researcher and participant (Mueller and Segal, 2015). The use of semi-structured interviews, alongside the use of visuals aligns with a pragmatic ontology and epistemology, as it was deemed best fit for the topic being explored. Pragmatism encourages researchers to base their choices on the relevance of certain methods in terms of 'carrying us from the world of practice to the world of theory and vice versa' (Kelemen and Rumens, 2012), rather than questioning the intrinsic value or validity of these methods.

The participants were offered the choice of being interviewed in person or virtually. Whilst some literature states that face-to-face interviews optimise communication due to allowing for both verbal and non-verbal communication to be taken into account (Robson, 2011), more recent studies have found that the type of interview conducted does not affect the quality of the data (Shapka et al., 2016; Zadkowska et al., 2022). Several studies suggest that for some participants, virtual interviews reduce social pressures presented by the interviewer being in the room; the reduction of social pressures meaning that the researcher can gain higher quality data (Schober, 2018). Peasgood et al. (2023) did not find any statistically significant impact between offering individuals face-to-face or online interviews. The researchers in the aforementioned study also discussed how offering virtual interviews alongside in-person ones, allows participants the ability to select the most convenient option.

Only one participant out of eight chose to have the interview in person. The remaining seven participants chose to be interviewed virtually via Microsoft Teams, a video-calling platform. An appropriate date and time was negotiated between researcher and participant. It was anticipated that the duration of the interviews would be no longer than 60 minutes, however these varied in length between 27 and 65 minutes. The in-person interview was recorded using an audio-recording device, whilst the virtual interviews were recorded using the 'record' option within Microsoft Teams. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Video and audio recordings were deleted following transcription. Three of the participants interviewed asked the researcher if they would be able to be interviewed in Romanian, due to the researcher speaking the same language. The participants disclosed that they would feel more comfortable and be able to express themselves more freely if they are able to speak in their mother tongue. The researcher was happy to comply, to support the participant's communication and respect their wishes.

2.4.4 Data analysis

The transcripts underwent analysis using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), employing Braun and Clarke's most recent six-phase framework (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Thematic analysis aims to extract common themes from data while acknowledging diverse perspectives shaped by cultural, historical and social contexts (Braun and Clarke, 2012). It is an easily accessible and theoretically flexible approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the researcher in identifying and analysing patterns or themes in a data set (Byrne, 2021). Considering the reflexive nature of approach, it incorporates the researcher's own socially and contextually situated interpretations when deriving meaning from the data. As highlighted in Braun and Clarke's guidelines (2022), this approach is appropriate when a single researcher is involved in data analysis. Given the researcher's role as a practitioner-researcher and also being part of the EE community, RTA facilitated continuous reflection during data interpretation, taking into account the shared identity between the researcher and participants.

Braun and Clarke (2022) denote that the researcher needs to make a series of choices regarding how they engage with the data and justify the choices made when conducting reflexive thematic analysis. The choices made by the researcher are presented in the table below.

Table 4. *Approaches to reflexive thematic analysis*

Variation	Approach	Rationale
Orientation to data	Inductive	The inductive approach allowed the researcher to work with the data from the bottom up. It has been recognised by Braun and Clarke (2022), that an entirely inductive approach is not possible due to researcher prior knowledge, biases and interpretations, which cannot be separated from the data collected. However, to mediate this, the researcher intentionally avoided revisiting the literature review during data collection and analysis, to lower the possibility of the analysis becoming deductive.
Focus of meaning	Semantic and latent	The analysis captured mainly semantic meaning (at the more surface, or explicit level), which aligned with the participant's understanding of their own experiences. However, some latent meanings (at the more underlying or implicit level) were also explored throughout the process.
Qualitative framework	Experiential	The research aim was to explore and capture people's own perspectives and understandings, as opposed to unpacking meaning around the topic of SEN support in British schools for EE parents and school staff.
Theoretical framework	Essentialist and constructionist	The analysis captured the truth and reality within the dataset, as expressed by both participant groups (essentialist). However, a constructionist framework (interrogated and unpacked realities expressed in the data set) was used during the discussion, to construct practical implications for EP practice and ways forward.

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), their six-phase thematic analysis is outlined in their book merely as guidelines to follow, rather than a set of linear rules, and is better categorised as a 'progressive but recursive process' (p.36). However, the researcher is viewed as having an active role in the analysis process. The authors' guidance notes that researchers should justify how they approach the six phases and how they construct themes, to denote their reflective engagement with the data whilst conducting RTA. This is captured in the table below under the heading 'process and action'.

Table 5. *Six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022)*

Phase	Process and action
1. Familiarisation with dataset	• The dataset was transcribed after listening to/watching the audio/visual recordings several times. • Listened to/watched audio/visual recordings again to checked transcripts against recordings. • Interviews conducted in Romanian were transcribed in Romanian and then translated into English. As the interviews were recorded in Romanian, they were firstly transcribed in Romanian and then translated. This was an arduous process, however it allowed the researcher to capture an authentic parental POV, as the researcher was able to navigate the meaning behind phrases and words that don't have a direct English translation, as a Romanian language speaker. • Immersion in data by re-reading and making brief notes in the form of a doodle for each participant, as seen in Appendix 4. The handwritten notes and doodles supported the researcher's reflective process.
2. Coding the dataset	• Systemic approach to working through the transcripts and generating 'codes' that encapsulated important features of the data set that were deemed relevant to answering the research questions and were of analytic interest. • The 'codes' captured single meanings or concepts. Both semantic and latent codes arised from the analysis, to reflect both implicit and overt meaning across the data set. • The process was carried out manually, noting down codes relevant to pieces of text, as seen in Appendix 5 . • As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2022), the process was repeated, each time in a different way (once with a top-down approach and the second time, a bottom-up approach).
3. Generating initial themes	• Codes were electronically tabulated and colour-coded to represent each participant group (blue = parents, red = school staff). • They were all printed and cut-out individually to allow researcher the flexibility to move them around during the process of generating the initial themes. • Codes from both participant groups were then separately organised into clusters to allow the researcher to identify patterns of codes that share a core concept. • Once potential themes were identified, the codes relevant to each theme were collated, as seen in Appendix 6. • During the process, individual codes that were only shared by one participant were let go.
4. Developing and reviewing themes	• An assessment of initial fit of themes were checked against the coded extracts and the full transcripts.

	• The hand-sorted themes were electronically tabulated and sorted (Appendix 7).
5. Refining, defining and naming themes	• As outlined by Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidelines, each theme was clearly defined and redefined (if needed) to 'outline the scope, boundaries and core concept' of each theme, for both participant groups. • A final thematic map was created.
6. Write-up	• The final phase was compiled through weaving together extracts from the data set and the researcher's analytical narrative. • Extracts to represent each theme were carefully selected from all participants, from both groups. • The write-up can be found in the 'findings' section of this research.

2.4.5 Rigour and quality of research

While the assessment of qualitative research has shifted away from traditional quantitative parameters such as replicability, there is still a need for qualitative studies to showcase their quality (Baillie, 2015). Various criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research redefine the traditional questions around reliability and validity; aiming instead to establish trustworthiness in the process of data collection and analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Ryan-Nicholls and Will, 2009; Johnson and Rasulova, 2017). In the context of RTA, Braun and Clarke (2022) discuss how they wish to depart from 'universal' criteria such as credibility, dependability and transferability and instead propose that high quality research arises from creative immersion in the data set and insightful understanding.

However, through creative immersion, research can become interpretative and guided by the researcher's view of the world and their set of beliefs (Darawsheh, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2022) describe this as part of the 'knowledge production process' and class these 'inferences' as vital to the analysis and interpretation of data. It is recognised in the literature that these factors can skew data interpretation and affect the credibility of research (Porter, 2007; Freshwater et al., 2010). In line with the researcher's pragmatist epistemology and to marry both elements of research, Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance on carrying out a 'good thematic analysis' was followed, alongside Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criterion for establishing trustworthiness. How the researcher addressed each criterion is outlined in Table 6.

Table 6. *Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria for qualitative research.*

Lincoln and Guba's criteria (1985)	Researcher action
Credibility To establish confidence that the results are true, credible and believable from the participants' point of view	The researcher comprehensively followed Braun and Clarke's guidance (2022) on engaging with, analysing and reflecting on the data, at every stage of the process. To ensure further credibility, it would have been ideal to share themes and findings with the participants before the write-up stage, however this was not possible due to time constraints.
Dependability To ensure the findings of this research are repeatable if the research was conducted a second time with the same cohort of participants, coders and within the same context	Due consideration is given to the potential of how the researcher's knowledge, prior experiences, personal values and other relevant contextual factors may have impacted the analysis and interpretation. However, Braun and Clarke (2022) consider the subjective point of view of the researcher to be a valuable key factor when conducting RTA.
Confirmability To establish the extent to which the research is shaped by the researcher's personal views, bias or interest	The reflective chapter outlines the researcher's considerations of potential biases and influences that may have had an impact on the analysis and interpretation process. The researcher aimed to be reflexive and reflective throughout the entirety of the process. By providing detailed explanations, the researcher also aimed to be clear and transparent at every step, to ensure further confirmability of the study.
Transferability To extend the degree to which the results can be generalised to other contexts	Detailed descriptions of the process of recruitment, data collection and analysis were provided, in the hope that it increases the level of transferability for the reader. Relevant, detailed information was provided about each participant to further support the potential for the findings to be generalised in other contexts for potential future research.

2.5 Ethical considerations

Full ethical approval was gained from the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics committee (Appendix 8). Ongoing research supervision also informed discussion and decision-making concerning ethics. The research was conducted in accordance with the principles of the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). Following recruitment through the different avenues aforementioned, individuals who wanted to participate in the study were provided with all the information necessary to partake in the research, outlined in the information and consent form (Appendices 9 and 10). The information sheets and consent forms were provided in English only, as one of

the inclusion criteria for the study was that participants can speak English, The information in the form highlighted the study aims, what the study would involve, the amount of time required for participation, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, ensured anonymity and outlined the complaints/concerns process. This allowed participants to give fully informed consent, as there was no element of deception.

Before beginning the interviews, anonymity, confidentiality, the right to not answer questions and to withdraw prior to data analysis were reiterated verbally. The participants were also asked for consent to have the interviews recorded for transcription purposes, alongside consent for a picture to be taken of their visual (if bringing an object to the interview). To ensure that the visual used would not be recognisable, the researcher ensured participants that any identifiable information would be blurred. Alternatively, participants were also offered the choice of not having their object photographed, but for the researcher to include a written description of the item.

Ethics concerning the sensitivity of the topic for both participant groups were considered. The researcher produced a one-page poster signposting each participant group to charities/organisations that could offer further support around topics discussed during the interviews (SEN, EHCPs, education, migration) (Appendices 11 and 12). This was sent to participants following interviews.

Anonymity was ensured during transcription by using pseudonyms or redacting identifiable information from the transcript. Participants were given the opportunity to check their transcripts for accuracy and to check for any information they felt needed to be omitted, before commencing data analysis. Personal information and data was stored on a password-protected laptop and in line with UK GDPR guidelines, University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy and the Data Protection Act (2018).

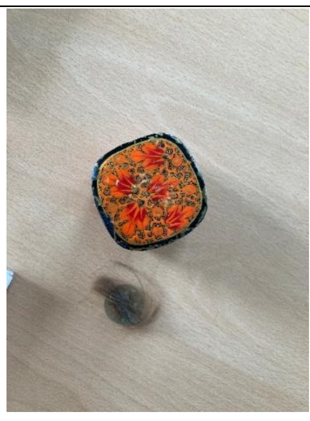
2.6 Findings

After transcript analysis, final themes and sub-themes were developed for both participant groups. These will be presented separately, first considering the themes that surfaced from interviewing parent participants and secondly, the themes that emerged from interviewing school staff, in line with the research questions. As previously stated, the participants were also encouraged to bring a visual (image or

object), that represented their experiences of being a parent or member of staff navigating SEND systems in Britain, in relation to working with or being EE. Visuals that are meaningful to respondents can encourage engagement, generate projective comments and deepen exploration of meaning in relation to the individual's views, whilst revealing insights into the way they make sense of the world (Glegg, 2019). 2 participants chose to bring an object, which was photographed, whilst the other 6 participants used internet images, which have also been included below.

2.6.1 Parent participants

Table 7. *Visuals used by parent participants*

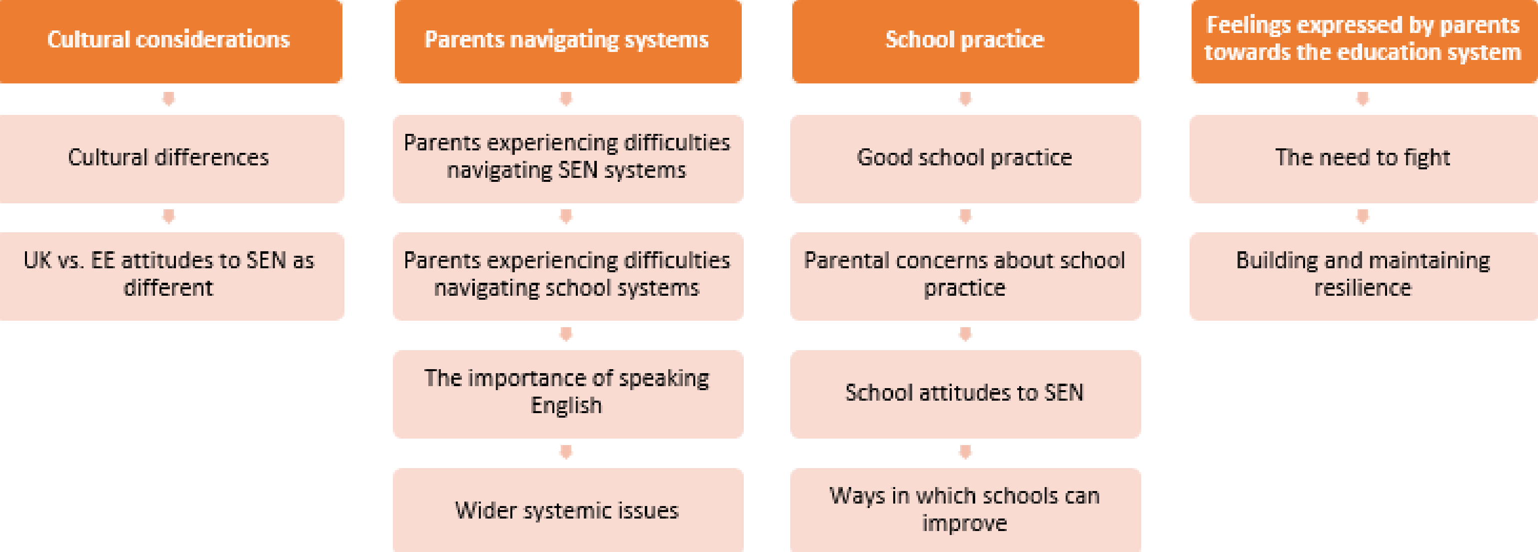
	
P1: *… this is my son's; my mum put it in there for him, you know what it's like. And my mum actually wrote on it (I need my glasses)… He chose the religious image of Saint Nectair, car keys and a white flower. I thought I would bring this. I was really considering bringing it because it was just sitting there on a shelf. My mum died in 2021 and I thought I would bring something related to both her and him. My mum was a Romanian and French language teacher and she loved to write. I'm glad she wrote it down because I wouldn't have remembered what he picked. It was so many years ago… but she wrote down what he picked. I know you told me to pick an object and I chose this one.*	**P2:** *For me this toy… is his dinosaur that he got from a kinder egg when he was about 3 years old, and he hasn't put it down since. When he was little, he used to sleep with it and take it everywhere he went. Now he's older, he gave the toy up last year, but still keeps it in his room. He used to take it everywhere before. I think it represents him somehow. His favourite colour is green, ever since he got this dinosaur. He went through a phase where everything he wore was green, his school bag had to have green dinosaurs on it. I think this toy represents him and I really love it.*

  P3: *An apple that is red and shiny on one side and the other side is rotten. That's me, 50/50. It all depends on what side you're looking at, what side I could be showing you on the day. You may see me as a rotten apple and on another day, when you or I switch sides, you may see my shiny side. Sometimes you may see me smiling, but on the inside it's snowing, there's a storm. That's me. You may see me smile, because I always smile, but that's just one side of me, not the whole.*	 **PS:** *A strong-as* woman. I'm very feminist. It's very fitting.*

The first two parents I interviewed chose to bring meaningful objects, such as a box with a lock of hair and handwritten notes (P1) and a child's toy (P2) and described their reasoning for choosing said object. P3 and PS (dual participant) chose online images to show a visual representations of how they perceive themselves in relation to being parents and/or educators.

Four themes were identified through completing RTA on the interviews conducted with the parent participant group, which are represented below:

Figure 2. *Thematic map illustrating themes and sub-themes for parent participant group*



2.6.1.1. Theme 1: Cultural considerations

The theme 'cultural considerations' reflects views expressed by parents regarding the importance and impact of their cultural backgrounds, as well as considerations of how these differ to cultural norms in the UK.

Subtheme 1.1 Cultural differences

This sub-theme covers some of the cultural differences between the UK and their homeland discussed by participants. One participant, for example, spoke about her own views of having a child with SEN versus how he is viewed in society when her family goes 'back home' to visit Romania. She highlighted how she *"never tried, even in Romania, to hide him, I always went out with him",* but that she saw "*people staring at him"*. She believes that this is due to him being "*a big boy, maybe sometimes I have to wipe his nose or his mouth. Maybe another child his age, their parents wouldn't need to do this".* However, she believes that "*attitudes have changed in Romania too"* (**P1**) and she experiences less judgement than in previous years. Another participant also touched on seeking diagnosis in her home country and the lack of knowledge encountered about this particular learning need. She

expressed feelings of "*they don't know much about it anyway, so that didn't make much of a difference"* (**P2**).

Participants also reflected on the impact of cultural beliefs surrounding medical diagnoses and mental health:

> **P3:** "*I feel like our way of being, and our culture has held us back. We aren't people that were educated about things like mental health (…) it affects everything because we come from a culture and a country where going to the doctor is the last resort (…) We don't do anything preventatively. Whereas here, in the UK, they are used to doing things preventatively, like going to the doctor early and getting a paracetamol first before anything."*

However, the same participant also discussed some positive reflections regarding levels of awareness within the EE community and more acceptance of SEN and diagnoses. She believes that "*levels of awareness have also increased in the last 10 years, so much so that people are more open to accept a diagnosis".* When speaking specifically about Romania, her home country, she believes that a significant amount of adults "*reach the conclusion that they haven't been diagnosed when living in Romania because of the system there and because of communism".* This has led to people "*accepting things easier. They have understood neurodiversity"* (**P3**).

Subtheme 1.2 UK vs. EE attitudes to SEN as different

This sub-theme details participant accounts of how UK and EE attitudes to SEN differ and the impact this has on various aspects of life, such as schooling and inclusion in society, both in the UK and their home countries. One participant, who is also an administrator for a Facebook group supporting EE parents of SEN children discussed how some parents fear judgement from others and "*don't feel confident talking openly"*. This can lead to parents holding back from speaking about SEN openly and refusing to open up to other professionals about their children's needs. She believes that "*parents don't understand that their child's diagnosis is also impacted by what they tell doctors. And of course, someone like a paediatrician seeing your child twice for like an hour, they can't figure out everything that is going on for that child, so you, as a parent, need to tell them stuff. But you refuse to accept things and you don't want to disclose things, that doesn't lead to good things. You sit*

there and think 'what are others going to think if I send my child to a special school?' or 'what will they say if a SALT or EP comes to see my child?'" (**P3**)

As well as there being negative perceptions within the community and fear of judgement from 'outsiders', some people experience judgment from their families. A participant shared experiences of her family expressing negative views of her son having an ADHD diagnosis and being told her son "*will grow out of the ADHD",* as well as using negative language when referring to children with additional needs such as "*my niece and nephew say they're thick or they're stupid"* (**PS**).

Furthermore, a few participants also discussed the stark comparison between support offered for those with additional needs in the UK vs. in EE countries, specifically discussing community inclusion, access to resources and being offered more opportunities in Britain. When talking about Poland, **PS** spoke about "*the culture of SEN is only just emerging in Poland",* which has led to a lack of support and access to opportunities. A few examples she spoke about include "*people there [Poland] fundraise for wheelchairs, which our children [in UK] get through NHS; everything is a financial battle in Poland".* She also reflected on her son being able to access mainstream education in the UK, which is not a possibility for children with additional needs in her home country. She continued to discuss issues of social isolation for SEN individuals in Poland, in contrast to the inclusive society she experiences in the UK:

> **PS:** *"I had another neighbour… he lived in a block of flats where my mum lives (…) he spent all his life in that flat. I can't remember seeing him outside apart from sometimes opening his window and shouting something. Here, we go on trips, we go out. There's specialist equipment provided for that. I take my children on a trip, and everybody smiles and says hello. If they shout, if they scream, it doesn't matter, they are part of society. Poland, no."*

A second participant reflected on being "*grateful"* for having access to opportunities in the UK, such as being able to change her son's school and getting legal support in the matter if needed. She spoke about the fact that "*at least in this country you know that there is legislation in place to support you. At home [Romania], no"* (**P1**).

2.6.1.2 Theme 2: Parents navigating systems

The theme 'parents navigating systems' focuses on parents' experiences of different aspects of sub-systems in the British SEN and school system, whilst also touching on wider systemic issues such as local authorities struggling to cope with current demands and how it directly impacts families.

Subtheme 2.1 Parents experiencing difficulties navigating SEN systems

This subtheme and subtheme 2.2 (school systems) are closely related. However, the researcher decided to divide the themes because the parents discussed SEN-specific needs, like processes for diagnoses and school admissions separately to specific in-school systems such as school provision and school rules.

Several participants detailed their experiences of seeking and receiving diagnoses for their children in the UK. When discussing her experience of being informed of her son's diagnosis, one participant recalled that "*a nurse came, and she said to me 'I think he has Down's Syndrome' and she walked away, and it was a bit shocking"* (**P1**). She continued by acknowledging this happened over 15 years ago and her hopes of mothers receiving more information in today's world. A second participant reflected on her experiences of seeking a diagnosis of dyslexia for her son, privately, as his school did not have the funds to provide a dyslexia screener. The school "*struggled to answer me that, if I paid all this money privately and he did get a diagnosis, how would this help him at school. They just told me to bring us a diagnosis and we talk about it"* (**P2**).

Parents also discussed issues of admissions into special schools based on their children's specific needs and struggling to receive support from schools and LAs for their children, without a diagnosis, regardless of high levels of need. **P1** had difficulties finding a special school place for her son due to his needs and reflected on how "*they didn't accept him into this other school when I applied because they claimed he had sensory issues. But he had no sensory issues, they said 'no' to me without good reason and I don't understand how these schools work".* **P3** detailed issues securing an EHCP for her younger son when he began to self-harm. However she faced refusal from both the school and the LA *"because he didn't have a diagnosis".*

Subtheme 2.2 Parents experiencing difficulties navigating school systems

As aforementioned, this theme focuses on specific in-school systems pertaining to school rules and school implementing provision. One parent's point of view is that there needs to be more communication from schools: *"it's one thing writing a plan and another to do it – how do I know that he's getting Lego therapy or whatever else they say he does when nobody informs me of anything"* (**P1**). A second parent expressed concerns about how schools utilise their resources and "*where their priorities are"* (**P2**), as she feels there are high numbers of EAL and SEN children in her son's school, and needs are not being met adequately.

One participant also spoke about her lack of understanding of school systems and feeling like she received no support when her child joined a school, and she was newly arrived in the country:

> **P2:** *"A lot of the times schools just expect us to know everything. For example, school reports. When I got my first one, nobody explained to me what it represents or what it means for my child. Nobody explains the processes or what next steps we need to take with anything. But at the start, honestly, there were so many things that I didn't know."*

She also touched on schools having expectations of parents to know all the rules, even though they have not been part of the British education system themselves : *"you have no way of knowing. There are so many things you have to know, especially things like what kind of packed lunch or school dinner you need to pack them. They don't tell you what you should sign up your child for or things like that".* The parent concluded her point by adding that parents *"have to catch things mid-air as you're going through it."*

Subtheme 2.3 The importance of speaking English

All participants shared their perceptions of the importance of speaking English when navigating SEN and school systems in the UK. Their beliefs are that speaking English can support you when going through the EHCP process and can help you support other parents that may need translating. A lower level of English proficiency can lead to barriers when communicating with schools and difficulties integrating within the school community. **PS** voiced that regardless of her English being "*good"* and having knowledge of "*a bit of the EHC process",* her son's EHCP was delayed, taking into consideration how a lack of English could further impact this process. **P1**

reflected on her experiences of volunteering to translate for other Romanian parents when she worked in a school setting and her belief that "*schools actually do everything they can to support these parents",* but language barriers can often impact this. **P3** echoed these sentiments by stating that *"a big problem is the language barriers, this tends to be the biggest issue when it comes to schools, because schools are always open to talk".* Conversely, **P2** expressed that even if she had "*no issues with speaking English",* she felt it was "*very hard"* for her to understand the British education system.

Subtheme 2.4 Wider systemic issues

Participants across the whole data set reflected on their personal experiences of systemic issues, such as going through the EHCP process and issues arising from this, problems with funding, lack of resources and access to privatised services.

> **P3***: " I live and breathe it; I see how other Romanian families struggle too. I have witnessed in the last 8 years the decline of the system and the services they offer. They're overwhelmed from all points of view. When you think of the NHS, when you think of funding for LAs... They simply can't meet demand anymore (…) I know that there are families that can't cope, and they haven't been able to for a while."*

Two of the participants specifically discussed the difficulties they faced when obtaining an EHCP and subsequently, during the annual review process. **PS** expressed her concerns that *"it was all about money"* which led to her going through the mediation process and "*ended up me having to ring them every day and it was shocking"* before her son's EHCP was agreed. **P1** also reflected on having to wait a considerable amount of time to receive paperwork following her son's annual review; her biggest qualm being the lack of communication from services which made her feel *"really bad"* and feel like "*it was all premeditated".* One particular reason for the difficulties and delays faced by LAs when issuing and updating EHCPs discussed by **PS,** is that "*without that paper in hand you can't move anywhere",* referring to EHCPs granting parents the freedom to choose a school for their children.

Parents identified issues with obtaining the EHCP and subsequently, annual reviews, to be linked to lack of staffing, long time frames and pressures faced by LAs. Parents also spoke about broader issues with the EHCP process, such as

needing "*more staff everywhere"* (**P1**). One participant detailed her experience of accessing special education for her son:

> **P3***: "When I moved 4 years ago, I wanted to bring my older boy to this same school (…) the headteacher looked at his EHCP and the level of funding and she told me, off record, that she doesn't get that sum of money, combined, for all her SEN kids in school. She also told me, again off record, that if I was to get turned down by 3 mainstream schools and the special schools here aren't right for him, then I could keep him at the same school in London."*

Overall, parents believe that a lack of funding, staffing issues and an increase in demands for EHC plans are the cause of a struggling system. One participant further reflected on her views on the EHCP process being an inequitable and discriminatory system: *"I put in a complaint based on the fact that I just thought, if I found it stressful, they would have no chance. What about someone that struggles to read or write? Maybe has a learning difficulty? Not a chance. I said to them you need to review your policies and practice because if we're talking about inclusive and adaptive practice in services, for everybody, then I think you're eliminating half of my clients at work [school]"* (**PS**).

Two separate issues that were discussed by other participants were the impact of accessing privatised services for school implementation of support: *"I asked this lady from a private clinic nearby and I asked her if legally, schools have to take in consideration private reports done by people like her. She told me no; she said legally there is nothing to force them to do anything. But they will consider it if they want to, and if not they won't"* (**P2**). **P3** also discussed considerable difficulties in accessing other services, such as support from the social care team: *"We're going through so much as a family. I have been referred to social services by my husband's oncologist, school, twice, the GP, twice and the paediatrician 3 times, and we've been rejected every time."*

It is evident from the findings that there is a myriad of issues that parents in the study perceive systems are currently facing, at all levels. These findings link with findings in the 'school practice' theme, which will be discussed further. It can be seen how wider systemic issues trickle down into the school system and cause schools to engage in practices that are less than ideal, due to issues of funding and pressures being exerted by local authority and societal demands.

2.6.1.3 Theme 3: School practice

Subtheme 3.1 Good school practice

The sub-theme 'good school practice' covers examples of positive experiences parents have had when working with schools and examples of school supporting EE children with SEN, as well as their families. Some parents detailed how schools supported their children with additional needs, regardless of not having diagnoses or an EHCP. In contrast to parents previously mentioning that without a diagnosis you cannot receive support in the sub-theme covering 'wider systemic issues', the findings in this sub-theme prove that some schools will offer support regardless of the demands placed on by wider systems. One parent conveyed her positive feelings towards the SENCo in her son's school that informed her *"the process will take years, and I think he needs the additional support now so we're going to put him in the IR even without an EHCP, because we want to support him"* (**PS**). Another participant spoke about her son's school refusing to pursue an EHCP application and choosing to support him in school: "*they wrote up a behaviour support plan in school. I go speak to the SENCo at the beginning of every half term, we set targets together and he does achieve them all the time"* (**P3**).

One participant spoke about the school including comments in an EHCP review, which were not favourable towards the school, but did represent the parents' views: "*When it came to the annual reviews, the school did write in everything I said, they mentioned the school I wanted to send him to, that I mentioned what X used to do in the past and what he does now. They even wrote down the fact that I told them I don't think it's normal to play catch in the playground at his age. He plays football in his spare time"* (**P1**). This shows that parents place value on being listened to by school staff. One other participant added that she valued the school offering their support during a difficult time in her life, by sending in referrals to other services: *"they did say they are always there for me; they've understood my home life situation, they've helped me by doing 2 referrals to social service"* (**P3**).

Further to this, parents also spoke about the importance of communication with the school and their children's teachers. **PS** has an open communication system with the school via email, due to them taking into consideration her own job of being an educator and lack of access to other means of communication during school hours. She described this as "*great communication established with them; I couldn't have any better".* One other parent reflected on her son's class teacher that

discussed the possibility of him having additional needs and valuing her open approach:

> **P2:** *"I spoke to the teacher who first spoke to me about getting a diagnosis. She told me she doesn't know much more, but thinks that there is a problem there, that there's something going on. She told me that he was doing really well in other subjects, like maths or science. I was laughing the other day because she said that whenever he puts his hand up, she will pick him because he always has something interesting to say."*

All the quotes in this subtheme show the importance of having a relationship between home and school for the participants in this study, and how this can have a positive impact on various aspects of both a child's and a family's life. Good communication, being listened to, being offered the right type of support for themselves and their child, are all factors that have been identified as important in fostering positive relationships between home and school.

Subtheme 3.2 Concerns about school practice

In contrast with the previous section, this sub-theme discusses school practice that has been considered less than ideal, alongside concerns raised by parents about certain aspects of school support. **P1** expressed her concerns about her son engaging in learning that is not age appropriate: *"he tells me that he does 3D shapes and CVC words… in secondary school. He's doing things he used to do when he was a little child".* The same participant also expressed her frustrations with her son's school setting him targets without co-producing them with her: *"I didn't get any support from that point of view, for them to consider what I say".*

Parents were dissatisfied with the level of support their children are getting in school, as well as issues such as not being involved in target setting during EHCP reviews or at the beginning of the school year. For another parents, frustrations also stemmed from the school offering a very basic level of support for families regarding parenting children with SEN: *"personally, no, because I feel like the type of support they offer parents when it comes to SEN are things I already know of. They haven't been able to offer me anything I didn't already know"* (**P3**). This alludes to a wish of being able to access different levels of support for parents that may be able to access information through other avenues (personal CPD).

Subtheme 3.3 School attitudes to SEN

P1: *"I went and visited this school before and the person that I met with didn't have a good attitude to SEN, I didn't like their attitude. If you consider negatives and barriers, instead of focusing on positives and how you would integrate my child (…)"*

Participants across the data set reflected inconsistencies across school attitudes to SEN and how their children are being supported. It is striking to conclude that most parents detailed negative experiences and described poor attitudes to SEN. One issue that arose from the parental perspective is schools not offering adequate support to their SEN children that have less significant needs. One parent expressed her frustration for her son, who has a dyslexia diagnosis, not being offered a place for a lunchtime club: *"from the POV of the school, they have lunch clubs for literacy support, but they haven't offered him a place in those either. When I asked, they said he doesn't need them because he's doing kind of ok generally"* (**P2**). A second parent also spoke about her second child not being able to access special needs education, compared to her first born: *"my second child is better, speech wise, but I didn't get a chance to send him to a special school. And I think he would have benefited from that too, but they wouldn't have him"* (**P3**).

One participant described her experience of a previous school questioning her child's allegations, which she deemed something of grave concern:

P1: *"I moved him because I didn't like that his teacher used to scream at him – I made a complaint and I spoke to the headteacher, and she told me to be careful that I don't ruin the teacher's career because of what my son was saying. And I told her that just because a child has needs and says that his teacher grabbed his hand, it doesn't mean that you automatically don't believe them."*

Two of the participants were also keen to highlight the difficulties faced by children attending special schools, which, according to them, often struggle to challenge children and develop their academic skills. One parent outlined her belief that her son's special school is a place where *"all children's needs are shoved in the same pot"* (**P1**). She further added that she believes *"teachers should be there to help them progress and add to his knowledge",* which she felt was not happening due to her child being asked to engage with non-age-appropriate activities during

lessons. A second parent also echoed that she would like *"somewhere that won't make excuses, be hard on him but help him"* (**PS**).

Subtheme 3.4 Ways in which schools can improve

This sub-theme encompasses the parents' answers when asked how schools can improve their practice to better support SEN children and EE families. **P1** highlighted that "*you need to find a teacher to help you or a headteacher that's really involved or management that can take into consideration every child and not group them all together as one".* **P2,** based on her own experiences, believes that schools need to offer more support when parents first join: "*but at the start, honestly, there were so many things that I didn't know. And nobody explained them to me. Maybe schools can explain some of that for others when their kids start school".* When asked about ideal school practice, **P3** voiced her desire for schools to run workshops aimed at parents, to develop their understanding of SEN:

> **P3***: "(…) there should be workshops run by schools for EE parents at least once a year to explain certain things like interventions to use with children, like talking to SEN children or using visuals at home (…) these workshops could explain the importance of things like making a visual timetable for your child and using it daily at home."*

As these extracts demonstrate that parents believe that there are several areas for improvement when considering school practice. Some believe that school management being more involved in daily school practice would be beneficial. More practical recommendations would be to support newly arrived parents when joining a school, to explain school expectations, rules and regulations, as well as offering parents workshops about ways they can support their SEN children in the home and to increase understanding of additional needs.

2.6.1.4 Theme 4: Feelings expressed by parents towards the education system

The final theme that emerged from the parent participant group focuses on the varied emotions that parents experience, such as feeling the need to fight for their child to get them the right support. Equally, this theme investigates what helps parents build resilience and maintain a positive outlook throughout their journey.

Subtheme 4.1 The need to fight

The sub-theme 'the need to fight' was derived from the amount of instances of parents using words such as 'battle' and 'fight' to describe their experiences of navigating SEND and school systems. **P1** spoke about how she is "*fighting with the LA"* because of wanting to send her son to a different school. She believes that "*you have to fight a little every time (…) it's true that as parent you want to fight the good fight for your child"*. **P3**, who is the parent of two children with additional needs, spoke about her experiences: "*I tried so hard for my first child, I fought everyone, the council, special schools and everyone else. And I thought to myself, I haven't gone down this pathway of not struggling so much before, so I let it be and sent him to mainstream".* Speaking more broadly about parents needing to 'fight the system', one participant voiced:

PS: "*As many parents as I've got who are in a position to have that battle, there's another half who wouldn't be able to have that battle on their own."*

Parents insinuated that it is a requirement of raising a SEND child to constantly fight for the right type of support from all avenues. Some parents also spoke about taking into consideration the fact that some parents do not have the ability to fight and also, that 'the fight' can leave you feeling tired and deflated.

Subtheme 4.2 Building and maintaining resilience

The aforementioned findings were countered by parents describing factors that help them build resilience and guide them through the difficulties of fighting 'the fight'. Two of the parents spoke about personal traits, a positive frame of mind and resilience as being reasons for their ability to overcome difficulties and persevere. **P1** articulated: "*I tried to be positive and see the positive side of things. It was a shock to begin with, but slowly, slowly, I tried to adapt myself and say: 'it is what it is', I will never give up on my child, I won't abandon him".* **P3** spoke about a more difficult time in her life when she felt like her "*mental health reached an all-time low"* and she felt like she "*didn't get support from anywhere",* which required her to "*pick myself back up and dust myself off".*

The same two participants carried on by describing further factors that contribute to their resiliency and positivity, such as religious and spiritual beliefs. One participant expressed "*I wanted to give him a saint name, to protect him. I think something happened in my mind then to do that"* (**P1**). Further, another participant

expressed: "*I personally work on myself a lot, work on my emotions and spirituality, it gives me strength (…) I'd rather be grateful for whatever it is I can do than tell them 'I can't do this; you come and help me'. I've come to realise there is something higher than me, there is something divine that helped me.*" (**P3**)

2.6.2 School staff participants

Table 8. *Visuals used by school staff*

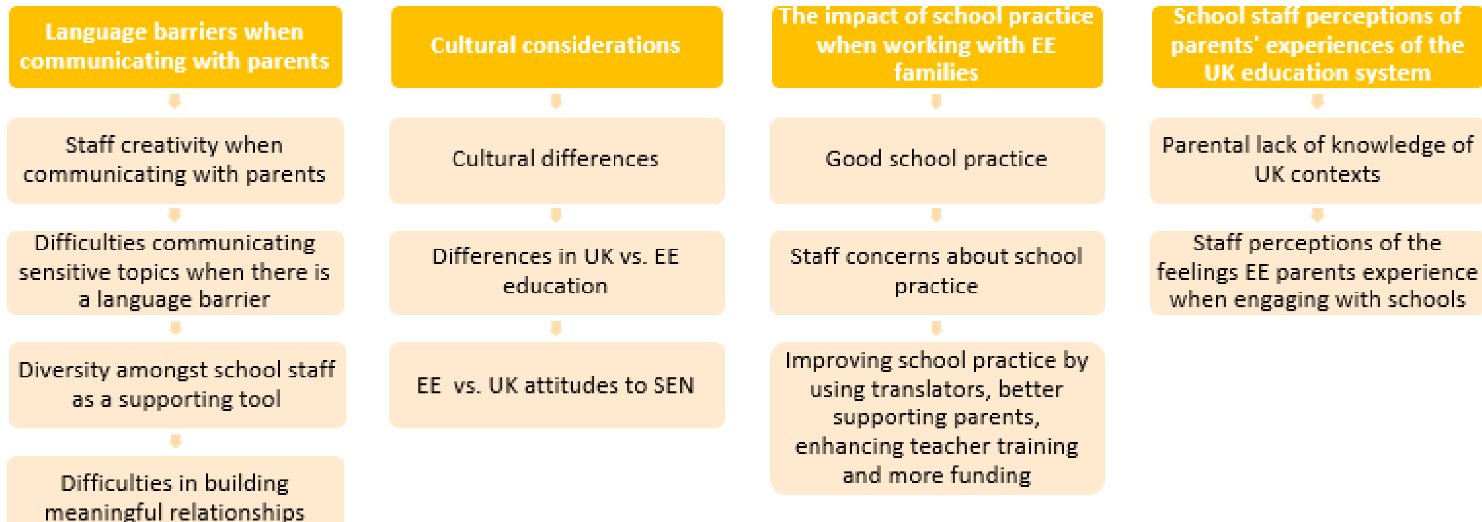
S1: *It's hard to have an object really. Initially I was thinking like a pen or something like that for marking, but that's not really important to me as a teacher. I think the important thing for me as a teacher, it's that lightbulb moment. When those children that haven't got it, suddenly go 'ooooh', that kind of moment. It's a moment more than an object, but a lightbulb maybe. You know when that lightbulb goes off. Yeah, it's a moment. It's all those little moments that add up. It's all those little moments that keep me going as a teacher.*	**S2:** *I would say like a flower, that blossoms. The children are flowers. You add a little bit of water, and they sprout and blossom. Working in school, you do see the changes, especially with EAL children. They start off with nothing and then when they're in Y5 or Y6, they don't stop talking. And it's like 'remember when you couldn't even say 'hi'?. And that's what they need, a little bit of water every day to help them grow. The children you could say start off really weak, maybe brittle but then they just grown and grow. Actually, no, I think I will choose a caterpillar and butterfly. I think that represents it better. A really pretty butterfly. Children start off as a caterpillar and then turn into a butterfly.*

S3: *An elastic band because it keeps going around and around and there's no end to it. It circles around and around, both in a positive and negative way. Negative, in terms of sometimes you get fed up with the same issues arising over and over again. Positive in the way that every time these problems circle around you, you learn more about them every single time. So they just keep circling around eventually you get an elastic ball where you have loads of information and loads of knowledge and loads of ideas of how you can support children and families. Also, elastic bands fling back; sometimes you stretch yourself out, but you always sling back.*	**S4:** T*he only thing I could think of was Papa Smurf. Papa Smurf always gave advice to the children and wanted them to do really well. And I wanted the same. And I tried to do that, and I feel like the kids in my year had good relationships with me. I do miss working there, but just for the kids.*

All staff interviewed chose online images to present a visual representation of how they either perceive themselves in relation to being educators or to describe meaningful metaphors relating to their experiences of working with children in a school setting.

Four themes were identified through completing RTA on the interviews conducted with the staff participant group, which are represented below.

Figure 3. *Thematic map illustrating themes and sub-themes for staff participant group*



2.6.2.1 Theme 1: Language barriers when communicating with parents

The first theme identified within the data set reflects views expressed by school staff about the difficulties they encounter when communicating with parents from EE backgrounds. Some of these include creative ways of communicating, barriers encountered when discussing sensitive topics such as SEN, reflections on the presence of diversity in schools and difficulties building meaningful relationships with parents.

Subtheme 1.1: Staff creativity when communicating with parents

All the participants involved spoke about how they have utilised various methods of communication when engaging with parents that struggled to speak English and how they navigated these conversations. Some participants spoke about making use of visuals to help them communicate, such as **S3**, who said she "*used to write things down on a piece of paper and give it to them [parents] so that they can translate it and read it. And then I would also say in my note that she can have a chance to think of any questions or anything she wants to ask me, so it's like prepping her a bit".* The participant also spoke about using objects of reference with parents: "*if one child takes another child's hat home, I use visuals like the actual hat or pictures of it to help me communicate. Also if we had a meeting for example, I would show them a piece of paper with different names and dates, and be like the*

meeting is not happening today, not Tuesday, but Wednesday". **PS** spoke about using similar techniques to creatively break down language barriers: *"I print things, I show it to them using pictures. If I say something to them I type it on a phone sometimes so they can translate".*

Some participants also spoke openly about their extensive use of Google Translate when communicating with parents, as there was a lack of alternatives being offered by the school: "*All I can do sometimes is send them a text message from Google Translate. Because as a school, we can't afford translators. We can afford them for parents evenings. But can't use them to speak to Mrs. so and so about an incident today"* (**PS**). Another participant reflected on other staff also using Google Translate to speak to parents: "*the class teachers would speak to the parents using a translator and tell them what their child is doing in the classroom"* (**S2**). One participant spoke about exclusively using Google translate or emails, as the school encouraged this due to lack of access to other resources:

> **S4:** "*I remember one of my students, he was Bulgarian. His mum didn't speak any English. We could only communicate via email because she could use google translate for that (…) unless it was a serious behaviour issue or the child had been excluded, the school advised me to just email parents and use Google translate all the time."*

One participant also mentioned that she asked a parent who had 5 other daughters who spoke fluent English to "*bring one of them and ask to translate bits of a written copy of a report that she doesn't understand"* (**S3**). One other participant spoke about being lucky that her setting had invested in an online infrastructure to *"translate the website into whatever language parents select (…) they can receive information translated"* (**S1**). This shows the disparity between provision for EAL families in each school and suggests that some schools place more value on offering support to families, when compared to others.

Subtheme 1.2 Difficulties communicating sensitive topics when there is a language barrier

Some participants discussed difficulties they encountered when wanting to communicate delicate matters to parents, such as a child potentially having additional needs: *" in terms of SEN things, it is really difficult because you can't get a child to translate. You can't really ask another parent to translate because it's a very*

sensitive topic. Especially EEs, because they always give a specific response, and with it being taboo, they probably don't want that to be known" (**S3**). Furthermore, another participant reflected on difficulties identifying SEN and having those conversations with parents. She reflected on how some children could struggle because of the trauma of migrating or language barriers but could equally have additional needs such as selective mutism and how it's "*very hard to talk about those things to parents"* (**S1**).

As can be seen from staffs' experiences, difficulties are encountered by parents not speaking English, staff not having the ability to utilise children or other parents to translate their message across, due to the weight of the matter. Further complications arise when exploring other factors such as migration and trauma. A couple of participants also reflected on experiences they had discussing these topics with parents:

> **S3:** *" I always had to tread very carefully when speaking to EE parents about SEN because I felt like I always got the same responses, pure anger and denial. They don't want to accept that there's something wrong with their child (…) they don't believe these things exist (…) the parents would just brush it off."*

Similarly, **S2** discussed her experience of speaking to an EE mother with high levels of English proficiency about her child potentially having ASC and asking her to pursue further assessment, and the mother *"couldn't accept it because of her background and culture not believing in special needs".* The extracts presented suggest that staff should take into consideration the interplay of culture and views of SEN when discussing sensitive topics. Providing a more culturally sensitive explanation of special educational needs could potentially support school staff in bridging gaps with parents.

Subtheme 1.3 Diversity amongst school staff as a supporting tool

> **S3:** *"The thing is, some of us are lucky because like me, I speak an EE language and my language links to a lot of other EE languages. Like if someone is Polish or Russian, I can talk to them a little bit. Obviously also helps knowing a bit of Spanish where I can kind of try to speak to them a little bit. However, if you only speak English it's very difficult."*

As exemplified by participant **S3**, this theme encompasses staff's experiences of diversity in schools and how this is utilised to communicate with parents. **PS** revealed that *"at work, we rely on staff for translating. Like me, speaking Polish, we have someone that speaks Arabic. Even I can speak Slovak to some parents, a little bit".* Similarly, another participant stated that in her setting, "*we've got Polish speaking staff, we've got Indian speaking staff, so in terms of some of those other countries, we have anyone in school that can translate for us",* which she believes helps with "*families that have just arrived"* (**S1**). One participant reflected on the rich diversity amongst the staff in her school, and the lack of white British teachers: "*I would say, there was about 4-5 white British teachers, everyone else was something else, they could relate to families because of their background, or they would be translating for parents in a different language"* (**S3**). Participant 4 echoed some of the feelings of other participants and reflected on being able to speak another language and how Turkish families "*would be fine because I speak Turkish"* (**S4**).

Staff speaking similar languages to different parent communities helps to break down language barriers and can support parents in building more meaningful relationships with schools. It can also be beneficial for discussing more delicate issues such as SEN and diagnoses.

Subtheme 1.4 Difficulties in building meaningful relationships

PS: "*But I have completely different relationships with these parents than with parents who I can communicate with in English, and I can make it more personal."*

All the school staff interviewed expressed difficulties building meaningful relationships with parents, with one key contributing factor being the language barrier, as highlighted by **PS**. Participants expressed that they felt unable to be personal when only being able to communicate with some parents via text. One participant reflected on how much more meaningful it would be to have better means of communicating with parents: *"if I could pick up the phone and have a 5-minute conversation with a parent that's really meaningful and build that relationship rather than have a piece of paper or a text message"* (**PS**). She continued by expressing that she can't build any relationships with these parents because "*it's not personal enough".* Her concerns also extended to the more serious conversations that need to be had with parents in case of emergencies: *"if a child's been throwing up all day,*

nobody speaks English, no other family who speaks English, I got no other language to communicate, I'm just sending a message and hoping for the best. I've done everything from my side, but did they really get it? Do they understand the importance?".

Another participant further expressed that, at times she would need to send several texts to discuss a more significant issue or check-up that parents have understood her message, she felt like parents "*probably thought I was annoying"* (**S3**). A couple of participants reflected on difficulties encountered when wanting to support parents who don't understand SEN systems but being unable to do so due to language barriers. **S1** believes that "*in terms of support, that's where it's harder because it's hard to signpost parents to get any type of support. When you know the system, it's hard enough, it's a nightmare, let alone when you don't speak the language, and you don't know the system".* A third participant expressed similar feelings regarding language barriers and how this can create misunderstandings between staff and parents: "*I feel like because of the language barriers, the parents hardly understood us. So when we were saying we think you need to get your child assessed, they would ask what would you mean assessed?"* (**S2**).

A participant also highlighted her feelings of frustration because she could only communicate to parents from the Turkish community, as she also spoke that language, but not being able to communicate with Bulgarian and Romanian parents (who were equally large communities in her school). She felt that "*schools don't bother if a parent doesn't speak English, and I couldn't do anything for these parents"* (**S4**). This implies that for the participants in this study, supportive systems may be able to lessen frustrations and allow them to build more meaningful relationships with parents who struggle to communicate in English.

2.6.2.2 Theme 2: Cultural considerations

Similarly to parent participants identifying differences between UK and EE culture, school staff spoke about some of the cultural aspects they encountered when working with EE families. There were discussions about specific cultural differences such as views on cleanliness, experiences of EE education vs UK education and EE parents having differing views of SEN.

Subtheme 2.1 Cultural differences

This sub-theme is comprised mainly from views expressed by two of the participants. The dual participant works in a special school and spoke about her experiences of needing to explain to parents how to use specialist equipment, due to parents not having had access to these resources in their home countries:

> **PS:** "*We have to explain that wheelchairs are expensive, and we need to look after them. So, sometimes you have to try and explain that even if you get things for free, with some stuff you don't get another one. Because these parents never had it, never had access to it, they don't know."*

The participant also continued on by discussing another instance of noticing cultural differences, in terms of cleanliness and what she deemed as a cultural perception of needing to save money. This can lead to situations when others may perceive this as neglect: "*parents think 'it's alright if the child wears that again and again'. It's money saving isn't it? But it's like 'your child might smell now' after 3 days (…) And it's that grey line between what's acceptable as a culture, what's neglect, what's not. I don't know if I believe it is neglect to be honest. I think it's culturally the mentality of save, save, save"* (**PS**).

Cultural considerations also extend to issues around mealtimes and some children with additional needs struggling to eat certain foods. **S1** describes an instance of a SEN child not liking fish and an EE parent saying that they will "*force feed them fish"*, which required the member of staff to explain to parents that "*it's not their fault".* She believes that these instances are due to "*their atittude, that sort of cultural expectation".* It's worth noting that although these cultural considerations refer to serious issues such as potential neglect and abuse (force-feeding children), staff discussing these, approached the issues sensitively. This suggest that some of the participants strive to apply a cultural lens when working with families, which potentially support them in being culturally competent and helps them with addressing delicate issues.

Subtheme 2.2 Differences in UK vs. EE education

Participants talked about further cultural considerations, in terms of the differences between UK and EE education, and as a result, parental expectations based on their own educational journeys in a different country. One participant elaborated on how parents struggle with how informal infant schools are in the UK:

S1: "*I think sometimes they are shocked by how informal some British schools are. Quite often they'll be sort of, asking for homework. And it's like, no, we definitely aren't at that stage. But we do have some parents will send a child in with a sheet with all this maths work they did, that we didn't set."*

She further discussed how as a result of parents believing UK infant schooling is too informal, there are requests of a firmer enforcement of boundaries for SEN children and parents saying "*in the schools in our country, we wouldn't accept that behaviour, we'd make them stand out in the corridor"*. This required her to then explain to parents that "*that's not going to help because your child has SEN*". Another participant also spoke about the lack of parental understanding of SEN children having access to education and other opportunities, as in some EE cultures, children with additional needs are not sent to school: *"there's a very big disparity of understanding that actually children who have additional needs can go to school, they don't have to be in the home. They will maybe live a different life, but they can live life"* (**S3**).

Subtheme 2.3 EE attitude vs. UK attitudes to SEN

As it can be seen from the extracts discussed in the previous subtheme, amongst the participants, there is the view that there are significant differences between attitudes to SEN in the UK vs. EE. Two of the participants reflected on how, when working with EE families, they encountered individuals who struggled to accept diagnoses and some that vehemently refused to accept them. **S1** reflected on this by saying that "*in some cultures they don't want a diagnosis, they don't want to hear it, they will refuse referrals and refuse for us to put certain support in place".* She continued by revealing that even when she attempted to signpost parents to support groups, there have been "*some people that don't want to know, point blank".* Another participant echoed similar experiences:

S3: *"(...) no matter how hard I tried to go into maybe it'll be a good idea for me to get somebody to have a second look at her when she's in lesson to see whether they can help her communicate more. They would also say 'no, no, she's fine'. They always brushed it off."*

The quotes allude to the reasoning behind the parents' refusal to accept a SEN diagnosis or SEN support for their child as being purely cultural. However, one participant said that she believes "*EE accept it more than other cultures do (…) they*

are more accepting than other cultures by far" (**S2**). The differences in perceptions of EE families are very context dependent and potentially also dependent on the role of the member of staff. As all participants had different roles within their schools, there could be a potential disparity in perceptions.

2.6.2.3 Theme 3: The impact of school practice when working with EE families

This theme encompasses all facets of school practice described by the participants. During the interviews, participants spoke about both good and less good examples of current practice when working with EE families. Data was also collected about participants perceptions of more ideal practice and things that they feel would support them in their roles.

Subtheme 3.1 Good school practice

As good school practice is heavily dependent on each setting, for this sub-theme, extracts from three of the participants will be illustrated separately. Firstly, the dual participant worked in a specialist setting. Her school offered parent coffee mornings and encouraged staff to use picture-based home-school communication books:

> **PS**: *"We invite parents for coffee mornings where they can support each other and make friends amongst themselves. I write every day home-school books, which are picture based. So even if the language isn't there, they can understand their child had a good day."*

The second participant worked in an infant school, which she described as being heavily culturally-aware and embedding a wide array of good practice. She spoke about her setting supporting parents with building relationships with other families: *"when it came to applying for the Junior school, mum and dad had no idea about our school system. So we tried to connect them with another family where the dad did speak Bulgarian. And also to make a connection. It's not just about learning, it's about the social side of things too"* (**S1**). The participant also expressed that her school had a tendency to support parents with services outside of the educational real, such as with housing application, because their school ethos believed that supporting the whole family "*goes beyond the children's learning".* Lastly, she also touched on supporting parents with more practical aspects of schooling, such as helping parents understand the free school meal options offered to their children:

S1: *“Even down to school dinners (…) they’ve never seen this spaghetti Bolognese before. So quite often we sort of translate what the recipe is for parents so the parents kind of know, and we send pictures. Now that I know what a taco is, and now I, you know, I know what a Yorkshire pudding is cause that sort of food is just not in their ordinary diet.”*

Participant **S2** expressed that she felt there was good practice in the primary school she worked in. Her school offered English lessons for parents because the school “*wanted to support them with English as well”*. Furthermore, because the school “*wanted parents to be involved”,* they encouraged parents to volunteer for event days (e.g., sports day, school fairs). Her school believed that “*it’s good for them [parents] to experience what it’s like in a UK school”.* When asked about supporting EE parents of SEN children, the participant informed me that her school held sessions for parents (not just EE, but all parents), to provide information about SEN-related issues, such as EHCPs and diagnoses:

S2: “*We had a sessions where we got all the mothers to come and share their experiences of being a mother of a child with special needs. And we invited other professionals to come to that sessions, to come to explain things like what is an EHC plan to the parents.”*

Subtheme 3.2 Staff concerns about school practice

S3: “*There’s not enough support out there for parents, but equally there’s not enough out there for teaching staff in general.”*

The two participants whose data did not contribute to the sub-theme of ‘good school practice’, contributed to the contrasting sub-theme of ‘concerning school practice’. Similarly to the previous sub-theme, this will also be presented individually, as school practice is very context dependent. In contrast to participant **S2**, participant **S3**, who also worked in a primary school, raised several concerns about the setting she used to work in. The participant reflected on the lack of support for staff across all year groups, to support newly arrived children and families: *“how do you support a student in Y6 from another country and does not speak any English but needs to sit their SATs? How do you do a spelling test to check English levels on a Y2 child who’s just come over from another country and I don’t speak their language. There’s nothing out there to tell you what to do*” (**S3**). She further reflected on the school not offering any support for parents who do not speak English, which leads to them

relying on other family members to translate for them during meetings: "*when we first met them initially she had to bring her daughter who is in sixth form, to have the meeting, to translate". * The participant continued by saying she believes that "*parents will try to think around the system"* because *"there is no support for parents; there's no middle point."*

Participant **S4** reflected on her experiences of working in a secondary school in a London Borough. Similarly, she felt that her setting did not offer adequate support to parents: *"they literally didn't support families at all. They knew that they had new students coming in throughout the whole of secondary, all the time. They don't know the system or anything and we weren't supporting them with anything"* (**S4**). She also expressed concerns about the lack of involvement from members of management, both with the student and parent community:

> **S4**: "*Yeah, the headteacher didn't ever have any relationships with children. They didn't even know who she was. She only knew the children from data on the computer. So how can I expect her to do anything for parents?"*

Subtheme 3.3 Improving school practice by using translators, better supporting parents, enhancing teacher training and more funding

Participants spoke about various factors that they feel would improve their practice and allow them to offer better levels of support to EE families. Considering all the mentions of language barriers, some participants indicated that they believe the answers lie in schools having more frequent access to translators. One participant raised concerns about funds regarding translators and needing "*a bank of translators that we can call anytime without getting a £200 bill every time"* (**PS**). Another participant spoke about the benefits of employing translators for parents evenings: "*they could get translators for parents and then allow parents to book time in with a translator, after receiving data and reports and then that teacher can give them more of an explanation and have the translator help too"* (**S4**).

Some of the other participants also discussed the possibility of schools offering classes or twilight sessions that could support parents in developing their knowledge and understanding of school rules and expectations, such as requirements for each year group: "*they could tell them 'this is what happens in y7, this is what happens in y8, etc.' And it would only take an hour, it would give them that understanding of how the system works and how they can support their kids"*

(**S4**). Participant **S3,** also expressed her idea of offering parenting classes for wider issues, such as SEN: "*parenting classes would be beneficial for them to understand things. Things like the possibility of their child having additional needs and that not meaning that they're never going to have a life or never going to be happy. To talk to them about what it means to need to access a different type of learning".* The same participant also believes there is a current lack of engagement with parents prior to them joining a school and feels that settings should gain access to information about families, such as English language proficiency. This could support staff in pre-empting issues arising from this:

> **S3:** *"When families are applying for a school, it would be good to get information on parents who don't speak English at all for teachers and staff to know. Just to pre-empt those issues and know in advance, because it's not helpful when you meet a parent for the first time at the door when their children are going home, and you find out then and there they can't speak English."*

Further, the participant also reflected on her teacher training. She expressed that providing teachers in training with more information about resources to support EAL families would be beneficial to all: *"when you're doing your teacher training, we learn absolutely nothing about EAL. It will be helpful to learn about some resources at least. Like if you have EAL families, there are some helpful websites, these are some helpful charities, these are some helpful schemes that are in place to support families who are EAL"* (**S3**).

Whilst the majority of participants focused on more tangible factors such as more funding or access to resources and translators, one participant expressed that her ideal school practice could only be achieved by parents and teachers having better relationships:

> **S2:** "*I think they should be open and honest with teachers and vice versa. The teachers should have that relationship with parents to be able to say when they notice children finding certain things difficult in the classroom."*

2.6.2.4 Theme 4: School staff perceptions of parents' experiences of the UK education system

The final theme that emerged from the interviews conducted with school staff encompasses the views of school staff on perceived levels of parental lack of knowledge and the emotions experienced by parents when interacting with schools.

Subtheme 4.1 Parental lack of knowledge of UK contexts

Four out of the five participants interviewed expressed some levels of frustration with their perceived lack of parental knowledge. One of the participants spoke about parents struggling to understand that certain behaviours are not acceptable in the UK, even if they would be in their home country:

> **PS:** "*And a lot of parents need to be told a lot of things, like 'that isn't acceptable here'. To be fair most things aren't acceptable, but it would probably be acceptable in homeland. It's just gauging sometimes the line between culture and neglect, it's a thin line sometimes really."*

Further, a second participant echoed similar feelings and described the constant need for reminding parents that they are in a different country than their own: *"we keep reminding them that they are not in their own country, that they are in a country where you can get support, and this is a normal thing. Yeah, you need to accept that your child has learning difficulties, and you need teachers and parents to work together to support your child"* (**S2**). Another participant shared that in her setting, parents struggled with school safety rules and often considered requests to be personal, as opposed to a general school rule:

> **S3:** "*Sometimes parents would struggle with basic school rules. We asked for children to not wear earrings to nursery, but parents would say their child always wears gold hoops. But how could I explain it wasn't personal, it was all for safety, they think we're just being difficult."*

Considerations were given to parental lack of knowledge around qualifications and examinations. One participant who worked in a secondary school expressed that she felt parents not understanding the importance of GCSEs stops them from supporting their children: "*they don't know the importance of GCSEs for example. They just leave their kids be, but I feel like if there was more support given to the parents and more information about the education system in this country, they would be able to push the schools more for their kids to get extra support"* (**S4**).

Subtheme 4.2 Staff perceptions of the feelings parents experience when engaging with schools

This sub-theme considers the feelings of parents from the point of view of staff. One participant reflected on her perception that parents feel patronised when she tries to communicate with them using other methods: "*but the thing is it can feel really patronising doing some of these things to a grown adult because they're an adult and they know how to speak. We just don't speak the same language"* (**S3**). Another participant reflected on the feelings of parents towards education when they identify as illiterate, even in their home language. In her experience, this had led to some parents believing that their children learning a trade would be an adequate alternative to them engaging with formal education:

> **S1:** "*(…) some of the EE parents will say 'I can't read and write myself, even in my home language'. They're illiterate and innumerate. And they say to us 'we can't do this; we can't help them'. We've had situations where they said we'll take them out of school if school is not for them and they can come and work with dad and learn a trade. "*

Furthermore, some participants shared their experiences of parents struggling to accept conversations concerning their children potentially having SEN. One participant expressed a frustration with parents "*thinking about feelings from a cultural perspective and not thinking about how you can help your son or daughter progress in life"* (**S2**). Similarly, another participant reflected on parental frustrations being aimed at her: "*a lot of anger that was aimed towards me because I was the one telling them; they would ask me why I'm saying there's something wrong with their child"* (**S3**).

2.7 Discussion

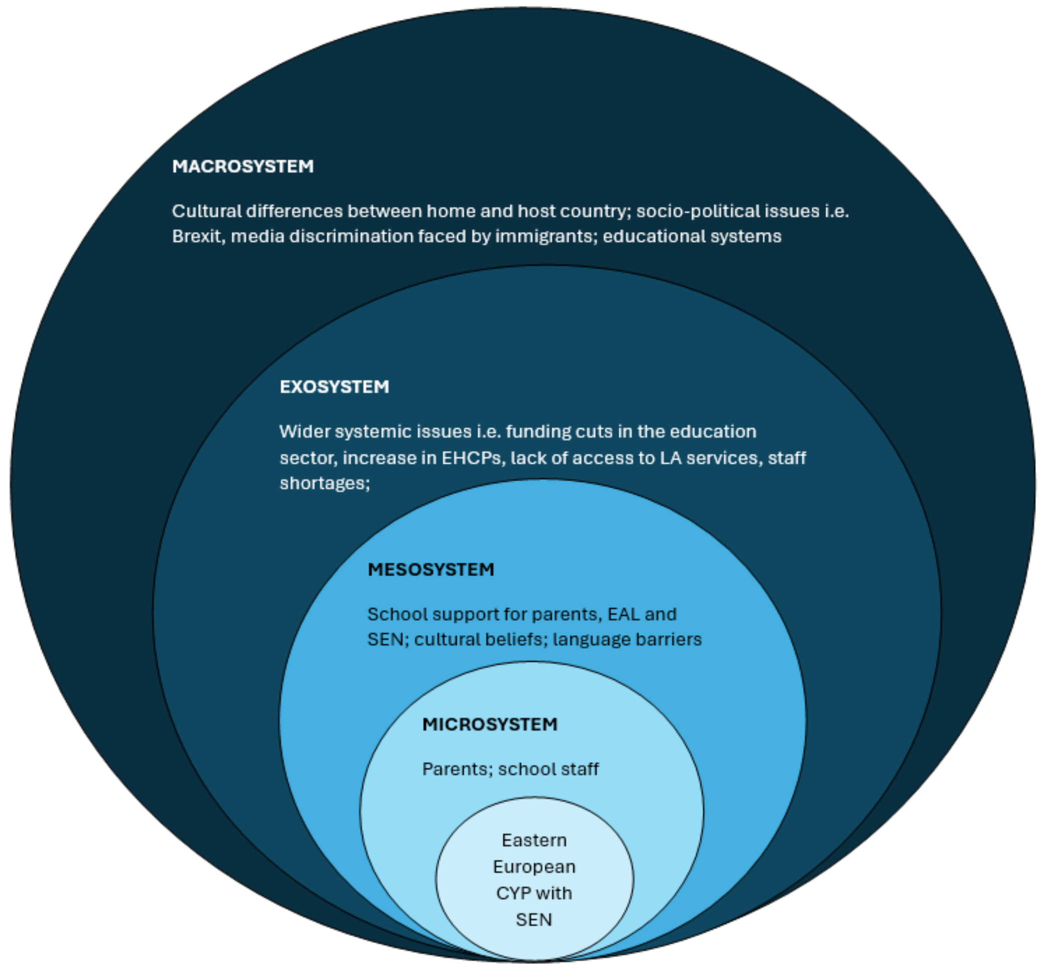
2.7.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of EEs parenting a child with SEN in the UK and perspectives of school staff working with families from EE countries. Parent views were explored to identify the level of support EE parents of SEN children receive from schools, collating both positive and negative examples of their experiences, alongside their views on what would constitute as better support. School staff views were also explored to identify examples of good and bad practice in school settings, alongside notions of ideal practice. Current literature

around EE parents of SEN children and staff views lacks studies exploring the intersections of all these factors. Therefore, this study aimed to provide a greater understanding of the perspectives of EE migrants parenting children with SEN, as well as provide an insight into school staff working directly with these families.

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse interviews conducted with 8 participants (3 parents, 4 school staff and 1 dual participant), which were split in two participant groups (parents and school staff). Four themes were identified from each participant group, in relation to the research questions. The findings will be discussed using a psychological ecosystemic lens according to Bronfenbrenner’s Systems Theory (1992), within the context of existing literature around the topics of EAL, SEN, school practice, acculturation and parent-school relationships. Bronfenbrenner’s theory provides a holistic, comprehensive framework for considering various interconnected systems which influence an individual (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022). As described by Christensen (2010) in his article examining Bronfenbrenner’s theory, the model provides a tool for understanding the connection between societal, organisational and individual systems, by allowing the exploration of the ‘continual meeting point where phenomena and actors occur on different levels, including those of the organisation and society at large’. This aligns with the phenomena explored by the current research, as relationships between individuals, school systems and wider societal issues have been explored throughout this study. This has been illustrated in Figure 4. Implications for practice in Educational Psychology and schools will be discussed. Limitations of the research will also be discussed briefly and explored further in the reflective account (Chapter 3). Ideas for future research will be discussed in light of the limitations of the current study.

Figure 4. *Experiences of EE parents and school staff against each element of Bronfenbrenner's (1992) model*



2.7.2 RQ1: What are the experiences of Eastern European migrant parents in receiving support and guidance from schools in parenting a child with SEN?

Many of the findings from this study echoed findings from previous studies exploring the voice of parents (Hamilton, 2013; Evans et al., 2016; Marku et al., 2022). A large number of identified themes that can also apply to non-migrant parents or those from other ethnic minorities, as there are similarities in parents experiencing various SEN systems, navigating types of support and working with schools (Stephenson et al., 2020). One significant challenge identified in the literature for migrant parents is often language proficiency (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Harper and Pelletier, 2010). Parents who have limited proficiency in the English language and can find it difficult to communicate effectively with school staff (Moskal and Sime, 2016), understand the British education system (Curdt-

Christiansen, 2020) or advocate for their child's needs (Schneider and Arnot, 2018). This can also create barriers such as accessing support services (e.g., social services) or understanding the way their children's needs are addressed within school. EE participants in the current study equally emphasised the importance of speaking English, which has allowed them to navigate the various systems required to access support for their children (e.g., applying for an EHCP). Some parents did discuss their beliefs that schools try their best to support parents, however language barriers stand in the way of that, which echoes findings in the literature (Ashraf, 2019).

Regardless of the participants' high levels of English proficiency, they still expressed that due to wider systemic issues such as lack of staffing, funding, high demand and an increase in SEN, they have felt a continuous need to fight. Systemic barriers within the educational system, such as limited availability of interpreter services, lack of culturally competent staff or inadequate resources to support diverse learners and their families can significantly impact the experiences of EE parents. This was identified in the participants' reflections on their experiences. When considering Bronfenbrenner's model (1992), this is an example of how changes made by policymakers at the exosystem (government) have an impact on the mesosystem (schools) and on microsystems (staff and parents). However, parents spoke about factors that support them in being resilient and being able to continue their fight, such as accessing Facebook support groups for parents of SEN children, their religious beliefs or spirituality and being positive in the face of adversity.

A significant factor identified within the literature is experiences of prejudice and discrimination faced by migrant parents, based on stereotypes or misconceptions (McLaren and Johnson, 2007). This can lead to negative perceptions of how their concerns are addressed or the level of support they receive (Lopez, 2010; Christie and Szorenyi, 2015). Similarly, this can impact how school staff treat children and families (Tereshchenko and Asher, 2014). In contrast to these earlier findings, participants in this study explicitly discussed not feeling marginalised and being aware that any school or LA shortcomings were due to wider systemic issues, as opposed to believing they are being discriminated against. Searching recent literature to find similar findings yielded no results, therefore it only allows for speculation of the reason behind why the findings of the current study are

significantly different. Parents not feeling marginalised and understanding the impact of wider systemic issues on schools and LAs could be due to previous studies being conducted 9-10 years ago (or earlier) and there potentially being a shift in thinking amongst migrant parents. This could also potentially be due to schools and LAs becoming more culturally aware and providing the right type of support or systemic issues becoming significantly more obvious than in previous years, due to continued funding cuts in the education sector (DECP, 2024). Whilst the findings in the current study may be hard to generalise due to the small sample size, the potential shift in parental perspectives is worth noting and investigated further.

Parent participants did, however, speak about the importance of consideration given to cultural aspects of their lives. The participants in this study spoke about their cultural backgrounds, particularly where attitudes towards disability or special needs differ vastly from those in the UK. Whilst all the parents interviewed were accepting of their child's diagnosis and willing to accept support, they all acknowledged that as a cultural norm, most EE parents struggle to understand diagnoses and shy away from support, out of fear of being judged and shamed by those around them. However, some parents identified that they have struggled with school's lack of cultural awareness. For example, one parent's discourse highlighted the lack of support she received when her child first started school in the UK, and criticised schools for having expectations of parents knowing and understanding the educational system. Literature has highlighted that there are vast cultural differences between education in the UK and EE (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015; Dyson, 2022), which is something that might be better acknowledged by schools. Whilst cultural considerations can sit at the macrosystem because they are based on both societal and culture-specific views, schools sit within the mesosystem, which implies that there needs to be an awareness of these factors in all aspects of school practice.

During the interviews, there were significant discussions surrounding school practice. As previously mentioned, school practice varies and is highly context dependent. The 4 parents interviewed all discussed different schools. The findings in the wider literature tend to focus on negative experiences of schools when working with migrant families (Baraldi, 2005; Crozier and Davies, 2008; Caldin, 2014). Two of the participants described similar incidents of concerning school practice. Their concerns revolved around schools not valuing parental input and not offering access to adequate levels of information regarding SEN. This is consistent with findings in

the literature, with some studies highlighting that schools fall short when providing information and support that is specific to migrant families (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015; Marku et al., 2022). One parent also raised concerns about her son attending a special school and not being able to access age-appropriate activities, as well as encountering members of staff that had exclusionary attitudes towards SEN. Whilst these are factors that have negatively impacted parental experiences and engagement with schools, it is worth noting that parents had no concerns regarding these negative experiences being related to issues such as discrimination.

Other participants in the study described feeling included within the school community. They also described several positive aspects, such as being involved in decision making, their views being valued during the EHCP annual review process, having a well-established communication system with their child's school and teachers being considerate when having discussions about potential diagnoses. This links with findings in the existing literature that indicate that a good home-school relationship can have a positive impact on both a child's and family's life (Gorard, 2013). Effective communication between parents and schools has been found to raise feelings of parental empowerment (Marku et al., 2022) and can contribute to developing a sense of belonging to those from marginalised communities (Konu and Rimpela, 2002; Faas, Sokolowska and Darmody, 2015). This appears to have been the case for participants in the current study.

To be able to help contribute to the literature related to what effective school practice entails, the participants were asked what their ideal notion of school practice would be. Echoing findings from the literature, parents believed that having management and school staff that can work collaboratively with EE parents, would result in positive outcomes for all involved. This aligns well with Bronfenbrenner's model (1992), as he believed all systemic elements need to work in tandem and engage in a process of bi-directionality and reciprocity, to support best outcomes for an individual. Staff participants also suggested that schools should run workshops specifically for EE parents, in an attempt to deepen parental understanding of SEN and help with existing misconceptions. Parental workshops have been found to be an effective tool in building relationships between parents and schools, as well as offering information to parents they might not be able to access elsewhere (Mendez-Baldwin and Busch-Rossnagel, 2003; Biktagirova and Khitruk, 2018). Following on from experiences of finding it difficult to understand the educational system due to

lack of information, one parent posited that schools should offer more practical information to migrant parents when they join a school (e.g., the meaning of reports, rules and regulations, etc.), to support their understanding of various aspects of school life that they may have not previously experienced.

An unexpected finding within the data gathered from parent participants were the extensive issues raised regarding wider systems, regardless of the interview questions being aimed at exploring school-specific support. This shows that systems around a family overlap and affect each other, so much so that parents find it hard to separate them when discussing their experiences of education. The UK is currently experiencing a SEN crisis (BPS, 2024) that is directly impacting factors such as applications for EHCPs, services being able to offer support, diagnoses and access to professionals such as EPs. The parents in this study discussed some of the aforementioned factors and how they have negatively impacted their experiences of accessing support both from LAs and schools due to extended timelines and an inability to access adequate support for themselves and their children. Applying a psychological systems lens, parents speak about how wider systemic issues (exosystem) impact school provision (mesosystem), which in turn impact them (microsystem), creating feelings of hurt and frustration. One example provided by one of the participants was experiencing a decline in her mental health due to parenting two children with SEN, having a third newborn child and her husband being unwell, yet being refused support 9 times by the LA social services team.

In relation to Berry's acculturation model (1997), the parent participants discussed a lot of the factors present in the model's micro system, such as their belief systems, family and friends abroad and their heritage. All the aforementioned factors were described as having varying degrees of importance whilst undergoing the process of acculturation in the UK. The majority of participants also spoke about clear differences within the majority culture macro versus their own cultures, such as views of SEN or culture-specific behaviours. One clear example of this is participant **PS** who spoke about EEs only doing laundry once a week with the intention of lessening expenses and sending children to school in 'the same jumper all week'. This is something that, according to the participant, is often perceived as neglect in the UK.

It is also interesting to consider the visual representations chosen by the parents. Whilst this was not part of the data analysis and functioned as a

conversation starter, the differences in visual representations highlight the importance of the individual experience. **P1** chose a very personal object to represent her experiences of parenting a child with SEN; a box with a lock of her son's hair, which also contained a written note by her late mother, illustrating the 3 choices he made at his Christening. As the researcher is also Romanian, there is an awareness that this is a common Romanian tradition and of great importance to parents, as it is believed that choosing 3 times out of a large tray of various objects, determines the child's future (e.g., if they choose car keys they will be a good driver, if they choose a pen they will be a writer, etc.). **P2** chose a toy belonging to her son, which she described as being his favourite throughout his childhood. **P3** chose a half-rotten apple to describe her experiences of having 'different sides', depending on how she is feeling and the situations she experiences as a parent, saying "*sometimes you may see me smiling but it is snowing inside*" . **PS** chose the image of a strong woman, claiming her feminism and beliefs. The participants choices are a good exemplification of how, even though participants are part of a homogenous group (EE parents of SEN children), their experiences are vastly different. These visual representations would be useful in both school and EP practice as examples of parents needing to be treated as individuals. Staff and professionals should develop an awareness of how parental experiences of raising a SEN child, migration and acculturation, shape a parent's world view and have a significant impact on how they view themselves.

2.7.3 RQ2: How do schools develop and maintain relationships with Eastern European migrant families parenting a child with SEN?

As highlighted by the literature, developing and maintaining relationships with migrant families parenting a child with SEN requires a culturally sensitive and collaborative approach (Souto-Manning, 2010; Meier and Lemmer, 2015). Schools are encouraged to develop a relationship with families based on collaboration and partnership (Epstein, 2011). Communication gaps between schools and families is something that has been highlighted by several studies as creating difficulties in developing and maintaining relationships. Language barriers (Naidoo, 2013), lack of support from schools (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015) or staff misconceptions and assumptions about migrant children and families (Schneider and Arnot, 2018) create communication gaps. Findings from the literature emphasise the need for reciprocal,

effective communication to be a priority in schools (Lueder, 2011; Chatzinikola, 2022).

Findings from the study revealed that language barriers when communicating with parents, cultural differences and levels of support offered by schools hindered staff's ability to develop meaningful relationships with parents. Applying a psychological systems lens, school support and language barriers would sit within Bronfenbrenner's (1992) mesosytem, whereas cultural differences would be in the wider sphere of the macrosystem. Even though parents and staff are separate microsystems, both are impacted by the same factors within the 'higher' systems. Participants highlighted how they attempt to overcome a lack of support from management and wider school systems, by being creative in their approaches. Staff reported using aids such as Google Translate, making use of visuals when communicating with parents or asking EE staff in their schools to act as a translator. In research, the latter has been considered a crucial part of the experience of so many EE parents; however, parents develop good relationships only with the 'translator' staff, but does not support other colleagues in doing so (Dyson, 2022). Conversely, some of the staff interviewed spoke other languages themselves. Participants discussed how they find it 'easy' to work with parents from the same background as them and trying to reach out to as many parents as possible even when they may speak a 'broken' language. For example, a Serbian participant spoke about being able to interact with Serbian and Bosnian parents, but also being able to speak to families from Spain, as she had mid-level proficiency in Spanish.

Some participants discussed the struggle of being able to reach parents, as they have had experiences of not being able to contact parents when a child is sick, or they needed to discuss a sensitive matter (e.g., further assessment for children who may have additional needs). Early researchers in the field coined the term 'hard to reach' parents, especially in relation to parents from minority groups (Levitas, 1998). However, more recent research has posited that in such cases, schools tend to only communicate with parents when problems occur, yet most parents highlighted that they valued more regular communication (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Conus and Fahrni, 2017).

Other factors that impact the development of meaningful relationships between schools and EE parents, as well as impeding successful communication is parents from minority ethnic groups experiencing difficulties initiating communication

with staff (Miller and Petriwskyj, 2013). Due to unfamiliarity with school systems and differing cultures within the host countries, migrant families are disadvantaged in their relationships with schools, when compared to non-migrant families (Kim, 2009). One participant specifically mentioned that she has 'completely different' relationships with migrant parents, especially those who cannot communicate in English, compared to non-migrant parents. The participant questioned whether parents understood her attempts at communication (e.g., text messages home) as she often did not receive replies, nor did these parents ever approach her. Therefore, relationship dynamics between school staff and parents that may not be familiar with school systems, can create an asymmetry of power (Dusi, 2012), which can impact parental confidence and autonomy (Bonnizoni, Romito and Cavallo, 2014). This can also lead to relationships being unidirectional. Some of the staff participants discussed difficulties building meaningful relationships with parents, whilst parent participants spoke about feeling 'lost' because they didn't understand school systems and due to a lack of communication.

A lack of involvement in a child's education has often been perceived as a lack of interest (Petrone, 2016; Soutullo et al., 2016). Parents are expected to be understanding of the absence of teacher communication and perceive it as a positive sign because 'no news is good news', whilst a lack of parental initiative is interpreted by school staff as negative (Conus and Fahrni, 2017). However, whilst this was echoed by some of the staff participants who spoke about some parents not wanting to engage with support provided by the school for cultural reasons or a lack of knowledge, a few of the participants recognised wider issues. These participants blamed aspects of lacking parental involvement on schools not providing enough support, such as not using funds to access translators when necessary. Conversely, one study highlighted that parents from minority groups actually initiate less interactions as a sign of respect (Crozier and Davies, 2007). Parents from the same study listed confidence in schools and feelings of not being 'qualified' to intervene as reasons for not initiating interactions with staff. This was echoed by some parent participants who agreed that knowledgeable and understand school staff allow them to feel more secure and trust schools. This is one example of how misconceptions are bred between schools and parents that could potentially be detrimental to all involved, as well as children, who are at the centre of all these systems.

Cultural differences were highlighted as factors that can contribute to maintaining relationships. Participants discussed cultural considerations, such as views of cleanliness derived from cultural norms, parental experiences of education in home countries or a lack of understanding of using specialist equipment. Similar to findings within the literature (Christie and Szorenyi, 2015;Marku et al., 2022; Dyson, 2022), participants also touched upon there being a disparity between UK and EE views of SEN, which led to negative experiences of working with EE parents that refused to accept further assessment or diagnoses of SEN, based on cultural beliefs. To combat some of the cultural differences and support EE families, the majority of participants discussed employing what could be described as a relational approach. This encompassed being considerate, empathetic and trying to support parents beyond the educational realm. Practical approaches such as offering newly arrived parents information about school lunches, inviting parents to volunteer at event days or hosting after-school English lessons were examples given by participants. Other staff also discussed supporting parents to apply for housing or gain support from other services. A sense of belonging was also fostered by connecting parents who spoke the same language and came from the same culture. Schools have been identified as playing a crucial role in helping migrant children and their families navigate not only the education system, but also wider social systems (Mazoni and Rolfe, 2019).

Despite the crucial role that schools play, Costley (2013) asserts that, in the last 60 years, within the UK education system, support for migrant families has been inconsistent. The wider literature has identified inconsistent practice in schools over several years (Conus and Fahrni, 2017; Tan, Ware and Norwich, 2017; Baxter and Kilderry, 2022). This was also the case within the findings of this study, as only 3 out of the 5 participants contributed to the theme of ‘good school practice’. Participants spoke about concerning school practice and issues that have contributed to distancing parents. Some of the key issues raised were a lack of support from management, not being able to access translators and a complete lack of EAL resources, in line with findings from the literature (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019; Marku et al., 2022). To combat these difficulties, staff believed that schools receiving funds to access translators, gaining information about families (such as English proficiency) before they join a school, re-shaping teacher training to include more information about working with EAL families and parent workshops would aid them in

better supporting those from an ethnic minority background parenting children with SEN.

Staff also expressed some frustrations with needing to support EE parents because of parents having a significant lack of knowledge of SEN and British school systems. One participant discussed parents needing constant reminders that certain things are not acceptable in British society (e.g., expressing negative views of SEN). Frustrations were also shared about parents aiming their anger towards individual staff when confronted about not respecting rules, due to a lack of understanding of school rules. Staff lacking a wider cultural perspective can have a negative impact on their view of parents, and subsequently lead to treating them differently (Conus and Fahrni, 2017). For example, a participant discussed her shock at parents identified as illiterate and innumerate in their home language, expressing valuing manual labour over formal education and encouraging their children to pursue a similar path. Conversely, other participants in the current study showed attention to cultural considerations when discussing the feelings of parents. One participant expressed her concern by acknowledging that she is often required to treat parents 'like children' just because they don't speak the same language. The participant discussed her worries of parents feeling patronised by her use of certain 'childish' methods of communication such as visuals or objects of reference. Staff also acknowledged that there is a lack of support and information offered to parents, which limits their ability to access extra support. Similarly, all the staff participants spoke about schools not offering support to staff to support parents, which led to feelings of frustration.

Whilst the visuals were not part of the data analysis and functioned as a conversation starter, it's worth considering the visuals chosen by staff. It is worth noting that although the question was addressed specifically about a representation of their experiences of working with EE parents of SEN children, the imagery chosen referred more to their wider experiences of working with children. **PS**, the dual participant, as mentioned before, chose an image of a strong woman to represent her experiences of both being a parent and an educator. **S1** and **S2** chose abstract notions of children having a 'lightbulb' moment and of a butterfly growing from a caterpillar. **S4** chose an image of Papa Smurf, which she believed represented her supportive role towards the children. The only participant that chose an image to represent working with parents was **S3**. She chose an elastic band ball to represent

experiencing the same issues every day, but also discussed the ball representing all the learning she acquired working with diverse children and families.

2.7.4 Summary of findings

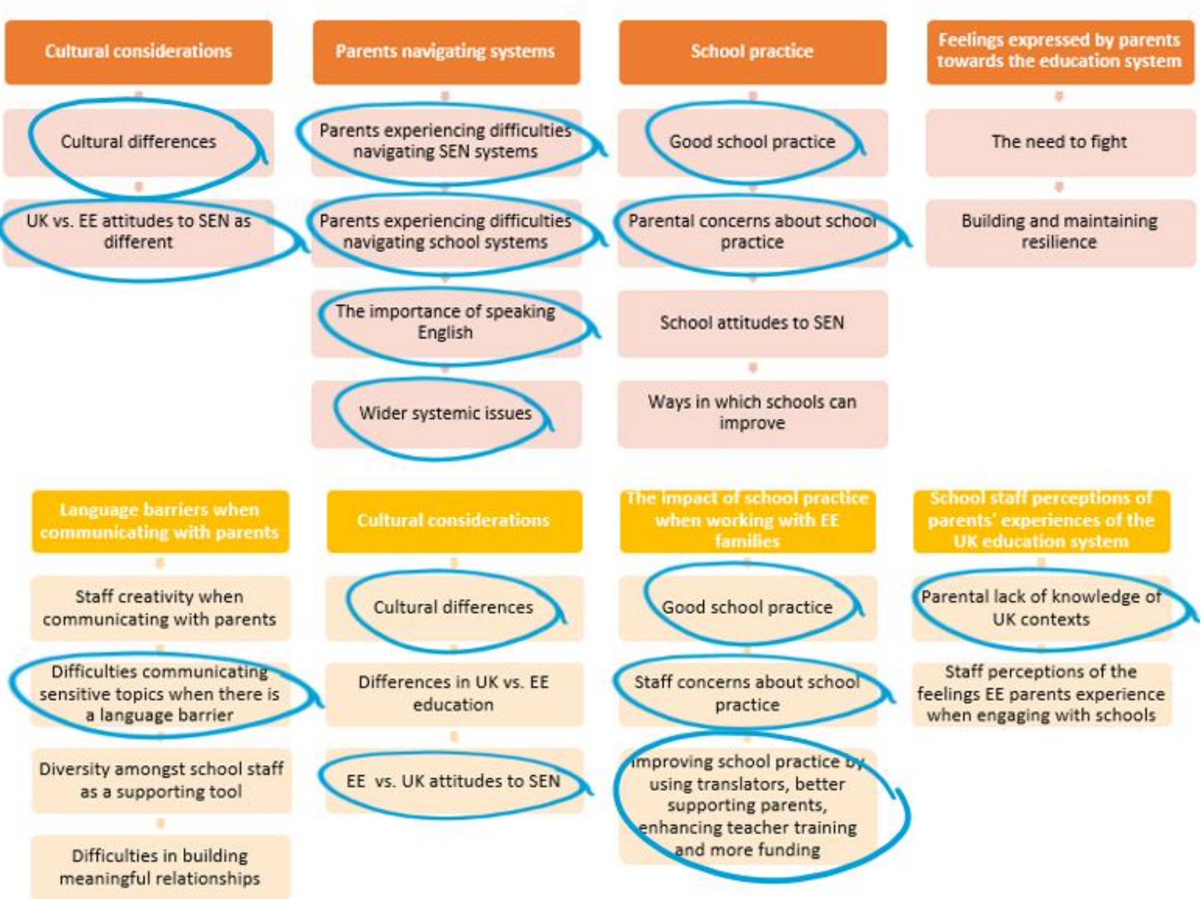
In terms of the experiences of EE parents raising children with SEN and navigating UK school and SEN systems, some of the findings mirrored those of earlier studies. Parents in the current study emphasised the importance of speaking English in being able to successfully navigate systems and language barriers having a negative impact on accessing support. Findings from the staff participants also revealed that language barriers when communicating with parents, cultural differences and a lack of support for staff, often hindered staff's ability to develop meaningful relationships with parents. Cultural differences were cited as a highly significant factor by both participant groups. Findings highlighted EE and UK cultural differences in social inclusion, cultural capital, attitudes to SEN, expectations of schooling and the role of staff. What supported staff to overcome barriers in communication was creativity in their approaches to communication such as staff acting as translators, using Google translate and making use of visuals (e.g., videos). Staff also discussed employing a relational approach by understanding that building meaningful relationships is 'not just about education' and supporting parents by helping them build connections with other families and in accessing other services (e.g., housing). However, school staff explained that parents not initiating any communication with schools, as well as a lack of involvement in or understanding of their children's education, resulted in struggles with developing meaningful relationships with migrants, when compared to non-migrant parents.

Some of the parent participants discussed their concerns about school-specific practice, as they felt that their input was not valued. Others expressed negative feelings towards schools providing inadequate information regarding SEN systems and encountering staff that had exclusionary attitudes towards SEN. Conversely, some parents described more positive experiences such as being involved in decision-making during the EHCP annual review process, having well-established communication systems in place and teachers being considerate of their culture when discussing sensitive matters. To help contribute to the literature related to effective school practice when working with EE parents, participants were also asked about changes they believe would improve levels of support. Parents and staff

participants posited that collaboration between school staff, parents and management, as well as more practical suggestions such as parent workshops, informational leaflets for newly arrived migrants and re-structuring teacher training to include a module on migrant families, would be most beneficial in EE parents feelings more supported.

One interesting finding from the current study is that, regardless of setting out to explore experiences of the schooling system, all the participants spoke at length about wider systemic issues such as lack of staffing in schools and LAs, high demand and an increase in SEN and a lack of resources to support diverse learners and their families. These issues caused participants to feel like they continuously needed to 'fight the system'. Participants also spoke about personal beliefs and community support as factors that can alleviate pressures felt when fighting the system. An equally unique outcome, in contrast to previous findings of parents experiencing racialisation and discrimination, participants in this study explicitly discussed not feeling marginalised. Parents spoke about being aware that any school or LA shortcomings were due to wider systemic issues, as opposed to believing they are being discriminated against. Participants expressed feelings of belonging within their respective school communities.

Figure 5. *Visual representing similarities in findings amongst parent and staff participants*



As exemplified in Figure 5, the findings also revealed several shared concerns between parents and school staff groups regarding the integration of EE families into the UK education system. Both groups recognize that cultural differences and misunderstandings can create significant barriers to effective communication and collaboration. For instance, EE parents often struggle with language barriers and an unfamiliarity with the UK schooling system, which can lead to feelings of disempowerment and anxiety. School staff also acknowledge these challenges, noting that they can hinder parents' engagement with their children's education. Another similarity in the findings is the recognition of the need for stronger relationships and better mutual understanding between parents and school staff. Both groups see the value in bridging cultural gaps and fostering open dialogue to improve the educational experience for EE children. Additionally, there is a shared

understanding that the successful integration of EE students requires not just academic support but also a more inclusive approach that respects and incorporates the cultural backgrounds of these families.

Furthermore, both parents and school staff acknowledge issues created by wider systems, such as lack of funding, an increase in SEN , a lack of staffing and limited support received from LAs. This common ground highlights the importance of collaborative efforts to ensure that EE children and their families feel supported and included within the UK education system.

2.7.5 Implications for EP practice

The primary aim of the EP role is to apply a psychological lens, alongside knowledge and skills to support CYP and their families (BPS, 2019). As further highlighted by the BPS in their practice guidelines (2017), EPs should strive to practice in an individualised, culturally aware manner when working with linguistically and ethnically diverse CYP and families. An inclusive approach should be adopted across the recognised five areas of EP practice: training, assessment, consultation, intervention and research (Fallon et al., 2010) when engaging with CYP and parents, as well as when collaborating with schools at a more systemic level.

Thinking about applying a cultural lens, EPs need to be aware of EE parents' feelings, some of which have been highlighted in the findings of this current study. Some parents, as well as some school staff, spoke about parents feeling worried to discuss SEN due to cultural stigma and a lack of understanding of the British educational system. A SEN diagnosis can be a scary experience for some EE parents, as there are educational and cultural differences between the UK and EE. Similarly, there are cultural differences between other countries and the UK, such as Asian or African countries, as identified in the literature (Ansari, 2004; Vincent et al., 2018) and EPs have a duty to support migrants from all backgrounds and practice in a culturally sensitive manner, being considerate of an individual's background.

School staff are encouraged to reflect critically on the experiences of ethnic minorities and proactively remove discriminatory barriers (Arnot et al., 2014), which is something EPs can support with. EPs have been identified as having a significant role in building relationships with schools, which allows them to promote culturally inclusive practices, and to challenge unethical practice, in a relational and constructive way (Rumble and Thomas, 2017). EPs are in an ideal position to bridge

the gap between parents and schools, in particular where there are difficulties building connections due to cultural factors (Schulze et al., 2018). EPs have a duty to ensure parent voice is considered in the decision-making process and to support parents in making autonomous choices. For example, in a study of the experiences of communication of Romanian parents, school staff and EPs, conducted by Dyson (2022), EPs discussed experiences of attending meetings where schools did not invite interpreters when needed and conversely, invited translators without consulting parents in situations where they were not needed. In the same study, participants also reflected on the need for EPs to challenge schools on their assumptions and biases regarding communicating with migrant parents. Furthermore, some studies have shown that parents prefer a trusted figure to translate during meetings as opposed to a school-hired interpreter (Edwards, Temple and Alexander, 2005). The current study also highlighted that parents and staff both believe that access to translators/interpreters would be beneficial in helping both groups feel more supported; parents would be able to access translators when there are language barriers and staff would be able to make sure parents understand them and aid them in building more meaningful relationships with families. The role of the EP could also extend to advocating for parental choices and autonomy; by discussing the type of support they would prefer for schools to provide, prior to meetings.

EPs can support EE parents of SEN children and schools to foster reciprocal dialogues and build stronger links between the school and wider EE community. EPs in Dyson's (2022) study suggested that community coffee mornings would be beneficial in breaking down barriers between parents and schools. Community events can foster a sense of belonging and boost parents' confidence in communicating with staff, which are issues that were identified as barriers by both the parent and staff participants in the current study. When discussing issues of SEN, one participant in Dyson's (2022) study believed that EP presence at events held by schools could offer parents and schools direct access to EP support, which may reduce stigma surrounding SEN in certain communities and break down staff biases. Cultural views of SEN, as well as discourses of cultural differences between the UK and EE (e.g., UK vs. EE education, social inclusion vs. isolation, culture vs. neglect) are issues that permeated throughout interviews with both participant groups in the current study. The literature has also identified that practitioners advocating for social justice highlight community-based initiatives as a highly

effective way of making changes within marginalised groups, as well as promoting collaboration with services (Schulze et al., 2018; Winter, 2019)

When thinking about EPs being involved at a systemic level, there is wide scope. Due to their psychological knowledge and skills, EPs are best placed to provide training to schools and other professionals (Fallon et al., 2010) on how to work in a culturally aware, holistic manner, to best support EE communities. Morgan (2023), in a recent article, discusses the need for EPs to be more involved in and contribute to DfE policies around education reform. EPs can also engage in the development and changes of LA policies (Dyson, 2022). As highlighted by this study, there are significant inconsistencies within school practice when providing support to migrant families, as well as staff. Some participants highlighted a lack of guiding policies, both at a school and at a wider level. A comprehensive, structured guide developed by government in collaboration with LAs, EPs and school staff could combat issues of inconsistencies in school practice.

2.7.6 Limitations of current study and suggestions for future research

This section highlights several limitations of the current study. Firstly, the small scale of the study affects wider generalisability of findings to other individuals or contexts, as only 8 participants were interviewed. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria was discussed in the 'methodology' section, regarding transferability. Due to this, it is felt that findings can be relevant to similar contexts (e.g., schools working with other migrant groups, non-EE parents who are parenting children with SEN). Future research would benefit from including a larger number of participants, to collate data that is more generalisable and develops a deeper understanding of the factors impacting the experiences of EE migrants parenting a child with SEN.

Nonetheless, the current study does not claim to be generalisable, but aims to provide a foundation for future research and hopefully contribute to changes in existing school practice with culturally diverse children and families. Some literature actually advocates for the use of a small sample, as it provides detailed accounts of lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009), even though it does not support generalisation. Furthermore, considering Malterud, Siersma and Guassora's (2016) concept of information power as a guiding principle, a study needs the least amount of participants when the study aim is narrow, the participant criteria is highly specific,

the research aims are supported by evidence-based and well-established existing theories, data gathered from interviews is strong and if the analysis includes an in-depth exploration of narratives. In relation to the current study, whilst the study aim could be considered wide as it's trying to have an understanding of the vast experiences of EE parents and staff, considering a variety of influences, the study does meet the remaining criteria. Participant groups were highly specific (particularly the parent group), it used well established literature and was guided by Bronfenbrenner's theory, gathered a high level of information from all interviews and was analysed using RTA, which focuses on narratives and their importance.

Secondly, in appraising the sample, the participants were all female across both participant groups. This is reflective of the staff participant group, as 76% of school staff are female (UK Government, 2023), but this may have particular significance within the parent participant group. This is similar to findings in the literature, that identify mothers as being more involved in their children's care and education (Zimmermann et al., 2022). This has led to research into education involving predominantly female participants when exploring the views of parents (Moskal, 2014; Dyson, 2022; Marku et al., 2022). However, literature has identified that the involvement of fathers in their children's education is equally significant (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2013; McKee et al., 2021). To truly capture the voice of 'parents' as opposed to just mothers, future research should aim to involve an equal number of male and female participants.

Considering the unique findings of this study which do not mirror current literature (parents not attributing issues to discrimination and prejudice), it is worth noting that participants were recruited through social media, which could mean they may have been more knowledgeable of SEN systems and thus less likely to attribute issues to prejudice. This can be considered a limitation due to arguably not capturing the voices of parents with differing levels of knowledge. Future research should aim to recruit parent participants through a variety of means (e.g. social media and in schools), to mitigate for perceived differences in levels of SEN knowledge.

Furthermore, the study aimed to explore the experiences of a wide array of migrants from EE countries. However, 3 of the participants interviewed were Romanian and 1 was Polish, which could have potentially affected the findings, in terms of skewing the narratives towards one country more than another. This was potentially due to the researcher being Romanian herself. This may have attracted

more Romanian participants due to there being less of a language barrier, and also the knowledge that the researcher will understand their specific culture. This impacted the diversity of countries this study represented. This is discussed in more detail in the reflective account in chapter 3. An exploration of migrants from all 12 EE countries would be ideal for future research in the area, to provide a holistic view of the experiences of the diversity of all EE parents in British schools.

Thirdly, school staff that participated in this study all had different roles and worked in schools in different areas of England. It is positive that the research provided the perspective of different staff from schools across the country, as the literature has identified that school staff all have different experiences working within a school, based on their roles (Radford et al., 2015; Butt, 2016; Basford, Butt and Newton, 2017). Nonetheless, it can also be considered a limitation due to being difficult to generalise to one specific group, as well as replicate. A next step in research would potentially be to enlist a case study approach of exploring the views of all staff in one school, to provide a clear narrative about the different experiences of staff in one setting, regarding their engagement with EE families raising children with SEN.

A further limitation of the study is the lack of a relationship between the parent and staff participant group. All participants were recruited individually, therefore there is no connection between their experiences of receiving and offering support. This could be addressed in future research by employing a different methodology, such as a multi-perspective interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Larkin, Shaw and Flowers, 2018). Multi-perspective IPA requires participants to have a ‘dyadic relationship’ (e.g., parents and staff from the same school). This approach would allow researchers to gain deeper insights into how a person or group make sense of a given situation of personal significance. A multi-perspective IPA approach could also be considered involving the dyad between parent-child or school staff-child, as the current study does not focus on the child’s voice.

Achieving rigour and external validity in qualitative research is something that has been raised as challenging, due to the potential researcher bias involved in coding, analysing and interpreting the data (Ali and Yusof, 2011). To mitigate for this, as previously mentioned, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria was used to ensure rigour and validity. Braun and Clarke (2022), in their thematic analysis guide, do not consider researcher subjectivity to be a limitation. They believe that critical reflection

whilst engaging with the process of analysis a necessity, which was the approach taken by the researcher of the present study. However, Braun and Clarke (2022) do recommend that researchers are explicit about their biases, personal beliefs and any subjective views they bring to the research and analysis process. This is explored in detail in the reflective account, in chapter 3.

2.8 Conclusion

This research has explored the inner perspectives and experiences of EE parents raising children with SEN, as well as the point of view of school staff working with them. It explored how support is offered and received within UK schools. It has highlighted how cultural differences, language barriers and differing views of education systems and SEN can cause difficulties for establishing positive, effective home-school relationships. Wider systemic issues such as a lack of support for migrants, societal discourse, funding, increased SEN demands and a lack of access to support services like social care teams or the NHS also play a key role in the type of experiences EE parents have. Applying a psychological systems lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), has highlighted how current socio-political factors (SEN crisis, Brexit, government funding) at the macrosystem, can impact mesosystems such as schools and communities, which in turn have a direct negative impact on microsystems (families and staff working within those systems). Findings highlighted how a relational approach coupled with culturally aware school practice can ameliorate negative impacts and improve parental confidence, autonomy and foster a sense of belonging.

Implications for practice were explored, concluding that implementation of findings within a school setting would allow for staff and parents to develop more positive and supportive relationships, which, in turn, ca improve outcomes for CYP (Christenson and Sheridan, 2001; Marku et al., 2022). The findings of the study can support systemic change in UK schools. Furthermore, the findings have implications across all areas of EP involvement, at the individual, group and systemic levels. Suggestions have been made for future research, in the hope that future studies will be able to provide further insight into this under researched, yet highly significant area of UK education.

Chapter 3: Reflective chapter

3.1 Introduction

This reflective account is written from a first-person perspective, to convey my active involvement in the current study and provide genuine reflections throughout my journey of undertaking doctoral-level research. Since the beginning of this process, I have engaged with the reflective process by writing a research diary and undertaking research supervision. This chapter will detail my reflections on conducting this study, including personal experiences and biases that may have shaped my research, key decisions made regarding the methodology of the study, the process of data analysis and implications of being a trainee EP and identifying with a dual researcher-practitioner role. Despite difficulties faced throughout the research journey, the process has enabled me to explore a topic close to my heart, whilst aiding both my personal and professional development. As a trainee EP, I am required to demonstrate self-awareness, work as a reflective and reflexive practitioner and adhere to the BPS practice guidelines (2017) and the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Ethics and Performance (2023) (BPS 2.1, BPS 10.2 HCPC 2.2, HCPC 5.7). HCPC and BPS competencies met throughout conducting my research will be referred to in the chapter and detailed in Appendix 13.

3.2 Choosing a research topic

To aid my reflections, I engaged with Kolb's reflective cycle (1984). Kolb's model emphasises the importance of experience in the learning process, suggesting that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. The cycle has 4 stages, concrete experience (engaging actively with an experience for the first time), reflective observation (reflecting on the experience), abstract conceptualisation (conceptualising the experience by forming ideas and theories about it) and active experimentation (applying new ideas in practice). Kolb's model is cyclical, meaning that once a learner completes the four stages, they begin the cycle again with new experiences, encouraging continuous learning. The process of engaging with this, I believe, started before I embarked on doctoral training. I consider my 'concrete experience' stage to be all the experiences I encountered doing research at undergraduate and master's level, coupled with my personal experiences of being a migrant in the UK educational system, which I will provide more detail on in the following sections.

Choosing a research topic was an easy decision for me. Due to personal experiences and my own identity, which will be discussed in the next section in more detail, I have always been passionate about conducting research into migrant students and families and the various aspects of this particular factor into their life in the UK. My previous research, at undergraduate level focused on exploring the experiences of Romanian students that had previously lived without their parents for significant periods of time due to migration, and the impact this had on them. I further explored my interests at master's level by looking into the anecdotal experiences of Romanian University-level students of EAL support received when starting school.

Whilst my previous research and findings were valuable, at the point of deciding on my current research topic, I realised that I had always focused on the Romanian community and have solely researched the experiences of students and young adults. As I've progressed through my journey, from working as an Assistant EP following my master's, embarking on the doctoral course and working as a trainee EP, I developed the skill of thinking more systemically and seeing the bigger picture. This led me to want to research systems around a child and explore narratives within those spheres. Considering Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecosystems (1992) which has been an influential aspect of doctoral teaching and something I've extensively used in my practice, parents and schools are the two most significant factors in a CYP's life. This, therefore, reflecting on my previous experiences and knowledge, led me to exploring the experiences of parents and school staff (BPS 1.9).

SEN is another special interest of mine, having worked as a SEN TA in an SLD setting for several years following the completion of my undergraduate degree. In the school I worked in, there was only one EE SEN child. During the years I worked there, I was asked several times to get in contact with this child's mother, as she was Romanian too. Staff often got frustrated with asking the parent for things and not receiving them (e.g., to send a towel for swimming lessons). This was believed to be due to a language barrier. During a phone conversation, I asked the parent if she required letters from school to be translated, as the school fear she may struggle to understand. The parent informed me that her level of English was high, however she worked multiple jobs and often forgot to send her child's swimming kit. That experience, alongside several others, led me to reflect on the misconceptions school staff often hold about EAL parents. A lingering thought was that school staff

believed she needed support with her English skills, but truthfully she only required understanding and empathy.

Furthermore, also considering that my previous research only included Romanian nationals, due to me being one myself, it was an easier community to reach, with the added bonus of me being able to offer interviews in Romanian to those that had a lower level of English proficiency. However, wanting to still follow my passion of exploring difficulties encountered by nationals from a Romanian background across various UK systems, but also having the desire to expand my reach, I decided that investigating the experiences of Eastern Europeans will allow me to do so. Knowledge from my personal life of having friends from across Eastern Europe and findings in the literature, where EEs have often been grouped together as a homogenous group, furthered my conviction to explore the wider EE community. There are a myriad of similarities in thinking, behaviours, traditions, morals and culture across nationals from EE. One example of this, being that SEN is generally considered taboo in EE culture. Being able to generalise and synthesise prior knowledge and experiences to apply during my research journey was highly valuable (BPS 10.1, HCPC 14.12).

An initial literature review revealed that there is huge scarcity in research exploring EAL parents of SEN children and their experiences of school; and even less focusing on EE nationals. Therefore, to marry all my interests and contribute to the literature gap, as well as engaging with Kolb's abstract conceptualisation stage during this process, I chose my research topic to investigate the experiences of EEs parenting a child with SEN in the UK, as well as school staff perspectives.

3.3 Personal biases and past experiences

To ensure full transparency, in this section I will outline key elements of my own background and identity which may have had an impact on this study. I am a first-generation immigrant and an EE national (Romanian), who came to the UK at 12 years old. I entered the UK schooling system in a London-based secondary school, in Year 8. Whilst I do not have a SEN diagnosis, nor am I a parent, I am an EAL student from an EE country that has years of experience navigating the UK education system. I am also an EE migrant who has experienced a different culture and schooling system in Romania, similar to the parents I interviewed, which grants me an insider perspective which I believe, has enriched this study.

The insider perspective was useful during the interview process. All the parent participants interviewed often referred to 'our culture' ('our' referring to me and them) or 'us Eastern Europeans' and uttered phrases such as 'you know what it's like' or 'you understand'. Having a shared understanding of cultural aspects such as SEN being taboo and social marginalisation, may have allowed the participants to feel more comfortable and be more open during the interview process. It could have also contributed to alleviating the power imbalance between the participants and I. Researchers from other backgrounds may be unfamiliar with life in a EE country and may struggle to develop a shared understanding. It is worth noting that due consideration was given to my insider perspective potentially impacting my interpretation and analysis. Using supervision and keeping a research diary, as well as asking clarifying questions during the interviews, allowed me to ensure I did not skew the participants' perspective in my interpretation.

Furthermore, I was on the receiving end of EAL support when I first started school in this country. I had negative experiences of having to take an 'English for beginners' class as extra support, just for being a newly arrived student, regardless of my English proficiency being high at the time. My parents equally recall never receiving any parent-specific support to help me acclimate and only engaging with my school during parents' evenings. There was no level of support given to myself or my family to navigate the secondary school system in the UK. My personal school experiences, paired with my professional experiences of working in a school later down the line, led to me having a multitude of preconceptions and biases. However, developing my reflective and reflexive practice skills whilst undertaking doctoral training have allowed me to take a subjective approach throughout the research process and feel competent in engaging with this topic, whilst being able to manage the potential emotional impact it could have on me (BPS 2.3, BPS 10.4, HCPC 3.4, HCPC 5.3).

Above all, I recognised that researching this topic would allow me to respond to the needs of a group of individuals that are under-represented in education and psychology literature. Due to adversity in their home countries, EEs have sought a 'better life' in the UK, where they are sometimes met with difficulties due to cultural differences. As highlighted in the research, being unaware of how to manage cultural differences can lead to negative relationships between parents and schools, as well as other practitioners. My hope was always that my research findings would offer an

insight into how professionals can work with EE families, whilst developing an appreciation for diversity and their cultural experiences (BPS 3.1, BPS 3.2, BPS 3.5, BPS 3.7, HCPC 5, HCPC 5.1).

3.4 Research design

Prior to selecting RTA as the methodology for the current study, multi-perspective IPA was considered as an alternative. Multi-perspective IPA is an approach that allows for an interpretive in-depth analysis of first-person accounts, whilst exploring a dyadic relationship (Larkin, Shaw and Flowers, 2018). Following supervision and deeper reflection, I realised that it may be difficult to find participants with a dyadic relationship due to time frames imposed by thesis deadlines. I would have been required to find parent and staff participants that attended the same school, which would have been limiting and potentially difficult to achieve. Therefore, RTA was considered a more viable alternative, as it allows for an interpretative exploration of common themes within groups of participants, without the need for a dyadic relationship (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, given consideration to personal biases and experiences, RTA also incorporates the researcher's own socially and contextually situated interpretations when deriving meaning from data (BPS 9.1, BPS 9.4, HCPC 14.27).

Whilst I felt slightly disappointed at the start that I made the decision of switching my methodology, I felt confident it would allow me to still explore the topic in depth. At the beginning of my research journey, I had hoped to embark on it by using a new approach that I was unfamiliar with, as my previous research at undergraduate and master's level both used TA. However, during the process, I found that although there were familiar aspects of the methodology, there was a much wider array of factors to engage with during analysis, due to using Braun and Clarke's new guidelines, only released in 2022. Designing this study required me to engage in reflection and seek support to help me make a decision. This led to using my previous experience, as well as engaging in 'active experimentation' (Kolb, 1984).

3.5 Participant recruitment

The initial plan was to recruit EE parents of SEN children and staff participants from mainstream primary schools, by using EP contacts, advertising on

several social media platforms and using the Romanian and EE charity hub (who agreed to support me prior to commencing recruitment). Following ethical approval, the charity identified four parent participants that were willing to be interviewed. Following direct initial contact, all four participants agreed to be interviewed. Two of the participants were successfully interviewed, but another was unresponsive regardless of several attempts to communicate with her. The 4th participant informed me at a later date that she would like to withdraw as she feels like it would be too difficult for her, emotionally, to discuss her journey of parenting a SEN child. EP colleagues also shared my recruitment poster with families they knew that met the criteria and were met with refusal to participate due to, in their words, 'traumatising' experiences. I also encountered difficulties recruiting school staff at this point. This, coupled with parents expressing anxieties as reasons for not wanting to take part in the study, I became very disheartened and reflected on whether what I was investigating potentially being too sensitive (HCPC 8.5).

Following this, I consulted my supervisor for advice, and she suggested that I expand my criteria to include parents of children of all ages, school staff from schools of all ages, as well as special schools. Due to ongoing difficulties gathering participants, it was also suggested that I contact schools directly via email, to share my research poster. I made the suggested changes to my research poster, contacted all schools within 2 LAs in the East of England and re-uploaded my research poster on social media platforms. In the end, all the remaining participants were recruited through social media. I was able to gather four staff participants, one parent participant and one dual participant that was both an EE parent and an educator (HCPC 13.11).

At the point of recruiting all participants, I reflected on the sample and what this meant for my research project. My research was open to exploring the experiences of those from any EE country. However, the parent sample included three Romanian mothers and one Polish mother, which can be considered somewhat skewed, as it impacted the diversity of countries represented. This was potentially due to me being Romanian, causing Romanian participants to be more inclined to take part. Due to time constraints and difficulties recruiting, it was hard to diversify the sample, so I had to continue using the participants I did gather in my pursuit of exploring the topic, even if the study did not achieve the level of diversity sought out at the beginning of the recruitment process.What was also interesting is

that all participants were mothers, which reflects wider literature (Moskal, 2014; Zimmermann et al., 2022; Marku et al., 2022). It made me wonder how my findings would differ if the research also included fathers, as well as what would make my research appealing to males wanting to participate.

Secondly, I reflected on the staff participant sample including those from both mainstream and special schools and across all age ranges from infant to secondary, as well as staff in different roles (TA, teacher, pastoral support). This removed any aspect of homogeneity within the levels of school support offered to parents and discussions surrounding school practice, making it difficult to generalise to one specific type of school (e.g. primary, secondary). However, I've considered this to be positive due to being able to provide the perspective of staff in different roles across the country. Literature has identified that school staff all have different experiences working within a school, based on their roles and their individual settings (Butt, 2016; Butt and Newton, 2017).

3.6 Conducting the interviews

In the original research design, I wanted to recruit translators to aid with interviewing the parent participants in their own language. However, upon reflection, I recognised that this would be difficult due to a mediator potentially adding or removing meaning during the translation process. Therefore, it resulted in me recruiting parents that were able to be interviewed in English. I did recognise that this would result in limiting access to parents with lower levels of English proficiency, however due to the constraints of conducting doctoral research in a short time frame, I decided to only recruit those that spoke English. Before commencing the interviews, to aid me in refining my questions, I conducted a trial interview with an EE parent of a SEN child, who was an acquaintance. This allowed me to improve my interview schedule and be mindful of things such as acronyms and convoluted language.

Whilst the aim was to interview participants in English, the three Romanian participants asked if they could be interviewed in Romanian at the beginning of our conversation. I agreed to do so, to support rapport building and allow them to communicate in the language they felt more comfortable in. It is common practice for Romanians to speak Romanian amongst themselves, regardless of their level of English proficiency or the amount of time they have lived in the UK. I also personally

speak Romanian with everyone in my life who speaks it, even if I have lived in the UK for almost 20 years. Whilst this aided the three participants to feel more comfortable, I was not able to offer the same option to the Polish parent. I've reflected on what impact this had on her versus the other three participants that were able to speak in their mother tongue. I recognise that there are issues of equitability here, however at the time I believed that if I had refused to speak in Romanian, the parents might had felt disengaged with the process or potentially felt a sense of rejection. This could have affected my ability to build rapport with them and in turn, help them get their voices heard. This, however, created an extra layer of work for me at the transcription stage.

Conversely, all the staff participants were interviewed in English. Some of my participants did speak other languages, but none were Romanian so there was no interest expressed in conducting the interview in another language. However, all participants asked me if I could ensure anonymity and confidentiality, as they felt without it, they would be uncomfortable discussing their places of employment. I ensured all participants that pseudonyms will be used for school names, localities and any other information that had the potential of revealing information about them or their places of employment. I also directed them to the consent form which outlined the procedures and pertinent information required for withdrawal at any point during the study, if they wished to do so (HCPC 6.5, HCPC 7).

One reflection throughout the interview process, particularly with the school staff, is that it was hard for the participants to think specifically about working with EE families. There was a lot of reference to 'EAL' or 'migrant families'. Participants needed constant reminders to refer to EE families specifically, as this was the topic being explored by the study. Research has maintained that educational institutions can be ignorant and operate from a homogenous perspective, when working with EAL families (Pascal and Bertram, 2009). In order to not 'break their flow', I would allow participants to speak about wider support for 'EAL/migrant families' and then ask a follow-up question specific to support offered to EE families.

It is also worth noting that for the dual participant, I tried to the best of my ability to ask her questions that were separate for each research question. I had a conversation with her at the beginning of the interview regarding the duality of her participation and she agreed that I would be asking her questions about her experiences as a parent first, followed by questions about her role as a teacher in a

special needs school. There was some slight overlap in some of her answers, which I believe was inevitable, however this was managed by asking follow-up questions about either parenting or school practice.

3.7 Data analysis

Due to having interviewed two separate participant groups and aiming to answer a research question per group, I had to complete a separate analysis for each group. Data analysis was a very long process for this project. However, depth takes time. To truly immerse myself in the data and obtain meaningful insight, I did have to spend extended periods of time on coding and creating the initial themes. I remember when I started the process I believed it would take me a day of work to finalise it, but it ended up taking around three or four full days of work. But revisiting my transcripts after creating my themes to check it aligned and seeing that everything was connected, assured me that it was worth spending longer periods of time on analysing the data, as it would allow me to do accurately portray my participants' views in my write-up.

When merging and creating my final themes, I struggled to identify clear themes initially as it felt that there was a lot of overlap. For example, staff participants talking about difficulties discussing sensitive topics with EE parents could have fitted under both my theme of 'language barriers when communicating with parents', as well as 'cultural differences'. This required for me to consult Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidelines to remind myself that my decision making was part of my 'active participation' in the study and my interpretation was valuable, as long as it could be justified. A further reflection when deciding on themes and subthemes was the vast number of subthemes that were finalised. Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise that the number of themes should be sufficient to provide a rich and meaningful analysis but should not be so many that the analysis becomes fragmented or superficial. They advise researchers to let the data, and the research question guide the number of themes. Braun and Clarke also make a distinction between themes and topic summaries. According to their guidelines, themes represent patterns of meaning across a dataset, while topic summaries are more superficial and merely describe what participants said without deeper interpretation. I ended up having 4 themes and 12 sub-themes, even after spending a long time cutting down the sub-themes I was creating. When analysing my final results and

reflecting on RTA guidelines, I did think that potentially, my 12 subthemes were topic summaries, and I may risk providing a 'superficial' analysis. However, when consulting the data set again, it became evident that the sheer amount of information gathered from both participant groups warranted a higher number of sub-themes to truly capture their narratives. I felt that combining sub-themes simply to reduce the number, would lead to losing meaning in the participant's stories.

One reflection I had during the process of doing separate analyses on the two participant groups was the amount of overlapping themes across the two data sets. I did consider adding a third research question to investigate the shared experiences of EE parents and staff (e.g., systemic issues), however due to time and word count constraints, I made a decision to only focus on the two current research questions and provide and in-depth account for each of them. To highlight the overlap, I weaved comments through my discussion to underline that the two participant groups had shared views and experiences.

One further point worth mentioning is the use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the reason behind choosing the older framework as opposed to the newer, PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). The 1998 theory also included the concept of 'time' and the impact of life experiences happening on a particular timeline, both individually and on a wider societal scale (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). However, I felt like my research was more context-based and using Bronfenbrenner's previous model (1992) better fitted with my research. Furthermore, none of the participants spoke about the impact of time on their experiences, which further solidified my decision.

3.8 Researcher-practitioner role

One important, and at times, challenging aspect during my research journey, has been navigating the dual researcher-practitioner role I have as a TE. This was most difficult when speaking to parents and staff about school practice that was less than ideal. In a situation where I am the link EP for a school, I would raise these concerns directly with a school SENCo or with the PEP. However I was unable to do so whilst interviewing participants, as I had to take on the role of being purely a researcher. My approach was to engage in active listening and try to remain objective. I did this by acknowledging how difficult it must have been for them to go

through these negative experiences, either as a parent or as a member of staff trying to support families and offering empathy and sympathy.

Managing my time was another difficulty I encountered whilst undertaking this research, as well as completing my responsibilities as a trainee EP on placement. I found it difficult to manage split focus throughout the process and would often be too focused on writing my thesis or too focused on work. I reflected on this both in my placement and research supervision sessions, where I was constantly reminded that what I am doing is difficult and requires a lot of time and effort. I was encouraged to complete a 'mini-PATH', to mark my research journey and be reminded of how far I have come at an given point. This was extremely helpful as it provided me with a constant visual reminder that I am making progress. As a TEP, in line with meeting BPS and HCPC competencies, I am required to demonstrate effective organisation and time-management skills in order to practice effectively (BPS 10.8, HCPC 1.2, HCPC 14.6, HCPC 3.2, HCPC 3.4). Support from supervisors, coupled with an understanding PEP that allowed me to take days off to focus on my thesis, made it possible to manage the difficulties encountered balancing being a practitioner and researcher at the same time.

3.9 Disseminating research

It is hoped that by contributing to a gap in the literature, this study will be able to offer an insight into the experiences of EE migrants parenting children with SEN, as well as the perspective of school staff working with these families. Schools and professionals such as EPs can utilise the findings to better support these families in educational settings. The plan for disseminating my research is to create an accessible one-page summary sheet of the findings, which can be shared with individuals at various levels. It is hoped this will maximise the potential impact of this research project. The one-page summary will be shared with the participants, on social media platforms, with colleagues in my placement LA, as well as colleagues in the new role I will be starting in September. I am part of a national special interest group aimed at supporting International New Arrivals (INA), as well as a LA-based EAL support group. Both groups have expressed an interest in hearing about my research, so I aim to share my one-page summary with them, in the hope they will disseminate it further. Finally, I hope to publish my research in various journals such as Educational Psychology in Practice, the British Journal of Educational

Psychology, EAL Journal and other journals relevant to the research topic (BPS 9.9, HCPC 8.9, HCPC 8.11).

3.10 Conclusion

I hope this chapter has been able to provide a clear and detailed account of the thinking behind decisions I made throughout the research process and my rationale for doing so. I have opted for transparency and reflected on how my personal experiences, background and identity may have guided and potentially affected my research journey. Undertaking this piece of research at doctoral level has been a steep learning curve, but I feel like it has contributed to my personal and professional development. I have remained open about difficulties encountered during the process, such as recruitment difficulties, curbing biases and the impact of time constraints. Regardless of challenges faced along the way, conducting this research has been highly valuable. During the process, I feel like I engaged in Kolb's reflective cycle (1984) several times, as I was required to constantly reflect on prior experiences whilst making decisions to 'experiment' with new ideas, such as interviewing a different participant group and undertaking RTA following new guidelines.

I am grateful that I have been able to pursue my passion by investigating a topic I feel strongly about. I am equally grateful for this process enabling me to further deepen my understanding and knowledge of difficulties faced by EE migrants parenting a child with SEN, as well as school staff in various roles. The findings have also impacted my practice and are something I will be taking into my role as a qualified EP. I am very thankful for all those that took part and I feel privileged that I have been able to contribute to an under-researched area of literature. It has allowed me to actively challenge barriers and hopefully, support the implementation of change within EP practice (BPS 3.3, BPS 9.2, HCPC 5.5, HCPC 5.6).

Appendices

Appendix 1. *Recruitment poster*

Are you an **Eastern European parent** who is raising a child with special educational needs (SEN) **OR work in a school** and have worked with Eastern European SEN children and their families ?

Are you interested in contributing to **research** about supporting migrant parents in the UK school system?

I am looking for participants to take part in an interview to inform research to better understand:

- The experiences of Eastern European migrants parenting a child with additional needs
- How schools develop relationships with and support this community

If you are interested in taking part, please contact **Luiza Salciuc**, Trainee Educational Psychologist at University of East Anglia, who will be able to give you more information:

L.salciuc@uea.ac.uk

Appendix 2. *Interview schedule for parent participants*

Interview questions for parents:

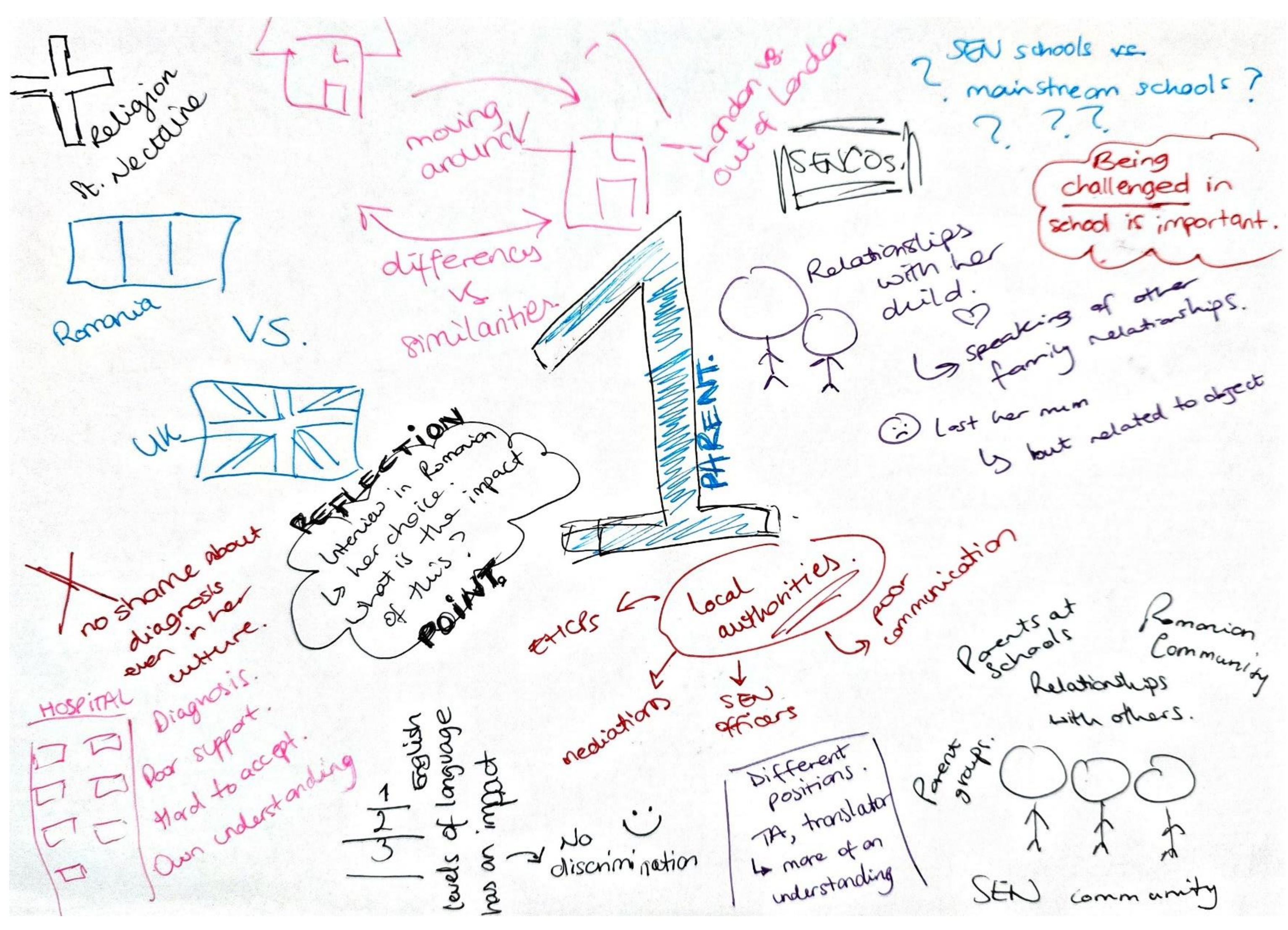
- Does your child have an EHCP?
- How would you describe your relationship with your child's teacher?
- What kind of support has the school offered you since receiving a diagnosis/EHCP?
- How has your relationship developed with the school over time?
- Do you feel that the school is offering an adequate level of support?
- What do you believe the school could do more of to make you feel more supported?
- How does SEN support differ than in your native country?
- Do you feel like your identity has played a role in accessing support in school?

Appendix 3. *Interview schedule for staff participants*

Interview questions for staff:

- What is your role in the school?
- What type of school do you work in?
- Does your school have a large number of migrant students?
- What does the school offer in terms of support for EAL students and their families?
- How do you find working with migrant families?
- What type of support could the school offer to these parents?
- What are some examples of good practice when working with EAL families?
- In your opinion, do you have a good relationship with the parents of EAL students in your class?
- What are your thoughts on the impact of EAL on SEN diagnoses?

Appendix 4. *Phase 1: initial data immersion doodle*



Appendix 5. *Extracts from coded interview*

DUAL PARTICIPANT

1 **R: Hi, thanks so much for joining me. It's been really hard to find participants,**
2 **I understand people are busy, but it's been a struggle.**

3 P: Hi, yeah I can imagine. Happy to help with whatever you need or whatever is
4 missing from your research. Whatever bit of information you would like to find
5 out, ask away. It is completely crackers looking at it from both sides, it's
6 completely different.

7 **Yeah absolutely, I think you're in a unique situation.**

8 Yeah, I've been blessed...or not. Depends how you look at it. Completely
9 different insight from one another. And it's probably about how I approach
10 things from my teacher head when I approach things with the school, because I
11 know what goes on, on the other side too.

12 **I think it's a privileged position to be in because you can do a lot of things at**
13 **home with him, that other people don't know about or have to learn about.**
14 **But I think with you doing it in your job, it should be a bit easier.**

15 Exactly. But if I'm doing homework with him, I can't do it. I don't have any
16 patience. He has no patience with me. At school he's so good, but at home he
17 has so much attitude because I'm his mum and it's like whatever.

18 **So how old is your son?**

19 He's 13, in Y9.

20 **Is he in mainstream or special school?**

21 It's a mainstream school with a resources hub. It's mainly for ASD children. It's
22 quite high functioning. They have specific criteria for admitting children there.
23 But yeah it's predominantly ASD high functioning children.

24 **And does he have an EHCP?** — EHCP process

25 He does have an EHCP. He got an ADHD diagnosis first, he was small when he
26 got it, about 7 or 8. That was quite easy then because it was pre-COVID and
27 ADHD was being diagnosed quite quickly. And then his autism diagnosis was 2
28 years later when he was 10. That was a massive waiting list, we waited 2 years
29 from the moment of referral to getting it. It wasn't a problem; we've never
30 been passionate about it [diagnosis]. Everyone knows we have additional
31 needs; we have problems with learning, but without that paper in your hand
32 you can't move anywhere. And he got an EHCP after.

(Annotations: diagnosis process; lengthy process to diagnose SEN; the importance of having a label / diagnosis?)

33 **How was it going for the EHCP? Did you get any support from the school he**
34 **was at?**

35 It was a horrendous process. I actually put in a complaint after because, here,
36 you've got 24 weeks from referral. And we had a referral from school, school
37 picked it up. They were fantastic. We were lucky because when we relocated to
38 X from Scotland, the only school we could get to was a great little local school,
39 because it was mid-term. It had a fantastic SENCo. When he got there in Y1, he
40 was accessing mainstream classes. It was another integrated resources school.
41 They started picking up that he may have ADHD or something. And the SENCo
42 said to me, the process will take years, and I think he needs the additional
43 support now, so we're going to put him in the IR even without an EHCP,
44 because we want to support him. He doesn't have it but we will support him. I
45 know they got in trouble for that with the LA after, because they said why on
46 earth is he going to an IR when he doesn't have an EHCP? And the school said
47 there is no paper but it's so obvious he has additional needs.

48 **Yeah, that's amazing from the school's perspective.**

49 Yeah, they were amazing. So once we had every paper in hand, we went for the
50 EHCP process, and it was a full year. It were awful, it was so stressful. I found it
51 so stressful. And considering my English is good and I have some knowledge of
52 it and I kind of know a bit of the process, they were prolonging and prolonging.
53 What it was coming down to, in his EHCP they said he needs to work in a small
54 group to have extra support. And that he was easily overwhelmed in big
55 classes. But they were refusing to say he needed to be in IR or secondary
56 school with extra provision. It seemed to me like it was all about money; like
57 yeah, he has additional needs and needs to work in a small group, but he can
58 go to mainstream school. I disputed it and ended up going through mediation.
59 There was one of the heads of children's services there and the mediator
60 looked at the paperwork and said how can you say this child needs to work in a
61 small group, but you won't write in he needs that extra support? It's like they
62 said here's a carrot and a potato and make it work. It was agreed at that point
63 that within 4 weeks we would have an EHC plan. It ended up me having to ring
64 them every day and it was shocking. We got it and they agreed to all their
65 wrongdoings. But I put in a complaint based on the fact that parents I work
66 with; lots of them have additional needs themselves or they have mental
67 health problems and I just thought, if I found it stressful, they would have no
68 chance.

school good practice re. EHCP process

SEN school attitudes

school SENCO offering early intervention support

Parental knowledge of SEN processes

the importance of speaking English

mediation with LA

issues with LA

consideration of EHCP process being stressful / complex for parents

69 **Yeah, absolutely.**

70 So, for somebody that is healthy, let's consider the point of health… and I found
71 it stressful. What about someone that struggles to read or write? Maybe has a
72 learning difficulty? Not a chance.

73 **I agree and I think you were in a good position by having the support of the**
74 **school. A lot of people don't have that.**

75 And that's why I says, I done my journey and no matter how hacked off I was, I
76 reached my goal, and I can draw a line. But I said to them you need to review
77 your policies and practice because if we're talking about inclusive and adaptive
78 practice in services, for everybody, then I think you're eliminating half of my
79 clients at work. As many parents as I've got who are in a position to have that
80 battle, there's another half who wouldn't be able to have that battle on their
81 own.

lack of inclusive practice within LA

some parents can't fight

82 **That's really true. And it's a shame because there should be some support in**
83 **place to go through what is a difficult process anyway. Leaving aside any**
84 **difficulties that come up during it. So it is really, really hard. After he got the**
85 **EHC, do you think, you as a parent are getting a good amount of support?**

86 Yeah. In the first school the support was above and beyond. It was a school
87 with a mega established SENCo, and mega established IR and they were
88 absolutely fantastic. The second school was hard to pick. X is quite a big city. I
89 call X a bit of a lost soul because he's high functioning; he's not a candidate for
90 a full SEN school for pupils with complex or profound needs. But then he can't
91 go to a mainstream school with no support, so there were only 3 places in the
92 whole of X that had a well-established IRs and good SENCos, there's not that
93 many. This was the only one I found. He actually travels a lot. He travels 12
94 miles to school every day. But it's the right school for him, they are great.

Praise for school

Post code lottery

95 **I'm really glad to hear. It's good that you found something that really works**
96 **for him but also works for you as a parent.**

97 Yeah, I really am. They were trying to give me a school closer based on the
98 distance and I said no. I think thinking pros and cons, he just needs to go to a
99 school where he needs to be well supported. And I feel like he is. They're hard
100 on him but they help him. And that's what I wanted for him, somewhere that
101 won't make excuses.

102 **To be challenged, yeah.**

level of support offered to child

103 If he was given a chance, he would do nothing. He's a teenager. So go hard on
104 him and push him in the right direction.

105 Yeah, I think most teenage boys would do nothing if given the chance. But it's
106 really positive, I'm glad to hear. I was thinking, I don't think it's that much of
107 an issue for you because your English is very good and you are well versed in
108 the English education system, which hasn't been the case with some other
109 parents. Do you feel like culture has had an impact with going through a
110 SEND diagnosis and being in the UK?

111 For me it was hard. I was brought up in Poland and he was there he would not
112 have any support, like he has here. Everything is based on money and private
113 fund raisers. People there fund raise for wheelchairs, which our children [in UK]
114 get through NHS. Everything is a financial battle in Poland. That culture of SEN
115 is only just emerging in Poland. So, yeah, we talk about being mega inclusive
116 and so on, but X can go to school here and he has loads of mainstream friends
117 here who know about his autism, and they can have a laugh about it, not in a
118 nasty way. He even makes jokes about it. In Poland… I'm so glad I'm here, I'm
119 so glad I'm in England and not in Poland because he would… You know, it's that
120 culture of 'you're thick, you're stupid'. If you aren't achieving in a mainstream
121 way… yeah, you may have autism but we're not going to administer meds for
122 you to do this or that. They think I'm just a teacher.

no support for SEN in Poland

UK vs. Poland

UK promotes inclusion in school + community

negative views of SEN in Poland

123 Mhm.

124 I remember, we had a neighbour, a mum with 2 sons with really severe
125 disabilities. And I think there was only once or twice a week a bus would come
126 to pick them up, they're at home all the time. So, yeah there are special
127 schools, but in terms of provision, what our children get here… it is a battle to
128 get it. But once you get there, the support is there. It's really bad [in Poland]
129 and I'm speaking from the EE side. I think our children get a lot from the NHS.
130 You may have to wait for an appointment, but once you're there, you're there.

social isolation of SEN individuals in Poland

131 I completely agree. And I'm Romanian originally and it's the same with us. It's
132 very much, a lot of children stay at home. They keep them inside. They
133 wouldn't do anything to integrate them in society.

134 No, they won't, because it's THAT embedded. I had another neighbour… he
135 lived in a block of flats where my mum lives, it's my childhood home, it's a
136 block of flats. And he's 50 and only last year he was moved from the home into
137 a care home… he spent all his life in that flat. I can't remember seeing him

138 apart from sometimes opening his window and shouting something. Here, we
139 go on trips, we go out. There's specialist equipment provided. I take my
140 children on a trip, and everybody smiles and says hello. If they shout, if they
141 scream, it doesn't matter, they are part of society. Poland, no. I don't think we
142 are there yet.

143 I think EE is very much behind. In Romania we didn't recognise dyslexia until
144 6 years ago and imagine a Romanian parent coming here 6 years ago and you
145 tell them their kid has dyslexia and they wouldn't even know it exists.

146 Yeah. With ADHD... my mum is a nurse; she's retired now but she's a clever
147 lady. She'll say to me he will grow out of it. I went through a stage where I said
148 to her 'if you say that to me one more time, I will not ring you again'. I were
149 very abrupt with her, and I really shouted. I says 'no, he won't, he will learn to
150 live with it, cope with, manage it and adapt, he won't grow out of it, it's for life'.
151 And she said, 'but look, he might grow out of it'. There's nothing to grow out
152 of!

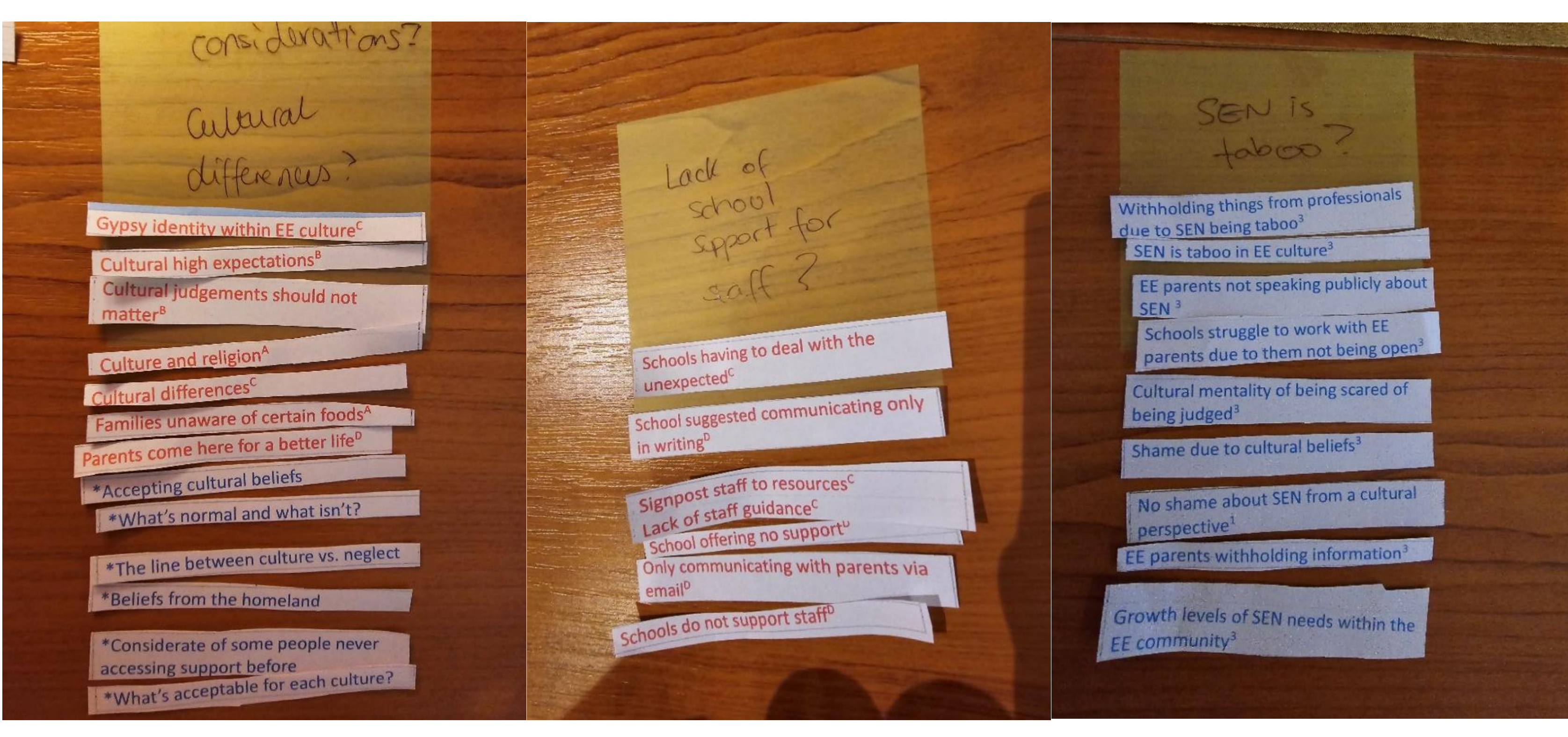
153 It's really hard to change that mentality isn't it. It's so heavily embedded in
154 the culture and in society. And I think especially in older generations. They
155 had less awareness than we do now, the generations nowadays.

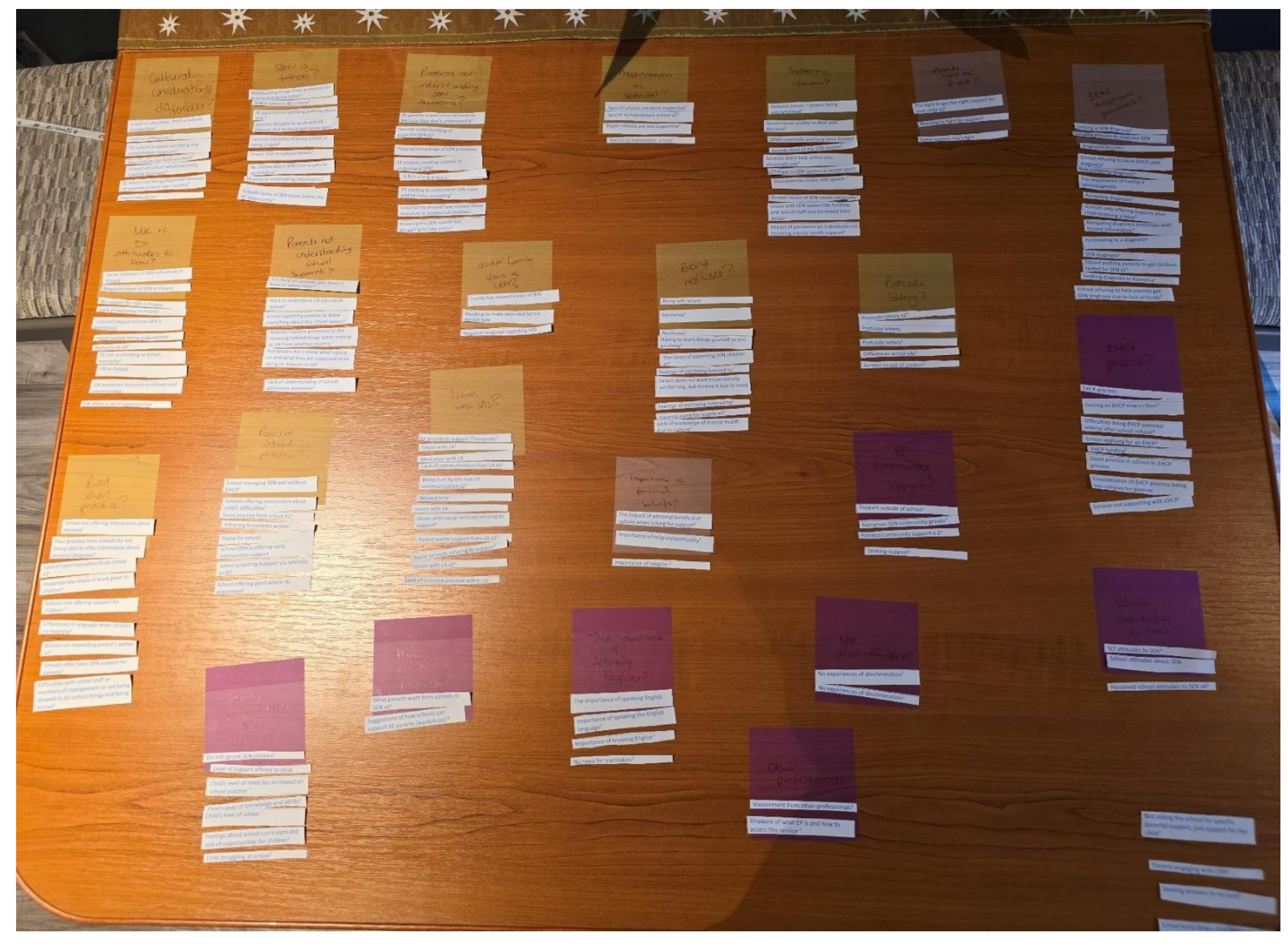
156 She doesn't say it now anymore. She'll just say he's calmed down a bit. And I
157 said to her that he has learnt to live with it. I had to be quite stern with my
158 mum. Even if I talk to my niece and nephew about work, the language they use
159 is 'they're thick or they're stupid', you know... They can call it what they want
160 there, but it's not acceptable here.

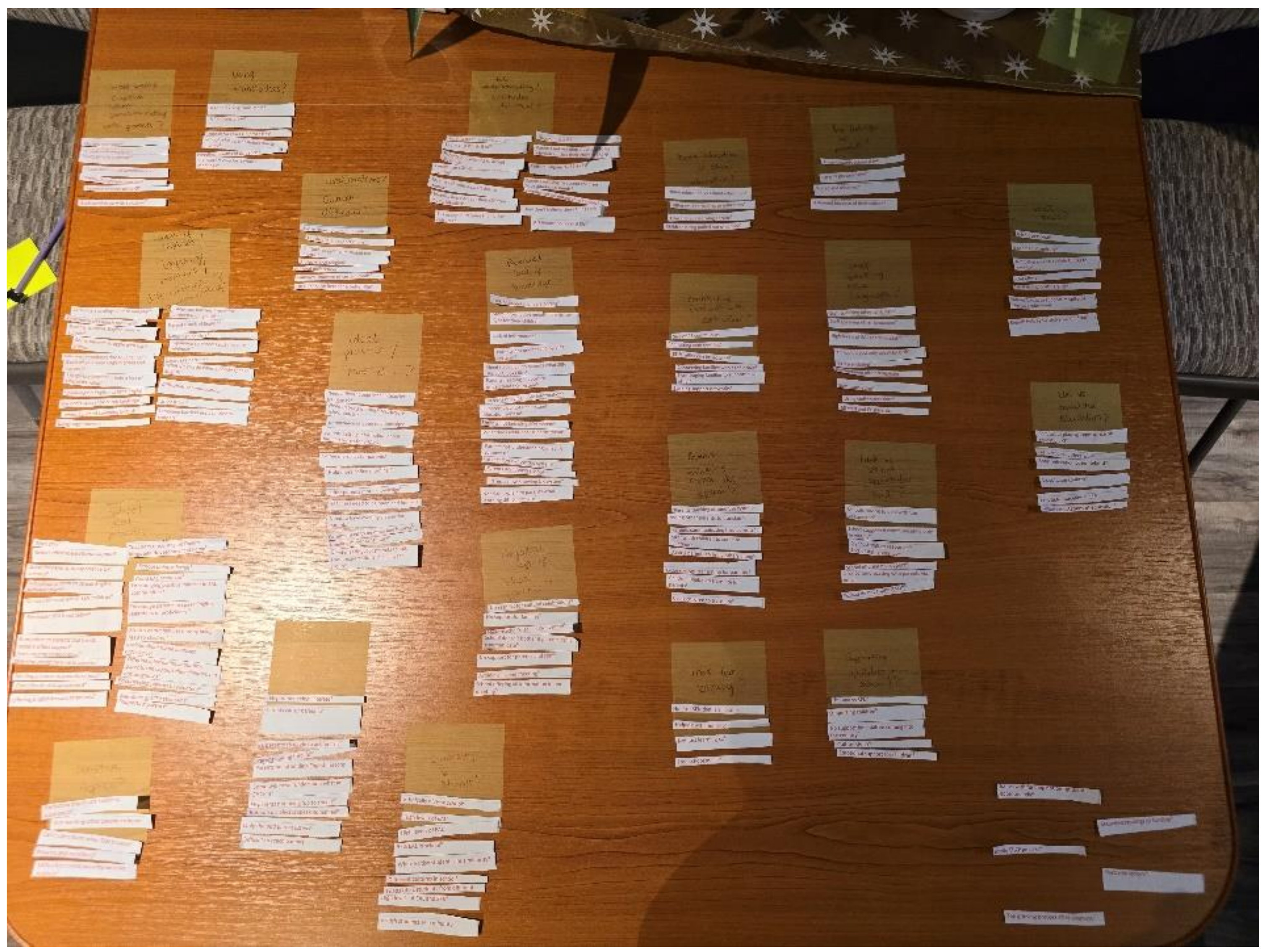
161 Absolute not. And you can see how wrong that mentality is. Because you see
162 a lot of children like your son and other children you've worked with and I've
163 worked with, you can see that it isn't the case. It's a barrier to certain things
164 in life, it is. But that doesn't mean they can't have a happy life.

165 Yeah, not at all. That's how I work with my children. I'm not harsh, but I'm
166 harder on them sometimes. I want my children, from school, I want them in
167 the community. I want them to be able to go the shop and not get freak out by
168 a fire engine. I want them to go to wherever and accept that some things are
169 not available today without having a meltdown. So we do lots of exercises like
170 that. That's my aim. Not all of them, some are hard work. Some children end
171 up being institutionalised and I can see why, but the majority of them, I say 'no,

Appendix 6. *Phase 3: Initial themes*







Appendix 7. *Phase 4: Developing, sorting and reviewing themes*

Cultural considerations/differences	SEN diagnosis processes
SEN is taboo	EHCP processes
Parents not understanding SEN systems	Postcode lottery
Mainstream vs special school	Being resilient
Systemic issues	Wider family views of SEN
Parents need to fight	Parents not understanding school systems
UK vs EE attitudes to SEN	Importance of personal beliefs
Bad school practice	EE community support
Good school practice	School attitudes to SEN
Issues with LAs	No discrimination
Other professionals	How can schools improve
The importance of speaking English	Schools working with SEN children

1 YELLOW

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

UK VS EE ATTITUDES TO SEN (SEN is taboo, wider family views of SEN)

2 BLACK

PARENTS NAVIGATING SYSTEMS

PARENTS AND SEN SYSTEMS (SEN diagnosis process, EHCP process)

PARENTS AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING ENGLISH

WIDER SYSTEMIC ISSUES (issues with LA, postcode lottery)

3 BLUE

SCHOOL PRACTICE

CONCERNS ABOUT SCHOOL PRACTICE

GOOD EXAMPLES OF SCHOOL PRACTICE

SCHOOL ATTITUDES TO SEN (schools working with SEN children, mainstream vs special school)

HOW CAN SCHOOLS IMPROVE

4 GREY

HOW DO PARENTS FEEL?

THE NEED TO FIGHT

BUILDING RESILIENCE (importance of personal beliefs, EE community support)

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Appendix 8. *Evidence of ethical approval*

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich. NR4 7TJ

Email: ethicsmonitor@uea.ac.uk
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

Study title: Exploring Eastern European migrant parents' and school staff's experiences of support they receive from British schools in navigating SEND systems

Application ID: ETH2324-1042 (significant amendments)

Dear Luiza,

Your application was considered on 30th November 2023 by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

The decision is: **approved**.

You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

This approval will expire on **31st May 2024**.

Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.

It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.

Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk).

I would like to wish you every success with your project.

On behalf of the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee)

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Warburton

Appendix 9. *Parent participants information sheet and consent form*

Miss Luiza Salciuc
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Exploring Eastern European migrant parents' experiences of support they receive navigating SEND systems and school staff experiences of working with these families

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?
You are invited to take part in a research study about the experiences of Eastern European migrant parents navigating SEND systems and the support they receive from British schools. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a parent from Eastern Europe that has a child with additional needs and they are currently attending a school in the UK. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling me that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?
The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s):
Miss Luiza Salciuc (Trainee Educational Psychologist and UEA Postgraduate researcher).
This will take place under the supervision of Dr Andrea Honess - UEA Associate Professor.

(3) What will the study involve for me?
The study will involve a one hour long interview that can be conducted either virtually via Microsoft Teams or at an agreed location. We can meet at a local amenity, such as a library, where I will book a room for the interview.
The study will involve a hour long interview, that will be recorded on a recording device, for transcription at a later stage. You will be asked to bring with you a picture or object that represents something dear to you, regarding being a migrant parent in the UK. This will be used during my interview just as a discussion point.
When bringing a picture or item, I will ask you if I am able to take a picture of it, to include in my analysis. Alternatively, I can use a description of the item as part of my study, if you would prefer for me not to take a picture of it.

Photographs may be taken of the item you bring.

You will have the opportunity to review information generated about you prior to publication.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?
As mentioned above, the interview will last about an hour. It will only be one interview, therefore no further time commitments are necessary.
However, if you would like to review the transcript after the transcription stage, a 45 minute meeting can be arranged virtually.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.
Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future or the school/anyone associated with your child's support.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised. You can do this by emailing me by December 2023.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?
You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?
Aside from giving up your time, I do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.
However, discussions about being a migrant parent in the UK educational system and navigating SEND support may not always be a positive experience. If you require further support following the interview, please refer to the websites below:
https://www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/children-families/send/send-info/
https://frg.org.uk/
https://sendfs.co.uk/

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?
The study will give you a chance for your voice to be heard in the world of Educational Psychology, through this study. Research about Eastern European migrants is very limited currently, and this study is aiming to expand my knowledge of this underrepresented community.
It is hoped that the findings of this research will offer an insight into the severely under researched area of migrants parenting children with SEN in the context of the UK educational system. The parental point of view can inform future practice in schools and improve the type of support offered to migrant families.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?
The data used for analysis will be anonymised and pseudonymised during write-up. This means that no names or identifying features can be distinguished (e.g., I will use descriptors such as Parent 1).

Following this, the data will be stored under password-protected encryption for a period of 10 years, to comply with University GDPR regulation.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study.
Study data may also be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were accessed. The deposited data will not include your name or any identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, Miss Luiza Salciuc will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study.
You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form.
This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary.
This feedback will be available upon completion of the research.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Miss Luiza Salciuc
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact my research supervisor.
If further action is required, please contact the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning: Yann Lebeau.

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?
To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?
According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and email it -. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information
This information was last updated on 26 May 2023.

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by email.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.
- The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES ☐ NO ☐

Photographs YES ☐ NO ☐

The data collected in this study may be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes, but the data will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

I consent to: Deposit of data in a repository YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: ____

____

☐ Email: ____

....
Signature

....
PRINT name

....
Date

Appendix 10. *Staff participants information sheet and consent form*

Miss Luiza Salciuc
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Exploring Eastern European migrant parents' experiences of support they receive navigating SEND systems and school staff experiences of working with these families

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?
You are invited to take part in a research study about the experiences of Eastern European migrant parents navigating SEND systems and the support they receive from British schools. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a member of staff working in a school that has worked with families from an Eastern European background. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling me that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?
The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s):
Miss Luiza Salciuc (Trainee Educational Psychologist and UEA Postgraduate researcher).
This will take place under the supervision of Dr Andrea Honess - UEA Associate Professor .

(3) What will the study involve for me?
The study will involve a one hour long interview that can be conducted either virtually via Microsoft Teams or at an agreed location. We can meet at your school, preferably in a quiet space as to not be disturbed.
The study will involve a hour long interview, that will be recorded on a recording device, for transcription at a later stage. You will be asked to bring with you a picture or object that represents something dear to you, regarding your position as school staff. This will be used during my interview just as a discussion point.
When bringing a picture or item, I will ask you if I am able to take a picture of it, to include in my analysis. Alternatively, I can use a description of the item as part of my study, if you would prefer for me not to take a picture of it.

Photographs may be taken of the item you bring.

You will have the opportunity to review information generated about you prior to publication.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?
As mentioned above, the interview will last about an hour. It will only be one interview, therefore no further time commitments are necessary.
However, if you would like to review the transcript after the transcription stage, a 45 minute meeting can be arranged virtually.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.
Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future or the school you work in.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised. You can do this by emailing me by December 2023.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?
You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want me to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from my records and will not be included in any results, up to the point I have analysed and published the results.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?
Aside from giving up your time, I do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?
The study will give you a chance for your voice to be heard in the world of Educational Psychology, through this study. Research about Eastern European migrants is very limited currently, and this study is aiming to expand my knowledge of this underrepresented community.It is hoped that the findings of this research will offer an insight into the severely under researched area of migrants parenting children with SEN in the context of the UK educational system.
The point of view provided by staff can supply insights to inform future training needs for school staff and implementation of better practice.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?
The data used for analysis will be anonymised and pseudonymised during write-up. This means that no names or identifying features can be distinguished (e.g., I will use descriptors such as Staff 2).
Following this, the data will be stored under password-protected encryption for a period of 10 years, to comply with University GDPR regulation.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study.
Study data may also be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were accessed. The deposited data will not include your name or any identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, Miss Luiza Salciuc will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study.
You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form.
This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary.
This feedback will be available upon completion of the research.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Miss Luiza Salciuc
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact my research supervisor.
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(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
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(16) Further information
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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researcher if I wished to do so.
- The researcher has answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording YES ☐ NO ☐

Photographs YES ☐ NO ☐

The data collected in this study may be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes, but the data will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.

I consent to: Deposit of data in a repository YES ☐ NO ☐

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?

YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: ____

____

☐ Email: ____

....
Signature

....
PRINT name

....
Date

Appendix 11: *Post-interview poster signposting parents to further support*

Free resources to access
(Press the CTRL key and click mouse to access websites)

Appendix 12. *Post-interview poster signposting staff to further support*

Free resources to access
(Press the CTRL key and click mouse to access websites)

Appendix 13. *BPS and HCPC competencies*

Competencies	
BPS 1.9	Demonstrate knowledge of parenting and family functioning and evidence working in partnership with parents and carers
BPS 2.1 HCPC 2.2	Demonstrate professional and ethical practice which adheres to the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct and the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Ethics and Performance Understand what is required of them by the HCPC
BPS 2.3	Work ethically and effectively at an appropriate level of autonomy, with awareness of the limits of competence, and accepting accountability to relevant professional, academic and service leaders/managers
BPS 3.1 BPS 3.2	Demonstrate appreciation of diversity in society and the experiences and contributions of different ethnic, socio-cultural and faith groups Demonstrate understanding and application of equality and diversity principles and actively promote inclusion and equity in their professional practice
BPS 3.3	Take appropriate professional action to redress power imbalances and to embed principles of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice in all professional actions
BPS 3.5	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different cultural, faith and ethnic groups, and how to work with individuals from these backgrounds in professional practice
BPS 3.7	Demonstrate understanding of the impact of inequality, socioeconomic and cultural status and disadvantage and the implications for access to resources and services
BPS 9.1	Demonstrate knowledge of paradigms and methods appropriate for research in the field of educational psychology
BPS 9.2	Critically evaluate research and produce systematically conducted research syntheses to inform practice and policy decisions
BPS 9.4 HCPC 14.27	Plan and conduct rigorous research i.e. identify research questions, demonstrate an understanding of ethical issues, choose and implement appropriate methods and analysis, report outcomes and identify appropriate pathways for dissemination, including publication Be able to initiate, design, develop, conduct and critically evaluate psychological research

BPS 9.9 HCPC 8.9 HCPC 8.11	Disseminate research to a range of audiences, through presentation and writing research reports and contribute to the professional knowledge base. Be able to communicate ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non- specialist audiences Be able to summarise and present complex ideas in an appropriate form
BPS 10.1 HCPC 14.12	Generalise and synthesise knowledge and experience to enable application and adaptation in different settings and novel situations Be able *to* generalise and synthesise prior knowledge and experience in order to apply them critically and creatively in different settings and novel situations
BPS 10.2	Demonstrate self-awareness and work as a reflective practitioner
BPS 10.4 HCPC 3.4	Demonstrate strategies to deal with the emotional and physical impact of practice and seek appropriate support where necessary Be able to manage the physical, psychological and emotional impact of their practice
BPS 10.8 HCPC 1.2 HCPC 14.6	Demonstrate effective personal and professional management and organisational skills Recognise the need to manage their own workload and resources effectively and be able to practise accordingly Be able to manage resources to meet timescales and agreed project objectives
HCPC 3.2 HCPC 3.4	Understand the importance of their own mental and physical health and wellbeing strategies in maintaining fitness to practice Develop and adopt clear strategies for physical and mental self-care and self-awareness, to maintain a high standard of professional effectiveness and a safe working environment
HCPC 5	Recognise the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice and practise in a non-discriminatory and inclusive manner
HCPC 5.1	Respond appropriately to the needs of all different groups and individuals in practice, recognising this can be affected by difference of any kind including, but not limited to, protected characteristics, intersectional experiences and cultural differences
HCPC 5.3	Recognise the potential impact of their own values, beliefs and personal biases (which may be unconscious) on practice and take personal action to ensure all service users and carers are treated appropriately with respect and dignity

HCPC 5.5 HCPC 5.6	Recognise the characteristics and consequences of barriers to inclusion, including for socially isolated groups Actively challenge these barriers, supporting the implementation of change wherever possible
HCPC 5.7	Recognise that regard to equality, diversity and inclusion needs to be embedded in the application of all HCPC standards, across all areas of practice
HCPC 6.5 HCPC 7	Recognise that the concepts of confidentiality and informed consent extend to all mediums, including illustrative clinical records, such as photography, video and audio recordings and digital platforms Understand the importance of and be able to maintain confidentiality
HCPC 8.5	Identify anxiety and stress in service users, carers and colleagues, adapting their practice and providing support where appropriate
HCPC 13.11	Engage service users in research as appropriate

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