**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

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Abstract

This research is set at a time when the number of people who have been forcibly displaced is rapidly rising, forcing thousands of separated young people to travel without the support of an adult, to seek safety in another country. Separated young people seeking safety have been found to experience difficulties in their resettlement in the UK, where young people aged between 16-18 years are noted to be particularly vulnerable. Research has highlighted the important role that systems around separated young people can play in supporting positive outcomes in resettlement, such as education. However, there is a lack of consideration given to the voice of separated young people seeking safety in their education, which appears to render them invisible in educational policy and practice. To address this gap, qualitative, exploratory research was undertaken.

This research aimed to explore the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. It sought to give voice to their individual lived experiences through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology. Semi-structured interviews were completed with five separated young people. Interpretation of the data highlighted four interconnected Group Experiential Themes: importance of developing English proficiency, aspirations for the future, sense of agency and sense of belonging. These themes are explored in relation to existing research and psychological theories. This research also offers unique interpretations, including the importance of an emotionally safe space to develop English proficiency, differences in experiences between forms of post-16 educational provision, and the need for guidance when navigating post-16 pathways that engage with separated young people's high aspirations and desire for independence. Limitations of the research are considered, before highlighting implications for the practice of Educational Psychologists, including their role in promoting the distinct needs of separated young people seeking safety in education.

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**Chapter 1**

**Introduction**

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## 1.1 Overview

This introductory chapter aims to introduce the topic of this thesis. It will outline the background to the present research, including my personal and professional interests in the topic area. The chapter will also provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

## 1.2 Terminology

The terminology used to categorise migrants depends on the definitions used, which are often politically motivated (McBrein, 2005). The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol are key legal documents that define and protect refugees in international law. This research will use their definition of a refugee:

*'someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.'* (UNHCR, 1951, p. 3)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2023) also provide the following definition of seeking asylum –

*'When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another country, they apply for asylum – the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance. An asylum seeker must demonstrate that his or her fear of persecution in his or her home country is well-founded.'*

This research will specifically focus on the educational experiences of separated young people seeking safety. The Home Office (2020, p. 10) uses the term 'unaccompanied asylum-seeking children' and acronym 'UASC', to describe a person who is –

*'under 18 years of age when the claim is submitted, claiming in their own right, separated*

*from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has*

*responsibility to do so.'*

This term is used in legislation, statistics and throughout literature. There have been projects and working groups that have explored young people's feelings about the language used to describe them (Oritz, 2019). This work has highlighted that this terminology and use of acronym can be experienced as dehumanising because it defines a person according to their immigration status (City of Sanctuary, 2021). Alternatives have been suggested, including describing 'refugees' and 'asylum-seekers' as 'young people' first (Ortiz, 2019), and describing their migration journey as seeking 'safety' or 'sanctuary' (City of Sanctuary, 2021). The term 'unaccompanied' has also been critiqued for its implications of a deliberate decision to send a lone child into danger. This does not reflect the fact that many people lose their families in the chaos of fleeing war and other dangers. The word 'separated' has therefore been suggested as a more appropriate alternative (City of Sanctuary, 2021). While acknowledging that there are times when legal terms need to be used in order to be meaningfully understood, this thesis will use '*separated young people seeking safety'* to reflect the terminology used in policy and legislation in the UK.

## 1.3 Global and National Context

The UNHCR report that the global number of people who have been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations is continuing to rise, with estimates suggesting that there were 103 million forcibly displaced people worldwide in June 2022 (UNHCR, 2022). This is a 15% increase of 13.6 million people when compared to the end of 2021 (UNHCR, 2022). The past year has seen a notable escalation of new and existing conflicts. At the time of writing, the invasion of Ukraine has captured global attention and has resulted in the fastest forced displacement crisis since World War II (UNHCR, 2022).

Other countries have also experienced intensifying violence, leading to significant displacement, including Ethiopia, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Myanmar and Afghanistan (UHNCR, 2022). The vast majority of people who have been forcibly displaced stay in their region of displacement, and consequently are hosted by lower income countries (UNHCR, 2022).

Within these statistics, there are thousands of children and young people under the age of 18 who have been forced to travel without the support of an adult, to seek safety in another country. It is reported that there were 5,152 new asylum applications by separated young people seeking safety in the UK in 2022 – a 36% increase on the number prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Home Office, 2022). Estimates suggest that 78% of separated young people who sought safety in the UK in 2021 were aged between 16-18 years of age (Home Office, 2022). This changing demographic profile has implications for systems of support, such as education, and so the role of Educational Psychologists (Hart, 2009).

## 1.4 The Asylum Process

Separated young people who have arrived in the UK to seek safety have to navigate a complicated asylum system. The system includes assessment and interview processes to guide decisions from the Home Office about a young person's asylum status (Home Office, 2020). Separated young people who are 16-18 years old are noted to be '*particularly vulnerable'* in this process as they are likely to be required to undertake an age assessment (Morgan, 2018, p.25). Separated young people may be given 'refugee status' or 'humanitarian protection status' that offers 5 years leave to remain in the UK. Many separated young people are granted temporary residence status that remains until they reach 17.5 years of age. When they reach 17.5 years, young people can again apply for refugee status. An overview of key points in the asylum process is presented in Figure 1.1.

Separated young people who seek safety in the UK are placed in the care of the local authority. As young people in care, they are entitled to a Care Plan that outlines their living arrangements, health information, their Personal Education Plan (PEP), their pathway plan for leaving care if appropriate and the dates for their Children in Care reviews. Young people who are below 16 years of age are placed in Foster Care, and those aged 16-18 years are placed in 'supported accommodation'. The vast majority of separated young people seeking safety are placed in private sector shared housing, with or without support (Wade et al., 2012). An overview of these processes is presented alongside key points of the asylum process in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1**

*An overview of the asylum process, guided by UK Visas and Immigration (2020), Refugee Council (2019) and Lincolnshire's Children's Services (2022).*
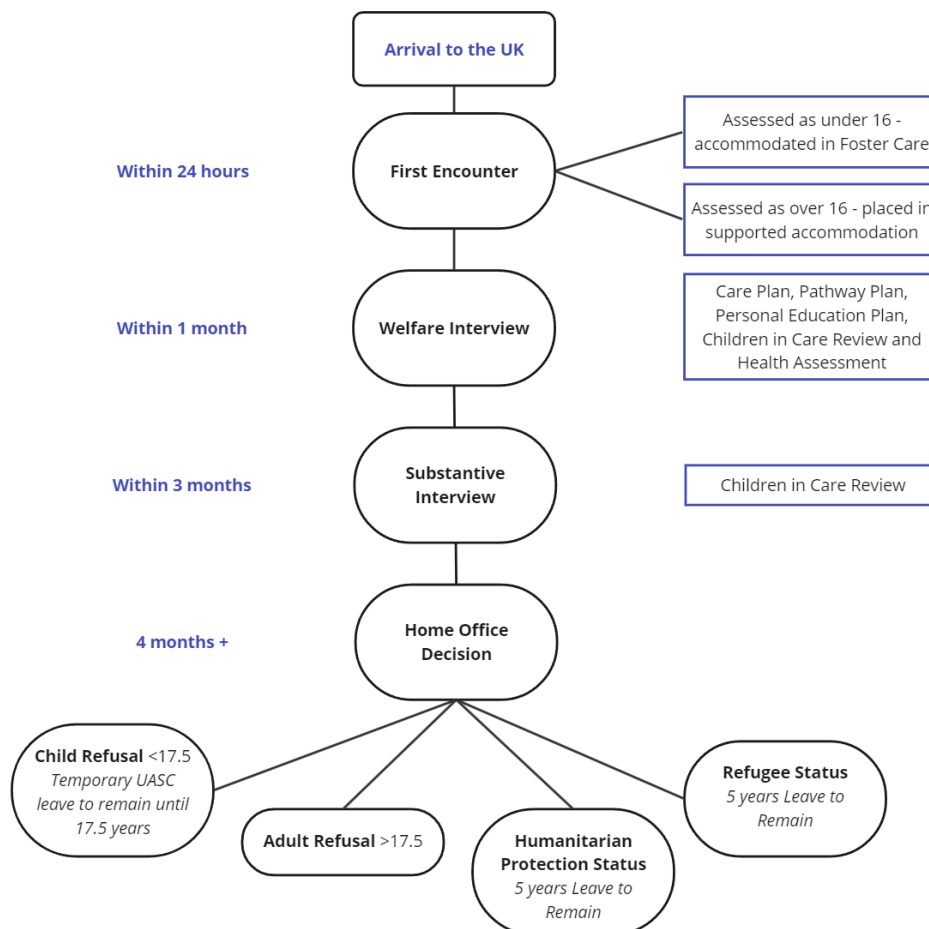
## 1.5 Access to Education

The right to education for all children and young people, regardless of immigration status, is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Separated young people, who are in the care of the local authority, are also entitled to additional educational support. This includes high-quality, full-time educational provision within 20 school days following their entry into local authority care (DfE, 2018). Statutory guidance also details the additional educational support that separated young people seeking safety are entitled to across the UK. This includes being prioritised in school admission arrangements, support from a Personal Education Plan (PEP) in England and Wales (DfE, 2018), funded support by the Minority Ethnic Achievement Service Teams in Wales (AWCPPRG, 2015) and funded individualised support from the Scottish Guardianship Service in Scotland (ALISS, 2023). While these arrangements should promote access to quality education for separated young people seeking safety, research has highlighted several barriers to accessing education (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018). This will be explored further in Chapter 2.

Key authors within the field of refugee education (e.g., Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Hek, 2005; McIntyre & Abrams, 2020) have noted the absence of reference to people seeking safety in educational policy and practice. Policy to support this group is situated within legislation on immigration and welfare policies of housing and benefits (McIntyre et al., 2020), or within policies about children in care (DfE, 2018). Moreover, broader policy changes in the UK, such as a focus on controlling migration, measures of educational performance and centralised funding, have led to '*greater vulnerability and invisibility*' of young people seeking safety in education (McIntyre & Hall, 2020, p.583). Given this 'invisibility', the growing research that focuses on the experiences of education for young people seeking safety is deemed to be particularly valuable (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Hek, 2005).

## 1.6 Personal and Professional Interest

I have a personal and professional interest in understanding the experiences that affect separated young people seeking safety in the UK. I hold dual citizenship of Britain and have experience of voluntary migration. My family's experiences of migration and forced displacement have likely shaped my own identity and belief systems. I have strong core beliefs about the ethical obligation to support all people seeking safety, based on our common humanity. I believe that society can be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable members and consider that there is a significant amount of work to be done to support people seeking safety in the UK. I am also motivated to carry out research that is relevant to Educational Psychology practice, and my future practice as an Educational Psychologist. The methodology employed by this research aims to give voice to the experiences of smaller, growing populations that are not routinely considered in practice. I hope that this can lead to learning points in respect of how we can support separated young people seeking safety in education.

## 1.7 Overview of thesis

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, *Chapter 2* aims to establish what is already known about the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. The chapter will begin with a brief outline of the theoretical perspectives in this area, before considering research that outlines the needs of separated young people seeking safety, the role of education, and the gap for educational psychology. This is followed by a systematic qualitative synthesis of literature, guided by inclusion and exclusion criteria. The chapter will conclude with consideration of the rationale for the present study and the research question.

*Chapter 3* presents the methodology and methods used to answer the research question. This will include discussion of the research paradigm and ontological and epistemological position this research aligns with, to outline why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

(IPA) was chosen for this research. The research aims to explore the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety. To do this, semi-structured interviews were utilised with young people who met selective inclusion criteria. Interview transcripts were then analysed using IPA to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. Considerations relating to the context of the research, including validity, reflexivity and ethics will also be outlined.

*Chapter 4* provides detailed interpretation of the Group Experiential Themes that were interpreted from the analysis of interview data, followed by close consideration of each theme, presented with quotes as they were shared by participants and my interpretation of their meaning and significance.

*Chapter* 5 focuses on making meaning of the interpretation of participants' experiences of post-16 education. The themes identified within the findings section are discussed in relation to relevant psychological theory and recent research, to answer the research question. Limitations of the design are considered, before highlighting implications and unique contributions for practice and future research. The chapter ends with a conclusion to this thesis.

<center>**Chapter 2**</center>

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

**2.1 Overview**

This chapter aims to establish what is already known about the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. The chapter will begin by outlining relevant theoretical perspectives in this area, before considering research that explores the needs of separated young people seeking safety, the role of education, and the gap for educational psychology. This is followed by a systematic qualitative synthesis of the literature that considers the views and experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety, guided by inclusion and exclusion criteria. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of the rationale for the present study and the research question.

**2.2 Theoretical perspectives**

This section aims to outline key theoretical perspectives that underpin research and literature on the educational experiences of separated young people seeking safety, including narratives of mental health, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) and Kohli's (2011) concepts of safety, belonging and success within resettlement. When considered together, these perspectives provide a conceptual framework through which to explore young people seeking safety's experiences of education.

**2.2.1 A mental health perspective**

Much of the research in this area explores the experiences of people seeking safety in terms of trauma, narratives of adversity and their impact on mental health (see Wood et al. (2020) for a summary). In the context of education, it is important to consider the impact of trauma and adversity on separated young people's wellbeing and capacity for learning. However, there is a danger in adopting a single perspective, such as that of trauma and mental

health, when considering the needs of young people seeking safety (Devenney, 2017; Mohamud, 2021; Ott & O'Higgins, 2019). Considering or categorising young people as 'traumatised' can fail to acknowledge the significance of their post-migration experiences (Rutter, 2006; Shah, 2018). It has therefore been suggested that professionals should move away from a focus on past experiences to allow for due consideration to be given to young people's experiences of resettlement (Kohli & Mather, 2003). Moreover, a focus on trauma and mental health often locates the needs of young people at an individual level, which may miss the important role that systems around young people can play in supporting positive outcomes, such as education (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018; Sobitan, 2022). In consideration of this, separated young people's post-migration experiences of education will be the focus of this literature review.

## 2.2.2 An ecological perspective

It is typical for most young people to have experienced gradual changes across some aspects of their lives; the environmental changes and transitions that separated young people experience are likely to have occurred quickly, affecting almost all aspects of their lives (Hamilton & Moore, 2003). This highlights the importance of ecological perspectives that consider the context and interaction between young people and their changing environmental circumstances when recognising the needs of separated young people seeking safety (Hart, 2009). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) has been applied to highlight the numerous systems and contexts that influence the wellbeing and integration of people seeking safety upon resettlement (McDiarmid et al., 2022; Pastoor, 2015; Thommessen & Todd, 2018). This theoretical perspective encourages consideration of the dynamic and reciprocal nature of young people's interactions with their environment, as represented in Figure 2.1. The model shows the developing individual nested at the centre of several environmental systems, namely

the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, that are separated

according to the immediacy with which they impact on the young person.

**Figure 2.1**

*A visual depiction of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Adapted from*

*Swanson et al. (2003).*
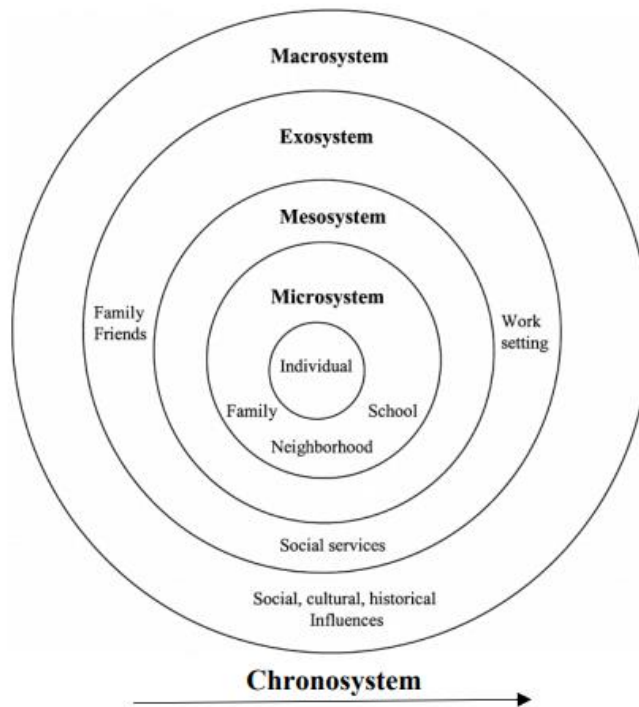


The *microsystem* refers to the young person's immediate setting and represents those

with whom young people have close contact and relationships with (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

For separated young people who have arrived in a new country on their own, their immediate

context and relationships will have been significantly disrupted as they have left behind family,

friends, or their home environment. Their microsystem following migration is likely to reflect

the new environment and people that they encounter daily, such as those within education. This

suggests that for people seeking safety, their educational context may be particularly important

(Thommessen & Todd, 2018). The *mesosystem* refers to the connections between the young

person's immediate settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This may include how the policies or

ethos of an educational setting shape a teacher's role and decisions when working with

separated young people (McDiarmid et al., 2022). The *exosystem* refers to contexts that affect the young person indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This may include government policies and laws that regulate the responsibilities of educational professionals (McDiarmid et al., 2022). The *macrosystem* refers to the broader systems within society, such as culture, belief systems and political decisions, that influence young people's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Separated young people are likely to experience new norms as they adapt to their new environment. The *chronosystem* refers to the passage of time and life transitions that might affect young people (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This is particularly relevant for separated young people seeking safety who are likely to have been affected by external factors, such as war or political issues, that led to the major life transition of having to leave their home. The chronosystem also refers to changes over time post-migration, such as transitioning to adulthood.

### 2.2.3 Safety, belonging and success in resettlement

It is also important to consider young people's experiences of resettlement. Kohli (2011) provides a theoretical framework that acknowledges the number of transitions young people may experience in their quest for '*ordinariness*' in resettlement (p. 312). This perspective highlights how separated young people's journey continues when they have reached a resettlement destination, where they '*search for safety, the growth of belonging and the will to succeed within new environments*' (Kohli, 2011, p. 313). Kohli (2011) offers a conceptual map that highlights these three dimensions, safety, belonging and success, as the foundation of stability in resettlement for young people (see Figure 2.2). This theoretical perspective has been applied to help us understand the role of education in facilitating young refugee's journeys towards resettlement (McIntyre & Abrams, 2020; McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021).

**Figure 2.2**

*A conceptual map of Kohli's (2011) processes in resettlement following forced migration.*
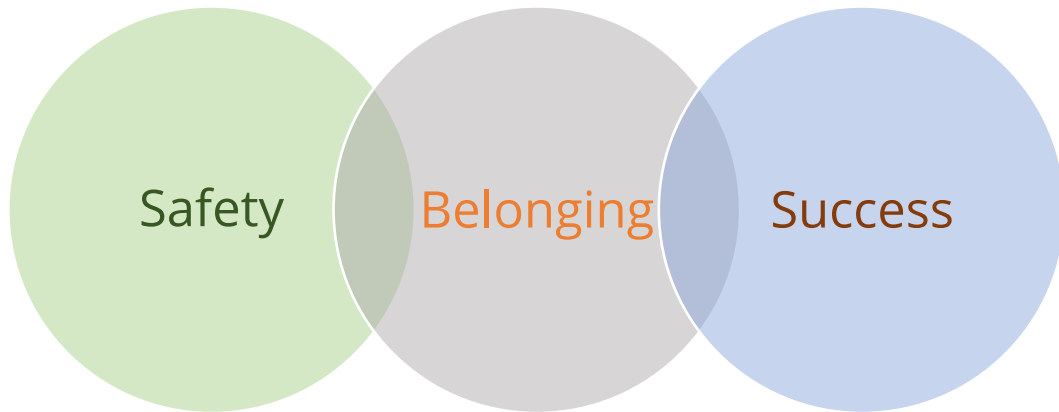


The search for *safety* can be conceptualised on several levels, including young people's physical, emotional, and psychological safety (McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). Kohli (2011) suggests that reaching safety takes time and is a process that requires effort from young people and those around them. Education can support a sense of safety for young people, by offering consistency, opportunities to build trust, and a place to learn and develop high aspirations (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021). Kohli (2011) suggests that once young people feel safe and make sense of their new context, they can begin to feel a sense of belonging. Developing *belonging* is an important process for separated young people who have likely moved away from family, friends, and the physical space of home (Kohli, 2011). Kohli (2011) suggests that the need to belong to people and place becomes a conscious goal for separated young people, made through connections with others. Education can develop young people's sense of belonging, by creating opportunities to develop relationships with the self, with peers and with a new place (McIntyre & Abrams, 2021). This theory suggests that this process can support separated young people to experience feelings of success in their new environment. *Success* can be considered in

different ways, from the perspective of the individual, from those in their environment, or in societal expectations of success (Kohli, 2011). Success in education can include academic performance, making choices about one's next steps and feeling valued (McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). Kohli's (2011) theory suggests that when separated young people are offered safety to remain and the time to grow and experience connections with others and their environment, they can achieve success in resettlement.

**2.3 Research Literature**

**2.3.1 What is known about separated young people seeking safety?**

This section aims to outline what is known about separated young people seeking safety, before considering their experiences of education. People seeking safety are a unique population, distinct from other groups who voluntarily leave their home countries to seek better economic possibilities (Hastings, 2012; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). They are likely to have faced adversity pre-migration, during migration and post-migration (Wood et al., 2020). There is a tendency for professionals working with people seeking safety to perceive their pre-migration experiences as the biggest or sole source of trauma, and by seeking asylum, they have reached 'safety' (Hart, 2009). However, research suggests that the experiences of people seeking safety during resettlement in the UK may be more harmful to their mental health than experiences in their home country (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Hart, 2009). This highlights that research that seeks to understand the individual experiences of people seeking safety during resettlement continues to be '*urgent and necessary*' (Thommessen et al., 2017, p. 293).

Separated young people represent a distinct group within the wider community of people seeking safety, described as one of the most vulnerable groups in the UK (Groark et al., 2010; Towers, 2019). Research suggests that separated young people experience higher rates

of social, emotional, and mental health needs, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, than accompanied young people seeking safety and the general population (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2007; Huemer et al., 2009; Hodes et al., 2008; Rutter, 2003; Thommessen et al., 2017). This is likely linked to experiences of separation, loss and trauma that are associated with forced migration journeys without the protection of an adult caregiver (Jensen et al., 2015; Thommessen et al., 2017; Towers, 2019). Moreover, separated young people are less likely to receive specialist interventions and mental health support than accompanied young people seeking safety (Michelson & Sclare, 2009; Sanchez-Cao et al., 2013).

The age of separated young people seeking safety is also considered to add to their vulnerability in resettlement, where young people aged between 16-18 years old are described as '*particularly vulnerable*' (Morgan, 2018, p. 25). This is concerning given that estimates suggest that 78% of separated young people seeking safety in the UK are aged 16-18 years (Home Office, 2022). Hodes et al. (2008) identified that increasing age is associated with increased post-traumatic symptoms for separated young people seeking safety; whereas the impact of age was not seen for accompanied refugee children (Hodes et al., 2008). They suggested that this finding reflects the impact of transitions for separated young people seeking safety. Young people who approach 18 years of age will experience several changes, including housing arrangements and a review of their legal status, that may increase their fear and preoccupation with the adversity experienced pre-migration. Similarly, O'Higgins' (2019) analysis of care and educational pathways for separated young people seeking safety suggests older separated young people had greater social and emotional difficulties and experienced more home and educational placement changes. Rutter (2003) noted some of the distinct difficulties that separated young people in this age group experience, including being placed in temporary housing, difficulties with accessing appropriate schooling, high geographic mobility, financial difficulties, lack of social support, lack of appropriate college courses, and

lack of access to youth work. This suggests that particular attention needs to be paid to the support available to these separated young people seeking safety aged between 16-18 years due to their described vulnerability.

### 2.3.2 Importance of education

Access to education has been shown to play a key role in the resettlement of young people seeking safety, by supporting the development of language, facilitating socialisation, developing a sense of belonging, and overcoming mental health difficulties (Kia-Keeting & Ellis, 2007; Ott & O'Higgins, 2019; Sobitan, 2022; Ward, 2021). Schools are often where young people spend most of their time (Thommessen & Todd, 2018), and are described as the first place to provide emotional containment and consistency for young people seeking safety (German & Ehntholt, 2007). Education, therefore, has a significant role to play in meeting the post-migration needs of separated young people who seek safety in the UK.

### 2.3.3 Access to education

As outlined in Chapter 1, the local authority is responsible for separated young people's access to education and the monitoring of their progress (DfE, 2018). Gladwell and Chetwynd (2018) examined young people seeking safety's access to education across primary, secondary, and further education levels, by drawing on local authority data, discussion with young people and their families, and interviews with professionals. They reported that no regions in the UK had met the 20 school-day target for accessing education for all the separated young people in their care. They identified that the most significant delays occurred for 'older' separated young people at the secondary and further education levels, where up to a quarter of young people had to wait over three months for a school or college place (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018). The challenges with accessing education were linked to a lack of school places for young people that arrived during the academic year, delays associated with finding appropriate housing

arrangements for young people, participation in the National Transfer Scheme[1], and a reluctance from some educational settings to take on young people whose academic results may negatively affect the setting's overall results. They also identified several barriers that limited separated young people's ability to continue and succeed in education, such as being placed in a setting that is not suited to their needs, limited access to full-time educational provision, a lack of language support and limited understanding from staff about the wellbeing needs of young people (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018).  This research highlights the challenges many separated young people seeking safety face when approaching an unfamiliar education system in the UK.

Ott and O'Higgins (2019) aimed to explore what educational provision is available to separated young people in the UK through a mapping exercise. This included interviews with a range of professionals, document analysis and a workshop with key stakeholders at the Department for Education. Their findings identified three non-exclusive types of educational provision:

1) Mainstream educational provision – this includes schools that follow the national curriculum, such as state schools, community schools and academies.

2) English language provision – this includes English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision by third sector charities and further educational colleges, or English as an Additional Language (EAL) provision in secondary schools.

3) Bespoke provision – non-statutory educational provision, developed by charities, schools and/or colleges for newly arrived children and young people, often as an interim while young people await a mainstream school place.

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[1] The National Transfer Scheme places separated children seeking safety in the UK in the care of local authorities around the country to ensure a '*fairer, more equitable distribution of children across local authorities*' (Home Office and DfE, 2022, p.3).

They concluded that it remains unclear what educational support is being provided to this vulnerable group, and what the outcomes of provision are. This highlights the need for further research, to develop the knowledge and understanding of the experiences of different educational placements and pathways available to separated young people seeking safety in the UK.

Doyle and O'Toole (2013) explored people seeking safety's experiences of accessing post-16 learning, through the use of a survey and interviews with post-16 learning providers and young people seeking safety. They noted the importance of post-16 education in providing young people with opportunities to learn English, develop vocational skills, take steps towards higher education, and integrate into the community. Their research highlighted some of the barriers that young people face when trying to access post-16 learning, and the difficulties educational settings face when trying to meet the needs of this group. This included a lack of formal information, advice and guidance about how young people can access education, misconceptions around eligibility to study and fees, lack of access to appropriate support (e.g., funding, stationary, computer facilities) and a lack of awareness from providers about the needs of this group of young people. They concluded that there was a need for post-16 settings to develop an understanding of the needs of young people seeking safety so that learning providers can grant access and support learners appropriately. This highlights the need for further research to explore the needs and experiences of young people seeking safety in post-16 education.

### 2.3.4 The voice of separated young people

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) describes how children and young people should have the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters that concern or affect them. Young people's own theories about their experiences of education, and how other young people might manage similar situations, offer

a valuable source of information for researchers and practitioners (Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). Despite this, research undertaken by Educational Psychologist's has highlighted the lack of consideration given to the voice of young people seeking safety in their education (Hastings, 2012; Hulusi & Oland, 2010; Mohamud, 2021). Moreover, the majority of educational research into the experiences of young people seeking safety in the UK is noted to be dominated by practitioner discourses, rather than the voices of young people themselves (Hek, 2005; Rutter, 2006; Shah, 2018). Given the described *'invisibility'* of young people seeking safety in education (McIntyre & Hall, 2020, p.583), research that focuses on their experiences is considered to be particularly valuable (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Hastings, 2012; Hek, 2005; Hulusi & Oland, 2010; Mohamud, 2021; Shah, 2018).

## 2.4 A role for educational psychology

Educational Psychologists seek to apply psychological theory and evidence to support the needs of all children and young people in education, including separated young people seeking safety (Hart, 2009). Despite the described difficulties in access to education and personal difficulties that may hinder learning, young people seeking safety are reported to be very motivated, viewing educational success as a priority (Morrice et al., 2020; O'Higgins, 2019). It is therefore imperative that professionals, such as Educational Psychologists, work to support this motivation, by advocating for young people, removing barriers to learning and contributing to the planning of appropriate support (O'Higgins, 2019). Educational Psychologists are well placed to advocate for the needs of children and young people within education and help to shape the provision offered in educational settings (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Ingram, 2013). However, as noted, research from Educational Psychologists has highlighted the lack of consideration given to the voice of young people seeking safety in education (Hastings, 2012; Hulusi & Oland, 2010; Mohamud, 2021). This highlights the

continued need for further research that elicits the views of separated young people about their education in the UK.

**2.5 Summary**

The outlined literature has emphasised the continued contemporary relevance of research that focuses on separated young people seeking safety in the UK. In particular, the literature has highlighted the role of education in supporting separated young people's experiences of resettlement. The literature has also suggested a need to consider the experiences of education from the perspective of separated young people seeking safety themselves. This prompted a focused review, utilising systematic methods, of the available literature in this area.

**2.6 Systematic Qualitative Synthesis**

**2.6.1 Purpose**

The purpose of a systematic review is to offer a clear and comprehensive overview of the existing literature in a research area, synthesise the findings, and identify gaps in current understanding (Peričić & Tanveer, 2019). Systematic reviews also appraise the existing research, highlighting any methodological concerns to be addressed in future work in the topic area (Peričić & Tanveer, 2019). The aim of this systematic synthesis is to review the literature that explores the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. The review aims to answer the following question: *what is known about the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK?*

**2.6.2 Scoping**

A scoping search of the literature was performed to explore the research in this area and inform the systematic search strategy. Previous literature reviews (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016) have investigated the efficacy of school-based interventions for

young people with refugee or asylum-seeking status, highlighting 'what works' when supporting this group. Other literature reviews (Hek, 2005; McBrien, 2005) have also explored the broad experiences and needs of young people with refugee or asylum-seeking status in their resettlement. Most recently, Peterson et al. (2016) explored the educational experiences of young people with refugee or asylum-seeking status in an international context. However, to date, there are no existing literature reviews that explore the experiences of *separated* young people in relation to their education in the UK. Therefore, the present review aims to add to this existing work, by utilising a systematic search strategy to explore the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.

The scoping search also highlighted a lack of published, peer reviewed research exploring the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. This prompted the review to consider grey literature in the search strategy. In this context, grey literature refers to research that is published outside of research journals (e.g., published reports available online) and unpublished research (e.g., theses, dissertations). Scoping also supported consideration of the broad range of terms used within research, highlighting the need to consider the breadth of the search terms to reflect the range of language used in research.

**2.6.3 Identification of studies**

A systematic review of the literature was undertaken between August 2022 and April 2023, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021). Four online electronic databases; Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO and Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC) were systematically searched. The databases were chosen to cover a wide range of multidisciplinary scholarly databases alongside a focus on Education and Psychology. A search of grey literature was also undertaken using ProQuest, E-Theses Online Service (EThOs) and Google Scholar.

Studies were identified through combinations of the following search terms:

refugee OR asylum seek* OR forced migrant

AND experience OR perspective OR view OR voice

AND education* OR school* OR college

AND child* OR young person OR pupil OR student

These broad search terms were chosen due to variations in wording and terminology used to describe separated young people seeking safety. The search aimed to identify studies that explore the experience of young people seeking safety more broadly, where studies pertaining to separated young people were extracted from the systematic search. 877 articles were identified from scholarly database searches and 7 studies were located from grey literature searches. 32 duplicates were removed using EndNote reference management software.

**2.6.4 Screening of studies**

The identified studies were screened to establish their relevance to the review question. Pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to minimise the possibility of selection bias. The inclusion and exclusion criteria and their rationale are presented in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1**

*Pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria for review.*

| | Inclusion Criteria | Exclusion Criteria | Rationale |
|---|---|---|---|
| Publication Type | | | |
| A | The study is reported in English | The study is reported in a language other than English | • The researcher's primary language is English.<br>• The researcher has limited access to translation services. |
| Participants | | | |
| B | Participants entered the UK as 'unaccompanied | Participants were born in the UK, have voluntarily migrated to the UK or sought | • Separated young people seeking safety are a unique population who are distinct from young people who have not migrated, |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | asylum-seeking children' | safety in the UK with an adult. | who have migrated voluntarily, or who have been accompanied while seeking safety. |
| C | Participants had attended an educational setting in the UK | Participants had only attended an educational setting in another country | • The focus on UK educational settings aimed to gain a better understanding of experiences in this specific cultural context and educational system. |

**Study Design**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| D | Included qualitative data | Included quantitative data only | • Review question focuses on experiences and so is answerable through rich, qualitative approaches. |
| E | Included data from the perspective of separated young people seeking safety in the UK | Included data from adults supporting young people only (such as teachers, parents and social workers) | • This review focuses on the experiences of separated young people seeking safety themselves. The views of adults supporting young people are likely to reflect what they perceive as relevant and important, limiting a true reflection of young people's experience. |
| F | Included data about post-migration experiences of education in the UK | Does not include data about experiences of post-migration education in the UK | • This review focuses on the post-migration experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety, not pre-migration experiences or re-settlement experiences more broadly. |
| G | Included data about primary, secondary or further education setting experiences | Included data about higher educational experiences only (e.g., university) | • Separated young people under the age of 18 have a right to education in the UK.<br>• Higher educational settings are distinct from primary, secondary or further education settings.<br>• Educational Psychologists are more likely to support pupils in primary, secondary and further education settings than higher education settings. |

Titles and abstracts were screened, and studies that either met one of the exclusion criteria or did not meet one of the inclusion criteria (as shown in Table 2.1) were excluded. At this point, 812 studies were excluded, leaving 40 studies for full text screening against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. 30 studies were subsequently excluded, as detailed in

Appendix 1. Of the excluded studies: 16 studies did not include participants who entered the UK as 'unaccompanied asylum-seeking children' (criteria b); 4 studies did not include participants who had attended an educational setting in the UK (criteria c); 5 studies did not include data about post-migration experiences of education in the UK (criteria f) and 10 studies included data about higher educational experiences only (criteria g). 5 studies did not meet more than 1 of the criteria. The 10 remaining studies which met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected for analysis. See Figure 2.3 for an overview of the identification, screening, and selection process.

**2.6.5 Included studies**

A total of ten studies were included in the review. Details of their aims, participants, data collection and analysis methods and main findings are presented in Table 2.2. The included studies were dated from 2010 to 2021. Three studies were published in peer reviewed journals (Chase, 2013; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Groark et al., 2010), six studies were doctoral theses (Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Tadesse, 2015), and one study was a commissioned report (Peterson et al., 2017).

**Figure 2.3**

*An overview of the identification, screening, and selection process in the systematic search strategy.*
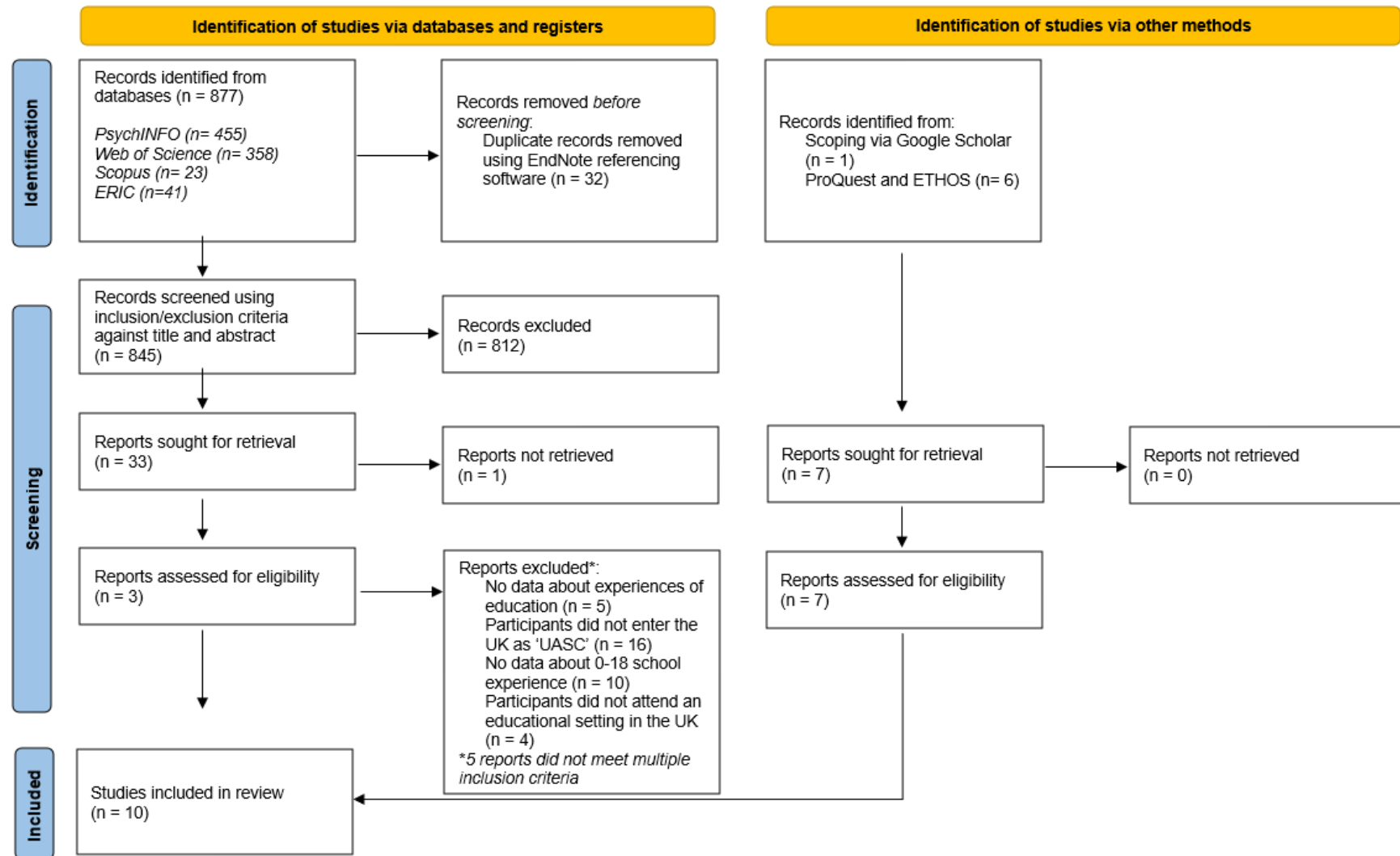
**Table 2.2**

*Key characteristics of the reviewed studies*

| Authors, year | Aim and focus of study | Participants | Data collection method | Data analysis method | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Chase (2013)** | Study of the factors affecting the emotional wellbeing of children and young people seeking asylum on their own in the UK and their implications for policy and practice | 54 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 11-23 years, arrived from 18 different countries | Semi-structured interviews | Inductive Thematic Analysis | • Trauma and its destabilising impact on self<br>• Lack of status, loss of identity<br>• Order, routine and security<br>• Re-emergence of insecurity |
| **Doggett (2012)** | Study of the resilience and coping of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People arriving in a rural local authority. | 3 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 16-19 years, arrived from Afghanistan and Iran | Talking Stones interview technique and self-report questionnaires<br>*data from questionnaires are not included in this synthesis.* | Combined thematic and structural narrative analysis | • Coping strategies: suppression of reflection, seeking personal agency, cultural distancing, appreciating the positive, externalising locus of control<br>• Contextual support/barriers: relationships, school |

| Authors, year | Aim and focus of study | Participants | Data collection method | Data analysis method | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Farmbrough (2014)** | Study of the factors that contribute to the emotional wellbeing, educational success and social connectedness of those arriving in one local authority as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. | 6 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 18-20 years, arrived from Afghanistan and an unnamed African country *data from adults is not included in this synthesis* | Semi-structured interviews with young people and focus groups with key adults *data from focus groups are not included in this synthesis.* | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis | • Meeting basic needs as a protective mechanism<br>• Protective mechanisms through relationships<br>• Primary importance of education<br>• Vulnerabilities and risk factors<br>• Internalised protective mechanisms<br>• Life trajectory |
| **Farrugia (2020)** | Exploring the educational experiences of unaccompanied children and young people | 5 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 16 – 18 years, arrived from Albania, Sudan, Eritrea and Afghanistan. | Camera walking tours and collages | Thematic Analysis | • Teacher providing emotional containment<br>• Environmental factors and promote learning<br>• Supporting holistic development |
| **Fuller and Hayes (2020)** | Exploring the experiences of education for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors in the UK | 6 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 18-19 years, arrived from Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iran | Semi-structured interviews | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis | • Education facilitating socialising<br>• Education and English proficiency leading to a better future in the UK<br>• The impact of transitions<br>• The impact of external stressors<br>• Wanting additional resources to learn at their own pace |

| Authors, year | Aim and focus of study | Participants | Data collection method | Data analysis method | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Groark et al. (2010)** | Exploring the experiences and emotional needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking adolescents in the UK | 6 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 16-18 years, arrived from countries in Africa and Asia | Semi-structured interviews and self-report questionnaires *data from questionnaires are not included in this synthesis.* | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis | • Loss<br>• Negotiating a new way of life<br>• Experience of distress<br>• Process of adjustment |
| **Johnson (2021)** | Investigating the practices and understandings of integration of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children | 7 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 17-20 years, arrived from different countries. *data from professionals are not included in this synthesis* | Fieldwork approach including reflexive participant observations, semi-structured interviews, ethnographic tools and relational practices. *only data from interviews is included in this synthesis.* | Mapping and coding using NVivo | • At Home in the Field<br>• Asylum and Immigration<br>• Structures of care and control<br>• Agency and Integration |
| **Morgan (2018)** | Exploring the educational needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK in one local authority | 6 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 13-18 years. *professional data are not included in this synthesis* | Semi-structured interviews and Talking Stones interview technique with young people, group supervision with professionals. *Group supervision data with professionals are not included in this synthesis* | Thematic Analysis | • Adverse experiences and the importance of relationships and support.<br>• Emotional states and wellbeing.<br>• Language and cultural adjustment.<br>• Educational experiences<br>• Suppression and moving forward.<br>• Uncertainty of the future linked to asylum status. |

| Authors, year | Aim and focus of study | Participants | Data collection method | Data analysis method | Main Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Peterson et al. (2017)** | Exploring the perceptions of practices and initiatives employed by one school to support the inclusion of newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children. | 10 separated young people seeking safety, attending one school in years 9-11. *professional data are not included in this synthesis* | Case study of one school, including exploration of school policy documentation and data, semi-structured interviews with teaching staff, focus groups with young people *Data from review of policy and interviews with professionals are not included in this synthesis* | Thematic Analysis | • Supporting inclusion, adaptations(s) and acculturation<br>• Hostile vs. Hospitable and holistic responses<br>• Whole-school approaches<br>• Educational pathways |
| **Tadesse (2015)** | Exploring the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people from the Horn of Africa in the UK, focusing on adolescence and identity. | 15 separated young people seeking safety, aged between 15-17 years, arrived from Ethiopia and Eritrea | Semi-structured interviews, analysis of research and documents. *Data from analysis of documents are not included in this synthesis* | Analysis Framework Approach | • Resilience as an outcome of relationships with settings<br>• Unique background and history as a protective factor<br>• Moving away from feelings of rejection<br>• Separate from majority and minority culture |

### 2.6.6 Critical Appraisal

The studies were assessed using the Weight of Evidence framework (Gough, 2007) for research quality. This includes a judgement of their methodological quality, the appropriateness of evidence for the review and relevance of focus to the review question (Gough, 2007).

*Methodological Quality (Weight of Evidence A)*

Weight of Evidence A consists of a generic judgement of the methodological quality of a study in relation to quality standards for studies of that type (Gough, 2007). Studies were assessed according to the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018) framework for appraising qualitative research. The framework includes 10 questions that enable evaluation of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of primary studies, which are important to consider when judging qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each answer is assigned a numerical value (i.e., no = 0, can't tell = 0.5, yes = 1), with a maximum achievable score of 10. The overall score determines the overall methodological quality of the study (i.e., >8 is high, 6–8 is medium, and ≤5 is low).

The CASP framework (2018) indicated variability in the methodological quality across the ten eligible studies. All studies reported their aims clearly, used an appropriate qualitative design, collected data appropriately and clearly reported their findings. The majority of studies (Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Groark et al., 2010; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017; Tadesse, 2015) used appropriate recruitment strategies. Three studies (Chase, 2013; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2021) did not provide clear details about the recruitment process, limiting conclusions about their transferability. The majority of studies (Chase, 2013; Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Groark et al., 2010; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Tadesse, 2015) considered the relationship between the researcher and participants, illustrating reflexivity. However, two studies (Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Peterson et

al., 2017) did not report a critical examination of the researcher's role and potential influence on participants, study design and collection and analysis of data. This is problematic due to the subjective nature of qualitative analysis (Legg & Tickle, 2019), limiting their confirmability. The majority of studies (Chase, 2013; Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Groark et al., 2010;  Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017) considered ethical issues, including seeking ethical approval and providing details of how ethical standards were maintained; but two studies (Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Tadesse, 2015) did not provide sufficient evidence of the consideration of ethical issues or ethical approval. The majority of studies (Chase, 2013; Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Groark et al., 2010; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017) presented evidence of rigorous analysis of data; however, one study (Tadesse, 2015) did not clearly illustrate how themes were derived from the data, limiting its dependability. All studies were judged to be 'valuable' by contributing to the research-based literature, identifying areas where further research is necessary and discussing the implications of their findings. An overview of the assessment of methodological quality is presented in Appendix 2.

*Appropriateness of evidence (Weight of Evidence B)*

Weight of Evidence B consists of a review-specific judgement of the appropriateness of the type of evidence to answer the review question (Gough, 2007). The design of three studies (Chase, 2013; Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020) were judged to be highly appropriate to the review question. This included the use of qualitative data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and visual participatory methods, to explore the experiences of separated young people, and use of suitable analysis techniques, such as Thematic Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The design of the remaining studies (Farmbrough, 2014; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017; Tadesse, 2015) were judged to be of medium appropriateness to the review question, as their design

generated data that was not directly relevant to the review question, including data from other respondent groups, quantitative data from self-report questionnaires, or data from a review of documents. Details of the assessment of the appropriateness of the study design are presented in Appendix 3.

*Relevance of focus (Weight of Evidence C)*

Weight of Evidence C consists of a review-specific judgement of the relevance of the focus of the study to answer the review question (Gough, 2007). The studies were evaluated against the extent to which the focus of the study was on the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK themselves. Two studies (Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020) were judged to have a high relevance of focus; they focused entirely on the experience of education from the viewpoint of separated young people. Two studies (Morgan, 2018, Peterson et al., 2017) were judged to be of medium relevance due to a focus on educational experiences, needs, and aspirations for separated young people and other respondent groups. Six studies were judged to have a low relevance of focus to the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety, reflecting the dearth of literature in this area. The six studies were judged to have a low relevance due to a broad focus on the overall resettlement experiences of separated young people (Chase, 2013; Groark et al., 2010), a narrow focus on specific wellbeing and integration outcomes (Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Johnson, 2021) or theoretical frameworks (Tadesse, 2015). Within these different areas of focus, all studies did report primary findings about the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety, and so were included in the synthesis. This highlights the importance of education for this group of young people. Further details of the assessment of the relevance of the study focus are presented in Appendix 4.

*Overall Assessment (Weight of Evidence D)*

These three sets of judgements were combined to form an overall assessment (Weight of Evidence D) of the extent that the study contributes evidence to answering the review question. Two studies (Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020) were judged to be of high quality and the remaining eight studies (Chase, 2013; Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Groark et al., 2010; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017; Tadesse, 2015) were judged to be of medium quality. As all 10 eligible studies were determined to be of medium or high quality, it was concluded that a sensitivity analysis would not add value to the review. The overall quality appraisal judgements for included studies are presented in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3**

*Summary of Weight of Evidence Judgements*

| Authors | WoE A | WoE B | WoE C | WoE D |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chase (2013) | High | High | Low | Medium |
| Doggett (2012) | High | Medium | Low | Medium |
| Farmbrough (2014) | High | Medium | Low | Medium |
| Farrugia (2020) | High | High | High | High |
| Fuller and Hayes (2020) | Medium | High | High | High |
| Groark et al. (2010) | High | Medium | Low | Medium |
| Johnson (2021) | High | Medium | Low | Medium |
| Morgan (2018) | High | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Peterson et al. (2017) | High | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| Tadesse (2015) | High | Medium | Low | Medium |

**2.6.7 Data Synthesis**

There are a range of different approaches available to synthesise qualitative data. It is important to consider the review question, epistemology and type of data when selecting an

appropriate approach (Booth et al., 2018). The present review question draws on the interpretivist paradigm, by seeking to understand separated young people's subjective experiences of education, and so is answerable through a qualitative synthesis. As outlined in 2.6.2, due to the sparsity and diversity of the literature in this area, there is variation in the richness of data in the studies that are included in this review. I therefore considered that the review would be suited to a combination of integrating and interpreting the findings within each study. A thematic synthesis method was therefore chosen to analyse the included studies, as it offers both integrative and interpretative elements through the development of descriptive and analytical themes (Cherry et al., 2017). Other methods of qualitative synthesis, such as meta-ethnography, were explored. However, following consideration of the diversity of the type, quality and richness of the qualitative studies included, a thematic synthesis was considered to be most appropriate to answer the review question.

### 2.6.8 Thematic Synthesis

Thomas and Harden's (2008) method of Thematic Synthesis was used to analyse and synthesise the studies. This included three stages: coding, developing descriptive themes, and generating analytical themes.

*Coding*

Thematic synthesis involves the systematic coding of data to translate and synthesise concepts from qualitative studies. The data in the included studies were largely presented in the form of quotations from young people. However, in some studies with a low relevance of focus to the review question, it was difficult to identify key concepts relating to young people's experiences of education. I was also concerned about missing any relevant data when synthesising the experiences of education for young people in studies that included other respondent groups, or data about broader resettlement experiences. I therefore followed

Thomas and Harden's (2008) guidance and put the review question to one side and coded all the text labelled as 'results' or 'findings' in the included studies. Each line of text was coded inductively according to its meaning and context using NVivo software. This led to a bank of 119 unstructured codes from the findings from each study, which are presented in Appendix 5. All text given a code was re-examined to check the consistency of the interpretation and to see whether additional levels of coding were needed.

*Developing descriptive themes*

Codes were grouped according to their similarities and differences and translated into a hierarchical structure. These structures were labelled, forming descriptive themes that closely related to the extracted data. Eight descriptive themes were developed: *unfamiliar pathways, feelings of difference, being part of a community, relationships with others, language acquisition, language as a barrier, aspirations for further education* and *hopes for the future.* Table 2.4 illustrates how each study contributed to the descriptive themes. The descriptive themes are presented alongside their groups of codes in Appendix 5.

*Generating analytic themes*

Relationships between descriptive themes were organised and interpreted to generate analytical themes that aimed to answer the review question. This was a cyclical process that was repeated until the analytical themes interpreted all of the initial descriptive themes. Analytical themes go beyond the meaning of descriptive themes to develop additional concepts and interpretations. This process generated four analytical themes: *lack of security, sense of belonging, role of language,* and *aspirations.* The descriptive and analytical themes are illustrated in a thematic map, presented in Figure 2.4. The analytical themes are presented alongside the descriptive themes and codes in Appendix 5. Quotations from the studies are provided to illustrate these themes in the following section.

**Table 2.4**

*The contribution of reviewed studies to each descriptive theme.*

| Descriptive themes | Studies | | | | | | | | | | Total number of contributing studies |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Chase (2013) | Doggett (2012) | Farmbrough (2014) | Farrugia (2020) | Fuller and Hayes (2020) | Groark et al. (2010) | Johnson (2021) | Morgan (2018) | Peterson et al (2017) | Tadesse (2015) | |
| Unfamiliar pathways | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 10 |
| Feelings of difference | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 10 |
| Being part of a community | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | 7 |
| Relationships with others | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 10 |
| Language as a barrier | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | 6 |
| Language acquisition | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | 7 |
| Aspirations for further education | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 7 |
| Hopes for the future | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 7 |

**Figure 2.4**

*A thematic map showing the links between analytical and descriptive themes in the qualitative synthesis.*



What is known about the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK?

**Lack of Security**

Unfamiliar pathways

Feelings of difference

**Sense of Belonging**

Being part of a community

Relationships with others

**Role of Language**

Acquisition of English

Language as a barrier

**Aspirations**

Aspirations for further education

Hopes for the future
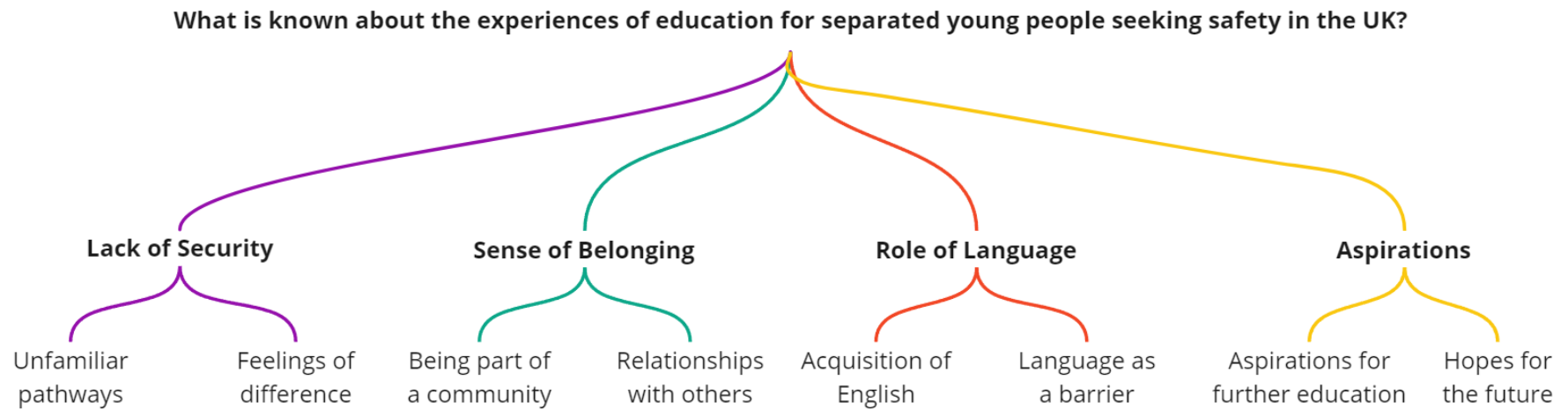
**Theme 1: Lack of security**

Two descriptive themes were generated from the studies linked to young people's experiences of vulnerability within education: *unfamiliar pathways* and *feelings of difference.* These descriptive themes were translated into the analytical theme: *lack of security.* All ten studies contributed to the descriptive themes within this analytical theme, suggesting that a lack of security was a key experience for separated young people sampled in these studies.

*Unfamiliar pathways*

Studies described the difficulties young people experienced when navigating an unfamiliar education system in the UK. For some young people, this included experiencing difficulties when trying to gain a place in an appropriate educational setting (Doggett, 2012; Johnson, 2021). Some young people sought informal educational support from charity services while they awaited a formal educational placement, however, they described that this support was not equal to full-time formal educational provision (Johnson, 2021).

Young people also shared how the education system in the UK differed from their expectations or previous experiences of education (Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Groark et al., 2010; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017; Tadesse, 2015). Some young people had not previously attended any form of educational provision before arriving to the UK, which presented challenges when having to adapt to new routines, expectations, and language within education (Doggett, 2012; Morgan, 2018).

*'different lessons, different language and lots of difference for me. Hard for me'* (Morgan, 2018, p. 103).

Others shared that they would have preferred to be placed in a different educational setting, including hopes that they could attend school rather than college (Fuller & Hayes, 2020;

Tadesse, 2015). Young people's descriptions highlighted the differences in experiences of support across settings in the UK:

*'When I went to college, I realised college was really different to school, like they are not really linked … Like, nobody said to me or talked to me if there's anything I need help with.'*

(Fuller & Hayes, 2020, p. 418)

These initial experiences of unfamiliarity appeared to be challenging for young people, contributing to feelings of uncertainty and a lack of control (Chase, 2013). Many young people also experienced feeling a lack of control when navigating the asylum process (Chase, 2013; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Groark et al., 2010; Morgan, 2018). Young people described the impact of their immigration status on their education. For some, uncertainty about their status was a distraction from their education and affected their motivation to learn (Chase, 2013; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Morgan, 2018).

*'But sometimes when I'm doing education, studying some lessons, I don't know if my asylum case, am I getting sent back to my country? Why I have to learn?'* (Fuller & Hayes, 2020, p. 418)

For others, education was a positive distraction from stress surrounding the asylum process where young people described being able to forget their problems and past when they were in education (Chase, 2012; Morgan, 2018).

*'When I am in class I can forget, I am focusing on lessons and don't have to worry about my past'* (Chase, 2013, p. 864)

*Feelings of difference*

Young people experienced a range of emotions when they started in a new setting, including fear, isolation, and loneliness that appeared to contribute towards feelings of difference to others (Chase, 2013; Doggett, 2012; Groark et al., 2010; Fuller & Hayes, 2020;

Tadesse, 2015). For example, young people described how they felt different to others when they joined a new setting in the middle of the year:

*'You feel outside because everybody knows each other and you just came … But in the college .. you start at the same point, like we all start in September … everybody has not got anybody there, so you can build up your friendship and you can start there'* (Fuller & Hayes, 2020, p. 417)

Some young people also described experiences of bullying and discrimination from peers, including perceptions of racism from peers that appeared to contribute towards feelings of difference to others (Chase, 2013; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Peterson et al., 2017). There appeared to be tension within young people's accounts, where they wanted to be seen as *'normal',* yet they were often reminded of their differences to others (Groark et al., 2010, p.429).

*'Sometimes we get racism, sometimes but not that much. … about your religion … People ask "what is your religion", and we say "Muslim". So sometimes we say "we are atheist"'*
(Peterson et al., 2017, p. 28)

Some young people also described experiencing negative perceptions and doubt from the adults supporting them, including their teachers and foster carers (Doggett, 2012; Farrugia, 2012; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Morgan, 2018). Chase (2013) described that younger children shared experiences of sympathy and kindness, while young people in their mid to late teens encountered hostility and suspicion. This suggests that age may be an important factor that contributes to young people's different experiences of security in the UK.

Overall, *lack of security* was considered a suitable translation for these experiences, which seemed to be an important experience for separated young people identified within previous research.

**Theme two: Sense of belonging**

Two descriptive themes were interpreted from the studies linked to young people experiencing feelings of belonging within education: *being part of a community* and *relationships with others.* These descriptive themes were translated into the analytical theme: *sense of belonging.* All ten studies contributed to the descriptive themes within this analytical theme, suggesting that developing a sense of belonging was an important experience for separated young people sampled in these studies.

*Being part of a community*

Young people described how education supported them to feel like part of a community, which appeared to contribute to a sense of belonging within education (Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Peterson et al., 2017). This included feeling welcome, where young people felt part of something and there was a reciprocal exchange of support (Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Peterson et al., 2017).

*'think this school is so different from others… it is like being in a family'* (Peterson et al., 2017, p. 27)

Young people described how they were able to meet people from different countries in education (Doggett, 2012; Farrugia, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Peterson et al., 2017; Tadesse, 2015). Some young people valued the diversity of their peers within education, which appeared to limit their feelings of difference to others, and so contributed to a sense of belonging and community in education (Farrugia, 2020). Other young people valued being surrounded by peers who were similar to them, in experiences, background or age, to develop their feelings of belonging and identity (Farmbrough, 2014; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2018). It appeared that the community created within education contributed to young people's sense of belonging in different ways.

*Relationships with others*

All studies described how young people's relationships with others were of great importance to them. It appeared that these relationships contributed to a sense of belonging within education. Teachers were described as an important form of support for separated young people. Support from teachers included and went beyond providing academic support (Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017). Young people described how their relationship with their teachers created a containing environment which made them feel accepted, respected, and valued within education (Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Morgan, 2018).

*'the things that make it really good for you is that the teachers are breaking things down.*

*They are treating you with love and care'* (Morgan, 2018, p. 104)

Young people also described support from adults outside of school, including Foster Carers and Social Workers, who provided academic support and personal encouragement (Farmbrough, 2014; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017; Tadesse, 2015).

The studies described the significance of opportunities to meet and spend time with their peers in education, who became their friends, which appeared to contribute to their enjoyment and wellbeing. Peer relationships provided a range of functions, including a source of learning support (Farmbrough, 2014), offering advice (Groark et al., 2010; Morgan, 2018), relieving negative feelings of sadness and loneliness (Doggett, 2012; Morgan, 2018; Tadesse, 2015), and supporting young people's knowledge of the environment and rules in education (Fuller & Hayes, 2020). Young people also described how their relationships with peers developed their cultural understanding in a new country, which supported them to feel like they fit in (Groark et al., 2010; Farmbrough, 2014; Peterson et al., 2017).

*'We talk to friends about [our] cultures and religion… like fasting… we explain.'* (Peterson et al., 2017, p. 24)

The predictability and routine of education for young people also appeared to support the development of trusting relationships within education. Young people described that education kept them busy and offered them a place to be (Chase, 2013; Farrugia, 2020; Farmbrough, 2014). The growing familiarity with education appeared to provide a sense of emotional containment for young people, which supported them to build trusting relationships with the people they encountered, contributing to feelings of safety and belonging (Chase, 2013; Farrugia, 2020).

*'College was like a haven for me, you know? A safe haven where I could go and hide. I'd be in the college morning to evening every day.'* (Chase, 2013, p. 864)

Overall, *sense of belonging* was considered a suitable translation for these experiences, and seemed to be an important experience for separated young people identified within previous research.

## Theme three: Role of language

Two descriptive themes were generated from the studies linked to the importance of language within young people's experiences of education: *language as a barrier* and *acquisition of English.* These descriptive themes were translated into the analytical theme: *role of language.* Eight studies contributed to the descriptive themes within this analytical theme.

### *Language as a barrier*

Young people described how their levels of English upon arrival to the UK presented as significant barriers to their experience of education, including limiting their ability to socialise with others, progress academically, and attain the requisite qualifications needed to access certain courses (Chase, 2013; Doggett, 2012; Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020;

Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017). Some young people described that attending education was a '*waste of time*' without English competence*,* as it was not possible to understand the curriculum or other people (Doggett, 2012, p. 109). Young people appeared to place significant emphasis on the importance of learning English to access education and reach their goals.

*Acquisition of English*

Many young people shared their motivation to learn English and described great personal agency in learning English, including attending English courses, seeking additional learning opportunities outside of education, and meeting other people to practice (Chase, 2013; Doggett, 2012; Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018).

*'I don't want to waste my time, so I try to improve my English'* (Chase, 2013, p. 863) Some young people appeared to value extra learning opportunities or additional resources that would allow them to learn independently at their own pace (Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020). Others described that they felt they were not given sufficient language support within education (Chase, 2013; Fuller & Hayes, 2020), which appeared to contribute to the significant personal efforts young people made to learn English.

There were also differences in experiences of language acquisition across educational settings. Some young people spoke positively about English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL*)* courses at college as they valued being surrounded by other English learners (Farmbrough, 2014; Fuller & Hayes, 2020). Others shared their frustration at being placed in a college setting with other English learners, rather than a school environment where they hoped they would learn appropriate cultural communication through their interactions with UK citizens (Farmbrough, 2014). It appeared that peers were considered to be important in young people's acquisition of English.

*'it was more useful to communicate with people in English than attend an ESOL course'*

(Farmbrough, 2014, p. 237)

Overall, the role of language seemed to be a key factor in young people's experiences of education, identified within previous research.

**Theme four: Aspirations**

Two descriptive themes were generated from the studies linked to young people's aspirations: *aspirations for further education* and *hopes for the future.* These descriptive themes were translated into the analytical theme: *aspirations.* Nine studies contributed to the descriptive themes within this analytical theme, suggesting that it could be an important part of the young people sampled in these studies experiences of education.

*Aspirations for further education*

Throughout studies, young people described their plans for progression within education. This included ambitions to develop their English proficiency, pass college courses, achieve qualifications, and access and graduate from university (Chase, 2013; Farmbrough, 2014; Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2021; Morgan, 2018; Peterson et al., 2017). Young people described how progressing with education was central to their plans for the future, so they could achieve the skills and qualifications needed to access clearly defined careers:

*'Because, from my childhood I'd like to be an engineer and when I started here, I was thinking about this and if I improve my English here I can continue to university and continue my education and touch my future. I was thinking about this'* (Fuller & Hayes, 2020, p. 417).

Other young people appeared to find it difficult to plan beyond the current college course they were taking, however, they remained clear about their desire to be successful, where education was an important mechanism to changing their lives for the better (Farmbrough, 2014). The accounts indicated that young people had considered the meaning

that education could give to their future lives, where working towards a career could lead to a better life (Chase, 2013; Farmbrough, 2014; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2021).

*'...without education you won't get a better job, you won't get a better life, you won't have better lifestyle'* (Farmbrough, 2014, p. 236)

*Hopes for the future*

Young people's aspirations for further education appeared to be closely linked to their broader hopes for the future. This included hopes for a better life, which appeared to mean financial and social success for young people and their families (Chase, 2013; Farmbrough, 2014; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2021). These hopes for the future provided motivation to work hard in education (Johnson, 2021). Young people described accessing and progressing with education in the UK as an opportunity; it allowed them to consider what their lives might look like in the future (Chase, 2013). Some young people compared the opportunity of education in the UK with their previous experiences in their home country, where they could not consider the same possibilities for the future (Doggett, 2012; Groark et al., 2010; Johnson, 2021).

*'You know, when we came here, we all have this one mission in our lives, to study, to find a job, so we can... Basically, we can build our lives. We didn't have, you know, the opportunities, you know, back home, that we have here in this country'* (Johnson, 2021, p. 127).

For some young people, their hopes for the future appeared to be bound up with their views of themselves as people (Groark et al., 2010; Farmbrough, 2014). For example, one young person described how better access to education may have been why his family had sent him to the UK (Farmbrough, 2014). His *'dream'* of going to university, and finding a job, was closely linked to how he viewed himself as a person, considering the risks taken by him and

his family for him to come to the UK (p.232-233). Other studies also highlighted the importance of young people trying to *'better themselves'*, where education was seen as a *'way out'* and *'a way to better their life'*, given the loss and powerlessness young people had experienced (Groark et al., 2010, p. 428).

Some young people also described feelings of hope and optimism, where the challenges ahead were viewed as rewarding (Chase, 2013; Farmbrough, 2014; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2021). For example, one young person described the steps within education to reach their goals, suggesting that they were aware of the challenges ahead. For this young person, it appeared that progressing socially in society was his end goal:

*'Because I feel like I want to be high, I want to be in the top ... I'm trying to be like one of them high people, I'm trying to reach, I'm aiming high and I'm trying to reach that aim.*

(Fuller & Hayes, 2020, p. 417).

Overall, young people's aspirations seemed to be highlighted within previous research as a key factor and motivator within their experiences of education.

### 2.6.9 Reflections

There are limitations to the review process that may have influenced the conclusions drawn. The development of themes was solely the responsibility of one reviewer. This is considered a limitation due to the likely biases that might impact the interpretation and integration of the datasets. It is hoped that the audit trail provided in this chapter and the appendices enhance the transparency of my interpretations for the reader.

There was also variability in the richness of data in the studies included in this review, linked to the sparsity and diversity of the literature in this area. The content of three studies (Chase, 2013; Groark et al., 2010; Fuller & Hayes, 2020) may have been limited to meet publishing requirements, which in turn may have affected my judgement of their quality and

relevance. Moreover, the variability of the included studies also means that the review drew more heavily from studies that presented findings that were more relevant to the review question. The review's focus on the perspectives of young people meant that sections of data from studies with multiple respondent groups (e.g., views of parents and teachers) or other forms of data (e.g., policy review, observations) were not synthesised. This could mean that potentially valuable data may not have been considered in this review.

## 2.7 Summary

The qualitative synthesis aimed to systematically identify, appraise, and synthesise qualitative research that explores the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. The search highlighted a lack of published research in this area, prompting consideration of grey literature in the search strategy. Ten studies were identified and were critically appraised using Gough's (2007) framework. Their results were synthesised using Thematic Synthesis and four analytic themes were generated. The synthesis suggests that lack of security, sense of belonging, role of language, and aspirations are important themes within previous research into separated young people's experiences of education. The synthesis also highlighted differences in the experiences of education associated with the age of the young people, and the type of educational placement they experienced. The synthesis indicates that there is limited existing research that focuses on separated young people's experiences of education, highlighting a gap in the literature.

## 2.8 Rationale for research

The review of literature has highlighted the needs and vulnerability of separated young people in their resettlement in the UK, particularly those aged between 16-18 years. Access to education has been shown to play a key role in the resettlement of separated young people and their aspirations for the future. The review further highlights the difficulties in accessing

appropriate educational support for this age group, and a lack of awareness from post-16 providers about the needs of this group of young people. Therefore, further research that focuses on the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety is deemed to be particularly important.

The review has also highlighted the lack of consideration given to the voice of young people seeking safety in their education and their invisibility in educational policy and practice. There is a dearth of research that explores the educational experiences of separated young people from their own perspective, highlighting another gap in the literature. The present study therefore aims to give voice to the lived experiences of separated young people seeking safety. It is hoped that this will generate increased understanding of their educational needs and aspirations, to enable professionals to learn from their experiences and inform the support offered across educational settings.

## 2.9 Research Question

This literature review has led to the development of the following research question: *what are the lived experiences of separated young people seeking safety in post-16 education in the UK?*

## Chapter 3

## Methodology

### 3.1 Overview

This chapter aims to outline the methodology and methods used to answer the research question introduced in Chapter 2. This will include a discussion of the research paradigm, and ontological and epistemological position this research aligns with, to outline why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen for this research. Considerations relating to the context of the research, including validity, reflexivity and ethics will also be outlined throughout.

### 3.2 Research paradigm

There has been long-standing debate surrounding the paradigmatic positions adopted in educational and psychological research (Bryman, 2008). A paradigm is a worldview that reflects philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge (i.e., epistemology) and the nature of reality (i.e., ontology) (Mertens, 2014). These assumptions have implications for the methodological approach to research, where different epistemologies and ontologies demand distinct methods (Cohen et al., 2017). The positivist paradigm dominated early educational and psychological research, aiming to discover a single objective reality and truth, largely through quantitative methods (Cohen et al., 2017). This position has been argued to position refugee populations as passive subjects of research, where the search for objectivity means their views should not influence or 'bias' research outcomes (Temple & Moran, 2006). The present research rejects this notion, and instead adheres to the interpretivist paradigm, aiming to explore how individual participants give voice and make sense of their experiences through qualitative methodology. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of this view will now be outlined.

### 3.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, considering 'what is there that can be known about?' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). The present research adopts a relativist ontology, building on the assumption that a single phenomenon can have multiple interpretations according to the individual and their context, all of which are valid (Coolican, 2019; Willig, 2013). This view stands in contrast to the realist view, which seeks to measure a single, static truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2014). Relativism acknowledges the influence that different perspectives can have on how experiences are retold (Coolican, 2019), including how interpretations of realities can conflict with one another and can change over time (Mertens, 2014). I therefore approached this research aiming to gain a deeper understanding of young people's multiple and individual interpretations of their experiences of education in the UK.

It is difficult to separate ontology from epistemology. Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, considering the relationship between the 'knower' and 'what can be known' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Building on a relativist ontology, the present research adopts a subjectivist epistemology. Subjectivism acknowledges the importance of the interaction between the researcher and the research(ed), where knowledge is embedded within context and so is shaped by values and experiences, rather than discovered (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). In this way, meaning is created through the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2014). This contrasts with positivism's focus on objectivity, where researchers seek to prevent any influence of personal biases on the research outcomes (Mertens, 2014). In the present research, young people were viewed as having interpreted their own subjective meaning about their individual experiences of education in the UK. I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of young people's individual experiences through my interaction with them, to which I bring my own interpretation as the researcher. It is important to acknowledge that my

interpretation reflects my own history, values, and culture (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). This research is a product of my own values and cannot be separated from them.

**3.3 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a continuous process throughout qualitative research (Willig, 2013). Building on the epistemological underpinning of this research, it is important to consider how I, as the researcher, influence the research process. Seeking to make sense of what has been said necessitates close interpretive engagement from the researcher. The research process is shaped by my own standpoint, both personally and epistemologically, and by my dual role as a researcher and practitioner in the local authority. Reflexivity is therefore an essential part of the iterative process of data collection and analysis and so will be revisited throughout this study (Willig, 2013). To facilitate greater reflexivity, I recorded my reflections and considerations of how my own thoughts, feelings and cultural experiences may be influencing the research in a research journal at various stages of the research process, details of which will be noted at points throughout this study. It is important to continually consider the role I will play in the data collection process, including how my position may impact participants' responses, and influence what young people felt comfortable to share. Reflexivity is particularly important to consider in this research when working alongside cultural groups who have been marginalised in society, and within educational research. Milner (2007) highlights the dangers that can occur when researchers do not attend to their own and others' cultural systems of knowing and experiencing the world.

It is therefore important to first acknowledge my own background and positioning explicitly. I am a White, dual citizen of Britain, with experience of voluntary migration. I have no experience of forced migration, and it is likely that my experiences of post-16 education in the UK and beyond are considerably different to the experiences of participants. I am therefore an outsider to the research topic. My family's experiences of migration and displacement have

likely shaped my own identity and belief systems. I empathise with people who have been displaced and have strong core beliefs about the importance of supporting people on their resettlement journeys. My belief systems could therefore present a challenge to my position as a researcher. My values stand in contrast to the politics that are currently dominating policies that affect people seeking safety in the UK in 2023. I am mindful that I would seek to share accounts of young people seeking safety in a positive light, in contrast to media portrayals.

As outlined in Chapter 1, I am motivated to carry out research that is relevant to Educational Psychology practice, and my future practice as an Educational Psychologist. It is likely that my previous experiences of working with a diverse group of children and young people that had sought safety in the UK enhanced my motivation to pursue research of this nature, to support their voices to be heard within education. This contrasts my current professional experience, where I work as a Trainee Educational Psychologist in a pre-dominantly White community, which is where this research took place (as will be outlined in 3.6.1). I was therefore motivated to develop research that not only builds on my own values and interests, but that would be purposeful to the Educational Psychology Service and community I work in, by aiming to give voice to the experiences of smaller, growing populations that are not routinely considered in practice.

### 3.4 Qualitative Approaches

This research aims to explore and give voice to separated young people seeking safety's individual experiences of post-16 education in the UK. Several qualitative approaches were considered when planning this research, considering their methodological integrity to the research paradigm adopted and the research question (Levitt et al., 2017). These approaches will be outlined, before presenting the rationale for the chosen methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

*Discourse Analysis*

Discourse analysis explores language use and the ways of talking about a phenomenon to gain insight into how people construct their experiences (Willig, 2013). The use of interpreters within this research to support participant's access to interviews would likely alter the use and structure of the participant's language, limiting a discourse analysis of data. Moreover, the present research aims to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences, rather than their use of language to construct their experiences.

*Narrative Analysis*

Narrative analysis is considered to be well suited to cross-language research (Squires, 2009). Narrative analysis is used to collect stories as a means to understand how people construct their experiences; this may include a focus on the content, structure, or relationships in the stories people tell about their experiences (Silver, 2013). This deviates from this research's focus on the individual, lived experience. Narrative analysis would be more suited to research that seeks to explore the development of experiential accounts over time (Smith et al., 2022).

*Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory offers a way to generate a theoretical account of a phenomenon through data analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). This often requires a large scale of theoretical sampling (Smith et al., 2022). The aim of the present research is to explore the lived experiences of individual young people, rather than to theorise. The present research's focus could lead to a subsequent piece of grounded theory research (Smith et al., 2022).

*Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis offers a method to explore people's subjective experiences and sense-making (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). Thematic analysis generates patterns or themes across cases, to offer insight into shared experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis therefore enables a broad understanding of experience, rather than an in-depth analysis of individual experience. The present research aims to explore and give voice to separated young people seeking safety's individual experiences of education in the UK, which therefore benefits from a more idiographic approach than that of Thematic Analysis.

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this research for several reasons. It is consistent with the aims of the research, to explore how people have made sense of a significant life experience (i.e., the experience of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK). IPA is considered to be particularly valuable when exploring complex, affective topics due to its detailed focus on the individual, lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA's idiographic commitment was also considered appropriate to support the research's sensitivity to the individual cultural experiences of the participants. This is particularly important due to the cultural experiences and differences between myself, as the researcher, and the participants.

### 3.4.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is an established qualitative methodological approach that aims to explore how people make sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2022). It is important to consider the theoretical perspectives that are central to IPA, which underpin this research: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2022).

*Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that is concerned with the study of experience (Smith et al., 2022). The concept of phenomenology has developed over time and is rooted in the work of philosophers, including Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith et al., 2022). Phenomenologists are broadly interested in what the experience of being human is like, considering the things that are important to individuals, and which constitute their lived world (Smith et al., 2022). A fundamental principle of phenomenological inquiry is that experience should be explored 'in its own terms', rather than according to predefined categories or theories (Smith et al., 2022). This idea was developed further, to also consider the 'worldliness' of experiences, which are embedded in relationships, language, and culture. This positions 'experience' as a complex, lived process, the interpretation of which is unique to each person's position and relationship to the world. IPA draws from these phenomenological ideas, aiming to capture and voice particular experiences, as they are interpreted for particular people (Larkin et al., 2006).

*Hermeneutics*

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation, which builds on the ideas of Heidegger, Gadamer and Schleiermacher (Smith et al., 2022). Hermeneutics is central in phenomenological enquiry; understanding other people's relationship to the world, and how they make meaning out of their lives, requires interpretation. In order to access lived experience, the researcher will interpret what participants share about their experience. This is described as a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith & Osborn, 2015), where the researcher is making sense of the participant's sense making. In this way, IPA moves beyond description, to present an interpretation of particular experiences within their particular context (Noon, 2018). IPA, therefore, subscribes to a phenomenological requirement to capture particular lived

experiences, and a hermeneutic requirement to interpret and 'make sense' of these experiences from a psychological perspective (Larkin et al., 2006).

*Idiography*

Idiography is concerned with the particular (Smith et al., 2022). IPA's commitment to the particular is two-fold. As a phenomenological and interpretive approach, IPA considers how particular individuals make sense of particular events in their lives (Smith et al., 2022). IPA also aims to describe the particular in detail, through a detailed exploration of each voice, before looking to shared themes (Smith et al., 2022).

**3.4.2 Critique of IPA**

While IPA was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this research, there are limitations of the approach that were considered. IPA has been criticised for its reliance on the analysis of language, which assumes that participants can communicate complex lived experiences through language (Tuffour, 2017; Willig, 2013). This has led researchers to exclude participants on the basis of their language skills (Noon, 2018). This consideration is particularly relevant to this research, where English was not the participants' first language. It was important to carefully consider how I could support participants to share their experiences, to ensure that all voices were equally heard during the research process, regardless of their current levels of English fluency. This included involving a trained interpreter in the research process, which will be outlined in 3.7.1. Unlike other qualitative approaches, IPA does not focus on the effect of the words and language used by participants, but instead on how participants interpret their experiences. It was therefore considered to be consistent with the current research's aim and epistemological position.

Critics have also highlighted the lack of a standardised process within IPA as a limitation (Giorgi, 2009). However, in line with the interpretive foundation of this research,

IPA's iterative and dynamic process of analysis aims to support meaning making at several different levels, including consideration of my own shifting relationship with the data, as the researcher. This is a particularly valuable approach when research is produced with marginalised groups, such as young people seeking safety; Temple and Moran (2006) describe the disadvantages of relying on a predetermined process and agenda drawn from the outsider's perspective, as this can leave little room to consider the voices of the individual.

Despite this, risks do remain when using phenomenological approaches to do research with marginalised groups, such as separated young people seeking safety. While IPA does present a methodological framework for individuals to speak for themselves, rather than seeking objective generalisations, it could be considered that there is a risk that the thematisation process could oversimplify complex experiences (Orbe, 2000). IPA's idiographic commitment aims to consider each individual voice in detail, before looking across cases. In this way, it is hoped that this approach will highlight how individual young people give voice to their own lived experiences, before seeking to reveal any 'commonalities in diverse experiences' (Orbe, 2000, p. 617).

**3.5 Ethical considerations**

This research required careful consideration of factors that may affect ethical practice. The nature of the research, involving young people and the recall of experiences, required careful consideration of ethical guidelines. Ethical guidelines (e.g., BPS, 2021) were consulted prior to recruitment. Ethical approval from the University of Nottingham was received in May 2022 (see Appendix 6). Key ethical considerations which informed decision making in relation to the research design are outlined throughout the following sections to demonstrate their consideration throughout the research process as a whole.

**3.6 Research Design**

To fulfil the outlined research aims, five separated young people seeking safety were recruited to explore their experiences of post-16 educational provision. In this section, I will outline the context in which this research took place, the process of sampling and recruitment, and key ethical considerations made throughout this process.

**3.6.1 Context of research**

This research took place within a Midlands local authority where 93.6% of residents are UK born, which is higher than the national average of 82.6% (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Within this local authority, the number of residents born outside the UK has increased by 46% between the 2011 and 2021 censuses (Office for National Statistics, 2021). At present, there does not appear to be a central record of the number of refugees or people seeking safety who have resettled in the local authority area. There also does not appear to be a central record of the number of young people seeking safety who are accessing educational provision in the local authority. This context enhanced my motivation to pursue this research, by seeking to share and advocate for the experiences of smaller, growing populations that are not routinely considered in practice.

**3.6.2 Charity service involvement**

I approached a local charity service that supports separated young people seeking safety in the local authority, to ask if they would like to support and contribute to the present research. Staff at the charity service expressed an interest in being involved in the research; we then set up a subsequent meeting to discuss the research further, and from there, they agreed to take part and support the recruitment of participants who are known to them and their organisation. It was a privilege to collaborate with staff from the charity service throughout this research. Their invaluable role in this research, such as supporting recruitment, will be outlined throughout the following sections.

The charity service is not named to protect the anonymity of the participants involved. However, to further contextualise this research, their roles and responsibilities in the local authority will be briefly outlined. The charity service work alongside agencies within the local authority that can refer separated young people to access their support. At the time of writing, they offer support to approximately 160 separated young people aged between 13-25 years who are in the care of the local authority, or who are care leavers. The charity service offers education to separated young people who are waiting for a place in formal educational provision, or for those who are not able to attend formal educational provision. The charity service also offers a bespoke timetable of support for separated young people outside of school or college hours, including access to therapeutic support from a qualified counsellor, additional English lessons, homework clubs and music, drama, and cooking workshops. Staff at the charity service are also available to provide support and guidance to separated young people as they move to independence and make their transition into adulthood. This includes supporting their access to activities in the community, such as sports clubs, educational courses and work experience opportunities, and attendance at relevant meetings for young people as they move through the care and asylum systems, such as Children in Care reviews.

**3.6.3 Sampling**

IPA's idiographic approach relies on selecting a small, homogenous sample, for whom the research question is meaningful (Smith et al., 2022). This allows for rich, detailed accounts of individual experiences. Smith et al. (2022) indicate that a sample size of three to six participants is an appropriate guide for student research projects to allow enough data for the development of meaningful comparisons between participants. The final sample for this research included five young people.

*Reducing Harm to Participants*

It was essential to consider the potential vulnerability of young people in the recruitment process, to reduce harm and ensure ethical integrity. Eligibility criteria for this research were informed by discussion with charity service staff to consider the key decision points in the resettlement processes for newly arrived young people, that may contribute to stability in their circumstances. This informed the timescales stated in the criteria;  recruiting participants who had been in the UK for at least 6 months aimed to ensure that young people had begun involvement with the Home Office, had experienced an initial health assessment, had seen the local asylum team, had the opportunity to meet with a solicitor, had at least two Children in Care reviews and will have been monitored by a Personal Education Plan in an educational setting. See Figure 1.1 for an overview of key points in the asylum process.

Moreover, while the procedures aimed to reduce harm and support unexpected outcomes (as will be outlined in section 3.7), it was also acknowledged that the researcher could offer limited containment in the case of significant distress. Eligibility criteria for participants therefore excluded young people who have current mental health needs or indications that warrant a referral or involvement with support services.

The following inclusion criteria were used to identify participants:

- Participants have arrived in the UK as 'Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children'.

- Participants are aged between 16-25 years of age.

- Participants are attending or have attended educational provision in the local authority.

- Participants have attended post-16 educational provision within the UK for a minimum of 3 months.

- Participants have been in the UK for a minimum of 6 months.

- Participants are considered to be in a 'period of stability' as agreed by professionals involved (e.g., charity service staff, Social Workers).

- Participants are not currently experiencing mental health needs or indications that warrant a referral or involvement with support services (e.g., Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service or other counselling).

### 3.6.4 Final Sample

The final sample for this research included five young people. The young people who participated in this research were homogenous in that they all arrived in the UK as separated young people, are aged between 17-22 years and all have experience of attending post-16 educational provision in the local authority where the research took place. The young people were also homogenous in that they were displaced from two countries and were now resettling in one area of the UK. Table 3.1 details demographic information to support contextualising of the sample.

**Table 3.1**

*Demographic information of participants included in this research.*

|  | Number of participants |
|---|:---:|
| **Gender** | |
| Female | 2 |
| Male | 3 |
| **Age** | |
| 17 years | 3 |
| 22 years | 2 |
| **Region of Origin\*** | |
| Western Asia | 3 |
| Eastern Africa | 2 |
| **Current formal educational provision** | |
| ESOL course | 2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Level 2 Diploma | 2 |
| Not currently enrolled in a formal educational course | 1 |

*\* The regions of origin of the participants are named rather than the specific countries of origin to protect their anonymity.*

*Anonymity*

It was important to acknowledge that due to the small number of participants in the study, there was a risk that participant responses might be identified by those that know them (e.g., familiar adults in the charity service and social workers). Specific identifiable information, such as names and locations, were therefore removed or replaced with pseudonyms. Participants were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. However, some participants suggested their real nickname or used initials that may have enabled their identification. I therefore chose all pseudonyms to aid anonymity. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the participants, their pseudonyms are not presented alongside their individual demographic information, and demographic information is presented at a group level.

### 3.6.5 Recruitment Process

In line with IPA's theoretical orientation, the participants were recruited purposively to enable insight into the experience of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK (Smith et al., 2022). Recruitment included methods of referral using the charity service as a gatekeeper for participants and snowballing from one participant to another. Details of the recruitment process will now be outlined.

*Informed Consent*

Charity service staff shared the information sheets with young people to outline the nature and purpose of the research, and the outcomes of data analysis, to support young people

to consider if they wished to be involved (see Appendix 7). This aimed to give young people an opportunity to discuss the research with a familiar adult. One participant shared his experience of being part of the research with a peer at the charity service, who then also asked to be involved. Written consent was obtained from all participants who agreed to take part in the research (see Appendix 8). The consent forms were adapted as appropriate given the needs and age of young people (see Appendix 9). For three participants, an interpreter translated the consent forms and information sheets into their first language to support their understanding of the research. For participants who were in the care of the local authority, written consent was also sought from relevant professionals with parental responsibility for them (e.g., Social Workers); a separate information sheet and consent form was shared with professionals in an adult format (see Appendices 10 and 11). At the outset of the interviews, participants were read a verbal script and were asked to provide verbal assent before the interview proceeded (see Appendix 12).

*Right to Withdraw*

The information sheets provided to young people and relevant professionals outlined that participants were under no obligation to participate, and were free to withdraw prior to, during or within a set time frame after participating in the research. If participants did choose to withdraw, their data would be removed from the research and destroyed. The time delay between the initial agreement to take part and the interview dates supported young people to consider if they still wanted to proceed. At this stage, after initially agreeing to take part, one young person withdrew from the research as they no longer wished to take part in an interview.

**3.7 Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were utilised as part of this research. IPA research aims to analyse how participants perceive and make sense of their lived experiences in detail.

Interviews offer a method of collecting descriptions of lived experiences by presenting a way for participants to tell their stories in their own words (Anderson & Jack, 2015). Smith and Osborn (2015) suggest that the flexibility of semi-structured interviews is most suited to the aims of IPA research. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher and participants to engage in a two-way dialogue, where questions are tailored following participants' responses so that the interview can follow the individual ideas and experiences of the participant. This contrasts with a structured interview, where the topics to be discussed are decided in advance by the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The two-way dialogue created through a semi-structured interview also allows the researcher and participants to check their understanding of what has been said and clarify and summarise as appropriate. This is particularly valuable in this research, where the participants' first language was not English.

### 3.7.1 Interview structure

Participants were interviewed individually in a quiet room within the charity service building. Interviews were arranged around participants' college timetables. Participants were asked if they wanted to have a trusted adult present with them in the room during the interview, but no one utilised this option. As part of the consent and debrief procedures, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw without question or consequence. Visual task cards were used to support participants to communicate if they wanted to take a break or stop during the interview. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and were transcribed verbatim in English.

*Use of an interpreter*

Three participants opted to utilise an interpreter within the interview to reduce language demands. Interpreters offer a way of addressing language barriers that can arise in research (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013). This research sought to avoid silencing voices due to

language barriers between myself and the participants. The use of trained interpreters offered a way to support the voices of young people to be equally heard within the research process, regardless of their current fluency in English. Some researchers have suggested that phenomenological research that involves translating data disrupts the essence of the experience being studied (Squires, 2009). However, it was considered to be more pertinent to attempt to explore young people's experiences through the use of an interpreter, whilst acknowledging the limitations that this poses, than exclude the voice of potentially vulnerable and marginalised individuals on the basis of their language skills. Previous research has been criticised for making the role of interpreters 'invisible' in the research process (Squires, 2009). This section aims to describe the role of the interpreter in this research, including considerations of validity, trustworthiness, and ethics.

Following guidance, I sought a single interpreter for the research in a bid to enhance the reliability of the translation (Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). It was also important to consider the credentials of the interpreter to strengthen the validity of the translation (Pitchforth & van Teijlingen, 2005); the chosen interpreter was experienced and qualified in verbal translation. The interpreter was also matched with the participants in respect of their cultural background and gender. While some advocate for the interpreter having personal knowledge of the participant (Miller et al., 2002), it was considered that this would limit the confidentiality of the discussion and later anonymity of the participant.

The interpreter had not previously served as an interpreter for a research project. It was therefore important to engage with them ahead of the project to outline the aims of the research and explain the process of qualitative interviews (BPS, 2017). This included a discussion of ethical considerations, including confidentiality (see confidentiality agreement in Appendix 13), and the interpreter's right to ask for the interview to be paused or terminated if the content matter caused them to experience distress. The sample interview questions were shared with

the interpreter ahead of the interviews to gain feedback on the clarity of the language used and the appropriateness of the questions (Squires, 2009). At this point, the interpreter queried the open nature of the questions. It was therefore valuable to discuss the purpose of open-ended questions in qualitative interviews, to reinforce the interview's aim for an open, conversational dialogue rather than a strict question and answer format.

The interpreter was asked to verbally translate the questions and responses in the first-person voice as verbatim as possible (Essén et al, 2000) so that the meaning experienced by participants and the meaning interpreted is as close as possible (Polkinghorne, 2007). It was valuable to utilise prompts and follow up questions to ensure that the lived experience was captured in sufficient detail (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013). While efforts were made to increase the validity of the translation process, it is important to acknowledge that exact word-by-word translation was unlikely to be possible (Murray & Wynne, 2001). The emphasis of translation was therefore to grasp the essential meanings of the spoken word and to mediate that meaning for a different language. This leads to a three-way co-construction of data, where the interpreter is part of the hermeneutic circle. In this way, the role of the interpreter (and the researcher) can be minimised, but cannot be eliminated (Björk Brämberg & Dahlberg, 2013).

At the outset of the interview, the interpreter translated the written information for the three participants, which included that participation was voluntary, their right to withdraw, confidentiality and its limits, and how the data would be used and stored. The interpreter was also debriefed at the end of the interview. This included reflection about the interview process, and the topics discussed.

**Reflexive commentary – use of interpreters**

I noted that my skills and confidence when working alongside an interpreter increased as I progressed with the interviews. I reflected that working alongside an interpreter changed the pace of the dialogue, and at times, punctuated the flow of participant accounts. It was therefore important to utilise more prompts and follow up questions to try to capture the complexity of the participants lived experiences in enough depth, as suggested in Björk Brämberg and Dahlberg (2013).

It was also valuable to have time to reflect with the interpreter about their experiences of each interview. This led to valuable discussions about the importance of open-ended questions in qualitative interviews that appeared to support the flow of subsequent interviews.

Our reflections also included discussions of the political and cultural history that participants were describing in their accounts. The interpreter shared their interpretation of the participants' experience and how they had made sense of what had been said, in light of their own experiences. This highlights the importance of acknowledging the role of interpreters in the three-way co-construction of data, which cannot be eliminated.

*Confidentiality*

Information about participants was bound by confidentiality, as outlined in the information sheets (see Appendix 7). The limits of participant confidentiality, where confidentiality may be breached in exceptional circumstances if there is a risk to the safety of the participant or another individual, was also reiterated to all participants prior to the interview. As noted, the interpreter was also asked to sign a confidentiality agreement specific to the research project ahead of their involvement in the project (see Appendix 13).

Participants were informed that interview data would be collected with two audio-recording devices to aid analysis and would be deleted immediately after transcription. All personal information and data collected were securely stored and used in accordance with the UK's Data Protection Act (2018). The interviews were transcribed verbatim in English.

*Reducing harm during interviews*

It was also important to consider how the IPA methodology, which explores lived experiences, may include a discussion of personal topics that may lead to an emotional response. Procedures were planned in the event that distress did arise, including the immediate ending of the interview, pastoral support for the young person, and debrief with a familiar adult from the charity service. Open questions aimed to support participants to direct the focus of the interview and only share what they felt comfortable with. Participants were reminded that they did not need to answer any questions if they did not want to and could take a break or stop the interview at any point without consequence. At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions or provide comments. A familiar adult from the charity service also provided a check-in with the participants at the end of the interview. Participants were also signposted to support outlets included in the debrief process (Appendix 14). A follow up meeting was also offered to participants within 2 weeks of the interview if they wanted to discuss the purpose of the research or ask any further questions, however, no participants sought to meet again. All participants were sent a written letter thanking them for their involvement in the research, passed on by charity service staff.

### 3.7.2 Interview questions

Interview questions were developed following Smith et al.'s (2022) guidance. The questions aimed to begin at a broad, descriptive level to explore how young people made sense of their experiences of education. Subsequent questions were informed by themes generated

from the literature review, to explore young people's relationships with others and hopes for the future. The questions aimed to answer the research question by exploring the significance of young people's experiences of education, and gain insight into how they considered other young people might manage similar situations. The questions evolved over time, following collaboration with charity service staff and the interpreter, and in response to my reflections following each interview. This process led to the generation of six sample interview questions that aimed to serve as a fluid guide for the interviews:

1. Tell me a bit about your experience of education in the UK?

2. Has anything or anyone helped you?

3. What are your hopes for the future?

4. What help will you need to get there?

5. How important is education to you?

6. What advice would you give to a separated young person who has just started education in the UK?

These questions were supplemented with probes such as 'can you tell me a bit more about that', or 'if you feel comfortable to share, how did that make you feel?'. As the interview dialogue developed, the sample questions became less important, and the interviews were guided by the topics that the participants raised. In practice, the first sample question was the only question that was consistently asked both in the manner written and, in the order given across all interviews.

**Reflexive commentary – interview process**

It was important to consider how I was affected by the interview process, and the impact of this on the data collected. Some of the participants shared their perceptions of discrimination when retelling their experiences of education, which was upsetting to hear. In these situations, I considered my role as a researcher where it would be unethical to offer advice or direct support, particularly as I had a limited understanding of the experience. I therefore actively listened, to ensure that participants felt heard and followed planned debrief procedures that signposted participants to local support organisations. I wondered whether I had followed up with this appropriately and discussed this with my research supervisor. We reflected that it was more appropriate for the professionals who were already involved and aware of this situation to support with this.

I also reflected on my interview skills in this situation. When I reviewed the transcripts, I noted that I moved away from more emotive topics of discussion, such as that of participants perceptions of discrimination, in my first interview. I considered that there were missed opportunities where I could have prompted the participant to share their experiences in more depth or checked my understanding of what had been said. This reflection encouraged me to adapt my interview style and questioning as I progressed with the interviews. I felt more confident to ask further questions to later participants who shared similar experiences. I felt that my interviewing technique improved across the interviews as I was able to use my previous experiences to manage these conversations.

I also reflected on how my style of interviewing changed according to each individual participant. Some of the participants appeared more comfortable to share their experiences in the interview, which generated more data and required less prompting. Other participants shared less, but I noted what they did share was very insightful.

### 3.7.3 Transcription

The audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed to create a semantic record. This is particularly important when research crosses cultural and linguistic boundaries (Wallin & Ahlström, 2005). I transcribed all information that would be used for analysis (O'Connell & Kowal, 1995), which did not include transcribing any discussion between the interpreter and participant in languages other than English or any prosodic aspects of the interviews. I transcribed all the interviews before beginning the analysis of the first case. While this was a lengthy process, it felt invaluable to my immersion and familiarisation with the data.

### 3.8 Validity and quality

The quality of the research was also considered when developing the research method. It is important that qualitative research is evaluated using appropriate criteria, rather than criteria that reflects the aims of quantitative research. Smith et al. (2022) suggest that Yardley's (2008) principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research are particularly relevant for IPA research; this includes 'sensitivity to context', 'commitment to rigour', 'coherence and transparency' and 'impact and importance' (Yardley, 2008). These principles will be outlined, including how the current research seeks to meet them.

*Sensitivity to context*

Sensitivity to context includes the researcher's sensitivity to the context in which the research is situated, their relationship with the participants, and to the data itself. It was important to review the literature relating to the research topic (as presented in Chapter 2) and theoretical underpinnings of the research methodology (as outlined in 3.3.2) to demonstrate sensitivity. The chosen methodology of IPA, and its idiographic commitment to the particular, centres the importance of sensitivity to context from the outset of the research process. IPA is an inductive methodology, where the meanings shared by participants are interpreted, without

pre-conceived categorisation. This allows detailed engagement with participants during interviews and analysis of their transcripts, to access their individual lived experiences.

Sensitivity is also demonstrated through careful consideration of the interactions that take place between the researcher and the participants during the interview process. I engaged with stakeholders throughout the research process to develop my understanding of the presenting concerns and needs of separated young people seeking safety in the local authority, as well as to support the recruitment of a purposive sample. Interviews were arranged at a location and time that suited participants, which allowed me to engage with and experience their setting. It was valuable to spend time developing rapport before the interviews started to put participants at ease. Open questions also allowed participants to guide the topics of discussion.

It was also important to ensure that ethical principles were adhered to, to maintain sensitivity. Key ethical considerations are outlined throughout this chapter.

*Commitment and rigour*

Commitment is closely linked to sensitivity, as it includes the researcher's attentiveness to the participant, the data and analysis. Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the research. The sample were selected carefully so that they were reasonably homogenous (as outlined in 3.6.4), and that they matched the research aims. The research purposively selected five individuals who had experienced the research topic (i.e., separated young people who had sought safety in the UK, with experience of attending post-16 educational provision). This sample size aimed to allow for a detailed, idiographic, and interpretative level of analysis. I was committed to enabling the individual voices of separated young people seeking safety to be heard, including those who are not yet fluent in English. It was therefore important to consider measures to ensure I could attend closely to what participants were sharing. This included collaborating with stakeholders and interpreters around the appropriateness of the sample, clarity of the

language used, and seeking a trained interpreter to support the interview discussions. Verbatim transcription of the data aimed to ensure that the analysis was true to the data. A detailed method of analysis (Smith et al., 2022) was used to consistently analyse all data; data from semi-structured interviews was analysed one by one, to allow detailed engagement with individual cases, before looking for patterns across cases. Extracts from each participant are presented to illustrate each theme.

*Transparency and coherence*

Transparency includes how clearly the stages of the research are described (Smith et al., 2022). I have aimed to clearly describe how methodological decisions were made throughout this study, including transparent reporting of the rationale for the design, data collection, sample, and analysis of data. Raw data and verbatim quotations are also offered in the findings to evidence my interpretations, and to enable alternative explorations and interpretations. I have also aimed to present the research's coherence with the theoretical assumptions of IPA, as outlined in 3.3.2.

*Impact and importance*

Importance and impact include how the research leads to findings that are interesting, important, or useful (Yardley, 2008). I have aimed to highlight the contemporary relevance of the present research throughout this study. The potential impact of recommendations from this research is presented in Chapter 5. I have arranged to disseminate the findings with the charity service and will also provide them with an overall summary of the findings in an accessible format, to be shared with the young people who participated in the research. In addition, I will disseminate the findings within the Educational Psychology Service in the local authority in which the present research took place.

**3.9 Data Analysis**

In line with IPA's interpretive foundation, there is not a prescriptive, structured method of analysis within IPA research; analysis is instead an iterative and dynamic process. For the purposes of this research, I chose to follow guidance from Smith et al. (2022).

*1. Reading and re-reading*

The first step of my analysis involved reading and re-reading a hard copy of the transcript to immerse myself in the original data. I also listened to the audio-recording of the interview alongside reading the transcript a few times to check the accuracy of the transcription. This process helped to focus on the participant's individual voice and consider how they told their story.

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**Reflexive commentary**

At this stage, I recorded some reflections and recollections from the interviews in my research journal. For example, for one participant I noted: *'there was a sense that they were trying to give the 'right' answers in the interview'.* By recording this, I noticed that I was drawn to examples within their account that also appeared to reflect this observation in relation to their experiences of education. Noting my initial reflections supported me to become aware of how they could influence my impressions of the data and supported me return to focus on the data itself.

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*2. Exploratory noting*

After reading each individual transcript several times, I began to write down my initial notes in the left margin of the transcript and highlighted text that seemed important. This included a focus on what the participant had said, how they described their experiences, and what that may mean for the participant. I used a different colour pen each time I read the transcript. This

highlighted how the subsequent re-reading had supported my gradual shift away from the participants' verbatim words, towards emerging interpretations of meaning. An example of this process is presented in Appendix 15.

### 3. *Constructing experiential statements*

I subsequently moved away from reading the transcript, to focus on the exploratory comments I had made. I aimed to reduce my exploratory notes into experiential statements that capture and reflect my understanding of the transcript. Experiential statements were recorded on the right margin of the transcript. An example of this process is presented in Appendix 15.

### 4. *Searching for connections across experiential statements*

The experiential statements were initially listed in chronological order, based on the sequence of the transcript. I began to cluster them together by meaning. This process highlighted connections between statements, that were then visually mapped on paper. The main organising method was grouping similar themes of highly related experiential statements together. I also considered polarising statements, by bringing together contrasting statements to highlight any contradicting aspects of the participant's experience. It was important to check back to the transcript to see that the connections made sense to the original words used by the participant. An example of this process is presented in Appendix 16.

### 5. *Naming, organising, and consolidating Personal Experiential Themes*

The clusters of experiential statements were given a title to describe their characteristics; these became Personal Experiential Themes. The themes aimed to reflect analytic entities that had been interpreted from the participant's experiences. An example of this process is presented in Appendix 17, to support the reader to trace the analytic process.

*6. Continuing the individual analysis of other cases*

In line with IPA's idiographic commitment, each case was analysed individually, before moving on to the next case. Once the Personal Experiential Themes had been generated for the first participant, steps 1-5 were repeated for the remaining 4 transcripts.

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**Reflexive commentary**

It felt challenging when moving from analysis of one transcript to another without considering the transcript in relation to others. I was aware that I was more likely to identify and comment on experiences that felt familiar. It was therefore important to engage in re-reading and cross-checking to ensure that any patterns across transcripts are evidenced. I have also offered an example of the data analysis process in the appendices to make my process of analysis transparent to the reader.

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*7. Developing Group Experiential Themes across cases*

When Personal Experiential Themes had been generated for all five cases, I began to look for similarities and differences across them to create Group Experiential Themes. Themes were generated in relation to their prevalence and depth across participant accounts. This was a dynamic process that involved returning to the experiential statements and exploratory notes to check the context and details and honour the idiographic. Four Group Experiential Themes were generated and labelled to capture their meaning and were divided into ten subthemes. Subthemes aimed to represent the idiographic experience of participants, to capture any convergence of participants' experience within the Group Experiential Themes. All Group Experiential Themes were shared across all participant accounts, suggesting that there may be some similarity in the experiences of education for the separated young people in this research, however, these themes were manifested in unique ways for each participant. A table of the

Group Experiential Themes and subthemes is presented alongside key phrases from the transcripts in Appendix 18 to illustrate this. Each Group Experiential Theme is presented individually, however, there are several interconnections that exist between each theme, as will be presented in Figure 4.1. The wider account that is presented across the four themes aims to capture the complexity and connections within the data, which will be explained and explored in Chapter 4.

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**Reflexive commentary**

Throughout the process of analysis, I aimed to move away from a literal interpretation of the text whilst trying to balance the influence of my own experiences, beliefs, and expectations on my interpretations. I sought to actively monitor and reduce the impact of my assumptions about the research by recording them in my research journal. This included 'bracketing off' my own experiences, knowledge of the literature, and links to psychological theory. However, I recognise that it is somewhat inevitable that my interpretations reflect my own beliefs and thoughts. I am mindful that I was likely to be attuned to finding experiences that represent young people seeking safety in a positive light.

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<div align="center">**Chapter 4**</div>

<div align="center">**Findings**</div>

## 4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents my interpretation of the findings from the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of participant interviews. It aims to highlight and examine the lived experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety. This will include presenting an overview of the Group Experiential Themes that were interpreted from the interviews, followed by close consideration of each theme, presented with quotes as they were shared by participants, and my interpretation of their meaning and significance.

## 4.2 Group Experiential Themes

Following the in-depth analysis of the interview data (as outlined in 3.9), four Group Experiential Themes were interpreted: *importance of developing English proficiency, aspirations for the future, sense of agency* and *sense of belonging.* These themes and their inter-related subthemes are presented visually in Figure 4.1. The prevalence of each Group Experiential Theme and subtheme across participant accounts are presented in Table 4.1.

**Figure 4.1**

*A visual map of the four Group Experiential Themes, ten connected subthemes, and links between them developed through IPA.*
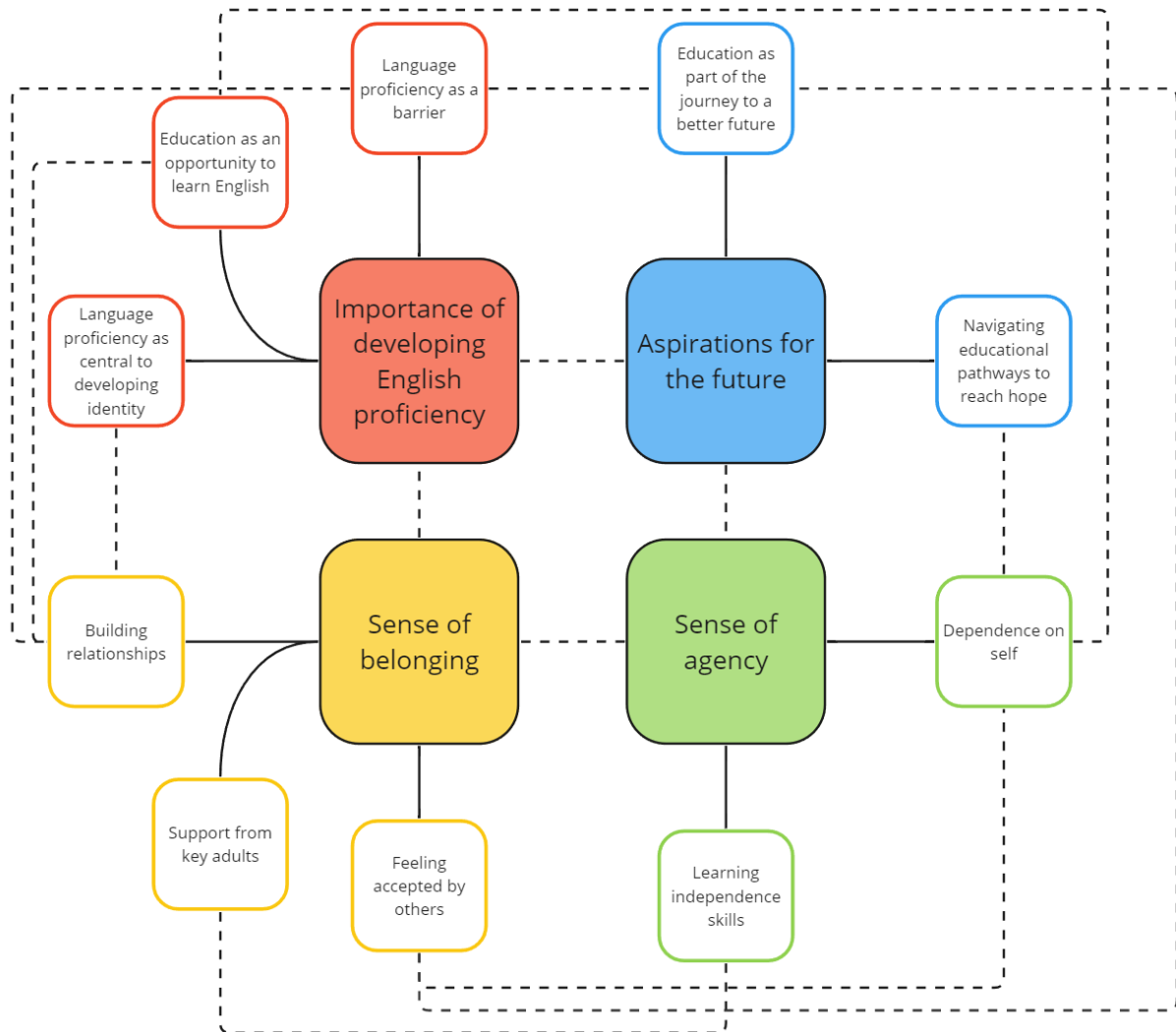


The solid colour boxes represent Group Experiential Themes, the outlined boxes represent subthemes, and the dashed lines between them highlight their connections. The themes are grouped by colour.

**Table 4.1**

*The prevalence of each Group Experiential Theme and subtheme across participant accounts.*

| Group Experiential Theme | Subtheme | Contributing Participants[2] |
|---|---|---|
| Importance of developing English proficiency | Education as an opportunity to learn English | Desta, Ali, Majid, Ahmad, Ayele |
| | Language proficiency as central to developing identity | Desta, Ali, Majid |
| | Language proficiency as a barrier | Desta, Ali, Majid, Ahmad, Ayele |
| Aspirations for the future | Education as part of the journey to a better future | Desta, Ali, Ahmad, Ayele |
| | Navigating educational pathways to reach hopes | Desta, Ali, Majid, Ahmad, Ayele |
| Sense of agency | Dependence on self | Desta, Ali, Majid, Ahmad, Ayele |
| | Learning independence skills | Desta, Majid, Ayele |
| Sense of belonging | Building relationships | Desta, Ali, Majid, Ahmad, Ayele |
| | Feeling accepted by others | Desta, Ali, Majid, Ahmad |
| | Support from key adults | Desta, Ali, Majid, Ahmad, Ayele |

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[2] All names are pseudonyms.

**4.3 Importance of developing English proficiency**

The importance of developing English proficiency in participants' experiences of post-16 education was interpreted to be a significant theme across each of the data sets. In this context, English proficiency refers to young people's competence or ability to speak, read, write, and use the English language in an educational context, and beyond. This is captured in the related sub-themes: *education as an opportunity to learn English, language proficiency as central to developing identity* and *language proficiency as a barrier*. The presence of this theme across accounts suggests that it was a shared experience across the sample.

*4.31 Education as an opportunity to learn English*

All the participants appeared to view learning English as a significant part of their experience of education. Education created an opportunity to learn and develop their English proficiency, through attendance at English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses in college and English lessons at the charity service. For participants, developing their English language proficiency appeared to be one of the main reasons to attend educational provision, where education seemed to be positioned as the best and quickest way for young people to develop their English proficiency:

*'For example... there are two friends. One, he's going in college, one he's not going college. And then for understanding, which one is quicker at understanding? It's that guy who's going to college, because he know everything, he learned how to communicate with the people, like so study is important'* - Ayele

For some participants, there was a sense that education not only created the opportunity to learn, but also appeared to offer a safe atmosphere and environment to learn English. Ali described this as the most important part of his experience of education, highlighting its value:

*'...the most important thing is the atmosphere to learn English. I love that.'* - Ali

*'Yeah, it's funny because we are* [from] *too many different country, and then someones, someone not English, someone don't know English. I like ESOL class because everyone is not scared. It's free. You're talking for anything.'* - Ayele

Ayele's description of feeling '*free*' and '*not scared*' in ESOL classes indicates a feeling of emotional safety within education to be able to learn. There was a sense that being surrounded by peers who are also developing their English proficiency created a shared learning experience, where young people could practise their skills freely and talk '*for anything*', without the fear of making mistakes.

Across accounts, the support networks that were formed in education were described to be key in participants' developing English proficiency, including support from teachers and peers. This appears to highlight learning English as a shared experience with others.

*'In terms of college, I got a friend which is very helpful and his English is very, very good. So he has been really helpful in terms of my English and stuff here… when we go out together and I try to listen, to speak in English, but there are some mistakes and error and they tried to say you will be better if you say it in that way, in a different way, just correct me in some way that's helpful'* - Ali

*'Yeah, teacher helping us. When we say something they say, no, you have to say this, this is wrong, they will help, helping us for everything what you've done'* - Desta

*4.32 Language proficiency as central to developing identity*

For some participants, their developing English language proficiency appeared to be linked to how they viewed themselves. There was a sense that their language proficiency contributed to their identity, and how they view their status in the world. Ali had not previously experienced education before his journey to the UK. Ali's account indicated that his experience of education was empowering for him, he clearly stated how important this was to his life.

Interviewer: *… How important is education to you?*

Ali: *It is very. It's like a big part of my life… and imagine when I came here, I couldn't read or write* [first language] *even, but now I can read and write* [first language] *properly, and some English. And that's why is very important for me.*

Desta's account further highlights how her view of herself changed as her English proficiency developed. Desta described herself as *'shy'* when she first started education in the UK, and noted the role language played in who she would like to be, *'friendly'*.

*'First of all, when I came here, I don't know English to be honest. Still not... it's, I mean, I need, I need more, more practice. But I am proud of myself, I think, I'm good enough for at the moment. And I learned more English, how to communicate with peoples. Sometimes, I'm a bit shy, but I try to communicate with others. Like, be friendly'* - Desta

Throughout Desta's account, the way she spoke about her developing English proficiency revealed the value she placed upon language. There was a sense that she may feel that her emerging language skills might disappoint others, and she seemed tentative in describing her progress, quickly adding that she needs more practise. Desta's emphasis changed as she acknowledged how her skills had developed, describing herself as *'proud'* and *'good enough'*. This seems to suggest that how she views herself may be changing as her skills develop, and she still sees herself on the way to her actualised, *'friendly'* self.

*4.33 Language proficiency as a barrier*

Throughout participants' accounts, their developing English proficiency appeared to be positioned as a barrier to learning, socialising, and reaching future aspirations. For Ayele, who had previous experiences of education in her home country and on her journey to the UK, language seemed to present as a significant barrier to her learning and status as a learner, where she was otherwise familiar with the topics she was learning in college. This appeared to be a frustrating experience for Ayele, that she could not control:

*'Because of what happened, I'm coming here without qualification. I start from ESOL class*

*... Just I know every lesson, only change language. For example, in Health and Social Care,*

*they teach everything but I know that thing... it's just only language you know?'* - Ayele

All participants also described the social role of language. Their accounts seemed to emphasise the importance of developing their English proficiency to enable both clear communication with others and their ability to be understood themselves. For Majid and Desta, their English proficiency appeared to contribute to worries when making the transition to education in the UK and meeting new people.

*'It was hard from the very beginning, I was trying really and I was worried like oh I say*

*something which is, they, they get it in a wrong way and that will be bad, but my social*

[worker] *said don't be shy. Speak, even with a broken English - it doesn't matter people will*

*understand you and you'll get on with it'* - Majid

*'Now I think I am better than before, but still have a little bit shy. I want to improve that one.*

*I think that's because of my English still now. It's, it's better than before but sometimes I don't*

*know why I'm not I don't know how to explain myself. I mean, if I'm not comfortable to, not*

*comfortable like, too scary to be friends with others. I mean, maybe they think, I don't know*

*what they think, but I'm thinking something or maybe that's not true'* - Desta

Participants' developing language proficiency appeared to present as a barrier to socialising. It could be considered that being *'shy'* or a reluctance to talk may reflect a coping strategy in response to a fear of being misunderstood. There was a sense that participants' emerging level of English was linked to their broader feelings of psychological safety in the UK, where there were initial fears about saying the '*wrong*' things that could be taken in the '*wrong way*'. It appeared that as participants' language proficiency developed, so did their feelings of safety around others.

Participants also seemed to position English as a barrier to their future aspirations, placing the development of their English proficiency as key to their future, and the first step to take towards their future goals of further study and work.

*'Well, I know first of all make your English well, and then go to university and from there you can take it'* - Ahmad

*'If you can't speak, how can you work?'* - Majid

These accounts highlight the connection between developing English and participants' aspirations for the future, which will be explored further in the next emerging theme.

**4.4 Aspirations for the future**

Participants' aspirations for the future were highlighted as a significant theme across each of the data sets. All participants talked about their hopes for the future when discussing their experiences of education. This is captured in the related sub-themes: *education as part of the journey to a better future* and *navigating educational pathways to reach hopes.* The interpretation of participants' experiences highlighted interconnections between the Group Experiential Themes 'importance of developing English proficiency' and 'aspirations for the future', where participants appeared to perceive a lack of English proficiency as a barrier to reaching their future aspirations.

*4.41 Education as part of the journey to a better future*

All of the participants talked openly about their experiences of education as a key part of their journey to a better future. Education appeared to be at the centre of how participants made sense of the possibilities for the future. When Ayele was asked about the importance of education to her, she shared:

*'It's important. It's not only for me for generally, for everyone, because I want to, I need to change my life. So how I'm changing my life? If I go to college or uni, if I have qualification'*

- Ayele

Ayele's self-correction emphasised the significance that she seemed to attribute to education, to fulfil a '*need*' to change her life for the better. There was a sense that being in education enabled participants to consider what their life in the future might look like, supporting them to recognise the possibilities for change. Education appeared to be positioned as a way to learn and achieve qualifications which would lead to that better future. There seemed to be a similarity in the way that participants spoke about why they had come to the UK (e.g., '*I came here just to get a better life*' - Majid)*,* and why education was important to them. This appears to suggest that education may be experienced as another part of the participant's journey to safety and a better future in the UK.

*4.42 Navigating educational pathways to reach hopes*

Participants described the processes within education that they had to navigate, including passing exams and achieving qualifications to move towards their preferred subjects of study. Navigating the pathways of education appeared to be at the centre of how participants described their future. Desta's account highlights the number of courses and qualifications young people need to navigate, which includes transitioning between educational settings.

*'I go to college. Yeah, I start from Entry 2, it's in --- college. And I passed that one, to Entry 3 that I did in --- college. And when I finished that, I passed to Level 1 and I did the Health and Social Care course, in the --- college. And I passed that too, as well to go the Level 2 … I would like to do the nursing, maybe in the future, if I be a nurse, I will, I will do more steps'* –

Desta

There was a sense that Desta viewed her experiences of education as a journey, with many steps, to reach her hoped for destination of becoming a nurse. In this way, education appeared to structure how Desta made sense of the future, offering a possible trajectory to educational opportunities and courses, that in turn, lead to a career of choice.

For all participants, their accounts about their experiences of education appeared focused on the future, where their decisions in education felt purposeful. Ayele's account highlighted her determination to reach her desired future, with education at the centre of her future planning.

*'I'm not changing my mind you know, to go work because I need my education not for now. If I get if I go like some warehouse or care home if I if I could today. Maybe I have money today. But I'm thinking not today, I think about tomorrow…I have targets. I have a goal. I have short goals, and then long goals. My short goal, for example, in January I have an exam. I hope to pass that exam. … And my long goal, maybe I'm doing my college, uni, and then to get qualification and then to start work'* - Ayele

There appeared to be a real sense of determination and certainty about future goals across participants' accounts. This stood in contrast to the uncertainty in participants' accounts when describing their experiences of navigating the educational processes to reach their future goals. Ayele's account highlights her sense of confusion and frustration when she was not able to access certain educational courses despite being told she needed those qualifications for the next step in her educational journey:

*'So when I started the course, in my time table, I'm doing only Health and Social Care? I'm asking them, why? Why it's only Health and Social care. Why not Maths and English? Without Maths and English, they say you are not going uni. So, I'm going office and then I*

*asked them, they said it's not only me. Most students, then it's waiting list. I say why waiting*

*list? I'm not a new student... I'm not losing this, this my chance you know for uni'* - Ayele

This uncertainty around navigating educational processes was noted throughout participant accounts. When describing her course, Desta did not appear certain about the next steps:

*'I don't know. They say it's just this traineeship and for the apprenticeship… I don't know what to do in the apprenticeship as well…'* - Desta

However, there was a sense of confidence when Desta described reaching her end goal, where it seemed that she believed she could transcend any challenges ahead.

*'Just do whatever you have to do for for your dream. Maybe there is, there is a way, but sometimes we fail. And failing is not like, always there. You can get up and keep going, for what you want. I'm trying my best to get my dream. And I will do it.'* – Desta

There was a sense that participants' focus on the future may have offered a way of coping with the experiences where they were lacking control. It appeared that this focus on the future supported them to maintain confidence and belief in themselves. This interpretation of aspirations of future as a coping strategy is connected to participants 'sense of agency' and 'sense of belonging' in education, which will be explored further in the themes below.

**4.5 Sense of agency**

Another theme that was interpreted across the data sets was the participants' sense of agency in their experiences of education. In this context, agency refers to the sense that participants feel in control of their experiences within education and have the capacity to make decisions concerning their own future. This is captured in the related sub-themes: *dependence on self* and *learning practical skills.* The interpretation of participants' experiences highlighted interconnections between the Group Experiential Themes 'aspirations for the future' and 'sense

of agency', as participants appeared to look towards the future as a way of coping with experiences in which they were lacking control.

*4.51 Dependence on self*

There was a powerful sense of independence across all participants' accounts, where participants appeared to make sense of their educational journey as something they were pursuing on their own. There was a sense that this dependence on oneself offered a way of navigating and coping with experiences over which they were lacking control. I also wondered if this reflected the independence they had already shown on their journey to the UK as separated young people.

All participants were directly asked if there was anyone that could help them reach the future they described. Their responses seemed to suggest that young people viewed themselves as having the most important and active role in their educational journey.

Interviewer: *... Is there anybody that can help you get there?*

Ali*: There is no particular body or organisation or person. But as I carry on my education my learning of English then, with a process and we'll see what's happened.*

Ali's account may reflect a motivation to act independently. It could also be considered that Ali perceived there to be a need to depend only on himself, due to challenges in accessing appropriate support. There was a sense that viewing oneself as independent may contribute towards a reluctance to recognise opportunities to be supported by others. The extent to which participants may be able to recognise or accept help from others may also link to the relationships they had previously experienced in education. This interpretation will be explored further in the Group Experiential Theme, 'sense of belonging'.

Other participants did acknowledge the role of learning from other people within their experiences of education, however, there remained a strong sense of agency in their decisions concerning their own future.

Interviewer: *… Do you need any help to get there?*

Majid: *I rely on myself, on myself mostly. I would say if there were a course, in your particular type of style, I may just go there. Because you just need to get new things and you learn new things from others* (Majid)

It appeared that this sense of agency contributed to participants' intrinsic motivation to overcome challenges to reach their goals.

Interviewer: *… Is there anything that can help you get there?*

Ayele: *Yeah, more practicing myself. Not only tutor. The tutor they show you the way, only the way not that* [end] *point. For that point, if I get challenge anything, I do.*

It also appeared that participants' sense of agency empowered them to maintain belief in themselves. There was a sense that participants held a positive view of themselves as learners, which contributed to the recognition that they have the personal means and skills to make decisions that will lead to success inside and outside of education.

*'Just, just follow your, your feeling, just follow your mind for what you want to do in the future. And sometimes you have to ask people around you, because we are different. Some peoples have like good knowledge, to give you some advice.  Maybe from life experience, or from studying experience. So you don't, you don't, you don't have to do what they say to you. But just ask them and just keep it on your mind. And if it's cool, just follow that thing'*

- Ayele

A sense of agency also appeared to be reflected in participants' descriptions of learning. Many participants discussed their motivation to learn English and described great personal agency in learning and practising English outside of education.

*'I practice at home. I practice like spelling, reading. And then most of time I'm listening to English music. And then the news. I listen to news. And then if I, if I listen to some word, new word, I translate it'* - Ayele

*'I would say everybody has their own way. And they can find a way to make themselves better in every way of life, especially education. And in terms of learning language, try to watch movies, films, talk to people at anytime, and don't be shy. Be open to other people. And you can just find your way from there. Yeah, you will be good then'* - Ahmad

*4.52 Learning independence skills*

There was also a sense that participants valued their experiences of education as part of their move to independence. In this way, it appeared that independence was positioned as a destination, as well as an adaptive coping strategy. Ayele described the value of work experience linked to her college course, to develop her life skills as she moves towards independence.

Interviewer: *...do you think work experience has been helpful for you?*

Ayele: *Yeah. Because how I can communicate with the people, and then how I'm listening to the manager as well, and then how I'm organising everything in there. And then as well timekeeping...*

Majid's account also highlighted the importance of learning skills that he understood to be necessary to move towards independence. He also seemed to understand the purpose of the

support from his Social Worker and Support Worker as to learn how to depend on himself; their support appeared to be key to achieving this goal:

*'They help us in terms of learning daily activity necessary. Like bring a paper for me, write name of things in your household, going out how to read out the number of bus, where they going, where the bus stop and try to teach us to depend on ourselves rather than depending on someone else'* – Majid

There appeared to be tension between young people's desire for independence and agency and recognising the role of others to help them become more independent. There was a sense that while support from others was important to them, they were not dependent on these relationships. Young people's relationships with others will be explored further in the following theme, 'sense of belonging'.

**4.6 Sense of belonging**

A significant theme that was interpreted across each of the data sets was participants' accounts of experiencing a sense of belonging within education. In this context, belonging refers to the sense that participants feel accepted, included, and supported by others in education. The presence of this theme throughout the data seemed to suggest that it was a significant, shared experience across participants. Participants' accounts suggest there was some polarity within this theme, offering insight into the range of experiences that may influence young people's feelings of belonging. This polarity also seems to suggest that the experience of belonging is unique to individual participants. This is captured in the related sub-themes: *building relationships, feeling accepted by others,* and *support from key adults.* The interpretation of participants' experiences highlighted interconnections between the group experiential themes 'sense of agency', 'sense of belonging' and 'aspirations for the future',

where feelings of acceptance in education seemed to impact upon the extent to which participants asked for help, and their focus on the future.

*4.61 Building relationships*

Participants described a range of potent emotions following their arrival to the UK. This included feelings of sadness, loneliness and depression that were linked to their status as 'separated' young people who were apart from loved ones from their home country. All the participants described the value of building relationships with other people in college and the charity service as part of their resettlement in the UK. It appeared that these connections had a significant influence on their feelings of inclusion, contributing to a broader feeling of belonging. Desta's account highlights this emotive feeling, where she describes her experiences of educational provision at the charity service as that of a friendship and family:

*'This is like a friendship here. Yeah, like family because I mean, I'm here alone, I haven't got any family here. But when I came here, I can get to know many peoples in here.' - Desta*

The opportunity to build relationships with others appeared to be significant for Desta, where she contrasted her experiences of education with her experiences of being '*alone*' without her family in the UK. For Desta, developing a community and sense of belonging appeared to be a process that happened over time. It appeared that Desta felt integrated and part of something through the relationships she formed within education.

All participant's described how their experiences of education facilitated relationships with a variety of peers, who became their friends. Some participants described the value they placed on meeting a diverse range of people in education. There was a sense that meeting a range of different people who were from different backgrounds supported participants to consider their shared experiences of learning at college. It appeared that these shared

experiences supported participants to feel included and part of their own peer support group, which was enjoyable.

*'There were different types of people in college, apart from teachers. Friends, even most of them were not* [from country of origin]*, but from different nationality. We still went out together and talk with broken English but that was really helpful and I enjoyed seeing each other in college'* - Majid

Ahmad described how he valued meeting other young people from the same cultural background. I wondered whether their connection resulted from experiencing a 'sameness', in terms of language and culture, as well as the experiences they were having in their transition to the UK.

Ahmad: *At college, we still mostly with* [students from his country of origin] *... We still have other nationality friends, but mainly with the* [students from his country of origin]*. When I'm not at college, we go out with* [people from his country of origin] *again and they are just really nice people, if you need something, they can help with it.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel, having people that are from the same place as you?*

Ahmad: *Yeah, it's really nice. And it just take down from your home sick feeling and depression, and that's nice…*

For Ahmad, it appeared that being alongside others from a similar background supported him to feel part of a community, which offered a source of comfort and help beyond education. He described going out and accessing the local community with his network of peers. There was a sense that building relationships with peers who shared his language, culture, and experiences of transition to the UK made Ahmad feel safe and included, which gave him the confidence to explore the community beyond education.

There was also a sense that sharing similar experiences helped to relieve negative feelings associated with the transition to life in the UK. Ahmad described how being around peers reduced his feelings of homesickness. This was also noted in Ali's account, where he described that being surrounded by people and '*nice faces*' relieved his negative feelings associated with being in the UK without family:

*'The main good things is I don't feel homesick a lot when I'm here. Because when I'm home I feel a bit sad and depressed... that's why I came here a lot. Yeah, see all of this people, nice faces, nice stuff. So yeah, it's really good'* - Ali

There was a sense that being in the same environment as a lot of other people served as a positive contrast to participants' experiences of isolation in their transition to life in the UK. Ayele shared her positive experiences of college, linked to her relationships with others and the college environment:

Interviewer: *I wonder what you think the best thing about college is… your favourite thing or the most important?*

Ayele: *Everything! All of college... like tutors, friends, even college. I love my class. Because it's not empty…*

It appeared that for Ayele, who talked about being alone and without her family in the UK, connecting with others was very important. Her description of college as *'not empty'* seemed to suggest that being around and connecting with other people was an important part of her experience of college education. It is likely that this contributed to feelings of belonging and community within college.

*4.62 Feeling accepted by others*

There was also a clear sense that it was important for all participants to feel accepted in education. It appeared that the nature of participants' relationships with others influenced their feelings of acceptance within education, further contributing to a broader feeling of belonging. Ali described the role that staff at the charity service played in making him feel welcome when he joined:

*'They welcome us in, and if we need a drink or coffee or something, they get us that. And if we have a concern about something, sometime we tell them and they are helpful'* - Ali

His use of collective language '*us*' and '*we*', suggests that he may view his experiences of feeling welcome as a shared experience with his peers in education.

Similarly, Majid's account reinforced the importance attributed to feeling welcome, indicating that a welcoming environment is a priority for young people in their transition to education in the UK.

Interviewer: *And what advice would you give to a young person who arrives in the UK to seek safety and is just starting college?*

Majid: *I would do lots of things. First of all, I say okay, welcome...*

Participants' accounts seemed to suggest that feeling welcome and accepted in education went beyond the positive initial welcome they received. Ali, Ahmad, and Majid described how important it was that they felt that adults were fair to them as individuals, where they were accepted in the same way as their peers. Their accounts described the charity service as an accepting environment, where adult support embraced the differences of all young people.

*'They are really, really good people. And the, the main issue is they never ever differentiate between pupils ... we've seen this kind of discrimination outside well we never ever seen here they treat everybody equally and in the same level'* - Ali

*'Well, all of them are really good. And no discrimination'* - Ahmad

Majid's account of his experiences of education at the charity service included an acknowledgement of the cultural differences between the UK and his home country:

Interviewer: *.... How do you feel when you're at* [charity service]*?*

Majid: *Here is just like a second home we learned a lot, not just English, cultural things. Things are different between here and my home country ... yeah, it's not just about language, it is about making a personality here.*

There was a sense that learning about '*cultural things*' and '*making a personality*' may contribute towards Majid feeling accepted for who he is by others in the charity service. It appeared that staff created an environment where learning included showing interest and respect towards different cultural identities. This may have contributed towards participants' feeling that their differences were accepted within the educational context. This may have supported Majid's broader feelings of resettlement in the UK, where he described feeling like the charity service provided a '*second home*'.

These experiences of acceptance within the charity service were contrasted against some participants' perceptions of discrimination and exclusion at college.

*'I got very bad and sore and I couldn't go to college. I already emailed them that I can't come to school, and I need a sick leave or something like that. But my teacher didn't accept. And due to that, then they said, you can't come back to college. At the same time. I've seen people from other nationalities they didn't come to college for even two weeks. And nobody say anything to them'* - Majid

There was a sense that Majid understood the college's lack of acceptance of his reason for absence as a reflection of a broader lack of acceptance of his nationality. Majid also described how he saw a difference in how people behaved towards him and appeared to compare himself

to other people from different nationalities to make sense of this experience. There was a sense that this experience contributed to internalised feelings of difference from peers who were from other nationalities.

Majid described how challenging he found this experience at college:

*'It was really bad, an awful situation for me. And we try to tell people from college that there is an issue with this teacher. But I don't think they have done anything… they just took me off then… they just delete or remove us from going there'*

There was a sense that this contributed to feeling isolated and disconnected within education, where he appeared to feel dispensable within college following this as he was simply '*delete*[d]*'* from the system.

Ahmad also recounted his experiences with a member of staff that he perceived to be discriminatory. Ahmad appeared to make sense of this experience throughout the interview, where he hypothesised that the history of conflict in his home country contributed to a lack of acceptance of him and others with a shared background.

*'I will say this, that teacher doesn't want to see us... Mostly* [students from his region of origin] *and always looking for an excuse to us to get us in trouble… I think it's kind of racism things behind this … because of the conditions in our countries, they are in conflict most of the time. Maybe you don't see it outside, but actually, there's a real history of conflict…'* -

Ahmad

There was a sense that Ahmad's experiences may have further contributed to feelings of difference within the college setting by reminding him of the conflict within his home country, that led to his displacement. It appeared that Ahmad did not feel wanted or accepted in college following this experience.

There was also a sense that participants' perceptions of discrimination may have also contributed to their focus on the future, as a way of coping with these experiences. This links with the interpretations in the earlier group experiential theme, 'aspirations for the future'.

*'I didn't care about it for a while, what was going on between the teacher and the other* [students from his region of origin] *and I was still keep going on, asking her, asking them questions. They answered me most of the time. It was not nice to have such a kind of, type of personality in this high level of education in this country. I carried on for until I get to a point, I say I can't, I can't any longer so that's why I stopped'* - Ahmad

It could be interpreted that these experiences had led young people to work harder and '*still keep going on'* to achieve their goals and overcome these negative perceptions. However, for Ahmad, it appeared that this experience impacted his ability to cope with and enjoy education.

These experiences may also be linked with the previous group experiential theme, 'sense of agency' in which it was noted that participants appeared to view themselves as having a key and active role in their educational journey. One possible interpretation of this is that perceptions of discrimination may have influenced the extent to which participants felt they had trusting relationships, such that they could ask for help. In this context, participants seem to have made sense of the experience of not feeling accepted as a broader reflection of education as a hostile place, which may have contributed to a reluctance to recognise or ask for help. These accounts indicate how important feeling accepted and included within education is for young people seeking safety.

*4.63 Support from key adults*

All participants described how adults offered support with their education. There were differences in the description of adult support across college and charity service settings for

individual participants, however, the commonality of this theme indicated a level of similarity in relation to the importance of this support.

For Ayele, her teachers at college were important contributors to her self-belief as a learner, and she described their support as motivating. There was a sense that the support from adults at college helped Ayele to feel safe to take risks in her learning and utilise opportunities required to succeed in education.

Interviewer: *Is there anyone that helps you?*

Ayele: *First of all, teachers… I say I cannot do these things because it's not my first language, English… they say I can. They motivate for me. So first of all, teachers. (Ayele)*

Ayele also described how the relationship she built with a tutor at college also offered her emotional support. Her account suggests that the role of adults at college went beyond supporting her learning, comparing the tutor's role to that of a parent caring for a child. This relationship appeared to be significant for Ayele, built on trust, consistency, and emotional containment.

*'For example, my tutor, yeah. When I get in morning, she's asking me every week, she's asked not only me, everyone how was last night?. If I say for example, not good, she's asking me, why? Then why not good? And then if something happened later, she knows everything. So we have like with the tutor, not like teacher and student, like, child and the Mum like'* - Ayele

For Ali, Majid, Ahmad and Desta, it was adults at the charity service who provided a source of emotional support and guidance.

*'At any time if you have a worry about something you can just come over here talk with the staff and they show you kind of path, the way, which, which way is good to go through and to solve the issue. And maybe relax.'* - Ahmad

There was a contrast in how they described support from adults at college compared to adults at the charity service. Participants appeared to view the purpose of adults in college as offering support for their learning. This is illustrated in Desta's account; when describing the support from adults within her college, she noted their helpful role in providing learning tasks and checking for mistakes:

*'They, they try to help as much as they can. And yeah, they give us something to write and they will check how we write that thingy and if it's, if it's something wrong, they will let you know these are wrong, you have to change this this way. Yeah, they will check us for everything'* - Desta

There was a contrast in how she spoke of the support from adults at the charity service. Desta described key characteristics of the adults that she valued:

*'Everybody's nice and kind, and honest as well … they're beside me all the time … they're helping me with, with everything if, if they can do, if they can't do, of course they will. They will try to find other ways… they're lovely'* - Desta

There was also a sense that this support felt consistent for Desta, where staff were '*beside*' Desta to help support her through any challenges within education. Desta's description suggests that she perceived that adults at the charity service showed genuine care for young people. Her description of their support suggests a high level of commitment from staff, where she felt that they will *'find other ways'* to support them if needed. As noted earlier, Desta describes her experiences of educational provision at the charity service to that of a friendship and family:

*'This is like a friendship here. Yeah, like family because I mean, I'm here alone, I haven't got any family here. But when I came here, I can get to know many peoples in here. And sometimes they, they give us a chance to go somewhere to see and to spend time with them. For Christmas, they just give us some gifts. And we play with them'* - Desta

It appears that support from key adults offered the experiences that young people may typically share with a family member, where they could spend time with adults, go out into the community, and celebrate holidays. There was a strong sense that this support from key adults was a significant experience for young people in education.

**4.7 Summary of findings**

The findings highlighted four interconnected Group Experiential Themes that were interpreted from young people's experiences of post-16 education: *importance of developing English proficiency, aspirations for the future, sense of agency,* and *sense of belonging.* The findings indicate a level of similarity regarding what was significant in the experiences of education for young people seeking safety in this research, where participants manifested the themes in unique ways. These findings will now be discussed in more detail in relation to relevant psychological theory and existing research.

# Chapter 5

## Discussion

### 5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter focuses on making meaning of the interpretation of participants' experiences of post-16 education. The themes identified within the findings section are discussed in relation to relevant psychological theory and recent research, to answer the research question. Limitations of the design are considered, before highlighting implications and unique contributions for practice and future research.

### 5.2 Summary of research

This research aimed to explore the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. It sought to give voice to their lived experiences through semi-structured interviews and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology. The research aimed to answer the following research question: *what are the lived experiences of separated young people seeking safety in post-16 education in the UK?* Four interconnected Group Experiential Themes were interpreted from young people's experiences of post-16 education: *importance of developing English proficiency, aspirations for the future, sense of agency* and *sense of belonging.* While these themes were manifested in unique ways for each participant, the findings suggest that there may be some similarity in the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK, based upon the participant sample used and interpretation offered within this study. These findings will now be discussed in more detail in relation to relevant psychological theory and research.

### 5.2.1 Importance of developing English proficiency

The importance of developing English proficiency was interpreted as a theme in all young people's experiences of education. Young people's developing language skills appeared to have a significant impact on their experience of education, where language was key to their social identity, academic progress, and reaching their aspirations for the future. This is, perhaps, not a surprising finding, as it adds to the considerable prior research that notes the importance of language in the resettlement of separated young people seeking safety (Chase, 2013; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Morgan, 2018). These findings suggest there is a continued need for appropriate post-16 language provision, catering for the needs of separated young people.

*A safe space to learn English*

Young people appeared to make sense of education as a way to learn English and described significant efforts to develop their proficiency. This is in line with research by Fuller and Hayes (2020), where separated young people perceived their education as a way of learning English and had a strong desire for additional resources to learn at their own pace. The present findings also suggest that for some young people, education not only provided an opportunity to learn English, but also an emotionally safe environment to learn. Young people appeared to value the shared experience of learning alongside others, where they felt safe to practice and make mistakes. Interestingly, the experience of an emotionally safe environment to learn English did not appear in the reviewed literature that contained the perspectives of young people seeking safety. Previous research using the perspective of teachers in Australia has highlighted the value of creating safe spaces in education for young people seeking safety, where they can make mistakes, explore new understandings, and build their confidence (Crawford, 2017; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010). It could be interpreted that other themes found within the literature, such as 'sense of belonging', may reflect the importance of having a sense

of emotional safety for separated young people in education. The present study findings add to this, by suggesting that separated young people may interpret post-16 education as an emotionally safe space to develop their English proficiency, which appeared to be an important aspect of the experience of the young people in this research.

*A link between language and safety needs*

It was also interpreted that young people's developing English proficiency contributed towards their feelings of safety in resettlement. Participants shared their initial fears of being misunderstood because of their language skills, which appeared to discourage some participants from attempting to communicate with others. Developing their English proficiency appeared to provide a level of practical safety, where young people could express their needs to others and access support without the fear of being misunderstood. This is consistent with Chase's (2013) research, which presented language as a barrier to separated young people's security in resettlement. The present research suggests that young people's sense of safety in education appeared to be extended when they felt they were able to communicate with others and build trusting relationships. Developing a sense of safety through language appeared to be a necessary step before the young people in this sample felt confident to communicate and build relationships with others to develop a sense of belonging, and progress with learning.

These findings appear to suggest a symbiotic interaction between language proficiency and safety. English proficiency appears to contribute to young people's feelings of safety to interact with their environment, in the same way that a safe educational environment appears to enable the development of English proficiency. This interpretation is consistent with Madziva and Thondhlana's (2017) view that positions young people seeking safety's language proficiency at the centre of their interactions with their environment. The findings suggest that language may play a mediating role in young people's reciprocal interactions with their

*microsystem*, where education offers a safe place to develop English proficiency, which provides a tool for communication with others*,* contributing to feelings of safety. This interpretation seems to be consistent with the value young people in the present study placed on developing their English proficiency and suggests the need for appropriate post-16 language provision for separated young people.

## 5.2.2 Aspirations for the future

*Role of education in making sense of the future*

The aspirations of separated young people seeking safety were also highlighted as a group theme, where young people in the present study described high educational aspirations and hopes for the future. This links to previous research that describes separated young people as highly motivated, viewing educational success as a priority (Morrice et al., 2020; O'Higgins, 2019). The young people's hopes for the future seemed to provide motivation to work hard, where education was at the centre of their planning. Similar to previous research, young people's conceptions of success appeared to be closely connected with educational attainment and moving towards clearly defined careers (Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Johnson, 2018). It was interpreted that education supported young people to make sense of their future, where navigating educational pathways became central to how they imagined the future. This supports interpretations from Chase (2013, p. 858), who suggested that separated young people have a fundamental need for a *'projected self',* where they can visualise their place and future role in the world. Chase (2013) suggests that this need is integral to young people's wellbeing. The present findings suggest that clear educational pathways may contribute towards young people's ability to imagine themselves in the future, offering structure to their hopes and paving the way for future successes.

*Navigating educational pathways with hope*

Interestingly, within the present research, young people's clarity around their hopes for the future appeared to contrast with their sense of uncertainty when describing navigating the processes within education to reach their goals. This finding fits with the described difficulties that separated young people seem to experience when navigating an unfamiliar education system in the UK (Gladwell & Chetwynd, 2018; Doggett, 2012; Johnson, 2021, Morgan, 2018). Doyle and O'Toole (2013) reported a lack of formal information, advice, and guidance around access to post-16 educational pathways. The present findings suggest that this was a confusing and frustrating experience for young people. It was interpreted that young people's focus on the future may serve as a coping strategy when navigating this uncertainty. This way of coping has been noted in previous research with separated young people; Groark et al., (2010) suggested that looking to the future may offer a way of coping with experiences over which separated young people were lacking control. Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) reported a similar interpretation in their study of separated young people in Ireland. Their research suggested that separated young people adopt a positive outlook of hope towards the future, to cope with difficult present life circumstances. It appears that separated young people's hopes for the future may offer a powerful source of positivity. The present findings add to this, by suggesting that education may contribute towards young people's ability to imagine themselves in the future, which may serve as a hopeful coping strategy when navigating an educational system over which they lack control.

### 5.2.3 Sense of agency

*Coping with limits to agency*

Young people's sense of agency was interpreted as a group theme within their experiences of education. Young people appeared to view themselves as independent, where

they seemed to make sense of their educational journey as something they were pursuing on their own. This was an interesting finding, given young people's descriptions of experiences that appeared to limit their agency in education, including the barrier of English, navigating unfamiliar educational pathways, and perceptions of discrimination from others. It was interpreted that young people's apparent self-reliance may serve as a way of coping with their educational experiences. Their sense of personal agency appeared to empower them to maintain a belief in themselves and their ability to overcome the challenges that may lie ahead. This interpretation sits alongside previous research which has suggested that independence may reflect a way of coping for separated young people. For example, Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010, p. 231) identified '*acting independently*' as an active coping strategy for separated young people seeking safety. They suggested that adopting an independent self-perception may support young people to feel a sense of control and help them to cope with their circumstances. Moreover, Fuller and Hayes' (2020) research also noted this strategy in an educational context, where separated young people appeared to search for opportunities to learn independently, seeking additional resources to learn at their own pace. They suggested that this may have been a means of coping with stress. The present findings add to this research, by noting that the experience of post-16 education may limit young people's feelings of agency, which may contribute towards their view of themselves as independent, as they seek to cope with the possible challenges that lie ahead.

*Agency and relationships*

It was further interpreted that viewing oneself as independent may hinder young people's ability to recognise when they may need support from others. Johnson (2021) notes the dangers of assuming separated young people's agency, without balancing this with recognition of their individual needs and vulnerability. Johnson (2021) endorses a view of

agency in terms of a person's relationships and context. In line with this understanding of agency, it was interpreted that young people's desire for personal agency and independence may reflect their experiences of support, or lack of support, in post-16 education. The findings highlighted tension between young people's desire for personal agency, and the need for trusting relationships with others to consider the possibility of help. This tension was also noted in Doggett's (2012) research, where an interaction between personal agency and drawing upon relationships was noted to be a dilemma for separated young people seeking safety. This dilemma was considered to be particularly relevant for separated young people who may be trying to maintain resilience given their experiences of transition and loss.

The present findings appear particularly pertinent to separated young people in post-16 educational provision, where young people are encouraged to move towards independence to prepare for adulthood quickly (Sirriyeh & Raghallaigh, 2018). It therefore seems important to consider the connection between young people's sense of agency and their aspirations for the future. The previous theme, aspirations for the future, noted the contrast in the clarity of young people's high educational aspirations compared to their uncertainties about how they might reach these goals. It could be interpreted that young people's strong sense of personal agency limited their ability to recognise the help that was available in navigating the educational pathways to their hopes. Alternatively, young people's independence in their plans for their educational journey may reflect the lack of support available for this age group in post-16 education. Rutter (2003) reported difficulties with accessing appropriate careers advice for separated young people in further education. Peterson et al. (2017) also noted the challenges for educational settings in supporting the aspirations of young people seeking safety. Young people seeking safety's needs may be different to other young people in post-16 educational settings, where cultural factors, immigration status and individual aspirations may affect their choices and access to different educational pathways (Rutter, 2003). These needs may, in turn,

impact on the advice and guidance given to them. When considering these interpretations together, the findings suggest that while separated young people are motivated to succeed in education and view themselves as active agents in reaching their goals, many young people may benefit from support from adults to help them navigate the path to success. This fits with Kohli's (2011) theory of resettlement as involving transitions through safety, belonging and success. The findings suggest that young people need to feel safe in education, to be able to build trusting relationships with adults that can support them to navigate the pathway to success.

It is helpful to consider the dynamic and reciprocal nature of young people's journey to success, in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective. The findings suggest that we should not only consider how young people develop within and experience the *microsystem* of post-16 education, but also how the *microsystem* of post-16 education adapts to the needs of this group of young people. The present study suggests that separated young people may stand to benefit from more focused support when navigating educational pathways, which engage with their high aspirations and desire for independence.

**5.2.4 Sense of belonging**

Young people's sense of belonging in education was also interpreted as a group theme, where young people described the significance of building relationships, feeling accepted by others, and support from key adults in education. This is consistent with prior research that has highlighted the importance of developing a sense of belonging in schools for young people seeking safety (Hastings, 2012; Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; McDiarmid, 2022; Pastoor, 2015; Sobitan, 2022). Kohli's (2011) theory highlights the importance of developing belonging for separated young people who have moved away from family, friends, and the physical space of home. Kohli (2011) suggests that the need to belong to people and place becomes a conscious

goal for separated young people in their resettlement. This interpretation appears to be consistent with the importance of belonging for young people within this research.

*The importance of relationships*

The experience of building relationships with peers and adults in education was interpreted to play a key role in young people's sense of belonging, supporting previous findings (Cartmell & Bond, 2015; Sobitan, 2022). These relationships in education are likely to be particularly important for separated young people who are apart from their parents or relatives (Farrugia, 2020). The findings suggest that young people appeared to make sense of their relationships in education as a way of relieving feelings of loneliness and homesickness associated with being in the UK without family. This supports previous research that has associated developing a sense of belonging with emotional wellbeing and better mental health outcomes for young people seeking safety (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Sancho & Cline, 2012; McDiarmid, 2022). This suggests that it is important that systems of education enable opportunities for social relationships to develop to improve the wellbeing of young people seeking safety (Thommessen & Todd, 2018).

*The role of peers*

Young people's relationships with their peers appeared to be an important part of their experiences of education. Young people appeared to see their peers as key helpers during their resettlement; this included the shared learning experience of developing their English proficiency together, exploring the local community with their peer network, and feeling part of a peer support group. This finding supports previous research that has highlighted the role of peers in helping young people settle into education (Hastings, 2012), increasing their

knowledge of the environment and rules (Fuller & Hayes, 2020), being a source of learning support in the classroom (Farmborough, 2014), and offering advice (Morgan, 2018).

In line with previous research, some young people valued being around a diverse range of peers in education from different backgrounds (Farrugia, 2020). It was interpreted that this experience supported young people to consider their shared experiences, which contributed to feeling included and part of something within education. Other young people appeared to seek and value friendships with peers who were similar to them in experiences, background or age, which concurs with findings by Farmbrough (2014), Fuller & Hayes (2020), and Johnson (2018). It was interpreted that some young people may have experienced a stronger connection to young people that were similar to them, contributing to their feelings of belonging (Farrugia, 2020). While young people shared different perspectives on peer relationships, when considered together, these findings suggest that the value of peer relationships was their contribution to young people's sense of belonging within education.

*The role of adults*

All participants described how adults offered support with their education, including supporting their developing English proficiency, contributing to their self-belief, providing emotional support, and guiding them to make the right decisions. This is in line with previous research that has shown the importance of developing positive relationships with adults in young people's experiences of education. Young people have reported the importance of supportive adults in education, that helped them to settle in school (Hek, 2005), fostered their confidence and motivation to achieve (Thommessen & Todd, 2018) and created a containing environment which made young people feel accepted, respected, and valued within education (Farrugia, 2020; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Morgan, 2018). The present research highlights the value of relationships with key adults in education for young people, which appeared to

contribute towards their sense of belonging. Research suggests that separated young people may value the opportunities to develop relationships with adults in education in the absence of their families (Thommessen & Todd, 2018; Farrugia, 2020). These adults may take on a *'parent figure'* in education by providing emotional support and guidance (Pastoor, 2015, p. 248). Pastoor (2015) suggests that teachers may have '*to step out of their role'* and move beyond teaching, to become a key adult in young people seeking safety's lives (Pastoor, 2015, p. 249).

The present findings also highlighted the significance of negative interactions with adults in young people's experiences of education. Some young people shared their perception of experiences of discrimination and racism from adults in college, which appeared to contribute to feelings of isolation and difference, and for one young person, it contributed to their decision to stop attending college. Previous research with young people seeking safety has also reported perceptions of racism and prejudice from adults within education (Bešić, et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2019; Thommessen & Todd, 2018). Research suggests that negative interactions with adults in education are linked to negative outcomes for young people, including mental health outcomes (Fazel et al., 2012), highlighting the need to eliminate discrimination in education. It was also interpreted that these experiences may have contributed to young people's strong focus on the future, and reliance on themselves to get there, as outlined in 5.2.3.

When interpreting these experiences for young people, I wondered whether the continued policy changes in the UK, such as a focus on controlling migration, measures of educational performance and centralised funding as outlined in Chapter 1, may influence the sense of inclusion experienced by separated young people seeking safety within education. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective encourages consideration of the layers of systems that influence and contribute to individual experiences. It could be interpreted that

political agendas and negative discourses around separated young people may present as *macrosystemic* influences on the *microsystem* of education, contributing to experiences of discrimination within education (McIntyre & Hall, 2020; Thommessen & Todd, 2018).

*Differences between different education settings and provision*

An interesting finding from this research is the interpretation of differences in how most young people appeared to experience relationships with adults across different forms of educational provision. Young people appeared to value different characteristics of adults across settings. Young people noted the value of adults in formal educational provision, such as ESOL classes, where adults supported their learning, by providing work and checking for mistakes. In contrast, young people described adults from the charity service where they received informal education as consistent, accepting, providing emotional support, and showing genuine care and personal investment in the life of the young person (see section 3.6.2 for details of the roles and responsibilities of the charity service). These characteristics show some similarities to the attachment figures described by Bowlby (1969). Attachment theories highlight the importance of relationships where young people feel safe, can trust that their needs will be consistently met, and have a secure base from which to explore the world (Donaldson, 2020). This interpretation suggests that separated young people, who have typically been forced to leave or have lost these important relationships, may seek adults who can provide a secure relationship of this kind in their resettlement. For one young person, formal college education appeared to provide this type of relationship. However, the findings suggest that most young people found security in the relationships created with adults in the charity service. These findings were interpreted to suggest that whilst the help that adults in formal education provide to support the learning of young people is beneficial, it is the development of secure

relationships in the charity service that appeared to contribute to the wellbeing and belonging of young people in resettlement.

There also appeared to be differences in young people's descriptions of belonging across different education settings and provision. It appeared that the nature of participants' relationships with others across different educational settings influenced their feelings of belonging. Young people described the charity service as an accepting environment, where adult support embraced and respected their different cultural identities. This was contrasted against some young people's perceptions of discrimination and a lack of acceptance within the further education environment. The findings suggest that the experience of acceptance of their unique identities is an important experience for separated young people in education. This can be understood in the context of Kohli's (2011) theory of safety, belonging and success, which would suggest that finding a space where young people feel *safe* to be themselves is an important step towards developing a sense of *belonging.* This interpretation is also in line with previous research that suggests that young people seeking safety experience enhanced belonging when the different aspects of their identity are respected and affirmed (Allen & Kern, 2017; Sobitan, 2022).

These findings may be of particular pertinence to young people in post-16 educational provision. Colleges of further education can be experienced as *'impersonal places'* for young people seeking safety, where there is limited pastoral support available to young people who are managing the impact of the significant transition of life in the UK alone (Rutter, 2003, p.175). The present findings suggest that for young people in post-16 education, the pastoral support and acceptance provided by informal educational provision, such as the charity service in this research, is particularly important given their experiences of formal education. This interpretation can be considered with reference to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory

(1979) which suggests that we must not only consider young people's immediate educational environment, *the microsystem,* but also the links between the settings that the young people participate in, *the mesosystem,* and that these taken together represent a holistic community of support for young people.

*Safety, belonging and success in education*

The present findings suggest the value of consideration of Kohli's (2011) concepts of 'safety', 'belonging' and 'success' when considering the role of education in facilitating separated young people's journeys towards resettlement (McIntyre & Abrams, 2020; McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). The findings highlight the importance of creating a safe space in which young people can develop their English proficiency, engage in shared learning experiences with their peers, and build trusting relationships with key adults whom they can turn to for help. Once young people feel safe and make sense of their new context, they appear to begin to feel a sense of belonging. Moreover, the findings appear to indicate that belonging is a unique process for individuals, that may be enhanced by an inclusive and accepting ethos, culturally competent practice and explicit opportunities for relationship building with peers and key adults in education. Developing a sense of belonging in this way may create opportunities for young people to experience feelings of success in their new environment. The findings suggest that the concept of success goes beyond academic achievement, where young people may benefit from opportunities to imagine themselves in the future, support to navigate the pathways towards their hopes and ultimately develop a sense of agency.

## 5.2.5 Comparison of IPA Themes to the Thematic Synthesis

These interpretations can also be compared to the findings of the thematic synthesis of the literature, as presented in Chapter 2, to consider what the present research has added to our understanding. The thematic synthesis of the literature identified four key themes regarding

separated young people's experiences of education: *lack of security, sense of belonging, role of language,* and *aspirations*. These themes are represented within the Group Experiential Themes that were generated in the present research, strengthening previous interpretations from other studies. This suggests that these themes represent important aspects of the educational experience for separated young people seeking safety, in a different context. The present research also adds a new interpretation to the existing literature, with its novel focus on experiences of post-16 education.

The importance of developing English proficiency was highlighted as a Group Experiential Theme within the present findings, supporting the thematic synthesis of the literature. The present findings also add depth to this theme, by suggesting that separated young people seemed to interpret post-16 education as an emotionally safe space to develop their English proficiency, which appeared to be an important aspect of their experience. Interestingly, this finding did not appear in the thematic synthesis of the literature. The present research, therefore, extends our understanding of the important relationship between language and education for this age group by using the perspective of young people.

The aspirations of separated young people were also highlighted as a Group Experiential Theme within the present findings, supporting the thematic synthesis of the literature. In the present research, it was interpreted that young people's aspirations may serve as a hopeful coping strategy when navigating a confusing educational system, over which they lack control. This interpretation links to the theme, lack of security, which was highlighted as a standalone theme in the thematic synthesis of the literature. The present research, therefore, suggests an interesting connection between the role of aspirations and feelings of security in post-16 education.

The importance of belonging in education was also highlighted as a Group Experiential Theme within this research, supporting the thematic synthesis of the literature. Interestingly, this theme was experienced divergently between participants in the present research. The findings highlighted differences in experiences of education across forms of post-16 education, linked to young people's relationships with adults in these settings. This present research, therefore, adds to our understanding of belonging for separated young people and highlights the need to consider the holistic community of support for young people when considering their experiences.

In the present research, separated young people's sense of agency was also highlighted as a Group Experiential Theme. This did not emerge as a standalone theme in the thematic synthesis of the literature, representing a new interpretation in the present study. It may be that exercising agency is particularly pertinent in the post-16 educational context, where young people are encouraged to move towards independence as they transition to adulthood. It was also interpreted that young people's self-reliance in their plans for their educational journey may reflect the lack of support available for this age group in post-16 education. Therefore, the present research suggests that there is a need for guidance for young people when navigating post-16 pathways that engage with their high aspirations and hopes for independence.

### 5.2.7 Summary

The research aimed to answer the following research question: *what are the lived experiences of separated young people seeking safety in post-16 education in the UK?* The findings highlighted four interconnected Group Experiential Themes from young people's experiences of post-16 education: *importance of developing English proficiency, aspirations for the future, sense of agency* and *sense of belonging.* These findings strengthen previous interpretations from other studies with separated young people seeking safety in the UK, in a

different context. The novel focus on post-16 education also adds a new interpretation to the literature in this area. The methodology of the present research will now be reviewed, before suggesting its distinctive contribution and highlighting possible implications for practice and further research.

**5.3 Methodological Review**

It is important to consider and review the quality of the research methodology before any implications can be highlighted. The research considered Yardley's (2008) principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research when developing the research method. Details of the steps taken to meet these criteria are outlined in section 3.8.

The present research aimed to explore the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK; in doing so, it sought to give voice to young people's individual lived experiences. The research is grounded in interpretivism, and as such, aimed to gain a deeper understanding of young people's multiple and individual interpretations of their experiences through my interaction with them. It is considered that IPA was an appropriate methodology to meet these aims.

The small scale of this research, exploring the views of five participants, was deemed to be appropriate for an IPA study to allow a *sensitive* and *rigorous* interpretation of experience. The purposive sampling method, using referral and snowballing through the charity service, aimed to recruit a homogenous sample, as reported in section 3.6.4. While this method did support access to participants, the sampling method was only likely to access young people who have already created social networks with the charity service. This means that the findings do not reflect the experiences or views of other separated young people in the UK, especially given the heterogeneity of the experiences of people seeking safety (Pinson & Arnot, 2010; Rutter, 2006). Moreover, despite the described homogeneity in the selected sample, it is also

important to recognise that the young people in this research also have unique experiences and will have shared their individual interpretations of their experiences. Whilst the interpretations suggest some commonalities of experience between participants, and with other studies with separated young people seeking safety, I do not seek to claim transferability of these findings. It is instead hoped that the tentative conclusions that are drawn may hold practical *importance* for educational and psychological practitioners, as will be explored in section 5.5.

It is also important to consider how I, as the researcher, have influenced the research process. I bring my own interpretations to the analysis and findings that are presented and recognise that another researcher may have interpreted the data differently. I therefore do not claim neutrality and consider it to be inevitable that my personal experiences will have influenced the research process. I have aimed to demonstrate my reflexivity throughout this thesis to highlight my *commitment* to the participants' individual experiences. I have also sought to maintain *transparency* regarding my interpretations through the presentation of a step-by-step example of my approach to analysis (see Appendices 14-17), alongside several verbatim quotations, to guide the reader through my interpretations and to support drawing of their own interpretations.

The research was also limited by my own linguistic abilities. I was not able to communicate in depth with three separated young people without the use of an interpreter. As noted in earlier chapters, working alongside an interpreter for three of the interviews is likely to have added to the layers of interpretations, creating a three-way co-construction of data. I aimed to be transparent about the role of the interpreter in the research process throughout this thesis and actively sought to consider the impact of their interpretation on my interpretation of the data (see section 3.7.1). It was considered to be more pertinent to attempt to explore young people's experiences through the use of an interpreter, whilst acknowledging the limitations

that this poses, than exclude the voice of potentially vulnerable and marginalised individuals on the basis of my language skills.

**5.4 Distinctive Contribution**

As discussed in the literature review, much of the research in this area has focused on the experiences of trauma for people seeking safety and their narratives of adversity, which can fail to acknowledge the significance of their post-migration experiences (Rutter, 2006; Shah, 2018). The aim of this research was to move away from a focus on past experiences to allow for due consideration to be given to young people's experiences of resettlement, and in particular, the important role that systems around young people can play in supporting positive outcomes, such as education (Hart, 2009). Research has also highlighted the lack of consideration given to the voice of young people seeking safety in their education, and their invisibility in educational policy and practice (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Hek, 2005; McIntyre & Abrams, 2020). This research aimed to fill this gap, by giving a voice to separated young people seeking safety about their experiences of education in an academic sphere, where they are usually not considered.

Moreover, the literature review suggested that separated young people seeking safety aged between 16-18 years are particularly vulnerable in resettlement, linked to difficulties in accessing appropriate educational support, and a lack of awareness from post-16 providers about their needs. This research therefore specifically explored the experiences of separated young people in post-16 education, to generate novel insight and understanding of their educational needs and aspirations in this context, and to enable professionals to learn from their experiences and inform the support offered across educational settings.

The inductive IPA methodology offers a unique interpretation of a group of separated young people's experiences of post-16 education in a Midlands local authority. While the

findings have strengthened previous interpretations from other studies with separated young people seeking safety in the UK, the methodology also encouraged the research to move into unanticipated areas, which allowed for interpretations that were not prevalent in current literature in this area. Examples include the importance of an emotionally safe space to develop English proficiency, differences in experiences between different forms of post-16 educational provision, and the need for guidance when navigating post-16 pathways that engage with young people's high aspirations and desire for independence. This research suggests that post-16 educational settings stand to benefit from developing their understanding and practices that support the needs of separated young people seeking safety. The implications of these findings will be discussed in 5.5.

## 5.5 Implications for practice

Yardley's (2008) principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research highlight the need to consider the impact and importance of research. In this section, I will draw on the unique interpretations, conclusions, and wider literature to suggest possible implications for individuals and systems involved in separated young people's education, to highlight the proposed impact and importance of these findings.

The findings support previous literature that noted the important role that education can play in supporting separated young people seeking safety in resettlement (Ott & O'Higgins, 2019; Sobitan, 2022; Thommessen & Todd, 2018; Ward, 2021). Furthermore, they suggest that professional's practice may benefit from considering the context of, and the interaction between, separated young people and their educational environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When looking at the findings from an ecosystemic perspective, implications can be drawn at different levels. At the *microsystem* level, the findings highlight the value of creating explicit opportunities for relationship building and shared learning experiences between separated

young people, their peers, and key adults in education to foster feelings of safety and belonging. The findings also suggest the need to consider connections between young people's immediate systems, at the *mesosystem* level, such as the different support available in informal and formal educational settings. There could be potential opportunities for enhanced collaboration between these systems to offer a holistic, community understanding of the needs of separated young people. The findings also seem to indicate that educational settings could benefit from developing further understanding of the individual needs and aspirations of separated young people, in order to offer support indirectly, at an *exosystem* level. There may also be changes needed at the *macrosystem* level, to challenge the current political agendas and negative discourses about separated young people seeking safety that may contribute to their experiences of discrimination within education. Some of these implications will now be explored in further detail.

*Promoting relationships with peers*

The present research highlights the importance of peer relationships in the development of young people's sense of belonging within education, where separated young people appeared to value opportunities for shared learning in education, as well as opportunities to explore the broader community with their peers. Educational settings could create explicit opportunities for separated young people to build relationships and extend their social networks; this could include, for example, creating a buddy system, arranging college trips, and providing extracurricular activities.

*Key adult role*

The findings highlight the important role of key adults in education, where separated young people appear to value both academic and emotional support from adults to experience

feelings of safety, belonging and success in education. This suggests implications for providing separated young people with a key adult within the setting who can provide this support. This is an important consideration for educational settings, such as further education colleges, that have been noted to be 'impersonal places' with limited pastoral support for separated young people who may be managing the impact of the significant transitions alone (Rutter, 2003, p.175). The findings suggest that educational settings may need to reconsider their pastoral provision and enhance the supportive role played by some staff to meet the needs of separated young people, so that they can become a key adult in young people's lives. It will be important for settings to consider who is best placed to provide this type of support. These staff may need appropriate professional learning and development opportunities to support their understanding of the experiences, needs and aspirations of separated young people to be able to move into this role.

*A welcoming and accepting ethos*

Education settings may also benefit from some further reflection on their approach to separated young people seeking safety at an organisational level, to build a welcoming and accepting ethos that could challenge wider discourses and practices that may be perceived as discriminatory. It is imperative that separated young people experience education as a safe and accepting environment, that is free from discrimination. The findings further suggest that educational settings may benefit from training and supervision to develop their reflexivity, to consider how their systems, discourses and personal bias may contribute to young people seeking safety's experiences of discrimination within education.

*Appropriate educational and careers guidance*

The findings highlight that separated young people may also stand to benefit from more focused support when navigating educational pathways that encourage their high aspirations and desire for independence. Educational settings should hold high expectations of separated young people. Settings could also develop clear processes that allow young people to access appropriate educational and careers guidance that acknowledges their needs, while offering flexibility and choice in relation to their options. This could include, for example, support to find volunteer placements, work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships, and further or higher education courses that may lead to their chosen careers.

*Creating safe spaces to develop English proficiency*

Additionally, this research emphasises the importance of developing English proficiency for separated young people and suggests there is a continued need for appropriate language provision, catering for the needs of separated young people. The findings suggest that professionals should consider how safe spaces of learning are developed, that allow for shared learning experiences with peers in education, where young people feel safe to make mistakes. The findings suggest that support to develop young people's English proficiency may contribute to their broader feelings of safety, belonging and success in education.

## 5.6 Implications for Educational Psychology practice

I have been professionally motivated to carry out research that is relevant to Educational Psychology practice, and my future practice as an Educational Psychologist. The changing demographic profile of young people seeking safety in the UK has implications for systems of support, such as education, and so the role of Educational Psychologists (Hart, 2009).

The findings suggest that educational settings may benefit from support in developing their understanding of the needs of separated young people seeking safety. Educational

Psychologists can play an active role in promoting the distinct needs of separated young people seeking safety in their work with educational settings (Hart, 2009). This could include explicit consideration of young people seeking safety in planning meetings with settings and networks of professionals and contributing to training to support the needs of educational settings, by using and applying psychological theory and knowledge outlined in this research. For example, Educational Psychologists could support settings to explicitly consider what they are doing to promote concepts of safety, belonging, and success across systemic levels in casework and consultation with settings, and when promoting whole-setting organisational change approaches.

This research has also highlighted the value of giving a voice to separated young people in education, and so calls for further opportunities for separated young people to share their experiences. Educational Psychologists are well placed to gather the views of young people so that their individual experiences and needs are privileged and remain at the centre of their support (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Ingram, 2013).

## 5.7 Implications at a local authority level

The research may also hold implications at a local authority level. As noted in section 3.6.1, there does not appear to be a central record of the number of separated young people who are accessing education in the local authority where this research took place. It appears that policy and practice that supports and monitors the outcomes for separated young people falls within the broader policies surrounding children in care (DfE, 2018). This research suggests that separated young people seeking safety are a distinct group of young people, with their own individual experiences and aspirations. This research therefore calls for consideration of the distinct needs of separated young people within policy and practice that aims to support looked after children, particularly pertaining to their education. This research suggests the need

to consider how local authorities are ensuring that the unique needs of separated young people are addressed in policy and practice, and how their views are taken into account.

**5.8 Implications for future research**

The present research has explored the idiographic experiences of a small sample of separated young people seeking safety in one local authority. Further research could expand on these findings to consider how the themes are represented across the wider population of separated young people in different contexts in the UK, drawing data from a range of different forms of educational provision. Moreover, further research could also utilise different informant groups, such as teachers, other pupils, and relevant members of the community to explore the ways in which support can be offered within the educational context.

The present study highlighted the value of working with separated young people and encouraging them to give voice to their experiences. To generate insight and ideas for change, further research could also utilise different methodologies to provide additional depth to the understanding of educational experiences for separated young people. It has been suggested that research with people seeking safety is suited to participatory action research, which allows young people to have greater ownership and influence over the research outcomes (Temple & Morgan, 2006; Sobitan, 2022). On the basis of the present study, this is something that could usefully be explored further.

Further research could also consider the use of a longitudinal design to explore how young people navigate the pathways of education and transition to adulthood. This could include consideration of the experiences of separated young people over time, following up with young people who are considered to succeed as well as those who do not continue in education. It might be valuable to consider how systems can support separated young people to reach their high aspirations through post-16 routes and into higher education, considering

the barriers they might face and the support mechanisms which may help to manage these barriers.

## 5.9 Research Conclusion

This research is set at a time when the number of people who have been forcibly displaced is rapidly rising; the past year has seen a notable escalation of new and existing conflicts that resulted in the fastest forced displacement crisis since World War II (UNHCR, 2022). This has forced thousands of children and young people to travel without the support of an adult, to seek safety in another country (Home Office, 2022). This context highlighted an important area for research, to explore the needs of separated young people seeking safety and consider how they could be supported in their journeys to resettlement in the UK.

A review of the literature highlighted the important role that systems around young people can play in supporting positive outcomes, such as education (Hart, 2009). Despite this, there is a lack of consideration given to the voice of young people seeking safety in their education, which appears to render them invisible in educational policy and practice (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Hek, 2005; McIntyre & Abrams, 2020). This prompted a focused review, utilising systematic searching methods, to synthesise qualitative research that explores the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety. The review highlighted the lack of research in this area, and highlighted differences in the experiences of education associated with the age of separated young people, and the type of educational provision they experienced.

To address this gap, qualitative exploratory research was undertaken. This research aimed to explore the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK. It sought to give a voice to their lived experiences through semi-structured interviews and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis methodology. Four

interconnected Group Experiential Themes were interpreted from young people's experiences of post-16 education: *importance of developing English proficiency, aspirations for the future, sense of agency* and *sense of belonging.* While these themes were manifested in unique ways for each participant, the findings suggest that there may be some similarity in the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK, based upon the participant sample used and interpretation offered within this study.

The research attempts to offer a distinctive contribution through its focus on post-16 education. This focus strengthened previous interpretations from other studies with separated young people across other age groups and settings, while offering novel interpretations that were not prevalent in the current literature in this area. Interesting findings include the importance of an emotionally safe space to develop separated young people's English proficiency, differences in separated young people's experiences between different post-16 educational settings, and the need for guidance when navigating post-16 pathways that engage with separated young people's high aspirations and desire for independence.

A methodological review highlighted the strengths and limitations of this research. The small scale of this research, exploring the views of five participants allowed a sensitive and rigorous interpretation of their experience. Whilst the interpretations suggest some commonalities of experience between participants, and with other studies with separated young people seeking safety, this research does not seek to claim transferability of these findings. It is instead hoped that the tentative conclusions that are drawn may hold practical utility for educational and psychological practitioners, and prompt further research in this area.

The research has highlighted implications for Educational Psychology practice. The research suggests that educational professionals at a local authority and setting level may benefit from developing their understanding of the unique needs of separated young people

seeking safety. Educational Psychologists can play an active role in promoting the distinct needs of separated young people seeking safety in their work in the local authority and educational settings, through consultation, supervision, training, and further research. Promoting opportunities for building relationships with key adults, building a welcoming and accepting ethos, developing appropriate educational and careers guidance, and creating safe spaces to develop English proficiency were highlighted as key implications. Moreover, the research suggests that Educational Psychologists are well placed to continue to gather the views of separated young people seeking safety, so that their individual experiences and needs remain at the centre of their support.

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Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.)*.* McGraw Hill Education, Open University Press.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Excluded Studies

| Reference | Reason(s) for exclusion |
|---|---|
| Brunton, J., Farrell, O., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Foley, C., & Brown, M. (2019). Duelling Identities in Refugees Learning through Open, Online Higher Education. Open Praxis, 11(4), 397-408. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria g. |
| Chen, S., & Schweitzer, R. D. (2019). The experience of belonging in youth from refugee backgrounds: A narrative perspective. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 28, 1977-1990. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria c. |
| Closs, A., Stead, J., Arshad, R., & Norris, C. (2001). School peer relationships of 'minority' children in Scotland. Child: Care, health and development, 27(2), 133-148. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Court, J. (2017). 'I feel integrated when I help myself': ESOL learners' views and experiences of language learning and integration. Language and Intercultural Communication, 17(4), 396-421. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b or g. |
| Daniel, S. M. (2019). Writing our identities for successful endeavors: Resettled refugee youth look to the future. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 33(1), 71-83. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria c. |
| Devenney, K. (2017). Pathway planning with unaccompanied young people leaving care: Biographical narratives of past, present, and future. Child & Family Social Work, 22(3), 1313-1321. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria f. |
| Eruyar, S., Hunt, S., O'Reilly, M., Alowaybil, R., & Vostanis, P. (2022). Responsiveness of support systems to address refugee young people's mental health needs: Stakeholder perspectives from Turkey and the UK. International Journal of Mental Health, 1-19. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria f. |
| Farrell, O., Brunton, J., Costello, E., Delaney, L., Brown, M., & Foley, C. (2020). 'This Is Two Different Worlds, You Have the Asylum World and You Have the Study World': An Exploration of Refugee Participation in Online Irish Higher Education. Research in Learning Technology, 28. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria g. |
| Fazel, M., Garcia, J., & Stein, A. (2016). The right location? Experiences of refugee adolescents seen by school-based mental health services. Clinical child psychology and psychiatry, 21(3), 368-380. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Gladwell, C. (2021). The impact of educational achievement on the integration and wellbeing of Afghan refugee youth in the UK. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47(21), 4914-4936. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria f. |

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|---|---|
| Hastings, C. (2012). The experience of male adolescent refugees during their transfer and adaptation to a UK secondary school. Educational Psychology in Practice, 28(4), 335-351. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Hek, R. (2005). The role of education in the settlement of young refugees in the UK: The experiences of young refugees. Practice, 17(3), 157-171. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Jack, O., Chase, E., & Warwick, I. (2019). Higher education as a space for promoting the psychosocial well-being of refugee students. Health Education Journal, 78(1), 51-66. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria g. |
| Lambrechts, A. A. (2020). The super-disadvantaged in higher education: Barriers to access for refugee background students in England. Higher Education, 80(5), 803-822. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria g. |
| Madziva, R., & Thondhlana, J. (2017). Provision of quality education in the context of Syrian refugee children in the UK: Opportunities and challenges. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 47(6), 942-961. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Mohamed, S., & Thomas, M. (2017). The mental health and psychological well-being of refugee children and young people: An exploration of risk, resilience and protective factors. Educational Psychology in Practice, 33(3), 249-263. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Morrice, L. (2013). Refugees in higher education: Boundaries of belonging and recognition, stigma and exclusion. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 32(5), 652-668. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria g. |
| Morrice, L., Tip, L. K., Brown, R., & Collyer, M. (2020). Resettled refugee youth and education: aspiration and reality. Journal of Youth Studies, 23(3), 388-405. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Raghallaigh, M. N., & Gilligan, R. (2010). Active survival in the lives of unaccompanied minors: coping strategies, resilience, and the relevance of religion. Child & Family Social Work, 15(2), 226-237. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria f. |
| Raghallaigh, M. N., & Sirriyeh, A. (2015). The negotiation of culture in foster care placements for separated refugee and asylum seeking young people in Ireland and England. Childhood, 22(2), 263-277. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria f. |
| Ramia, A. M. (2020). "It gives me courage to do the same": Exploring the Narrated and Lived Experiences of Refugee Students (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo). | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b or c. |
| Samara, M., El Asam, A., Khadaroo, A., & Hammuda, S. (2020). Examining the psychological well-being of refugee children and the role of friendship and bullying. British journal of educational psychology, 90(2), 301-329. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b or f. |
| Shapiro, S., & MacDonald, M. T. (2017). From deficit to asset: Locating discursive resistance in a refugee- | Study did not meet inclusion criteria c. |

| | |
|---|---|
| background student's written and oral narrative. Journal of Language, Identity & Education, 16(2), 80-93. | |
| Smith, K., Ní Raghallaigh, M., & Scholtz, J. (2021). 'I hope like they talk with us like how they talk with Irish':'difference', discrimination and affective inequality in the lives of young Syrian refugees resettled in Ireland. Journal of Youth Studies, 24(8), 1117-1134. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Sobitan, T. (2022). Understanding the experiences of school belonging amongst secondary school students with refugee backgrounds (UK). Educational Psychology in Practice, 38(3), 259-278. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Stevenson, J., & Willott, J. (2007). The aspiration and access to higher education of teenage refugees in the UK. Compare, 37(5), 671-687. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |
| Stewart, E., & Mulvey, G. (2014). Seeking safety beyond refuge: the impact of immigration and citizenship policy upon refugees in the UK. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 40(7), 1023-1039. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b or g. |
| Stobbart, G. (2023). Refugee and asylum-seeking children and their families: Exploring processes of 'integration' within a dispersal area. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b or g. |
| Stobbart, G. (2021). Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Children and their Families: Exploring Processes of 'Integration'within a Dispersal Area. University of Northumbria at Newcastle (United Kingdom). | Study did not meet inclusion criteria g. |
| Thommessen, S. A. O. T., & Todd, B. K. (2018). How do refugee children experience their new situation in England and Denmark? Implications for educational policy and practice. Children and Youth Services Review, 85, 228-238. | Study did not meet inclusion criteria b. |

**Appendix 2 - Assessment of Study Quality (WoE A)**

| Authors | Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? | Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? | Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? | Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? | Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? | Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? | Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? | Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? | Is there a clear statement of findings? | How valuable is the research? | Score /10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Chase (2013)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 0.5 (Can't tell) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 9.5 (High) |
| **Doggett (2012)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 10 (High) |
| **Farmbrough (2014)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 10 (High) |
| **Farrugia (2020)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 10 (High) |
| **Fuller and Hayes (2020)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 0.5 (Can't tell) | 1 (Yes) | 0 (No) | 0 (No) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 7.5 (Medium) |
| **Groark et al. (2010)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 10 (High) |
| **Johnson (2021)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 0.5 (Can't tell) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 9 (High) |
| **Morgan (2018)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 10 (High) |
| **Peterson et al. (2017)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 0 (No) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 9 (High) |
| **Tadesse (2015)** | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 0 (No) | 0.5 (Can't tell) | 1 (Yes) | 1 (Yes) | 8.5 (High) |

**Appendix 3** - **Appropriateness of study design to the review question (WoE B)**

| Authors | Appropriateness of evidence | WoE B judgement |
|---|---|---|
| **Chase (2013)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews with young people<br>• Data was analysed using Inductive Thematic Analysis. | High |
| **Doggett (2012)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews with young people, utilising a 'Talking Stones' approach<br>• Self-report questionnaires (*data from questionnaires is not included in this synthesis*)<br>• Data was analysed using combined Thematic and Structural Narrative Analysis. | Medium |
| **Farmbrough (2014)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews with young people.<br>• Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.<br>• Focus groups were utilised with other respondent groups (*data from other respondent groups is not included in this synthesis*) | Medium |
| **Farrugia (2020)** | • Use of visual methods of camera walking tours and collages.<br>• Data was analysed using Thematic Analysis. | High |
| **Fuller and Hayes (2020)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews.<br>• Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. | High |
| **Groark et al. (2010)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews.<br>• Self-report questionnaires (*data from questionnaires is not included in this synthesis*)<br>• Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. | Medium |
| **Johnson (2021)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews with young people.<br>• Semi-structured interviews were also utilised with other respondent groups (e.g., professionals).<br>• Observation of young people through voluntary work. | Medium |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • *Observation data and data from other respondent groups is not included in this synthesis.*<br>• Use of NVivo to map and code data. | |
| **Morgan (2018)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews with young people, utilising a 'Talking Stones' approach.<br>• Group Supervision was also utilised with professionals (*data from other respondent groups is not included in this synthesis*)<br>• Data was analysed using Thematic Analysis. | Medium |
| **Peterson et al. (2017)** | • Case study approach of one school's practice.<br>• Utilising focus groups with young people<br>• Review of policy and data.<br>• Semi-structured interviews with other responded groups (e.g., professionals).<br>• Data was analysed using Thematic Analysis.<br>• *Review of policy and data from other respondent groups are not included in this synthesis.* | Medium |
| **Tadesse (2015)** | • Use of semi-structured interviews with young people.<br>• Analysis of research and documents (*data from analysis of documents is not includes in this synthesis*).<br>• Data was analysed using Analysis Framework Approach. | Medium |

**Appendix 4** - **Appropriateness of the focus of the study to the review question (WoE C)**

*The extent to which the focus of the study was on the experiences of education for separated*

*young people seeking safety in the UK.*

| Author | Focus of study | WoE C judgement |
|---|---|---|
| **Chase (2013)** | • Broad focus on the overall experiences of separated young people seeking safety in the UK, with a focus on security and wellbeing. | Low |
| **Doggett (2012)** | • Narrow focus on the overall resilience and coping of separated young people seeking safety in one rural local authority. | Low |
| **Farmbrough (2014)** | • Narrow focus on the factors that contribute to separated young people's overall emotional wellbeing, success and social connectedness, alongside other respondent groups. | Low |
| **Farrugia (2020)** | • Focus entirely on the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety themselves. | High |
| **Fuller and Hayes (2020)** | • Focus entirely on the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety themselves. | High |
| **Groark et al. (2010)** | • Broad focus on the overall experiences and emotional needs of separated young people seeking safety in the UK. | Low |
| **Johnson (2021)** | • Broad focus on separated young people seeking safety's integration, alongside other respondent groups. | Low |
| **Morgan (2018)** | • Focus on the educational needs and opportunities for separated young people seeking safety, alongside other respondent groups. | Medium |
| **Peterson et al. (2017)** | • Focus on the educational experiences of separated young people seeking safety in one school setting, alongside review of policies and other respondent group perspectives. | Medium |
| **Tadesse (2015)** | • Narrow focus on the experiences of separated young people seeking safety from the Horn of Africa specifically in relation to theoretical frameworks. | Low |

**Appendix 5 – Thematic Synthesis**

| Codes (number of studies contributing to code in brackets) | Descriptive Theme | Analytical Theme |
|---|---|---|
| Racist bullying from peers (2) | Feelings of difference | Lack of security |
| Rejection from Foster Carer (1) | | |
| Rejection when asking for help (1) | | |
| Stigma around asylum status (2) | | |
| Doubt from teachers about ability (3) | | |
| Being evaluated by others (1) | | |
| Lower expectations from others (2) | | |
| Feeling different (3) | | |
| Labelled as 'other' (2) | | |
| Feeling sad (1) | | |
| Feelings of isolation/loneliness (3) | | |
| Feeling unimportant (1) | | |
| Feeling unknown (1) | | |
| Mental Health needs (2) | | |
| Mistrust of others (1) | | |
| Lack of support from Foster Carer (1) | | |
| Lack of understanding about situation (1) | | |
| No friends (1) | | |
| Not belonging to a group (1) | | |
| Not understood (2) | | |
| Impact of trauma on view of self (2) | | |
| Changing identity as an 'asylum seeker' (4) | | |
| Impact of age (2) | | |
| Status affecting motivation (2) | Unfamiliar pathways | |
| Education to regain control (1) | | |
| Feelings of fear (3) | | |
| Other people have control (2) | | |
| Others make decisions for them (1) | | |
| Feelings of loss (3) | | |
| Lack of agency (1) | | |
| Uncertainty about the future (4) | | |
| Uncertainty and waiting (4) | | |
| Worries about exams (1) | | |
| Worry about immigration and asylum status (4) | | |
| Differences in school experiences (7) | | |
| Different behaviour of children towards adults (3) | | |
| Different systems to previous educational experiences (2) | | |
| Different types of educational provision (5) | | |
| Difficulties accessing education (2) | | |

| Codes (number of studies contributing to code in brackets) | Descriptive Theme | Analytical Theme |
|---|---|---|
| Difficulties with school or college work (3) | | |
| Distraction from education (2) | | |
| Education as a distraction (4) | | |
| Not understanding what was happening (1) | | |
| Fears about the future (2) | | |
| Lack of academic catch-up support (1) | | |
| Lack of additional support at college (vs. school) (1) | | |
| Lack of differentiation (1) | | |
| Learning about a new culture (4) | | |
| **Codes** (number of studies contributing to code in brackets) | **Descriptive Theme** | **Analytical Theme** |
| Access to activities (2) | Being part of a community | Sense of belonging |
| Being part of a community (5) | | |
| Diversity of people within education (5) | | |
| Education as a positive experience (4) | | |
| Avoiding worries (1) | | |
| Feeling of home (4) | | |
| Feeling welcome (3) | | |
| Feeling the same as others (3) | | |
| Opportunity to meet other people (1) | | |
| Peers supporting exploration of the environment (1) | | |
| Sense of identity when around peers from similar ethnic backgrounds (1) | | |
| Sharing own culture (2) | | |
| Education as providing safety (2) | | |
| Opportunities to relax (1) | | |
| Spirituality and religion (2) | | |
| Building trusting relationships in education (3) | Relationships with others | |
| Access to activities (1) | | |
| Education as providing predictability and routine (3) | | |
| Need for security (1) | | |
| Education to make friends (9) | | |
| Foster Carer advisor in relation to education (1) | | |
| Help from teachers (7) | | |
| Help with academic work (1) | | |
| Informal activities to make friends (2) | | |
| Introductions to peers and the school community (1) | | |
| Key adult role (2) | | |
| Praise from teachers (2) | | |
| Patience of teacher (3) | | |
| Relationship with foster carers (2) | | |

| Codes (number of studies contributing to code in brackets) | Descriptive Theme | Analytical Theme |
|---|---|---|
| Relationships supporting wellbeing (2) | | |
| Support from foster carers (2) | | |
| Support from social worker (1) | | |
| Teachers providing emotional containment (2) | | |
| Peers facilitating resettlement (3) | | |
| Peers help to understand the rules and processes (1) | | |
| **Codes** (number of studies contributing to code in brackets) | **Descriptive Theme** | **Analytical Theme** |
| Peers as language role models (1) | Acquisition of language | Role of language |
| Practising English outside of school (3) | | |
| Education to learn English (3) | | |
| Lack of language support (2) | | |
| Learning environment (2) | | |
| Balancing use of home language (1) | | |
| Reduced curriculum (1) | | |
| Hopes for faster pace of learning (1) | | |
| Extra learning opportunities and resources (5) | | |
| Language as a barrier to accessing learning (4) | Language as a barrier | |
| Language as important (3) | | |
| Language as a barrier to socialising (5) | | |
| Not being able to understand peers (4) | | |
| Language to access community (2) | | |
| Language to access education (3) | | |
| Language to facilitate communication (2) | | |
| Language to regain control (1) | | |
| Confusing use of slang and colloquialisms (1) | | |
| **Codes** (number of studies contributing to code in brackets) | **Descriptive Theme** | **Analytical Theme** |
| Aspirations for more education (6) | Aspirations for further education | Aspirations |
| Education as an opportunity (4) | | |
| Education for a better job (3) | | |
| Motivation to learn (3) | | |
| Education as a journey (2) | | |
| Aspirations for the future (7) | Hopes for the future | |
| Education supporting a plan (1) | | |
| Learning new skills (3) | | |
| Challenges as rewarding (2) | | |
| Education to lead to a better future (7) | | |
| Education to structure future (1) | | |
| Focus on future (3) | | |
| Hopes for independence (2) | | |
| Education to teach right and wrong (1) | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Education to progress socially and regain lost social status (3) | | |

## Appendix 6 - Ethical approval from the University of Nottingham

**The University of Nottingham**

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

School of Psychology
The University of Nottingham
University Park
Nottingham
NG7 2RD

T: +44 (0)115 8467403 or (0)115 9514344

SJ/tp

Ref: **S1424R**

Friday 27th May 2022

Dear Barbara Nielsen and Nick Durbin,

**Ethics Committee Review**

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research 'An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.'

That proposal has now been reviewed by the Ethics Committee and I am pleased to tell you that your submission has met with the committee's approval.

Final responsibility for ethical conduct of your research rests with you or your supervisor. The Codes of Practice setting out these responsibilities have been published by the British Psychological Society and the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns whatever during the conduct of your research then you should consult those Codes of Practice. The Committee should be informed immediately should any participant complaints or adverse events arise during the study.

Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.

Yours sincerely

*Professor Stephen Jackson*
*Chair, Ethics Committee*

**Appendix 7 – Participant Information Sheet**

<table>
<tr><td>School of Psychology<br>Information Sheet</td><td>The University of<br>Nottingham<br>UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA</td></tr>
</table>

**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

Ref: S1424R

Researcher: Barbara Nielsen          Supervisor: Dr Nick Durbin

barbara.nielsen@nottingham.ac.uk          nick.durbin@nottingham.ac.uk

Hello! My name is Barbara. I am a postgraduate research student at the University of Nottingham.

This is an invitation to take part in a research project I am carrying out about **the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK**.

You do not have to be involved in this project – to help you make up your mind, you can read the information on this sheet.

If you participate, we will arrange 1 or 2 meetings. You can decide where and when you would like these meetings to take place.

Meeting 1

We will talk about your **experiences of education** in the UK. If you consent, the conversation will be audio-recorded. It will last around **1 hour**.

- You can ask any questions you have about the project.
- We will only talk about what you want to talk about.
- If I ask you a question that you don't want to answer, you don't have to.
- There are no right or wrong answers.

Meeting 2

We can meet again to talk about the project, and you can ask me any questions. I will also write you a letter after Meeting 1 about the things that you said about your experiences of education.

**Other things you need to know**

If you feel you would like help speaking or understanding English, I can arrange for an interpreter.

If you decide you don't want to take part either before or during the project, you can withdraw and without giving me a reason why.

If you decide that you don't want our conversation to be part of my research, you need to let me know this within 1 month of our meeting.

I will not tell anyone else about the things we talk about unless I am worried that you or someone else is in danger.

You can choose a pseudonym (different name) that will be used in the published report. I may use quotations to share your experiences.

If you would like to be involved in this research or would like any more information, please contact me, or let ████████████████████ know.

I can also be contacted after your participation at the above address.

Thank you!

Barbara

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

**Appendix 8 – Participant Consent Form**

| School of Psychology<br>Consent Form |
|---|

**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

Ref: S1424R

Researcher: Barbara Nielsen         Supervisor: Dr Nick Durbin

barbara.nielsen@nottingham.ac.uk      nick.durbin@nottingham.ac.uk

---

The young person should answer these questions independently:

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet?     YES/NO

- Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study?     YES/NO

- Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)?   YES/NO

- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study?<br>(at any time and without giving a reason)     YES/NO

- I give permission for the interview to be audio-recorded.     YES/NO

- I give permission for the my data from this study to be<br>shared with other researchers provided that their anonymity is<br>completely protected.     YES/NO

- Do you agree to take part in the study?     YES/NO

"This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time."

Signature:                            Date:

Name (in block capitals):

---

I have explained the study to the young person and they have agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher:                 Date:

**Appendix 9 – Adapted Participant Consent Form**

| | |
|---|---|
| **School of Psychology** | |
| **Consent Form** | |

**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

Ref: S1424R

Researcher: Barbara Nielsen            Supervisor: Dr Nick Durbin

barbara.nielsen@nottingham.ac.uk            nick.durbin@nottingham.ac.uk

_____

Please read the statements and tick (✓) if you agree with them:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 👂 | I have listened to and understood the information about the project. | |
| ? | I have had the chance to ask questions about the project. | |
| 🎤 | I am happy to be audio-recorded. | |
| 🚫 | I understand that I can ask to stop at any point during the project. | |
| 📄 | I am happy for the information I give to be shared with the project team. | |
| 😃 | I agree to take part in the interview. | |

If you would like help speaking or understanding English, I can arrange for an interpreter to be present during the interview.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 🗨️ | I would like an interpreter to be present during the interview. | |

If so, what language would you like to use during the interview? _____

173

Name:                                    Date:

Signature of the Participant:

**Appendix 10 – Professional Information Sheet**

<table>
<tr><td>School of Psychology<br>PR Information Sheet</td></tr>
</table>

**The University of Nottingham**

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

Ref: S1424R

Researcher: Barbara Nielsen          Supervisor: Dr Nick Durbin

barbara.nielsen@nottingham.ac.uk          nick.durbin@nottingham.ac.uk

This information sheet has been sent to you because I am seeking the young person in your care's agreement to be involved in a research project that I am conducting. They will require your consent if they wish to be involved. Before you decide if you wish for the young person to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

**Aims of the project:**

The research hopes to find out more about the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.

**Who is conducting the research?**

My name is Barbara Nielsen. I am a postgraduate research student at the University of Nottingham and am training to become an Educational Psychologist.

**What is involved?**

- If the young person wishes to participate, both you and the young person will be asked to provide written consent. I will provide forms for this.
- They will then be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will last for around 1 hour.
- I will ask a few open questions about their experiences of education in the UK. They only need to answer questions and share what they feel comfortable to.
- If the young person wishes, a trained interpreter can be provided to reduce the language demands.
- A follow up meeting will also be offered to participants within 1-2 weeks of the interview if they would like to discuss the purpose of the research and ask any further questions. At this point, young people will also receive a written letter thanking them for their involvement in the research which will include a brief written summary of their individual contribution.

**What will happen with the information gathered?**

- All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. It will be stored in compliance with the 2018 Data Protection Act.

- The only exception to confidentiality would be in the unlikely situation of information being shared that suggests that the young person or another is at risk. If this were to occur, I would have a duty to report such information following the local authority's safeguarding procedures.

- With their consent, the conversations will be audio-recorded to ensure I capture the discussions accurately. Records will be stored securely and once transcribed, they will be deleted.

- The young person will be asked to choose a pseudonym (different name) to ensure that their stories are not identifiable. Any information that might identify them will be anonymised.

- Anonymised extracts/quotations from the interviews may be used in published works that are posted online. The doctoral thesis will be available to other students through the University of Nottingham's online library services.

- Further information can be found in the attached Privacy Information document.

**What if we change our mind?**

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and they are under no obligation to take part. They are free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. If they wish to withdraw their data after the interview, they can do this within 1 month of the interview.

**How do I find out more?**

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask using the email provided above. I can also be contacted after their participation at the above address.

Thank you!

Barbara

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

**Appendix 11 – Professional Consent Form**

| | |
|---|---|
| **School of Psychology** <br> **Consent Form** | The University of Nottingham <br> UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA |

**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

Ref: S1424R

Researcher: Barbara Nielsen

barbara.nielsen@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Nick Durbin

nick.durbin@nottingham.ac.uk

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The professional should answer these questions independently:

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet?            YES/NO

- Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study?       YES/NO

- Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)?  YES/NO

- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw the young person from the study? (at any time and without giving a reason)       YES/NO

- I give permission for the interview to be audio-recorded.        YES/NO

- I give permission for the young person's data from this study to be shared with other researchers provided that their anonymity is completely protected.                         YES/NO

- Do you agree to the young person taking part in the study?       YES/NO

"This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree for the young person to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw them at any time."

Signature:                                    Date:

Name (in block capitals)

Relationship to the young person:

**Appendix 12 – Verbal Script**

- Before we start, I will talk through the information on the sheets *[refer to information sheet and consent form]*

- This project aims to explore the experiences of education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK who are older than 16. I hope to learn from you about how we can make education better for young people.

- If you decide you don't want to take part now, or during the project, you can withdraw without giving me a reason why.

- If you decide that you don't want our conversation to be part of my research, you need to let me know this within 1 month of our meeting.

- I will not tell anyone else about the things we talk about unless I am worried that you or someone else is in danger.

- You do not need to answer any questions that you don't wish to. Only share information and experiences that you feel comfortable to share.

- You can choose a pseudonym, a different name, that will be used in the published report. I may use quotations to share your experiences.

- You can have a break, or stop at any point *[refer to visual cards]*

- I will record our conversation so that I can make better notes about what we talk about. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. When the recording has been typed up, it will be deleted.

- Do you have any questions about the study?

- Do you agree to take part?

- Do you give permission for the interview to be recorded?

## Appendix 13 – Interpreter Confidentiality Agreement

| School of Psychology | The University of Nottingham |
|---|---|
| | UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA |

**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

Ref: S1424R

Researcher: Barbara Nielsen          Supervisor: Dr Nick Durbin

barbara.nielsen@nottingham.ac.uk          nick.durbin@nottingham.ac.uk

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**Interpreter Confidentiality Agreement**

I am interpreting interview data for the named project. I know that I am bound by ethical confidentiality guidelines regarding this data and will not break confidentiality in any way. I will not communicate about the data, or the participants, with anyone other than the researcher and supervisor listed above.

☐ I agree to interpret this interview in accordance with these stated conditions.

Signature:                              Date:

Name (in block capitals):

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I have explained the study to the above professional and they have agreed to take part and abide by the stated conditions.

Signature of researcher:                              Date:

**Appendix 14 – Debrief Process**

<table>
<tr><td>

**School of Psychology**

**Debrief Sheet**

</td><td>

**The University of Nottingham**

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

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**An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experiences of post-16 education for separated young people seeking safety in the UK.**

Ref: S1424R

Researcher: Barbara Nielsen                Supervisor: Dr Nick Durbin

barbara.nielsen@nottingham.ac.uk        nick.durbin@nottingham.ac.uk

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The aim of this research was to explore how separated young people seeking safety experience post-16 education in the UK.

*Your rights*

It is important to remind you that you can withdraw your data if you no longer wish to be part of the study. To do this please email the researcher, Barbara, or let ███████████████ know within 1 month.

*Support and advice*

It is hoped that the project has not caused any distress, however if you have any worries about what we discussed, you can seek advice and support. The following information might be useful:

Refugee Council:

- The **Infoline** is an England-wide free telephone service to support people seeking asylum, and recently recognised refugees, with information and services relevant to individual needs in order to avoid crisis.
    - https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/infoline/
    - Call 0808 196 7272 between 9.30am and 12.30pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- The **Children's Advice Project** supports unaccompanied children seeking asylum.
    - https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/childrens-advice/
    - Call 020 7346 1134 between 9 am and 5pm on Monday – Friday or email the Children's Advice Project at children@refugeecouncil.org.uk

You will also be able to seek support and guidance from ███████████████
If you have any remaining questions, please contact me via email. If you have any concerns about the study which you would rather not discuss with me, please contact my supervisor, Nick Durbin.

I would just like to say a big thank you for taking part in the project!

Barbara

**Appendix 15 – An example of steps 1-3 in the IPA process**

*Example of a section of Desta's transcript, including initial noting and experiential statements.*

[R]: Researcher
[D]: Desta

| Exploratory Notes | Desta's transcript (lines 16-60) | Experiential Statements |
|---|---|---|
| | [R] I'm wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your experiences of education in the UK? | |
| English as a barrier at first<br>Importance of practice<br>Communicating with others<br>English proficiency as 'good enough'<br>English proficiency 'at the moment' – changing identity with time<br>Feeling shy<br>Friendly as ideal self<br>Education to learn new skills | [D] First of all, when I came in here, I don't know English to be honest. Still not... it's, I mean, I need I need more, more practice. But I am proud of myself, I think, I'm good enough for at the moment. And I learned more English, how to communicate with peoples. Sometimes, I'm a bit shy, but I try to communicate with others. Like, be friendly. And I learned a lot of things here. | Language skills present as a barrier to learning<br><br>Changing identity as English proficiency develops – moving towards ideal self<br><br>Language skills present as a barrier to making friends<br><br>Language skills are linked to feelings of confidence in education |
| | [R] Yeah. So when you first came to the UK, what was the first education setting you went to? | |
| College courses – multiple levels of a journey<br><br>Passing courses<br><br>Transitioning between settings | [D] I go to college. Yeah, I start from entry 2. It's in XXX college.  And I passed that one, to entry three that I did in XXX college. And when I finished that, I passed to level one. And I did the Health and Social Care | Education is a journey with many steps |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | course, in the XXX college. And I passed that too, as well to go the level two. | Opportunity to learn new skills in college |
| | **[R]** Yeah. | |
| English as a barrier | **[D]** But sometimes, I mean, my English was not good. And sometimes I'm not. I don't have | Language presents as a barrier to learning |
| Education to learn English | good understanding the words and I don't know sometimes, how to say how to write that in this, but I just took that once just to improve more my English. | Developing language proficiency as the purpose of attending education |
| Trying best | And now I'm doing the traineeship. It's okay. I mean, I just try a bit. I just try my best to do the best things. | Sense of determination that allows Desta to give things a go<br><br>Trying to stay on the 'right' path of the educational journey |
| Uncertainty<br>Purposeful choices | **[R]** Yeah. So what's the traineeship for?<br>**[D]** The traineeship - I think that's the way to go to the apprenticeship. And after that, | |
| Aspirations | you can do whatever you want. If you want nurse or other | Uncertainty around navigating educational processes to get to the |
| Education course to reach aspirations | things. I want to do nursing. Yeah, that's why I just, I just chose this course. | preferred future<br><br>Clear hopes for the future to pursue a chosen career. |
| Uncertainty | **[R]** Yeah. So is the course preparing for nursing?<br>**[D]** Yeah, I think so. Yes.<br>**[R]** Has it got a name, the course?<br>**[D]** To be honest I don't know. | |
| Relying on others | They say it's just this | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | traineeship. And for the | Uncertainty around |
| Uncertainty about next steps | apprenticeship. Yeah. But I don't know what to do in the | navigating educational processes |
| | apprenticeship as well. Even | Guidance from others |
| Learning English and Maths | now, there is English and Maths.. I'm doing and that for | appears unclear |
| | the traineeship, they just teach us about safeguarding, equality and | Reassurance that topics and learning in college is |
| | diversity, some important points, | important |
| Learning practical skills that are important | and how to do CV as well. Yeah. [R] Yeah. Yeah. Sounds really | |
| | good. So what was college like | |
| | when you first started? | College as a space to make |
| | [D] I like, like, I can meet my | friends and connect with |
| | friends there. I learn new things | others |
| Education to make friends | from college. Yeah. | Opportunity to learn new |
| Education to learn new skills | [R] Yeah. How did you feel when you started college? | skills in college |
| | [D] I was feeling like shy and | English presents as a |
| Feeling shy | scared as well, because I don't | barrier to making friends |
| Feeling scared | know how to speak and how to | |
| English as a barrier | say properly. So sometimes, I'm scared if I say something wrong. | Changing identity as English proficiency |
| Fear of upsetting others | And if they take that the wrong way. I don't want that thing. So | develops Language skills are linked |
| Not talking as a coping strategy | this would be quiet, instead of talking what I'm thinking, yeah. | to feelings of confidence in education |

**Appendix 16 – Map of connections across experiential statements**

*Example of connections across experiential statements from Desta's transcript.*

Changing identity as English proficiency develops — Language skills present as a barrier to learning

Language skills are linked to feelings of confidence and safety in education — Language skills present as a barrier to making friends

The atmosphere to learn is important — Developing language proficiency as the purpose of attending education

Clear hopes for the future to pursue a chosen career — Moving towards the ideal self

Sense of determination that allows Desta to give things a go — Education is part of the journey to a better future

Opportunity and resources to learn new skills in college — Education is a journey with many steps

Trying to stay on the 'right' path of the educational journey — Reassurance that topics and learning in college is important

Education creates a sense of community — Support from key adults in education is important

Education creates opportunities to make friends and connect with others — Relationships in education provide consistency

Dependence on self to get to the preferred future

Guidance from others appears unclear — Feelings of fear in education

Adjusting to life in the UK without the support of family — Uncertainty around navigating educational processes

**Appendix 17 – Personal Experiential Themes**

*Table of Personal Experiential Themes (PETS) for Desta*

Each PET is shown in **UPPERCASE BOLD**, and each linked experiential statement is in **lower case bold.** Underpinning these you can see examples of key phrases from the transcript and associated line numbers.

---

**DEVELOPING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

**Language skills present as a barrier to learning**

- *I don't have good understanding [of] the words and I don't know sometimes, how to say how to write that* (34-35)

**Changing identity as English proficiency develops**

- *I need more, more practice. But I am proud of myself, I think, I'm good enough for at the moment* (19-20)

**Language skills present as a barrier to making friends**

- *Too scary to be friends with others* (103)

**Language skills are linked to feelings of confidence and safety in education**

- *So sometimes, I'm scared if I say something wrong. And if they take that the wrong way* (58-59)

**Developing language proficiency as the purpose of attending education**

- *I just took that one* [re: traineeship] *just to improve more my English* (35-36)

**The atmosphere to learn is important**

- *I mean, if if you if you if you come to learn, you have to learn. If you are in the class, you came there to learn* (178-179)

**JOURNEY TO A BETTER LIFE**

**Moving towards the ideal self**

- *I try to communicate with others. Like, be friendly* (22)

**Clear hopes for the future to pursue a chosen career**

- *I want to do nursing* (42)

**Education is part of the journey to a better future**

- *Education is important to me. You can earn good money as well, for you, for your future* (219-220)

**Education is a journey with many steps**

- *If I be a nurse, I will, I will do more steps* (205)

**Sense of determination that allows Desta to give things a go**

- *Just do whatever you have to do for for your dream* (208)

**Opportunity and resources to learn new skills in college**

- *There is like a Costa there, we can use that* (142)

**Reassurance that topics and learning in college is important**

- *They teach us about safeguarding, equality and diversity, some important points, how to do CV as well* (48-49)

**Trying to stay on the 'right' path of the educational journey**

- *I just try my best to do the best things* (37)

## COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

**Support from key adults in education is important**

- *And they are a big support for us. For everything, even for study.* (68-69)

**Education creates a sense of community**

- *This is like a friendship here. Yeah, like family* (90)

**Relationships in education provide consistency**

- *They're beside me all the time* (82)

**Education creates opportunities to make friends and connect with others**

- *I can meet my friends there* (54)

**Dependence on self to get to the preferred future**

- *Just follow your, your feeling, just follow your mind for what you want to in the future* (231-232)

## FEELINGS OF FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY

**Feelings of fear in education**

- *I was feeling like shy and scared as well, because I don't know how to speak and how to say properly* (57-58)

**Guidance from others appears unclear**

- *I don't know. They say it's just this traineeship and for the apprenticeship* (46-47)

**Uncertainty around navigating educational processes**

- *Yeah. But I don't know what to do* (47)

**Adjusting to life in the UK without the support of family**

- *I'm here alone, I haven't got any family here* (91)

**Appendix 18 – Group Experiential Themes**

*Table of Group Experiential Themes (GETS)*

Each GET is shown in **UPPERCASE BOLD**, and each group-level sub-themes in **lower case bold.** Underpinning these you can see examples of key phrases from contributing participants, and associated line numbers.

---

**IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

---

**Education as an opportunity to learn English**

- *I just took that one [re: traineeship] just to improve more my English (*Desta, 35-36)
- *And since I joined the college and here [charity] continuously come in here to learn English* (Ali, 7-8)
- *But I came here [charity service] every now and then, to learn some English…* (Majid, 20-21)
- *And I just started from very beginning here. And they help me how to speak, what to do to learn English more.* (Ahmad, 103-104)
- *I started ESOL class because I have little bit basic English, but not like 100%* (Ayele, 49-50)

**Language proficiency as central to developing identity**

- *I need more, more practice. But I am proud of myself, I think, I'm good enough for at the moment* (Desta, 19-20)
- *And imagine when I came here, I couldn't read or write Kurdish even, but now I can read and write Kurdish properly, and some English. And that's why is very important for me.* (Ali, 191-194)
- *I think it is very important. If you can't speak, how can you work?* (Majid, 152)

**Language proficiency as a barrier**

- *And sometimes …I don't have good understanding [of] the words and I don't know sometimes, how to say how to write that.* (Desta, 34-35)
- *Okay, well, it was really hard from the very beginning because everybody speak in English and I didn't know how to speak in English.* (Ali, 38-39)
- *I was worried like oh I say something which is they they get it in a wrong way and that will be bad.* (Majid, 57-59)
- *I hope I will be a solicitor in future. And well you know, you have to make your English well, before that, but that's a whole...* (Ahmad, 143-144)
- *I say I cannot do these things. Because it's not my first language, English.* (Ayele, 144)

---

## ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

### Education as part of the journey to a better future

- *And after that, you can do whatever you want* (Desta, 40)

- *First of all, as I learn from my college, they said make sure your language is okay and good and enough for a level to go to take a course or mechanic in college. And then that will be the way I think.* (Ali, 182-184)

- *And they can find a way to make themselves better in every way of life, especially education.* (Ahmad, 176-177)

- *So how I'm changing my life. If I go to college or uni, if I have qualification* (Ayele, 381-382)

### Navigating educational pathways to reach hopes

- *If I be a nurse, I will, I will do more steps* (Desta, 205)

- *I want to go through levels* [of education] *As I told you, if I can get to a point with English, I can be a mechanic or going to take a course.* (Ali, 176-178)

- *I would like to go to college.* (Majid, 28-29)

- *Well, I know first of all make your English well, and then go to university and from there you can take it.* (Ahmad, 148-149)

- *If I'm doing ESOL class, where I am today? So I am now Level Two, if I start from low class, if I'm not started from there, how I'm doing this Level Two?* (Ayele, 83-86)

## SENSE OF AGENCY

### Dependence on self

- *I'm trying my best to get my dream. And I will do it.* (Desta, 211)

- *There is no particular body or organization or person.* (Ali, 187)

- *I rely on myself, on myself mostly.* (Majid, 142)

- *I would say everybody has their own way. And they can find a way to make themselves better in every way of life, especially education.* (Ahmad, 176-177)

- *Yeah, more practicing myself. Not only tutor. The tutor they show you the way, only the way not that [end] point. For that point, if I get challenge anything, I do.* (Ayele, 328-330)

### Learning independence skills

- *They teach us about safeguarding, equality and diversity, some important points, how to do CV as well.* (Desta, 48-49)

- *...try to teach us to depend on ourselves rather than depending on someone else.* (Majid, 93-94)

- *Because how I can communicate with the people. Yeah. And then how I'm listening to the manager as well. Yeah. And then how I'm organising everything in there. And then as well timekeeping…* (Ayele, 111-114)

## SENSE OF BELONGING

### Building relationships

- *I can meet my friends there* (Desta, 54)

- *But I got many friends there and **we** try to help each other* (Ali, 40-41)

- *I enjoyed seeing each other in college* (Majid, 85)

- *I would say more, most, nearly all of my friends are from here, which is really good. It's a good place to show socialize and see other people* (Ahmad, 126-128)

- *And then I have, I have too many friends from here, we are a different country. Yeah. It's not bad.* (Ayele, 353-354)

### Feeling accepted by others

- *Everybody's nice and kind. And honest as well. They, I mean, what, what I asked them, they don't say no, they will. They're beside me all the time.* (Desta, 80-82)

- *They are really, really good people. And the, the main issue is they never ever differentiate between pupils* (Ali, 88-90).

- *They were nice, and very polite, and no discrimination at all… we were always there… someone listened to you.* (Majid, 74-75)

- *Well, all of them are really good. And no discrimination. Treating everyone equally, politely* (Ahmad, 118-119)

### Support from key adults

- *And they are a big support for us. For everything, even for study.* (Desta, 68-69)

- *I already told the social worker about this issue (*Ali, 103)

- *There is a lot about here and, especially XXX and XXX* [charity service staff] *was really good with us.* (Majid, 102-103)

- *At any time if you have a worry about something you can just come over here talk with the staff* (Ahmad, 111-112)

- *So we have like with the tutor, not like teacher and student, like, child and the Mum like.* (Ayele, 185-186)