An investigation of practitioner and parent causal attributions for perceived challenging behaviour in Early Years Foundation Stage

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Abstract

Challenging behaviour in schools is a widely discussed topic, with an array of negative impacts identified for pupils, staff, and parents. Research indicates that the attributions held by key adults can impact the support that they give to young people exhibiting these behaviours, including their interactions, relationships, behaviour management, and intervention implementation (Försterling, 2001). Attributions for challenging behaviour have previously been explored for primary and secondary age pupils (Lambert & Miller, 2010; Miller, 1995; Miller et al., 2002). However, staff and parent attributions in relation to Early Years have not been specifically researched. It has been identified that there may be differences in attributions for behaviour in younger children compared with older children (Dix et al., 1986; Johnston, Patenaude, & Inman, 1992; Phares, Ehrbar, & Lum, 1996). The present study aims to explore parent and practitioner causal attributions for challenging behaviour relating to children aged 3-5 years old, in the context of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

This study implements a non-experimental, fixed design using a survey method to gather the views of parents and practitioners following three stages: development of the measure through focus groups, an online survey, and analysis of data via factor analysis.

This resulted in the extraction of a 5-factor practitioner model and a 3-factor parent model. Overall, findings revealed that both groups attributed behaviour mostly to external, situational causes and perceived the most important factors influencing challenging behaviour within this age group to be ineffective setting practices and adverse home circumstances. A level of congruence was identified between the factor models, suggesting similar perspectives on causes of challenging behaviour between the groups. The findings suggest that both groups acknowledge their potential role in influencing behaviour in 3–5-year-olds. The research suggests that patterns of attributions differ when relating to younger children, which may have implications for helping behaviours in EYFS settings, in work with parents and pupils, and for how external agencies assist with this.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to Current Research

This research was undertaken by a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) as part of the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at the University of Nottingham.

The behaviour of children and young people in education, and the reported rise of challenging behaviours (The Guardian, 2013), has remained a high priority over time for educationalists, the government and the media. This is reflected in key historical reports including the Hadow report (Board of Education, 1931) and the Elton report (DfES, 1989). What is more, children at risk of exclusion remain a key priority group for Educational Psychology Services to work with across local authorities.

Research indicates that early intervention and a collaborative, coordinated response may effectively reduce levels of challenging behaviour and support children and young people to achieve their potential (Banks & Bush, 2016). Research further suggests that attributions for challenging behaviour have a large influence on the way in which those around the child or young person respond and that this can greatly influence future behaviour and outcomes, including the overall effectiveness of intervention (Poulou & Norwich, 2002; Andreou & Rapti, 2010).

This research aims to explore parent and practitioner causal attributions for perceived challenging behaviour within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with the purpose of highlighting the attributions held by staff and parents within this early age phase and to consider the implications of any similarities and differences in these attributions.

1.2 Personal and Professional Interests of the Researcher

The researcher's interest in this area developed from previously working within EYFS. From this experience, the researcher noted how the Early Years culture, including the high level of parent contact, seemed to be supportive of the positive development of social and emotional skills. However, the researcher noted that behaviour management systems in place often did not seem appropriate to the age

and developmental needs of the children and that the implementation of this could exacerbate behaviour and lead to children being labelled, often with terms that had negative connotations and that seemed difficult to remove. These labels were then observed to follow children through school as they left EYFS. Further, the researcher noticed that staff may alter their responses to children's behaviour depending on these labels and their views of the behaviour. This would affect how they communicated with the child and their parents, decisions around support or consequences, feelings of empathy, and future expectations.

The researcher recognised the key position of EYFS as the first experience of education for children and as a base for their futures. This highlighted the importance of early identification if children required additional support and early intervention to prevent recurring cycles of labelling and self-fulfilling prophecies. As contact with parents is so frequent in EYFS it seemed that there was a clear opportunity to collaborate with parents to ensure that appropriate support and plans were in place for children exhibiting challenging behaviour to support them throughout EYFS and give them the best opportunities for future education.

As a TEP, the researcher began to further appreciate potential tensions and the role of the Educational Psychologist in such work. From further reading within the area, it became apparent that Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958) may be a useful lens to view challenging behaviour through to effectively support adults around the child with consideration of systems theories viewing the child as developing within the systems in which they exist (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

2   Literature Review

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of existing research which ultimately led to the rationale for the author's thesis exploring parent and practitioner attributions for challenging behaviour in the Early Years context. Thus, the review considers three broad areas: challenging behaviour, attributions, and Early Years, and how these three areas link together.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the definitions for challenging behaviour, considering the socially constructed nature of this term. This is explored further within the general context of education with particular examination of exclusion, labelling, and culture. It then considers attributions, outlining theories of attribution before moving onto exploration of the evidence around parent and staff attributions for challenging behaviour. The educational phase of Early Years Foundation Stage is then focused on, with consideration to the culture within Early Years including the curriculum and values, behaviour management, and parental partnership. The importance of early intervention is highlighted in the final section within this area.

A Systematic Literature Review is then presented which merges these topics, this aims to establish what existing research indicates about the perceptions of challenging behaviour within the Early Years. A configurative meta-narrative review (Gough, Thomas & Oliver, 2012) of nine studies is used to understand what is known already and to create rationale for the present study. Finally, the research aims, and ultimate research question are outlined.

2.1   Challenging Behaviour

2.1.1   Definitions

'Challenging behaviour' can be viewed as a socially constructed term which is based on the negative perception of an individual's behaviour as being inappropriate by others and is thus, subjective (Banks & Bush, 2016). The way in which behaviours are classified is dependent upon an infinite number of factors but predominantly

based on the context in which the specific behaviour is exhibited within and the views of those around them. Thus, this creates chronic definition difficulties (Visser, 2003).

What is more, the term 'challenging behaviour' is relatively new in its widespread use in literature and media (Stanforth & Rose, 2018). Over time and across professions, there have been many interchangeable phrases used. Commonly used terms include behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, 2011), maladaptive behaviour (Hair & Hampson, 2006), and abnormal, dysfunctional, or problem behaviours (Downey, Johnston, Hansen, Birney, & Stough, 2010), to name a few. Further, an alternative way of referring to challenging behaviour arises within some organisations as 'behaviour that challenges' to attempt to capture the subjectiveness of such behaviours and to place the challenges outside the individual exhibiting them and onto those around them. For the purposes of this thesis, the author will predominantly be using the term 'challenging behaviour', however in some research and policy referred to, terms may differ.

A plethora of definitions exist for challenging behaviour. Banks et al. (2007) describes the term with consideration of the intensity, frequency, or duration of the behaviour being so much so that it threatens quality of life and/or safety of the individual, or others around them. Emerson et al. (2001) expands on this by citing challenging behaviour as culturally abnormal behaviours that occur with such intensity or frequency that safety is jeopardised or access to community facilities is severely limited, including to full-time, mainstream education. Alevriadou and Pavlidou (2016) outline that there are a variety of forms of challenging behaviours, but these are usually defined by their level of risk, intensity, and persistence over time. Challenging behaviour is subjective and socially determined and thus, can also be defined by the responses of others. This includes placing the individual exhibiting such behaviours under restrictive or aversive measures. Behaviours are seen as challenging when they invoke feelings in others that are seen as intolerable such as being perceived as dangerous, distressing, or alarming. Banks and Bush (2016) expand on this point, discussing how the label of challenging behaviour becomes

irrelevant when the responses of others become non-restrictive, and an enabling environment is maintained despite the behaviours.

The number of terms used, and the lack of a concrete shared definition, represents some confusion and a lack of consistency across research, policy and practice about what the term means. However, it also reflects changes in the way that challenging behaviour is viewed. For example, updates to the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015) where the area of 'Behaviour, emotional and social difficulty' was replaced with 'Social, emotional, mental health' (SEMH). The code of practice highlights that those experiencing SEMH difficulties may exhibit challenging behaviours; this reflects a change of focus to underlying causes rather than on the presenting behaviour alone. Banks and Bush (2016) further this point, discussing how the term challenging behaviour is used to shift perceptions of an individual causing a challenge to others rather than as a difficulty located within the individual. However, they acknowledge that there continues to be a lack of understanding around the term and its use. Leading from this, Banks and Bush (2016) call for sustained reiteration of the term in context to ensure the shift to consider systems around the individual rather than for diagnostic, within-individual use.

2.1.1.1 Forms of Challenging Behaviour

Challenging behaviour can be seen in a variety of forms. MacLure, Jones, Holmes, and MacRae (2011) suggest two main types of challenging behaviour: traumatic actions, such as violence including kicking, punching, and biting, and persistent failure to comply to collective rules, also referred to as persistent low-level disruption, including calling out, not following instructions and distracting others. Alevriadou and Pavlidou (2016) alternatively identify forms of challenging behaviours to include stereotypy, self-injurious behaviours, and aggression. However, it is important to acknowledge the subjective nature of the different forms and categories of challenging behaviour, as what may be perceived to be challenging by some, may not be challenging to others (Banks & Bush, 2016). Thus, challenging behaviour cannot be seen as definite, discrete behaviours which can be described, thus for the purposes of the current research, will be therefore

considered to be a socially constructed, subjective concept and will be left to the interpretation of each individual.

Challenging behaviours can manifest for a plethora of reasons, including communication difficulties, response to trauma, developmental disorders, physical needs such as hunger or pain, as well as due to environmental factors and functional determinants (Banks et al., 2007). Scope (2021) outlines that such behaviours usually mean that the individual has a need that is not being fulfilled and which they have a difficulty communicating appropriately. The DfE (2017) further acknowledge that such behaviours can be indicative of unmet needs. The SEND code of practice (2015) discusses how when individuals have SEMH needs, this can be exhibited through challenging, disturbing, or disruptive behaviours. Such behaviours are reinforced or supported by systemic factors including relationships in school, culture, family circumstances, and the classroom environment (Wilding, 2015).

2.1.2 Challenging Behaviour in Education

Concerns regarding challenging behaviour within education are widely documented across the decades within research, policy, and media. Reports including the Elton Report (DES, 1989) and the Steer Report (DfES, 2005) aimed to explore the extent of challenging behaviour in schools in response to concern from the public and to make recommendations for improvements in practice. Public reports and media coverage can cause widespread concern over the impact of challenging behaviour on society and how unease about it is managed, with headlines such as 'Massive rise in disruptive behaviour, warn teachers' (The Guardian, 2013) and 'Crisis as teachers face shocking surge in classroom assaults by violent pupils' (Daily Record, 2019).

While it is traumatic actions and high-intensity behaviours which are the typical focus of media attention, it is often the low-level disruptive behaviours which are actually more problematic to schools (Stanforth & Rose, 2018). Low-level behaviours and the disruption caused by them was said to cost pupils up to 38 days per year of learning when put together (Ofsted, 2014). What is more, Ofsted (2014)

found that the most common forms of challenging behaviour in schools were incessant chatter, inattention, and calling out. Teachers expressed that they found these low-level, persistent challenging behaviours most difficult to deal with and caused them the highest levels of concern (Department for Education, 2016). The survey revealed that these behaviours were found to irritate staff and to interrupt learning for the whole group, with two fifths of teachers reporting low level disruption in every lesson every day (Ofsted, 2014).

Teachers cite concerns around challenging behaviour as one of the main reasons for departing from the profession (Department for Education, 2015). TES (2020) relay that figures show that nearly one third of teachers leave the profession within 5 years of qualifying. Further, a staff wellbeing report by Hays (2020) revealed that 65% of teachers asked had considered leaving the profession in the past year due to poor wellbeing, mainly due to teacher burnout. Allen et al. (2020) discuss findings that teachers within the United Kingdom consistently report higher levels of sustained psychological distress when compared to the general population, with a large impact from unreasonable workloads and competing demands.

Teachers may be seen to have a primary role of educating children and young people, with behaviour management and pastoral roles as secondary, however these roles can appear to reverse due the large impact that challenging behaviour can have in the classroom (Ofsted, 2014). Dealing with conflict and challenging behaviour is subject to regular discourse in education and is an issue that teachers are expected to manage on a daily basis (Frau, 2018). This can evoke negative emotions in school staff, increasing levels of stress and leading to burnout and emotional detachment (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). In addition, high numbers of teachers report that they feel that their training is inadequate to cope with daily disruptive classroom behaviour and that this has a significant impact on the classroom environment, teacher self-efficacy, and burnout (Allen et al., 2020).

In addition, challenging behaviour in the classroom is extremely common and remains a key concern for educationalists (Bennett, 2006). However, it has been suggested that relevant support for assessment and intervention is often not sought until behaviour has reached an unmanageable level for schools (National Institute

for Health and Care Excellence, 2015), with opportunities potentially being failed to be acted upon to effectively prevent the escalation of behaviours which may include referrals to agencies such as CAMHs and Educational Psychology. However, policy and guidance call for comprehensive packages of support where agencies work collaboratively to support schools and children and young people (Department for Education, 2015). Such coordinated and collaborative support should involve the young person, families, educators, and other relevant agencies to deliver appropriate support within their setting.

2.1.3   Inclusion v Exclusion

Inclusion is viewed as a unified drive towards maximal participation in schools where barriers to access are identified and minimised (Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006). Grieve (2009) outlines that a drive towards inclusion demands changes within the whole school ethos and Clough (2010) specifically identifies support for challenging behaviour as a key consideration when developing inclusive practice. Despite the acknowledgement of inclusion as a key aim in education, government guidance steering policy and practice in behaviour management remains with a focus on authoritarian measures of discipline within the current guidance from DfE entitled 'Behaviour and discipline in schools' (Department for Education, 2016). Throughout the guidance terms such as power, discipline, sanction, and punish are used frequently and the use of consequences including extra work, loss of privileges, and exclusion are suggested (Department for Education, 2016). However, research indicates that these responses to behaviour are actually thought to be counterproductive (Ford et al., 2018).

Children and young people need to have good mental health as a precondition for the manifestation of positive behaviours and schools hold a responsibility for ensuring the positive wellbeing of their pupils (Wolpert et al., 2013). A key message across literature is the importance of whole school approaches to developing an inclusive culture. This includes where positive relationships with children and parents can be developed, mental health is a focus, and perceived challenging

behaviours are not given chance to escalate due to systems in place (Graham, White, Edwards, Potter, & Street, 2019).

One significant consequence for those exhibiting challenging behaviour in education is exclusion. Despite a continued drive towards inclusion across policy and literature, the issue of school exclusion remains pertinent. The data from the Department for Education (2021) reveals that in the academic year 2018/19 in England there were 7,894 permanent exclusions. Although this shows a small decrease from the previous year, the rate of permanent exclusions as a proportion of the overall school population remained the same. The number of fixed term exclusions increased, with 438,265 fixed period exclusions reported in the year 2018/2019. Worryingly, within these figures there were 10,585 fixed term exclusions and 134 permanent exclusions of children 5 years old and under (DfE, 2021). Patterns show that these rates rise throughout KS1 and KS2, peaking for 14 years-olds (DfE, 2021). This data shows a continuous rising trend in exclusions since the academic year 2013/14 when the lowest rate was reported at 142,850 fixed period exclusions (DfE, 2015). The most common reason cited for both permanent and fixed term exclusions across age groups was persistent disruptive behaviour (DfE, 2020).

Exclusion from school has been found to have significant impacts on those affected. Evans (2010) examined how exclusion can isolate children and young people and lead to feelings of helplessness and low self-confidence. Graham et al. (2019) further outlined the high prevalence of social, emotional and mental health issues amongst children and young people who experience exclusion. This relationship can be seen as bi-directional as those with SEMH needs are more likely to be excluded and those who experience exclusion are more likely to have mental-health issues (Graham, White, Edwards, Potter, & Street, 2019).

Parsons (2005) considered outcomes in secondary school for those who had been excluded in primary school and found that 23% of these pupils received further multiple fixed-term exclusions, permanent exclusions, and multi-agency involvement, and 46% received at least onr further single fixed-term exclusion. They concluded that exclusion during primary school was a serious, disruptive

experience. Brookes, Goodall and Heady (2007) further explored outcomes for young people who have experienced exclusion and outline how they are three times more likely to leave school without any qualifications and 37% more likely to be unemployed in adulthood. Evans (2010) expands on this, suggesting that the impact of exclusion can lead to young people being poorly equipped to compete for, and keep, jobs in the future for several reasons including lack of qualifications, low self-confidence, and fear of rejection. This is further considered by Newman and Ingraham (2017) who outline that exclusion can result in poor self-belief and low self-confidence, this leaves young people vulnerable to alternative life-choices such as addiction and crime.

Daniels (2011) looked at offending rates of young people who had been excluded and found that 55% of those studied offended post-exclusion, with over one third being first-time offenders' post-exclusion. Further, Berridge et al. (2001) found that, 65% of individuals studied who had been excluded were later cautioned or convicted. Evans (2010) considers how an experience of exclusion can socially isolate young people and place them at higher risk of involvement in risk-taking behaviours and alternative life-choices. Knoff (2013) outlines the recurring themes for those excluded, of poor skills and qualifications, crime, and reduced prospects. This shows the potentially long-lasting negative impacts that exclusion at an early age can have and how this can affect outcomes and life chances.

Evans (2010) raises the question as to how challenging behaviour is allowed to build to such an extent that exclusion becomes the consequence, especially when this is mostly low-level behaviours. A range of topics have emerged within literature regarding wider factors behind school exclusions, these include sense of belonging, school policy and practice (specifically regarding SEMH and SEND), teacher training, relationships, and age, stage and setting (Graham et al., 2019). As previously discussed, teachers can often feel that they lack the expertise and toolset to appropriately manage challenging behaviour. This was found to be a large risk factor for exclusions, with a lack of skills in teachers to identify and assess SEMH needs, failure to explore underlying causes of behaviour, and delays in referring children and young people for additional support identified as key failures

experienced by those who had been excluded (Graham et al., 2019; Mowat, 2010; White, Lamont, & Aston, 2013).

2.1.4 Labelling

A further risk factor for exclusion is negative labelling of an individual. Labelling theory outlines that a young person may become predisposed to exhibit further challenging behaviour through stigma where a label is placed upon them, and a self-fulfilling prophecy is produced (Chandrasegaran & Padmakumari, 2018). MacLure et al. (2011) argue that the label itself may have a greater effect on an individual's self-identity than the actual levels of challenging behaviour and causes for such behaviour. Once a label is established, this can become internalised by a young person and significantly influence future behaviours as the individual takes on this given role, fuelling a determined path driven by the judgement of others (Chandrasegaran & Padmakumari, 2018). What is more, stigma from perceived challenging behaviour can lead to compromised peer relationships and social withdrawal (Holden & Gitlesen, 2006). This can have further negative impacts leading to feelings of shame, depression, resentment, and isolation (Miller & Kaiser, 2001).

Such labels can emerge when a young person may be engaging in more risk-seeking and curious activities but are labelled using language such as 'naughty' or 'disruptive'. MacLure et al. (2011) found that once such language is used and a young person builds a reputation within a system from an early age, teachers are more likely to pick up on, and to sanction, that young person for behaviours which may be ignored in other young people without such labels. However, MacLure et al. (2011)'s research was relatively small scale, based on data from four reception classes within one city, thus generalisations must be viewed with caution. Stanforth and Rose (2020) further outline the negative teacher-pupil relationships which can emerge around such labelling, with young people claiming that they are unfairly sanctioned, ignored, or publicly shamed due to labels. Further, they discuss how teachers can develop low expectations for young people with perceived reputations of challenging behaviour leaving them vulnerable to poorer outcomes. Graham et

al. (2019) agree with this, discussing the importance of positive relationships with school staff for decreasing the effects of labelling. Research shows that teachers spend less time teaching and interacting with young people with such labels, restricting their access to the curriculum (Rae, Murray, & McKenzie, 2011).

Language used to describe young people exhibiting challenging behaviour may be damaging and labels can have a lasting impact for the entire time a young person remains in education (Chandrasegaran & Padmakumari, 2018). Apland et al. (2017) found that young people experiencing labels for challenging behaviour felt that this led to them being victimised throughout schooling. Labels such as 'trouble-makers' led to the perception that they would be sanctioned more readily and at a higher level for smaller breaches compared to others (Levinson, 2016). Further, Grieve (2009) explores the idea that the application of labels can absolve school staff from responsibility for managing challenging behaviour meaning that they may be less likely to implement support for the young person or to feel empathy towards them.

2.1.5 Culture

Challenging behaviour varies in type, severity, and frequency, which may partly be due to its socially constructed, subjective nature (Banks & Bush, 2016). However, this may also be greatly impacted by the environment. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) highlights how a child or young person (CYP) exists within interacting systems and how these systems have a significant effect on the CYP's development including their behaviour. School is seen as part of a CYP's microsystem. A large part of schools' influence on behaviour is seen within school culture, this may be through a variety of concepts such as sense of belonging, relationships in school, the behaviour management policy and implementation, parent partnership, and ethos.

Feelings of school belonging have been found to influence attitudes, engagement, attendance, and behaviour of young people in school (Graham et al., 2019). Further, feelings of school belonging were heavily dependent on positive relationships between young people and school staff. Reasons for increases in exclusion rates in secondary schools have been explored, with findings revealing that primary schools

had more family-like, caring cultures overall, whereas secondary schools lacked flexibility and were impersonal (Farouk, 2017). Culture and approaches to practice were seen as key factors in promoting positive behaviours and supporting young people's SEMH needs (Al-Ghabban, 2018). What is more, environments which showed positive social interactions and opportunities for establishing and maintaining positive relationships were viewed as most supportive of mental health needs in young people (Banks & Bush, 2016). Further, home-school relationships were seen to be of key importance, with schools that build successful positive relationships with parents seen to minimise rates of exclusions (Ofsted, 2009).

2.2 Attributions

2.2.1 Attribution Theory

Attribution theory is based on the notion that people attempt to make sense of the world by searching for causality (Heider, 1958). Fiske and Taylor (2013) add that attribution theory is concerned with how a social perceiver arrives at a causal explanation for actions, behaviours, and mental states, using information gathered and combined to form a judgement. Heider (1958) described people as naïve psychologists with a need to make sense of the world through seeking to establish cause-and-effect relationships, even when these do not explicitly exist. Thus, attribution theory considers the perceived causes for events and behaviours rather than the actual causes.

Attributions for causality may fall into two categories: internal, dispositional causes, and external, situational causes (Heider, 1958). Dispositional attributions refer to causes of behaviour relating to internal characteristics of a person such as personality or beliefs (Heider, 1958). When these explanations are over-emphasised, with an under-emphasis on situational causes, this is known as a fundamental attribution error (Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977). An example of this would be if an individual was late to an appointment, they may automatically be perceived by others as irresponsible and bad at timekeeping, however external causes such as traffic might also have been considered. Situational attributions refer to these external causes for behaviour which are outside of an individual's control,

rather than within-people factors (Heider, 1958). A self-serving bias may exist when assigning causality, meaning that people are more likely to attribute their successes to internal causes, and their failures to external causes (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999).

Weiner (2000) expanded on work by Heider (1958) to outline dimensions of causality. Three causal dimensions were identified: locus, stability, and controllability by which causes can be classified. Locus draws on previous categories discussed and refers to the internal or external perceived causes of behaviour. Stability refers to how fixed or varied these causes are seen as over time and other situations. Controllability refers to the perceived level of control the individual has over the causes. Weiner's dimensions have had a large influence on attributional studies over time, especially within education focused on achievement (Cortés-Suárez & Sandiford, 2008; House, 2003; Kivilu & Rogers, 1998).

A further influential branch of attribution theory comes from Kelley (1967) who proposed the covariation model which can be used as a logical way to determine whether behaviours can be attributed to internal or external causes. Kelley argued that people consider three kinds of evidence when making judgments. These are: consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. Consensus refers to the extent to which other people behave similarly in similar situations. Distinctiveness refers to the extent to which the individual behaves similarly in a similar situation. Consistency refers to the extent to which the individual behaves similarly each time the situation occurs. The covariation model states that people use these types of information together to form a judgement about an individual's motivation for an event, action, or behaviour. However, Kelley's model fails to consider that not all this information can always be ascertained before making a judgement. Kelley (1967) further highlights that if we do not have all the relevant information, meaning that the covariation model cannot be applied, prior experience is drawn on through the principles of either multiple necessary causes, or multiple sufficient causes, to form our judgement. This means that an individual will make assumptions based upon what they see as necessary or sufficient causes to lead to such behaviour based on their previous experiences of similar situations. For

example, if an individual observes someone getting a high mark in a test, a necessary cause assumed may be that they are very clever, and an assumed sufficient cause may be that they have worked hard.

Attribution theory has been influential across the past sixty years and has application into many everyday situations, from seemingly trivial decisions to life-changing judgements. However, attribution theory has been criticised with the suggestion that people do not always follow such processes as they are assumed to (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). What is more, attribution theory has been further criticised for the assumption that people always search for causes when making judgements, with no acknowledgement of individual differences in making such judgements. Thus, attribution theory, and strands from this, should be used with caution and alongside consideration of wider factors and biases.

2.2.2   Attributions for Challenging Behaviour

Attributions may affect people's feelings and behaviour towards target individuals (Weiner, 1985) and may influence feelings of control and motivation (Skinner, 2014). By understanding the judgements made by individuals regarding actions and events, we can begin to consider their potential thoughts, feelings, and responses in similar situations. Over time, attribution theory has been applied to education to consider both attainment and behaviour. Reactions can reinforce and maintain behaviours so exploration of attributions can reveal further influences on behaviour including antecedents and consequences (Försterling, 2001). Researchers have sought to build an evidence-base to explore attributions for challenging behaviour within education to understand how this may affect stakeholder behaviour when supporting and intervening (Försterling, 2001). Current research has considered the attributions of staff (Miller, 1995), parents (Miller, Ferguson, & Moore, 2002), and pupils (Lambert & Miller, 2010). The majority of this research draws on samples from secondary schools, with less considering the primary population.

The importance of understanding the nature of causal attributions for challenging behaviour is highlighted through research, with this giving insight into what each stakeholder may contribute to situations. The impact of attributions in schools

includes actions taken to support young people, harmonious working, and positive collaboration with parents and with other agencies (Lambert & Miller, 2010). Försterling (2001) reflects that the application of attribution theory has the potential to support more productive working around conflicting views in terms of challenging behaviour and the understanding of such attributions can guide more positive, collaborative support.

This may be pertinent to the role of the Educational Psychologist when involved with such cases through exploration of different causal attributions for challenging behaviour within case work. Eco-systemic consultations and other approaches can be used to bring together stakeholders, enable shifts in perspectives, and build bridges to create temporary overlapping systems to allow new perspectives away from usual rules and norms of school and home systems (Miller, 2003). Bronfenbrenner (1979) outlines the role of the systems that a young person exists within and the influence of each system, and the interactions between such systems. Within the microsystem, both home and school are considered and the connection between these systems. These systems are built up of a complex interplay of factors and perceptions that have a large influence on the young person, their behaviours, and responses to them from others. Thus, it is important to consider casual attributions from both perspectives to understand how support can be tailored to create ownership for stakeholders and thus, aim to increase likelihood of effective implementation.

2.2.3   Staff Attributions for Challenging Behaviour

Previous research evidence suggests that teachers tend to attribute challenging behaviour more to within-child and home related causes rather than to teacher or school-environment related (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller & Black, 2001; Miller, 1995).

In a highly influential study, Croll and Moses (1985) found that 66% of 428 teachers who were surveyed attributed causes of challenging behaviour to home factors. Further, 20% attributed this to within-child factors and only 4% to teacher factors. This trend is reflected within the Elton Report (DfES, 1989) stating that schools

often judge parent and home factors as being major causes for challenging behaviour in school. Further studies support these findings, Miller (1995) used EP cases based on challenging behaviour and found that teachers located the origins of behaviour under the control of parents in 71% of cases. Miller and Black (1995) further found that school staff judged home factors as the biggest contributory influences on behaviour. Teachers further attributed challenging behaviour to within-child factors, which they viewed as beyond their influence (Grieve, 2009).

Rae, Murray and McKenzie (2011) suggest that the identified perspectives may impact on practice in the classroom including behaviour management and nature of interactions. Such attributions may impact on the vital role that teaching staff have of identifying potential SEND and for implementing, or referring for, support. Further, Poulou and Norwich (2002) stated that causal attributions made by teachers predicted their cognitive and emotional responses to challenging behaviours. This suggests that teachers perceive challenging behaviour as internal, stable and under the pupil's control then they are less likely to feel empathy and to show helping behaviours (Polou & Norwich, 2002). Andreou and Rapti (2010) found when staff perceived pupils to have more control over their behaviour, they had more negative attributions and were more likely to use more punitive approaches to behaviour management, with a relationship highlighted between attributions and reported practices. However, it must be considered that association does not indicate causality, with a plethora of other factors potentially influencing approaches to discipline such as policy, training, and individual differences. Carter et al. (2014) further found that attributions linked to quality of classroom interactions and practices, specifically related to supporting emotional needs. If causal attributions are viewed as stable this leads to higher feelings of stress and less optimism in staff. Further, if viewed to be in the control of the young person, feelings of anger and fear are higher in staff (Weiner, 1985). Research shows that negative emotions may reduce willingness to help, whereas feeling of optimism and sympathy increase this willingness (Polou & Norwich, 2002). With optimism and sympathy increased when behaviour is attributed out of the control of the individual displaying the behaviour.

What is more, research suggests that pupils are aware of negative attributions and may behave in accordance with this (Babad, 1990) which can lead to dangerous self-fulfilling prophecies (Madon, Willard, Guyll, & Scherr, 2011). Once these beliefs around a young person are in place, they are extremely difficult to change which may lead to labelling and the negative effects of this.

Miller (2003) suggests that school staff may be a part of a culture of blame in which they attribute causes to factors which they perceive as out of their control thus not reflecting on their own practice or acknowledging their own influence on behaviour. However, this may vary with the child's age, as Phares, Ehrbar and Lum (1996) highlight that staff judged parents and children as more responsible for behaviour in older children but were more willing to acknowledge their own role in influencing behaviour of younger children. Teachers rated the child as accountable for challenging behaviour exhibited in a 15-year-old, whereas rated parents and teachers as holding some responsibility in relation to the same behaviour in a 6-year-old (Phares, Ehrbar, & Lum, 1996).

Dix et al. (1986) further describe differences in staff attributions for older children when compared with younger children, finding that the behaviour of older children was more likely to be attributed to personality and as intentional than the behaviour of younger children. Johnston, Patenaude and Inman (1992) found that both hyperactive and aggressive behaviours were rated as significantly more internal in locus and controllable in 11-year-olds than in 5-year-olds and elicited more negative reactions when exhibited by older children. Such differences in the attributions for different age groups may have important implications for the implementation of interventions and willingness to help. Weiner (1980) found that where behaviour is attributed to causes uncontrollable by the child, this elicited helping behaviours. Thus, where behaviours are attributed outside of the child, teaching staff may be more likely to offer support, with research suggesting that such perceptions occur more often with younger children (Polou & Norwich, 2002).

2.2.4 Parent Attributions for Challenging Behaviour

Differing attributions can result in difficult relationships between home and school which may reduce the effectiveness of interventions and support (Miller, 2003). What is more, if there are discrepancies between attributions from school and from home, this can result in further tensions due to challenges in creating a consensus around why behaviour may be occurring and thus decreasing the opportunity for collaborative and consistent responses which have been found to be most effective (Miller, 2007). If such tensions exist between school and home, attempts to address challenging behaviour may be undermined due to the differing perspectives and lack of trust and respect (Miller, 2003). This highlights the importance of exploring and highlighting parent attributions due to these findings, and further due to ongoing government aims to promote more successful parent partnership with schools (DfE, 2019; Goodall et al., 2011; Ofsted, 2011).

Overall, research appears to suggest that parents seem to attribute challenging behaviour to a variety of factors. Miller et al. (2002) identified a 3-factor model of attributions whereby the most important factors in influencing challenging behaviour as viewed by parents were fairness of teacher actions, pupil vulnerability, and differentiation of classroom demands and expectations. Moreover, Jacobs, Woolfson and Hunter (2017) found that parents of both typically developing children and those with diagnoses of developmental delays identified themselves as having a high level of responsibility for, and control of, their child's behaviours, even when viewing their child's behaviour as fixed and unavoidable due to diagnoses.

Dix et al. (1989) highlight that parent attributions are heavily influenced by their judgement of the intentions behind behaviours, whereas this was not found to be the case for school staff attributions. Dix et al. (1989) suggest that parents are likely to infer intentionality of behaviour when children reach the age of 3 years old with this increasing with age. Research has also identified an association between early parent attributions and child development including future behaviours, with within-child negative attributions relating to more harsh parental discipline and later an increase in negative externalised behaviours by the child (Dix et al., 1986).

Phares et al. (1996) presented vignettes to parents regarding a 15-year-old and a 6-year-old child, parents were asked to rate who held responsibility for the development of behaviour difficulties presented and for intervention with the behaviour. Findings revealed that parents and young people were viewed as more responsible overall for behaviour exhibited by the 15-year-olds, however this differed regarding the 6-year-old with parents and teachers rated as more responsible than children. What is more, it was found that where parents felt more responsibility, they were more likely to become involved in interventions that were successful in reducing undesirable behaviours (Phares et al., 1996). However, it is important to note that the sample used within this study consisted of parents with university level education and a good understanding of psychology which may have impacted on the views expressed. Thus, this may limit the validity of findings due to the possible unrepresentative sample which does not consider how parents from alternative backgrounds may differ in their reasoning.

Further discrepancies between views were found relating to age and development by Dix et al. (1989) who found that parent attributions were closely related to the developmental level of the child. As children developed, behaviour was viewed by parents as being increasingly caused by within-child factors such as personality and as being increasingly more intentional and under the child's control. As developmental change occurred, parent attributions changed from viewing disposition as unimportant to showing a significant preference for dispositional attributions. When considering the behaviour of 4-year-olds, dispositional and external factors were given equal importance, however for 8- and 12-year-olds dispositional factors were seen as increasingly more significant. Where parents view themselves as holding some responsibility for their child's behaviour and see this as out of the child's control, they may be more likely to engage in appropriate interventions. Research discussed suggests that this may be more likely to occur when relating to younger children (Dix et al., 1986; Phares et al., 1996).

Parent responses to behaviours were also found to be connected to their attributions, with child related perceptions linked to negative affect in parents. The relationship between parent attributions and approaches to managing behaviour

has been further highlighted by Park, Johnston, Colalillo and Williamson (2016) who found that where parents expressed child-responsibility attributions they were more likely to respond using harsher parenting. Dix et al. (1989) found that parent attributions were affected by perceived desirability of behaviours, with some behaviours such as altruism perceived as more intentional, dispositional, and controllable regardless of developmental level. An additionally identified bias suggests that parent attributions may differ when regarding their own child, through a child-serving bias (Miller, 1995).

2.2.5 Impact of Attributions

As summarised in Section 2.2.3, research suggests that school staff tend to attribute challenging behaviour more to home and parent factors, with pupil factors the next most important. There is seemingly little recognition by school staff of the importance of school and teacher factors in studies which have examined their contribution. However, parent attribution showed more of a range, with acknowledgement of their own role in influencing behaviour, as well as the role of school and of dispositional factors from within the young person. This suggests a lack of concordance between key stakeholder attributions for challenging behaviour (Miller, Ferguson, & Moore, 2002).

This identified disparity between teacher and parent attributions may be problematic as it is acknowledged that support for pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour is optimal when stakeholders collaborate, and a consensus exists (Miller, 2007). Research identifies that such collaboration is commonplace with other SEND, however school-parent partnerships are often negative when surrounding behavioural needs (Miller, 1999). Attributions from school may lead to blame cultures developing against parents and defensive blocking due to this from parents may further prevent engagement. Moreover, Miller (2003) notes this tendency for staff and parents to blame each other resulting in circular causation whereby this is continuously exacerbated through 'punctuation points'. This refers to points within the cycle where each party gives seemingly legitimate and understandable accounts from their perspective such that others are influenced by who's perspective is being

given and at which time during the pattern (Miller, 2003). Such discrepancies in views can lead to emotionally charged atmospheres which are not conducive to effective support, whereby it becomes increasingly difficult to work collaboratively (Miller, 2003). This suggests that a key role for EPs in cases with challenging behaviour is to enable shifts in perspectives by creating temporarily overlapping systems to create shared goals and enhance parent partnership (Miller, 2003). This can begin to be achieved when attributions in different contexts and situations are explored and understood more fully for different parties to potentially create mutually acceptable punctuation points.

Although previous research has highlighted attributions of pupils, parents, and staff in secondary schools and across some of the primary age (Lambert & Miller, 2010; Miller, 1995; Miller et al., 2002), very little is known about attributions for younger children's challenging behaviour and whether discrepancy in attributions found between staff and parents in primary and secondary school settings those practitioners and parents in an Early Years context. As highlighted, age and development had a significant influence on views of behaviour by both school staff and parents (Dix et al., 1986; Johnston et al., 1992; Phares et al., 2008). This suggests that the consideration of attributions within Early Years may be of importance with potentially valuable implications for practice and policy.

2.3 Early Years
2.3.1 Curriculum, Values, and Principles

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) refers to the educational stage for children from birth to 5 years old in England. This can be provided within various types of settings including private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) settings and maintained nurseries and school EYFS. Settings must adhere to the EYFS Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017; revised for September 2021) which sets the standards for learning, development, and care. Further, settings often use the Development Matters document which provides non-statutory curriculum guidance for the EYFS (Early Education, 2012).

Within the statutory framework, there are seven areas of learning and development that settings must focus on for their provision (DfE, 2021). These are separated into three prime areas and four specific areas. The prime areas consist of communication and language, physical development, and personal, social and emotional development. These are outlined to be of particular importance for building foundations for children's curiosity and enthusiasm, whilst supporting them in forming relationships and thriving ready for future education and life. The specific areas are literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design. The specific areas build on the prime areas allowing these to be applied in a way which may be more similar to later academic focuses in preparation for future key stages. Children work towards achieving Early Learning Goals (ELGs) which are expected to be attained by the end of the EYFS. Staff are encouraged to use these to make holistic best-fit assessments of children's development and their readiness for Year 1 (DfE, 2021).

The statutory framework outlines that the EYFS seeks to provide quality and consistency, as well as anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities, to ensure that all children make progress and have a secure foundation for the future (DfE, 2017). It specifically highlights the importance of partnerships between practitioners and parents and/or carers. This is in line with the four overarching principles of EYFS which are the unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments, and learning and development (DfE, 2017).

An influential large-scale longitudinal study investigating effective pedagogy in EYFS by Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) highlighted that effective pre-school education can alleviate the negative effects of social disadvantage and provide children with a better start to school when compared to no pre-school education. This suggests that good quality EYFS provision can be an effective means of reducing social exclusion and for breaking cycles of disadvantage. Effective EYFS settings were outlined as having good leadership, reliable staff, good communication and consistent ways of working (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Effective settings used a balance of free choice provision alongside teacher-initiated learning, with interventions based on specific skills and concepts and awareness of the child's

zone of proximal development (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2010). This research indicates the effectiveness of children actively constructing their understanding in an enabling environment through phsyical and social opportunities. This highlights a largely different approach within EYFS than that taken in later key stages where the majority of learning is teacher-initiated and seemingly less practical.

2.3.2 Challenging Behaviour in the Early Years

EYFS is a crucial phase for the development of new skills including academic, social, and behavioural (Nemer, 2019). Often this is the first time that children have spent prolonged periods of time away from their primary caregivers and their home environment, and where demands and expectations may be very different to those which they have previously experienced. Personal, social, and emotional development (PSED) is a prime area of development within the EYFS that settings must focus on (DfE, 2017 & 2021). Within the statutory guidance, it is outlined that PSED is crucial to enable children to lead happy, healthy lives and highlights the link between PSED and cognitive development. It further states the importance of strong, warm, and supportive relationships with adults to support children to manage their emotions and to develop a positive sense of self to enable them to create a secure platform for later achievement (DfE, 2017 & 2021).

As mentioned, one of the EYFS principles is that of the unique child (DfE, 2017 & 2021). This highlights a core assumption that all children are different and should be given equality of opportunity to learn and develop regardless of additional needs. Research suggests that in EYFS children are generally allowed around 3 months to settle before practitioners expect them to show appropriate behaviour; if this is not observed they may be given negative labels and a reputation as a child who is likely to exhibit challenging behaviour (Laws & Davies, 2000). Macbeth (2003) acknowledged the public culture of EYFS, often using visual behaviour management systems with class wide recognition and suggested that practitioners and children have a good awareness of behavioural reputations across their cohort.

The earlier discussion of labelling highlighted that labels can stay with young people throughout their schooling impacting interactions, identity and opportunities

(Stanforth & Rose, 2018). What is more, MacLure et al. (2011) identified that practitioners more readily recognised and confronted negative behaviours from children holding such reputations compared to others. This can lead to social exclusion for children exhibiting challenging behaviour, which has been recognised as key vulnerability for children at risk of exclusion (Knoff, 2013). The impact of staff attributions on young people's behaviour has been highlighted, with knowledge that attributions strongly influence staff responses (Poulou & Norwich, 2002; Andreou & Rapti, 2010). Understanding patterns of staff attributions for challenging behaviour could also be beneficial in EYFS as the evidence in other settings suggests that staff attributions impact the level of support given, promote early intervention and guide appropriate support, which may ultimately help with the prevention of exclusions (Polou & Norwich, 2002).

Little guidance is given through EYFS statutory documents regarding behaviour management. It states that each setting is responsible for managing behaviour in an appropriate way. No further statutory guidance is given on this, aside from not using corporal punishment (DfE, 2017 & 2021). Thus, most settings tend toward behaviourist systems with the use of reward charts, warnings, time-out and ultimately, exclusion (MacLure et al., 2011). Considering the short period of time these children have been within education and their extremely young age, alongside the known impact of exclusion, the exclusion figures in EYFS are concerning. 10,585 fixed term exclusions and 134 permanent exclusions were reported in England for children 5 years old and under in the academic year 18/19 (DfE, 2021). With the consideration that pupils who experience exclusion, including fixed-term exclusions, are highly vulnerable to later exclusions, as well as other negative outcomes including less qualifications, social exclusion, poor self-concept, and later alternative life choices, this is something that needs to be taken seriously (Knoff, 2013; Newman & Ingraham, 2017). Appropriate intervention during EYFS and strategies for prevention by adults around the child may lead to a reduction in these numbers and thus potentially avert this cycle for young people.

Such systems and responses to challenging behaviour in EYFS appear to be similar to those used in higher school key stages, with school based EYFS often using the

same behaviour policy as the rest of the school. The appropriateness of using such policies within EYFS may be questioned due to the age and developmental stage of the children. Gogtay et al. (2004) outlines the exceptional immaturity of the frontal cortex of the brain in children of this age, which is essential for impulse control and self-regulation. These are functions needed for reflection on past behaviour and deciding future behaviour, skills which are often needed to be drawn on by children in the use of such behaviour management systems. Further, Maclure et al. (2021) highlight the amount of time devoted in EYFS to discussing rules and expectations with children, whereas children at this age and stage may not have the capacity to understand these yet.

Behaviour expectations are socially constructed and can lead to a discourse around 'normal' development (Banks & Bush, 2016). This may result in EYFS practitioners feeling obliged to manage behaviour based around this discourse, becoming more difficult to exercise proactive, reflective strategies in practice. Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) found that the most effective provisions in their study used non-punitive approaches, with staff helping children to co-regulate and discussing problems and solutions. Further, they found that effective settings were consistent and proactive in supporting social skills through stories, discussion, and modelling. The most important factor highlighted was warm, caring relationships and adults' positive responses to children's emotional needs. This aligns with the core principles of the EYFS (DfE, 2017 & 2021) and shows the impact of a nurturing culture.

2.3.3 Parental Partnership

Parental partnership is seen as central in literature around aims and goals of EYFS (Cottle & Alexander, 2013). The widely used Development Matters document (DfE, 2021) outlines seven key features of effective practice. One of these seven key features is partnership with parents. This outlines that it is vital for Early Years settings to have strong and respectful partnerships with parents to enable children to thrive. The document further highlights the significant impact that parents have on their children's learning and development and how knowledge and

understanding of children's home lives can ensure that settings can give appropriate help and support. The nature of EYFS, including the age of children attending, means that frequent contact with parents is common through both informal and formal means with a greater scope for interaction than in higher key stages (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). The culture of EYFS settings means that a two-way flow of information, knowledge, and expertise is valued, although this pinnacle is not always possible to the extent desired in practice (Cottle & Alexander, 2013).

Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) further emphasises that shared aims and continuity of experience from parents and practitioners is beneficial in all areas of development for young children. Systems such as the key worker system support this partnership, which may suggest that children exhibiting challenging behaviour are best supported when adults around them work together through positive collaboration. Cottle and Alexander (2013) outlined that good parent partnership was a key indicator of quality EYFS provision, with practitioners within the study stating that effective provision was not possible without such relationships based around shared values, common goals and purposes, and mutual trust.

Although such relationships are now seen as extremely positive, historically working with parents of young children was more judgemental and class-based (Cottle & Alexander, 2013). This stemmed from a compensatory model whereby childcare was provided for lower-class families and education for children of wealthier families (West & Noden, 2016). Practitioners often worked with parents to support with perceived deficits at home, using an expert status to guide on apparent gaps in child development due to home circumstances (Cottle & Alexander, 2013). In present day practice, parents are viewed as consumers due to government changes which seemingly marketise EYFS (Naumann, 2011). This can be seen as a positive for parents who may have more active involvement, with practitioners playing a central role in assisting families in supporting their child's development and learning. Moreover, Hohmann (2007) outlines a caring triangle, whereby expectations of parents and practitioners are underpinned by their own values, experiences, and class and cultural differences (Gelder, 2007). This may either aid the development

of trusting, respectful partnerships, or cause tension and conflict between parties. This may particularly be the case when considering challenging behaviour in the EYFS as literature acknowledges the emotionally-charged atmosphere that this can create between parties and the difficulties of positive collaboration between staff and parents (Miller, 2003).

2.3.4   Intervention and Prevention

Children have a right to an education (UNICEF, 1990). When children are excluded, this right is taken away from them, at least for a period of time. Article 29 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1990) states that all appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that school discipline is in line with the child's human dignity. Exclusion, and other punitive measures taken leading up to exclusion, may not fit with this right, with children not being allowed the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential or accessing equal opportunities (McCluskey, Riddell, & Weedon, 2014; Rivkin, 2007).

The underlying principles, values, and ethos behind EYFS appear to align with children's rights (DfE, 2017 & 2021). The EYFS stands to favour positive relationships, enabling environments, and the unique child to support children to thrive and enable them to have success in the future. To aid in avoiding exclusions, and instead supporting children effectively, early intervention and prevention appear to be key (Challenging Behaviour Foundation, 2021). Cottle and Alexander (2013) suggest that early interventions including individual education plans, support from key workers, specific behaviour targets, and group interventions are common across EYFS settings, giving additional support and resources to children and staff where required. Further, the EYFS curriculum, specifically regarding PSED favours the prevention of challenging behaviour, aiming to develop social and emotional skills and resiliency in children (DfE, 2017 & 2021).

Views from The Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2021) states that early intervention is one of the most crucial factors in positive outcomes for children exhibiting challenging behaviour. Children have the right to have their needs identified at early stages to aid the delivery of co-ordinated support at appropriate

levels. A project by the Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2014) found that appropriate early intervention reduced the severity and frequency of challenging behaviours and improved wellbeing for the young person leading to more desired outcomes, although the full circumstances for individuals is not reported thus causality cannot be inferred. Moreover, Banks and Bush (2016) outline that a coordinated and collaborative response should be provided as early on in life as possible, suggesting that intervention at this early stage can support in reducing challenging behaviours, thus alleviating the negative consequences associated with the continuation and acceleration of such behaviour.

The SEND code of practice (DfE, 2015) places emphasis on EYFS providers to monitor and review development of children through formal assessments, observation, and discussion with parents. This should inform decisions regarding specialist advice and interventions and support. Support should be matched to the child's needs and where this is not effective, settings are responsible for ensuring that appropriate specialist support is sought. The graduated approach should be followed, using a plan-do-review approach to monitor support for the child. Children who require additional support should be identified promptly so the most effective support can be provided as soon as possible (Cottle & Alexander, 2013). Appropriate decision-making, assessment and intervention by EYFS settings can enable coordinated approaches to ensure that needs are met (Challenging Behaviour Foundation, 2014). This requires a good level of knowledge and understanding by practitioners, meaning that training and support is key to enable practitioners to undertake these roles effectively. What is more, practitioners need to be willing to implement such support. If children's needs are met early on, this can reduce further challenging behaviours by ensuring the environment is appropriate for the young person and that staff, parents and young people have the skills required to cope (Banks & Bush, 2016). This may ultimately support in reducing exclusions within EYFS, and in later education.

2.4 Systematic Literature Review

2.4.1 Introduction

A systematic literature review is presented to explore what existing research indicates about attributions for challenging behaviour in the Early Years context. Systematic literature reviews aim to present what is currently known about the specified area, critique the evidence-base, and identify areas for future research (Andrews, 2010). Relevant studies are identified, selected and critically appraised by the author and results are synthesised in order to present findings relating to a formulated question (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). Contrasting to the previously discussed literature, studies outlined within this section have met specific inclusion criteria and have been critically appraised to consider their quality and relevance to the set review objectives.

2.4.2 Objectives of the Review

Initially, the aim of this review was to present an overview of the evidence around how parent and practitioners attribute causes of challenging behaviour within the Early Years. Following systematic searches on three databases (Web of Science, Scopus, and PsychoInfo) no published articles were returned explicitly exploring causal attributions for challenging behaviour within the stated age group. Thus, the decision was made to extend the search to include wider perceptions of behaviour within the Early Years.

Using this extended search criteria, only one study was identified that considered parent perceptions jointly with teacher perceptions and no studies were identified considering only parent perceptions within the stated context. Thus, the decision was made to focus the review on practitioner perceptions of behaviour, whilst including the study looking at joint perspectives.

Therefore, this review aims to present a systematic overview of practitioner perceptions of challenging behaviour within an Early Years context. This aims to appraise the current evidence base, considering the strengths and identifying areas

for further research to explore what is already known and to inform the current study.

2.4.3 Method

2.4.3.1 Eligibility Criteria

In order to identify studies that met the objectives of this review, eligibility criteria were set. From previous literature searches, it was clear that behaviour in other settings such as in institutions other than educational settings and at home were the focus of some studies. Due to the purposes of the current research, and the emphasis on views of practitioners and the implications for settings, it was decided that only behaviour relating to educational settings would be included. Views from practitioners would be the focus of the searches as pertaining to the research question and aim of the review, however if other groups were studied alongside practitioners this was not to be excluded.

Further, previous searches revealed that often the target age group for EYFS was included alongside other age groups such as primary school, often this was not separated out to break down findings. It was decided that research would only be included where it was explicitly within the EYFS age range or where definite splitting of findings was apparent to ensure that findings for the target age range could be reviewed and were not confounded by other age groups.

The decision to include studies where information is collected regarding perceptions/views/attributions/concepts was made as previous searches suggested that there was little specific attribution data, however when similar terms were used which looked at perspectives of practitioners this allowed for views to be captured in a helpful way. Additionally, searches revealed that behaviour was often researched without views regarding the behaviour being collected, instead looking at concepts such as intensity, most common behaviours, and links to topics such as attainment, language, and various diagnoses. These findings were not thought to have specific relevance to the research question and the aims of the review. However, where this information was collected alongside views of practitioners, research was included.

Additional decisions were made including the decision to include only studies published from 2000 onwards to ensure a relatively contemporary, up to date perspective was gathered. Studies included must be peer reviewed to ensure a level of rigour, and the full text must be available to enable the researcher to gain the full reported scope of the study. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses were not included due to the purposes of the review and the complexity that these types of methodology would add to a further review. The final inclusion and exclusion criteria are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Details of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic literature review.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Individual study	Meta-analyses or systematic reviews
Access to full text available	Abstract only
In relation to behaviour in a school or nursery setting	In relation to behaviour in other settings only e.g., home or community
Collects information regarding perceptions/views/attributions/constructs for behaviour	Does not consider perceptions/views/attributions/ constructs
Attributions from practitioners	Attributions from other groups only e.g., pupils
Study is based within an Early Years context explicitly	Considers a different age group or considers Early Years with other age

	groups without specific distinction between groups
Published in a peer reviewed journal	Source other than a peer reviewed journal
Studies published from 2000 onwards to reflect more contemporary systems	Studies published before the year 2000

2.4.3.2 Search Strategy

Systematic searches were conducted through three online databases: Web of Science, Scopus and PsychInfo in November 2021. Details of the search terms and the number of articles returned for each search are outlined in Appendix 7.1.

In order for a broad range of literature to be identified, search terms were simple, and synonyms were used for key words. Truncation was used to ensure that a variety of different forms of key words were included, for example 'behave', 'behaviour', 'behaving' and further to account for the American spelling 'behavior". Synonyms for Early Years that may be used across different cultures were also included as the review was not exclusive to the UK. As discussed, the review aimed to explore perceptions and was not limited to causal attributions, thus a variety of synonyms were used for this term including views, opinions, constructs and perceptions. Following the detailed searches, duplicates were removed, then titles and abstracts were reviewed by the author in line with the inclusion and exclusion criteria specified. This led to the exclusion of numerous studies and identified a final number of studies which appeared to be suitable for the review aims (see Figure 2.1 for a detailed representation of the screening process).
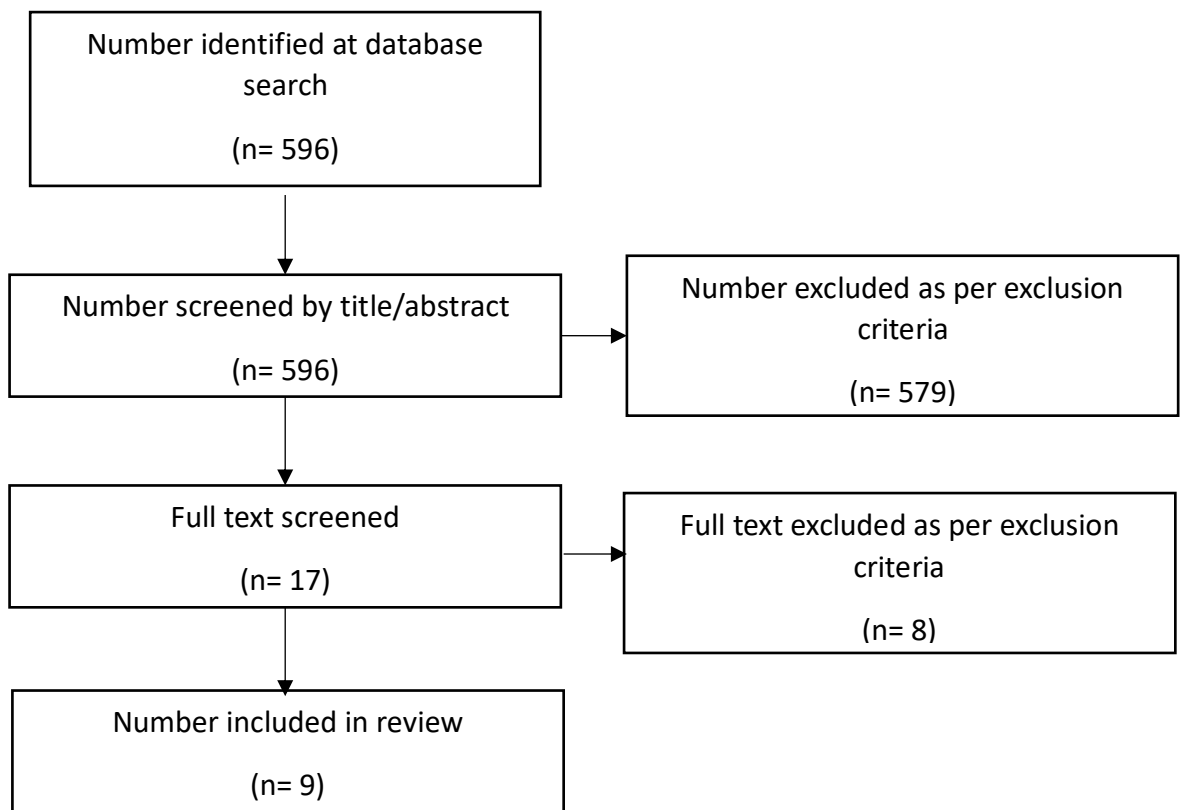
Figure 2.1: Flow diagram showing search and study selection for the systematic literature review.

2.4.3.3 Data Collection

Data was extracted independently, obtaining the same type of information from each study. Extracted data from the studies included: author/s, year published, location, participants and reported participant characteristics, method and measures, and key findings.

2.4.3.4 Quality Assessment

All 9 papers from the search meeting the inclusion criteria were included in the review. Gough (2007) Weight of Evidence framework was applied in order to critically appraise each study individually considering their quality.

Gough's (2007) framework comprises of the following four criteria in which studies are judged upon.

Weight of Evidence A: Judgement about coherence, integrity, and quality of the evidence in its own terms. This is non-specific to the current review question.

Weight of Evidence B: Judgement about the appropriateness of the design and methods used for answering the current review question.

Weight of Evidence C: Judgement about the relevance of the focus for answering the current review question, including sample, type of evidence, and analysis.

Weight of Evidence D: A combination of the former three judgements into an overall assessment of the extent that the study contributes to the answering of the current review question.

2.4.3.5 Configurative review

Included studies were review considering key areas- these were: sample size, cross-cultural research, participant and setting characteristics, methodology, purposes, and findings.

2.4.4 Results

2.4.4.1 Study Selection

When the specified search strategy was applied across the three identified databases, a total of 596 results were returned. The filtering process for these results is outlined in Figure 2.1. The initial 596 results were screened at title and abstract level against the defined inclusion/exclusion criteria. Principal reasons for exclusion included studies not being based around educational settings, not focusing on the desired age range, and not relating to behaviour. Following this, 17 results were screened at the next stage at full-text level and 8 studies were excluded. Details of the 8 excluded studies at this stage and reasons for exclusion can be found in Appendix 7.2. 9 studies were identified as satisfying the full inclusion criteria and thus were included within the review. The final studies included in the review are: Jamil, Emerson, McKown and Stephan (2021); Yoder and Williford (2019); Major, Seabra-Santos and Gaspar (2018); Dobbs and Arnold (2009); Maniadaki, Sonuga-Barke and Kakouros (2003); Zhang and Sun (2011); Nungesser and Watkins (2005); Kasik and Gál (2016); Al-Thani and Semmar (2017). Further details of the included studies are summarised in Table 2.2.

2.4.4.2   Study Characteristics

Table 2.2: Details of individual studies included in the systematic literature review.

Study	Sample	Method	Findings
Jamil, F. M., Emerson, A., McKown, G., and Stephan, A. T. (2021) USA	n= 8 Pre-school Head Start teachers 38% 10+ years of teaching 100% female	Reflective writing guided by questions Data analysed using content analysis	Authors found that teachers were experiencing stress resulting from challenging behaviours which they perceived as being rooted within the child and emanating from places beyond their control. Teachers struggled to identify their role in challenging behaviours and often attributed this to child's personality or attention seeking. Teachers attributed the cause of behaviour most often to the child, the family, or the relationship with the child. Authors found that the majority of teachers were unsure if children showing challenging behaviours could be helped. Those who said they could be helped had attributed behaviours in some part to themselves.

Yoder, M. L., and Williford, A. P. (2019) USA	n= 160 Lead pre-school teachers Experience M= 12.31 years 97.4% female	Survey ADHD Rating Scale-IV (ADHD-RS-IV; DuPaul, Power, Anastopoulos, & Reid, 1998) and the ODD Rating Scale (ODD-RS; Anastopoulous, 1998) Teachers' Sense of Self Efficacy Scale (TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Preschool Teaching Attributions (PTA; Carter et al., 2014). Data analysed using descriptive analyses and multilevel regression models	Authors found that years of experience were unrelated to ratings. Beliefs were signficantly associated with behaviour ratings- those who had greater reported overall self-efficacy and who endorsed more negative causal and responsibility attributions were more likely to rate children as displaying disruptive behaviour. Those who reported greater negative responsibility attributional beliefs were more likely to rate children higher on all 3 subtypes of disruptive behaviour. The degree to which teachers perceived behaviours to be stable and purposeful positively associated with disruptive behaviour ratings.

Major, S. O., Seabra-Santos, M. J., and Gaspar, M. F. (2018) Portugal	n= 28 Pre-school teachers and respective classroom aides Experience M= 12.09 years 100% female	Survey Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales – 2nd Edition (PKBS-2 Portuguese version). (Merrell, 2002) Data analysed using Pearson product-moment (rs; interclass) and intraclass correlations (ICCs)	Authors found a higher level of agreement for social skills than for problem behaviour. Agreements were higher for externalised behaviours than internalised behaviours. Similar ratings were found between staff reflecting the fact that teachers and classroom aides work together and know the children in a quite similar way.
Dobbs, J., and Arnold, D. H. (2009) USA	n= 24 Pre-school teachers 100% female	Survey Teacher Report Form (TRF) of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991) Observation Classroom observations conducted by research assistants	Authors found that teachers gave more commands to children they perceived as having greater behaviour problems even after controlling for shared variance in other classroom teachers reports. Authors discuss that this suggests that teachers use commands in a pre-emptive attempt to control the behaviour of children who frequently misbehave. Further, authors suggest that teachers' subjective interpretations of children's behaviour, which doubtlessly include attributions for that behaviour, were connected to teachers' behaviour toward the children.

		Data analysed using descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regressions	
Maniadaki, K., Sonuga-Barke, E. J. S., and Kakouros, E. (2003) Greece	n= 158 Trainee nursery teachers Age M= 20 years 100% female	Survey Adapted from the Parental Account of the Causes of Childhood Problems Questionnaire (PACCP; Sonuga-Barke & Balding 1993) Data analaysed using descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regressions	Authors found that concern for boys was no more severe or of greater concern than for girls. However, disruptive behaviour disorders were regarded as less typical for girls than boys.

Zhang, X., and Sun, J. (2011) China	n= 6 Pre-school homeroom teachers Experience M= 7.2 years 100% female	Survey Child Behavior Checklist/2–3 (CBCL/2–3; Achenbach, 1992). Data analysed using structural equation modeling (SEM) approach	Authors found that children's externalizing problems were reciprocally associated with teacher–child conflict; internalizing problems were also associated with later teacher–child conflict. However, neither internalizing nor externalizing problems were significantly associated with teacher–child closeness.
Nungesser, N. R., and Watkins, R. V. (2005) USA	n= 45 Head pre-school teachers	Survey Developed by researchers- Teachers' perceptions of challenging behaviors in preschool-age children using both closed and open ended questions Data analysed using descriptive statistics and content analysis	Authors found that aggressive behaviours were seen as more disruptive than social withdrawal. Violent physical reactions, uncontrolled/impulsive movements and refusal to comply with rules were rated as highly disruptive. It was consistently reported that teachers perceived home environment to be a key factor in contributing to challenging behaviour. Teachers frequently responded with reactive behaviour management approaches e.g. time out, restraint, removal.

| Kasik, L., and Gál, Z. (2016) Hungary | n= 925 (451 mothers, 451 fathers, 23 kindergarten teachers) Parents of children in kindergarten and their kindergarten teachers | Survey Social Problem-Solving Parent/Teacher Questionnaire (SPSQ) by Kasik & Gál (2013), based on Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised by D'Zurilla, Nezu, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2002 Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) by Goodman, 2001 Conners Parent/Teacher Rating Scale-Revised (CPTR) by Conners, 1997). | Authors found that parent and teachers had different opinions in almost all studied aspects. There was also a difference in how mothers and fathers rated most factors. It was found that it was not teachers who have most negative opinion but fathers. |

		Data analysed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA	
Al-Thani, T., and Semmar, Y. (2017) Qatar	n= 22 Pre-school teachers from independent schools	Survey Prosocial Behaviors of Children-Teachers' Perceptions (Dahlberg et al., 2005) Data analysed using descriptive statistics and MANOVA	Authors found that prosocial behaviours occurred on moderate levels irrespective of gender and school level. Girls displayed relatively more prosocial behaviours than boys.

2.4.4.3 Reliability and Validity of Studies

As per the inclusion criteria, all studies included were published within a peer-reviewed journal. It is hoped that this would help to ensure an adequate level of reliability and validity within the study to have passed the peer-review process.

Six of the included studies were entirely quantitative and used self-report methods of data collection (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Kasik & Gál, 2016; Major et al., 2018; Maniadaki, Sonuga-Barke, & Kakouros, 2003b; Yoder & Williford, 2019; Zhang & Sun, 2011b). A further 2 studies used a mixed-method design which included some form of self-report method (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). The use of self-report data collection can lead to participant bias and social-desirability bias. Besides Nungesser and Watkins (2005), the measures used in the studies were pre-existing measures and the internal consistency of the measures were explicitly discussed by all authors. Nungesser and Watkins (2005) developed their own measure which may lead to issues of construct validity as the measure created by researchers may not be representative entirely of what was set out to be measured. The final study used a qualitative method (Jamil et al., 2021). This possibly presents issues with interpretation of findings from the researcher.

Levels of reliability and validity varied between studies. As all studies were peer reviewed, it was deemed that studies had acceptable levels of reliability and validity to be used within the review.

2.4.4.4 Quality Assessment

Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework was used in order to assess the quality of the studies used within the review. The criteria used for this judgement, and scores for each study against these criteria, are detailed in Appendix 7.3. Table 2.3 shows the scores given for each study.

Table 2.3: Scores from the Weight of Evidence quality assessment.

Study	Weight of Evidence A	Weight of Evidence B	Weight of Evidence C	Weight of Evidence D
Jamil, F. M., Emerson, A., McKown, G., and Stephan, A. T. (2021)	Medium	Low	High	**Medium**
Yoder, M. L., and Williford, A. P. (2019)	High	High	High	**High**
Major, S. O., Seabra-Santos, M. J., and Gaspar, M. F. (2018)	High	High	Medium	**High**
Dobbs, J., and Arnold, D. H. (2009)	Medium	High	Medium	**Medium**
Maniadaki, K., Sonuga-Barke, E. J. S., and Kakouros, E. (2003)	Medium	High	Medium	**Medium**
Zhang, X., and Sun, J. (2011)	High	High	Medium	**High**
Nungesser, N. R., and Watkins, R. V. (2005)	Low	Medium	Medium	**Medium**
Kasik, L., and Gál, Z. (2016)	Medium	High	Medium	**Medium**

| *Al-Thani, T., and Semmar, Y. (2017)* | Medium | Medium | Medium | **Medium** |

The three studies receiving the highest quality judgement were Yoder and Williford (2019), Major, Seabra-Santos and Gaspar (2018), and Zhang and Sun (2011). Yoder and Williford (2019) used a survey method to look specifically at practitioner attributions, thus was rated as high quality across all three areas; quality of execution, appropriatenes of research methods, and relevance of the focus. Major, Seabra-Santos and Gaspar (2018) and Zhang and Sun (2011) were both rated as high for Weight of Evidence A and B due to their use of surveys which is clearly described, however they did not directly gather data regarding attributions, and thus received a medium ratings for relevance of focus.

The remaining six studies all received final judgements of 'medium'. Within this, Jamil, Emerson, McKown and Stephan (2021) were rated as high for relavance of focus as they directly considered attributions, however received the lowest rating for relevance of research methods due to the use of qualitaitve methodology. Dobbs and Arnold (2009), Maniadaki, Sonuga-Barke and Kakouros (2003) and Kasik and Gál (2016) all adequately, but not fully, described the use of survey methodology with relevant data analayis, thus received medium and high ratings for Weight of Evidence A and B respectively. However these studies did not directly consider attributions, thus received medium ratings for Weight of Evidence C. Al-Thani and Semmar (2017) was rated of medium quality against all three areas as there was adequate description of methodology, the use of survey within similar scales to the current study and the use of descriptive statistics for analysis, however attributions were not considered. Nungesser and Watkins (2005) received the lowest judgement rating for Weight of Evidence A due to a lack of description of methodology and analysis. From the details provided, measures appeared similar, however analysis used descriptive statistics and there was only some focus on perseptives regarding behaviour.

2.4.4.5 Review of Results

Sample size

Considerable variance can be seen in the sample size between included studies, ranging from 8 participants to 925 participants. The smallest sample size was 8 participants (Jamil et al., 2021). This is reflective of the design used by Jamil as the only qualitative study included in the review. Content analysis and emergent coding was used to analyse the data collected with this number of participants being appropriate for the chosen methodology. The largest sample size by a wide margin was 925 participants (Kasik & Gál, 2016). This represents 23 pre-school teachers and 451 sets of parents (451 mothers and 451 fathers). This is the only study found to include parents. The quantitative nature of the study suggests that a higher number of participants is favourable, with this study collecting a wide range of views from a large sample.

Of the remaining studies, 3 studies had samples made up of more than 100 participants (Maniadaki et al., 2003; Yoder & Williford, 2019; Zhang & Sun, 2011). The studies with larger sample sizes utilised inferential statistics within their analyses including multiple regressions. Studies with comparably smaller sample sizes (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Major et al., 2018; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005) reported the primary use of descriptive statistics then used correlational analysis and ANOVA/MANOVA for further analysis. Of those studies with smaller sample sizes, 2 of the studies used a mixed-method design using observations alongside surveys (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009) or including open-ended questions within their survey (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). Again, the inclusion of qualitative aspects may reflect the smaller number of participants. What is more, it is well recognised within research literature that self-report methods often receive a low response rate which again may be reflected in smaller sample sizes.

Overall, the sample sizes used were judged to be appropriate to the methodology, including the data analysis, utilised within each study. It is acknowledged that for quantitative research, larger sample sizes may be more representative, however due to the variance in statistical analysis and the range of research questions being

asked, no set number of participants can be claimed as the minimum or optimal number.

Cross-Cultural Research

No studies were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria that were conducted in the UK. Due to the variation in educational systems across other countries and cultures, it is important to consider the setting of the studies.

Of the included studies, 4 of the studies were conducted in the USA (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jamil et al., 2021; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019). Of these studies, 1 was conducted within a South-Eastern state in two rural counties (Jamil et al., 2021). Another was conducted in three urban regions across two Eastern states (Yoder & Williford, 2019). A further was conducted in a mid-sized mid-Western state (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005), and the final USA study did not give further description of the location (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009).

Further, 2 studies were conducted within Europe (Kasik & Gál, 2016; Maniadaki et al., 2003a); 1 in mainland Greece (Maniadaki et al., 2003a) and 1 in Hungary (Kasik & Gál, 2016). No further details regarding the location were provided within the study. The final 2 studies were conducted in Asia (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Zhang & Sun, 2011b), 1 in mainland China within an urban area (Zhang & Sun, 2011b)and 1 in Qatar (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017).

The value of research within this area, particularly the gathering of views from Early Years practitioners, is clearly recognised across the world by researchers. This is reflected by studies from across three different continents and five different countries meeting the inclusion criteria for the review. This is an important cross-cultural perspective that gathers views from educational systems that are set up in different ways and come from a variety of backgrounds, yet all see the value of gathering such information on views of challenging behaviour within the specified age range and the impact of such perspectives. However, this also brings limitations to the review due to the differences across cultures in Early Years provision including curriculum, systems and general set up. This makes it difficult to compare between studies which although may be within the same age range, may relate to

varying provisions and policies. This may include typical norms and values within the cultures referred to, especially when relating to collectivist cultures.

Participant and Setting Characteristics

All studies besides 3 (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Kasik & Gál, 2016; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005) provided details around participants beyond the number of participants and their job role which led to high and medium ratings regarding this criteria for all studies. The most striking information given is the high percentage of females within the samples. Of the 6 studies providing data on gender of practitioners included in their study, only 1 study had male representatives within their sample (Yoder & Williford, 2019), in this sample on 2.5% of practitioners were male. Although the extremely high percentage of females included may seem unrepresentative at first, this is a reflection of the Early Years workforce. It is reported that in the UK only 3% of Early Years sector workers are male (Department for Education, 2021). This may be in part due to historical childcare roles. Thus, the high number of females used in samples is judged to be an accurate representation of the workforce at the current time.

All studies indicated the type of practitioners used within the study, although definitions of titles of job role may differ across different cultures. All of the studies used the title 'teacher' as part of the description of type of practitioner. This included pre-school teachers (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jamil et al., 2021; Major et al., 2018; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005), kindergarten teachers (Kasik & Gál, 2016), nursery home-room teachers (Zhang & Sun, 2011), and trainee nursery teachers (Maniadaki et al., 2003). The title of teacher suggests a certain level of education and training to receive this role, thus increasing the judged quality of the sample within the research. However, Maniadaki et al. (2003) used trainee nursery teachers, this may impact on findings due to the suggested limits to the experience of this sample. However, trainees may have been more easily accessed as a sample which is reflected in the high number of participants within this study. Major et al. (2018) was the only study to use classroom aides alongside teachers due to purpose of their research to explore similarities in the

views of these two groups, this may increase validity as a range of practitioners were asked and may result in a more representative perspective.

Further characteristics reported by some studies include age, ethnicity, level of education, and years of experience which led to the highest score for description of participants for 6 of the studies. Samples appeared to show racial and ethnic diversity which appeared to be representative of the community in which the research was located within respectively. It was further noted that studies reporting participant characteristics showed variation in ages of participants and in years of experience reported.

Of the included studies, 3 provided some details of the children in which their samples were asked about within the research, beyond age (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jamil et al., 2021; Major et al., 2018). This suggested that there was an almost equal split of boys and girls within studies and varied racial and ethnic backgrounds which reflected those of practitioners. Further characteristics from 1 study included that the majority of children were from low-income backgrounds (Jamil et al., 2021) and from another study that 54% of children were from single parent households (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). It is important to consider the impact of these characteristics on the attributions that may be given for their behaviour and how this may be a key discussion point within research, yet only one third of included studies reported any characteristics relating to the children focused on. This influenced quality judgements of studies regarding criteria for Weight of Evidence A (see Appendix 7.3), whereby characteristics of participants needed to be clearly and fully described to receive a good score.

All studies reported some information relating to the characteristics of the Early Years setting which the research was based within. Interestingly, 5 of the studies identified that at least part of the sample used were within programmes designed to support families from low socio-economic backgrounds including Head Start centres (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jamil et al., 2021; Major et al., 2018; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019). A further study outlined the inclusion of nursery classes within public and private schools (Zhang & Sun, 2011). It is important to consider the impact of the characteristics of these settings on the

perspectives gathered within the research and how this may differ in different types of settings including those that are funded by the state or funded by parents. Furthermore, the description of setting characteristics needed to be full and clear in order to receive a good score for this criterion in Weight of Evidence A of the quality judgement (see Appendix 7.3).

Methodology and Measures

6 of the included studies used an entirely quantitative design in the form of self-report surveys and questionnaires and thus were rated highly for appropriateness of research methods to the current study (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Kasik & Gál, 2016; Major et al., 2018; Maniadaki et al., 2003; Yoder & Williford, 2019; Zhang & Sun, 2011). A further 2 included studies use a mixed-method design which included some aspect of self-report surveys or questionnaires (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). Dobbs & Arnold (2009) used observations alongside a survey measure and Nungesser & Watkins (2005) included open-ended questions within their survey, thus still received high ratings of method appropriateness. The final study used a qualitative design through a reflective writing exercise supported by question prompts and thus received the lowest score in appropriateness of method to the current study (Jamil et al., 2021). The majority of the studies used similar methodology across different age ranges to explore perceptions of challenging behaviour where self-report methods such as surveys and questionnaires have been commonly used, with the only exceptions being the additional use of observation alongside self-report by Dobbs and Arnold (2009).

With the exception of Jamil et al. (2021), all studies used some form of self-report measure reflecting why they received high ratings for this criteria within the quality judgement. Across these 8 studies 15 different measures were used. Internal consistency of all of the measures used were reported within studies and show good consistency which led to high scores relating to the measures used in quality judgement. This shows the wide variety of measures available to gather information around perceptions of behaviour. Only 1 study developed its own measure for the purposes of the research (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). This was developed through reviewing other assessment measures and was supported by university students

and staff to ensure validity of the developed measure, however the generalisability of using such a sample may be questioned and such this may bring limitations regarding how representative the final measure is. The measures used were judged as appropriate to the research question and purposes of the research respectively. The criteria by which the measure was rated for quality judgement in Weight of Evidence A (see Appendix 7.3) stated that the measure must be fully and clearly named and described, thus those studies which did not fully outline this were awarded lower scores (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Jamil et al., 2021).

Purposes

Whilst all of the studies looked at perspectives of behaviour in some form, the studies had different purposes. All studies besides 2 (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Kasik & Gál, 2016) specifically explored challenging behaviour, reflecting the lower score received by these 2 studies relating to this criterion within Weight of Evidence C. Some of the synonyms used for challenging behaviour by studies include 'disruptive behaviour' (Maniadaki et al., 2003; Yoder & Williford, 2019), 'behaviour problems' (Major et al., 2018). The 2 remaining studies explore prosocial behaviour and children's difficulties with this, which although useful to gain perspective on, did not fully align with the focus of the current study (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Kasik & Gál, 2016).

All studies looked at some form of perspectives of these behaviours by practitioners. However, the perspectives focused on varied between studies. As part of their purpose, 6 of the studies explored how practitioners describe behaviours, including their views on the nature of the behaviours, severity and intensity (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Jamil et al., 2021; Major et al., 2018; Maniadaki et al., 2003; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019). Further aspects explored included: the relationships between children and practitioners due to the behaviours (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jamil et al., 2021; Zhang & Sun, 2011), gender differences (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Maniadaki et al., 2003), and teacher factors including treatment and reactions (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019). 3 of the studies looked specifically at causes for the behaviour or causal attributions given by participants, thus were awarded the

highest score possible within Weight of Evidence C (see Appendix 7.3) relating to the relevance of the study whereby the study focuses on challenging behaviour and attributions (Jamil et al., 2021; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019).

Findings

Although studies had a high level of variation with purpose, measures and culture, several similarities were found across the findings of the studies. 5 of the studies found some association between teacher perceptions, teacher ratings, and the behaviour of the teacher towards the child (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jamil et al., 2021; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019; Zhang & Sun, 2011). Where negative causal attributions were given which perceived children as being more responsible for their behaviour, higher ratings of disruptive behaviour being present were given (Yoder & Williford, 2019). In addition, the higher the ratings for disruptive behaviour, the more pre-emptive commands given (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009), the more teacher conflict (Zhang & Sun, 2011), and the more reactive responses (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005).

Behaviour was attributed to home and within-child factors by the practitioners in the 3 studies directly reporting causal factors (Jamil et al., 2021; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019). Where behaviour was attributed to within-child factors, teachers rated this as out of their control and were unsure if they could help with this behaviour as they struggled to identify their role in this (Jamil et al., 2021). Attributions were also seen to be connected directly to behaviour towards the child (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). This suggests that teachers in the studies saw challenging behaviour as difficult to change and outside of their control which in turn impacts on their ratings and responses to the behaviour, including interactions and relationships.

3 of the studies commented on gender differences found in ratings of girls and boys by teachers (Al-Thani & Semmar, 2017; Maniadaki et al., 2003; Yoder & Williford, 2019). All of these studies identified that boys were rated as having higher levels of challenging behaviour, or lower levels of pro-social behaviour. Although concern for

boys was rated the same as for girls, disruptive behaviour was viewed as more typical for boys (Maniadaki et al., 2003). This highlights possible difference in perceptions by teachers on behaviour linked to gender which may be influenced by stereotypical gender views (Chapman & Slocum, 2015).

In the studies using comparison groups (Kasik & Gál, 2016; Major et al., 2018), teacher and assistant ratings were seen to be very similar to each other, whereas parent and teacher ratings differed significantly. Years of experience was seen as a teacher factor which was unrelated to ratings given (Yoder & Williford, 2019). Externalised behaviours were also seen as easier to rate more accurately (Major et al., 2018) due to the more visual nature of these behaviours. Moreover, the most disruptive and frequently reported behaviours were hyperactivity and aggressive behaviours (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005; Yoder & Williford, 2019).

2.4.5 Summary of Evidence

Overall, the studies included in the review were judged to be of good quality, all being rated as high or medium quality during quality assessment. This showed the relevance of the methodology and focus to the research question as well as the integrity of the designs implemented. Thus, this has implications for the content of the studies included within the review as all studies were rated to be of reasonable quality and relevance. Jamil et al., (2021) and Yoder and Williford (2019) were judged to be the studies with the most relevance of focus to the review question as they gathered direct attribution data relating to challenging behaviour. However, Jamil et al. (2021) used qualitative methodology thus was judged to have less relevance based on research methods. Overall, the study by Yoder and Williford (2019) was given the highest final rating for quality judgement through the use of survey methodology to gather practitioner perspectives on challenging behaviour, showing clear parallels to the review question.

A wide variation in measures used, participants, setting, and purposes was found across the studies. However, the majority of studies used a survey or questionnaire methodology with Early Years practitioners and all studies considered perceptions of challenging behaviours in some form. One key theme drawn out across studies by

researchers was the impact of ratings or attributions on teacher behaviour towards children. It was identified that where practitioners rated children highly for challenging behaviour or where the attributions for such behaviours were judged as negative, this appeared to impact the interactions and relationships between practitioners and children including the number of directive commands given, (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005) conflict (Zhang & Sun, 2011a), and the level of helping behaviours from teachers (Jamil et al., 2021).

Furthermore, it was found that the attributions reported focused on within-child factors including personality and home factors including family as key contributing factors to the causes for challenging behaviours (Jamil et al., 2021; Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). This further impacted on responses by practitioners which included a high level of reactive behavioural management strategies including time-out (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). The review highlights that practitioners may find it difficult to identify their role in contributing to perceived challenging behaviour and thus may suggests a self-serving bias for practitioners. From this, it appears that practitioners may have difficulty in identifying their role in supporting children displaying perceived challenging behaviours thus impacting their daily interactions, responses to behaviours, and willingness to support.

This has implications for the role of external professionals in supporting practitioners in developing insight into their potential role in improving and addressing behaviour and how such interactions may be enhanced. By external professionals having an increased knowledge and awareness of practitioner's perceptions, they may be able to further empower practitioners to enable change and support with vital early intervention work.

2.4.5.1   Limitations

The review was relatively small-scale, with only three databases used to run searches within a limited time frame. Had a larger scale search been conducted, it is possible that further relevant studies may have been identified which may have contributed to alternative or additional conclusions being drawn from the review. Therefore, it is acknowledged that this review is representative of the sources available at the time conducted and within the remits of the current research.

It is acknowledged that the current review holds some limitations. The review was conducted for the outlined aim of exploring what is known abouts the reported perceptions of challenging behaviour. As each study had its own purpose, this was not always the primary aim of the study and although the author discussed the purposes of each study and tried to capture a range of findings reported, it is acknowledged that the aims and purposes of each study varied from one another, which means that only tentative comparisons can be made between studies.

2.4.5.2 Conclusions

This review aimed to present an overview of perceptions of challenging behaviour in the Early Years using a systematic method. Whilst the limitations of the review have been acknowledged, the review was valuable for identifying the current evidence base and considering themes within existing research.

The relatively small number of studies that met inclusion criteria, despite the widening of initial criteria, identifies a lack of research exploring perspectives of challenging behaviour specifically within the Early Years in the UK. Further, it appears that causal attributions and the inclusion of parent views of challenging behaviour in the Early Years are particularly under researched. Further, no studies were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria that were conducted within the UK, although the different countries included in the review identifies an interest in the topic across cultures, it highlights a gap in the research within the UK which is important due to cultural differences in the education system and in wider aspects of culture.

This supports the rationale for conducting further research which aims to explore how the causes of challenging behaviour are perceived in the Early Years by both practitioners and parents within a UK context. Research in this area would extend the existing evidence base around this topic and could serve to inform Early Years, and Educational Psychology, practice in supporting perceived challenging behaviour.

2.5   Rationale

The researcher has previous experience as a practitioner in EYFS and thus recognises the important position of EYFS in identifying and supporting the social and emotional needs of children to provide enabling environments with positive relationships to prevent challenging behaviour and, where this is exhibited, to intervene at an early stage. This is of high importance for supporting young people's wellbeing and for supporting them to reach their potential. What is more, this can aid the prevention of exclusion and the negative effects that this can have on life opportunities. Further, the researcher acknowledges the emotionally charged tension that can exist between practitioners and parents relating to children exhibiting challenging behaviour and the culture of parent partnership within EYFS that may mean that such relationships have the potential to be different to those in higher key stages.

A key consideration for EP work is based in eco-systemic approaches, considering children and young people functioning as part of the systems in which they exist (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Research and literature show the influence of attributions made by each party regarding children and young people exhibiting challenging behaviour and impact responses and relationships leading to negative effects for young people. For this to be considered effectively, it is essential to explore the attributions of key stakeholders within these systems. Attribution studies have been conducted considering the attributions for challenging behaviour from key groups including parents, staff, and pupils (Lambert & Miller, 2010; Miller, 1995; Miller et al., 2002). However, most of this research has focused on secondary schools, with a small number considering primary and has highlighted differences in the attributions between parents and teachers. However, little is known about attributions for challenging behaviour in EYFS, as highlighted within the systematic literature review, thus a gap in the literature has been identified. The significance of early support, alongside the different culture and values in EYFS, suggests that this is an important age phase to highlight the attributions for challenging behaviour used by staff and parents to consider the implications of any similarities and differences in these attributions.

2.6   Research Aims & Question

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

-To explore practitioner attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS

-To explore parent attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS

-To explore the similarities and differences between practitioner and parent
attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS

The research question for the proposed study is as follows:

What are the causal attributions held by practitioners and parents for challenging
behaviour observed in pupils in EYFS (3-5-year-olds)?

3   Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology within the current study. A number of philosophical paradigms are considered, and the research's personal standpoint is identified in order to provide rationale for the chosen design. The method is split into 3 stages: developing the measure, data gathering, and data analysis where methodology for each stage is described including design, measures, sampling, and procedure. The quality of the research is then explored including issues relating to reliability, validity, and ethics.

3.1   Methodological orientation

The current research aims to explore causal attributions for perceived challenging behaviour within the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is an example of real-world research taking place in an applied setting. Real world research can be used to link theory with practice in an attempt to explain the world through small-scale studies examining experiences within society (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Such research is commonly used within education where research in an applied setting could be considered more ecologically valid than laboratory-based research. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) discuss how research in education is unavoidably intertwined with politics and decision-making which has further implications for methodology and practical considerations.

The epistemological and ontological orientation of the current research will now be considered in order to demonstrate the suitability of the chosen methodology.

3.1.1   Paradigms in Research

A paradigm can be viewed as a basic belief system which represents a worldview for its holder (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Paradigms are based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. Paradigms consider what is assumed about reality and knowledge, and how the researcher can go on to find out more (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) outline how ontological beliefs lead to epistemological assumptions that then give rise to methodological considerations, which inform measures, instruments, and data

collection. This shows the importance and purpose of researchers understanding their own standpoints and the impact of this on research. What is more, Grix (2010) states that by consciously acknowledging our own beliefs, and having an awareness of others' beliefs, researchers can engage in, and critique, research whilst being aware of the reasoning behind decision processes. Mertens (2015) further argues that researchers need to identify the paradigm which fits closest to their own beliefs and recognise the influence of this on research questions chosen and how these are pursued. As paradigms are human constructs and subjective, the paradigm an individual aligns can only be decided by the most up-to-date and relevant information presented to them at the time (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Researchers should be open to acknowledging and understanding a variety of paradigms and Benton and Craib (2001) suggest that the researcher's standpoint does not have to be fixed and permanent within one single paradigm.

There are multiple perspectives which may be considered, including: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and pragmatism. These paradigms will be explored in more detail to show how the researcher identified the paradigm which was most aligned with their personal epistemological beliefs as this will inform later decisions, including the design of the study.

3.1.2   Positivism

Positivism originates in the natural sciences and assumes that the world exists externally to the researcher and can be measured directly through observation using the senses (Gray, 2013). Positivism has roots in realist ontology and values causal associations and explanations through research based in objectivity (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Positivism argues that there is one true reality, and that this reality is consistent for all individuals. This paradigm favours quantitative methodology such as randomised control trials and other experimental methods. Such methodology is highly valued on the hierarchy of methods which underpins evidence-based practice (Cline, Gulliford, & Birch, 2015). However, the positivist paradigm has been criticised because of the risk of reductionism and the

impossibility of conducting social research without some level of interpretation (Mertens, 2015).

3.1.3   Post-Positivism

Post-positivism responds to criticisms of positivism, holding a similar realist ontology yet accepting that researchers can only imperfectly explain the world and approximate the truth (Mertens, 2015). Post-positivism advances that each individual view of reality is provisional and changeable (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). It accepts that there is no one true reality, whilst continuing to favour methods deriving from the natural sciences. Post-positivism acknowledges that whilst there may be an objective reality this can be viewed alternatively based on contextual and individual differences (Kaplan, 2015). Post-positivism may align with the philosophical stance of critical realism which believes that a reality exists independent of our thinking however, we can only study the 'observable' which is influenced by constructs, perspectives, and experiences (Groff, 2004). Thus, this paradigm often employs modified experimental methods within real world settings.

3.1.4   Constructivism

An opposing stance to positivism is that of constructivism, based within relativism. This paradigm argues that the world is interpreted through individuals' schemas and favours qualitative, in-depth methodology including case studies (Gray, 2013). Constructivism denies an objective reality and instead considers that realities are based on the individual's social constructs which are influenced by a plethora of factors including core values, previous experience, and demographics (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). These realities are not more or less true than one another, but instead more or less informed by knowledge and experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As such, a constructivist paradigm is interpretivist and researchers aim to understand different subjective realities through their research.

3.1.5   Pragmatism

The pragmatism stance is more concerned with the generation of practical consequences and actions from research and less so ideologies (Gray, 2013).

Pragmatism considers what works in relation to the research question and justifies the use of mixed methods. Pragmatism accepts that there may be a single reality whilst accepting that each individual will have their own interpretation of this due to a variety of influencing factors. Within this paradigm, reality is actively created by individuals through experience and is ever-evolving (Weaver, 2018). Pragmatism rejects the idea that a researcher must remain within a single scientific method based on their beliefs of knowledge and reality, and instead matches specific questions to methods (Mertens, 2015). This often leads to a mixed methods approach.

3.1.6 Philosophical Stance in the Current Study

The current research proposes a quantitative study within a real-world setting, this research aligns with the post-positivism paradigm. This paradigm attempts to pursue objective truth whilst acknowledging that a researcher can only approximate truth and imperfectly explain this truth. The post-positivism stance has implications for the researcher's epistemological stance, which is reflective of objectivism, whereby the researcher believes that an objective reality does exist independently of social factors. Further, the researcher's ontological standpoint is reflective of critical realism. This standpoint accepts that although a true reality may exist independently, reality can be viewed in alternative ways based on individual experiences and differences. This aligns with the researchers aims to produce tentative findings from the viewpoints of different groups within society which will attempt to capture co-existing views of reality, rather than capturing an objective truth.

3.2 Design

The identified philosophical standpoints have implications for chosen methodology. The design of the research not only reflects the epistemological position of the researcher but further must be appropriate for the outlined purpose of the study. Within a post-positivist paradigm, modified experimental methods are typically employed. This is based on inquiry in more natural settings with the aim of collecting situational information and soliciting the meanings and purposes that

people ascribe to their actions. The chosen design and methods are reflective of this and are outlined in the following section, whilst alternatives designs are also considered through outlining fixed, flexible, and mixed designs.

3.2.1 Fixed, Flexible and Mixed Designs

Fixed designs

Fixed designs are named as such as the design for the research is fixed before the implementation of data collection begins (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Such designs are usually theory driven, with the variables being measured based on the focus theory. This suggests that the researcher would have a good conceptual understanding of the theory and phenomena being studied prior to the research starting (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Fixed designs can be experimental, quasi-experimental, or non-experimental, depending on the purpose of the individual study. Most often, fixed designs employ quantitative methodology where there is a focus on controlling and measuring variables in a way which can be analysed statistically by the researcher (Mertens, 2004).

A fixed design may be chosen in order to reduce experimenter bias in exploring patterns within groups and processes (Cohen, 2011). However, an identified constraint of fixed designs using quantitative methodology include the limits on their ability to capture complexity within phenomena including nuances of behaviour, particularly at individual level (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Flexible designs

Flexible designs typically tend to allow more movement during implementation of data collection, allowing for change during this stage (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This differs from fixed designs as theory may not be readily known or available before the implementation of the research but instead developed during the study. Thus, questions asked can be more tentative at the offset, evolving as the research moves on. Generally, flexible designs employ qualitative methodology due to phenomena being researched not being appropriate to quantify (Cohen, 2011).

Often flexible designs are underpinned by constructivist, or interpretivist, paradigms with examples of methodology including, although not limited to, case studies, grounded theory, and ethnographic studies (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Such methodology can draw upon observations and interviews during data collection.

Flexible designs may be employed to study individual, unquantifiable phenomena at an in-depth level (Robson & McCartan, 2016). However, flexible designs have been criticised due to their limited predictive power and subjectivity, although it may be argued that such subjectivity is part of the purpose in this case (Cohen, 2011)

Mixed designs

Mixed method designs refer to the combination of qualitative and quantitative research to answer the research question (Mertens, 2004). This is usually based within a pragmatic philosophical standpoint whereby the design is decided on based on the question and the methods best able to generate the information required (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Mixed methods are often used to enhance what could be gained by using quantitative methodology or qualitative methodology alone. This leads to the benefits from both types of methodology, with the more in-depth insight from qualitative data alongside the statistical validity from quantitative data. However, it has been argued that there may be an incompatibility in mixed designs due to the differing paradigms from which they derive which can bring unhelpful complexity (Cohen, 2011).

3.2.2 Research Design in the Current Study

Thus, in line with the researcher's philosophical standpoint of post-positivism, with the purpose to explore parent and practitioner attributions for challenging behaviour, the researcher proposes a fixed design. Namely a quantitative study using a survey method. This is considered to be a non-experimental, fixed design. Whilst consideration was given to alternative approaches, the chosen design was deemed to be an effective strategy to explore viewpoints of key stakeholders on the

chosen topic. Previous research exploring similar research questions and purposes including Lambert and Miller (2010), Miller et al. (2002), and Raspin (2019) have also employed this design successfully and it is hoped that the current study will build on this body of research.

The researcher displays a good knowledge within the literature review of the theory in which the research derives from, namely attribution theory. This supports the use of a fixed design which is theory driven, with a good conceptual understanding of literature around the phenomena being studied.

As this is a non-experimental design, the phenomenon studied is not manipulated by the researcher. Instead, this study aims to offer descriptive data regarding the pre-identified phenomenon: the causal attributions of challenging behaviour in the Early Years. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, the current study does not aim to test any pre-specified hypotheses but later generates a posteriori hypotheses.

3.2.2.1 Surveys

Surveys aim to gather information at a specific point in time regarding existing phenomena (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). As data was collected over a short period of time, with a limited sample of the population, results are only to be perceived as representative of the specific sample from which the data was generated from, at the timepoint it was collected. Thus, attempts to generalise findings must be approached with caution. A longitudinal study may have been helpful in considering the phenomena over a longer period of time and may have led to greater generalisability, however due to the limited timescale available for the current research this was deemed to be less beneficial than a survey design.

A survey method was chosen as this was deemed an appropriate way to collect attribution data from groups of participants which is the main aim of the study. What is more, a survey allowed for information to be gathered from a relatively large sample from such groups within a restricted time frame. A standardised survey enabled attributions to be gathered and compared consistently within and between groups. Further, as attributions are not directly observable, they can only

be measured through indirect measures which includes surveys. The possibility of using interviews was explored which would have led to more in-depth data from participants. However, interviews would have limited the number of participants due to the time required for implementation and analysis and may have been more suited to the exploration of individual views rather than of group views which was the purpose of the current research. Moreover, previous studies on which the current research was based (Lambert & Miller, 2010; A. Miller et al., 2002; Raspin, 2019), employed a survey method which suggests that this is a frequently utilised method for exploring group attributions.

The disadvantages of using a survey are acknowledged by the researcher. Surveys do not allow for richness of data that may come from qualitative methods such as interviews which means that reasons behind responses cannot be inferred (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Further, items within the survey may be misunderstood or misinterpreted by participants which cannot be discussed or known by the researcher due to the indirect nature of a survey. A pilot stage can be employed to take steps to attempt to mitigate for this.

Within a survey method, there are different forms that can be utilised. Typically, surveys may vary in the type of questions used within them, either closed questions or open-ended. The use of surveys using open-ended questions are generally used for smaller scale research, as such data for larger participant groups can be difficult to analyse (Mertens, 2004). This format may also be used to answer research questions which aim to explore individual views, rather than the views of groups (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Surveys using closed questions are more easily quantified for analysis and can be more easily compared across and within groups through analyses which explore patterns within findings and can be used for larger samples (Mertens, 2004). As the current research aimed to consider relatively large groups of parents and practitioners and to compare these groups, a survey using closed questions was considered most appropriate. Thus, this was decided as the primary method for the current research.

As discussed, alternative methods, including qualitative methods, may also have been seen as helpful for answering the research question proposed, however the

purpose of the current study is to explore causal attributions held rather than the reasoning behind attributions. Surveys allowed for a relatively large sample to be included and the benefits of a survey were deemed by the researcher to outweigh potential threats to the research. In addition, the use of a survey clearly fits with the post-positivist paradigm in which the research aligns. Further risks to reliability and validity, and the steps taken to minimise these risks, are explored in detail in Table 3.5 and Table 3.6.

3.3   Methods

The method for the current study was divided into the three following stages.

Stage 1: Developing the measure: Development of the survey instrument to gather causal attributions for challenging behaviour in the Early Years from parents and practitioners.

Stage 2: Data gathering: Use of the survey instrument developed in Stage 1 to gather causal attributions for challenging behaviour in the Early Years from parents and practitioners.

Stage 3: Data analysis: An exploratory factor analysis using the data gathered in Stage 2 to explore causal attributions for challenging behaviour in the Early Years from parents and practitioners.

3.3.1   *Stage 1:* Developing the Measure

3.3.1.1   Measures

The primary measure used in the current study is an adaptation of an existing survey instrument which has been used in research exploring causal attributions for challenging behaviour in schools with teachers, parents and pupils (Miller et al., 2000). The survey items were later updated through interview processes (Lambert & Miller, 2010) and more recently by Raspin (2019) through focus groups. The most recently updated questionnaire (Raspin, 2019) includes 73 items (see Appendix 7.4). This uses a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) to rate items as Very Important; Quite Important; Neither Important Nor Unimportant; Not Very Important; Not Important At All. Instructions were given for participants to 'Please rate how important you

perceive each of the following statements to be in causing challenging behaviour for 3–5-year olds'.

The measure was originally used within a secondary school context (Miller et al., 2000; Lambert & Miller, 2010) then adapted to a primary school context (Raspin, 2019). The current study further adapted the items to ensure relevance to the Early Years context, contemporary issues, and the aims and purpose of the present study. The items were updated using focus groups, as detailed below.

3.3.1.2 Focus Group

Focus groups are a popular approach for informing understanding of social issues and can be used where a researcher is interested in how perspectives are developed and rely upon interactions within a group to elicit viewpoints (Mertens, 2015). Focus groups often inspire discussions based on experience and anecdotal observations to inform thinking (Kitzinger, 1995) which is valuable in the development of an instrument. Furthermore, focus groups can be useful for attracting participants who may be more reluctant to be interviewed individually (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Focus groups involve the group focusing on a collective activity an rely on the group interaction to generate data, this can be effective in developing understanding of key issues and refining phrasing of questions for surveys (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). Robson and McCartan (2016) outline how focus groups can be used in a wide variety of ways by researchers depending on the context and purpose of the method within a study. Thus, it was decided that a form of focus group would be an appropriate means for the further development of the survey instrument.

As the primary aim of the focus group was to ensure that the items used were relevant to the Early Years context, it was decided that Early Years leaders would be approached to participate. The decision to use Early Years leaders was made as an Early Years Project Group was running within the Local Authority in which the researcher was undertaking their professional practice placement. This group was made up of six Early Years leaders who were either Headteachers or Deputy Headteachers of local maintained nursery schools. It was deemed that this group had a high level of knowledge and experience within EYFS and would be

appropriately placed to help to adapt the measure. The group were emailed an information sheet and asked to express interest in participating in the focus group (see Appendix 7.5). All six Early Years leaders expressed interest in the focus group. Five of the leaders were able to attend on the suggested date of the focus group.

Focus groups were led by the researcher and took place via Microsoft Teams due to the Covid-19 context (the declared global pandemic from 2019 caused by Covid-19 outbreaks which led to a series of stay-at-home orders and other restrictions including social distancing and the closure of educational settings) and current restrictions at the time. The group were sent the adapted 73 items (Raspin, 2019) in advance of the focus group and asked to review the items considering language used and the relevance of items to Early Years Foundation Stage, and any further topics that may not be captured within the items. Within the focus group, participants were asked to feedback their initial thoughts regarding the items then a discussion around causes for challenging behaviour in the Early Years was opened up. Notes were taken by the researcher via a screen sharing tool so that all participants could see the notes during the focus group.

Following the focus group, the researcher amended language used within the items, removed items, and added new items in line with the focus group discussion. Changes made to the items are outlined in Appendix 7.6. The amended items were then sent to the group to check that this had encapsulated their discussion and invited the group to comment further if necessary. All participants from the focus group agreed with amendments made and no further changes were made.

Whilst the focus group was valuable in ensuring that the language used for the items and the items themselves were relevant to the Early Years context, the limitations of this are acknowledged. Ideally, the researcher would have held more than one focus group to capture a wider range of viewpoints. However, due to time limitations and the Covid-19 context and restrictions in place at the time, this was not possible. The disadvantages of holding a focus group virtually, rather than in person, are also recognised. This may have limited discussions and interactions due to not being able to read the body language of the group and due to the physical barrier of being behind a screen. However, participants were encouraged to use the

'chat' function in Microsoft Teams as well as speaking to support them in making contributions, so may have felt more comfortable completing this virtually. In the Covid-19 context online group meetings were regular practice for educators and all participants were familiar with using Microsoft Teams.

In addition, the researcher is aware that although the final items were developed based on discussion and input from the focus group, the final decisions were made by the researcher. This was heavily based on the interpretations of the researcher and the subjective nature of this is acknowledged. It is hoped that by sharing notes with the group and checking finalised items with the group that this subjectivity was somewhat minimised.

3.3.1.3   The Updated Measure

The researcher decided that the survey would be completed online by participants. This was due to the Covid-19 context at the time and restrictions in place during the research that limited face to face interactions and meant that extra precaution was needed. The survey was developed using 'Qualtrics' software. The software was chosen as The University of Nottingham have a subscription that students can access, and this was the recommended platform suggested during supervisory discussions. A paper copy of the survey would be available upon specific request. Where this was requested, the researcher would input these data into Qualtrics to ensure uniformity of data in preparation for extraction.

Following the focus group, 53 items were used within the online survey for participants to rate on the 5-point Likert scale. The items are made up of 19 items relating to setting/practitioner related causes, 18 items relating to parent/home related causes, and 16 related to child causes, although naturally there is some overlap of items between these themes.

Six demographic questions were used prior to the presentation of the 53 items. The demographic questions were used to gather information relevant to the aims of the research and research question and were agreed during supervisory discussions. An information sheet and consent question were presented as the first screen. The information sheet and consent question can be found it Appendix 7.7.

Demographics questions can be found it Appendix 7.8 and the 53-item survey can be found in Appendix 7.9.

3.3.1.4 Pilot Test

The updated survey instrument was piloted on the Early Years leader who was part of the Early Years Project Group but had not been able to attend the focus group and the researcher's supervisor. The participants were presented with the survey instrument in the same way it was anticipated that participants in Stage 2 of the research would be. A link to the online survey was sent to both pilot participants and they were asked to complete the full survey and give feedback on the ease of the survey, clarity of instructions, and the items presented, as well as any other comments.

Feedback from the participants suggested that instructions were clear and that the survey was easy to access and to complete. Following the pilot test, no additional changes were made, therefore the survey was finalised, and the research moved to Stage 2.

3.3.2 *Stage 2:* Data Gathering

3.3.2.1 Context and Stakeholders

Throughout planning for and conducting of the research, the researcher considered the following stakeholders.

The Researcher

As part of the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology, the researcher was required to complete the current research in order to meet course requirements.

The University of Nottingham

The completion of the current research was a mandatory requirement for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at The University of Nottingham.

The Local Authority

Whilst completing the research, the researcher was undertaking a two-year professional practice placement at a Local Authority Educational Psychology

Service. Before starting the research, the project was discussed and agreed by a Senior Educational Psychologist within the service. The Educational Psychologists who were supervising the researcher during the placement were kept updated regularly throughout the research. Connections within the Educational Psychology Service were utilised during the research for recruitment through opportunity sampling.

Practitioners and Parents

Practitioners and parents involved in the completion of Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the research were direct stakeholders in the research. The research was explained to them through an information sheet (see Appendix 7.7) and debriefs were offered by providing contact details for the researcher and their university supervisor.

3.3.2.2   Target sample and sample size

The target samples for the survey were:

- Early Years practitioners inclusive of a range of roles within this umbrella term such as teachers, teaching assistants, managers, nursery nurses, apprentices. Practitioners must currently be working in a Nursery school or school EYFS (Nursery or Reception) in the UK.

and

- Parents of children who are aged 3-5 years old and currently attend either a Nursery school or school EYFS (Nursery or Reception).

It was planned that data would be analysed using a factor analysis (as discussed further in Chapter 4). Four heuristics to ensure stable factor structures are developed are discussed by Ferguson and Cox (1993), three of which relate to sample size. These are outlined below.

1. A minimum sample size is suggested as n>100 by Kline (1986)
2. A minimum ratio of subjects to variables is 2:1 as advocated by Kline (1986).
3. A minimum ratio of subjects to expected factors is suggested as 2:1 by Cattell (1978).

Based on these heuristics, the sampling strategy aimed for a minimum of 100 participants within each group respectively. Guidance varies widely within the literature as to how large a sample should be for factor analysis. Whilst the researcher acknowledges that the larger the sample size, the more stable factors will be, it is recognised that the current research is real-world research and is constrained by time and resources. Thus, although minimum requirements outlined for participants within each group will act as a target figure, the analysis will be conducted based on how many participants have completed the survey within the timeframe and via the procedure outlined.

3.3.2.3   Recruitment

Convenience sampling was used initially as the researcher had links to schools and nurseries through their professional practice placement. In the first instance, the researcher sent an email to headteachers and SENCo's of schools and nurseries in which they were working at the time. This invited them to share the email with Early Years practitioners and parents of children in EYFS (see Appendix 7.10). The email was also circulated to colleagues within the Educational Psychology Service in which the researcher was undertaking their placement to ask them to further disseminate the email to schools and nurseries that they were working in.

The researcher anticipated that response rates would be low based on rates of completion reported in previous research using surveys (Kolar & Kolar, 2008). To account for this, the researcher distributed the survey on a wider scale through social media and online forums. Recruitment posts were shared on the researcher's Twitter account and on Early Years Facebook groups including a link to the survey (see Appendix 7.11). The survey was further shared through the researcher's university cohort who were on professional practice placements across England.

3.3.2.4   Participant characteristics

Following the outlined strategy for sampling, the final sample from fully completed online survey responses consisted of 138 Early Years practitioners and 63 parents. Demographic information was collected relating to age, gender and location for both groups and is outlined below (see Table 3.1, 3.2 & 3.3). Further, the job role of practitioners was gathered (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.1: A table showing the gender of participants from each group.

Gender	Practitioners (n= 138)	Parents (n=63)
Male	1	1
Female	137	62

Table 3.2: A table showing the age range of participants from each group.

Age range	Practitioners (n= 138)	Parents (n=63)
18-24	3	0
25-34	22	38
35-44	47	24
45-54	42	1
55-64	23	0
65-74	1	0

Table 3.3: A table showing the current location within the UK of participants from each group.

Current location within UK	Practitioners (n= 138)	Parents (n=63)
England	129	63
Wales	1	0
Scotland	6	0
Northern Ireland	2	0

Table 3.4: A table showing the job roles of practitioners.

Job role	Practitioners (n= 138)
EYFS lead (or equivalent)	37
Teacher	58
High level teaching assistant (or level 4 equivalent)	10

| Teaching assistant (or level 2/3 equivalent) | 33 |

3.3.2.5 Procedure

Participants from both groups accessed the same online survey via the link provided. They were instructed to read the information sheet and if consent was given, the online survey would begin. Participants completed the outlined demographic questions, each question had to be completed in order to move to the next question. The participants were then presented with the 53 items and the 5-point Likert scale. They were asked to rate how important they perceived each of the items to be in causing challenging behaviour in 3–5-year-olds. Only one rating was allowed for each item. Once all items had been rated the online survey was complete and participants were presented with a page thanking them for their contribution.

3.3.3 *Stage 3:* Data Analysis

The current research uses exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to analyse data gathered. EFA is used to determine the nature of underlying variables to synthesise data into a factor model (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This identifies correlations between variables and identifies clusters of variables which are highly correlated across groups. This supports the researcher in isolating constructs which can then be compared (Yong & Pearce, 2013).

An alternative technique for factor analysis which was considered by the researcher was confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA is used to attempt to confirm hypotheses set out by the researcher at the beginning of their research (Cohen, 2011). As the current study does not aim to test any pre-specified hypotheses, EFA was judged to be the most appropriate technique for data analysis which instead seeks to find patterns within previously unknown groupings of variables (Cohen, 2011).

EFA can be useful for handling large numbers of variables, however the answers given can only be as good as the questions which were asked (Field, 2013). This

depends on the accuracy and validity of the survey, if the survey does not measure what it set out to measure, this will impact the validity of results from the EFA. It is hoped that by considering the validity of the survey instrument this risk will be lessened. However, it needs to be acknowledged that there is some element of subjectivity when conducting an EFA. Decisions such as how many factors to extract and naming the factors lies with the researcher. There is a risk that the researcher could misinterpret or interpret the outcomes of the analysis differently to another researcher. The researcher therefore intends to check such decisions with other EPs familiar with the concepts and attributions related to challenging behaviour to check decisions. Further researcher error could occur when inputting data before running the EFA and risk invalidating the data. The researcher hopes that by using an online survey this may be transferred more easily and in order to reduce the risk of errors occurring the researcher intends to visually check data inputted to ensure that this is correct.

Data gathered was exported from Qualtrics to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Appropriate pre-analysis checks were run including Bartlett test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1937) and KMO measure (Kaiser, 1970). Data from the two participant groups (practitioners and parents) was separated, with a separate EFA conducted for each group.

This method of data analysis has been utilised successfully in previous research exploring attributions of challenging behaviour, which the current research aims to add to (Lambert & Miller, 2010; A. Miller et al., 2002a; Raspin, 2019). Further details on the stages of analysis and decisions made are outlined in Chapter 4.

3.4   Quality of research

It is important to acknowledge potential issues and limitations within research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Researchers should be transparent in their evaluation of the quality of their research. Therefore, threats to reliability, validity, and objectivity of the present study and how these threats were addressed, are presented.

3.4.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency with which something is measured (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Research that is deemed to have high reliability can demonstrate that if it were conducted with a similar group of participants within a similar context, similar findings would be obtained.

For the current study, this focuses on the reliability of the development of the updated survey measure through the focus group and the competency of the survey measure to provide an estimate of parent and teacher attributions in the stated context. Table 3.5 outlines potential threats to the reliability of the current study and presents the measures taken to minimise the impact of such threats.

Table 3.5: Potential threats to reliability and steps taken to minimise these threats.

Potential threat	*Steps to minimise threat*
Participant error: Possible within-participant factors which may impact on responses e.g., illness, stress, previous experiences.	The voluntary nature of the research was explicitly stated at the beginning of the research and participants could withdraw at any time. Participants were free to complete the survey without time pressure. This could be completed at a time decided by them as being most convenient and in a setting of their choice due to the online nature.
Variation in administration conditions: Due to the decision for the survey to be online, this meant that it would be completed in a non-standardised environment.	The information sheet provided, and instructions were standardised and remained the same for all participants completing the survey.

Participant bias: As the information sheet provided gave the research aims, participants may have been influenced by this in their responses.	The researcher had no stated desired outcomes as it is intended to develop hypotheses a posteriori and based on the outcomes of the analysis. As the survey was online and responses were entirely anonymous, it is hoped that this reduced the possibility of social desirability bias.
Researcher errors: Possible within-researcher factors could impact on researcher actions e.g., illness, stress, tiredness, specifically when data input/handling.	Due to the use of online software for the survey, data was transferred without the need for manual inputting.

3.4.2 Validity

Validity refers to whether an instrument measures what it has set out to measure (Winter, 2000). Thus, within the current study whether the survey instrument measures causal attributions for challenging behaviour. Within this, external, internal, and construct validity should be considered. Table 3.6 explores the potential threats to validity for the current study and outlines steps to minimise these.

Table 3.6: Potential threats to validity and steps taken to minimise these threats.

Potential threat	*Steps to minimise threat*
Content validity: Items within the measure may not cover a full range of potential causal attributions.	A previously developed survey measure was used as the basis for the current study. This had been deemed to be a

	useful measure of causal attributions for challenging behaviour by researchers who have utilised the measure for similar purposes, within similar contexts (Miller et al., 2000; Lambert & Miller, 2010; Raspin, 2019). The researcher used a focus group with participants who had specific knowledge and experience in the Early Years context in order to adapt the measure and ensure that the final measure encompassed a wide range of possible relevant attributions. A pilot test was also used, and feedback was sought around the items within the final measure.
Interpretation of focus group discussions: The researcher interpretation may be inaccurate and is subjective.	Notes were taken during the focus group which the participants could see to check validity of the researcher's interpretations. The final measure was sent to the focus group to ensure that this accurately reflected discussions during the focus group.
Historical experiences: Events may have occurred historically which influence participant responses.	Demographic information was collected that the researcher deemed to be relevant and purposeful. This is reflection of real-world research in which responses cannot be expected

	to be completely uninfluenced by previous experiences. It is hoped that the relatively large sample size will ensure that a large range of experiences are represented.
Context: The research findings may only be valid to the contexts which they were conducted in.	The survey was initially disseminated across a large local authority. This was then extended and shared across the UK. Caution is taken in reporting of findings with any generalisations.
Generalisability: The findings are only representative of the sample from which they came from.	Only tentative generalisations are made with caution due to the size of the sample. This is acknowledged throughout the research. The research is not intended to be used for the purposes of generalisation. The target population were parents and practitioners within the Early Years context and findings cannot be generalised to other participant groups.

3.4.3   Ethical Considerations

During the design and implementation of the current research, the researcher was informed by key ethical documents and guidance including the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics (The University of Nottingham, 2016). The BPS states that researchers need to respect participants' rights and dignity during research, ensuring participants have

confidence in the researcher by promoting mutual trust and respect between researchers and participants (BPS, 2014). Prior to the commencement of the research, the researcher sought ethical approval from the University of Nottingham Research Ethics Committee by submitting an ethics application and risk assessment. The submission received committee approval in April 2021 (see Appendix 7.12). Key ethical considerations for the current research are outlined below.

3.4.3.1 Consent

Valid consent must be obtained for all participants. Participants must consent freely and this must be on the basis of provision of adequate information (BPS, 2014). A standard, approved information sheet is provided at the beginning of the survey explaining the purposes and providing contact details, as part of this consent must be given to access the next stage of the survey (Appendix 7.7). If consent is not given, the survey will end.

3.4.3.2 Right to withdraw

To ensure respect for participant's rights to autonomy and self-determination, participants should be able to freely withdraw from the study at any point. This includes asking for the destruction of data already contributed (BPS, 2014). As part of the information sheet provided before consenting, participants were informed that they could withdraw their participation at any point. An email address was provided to allow participants opportunity to request destruction of data at a later stage. In cases where a participant had only partially completed the survey as recorded by Qualtrics, it was assumed that the participant had withdrawn from the research and data was deleted.

3.4.3.3 Confidentiality

Participant data must be kept confidential, and it is the right of the participant to expect this (BPS, 2014). During the research all data was kept fully anonymised. Personal information collected was kept to a minimum and no defining information such as name was collected. All data collected was stored securely, with online data being password protected.

3.4.3.4 Minimise harm

It is essential that researcher considers potential risk to well-being, values, and invasion of privacy or dignity (BPS, 2014). Attributions for challenging behaviour may be considered a sensitive topic, specifically items on the survey referring to potential causes for challenging behaviour. This may relate to experiences participants have had which may be emotionally charged. All participants were fully informed of the potential sensitivity of the topic and reminded of the voluntary basis of participating as well as their right to withdraw at any time.

3.4.3.5 Scientific integrity

Researchers should plan and implement their research in a way which ensures quality, integrity, and unique contribution (BPS, 2014). Throughout the research, supervisory resources were utilised from both university and the local authority in which the researcher was undertaking their professional practice placement. Guidelines were consulted and adhered to throughout.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology within the current study. This began by presenting the epistemological and ontological standpoint of the researcher and how this aligned with the research design and method. The three stages of the method were then outlined with details of design, measure, sample, and procedure. Finally, issues relating to the quality of the data and ethical considerations were then explored. The next chapter discusses stage three of the study in further detail and presents the results from the analysis.

4 Results

This chapter outlines the results of the current study. The procedure followed to conduct a factor analysis is detailed and the results for each data set are presented separately. Factor naming, intercorrelations and the perceived importance for separate data sets are then outlined. This is followed by a comparison of the resulting factor models where potentially congruent factors are explored.

4.1 Procedure

Practitioner and parent data were separated upon extraction from Qualtrics in order for the analysis to be conducted separately for each participant group. Both sets of data were screened to ensure that participants included in the analysis had fully completed the survey. Data was then inputted into SPSS Statistics (Version 28) in preparation for the exploratory factor analysis process. A three-stage process was followed for the exploratory factor analysis, as described by Ferguson and Cox (1993) and outlined below in Figure 4.1.

Stage 1: Pre-analysis checks

To ensure a stable population factor structure can emerge, to check that items are scaled properly and are free from bias, and to ensure that the data set is appropriate for the analysis.

Stage 2: Factor extraction

To identify and retain relevant factors.

Stage 3: Factor rotation

To ensure that each variable has a satisfactory loading onto one of the factors and zero or small loadings onto the others.

Figure 4.1: The three-stage process followed by the researcher to conduct an exploratory factor analysis (Ferguson & Cox, 1993).

Following this three-stage process, Ferguson and Cox (1993) outline the importance of factor naming in order to validate the model and measures. The same procedure for analysis was followed for both data sets (practitioner and parent).

4.2 Analysis of Practitioner Data

4.2.1 Data Screening

Upon the closure of the online survey, 169 Early Years practitioners had submitted responses through Qualtrics. Of these responses, 31 practitioners had not completed the survey in its entirety, thus these responses were removed. 138 practitioner responses were exported from Qualtrics into SPSS Statistics (Version 28) for analysis.

4.2.2 Pre-analysis Checks

A number of pre-analysis checks were conducted to ensure that the practitioner data set met the criteria to perform a factor analysis.

At 138 participants, the sample size met heuristics outlined by Ferguson and Cox (1993) as discussed in Chapter 3 relating to minimum sample size of N>100 and participants to variables ratio of 138:53 (approximately 2.6:1) meeting the required 2:1 aim.

A correlation matrix was created in order to examine the intercorrelations between variables to ensure that they were not too poorly, or highly, correlated. It is suggested that variables with a high number of low correlation coefficients (<+/- .30) within the data set should be removed to ensure that variables are measuring the same phenomenon (Field, 2013). Further, variables with very high correlation coefficients are also problematic and may produce a less reliable result, thus it is suggested that these variables are removed (>+/- .90) (Field, 2013).

3 items were removed following examination of the correlation matrix due to having no correlation coefficients larger than +/- .30. These were:

Item 3- 'The child is bored'

Item 10- 'Too many children with special educational needs in one group'

Item 45- 'The child cannot regulate their emotions'

No items within the data set were identified to have correlation coefficients higher than +/-.90.

The KMO test of sampling adequacy was found to be .786. This is greater than the acceptable value of .5 (Kaiser, 1970) and between the values deemed to be good (Hutcheson, 1999), indicating that the data was appropriate for the analysis. Bartlett's Test of Specificity had a score of 3422.146 and was significant (p<.001) indicating that there were discoverable relationships in the dataset.

Thus, all pre-analysis checks indicated that the data was appropriate for the application of factor analysis.

4.2.3 Factor Extraction

As no hypotheses were being tested, an exploratory factor analysis was employed, and thus principal components analysis was used for factor extraction. A number of heuristics are outlined by Ferguson and Cox (1993) in order to identify the appropriate number of factors to be extracted. Thus, the following three heuristics were utilised.

-Kaiser 1 (K1) rule: Extract as many factors as there are with eigenvalues greater than one.

-Scree test: Create a scree-plot and extract factors before an apparent break occurs from visual analysis.

-Parallel analysis: Compare a randomly produced set of eigenvalues based on the same sample size and number of variables as the current dataset. Retain factors with eigenvalues exceeding those from the randomly generated data.

Initially the K1 rule was applied to the analysis. 15 factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than one. This was deemed to be too many factors for the purpose of creating a simple model. The scree test was then employed (see Appendix 7.13) whereby breaks in the plots could suggest either a four-factor model or a five-factor model. Thus, to increase the clarity and reliability of the factor

extraction, a parallel analysis was conducted. A random dataset was generated using an online application (Vivek, Singh Mishra & Donovan, 2017). Five eigenvalues within the current dataset had greater values than those within the random dataset, thus concurring with a five-factor model to be extracted to represent the dataset.

4.2.4 Factor Rotation

The five-factor model was explored using both oblique and orthogonal rotations. The orthogonal (varimax) rotation produced the clearest outcome, thus was chosen. The initial rotated matrix accounted for 44.83% of total variance. 9 items did not meet the minimum criteria of a primary loading of .4 or greater on any of the 5 factors, thus the following items were removed from the dataset.

Item 43- 'Practitioners do not want to sanction children'

Item 52- 'Copying other children's behaviour'

Item 5- 'Behaviour expectations are inconsistent'

Item 12- 'Parental separation'

Item 4- 'Parents do no communicate effectively with their child'

Item 35- 'The child is tired'

Item 8- 'Practitioners give more time to children who misbehave'

Item 42- 'Parents are not limiting their child's screen time at home'

Item 9- 'Changes in routine'

Item 33- 'The child's reputation'

Following the removal of these items, a principal components analysis with varimax rotation was undertaken with the remaining 41 items. The resulting five-factor model accounted for 47.9% of total variance (see Table 4.1). The KMO test of sampling adequacy was rated as good for the model with a score of .802 and Bartlett's test of specificity gave a score of 2971.71 which was significant (p<.001). 4 items cross-loaded onto another factor, however overall, the model appeared to be

simple and coherent. For each of the factors within the model, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. 2 of the factors were above .8 suggesting good reliability, 2 were above .7 suggesting adequate reliability, and 1 factor was below .7 meaning caution must be exercised around this factor (Field, 2013) (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Table showing the results of the exploratory factor analysis for practitioner data including factor loadings, eigenvalues, variance explained and Cronbach's alpha.

Items	Factor				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Practitioners do not communicate well with each other	**.694**	.165	.069	.001	.119
Practitioners shout all the time	**.685**	-.154	.158	.001	-.140
Setting staff do not notice good behaviour	**.685**	.102	.095	.185	-.258
Practitioners let external stressors affect them at work	**.675**	.062	-.033	-.089	.314
Staff lack awareness of child's culture	**.671**	.039	.124	-.198	.190
Setting staff do not communicate effectively with children	**.651**	.113	.106	-.035	.125
Practitioners have favourites	**.623**	.010	.074	.081	-.018
The child is picked on or tormented by other children	**.620**	.364	.135	.173	-.075
Practitioners are not given sufficient training	**.593**	.038	.214	-.261	.197
The general management of the setting	**.580**	.031	.009	.279	.046
The environment is not stimulating enough	**.555**	.206	.064	.238	-.139
Practitioners are too strict	**.553**	-.201	-.019	-.112	.189
Practitioners are not supported in the setting	**.509**	.086	.266	-.277	.309

The child's feeling about themselves	**.508**	-.022	**.406**	.255	-.235
Overall physical wellbeing	**.482**	.340	.272	-.087	.027
The child needs more support	**.402**	-.141	.358	.313	.122
Parents have no control over their child	.066	**.766**	.061	.231	-.070
Parents seek medical explanations	.056	**.730**	.057	.071	.084
Lack of consistency between home and setting	.051	**.687**	.091	-.228	.014
Parents do not accept any responsibility for disciplining child	-.046	**.670**	.239	.211	.058
The child likes misbehaving	.251	**.648**	-.194	.225	.099
Parents let their children get away with too much	-.048	**.636**	.107	.202	.020
Lack of boundaries at home	-.168	**.598**	.173	-.207	.041
Parents behaviour sets a bad example	.091	**.562**	.285	.034	-.011
Personality	-.037	**.531**	-.105	.263	.249
Parents do not give attention or praise when child is good	.206	**.519**	.336	.141	-.165
Parents not ensuring opportunities for children to communicate	.214	**.513**	.260	.178	.058
Parents are uncaring	.295	**.482**	.301	.186	-.055
Family mental health issues	.019	.240	**.706**	-.050	.073
There are fights and arguments at home	.215	.274	**.640**	.116	-.059
The child is worried about other things	.165	.054	**.639**	.153	.049
The child has experienced trauma	.197	.117	**.616**	-.063	-.041

Problems at home	.153	**.506**	**.596**	-.239	-.139
The child has poor language skills	-.031	.069	**.487**	**.414**	.155
Families do not have enough money to eat or buy clothes	.296	.135	**.413**	.267	.275
The child does not know how to behave	.070	**.437**	-.001	**.669**	-.048
The child wants attention	.007	.202	.039	**.555**	.118
Child's lack of social skills	-.056	.143	.339	**.488**	-.024
Government pressures on settings	.076	.051	-.032	-.013	**.828**
Class sizes are too large	.229	.078	.108	.216	**.712**
Eigenvalues	*9.301*	*4.749*	*2.267*	*1.983*	*1.803*
Variance explained (%)	*23.253*	*11.874*	*5.668*	*4.958*	*4.507*
Cronbach's alpha	*.889*	*.871*	*.758*	*.638*	*.702*

4.2.5 Factor Naming

Factor naming aims to refine and validate the model. It can be challenging for a researcher to capture all variables within a factor successfully and what is more, this stage can have high levels of subjectivity. Ferguson and Cox (1993) describe two possible approaches to the naming of factors. Within the first approach, the researcher identifies factors which they hope to identify and a set of variables which represent each factor before analysis. This was not appropriate to the current research as no predictions were made prior to the analysis. The second approach is the Recaptured Item Technique which is utilised following the analysis and has no prior assumptions, thus this approach was employed. This approach involves three stages as described in Figure 4.2.

Stage 1: Items within each factor are split in half.

↓

Stage 2: A set of judges develop names for each of the factors based on one half of the items, first independently then as a group.

↓

Stage 3: A second set of judges are presented with the factor names and the other half of the items. They are asked to match the remaining items to the factor names. If judgements made by the second set of judges match with the first, these factor names are used.

Figure 4.2: A flow chart outlining the 3 stages of the Recaptured Item Technique for factor naming (Ferguson & Cox, 1993).

Items were split and four Trainee Educational Psychologists worked independently, then together, in stage 2 to develop names for the five factors. A second group of five different Trainee Educational Psychologists were then presented with these names and the remaining items to match the items to the factor name which they felt best represented each item.

In stage 3, judges matched items almost entirely accurately to the factor names developed by judges in stage 2. Discrepancies related to within-child items '*The child needs more support in the setting*' from Factor 1 and *'The child has poor language skills'* from Factor 3 which some judges placed within Factor 4 which related to only within-child factors. Thus, due to these discrepancies the researcher added to the names of Factor 1 and Factor 3 as shown below.

Factor 1: Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, and the impact of this on the child's sense of self

changed to

Factor 1: Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self

and

Factor 3: Situational stressors, challenging home environments and resulting worries'

changed to

Factor 3: Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills

Due to the high level of congruency across the other factor names, the process was viewed to be successful and to have accounted for issues of subjectivity, thus final factor names were confirmed and interpreted as outlined below.

4.2.6 Factors

Factor 1

Factor 1 was termed **'*Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self'*.** Factor 1 consists of 16 items, 12 of the items relate to practitioner/setting factors and 4 items relate to child factors. This factor appears to attribute causes of challenging behaviour to general practice within settings and the potential impact of this (see Figure 4.3). This includes poor practitioner communication and behaviour management skills (*e.g., 'Practitioners do not communicate well with each other', 'Practitioners shout all the time', 'Practitioners are too strict', 'Practitioners do not communicate effectively with children', 'Practitioners do not notice good behaviour', 'Practitioners have favourites'),* lack of support and training for practitioners *(e.g., 'Practitioners are not given sufficient training', 'Practitioners are not supported in the setting', 'Staff lack awareness of child's culture', 'Practitioners let external stressors affect them at work'),* and overall weak management and organisation of the environment *(e.g., 'The general management of the setting', 'The environment is not stimulating enough').* This factor further included causes relating to the child's wellbeing that are not being supported by practitioners *(e.g., 'The child is picked on or tormented by other children', 'The child's feelings about themselves', 'Overall physical wellbeing', 'The child needs more support').*

Figure 4.3: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 1 of the practitioner model.

Factor 2

Factor 2 was termed ***'Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour'***. This factor is made up of 12 items, 10 of these items are related to parent/home factors and 2 are related to child factors. This appears to attribute causes of challenging behaviour to parental behaviour and values (see Figure 4.4). This includes poor behaviour management focused primarily on a lack of discipline and boundaries implemented by parents *(e.g., 'Parents have no control over their child', 'Parents do not accept responsibility for disciplining child', 'Parents let their child get away with too much', 'Lack of boundaries at home', 'Parents do not give attention or praises when child is good')* and a lack of consistency for children *(e.g., Lack of consistency between home and setting').* This factor furthers includes parent behaviour *(e.g., 'Parents behaviour sets a bad example', 'Parents are uncaring', 'Parents not ensuring opportunities for children to communicate', 'Parents seek medical explanations').* Further items within this factor relate to within-child causes *(e.g., 'The child likes misbehaving', 'Personality').*
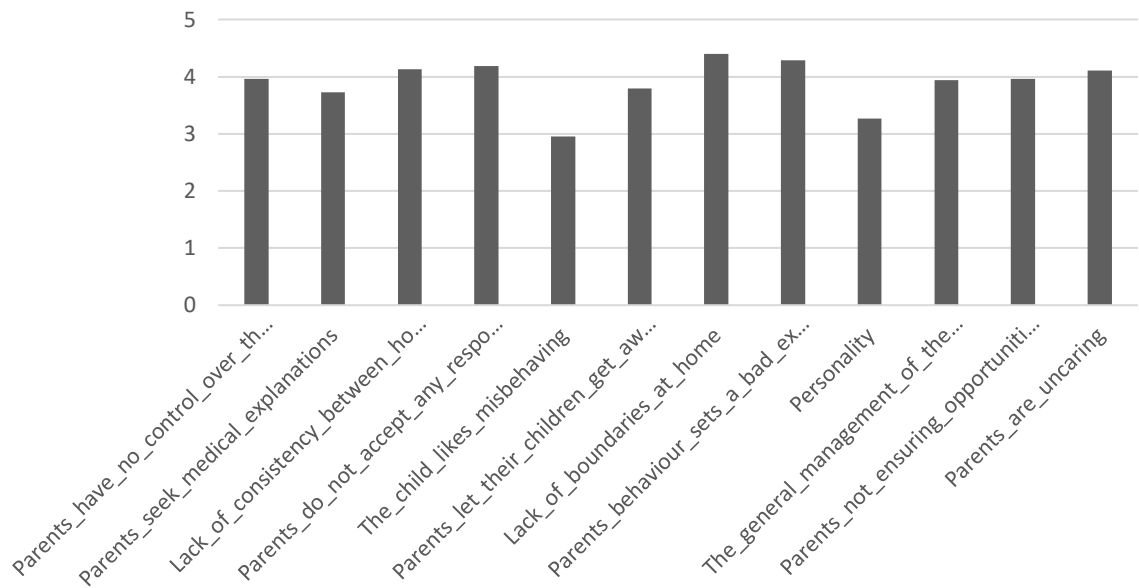
Figure 4.4: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 2 of the practitioner model.

Factor 3

Factor 3 was termed '***Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills'.*** This factor comprises of 7 items, 4 of the items are related to parent/home factors and 3 factors are related to child factors, with attributions of causes of challenging behaviour relating to an adverse home life (see Figure 4.5). This includes difficulties at home *(e.g., 'Family mental health issues', 'There are fights and arguments at home', 'The child has experienced trauma', 'Problems at home, 'Families do not have enough money to eat or buy clothes')* and the child's wellbeing and language which may be affected by these experiences *(e.g., 'The child is worried about other things', 'The child has poor language skills').*
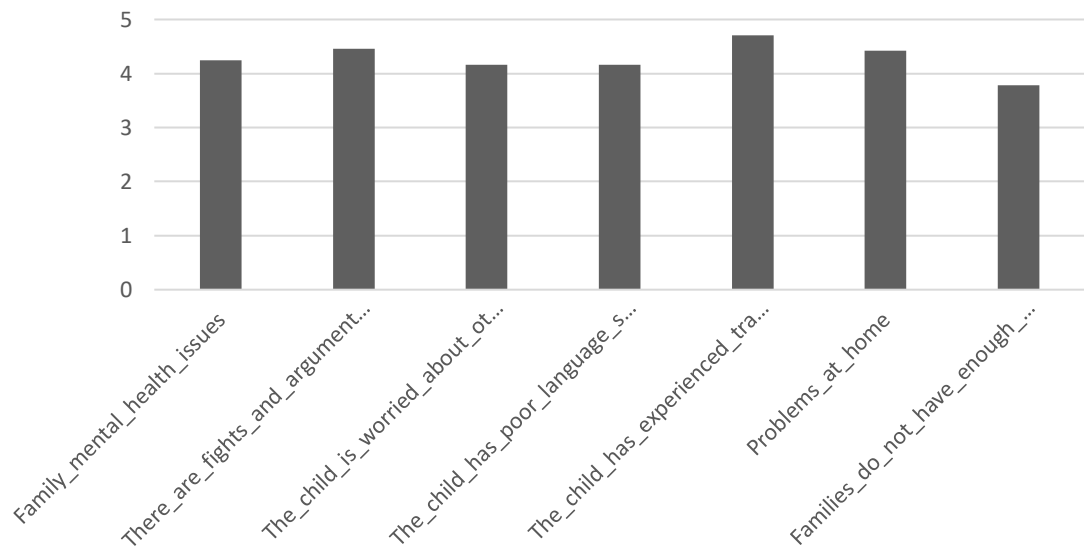
Figure 4.5: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 3 of the practitioner model.

Factor 4

Factor 4 was named *'Child's wants and current lack of skills'.* This factor is made up of 3 items relating to within-child factors (see Figure 4.6). This includes the child seeking interactions but lacking the necessary skills for this *(e.g., 'The child does not know how to behave', 'Child's lack of social skills', 'The child wants attention').*
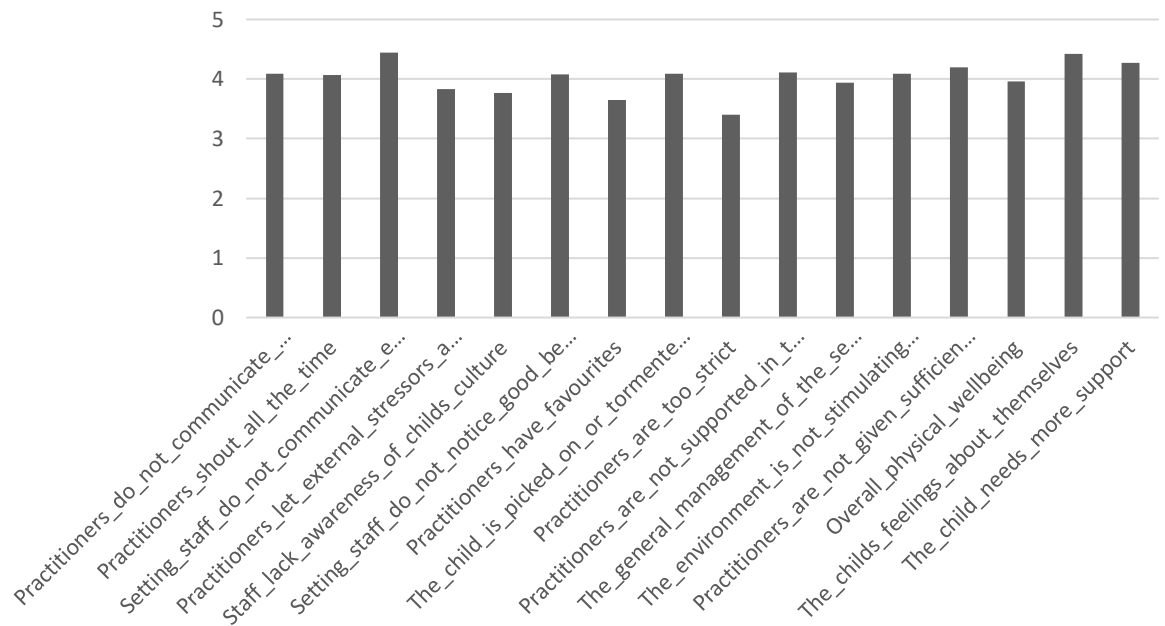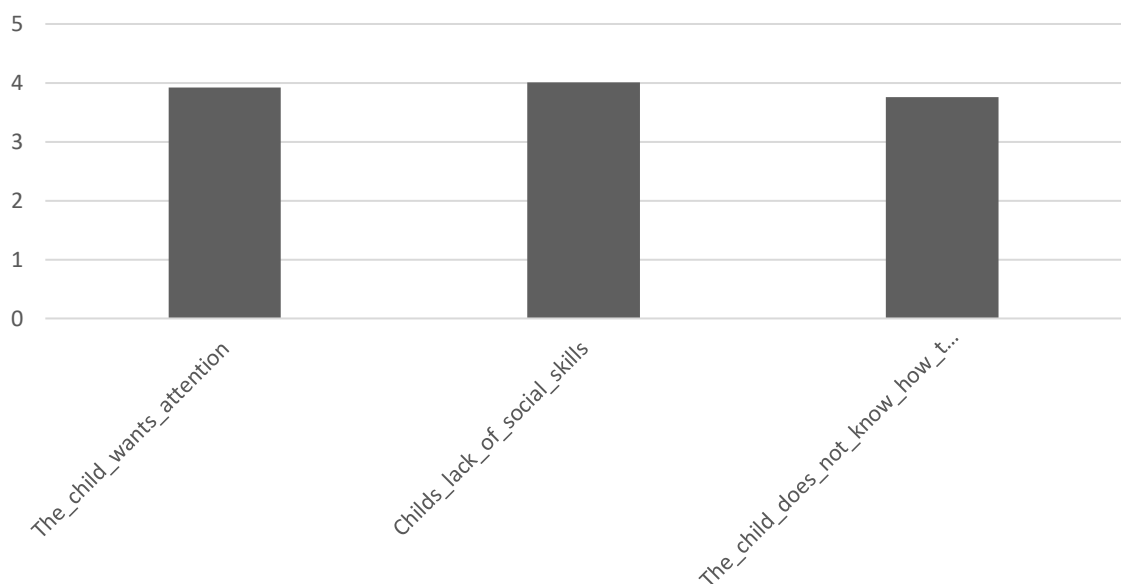

Figure 4.6: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 4 of the practitioner model.

Factor 5

Factor 5 was named *'Unhelpful policy context'.* This factor consists of 2 items related to practitioner/setting factors which attribute behaviours to systemic issues in education (see Figure 4.7). This includes class size *(e.g., 'Class sizes are too large')* and pressure from the government *(e.g., 'Government pressures on settings').*
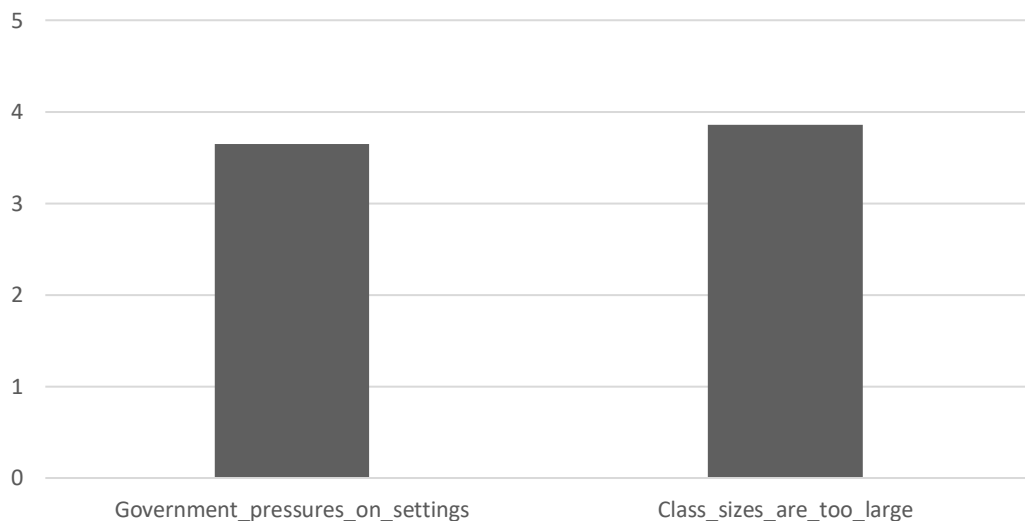
Figure 4.7: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 5 of the practitioner model.

4.2.7   Final Named Five-Factor Model

Factor 1: Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self

Factor 2: Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour

Factor 3: Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills

Factor 4: Child's wants and current lack of skills

Factor 5: Unhelpful policy context

4.2.8 Intercorrelation

Intercorrelations between factors were explored to ascertain how related each factor was to other factors within the model. The percentage of the maximum possible score was calculated for each participant by calculating the sum of participants scores for all items within a factor, then calculating this as a percentage of the score if all items were rated as 'Very important'. Scores assigned to each Likert Scale rating were-

Very Important- 5

Quite Important- 4

Neither Important Nor Unimportant- 3

Not Very Important- 2

Not Important At All- 1

These values were then used to create a correlation matrix (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: A table showing the intercorrelations between the 5 factors within the practitioner factor model.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Factor 1	1				
Factor 2	.266**	1			
Factor 3	.436**	.483**	1		
Factor 4	.124	.479**	.337**	1	
Factor 5	.233**	.150	.160	.077	1

**-correlation significant (p<.001)

A high degree of significant intercorrelations between factors was found, suggesting that factors were related to one another. The strongest correlations were between factor 2 (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour)* and factor 3 (*Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills*), and between factor 2 (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*) and factor 4 (*Child's wants and current lack of skills*).

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This suggests that practitioners who rated items within factor 2 (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*) to be highly important, also rated items within factor 3 (*Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills) and factor 4 (Child's wants and current lack of skills*) to have high importance.

4.2.9 Perceived Importance

The percentage of the maximum possible score was calculated for each factor by calculating the sum of all participants scores for all items within a factor then calculating this as a percentage of the score if all items were rated as 'Very important' by all participants. Scores assigned to each Likert Scale rating were-

Very Important- 5

Quite Important- 4

Neither Important Nor Unimportant- 3

Not Very Important- 2

Not Important At All- 1

This allowed the researcher to order the factors by perceived importance from these ratings from most important to least important as represented in Table 4.3

Table 4.3: A table showing the percentage of maximum possible score for each factor in the practitioner model and the order of these factors based on perceived importance.

Order of perceived importance (most important to least important)	Factor	Percentage of maximum possible score
1		91%

(Most important)	Factor 1: *Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self*	
2	Factor 3: *Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills*	85.6%
3	Factor 2: *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*	77.94%
4	Factor 4: *Child's wants and current lack of skills*	77.92%
5 (Least important)	Factor 5: *Unhelpful policy context*	75%

Factor 1 (*Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self)* received the highest overall rating (91% of the maximum possible score) and was thus perceived to be the most important cause of challenging behaviour as rated by participants. This was followed by Factor 3 (*Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills)* which had 85.6% of the maximum possible score. Factor 2 (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour)* and Factor 4 (*Child's wants and current lack of skills)* had very similar percentages of the maximum possible score at 77.94% and 77.92% respectively. Factor 5 (*Unhelpful*

policy context) had the lowest percentage at 75% and thus was rated to be least important.

4.3   Analysis of Parent Data

4.3.1   Data Screening

Upon the closure of the online survey, 92 parents had submitted responses through Qualtrics. Of these responses, 29 parents had not completed the survey in its entirety leading to these responses being removed. Thus, 63 parent responses were exported from Qualtrics into SPSS Statistics (Version 28) for analysis.

4.3.2   Pre-analysis Checks

The researcher completed pre-analysis checks to ensure that the parent data set met criteria to perform a factor analysis.

The number of participants (n=63) did not meet the stipulated ideal sample size heuristics outlined by Ferguson and Cline (1993) as discussed in the Chapter 3. However, Harrison (2021) suggests at least having more participants than variables, which is met (n=63>53 items). What is more, the literature around appropriate sample size to be used for factor analysis varies widely, with little empirical evidence to support recommendations (Mundfrom, Shaw, & Ke, 2009). Maccallum, Widaman, Zhang and Hong (1999) discuss how the use of specific heuristics may not be valid as the necessary sample size is not constant across studies and varies depending on the data set. Thus, the decision was made to run further pre-analysis checks to ascertain the appropriateness of the data and whether factor analysis would be useful and meaningful for the extracted parent dataset.

A correlation matrix was used to examine the intercorrelations between variables to ensure they were not too poorly, or highly, correlated. As discussed in the previous section, variables with a high number of low correlations (<.30) or a high number of high correlations (>.90) should be removed. Following examination of the correlation matrix no items were identified to meet this criterion and thus, no items were removed at this stage.

The KMO test of sampling adequacy was found to be .717. This is greater than the acceptable value of .5 (Kaiser 1974) and between the values deemed to be good (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999), indicating that the data was appropriate for the analysis. Bartlett's Test of Specificity had a score of 3310.62 and was significant (p<.001) indicating that there were discoverable relationships within the dataset.

Thus, although ideal sample size was not met, all other pre-analysis checks indicated that the data set was appropriate for the application of factor analysis.

4.3.3   Factor Extraction

As with practitioner data, no hypotheses were being tested, thus an exploratory factor analysis was employed and principal components analysis was used for factor extraction. As discussed in the previous section, heuristics outlined by Ferguson and Cox (1993) (K1, scree test and parallel analysis) were employed in order to identify the appropriate number of factors to be extracted.

Initial analysis using the K1 rule revealed 20 factors with eigenvalues greater than one. This was considered too many factors to create a coherent model. The scree test was then used (see Appendix 7.14) which suggested either a three-factor model or a four-factor model. As with the practitioner data, the researcher used a parallel analysis to increase the clarity and reliability of the factor extraction. Three eigenvalues in the parent dataset had greater values than those from the random dataset, thus concurring with a three-factor model to be extracted to represent the current dataset.

4.3.4   Factor Rotation

The three-factor model was explored using both oblique and orthogonal rotations. As with the practitioner data, the orthogonal (varimax) rotation produced the clearest outcome, thus was used. The initial rotated matrix accounted for 54.96% of total variance. 5 items did not meet the minimum criteria of a primary loading of .4 or greater on any of the extracted factors, thus the following items were removed from the dataset.

Item 1- 'Practitioners are too strict'

Item 8- 'Practitioners give more time to children who misbehave'

Item 24- 'The child wants attention'

Item 33- 'The child's reputation'

Item 41- 'The child has poor language skills'

When these items were removed, a principal components analysis with varimax rotation was undertaken with the remaining 48 items. The resulting three-factor model accounted for 58.08% of total variance (see Table 4.4). The KMO test of sampling adequacy was rated as good for the model with a score of .759 and Bartlett's test of specificity gave a score of 3064.96 which was significant (p<.001). 11 items cross-loaded onto another factor, however overall, the model was thought to be coherent. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each of the three factors within the model. All three factors were above .8 suggesting good reliability (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Table showing the results of the exploratory factor analysis for parent data including factor loadings, eigenvalues, variance explained and Cronbach's alpha.

Items	*Factor*		
	1	*2*	*3*
Parents have no control over their child	**.849**	.171	.142
Practitioners do not want to sanction children	**.802**	.188	-.015
The child does not know how to behave	**.792**	.117	.046
Parents let their children get away with too much	**.781**	.078	.155
Parents do not accept responsibility	**.749**	.330	.252
Parents are uncaring	**.722**	.383	.185
Parents do not give their child attention or praise	**.721**	.381	.200
Child's lack of social skills	**.717**	.185	-.002

The child's overall physical wellbeing	**.714**	**.402**	.323
Copying other children	**.706**	.177	-.002
Family mental health issues	**.683**	.132	.267
Parents seek medical explanations	**.683**	.193	.311
Parents do not communicate effectively	**.682**	.267	.479
Parents are not limiting screen time	**.673**	.201	.068
The child's feelings about themselves	**.667**	.339	.222
Parents not ensuring opportunities	**.652**	.253	.426
Parents behaviour sets a bad example	**.640**	.142	.357
The child is worried about other things	**.618**	.339	.433
Personality	**.618**	.332	-.149
Class sizes are too large	**.612**	**.494**	.163
Too many children with SEN in one group	**.610**	.207	.365
The child is tired	**.575**	**.405**	.120
Child cannot regulate emotions	**.557**	.004	.128
The child likes misbehaving	**.531**	**.411**	.167
Staff lack awareness of child's culture	**.479**	**.441**	**.423**
Staff do not find opportunities to notice good behaviour	.109	**.787**	.109
The general management of the setting	.309	**.779**	.040
Government pressures on settings	.352	**.721**	.035
Practitioners do not communicate well with each other	.359	**.717**	.198
Practitioners not given sufficient training	.059	**.699**	**.494**
Practitioners are not supported	.390	**.688**	.372
Environment is not stimulating enough	.270	**.657**	-.076

Practitioners let external stressors affect them at work	.246	**.587**	.116
Practitioners shout all the time	.217	**.583**	.302
Practitioners have favourites	.092	**.557**	-.019
Setting staff do not communicate effectively with children	.175	**.534**	.529
The child needs more support	.301	**.532**	.040
Families do not have enough money	.014	**.513**	**.466**
Problems at home	.217	.072	**.853**
There are fights and arguments at home	.079	.270	**.823**
Lack of boundaries at home	.335	-.148	**.702**
Lack of consistency	.075	.020	**.620**
The child has experienced trauma	-.271	.162	**.619**
The child is picked on	**.512**	**.429**	**.542**
Behaviour expectations are inconsistent	**.431**	.077	**.495**
Parental separation	**.470**	.280	**.476**
The child is bored	.271	.130	**.453**
Changes in routine	.394	**.415**	**.446**
Eigenvalues	*21.02*	*3.95*	*3.49*
Variance explained (%)	*42.9*	*8.06*	*7.12*
Cronbach's alpha	*.966*	*.916*	*.873*

4.3.5 Factor Naming

The researcher conducted the recaptured item technique as suggested by Ferguson and Cox (1993) for factor naming. This is the same strategy as was utilised with practitioner data and is outlined in the previous section.

The same two sets of judges were used to name the parent factors as were used to name the practitioner factors. The second set of judges matched items almost entirely accurately to the factor names developed by the first set of judges.

Discrepancies included '*Copying other children*' from Factor 1 which was placed in Factor 2 by judges. This led to the following changes:

Factor 1: Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour, and the impact on child's wellbeing

changed to

Factor 1: Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing

The high congruency with other factors led to the process being viewed as successful and to have accounted for issues of subjectivity, thus final factor names were confirmed and interpreted as outlined below.

4.3.6   Factors

Factor 1

Factor 1 was named **'*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*'.** Factor 1 consists of 25 items, 11 of the items relate to parent/home factors, 10 items relate to child factors, and 4 items relate to practitioner/setting factors. This factor appears to attribute causes of challenging behaviour predominantly to parent and child skills (see Figure 4.8). This includes parents displaying poor behaviour management skills (*e.g., 'Parents have no control', 'Parents let their child get away with too much', 'Parents do not accept responsibly for disciplining their child', 'Parents do not give their child attention or praise when they are good'*) and poor modelling of behaviour (e.g., *Parents do not communicate effectively with their child', 'Parents behaviour sets a bad example', 'Parents seek medical explanations to excuse or avoid addressing challenging behaviour', 'Parents not ensuring their children have appropriate opportunities and*

skills to communicate and interact effectively', 'Parents not limiting their child's screen time', 'Parents are uncaring'). This also includes items relating to the child not having appropriate skills yet (e.g., *'Child cannot regulate their emotions', 'Child's lack of social skills', 'Child does not know how to behave'),* the child having overall poor wellbeing (e.g., *'Child is tired', 'Child is worried about other things', 'Child's feelings about themselves', 'Overall physical wellbeing'),* and the child's wants (e.g., *'Child likes misbehaving', 'Personality', 'Copying other children').* This factor further includes wider systemic issues (e.g., *'Class sizes are too large', 'Too many children with SEN in one group', 'Staff lack awareness of child's culture')* and the impact of family mental health on behaviour (*e.g., 'Family mental health issues').*
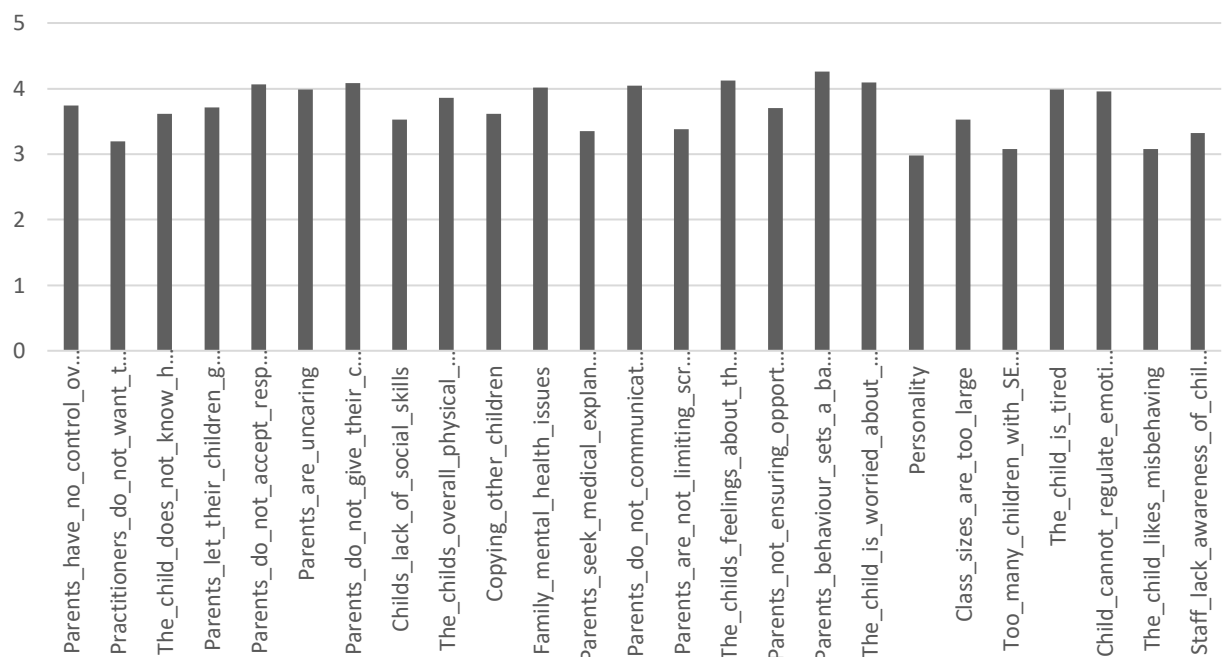
Figure 4.8: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 1 of the parent model.

Factor 2

Factor 2 was termed *'Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures'.* This factor is made up of 13 items, 12 of these items are related to practitioner/setting factors and 1 related to parent/home factors. This appears to attribute causes of challenging behaviour to ineffective setting practice (see Figure 4.9). This includes practitioners lacking necessary skills (*e.g., 'Staff do not find opportunities to notice good behaviour',*

'Practitioners do not communicate well with each other', 'Environment is not stimulating enough', 'Practitioners shout all the time', 'Practitioners have favourites', 'Setting staff do not communicate effectively with children', 'Child needs more support') and poor training/support *(e.g., 'General management of settings', 'Practitioners are not supported', 'Practitioners let external stressors affect them at work').* This also includes wider systemic issues *(e.g., 'Government pressures on settings', 'Families do not have enough money').*
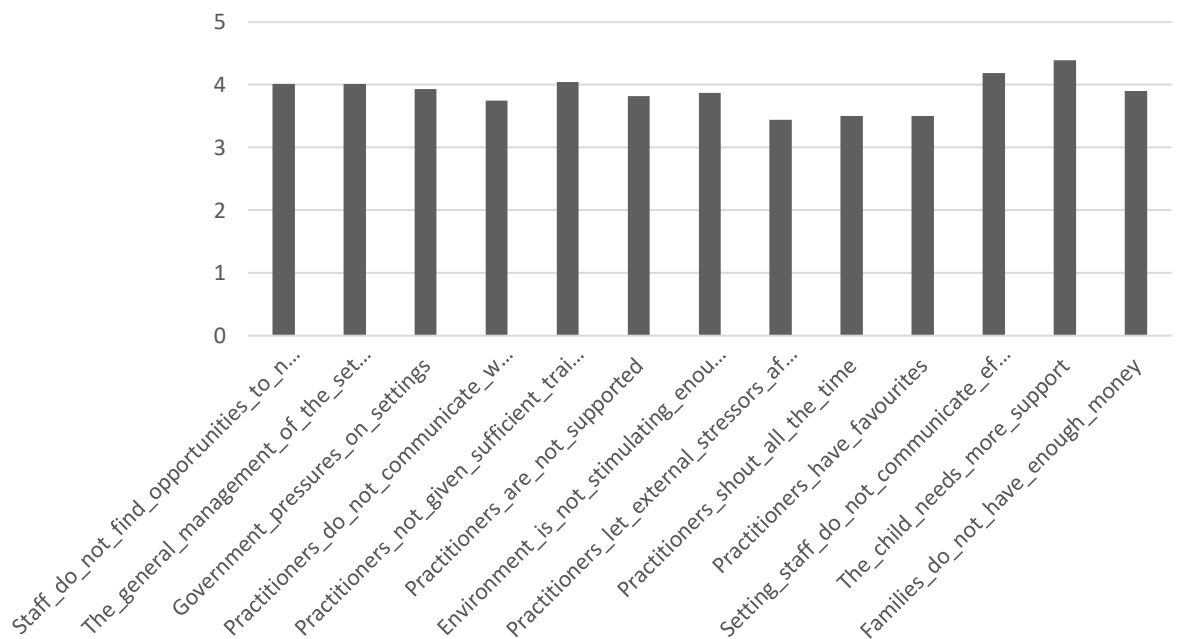
Figure 4.9: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 2 of the parent model.

Factor 3

Factor 3 was termed '***Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations'.*** This factor comprises of 10 items, 8 of the items are related to parent/home factors and 2 factors are related to child factors. Attributions of causes of challenging behaviour appear to relate to adversity and change (see Figure 4.10). This includes a difficult home life *(e.g., 'Problems at home', 'There are fights and arguments at home', 'The child has experienced trauma', 'Parental separation')* and other situational stress *(e.g., 'The child is picked on or tormented by other children', 'The child is bored').* This also includes a lack of

consistency *(e.g., 'Lack of boundaries at home', 'Lack of consistency', 'Behaviour expectations are inconsistent')* and change *(e.g., 'Changes in routine').*
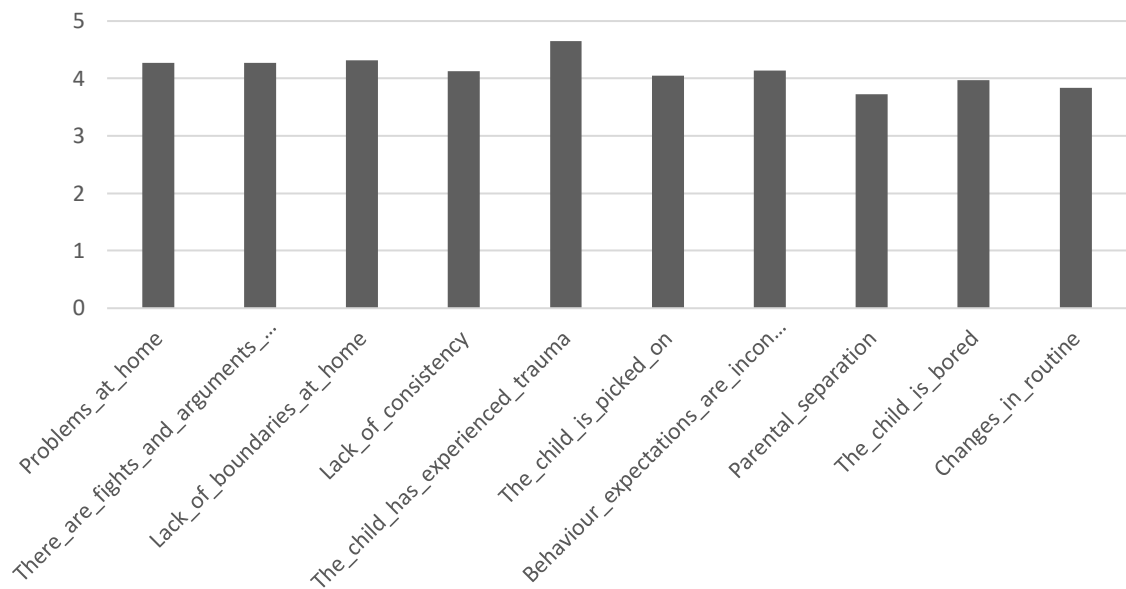
Figure 4.10: A graph showing mean ratings for each of the items within factor 3 of the parent model.

4.3.7   Final Named Three-Factor Model

Factor 1- Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing

Factor 2- Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures

Factor 3- Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations

4.3.8   Intercorrelation

Intercorrelations between factors were explored to ascertain how related each factor was to other factors using the same formula as described in the previous section. These values were then used to create a correlation matrix (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: A table showing the intercorrelations between the 3 factors within the parent factor model.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1	1		
Factor 2	.669**	1	
Factor 3	.187	.173	1

**-correlation significant (p<.001)

A significant correlation was found between factor 1 (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*) and factor 2 (*Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures*), suggesting that participants who rated items on factor 1 highly also rated items on factor 2 highly. Factor 3 was not significantly correlated with either factor 1 or factor 2.

4.3.9   Perceived Importance

The percentage of maximum possible score was calculated using the same formula outlined in the previous section. This allowed the researcher to order the factors by perceived importance from these ratings, as represented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: A table showing the percentage of maximum possible score for each factor in the parent model and the order of these factors based on perceived importance.

Order of perceived importance (most important to least important)	Factor	Percentage of maximum possible score
1 (Most important)	Factor 3: *Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*	82.73%
2	Factor 2: *Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures*	77.56%
3 (Least important)	Factor 1: *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*	73.83%

Factor 3 (*Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*) received the highest overall rating (82.73% of the maximum possible score) and was thus perceived to be the most important cause of challenging behaviour as rated by participants. This was followed by Factor 2 (*Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures*) with 77.56% of the maximum possible

score then by Factor 1 (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*) which was rated to be least important with 73.83% of the maximum possible score.

4.4   Comparing the five-factor practitioner model with the three-factor parent model

The practitioner model was compared with the parent model to explore similarities and differences between the factors within each model to ascertain which factors were congruent, which had limited congruency, or which were incongruent. This comparison was initially done through visual analysis by the researcher by comparing the names of factors, general themes, and number of shared items between factors. Further analysis of similarity was conducted by calculating Tucker's Coefficient of Congruence (Tucker, 1951). Generally, the greater congruence between factors is shown the closer this coefficient is to 1.0. Lorenzo-Seva and Berge (2006) suggest that coefficient values between .85 and .94 indicate a good similarity between factors and a value of .95 and above considers the factors to be equal. Table 4.7 shows the results of the visual analysis, including the number of shared items and Table 4.8 shows the results of Tucker's congruence coefficients where calculated. Appendix 7.15 outlines which of the items are shared between factors.

Table 4.7: A table to show the apparent similarities between factors from the practitioner model and the parent model including how many items are shared between factors.

Practitioner model	Comparison	Parent model	Shared items
Factor 1 *Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self*	Appears similar to…	Factor 2 *Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures*	11 items
Factor 2 *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*	Appears similar to…	Factor 1 *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*	10 items
	Shares some similarity with…	Factor 3 *Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*	2 items

	Factor 3	Shares some	Factor 3	3 items
	Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills	similarity with…	*Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*	
	Factor 4	Shares some	Factor 1	2 items
	Child's wants and current lack of skills	similarity with…	*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour at home and in setting, and child's wellbeing*	
	Factor 5	Not similar	-	-
	Unhelpful policy context			

Table 4.8: A table to show the calculated coefficients of congruence between the practitioner factors and the parent factors.

		Parent model		
		Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**
	Factor 1	-	.94	-
Practitioner model	**Factor 2**	.59	-	.84
	Factor 3	-	-	.84
	Factor 4	.37	-	-
	Factor 5	-	-	-

4.4.1   Congruent practitioner and parent factors

Practitioner factor 1: *Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self*

AND

Parent factor 2: *Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures*

Factor 1 of the practitioner model (*Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self)* appears to be similar to factor 2 of the parent model (*Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures)*. The names developed both focus on themes around ineffective practices within the EYFS setting. The factors share 11 items out of a possible 16 for the practitioner factor and 13 for the parent factor (see Table 4.7). All 11 items were related to practitioner/setting causes as outlined in Appendix 7.15. The most noticeable difference between the factors was from the missing items within the practitioner factor which related to the child ('The child is picked on or tormented by other children', 'The child's feelings about themselves', 'Child's overall physical wellbeing').

The congruence coefficient was calculated to be .94 (see Table 4.8). This indicates a good statistical similarity between the factors.

Practitioner factor 2: *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*

AND

Parent factor 1: *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*

Factor 2 of the practitioner model (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour)* appears to be most

similar to factor 1 of the parent model (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*). The factors share a total of 10 items (see Table 4.7). 8 of the shared items relate to parent behaviour/values and 2 relate to within-child causes (see Appendix 7.15). The difference in names stems from the large number of items within the parent factor. This reflects the parent factor as a more complex factor which encompasses further parent/home related causes not referred to in the practitioner model (including 'Parents not limiting their child's screen time', 'Parents do not communicate effectively with their child') and within-child causes (including 'The child does not know how to behave', 'Child's lack of social skills', 'The child is tired'). 8 of the items within the parent model which are not shared with factor 2 of the practitioner model are shared across the other factors within the practitioner model. This reflects the more complex five-factor model compared to the three-factor parent model.

However, the congruence coefficient was calculated to be .59 (see Table 4.8). This implies that the two factors were not statistically highly congruent.

4.4.2   Practitioner and parent factors with limited congruence

Practitioner factor 3: *Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills*

AND

Parent factor 3: *Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*

Factor 3 of the practitioner model (*Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills)* appears to have some similarities to factor 3 of the parent model (*Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*). These factors share 3 items from a possible 7 within the practitioner model and a possible 10 within the parent model (see Table 4.7). These items relate to adversity at home (see Appendix 7.15). The names developed for these factors reflect the similar

themes captured by the items within them, however the practitioner model appears to focus on the impact on the child ('The child is worried about other things', 'The child has poor language skills') whereas the parent factor includes further challenging environments ('Lack of boundaries at home', 'Parental separation', 'The child is picked on or tormented by other children', 'Changes in routine').

The congruence coefficient was calculated to be .84 (see Table 4.8). This suggests some statistical congruence between the factors.

Practitioner factor 2: *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*

AND

Parent factor 3: *Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*

Factor 2 (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour)* of the practitioner model also appears to have some similarities to factor 3 of the parent model (*Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*). The factors share 2 items from a possible 12 items in the practitioner factor and 10 items in the parent factor (see Table 4.7), these items relate to a lack of boundaries and consistency (see Appendix 7.15).

The congruence coefficient was calculated to be .84 suggesting a degree of statistical congruency between these factors (see Table 4.8).

What is more, factor 2 and factor 3 from the practitioner model had a significant intercorrelation (see Table 4.2) and both relate to factor 3 of the parent model. This suggests that factor 3 of the parent model reflects both of these factors from the practitioner model, again stemming from the more complex five-factor practitioner model.

Practitioner factor 4: *Child's wants and current lack of skills*

AND

Parent factor 1: *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*

Factor 4 of the practitioner model (*Child's wants and current lack of skills)* appears to have some similarities to factor 1 of the parent model (*Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing*). These factors share 2 items out of a potential 3 items within the practitioner factor and 25 within the parent factor (see Table 4.7). These items relate to the child's lack of effective skills to manage their behaviour (see Appendix 7.15).

The congruence coefficient was calculated to be .37 suggesting poor congruency between these factors (see Table 4.8).

Within the practitioner model, factor 4 and factor 2 had a significant intercorrelation (see Table 4.2). Both of these factors shared some similarity with factor 1 of the parent model and together they share 12 items with factor 1 of parent model. This suggests that factor 1 of the parent model reflects both factors 2 and 4 of the practitioner model which is reflected in the names developed. This highlights that the practitioner model is more complex and factors from the parent model may reflect multiple practitioner factors.

4.4.3   Factors with no congruence

Factor 5 of the practitioner model (*Unhelpful policy context)* was not found to be similar to any factors within the parent model. Although factor 5 of the practitioner model only contains 2 items, these items were within different factors in the parent model (between factor 1 and factor 2).

4.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the analysis conducted and has presented the results of the current study. Exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis was conducted for the practitioner and parent dataset separately. This resulted in a 5-factor practitioner model and a 3-factor parent model being developed to represent the respective datasets. Factors within each model were named and the perceived importance of factors was calculated. Comparisons were then drawn between the practitioner and parent model to identify congruence between relevant factors, including through the calculation of coefficients of congruence. Within the next chapter, these findings are discussed in relation to previous literature and theory.

5   Discussion

This chapter gives an overview of the findings of the research in relation to the aims for the study. Findings are discussed with consideration to prior theory and literature explored in Chapter 2. Possible implications of the study are then highlighted in relation to practice for settings and EP services. The methodology used within the study is critically evaluated, with limitations explored and discussed around the implications of this on the interpretation of findings and potential conclusions. Implications and thoughts are then discussed in relation to future research. The chapter closes with final conclusions from the research.

5.1   Summary of findings

The current study sought to explore attributions for challenging behaviour within an Early Years context with the following three aims outlined:

-To explore practitioner attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS
-To explore parent attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS
-To explore the similarities and differences between practitioner and parent attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS

These aims led to the overarching research question:

What are the causal attributions held by practitioners and parents for challenging behaviour observed in pupils in EYFS (3-5-year-olds)?

A survey was used to gather perceptions of practitioners and parents on this topic. From the survey responses, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted for each group. This revealed a five-factor model for practitioners and a three-factor model for parents. These findings are discussed below in relation to the stated research aims.

5.1.1   Aim 1: To explore practitioner attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS

Aim 1 was achieved by collecting survey responses from EYFS practitioners. A sample of 138 practitioners completed the survey; these responses were analysed

using factor analysis as outlined in Chapter 4. From this analysis, five factors were extracted which practitioners perceived to cause challenging behaviour in EYFS. The five factors extracted were:

Factor 1: Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self

Factor 2: Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour

Factor 3: Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills

Factor 4: Child's wants and current lack of skills

Factor 5: Unhelpful policy context

5.1.1.1 Factors

Factor 1: Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self

Factor 1 consists of 16 items from the survey, 12 of which relate directly to practitioner/setting causes and 4 which relate to child factors. This factor focuses on the practice within the setting and how this is ineffective including poor communication, unfair behaviour management, and a lack of practitioner training and support. Although some of the items within this factor are related to child causes, these items may reflect the impact of ineffective setting practice on the child, rather than within-child views on causation. This is reflected in the name of the factor which encompasses the child needing more support and currently not receiving this due to limits in practice.

This factor was rated by practitioners as the most important factor in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS from the factor model. This suggests that practitioners seem willing to take responsibility for their possible role in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. This differs from previous findings with older children where staff perceived school factors to be less important than home and within-child factors in causing challenging behaviour (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller &

Black, 2001; Miller, 1995). This links with the suggestions in previous literature that staff may be more likely to acknowledge their role in causing challenging behaviour in younger children and show less of a self-serving bias toward this age group (Phares et al., 2008).

Factor 2: *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*

Factor 2 consists of 12 items, 10 of which are solely home related causes and 2 of which are child related causes. This factor focuses on parent behaviour including behaviour management, values, and modelling.

This factor was rated to be third out of the five factors for perceived importance by practitioners. This suggests that although practitioners acknowledge that parenting has some influence, they did not view parent's actions as being a primary cause of their children's challenging behaviour. Again, this differs from previous research which found that staff attributed challenging behaviour most often to home factors and where often a culture of blame towards parents by staff was identified (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller & Black, 2001; Miller, 1995). This may reflect a different culture within EYFS of establishing a positive parent partnership with parents as outlined within literature and guidance documents looking at key values in EYFS (Cottle & Alexander, 2013; DfE, 2021; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004).

Factor 3: *Situational stressors/challenging home environments, resulting worries for the child and poor language skills*

Factor 3 consists of 7 items, 4 of which relate directly to home causes and 3 of which relate to within-child causes. Rather than focusing on parent behaviour as in Factor 2, this factor focuses on the home environment and adversity within this. The child items appear to be the consequence of these environments and experiences in that the practitioners perceive the child to be worried and have limited language due to adverse home life.

This factor was rated by practitioners to be the second most important factor in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. This is more in line with previous research where staff perceived home factors to be significant in causing challenging

behaviour (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller & Black, 2001; Miller, 1995). However, the items within this factor appear to be less blameful of parents and may reflect an appreciation by practitioners that these circumstances may be out of parents' direct control reflecting items relating to poverty, mental health issues, and domestic violence. This could suggest that practitioners recognised the important influence that home life has on a child's behaviour but were not blameful of parents, instead focusing on circumstances that gave rise to challenging behaviour.

Factor 4: Child's wants and current lack of skills

Factor 4 consists of just 3 items which relate to within-child causes for challenging behaviour. These focus on the child lacking appropriate interaction skills currently.

This factor was rated to be fourth out of five factors for perceived importance by practitioners. This implies that practitioners felt that home and setting factors were more significant causes of challenging behaviour but recognised that when children lack skills such as developed social skills and gaining attention through more appropriate means, this can be shown in their behaviour. As the EYFS curriculum has a strong focus on interaction skills and developing positive social, emotional, and mental health, it could be viewed that it is important for children to be taught these skills and for this to be appropriately modelled and reinforced by adults responsible for their care and education (DfE, 2021). This suggests that practitioners perceive that these skills may not have been mastered by children displaying challenging behaviour for a number of reasons which are outside of the child's control, and therefore does not necessarily point to practitioners feeling that children are ultimately responsible for their behaviour.

Factor 5: Unhelpful policy context

Factor 5 is the smallest factor, made up of only 2 items which relate to school causes. These focus on more systemic issues which come through government policy including pressures such as Ofsted and data checks, and class sizes.

This factor was rated by practitioners to be the least important factor in causing challenging behaviour. This suggests that practitioners recognised that the policy context of EYFS, and wider education, can be a factor influencing challenging

behaviour, however they did not view this as the most important cause. It could be argued that such context will have an impact on items in Factor 1 relating to setting environment and practice. Thus, it may be that these items had less of a direct relation to children's behaviour, instead exacerbating other causes.

5.1.1.2 Overall link to previous literature

The five factors reveal that practitioners attributed challenging behaviour to a range of causes including setting factors, home factors, within-child factors, and policy factors. This differs from previous research into staff attributions in older children which showed that staff attributed behaviour largely to home related causes and within-child factors, but not to teacher or school-related factors (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller & Black, 2001; Miller, 1995). Findings from these previous studies found that staff perceived home factors to be the most significant cause of challenging behaviour, and this was viewed to be within the control of parents which may have led to a blame culture in schools against parents and potentially to a lack of helping behaviour within school (Miller, 2003).

The present study findings also contrast with research within EYFS where teachers perceived the home environment to be the key factor influencing behaviour (Nungesser & Watkins, 2005). With further research in EYFS suggesting that teachers struggled to identify their role in causing challenging behaviour (Jamil et al., 2021). Only a very small percentage of staff in previous literature were identified to have attributed challenging behaviour to factors relating to teacher/school factors.

Overall, the current study has highlighted that practitioners mainly attributed challenging behaviour in the EYFS to external, situational causes. Four of five factors show this preference clearly, encompassing causes within the setting, at home, and with policy context, which suggests that causes are perceived to be beyond within-child factors by practitioners in EYFS. Only one of the factors focuses on a more internal locus of control for children, however as discussed this is based around the child's lack of skills which may need to be taught and modelled to them in order for them to be successful. The most important perceived factors focused on

setting/practitioner causes and adverse home experiences, which assign an external locus of control to challenging behaviour.

Interestingly, the findings reveal that practitioners perceived Factor 1 (*Ineffective and unhelpful practitioner skills/knowledge/values, the child requiring more support, and the impact on the child's sense of self*) as being the most important factor in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. This varies significantly from previous research which suggested that staff did not readily acknowledge the potential contribution of school and staff in challenging behaviour in respect to older children (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller & Black, 2001; Miller, 1995). The conclusions of Phares, Ehrbar and Lum (1996) also highlighted that staff rated parents and children to be more responsible for behaviour in older children, but were much more willing to acknowledge their role in influencing challenging behaviour in younger children, aligning with the findings of the present study. This suggests that the self-serving bias may not be exhibited by practitioners working with younger children.

Attribution theory suggests that attributions influence feelings and behaviour including perceptions of control and motivation to help (Skinner, 2014). As such, by practitioners acknowledging their responsibility for children's behaviour and the absence of perceptions of within-child, fixed attributions within the present study, Weiner (1980) suggests that practitioners may have increased empathy and willingness to help. Where behaviour is attributed to causes uncontrollable by the child, more helping behaviours were elicited in staff. The present study findings suggest that practitioners may be more likely to implement interventions in EYFS due to their attributions for challenging behaviour being predominantly external, situational causes and in part relating to their own role (Heider, 1958). This is in line with Jamil et al (2021), who outlined that those practitioners who attributed behaviour in some parts to themselves, also felt that they could help children.

The exploration of practitioner attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS in this study reveals that practitioners perceive there to be a variety of influential factors on the challenging behaviour displayed by children in EYFS. From the developed five factor model, two of the factors focus on setting causes (Factor 1 and Factor 5), two

on home causes (Factor 2 and Factor 3) and only one on child causes (Factor 4). This suggests that overall practitioners in this study viewed causes of challenging behaviour to be outside of the child's control and viewed situational causes as more important. What is more, the highest perceived factors related to setting causes and to adversity at home showing the perceived influence and importance of situational factors on a child's behaviour.

5.1.2 Aim 2: To explore parent attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS

Aim 2 was achieved by gathering survey responses from parents with children currently in EYFS. A total of 63 parents completed the survey in full, with these responses being used to conduct the factor analysis outlined in Chapter 4. From this analysis, three factors were extracted which parents perceived to cause challenging behaviour in EYFS. The three factors which were extracted were:

Factor 1- Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing

Factor 2- Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures

Factor 3- Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations

5.1.2.1 Factors

Factor 1- Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour from parents, practitioners and other children, and the impact on child's wellbeing

Factor 1 consists of 25 items, making it the largest factor across both factor models. 11 of the items directly relate to parent/home causes. 10 items relate to child causes, however similarly to the child causes captured within the practitioner model, the majority of these relate to skills that the child has yet to learn and could be taught, and the impact of adverse experiences on the child. 4 of the items in this factor were setting causes relating to values and modelling. The name of this factor

reflects how home, setting, and child causes are all captured within this relatively large factor.

This factor was rated by parents to be the least important factor from the model in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. This suggests that whilst parents acknowledged the range of causes captured in this factor to have some influence on challenging behaviour, they perceived other factors to be more important. Interestingly, this factor contains the most within-child items compared to the others in the model. This may suggest that parents perceived that the child's skills, wellbeing and wants impacted on their behaviour but that this was not a dominant cause for challenging behaviour in EYFS. The inclusion of within-child causes is in line with previous research which suggests that parents perceived pupil vulnerability to be a key cause (Miller et al. 2002). However, due to the low rated importance of this factor, these findings also correspond with previous research suggesting that the parents of younger children viewed children as less responsible overall for their behaviours (Phares et al., 1996).

Factor 2*- Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures*

Factor 2 consists of 13 items which predominantly relate to perceptions of poor setting practice and systemic issues. Nearly all of the items within this factor relate to practitioner/setting causes, with only 1 item relating to home causes.

This factor was rated by parents as the second most important factor from the model in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. This suggests that parents in the current study noted the important influence that practice within the EYFS setting can have on children's behaviour. This is in line with previous research that found that parents attributed behaviour to school setting factors including fairness of teacher actions and differentiation of classroom demands and expectations (Miller et al., 2002). However, parents in the current study did not see this as the most important factor unlike in previous research. This factor aligns with further studies that found that in younger children, parents were more likely to perceive teachers and themselves as responsible for behaviour than the child (Phares et al., 1996).

Factor 3 *- Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*

Factor 3 of the parent factor model consists of 10 items. These relate mainly to home causes, with 2 items relating to situational stressors with a more with-child focus. This factor focuses on adversity at home and a lack of clear expectations for the child, highlighting some causes which may be viewed to be within the parents' control such as a lack of boundaries and consistency, and some causes which could be viewed not to be within the parents' control at home such as trauma impacting on the family and leading to challenging home environments.

This factor was perceived by parents to be the most important cause of challenging behaviour within the model. This suggests that EYFS parents in the current study viewed home causes to have the most influence on behaviour. This differs from some previous attribution research with parents which found that parents tended to view school and child factors to be more important causes of challenging behaviour (Miller et al., 2002). However, other studies found that when regarding younger children, parents were more willing to acknowledge their role in causing their child's behaviour and thus take responsibility for implementing interventions (Jacobs, Woolfson, & Hunter, 2017; Phares et al., 1996; Dix et al., 1989). This factor may be reflective of similar perceptions by the group that for younger children, parents are viewed to hold more responsibility for their behaviours.

5.1.2.2 Overall link to previous literature

The three factors that were extracted reveal that parents attributed challenging behaviour to a range of causes, however these were predominantly home and setting causes. This differs from previous parent attribution research which found that parents were more likely to attribute challenging behaviour to teacher factors and child factors (Miller et al., 2002). However, further research suggested that parents did identify themselves as having a high level of responsibility for their child's behaviours even when viewing these behaviours as fixed (Jacobs, Woolfson, & Hunter, 2017).

The current parent factor model reveals that parents attributed challenging behaviour in EYFS to external, situational causes. All three factors reflect this view, with none of the factors containing mainly within-child items. This differs in some respects to previous research, Dix et al., (1989) suggested that parents perceived behaviour to be intentional from the age of 3-years-old and the inference of intentionality heavily influenced parent attributions, with more within-child attributions as the behaviour is viewed to be more intentional. Whereby, parents in previous research considering 4-year-olds gave dispositional factors and situational factors equal importance (Dix et al., 1989). However, Phares et al. (1996) found that with younger children, parents viewed themselves and teachers as more responsible than children. Similarly, within findings from the current study suggest that the group viewed the setting and home as the most important factors in influencing challenging behaviour.

Parents within the current study perceived Factor 3 (*Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*) to be the most important factor in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. This factor encompasses mainly home/parent related items, suggesting that parents in the current study saw parental influence and the child's overall home life as the most important factor. Previous research had not highlighted that parents viewed home factors to be the most important factor, however as discussed, the responsibility of parents increased for younger age groups (Dix et al., 1989; Phares et al., 1996). As such, the findings in the current study may reflect this difference in attributions due to age. Furthermore, some of the items in this factor linked to adversity at home; this could have links to subsequent 'pupil vulnerability' which was perceived as an important factor by Miller et al. (2002).

These findings may have implications for parental support for children exhibiting challenging behaviour. It has been suggested that where parents acknowledge the role of home and parent behaviour in causing challenging behaviour, they are more likely to engage in and to implement interventions (Dix et al., 1986; Phares et al., 1996). Moreover, the absence of within-child factors suggests that this could lead to a reduction in more harsh discipline including behaviourist type approaches and

instead lead to a focus on relational approaches which may be more effective (Park et al., 2016).

5.1.2.3 Conclusion

The exploration of parent attributions for challenging behaviour in EYFS within the current study reveals that parents perceive home and setting factors to be the biggest influences of behaviour. The three-factor model shows that one of the factors focuses mainly on home causes (Factor 3), one on setting causes (Factor 2) and one on a combination of home, child, and setting causes (Factor 1). This suggests that parents acknowledge the influence of a wide range of causes, however the ratings of perceived importance reveal that adversity at home and ineffective setting practice were viewed to be most responsible for causing challenging behaviour. Thus, revealing that parents viewed external, situational factors to be the most important factors for challenging behaviour in young children.

5.1.3 Aim 3: To explore the similarities and differences between practitioner and parent attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS

Aim 3 was achieved by considering the congruency between factors in the five-factor practitioner model and the three-factor parent model. It is noted that the methodology of the current study does not allow for direct statistical comparisons to be made between factor models, instead similarities and differences are considered by the researcher by reviewing names of factors, items within factors, and the perceived importance of factors, as well as general patterns and trends. Both groups of participants were presented with the same information and survey within the study which allows for this tentative comparison to be made. Further, the use of Tucker's (1951) congruence coefficients enabled the researcher to establish the level of congruence between factors in a more statistically sound way to confirm whether these tentative comparisons had a statistical basis.

5.1.3.1 Key findings

The most obvious difference between the two factor models is the number of factors within each model. The practitioner model has five factors compared to the

parent model which has three factors. This may suggest that the practitioner model is more distinguished, with causes being separated out further. This is reflected particularly within the factors made up of a much smaller number of items (Factor 4 and 5), whereas the parent model has more complexity within its factors, with a larger mixture of items originating from different causes in each factor, specifically in Factor 1. This reflects a difference in the way that the groups responded to the survey.

Aside from the number of factors within the models, there are some clear similarities between the two models which are reflected in the names of the factors. The factors which were revealed to have the highest amount of congruency were Factor 1 from the practitioner model and Factor 2 from the parent model. These factors focused on the role of the setting in contributing to challenging behaviour and included a range of ineffective setting practices. Interestingly, this was perceived as the most important factor by practitioners and the second most important factor by parents. Thus, this suggests that both groups viewed setting practice to be highly influential for behaviour in EYFS.

Further factors which were found to have a level of congruency were Factor 3 from the practitioner model and Factor 3 from the parent model. These factors focused on causes within the home environment that related to adversity and situational stressors. This factor was perceived by parents to be the most important cause for challenging behaviour and to be second most important by practitioners.

The final statistically congruent factors were Factor 2 from the practitioner model and Factor 3 from the parent model. These factors relate to a lack of boundaries and consistency, with Factor 3 of the parent model capturing these causes alongside adversity whereas within the practitioner model this is separated between two factors. This factor was rated as the next most important by practitioners. This suggests that both groups also viewed situational adversity at home to be a highly influential factor for behaviour in EYFS.

As discussed, the factors which each group rated to have the highest perceived importance were the factors which were congruent between the two models. This

suggests that in the current study both practitioners and parents held similar views about which causes had most influence on challenging behaviour in EYFS. These factors are based on setting causes and home causes which are external, situational attributions for challenging behaviour.

There is slight variation with the perceived importance of these factors between groups. Practitioner ratings revealed that they viewed setting factors to be the most important, whereas parent ratings revealed that they viewed home factors to hold the highest importance. This is an interesting finding as previously attribution research suggested that people tend to show a self-serving attribution bias whereby, they do not hold themselves accountable for undesirable outcomes, only successes (Heider, 1958). Previous studies suggest that staff and parents will often attribute causes away from themselves which may cause a blame culture, for example with staff blaming parents, and parents blaming school (Miller et al., 2002). With previous research showing differences in opinions between parents and teachers (Kasik & Gál, 2016). However, findings from this study differ, with staff rating setting factors as most important, and parents rating home factors as most important.

These findings may have positive connotations for future practice in EYFS as this shows a potential willingness to acknowledge the responsibility of each group's role in children's behaviours. In turn, these attributions may lead to practitioners being more willing to implement and be involved in interventions as their acknowledgement of their responsibility in potentially causing challenging behaviour can transfer to acknowledgement of their responsibility to support change (Poulou & Norwich,2002; Andreou & Rapti, 2010). What is more, the congruency of the perceived most important factors and what appears to be the omission of blame between settings for the two groups, may mean more harmonious collaboration which may lead to more effective outcomes. Research shows that interventions for challenging behaviour are most effective when key adults around the child have similar values and goals and work together to give consistent support to the child (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004; Miller, 2003).

The difference in findings in the current study compared to previous attribution studies may be a reflection of the differing views on challenging behaviour relating to younger children compared to older children (Phares et al., 1996). As discussed, previous literature highlights that as children get older, staff and parents are more likely to attribute their behaviour to dispositional factors that are internal and fixed (Dix et al., 1986; Johnston, Patenaud, & Inman, 1992). Whereas, when relating to younger children key adults are more likely to acknowledge the role of setting and home in causing challenging behaviour, attributing behaviour to more situational factors as was found within the current study. This may also be a reflection of difference in culture within the UK as some differing views were found within the systematic literature review across other countries.

The findings may be a reflection of the curriculum in EYFS which has a strong emphasis on the development of personal, social and emotional skills as a prime area of learning (DfE, 2021). This statutory focus may influence the perceptions of practitioners and parents on challenging behaviour to view this as skills not yet acquired by children and needing to be taught by key adults around them, rather than seeing behaviour as a choice or something within the control of the child. This may have influenced the perceived importance of external factors, rather than within-child factors found within the study. Although initiatives are in place to focus on these skills in later key stages, it could be argued that there is more of a focus on academic progress and results as education progresses, whereas in EYFS personal, social and emotional development is also measured thus placing a greater focus on this in EYFS compared to later key stages.

Moreover, the congruency between parent and practitioner factors and the lack of apparent blame culture between settings may be a reflection of the focus on parent partnership in EYFS. Within statutory frameworks, the need to seek consistency between home and school in outlined, and the importance of this partnership is highlighted (DfE, 2021). This is reiterated in the overarching principles of EYFS which relate to the unique child, positive relationships, and enabling environments (DfE, 2021). These values present every child as developing in their own way and strive for anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities, again highlighting why

EYFS practitioners may perceive dispositional factors as less important. The focus on relationships and environments may be reflected in the factors which were perceived to be of most importance in both factor models, with both relationships and environment being at the heart of these. As such, the findings are in line with the curriculum, and espoused values and principles within EYFS.

Attribution theory suggests that by understanding more about the judgements made by people, we can begin to consider their thoughts, feelings, and actions in similar situations as attributions can influence future behaviour (Weiner 1985; Skinner, 2014). Thus, the causal attributions found within the current study can give insight into how key adults may potentially respond to challenging behaviour and how this may help or hinder their approach. This understanding can support the promotion of more productive working and guide collaborative support between groups in the best interests of children (Försterling, 2001).

The findings from this study suggest that the percieved importance of external factors in causing challenging behaviour by both participant groups may lead to increased helping behaviours. This is due to an increased level of empathy where children's behaviour is not perceived as internal and under the pupil's control (Norwich, 2002). This can also lead to decreased feelings of anger and fear, and more feelings of optimism (Weiner, 1985). Thus, these attribitons could have an impact on classroom interactions and practice, including more relational behaviour management and a focus on supporting emotional needs (Carter et al., 2014). Likewise, within-child attributions were linked to more harsh parental discipline (Dix et al., 1986). By parents acknowledging that not only within-child factors influence children's behaviour, this may create a higher level of empathy and lead parents to see behaviour as less fixed, whereby harsher discipline may be reduced.

As discussed within the literature review, early intervention can be a crucial factor for promoting positive outcomes for children exhibiting challenging behaviour in schools to prevent exclusions (Banks & Bush, 2016). This includes having a coordinated and collaborative response to support the young person as early as possible (Banks & Bush, 2016). The external attributions within the factor models from this study suggest that practitioners and parents may be more willing to

implement such interventions and to work together to support children exhibiting challenging behaviours as they do not see these as internal and fixed. Moreover, other negative consequences that can come from internal, fixed attributions may be lessened including labelling and self-fulfilling prophecies. If practitioners and parents hold external attributions for challenging behaviour, they may be less likely to associate negative labels with children in EYFS exhibiting challenging behaviour and thus, these children may be less likely to gain a negative reputation. It is hoped that this would lead to less of the negative consequences that may be associated with these labels, such as social isolation, negative interactions, and a lowered sense of belonging and self-confidence (Holden & Gitlesen, 2006; Miller & Kaiser, 2001).

5.1.3.2 Conclusion

The comparison of the two factor models allowed the researcher to explore the similarities and differences between practitioner and parent attributions of challenging behaviour in EYFS. This revealed some level of similarity between the attributions made by the two groups, which was supported by Tucker's (1951) coefficients of congruence. Such results were interesting when considered alongside the perceived importance of factors, with practitioners and parents having similar top two factors as the most important. These relate to ineffective setting practice and adverse home circumstances, which were both considered as external attributions and were the factors that had the most significant congruence between the factor models.

A further interesting finding was the difference in which factor was perceived to have the highest importance by each group. Findings suggest that practitioners viewed setting factors as most important, suggesting that they acknowledged the role they had in influencing challenging behaviour for children in EYFS and may be more likely to accept a level of responsibility for this which can impact on helping behaviours. Further, parents recognised the key role that a child's home life has in influencing behaviour, moving away from within-child causes of behaviour and considering wider contextual factors that may impact.

5.2   Implications for Practice

5.2.1   EYFS Settings

This study intended to explore the causal attributions for challenging behaviour of two key groups in EYFS and further to consider the implications of this in terms of practice. As discussed within this chapter, the attributions that these groups hold are likely to influence their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour towards children in EYFS.

Within the factors rated as most important in causing behaviour, setting factors were viewed as influential to challenging behaviour which has implications for policy and practice. The recognition of the need for practitioners to have more training was highlighted as being essential. This may be regarding supporting children identified as having additional needs, in creating more stimulating environments, or on relational approaches to behaviour management. Further, the need for practitioners to have more support in settings and for more effective management was identified. It is possible that by enhancing EYFS practitioners' knowledge and skills through training, this will help practitioners to feel more able to support children within EYFS settings. This was identified within previous literature which considered the most effective EYFS settings (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) and was identified by both practitioners and parents as key within the current study. If attributions and perceived causes are highlighted, settings may be enabled to focus more on supporting practitioners in the ways identified which may in turn empower practitioners and reduce levels of challenging behaviour exhibited, thus it may be useful to include the factors highlighted in the present study as part of training offered to practitioners.

A key identified theme within factors related to behaviour management and a perception that the application of ineffective approaches led to increases in challenging behaviour. Department for Education (2016) suggest that the application of behaviourist approaches in EYFS place emphasis on control. Relational approaches, on the other hand, are seen as more effective. It will therefore be important for settings to consider this when reviewing and developing

their policies and practices. Further, the findings could have important implications for policy makers and for the guidance offered to EYFS settings on behaviour management.

The current study identified a high level of congruency between practitioner and parent views on the factors that were most important in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. The congruence found in their views has implications for parent partnership and collaborative working in EYFS. Raising awareness and appreciations of similarity in views could help to enhance the partnership between EY practitioners and parents and avoid a blame culture developing. This, in turn, may lead to preventative working and a general cooperative culture in settings with parents which may lead to positive outcomes for children. The present study highlighted a need for greater consistency and a shared approach as being important for supporting children. Factor 2 of the practitioner model includes the item 'Lack of consistency between home and setting', with this item receiving a mean rating of 4.2 out of a maximum of 5 for perceived importance. Factor 3 of the parent model further includes this same item relating to inconsistency between settings, again receiving a rating of 4.2 out of a 5 for perceived importance. The parent model further includes the item 'Behaviour expectations are inconsistent' within Factor 3, with a mean rating of 4.1 out of 5. This shows that within both factor models these items were rated highly, suggesting that both groups perceived this to be a key area in causing challenging behaviour in young children. As discussed, Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) concluded within their influential study looking at effective Early Years practice that effective settings were consistent and shared practice with parents. The most effective settings had shared aims with parents and findings showed that continuity from parents and practitioners was beneficial to all areas of development (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). This has implications for how settings manage such partnerships with parents. What is more, parents may be further supported by settings in implementing boundaries and routines at home and in relational approaches to behaviour management through this collaboration.

Further, the recognition from both groups relating to children who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, adversity and situational stressors at home may have implications for practice. Challenging behaviour was attributed to these experiences; thus, it is important for settings to consider their role in supporting children who may be identified as having these challenges at home. Settings should consider how they can work to increase resiliency factors for these children including through key adult systems to support secondary attachments, through interventions such as nurture groups, and other relational approaches to support in counteracting the impact of these experiences.

5.2.2 Educational Psychology Services

The current study has implications for educational psychologists, specifically regarding the ways in which they can support settings and parents. Miller (2003) outlines the key role EPs have in building bridges between staff and parents to create a shared perspective and support collaborative working. The current research suggests a similarity in perspectives exists as to the causes of challenging between parents and practitioners within EYFS. This has important implications for EPs in both surfacing and utilising this as part of their work with parents and practitioners through consultation and developing interventions, as well as within their own research and development of training.

By EPs increasing their understanding of attributions within EYFS, this may support bridge building during consultation to ensure that this pre-existing similarity in views is known to both groups and utilised in the most effective way. This may support the reduction of blame cultures and ensure that the development and implementation of interventions is as collaborative as possible through shared perceptions and goals. Based on this research, EPs can be mindful that some parents may be open to considering their influence on behaviour of children, but this would need further exploring in specific cases.

This may also have implications for training that EPs deliver both to settings and to parents, whereby they will have an increased understanding of the attributions these groups hold for challenging behaviour and can hold these as a focus. EPs can

use this to support settings in developing areas in which they view as important which may go on to increase implementation due to perceived importance and shared values and perspectives.

Experience from practice suggests that EP services often have the reduction of exclusions as a key priority for their work. Thus, research which increases awareness of attributions for challenging behaviour is useful in supporting the knowledge base of EPs and in adding to continuous professional development in this area. EPs can use such research to promote prevention and early intervention in EYFS.

5.3 Methodological Limitations

The current study aimed to explore causal attributions made by practitioners and parents regarding challenging behaviour in EYFS. However, the findings, implications and conclusions drawn must be considered within the context of the methodological strengths and limitations of the study. The extent to which the aims were met are dependent on the limitations and steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Identified methodological limitations and the impact of these are discussed in further detail below.

5.3.1 Methodological orientation

The philosophical stance of the researcher aligned with a post-positivist paradigm, whereby it was acknowledged that the research would aim to imperfectly explain an approximate truth regarding the chosen topic and research question. This is reflective of an objectivist epistemology which suggests that an objective reality does exist independently. Although this orientation shows a clear thread for the use of a fixed, quantitative design, some decisions made regarding definitions within the research may appear to not align as clearly. This includes the decisions made around the emphasis on the socially constructed, subjective nature of challenging behaviour which was integral within the scoping of the research and further with the positioning of the measure. From a post-positivist stance, it may be more typical for such definitions to be more fixed and pre-determined to reflect objectivity.

However, the researcher drew upon an ontological standpoint of critical realism, whereby the researcher accepts that their may be a true reality, thus that challenging behaviour may be situated within an objective reality, but crucially states that this reality can be viewed alternatively depending on individual differences and experiences. Although a fixed, quantitative design was chosen, the researched aimed to gather the perceptions of challenging behaviour rather than an objective truth about challenging behaviour. Thus, aligning with the decisions to explore challenging behaviour as a subjective construct, giving space for participant groups to draw upon their experiences to elicit attributions.

Limitations for the use of a post-positivist stance when exploring the subjective contrast of challenging behaviour may include the barrier to the use of a qualitative design. Had an alternative stance been taken, qualitative methods may have further elicited individual viewpoints which may be of interest within future research, as discussed within section 5.4. However, due to the focus on groups within the current study, and the extension on previous attribution work, this was not thought to have been a significant challenge to the research. Further, alternative decisions may have been made by other researchers to pre-determine the definition of challenging behaviour, reflecting the individuality of approaches. This may be used to guide participants in their responses, or the position the research in a specific way. This was not the intention of the current research, however may be an alternative approach depending on the research question and aims of future research.

5.3.2   Design

A non-experimental, fixed design was utilised in the current study in the form of a survey method. The strengths and potential limitations of using a survey were highlighted in Chapter 3. During implementation and analysis, a key limitation which resonated with the researcher was that the design only allowed for a snapshot of views from respondents. The responses given within the survey can only represent the thoughts of the participant at the time they answered, under the specific

circumstances in which they answered. This means that any generalisations must be approached with caution.

Furthermore, conclusions can only be drawn regarding the participants within the study, with generalisation to other EYFS practitioners and parents needing to be tentative. The researcher attempted to recruit as many participants as possible, with no limits on how many practitioners or parents could complete the survey before it closed. Heuristics were used to guide the researcher in terms of sample size (Ferguson & Cox, 1993), however for the parent group the minimum ideal sample size was not achieved. The researcher ensured that the achieved sample size for this group was still adequate for the analysis to be run effectively, nevertheless this adds a further level of caution to the generalisability of findings. Difficulty with response rates can be a common issue for survey designs (Kolar & Kolar, 2008), and this was further impacted by the limited timeframe for the current research and the circumstances of the Covid-19 restrictions which reduced in-person access to the target sample. Further, this may point to the difficulty in accessing parents as a group and possible reluctance to participate. This could be explored further in the future, with ways of increasing participation investigated to ensure that as a group a full range of parent views are included in such research.

In addition, limitations in the representativeness of the participants who did complete the survey is acknowledged. Across both participant groups, only one male responded. Typically, there are much higher numbers of female practitioners within EYFS with the current research being representative of this. However, specifically for the parent group it would be ideal for there to be a more even split of responses from genders to ensure that different viewpoints are included. It may be useful to consider how fathers could be targeted more effectively, and to explore whether there are existing differences in views.

In order to meet the agreed inclusion criteria to complete the survey, participants had to be currently located within the UK. However, it is acknowledged that the sample was skewed to being located in England, with only nine practitioners and no parents being located outside of England. It is not possible therefore to generalise

the conclusions to other geographical regions which may have differing systems, policies, and influences.

A final important limitation to the use of the survey design is the restricted responses allowed. Participants were limited to only using a rating scale to respond to a set number of items, with no capacity for additional comments or explanations. Thus, it was not possible in the current study to gather any further information outside of the final survey instrument which may have prevented participants from sharing their full views on the topic. It must be acknowledged that the phenomenon which was studied- challenging behaviour, occurs within a complex, real world environment in which there are many influences and an infinite number of different situations in which these behaviours occur, where attributions may differ. It may be seen as reductionist to only allow participants to respond using the given items and this is important to acknowledge when conclusions are drawn.

5.3.3 Measures

The use of a survey holds numerous advantages in gathering views from participants on a specified phenomenon, particularly in enabling the research to reach a larger number of participants and whilst allowing for a level of objectivity. However, this methodology heavily relies on the honesty of participants when completing the survey to ensure that findings are meaningful. Participants may have been impacted by social desirability bias whereby they may have responded in a way that they deemed to be more favourable to others. The researcher is unable to know whether participants have been honest in their responses, despite steps taken to encourage this, for example not asking for defining information to ensure anonymisation. Thus, a level of caution should be taken when viewing findings with the acknowledgement of this limitation.

Additionally, although precautions were taken when developing the measure, it is possible that participants interpreted the wording of the survey differently to each other which may have had an impact on the outcomes of the study. This limitation concerns the wording of instructions, items, and key terms such as 'challenging behaviour'. Misinterpretation or misunderstandings may have produced alternative

responses to those that the researcher intended. This is particularly due to the online nature of the survey which meant that the researcher was not present to explain the survey or to answer any queries raised during completion. Contact details were provided; however, these were not used by any of the participants.

A further point for consideration regards the decisions made for the demographic data collected as part of the measure, and the potential limitations of not including specific questions. This includes the decision made to not collect demographic data relating to social background of families, gender, and ethnicity of children, and whether the child had special educational needs or particular behavioural concerns. Previous research has considered these factors and how they may impact perceptions of behaviour (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009; Jamil et al., 2021; Major et al., 2018). Further, this may have important contextual impacts, for example, children from lower socio-economic status families may experience more situational stress at home due to poverty, or parents of children with behavioural needs may have different perceptions regarding the staff from their experiences. Had further demographic data been collected, this may have led to furthermore specific conclusions around how gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and special educational needs relate to attributions for behaviour. The researcher acknowledges the significance of these factors and how this may impact attributions. However, the researcher opted not to include such questions as the research did not ask participants to consider a specific child when responding to the measure, rather to consider what may cause challenging behaviour within this age group in general. The aims of the study were to consider this age phase as a group, rather than focus on individuals and thus, the collection of such data would have required alternative or additional aims which were not the purpose of the current study.

5.3.4   Analysis

Data was analysed using factor analysis. This method will always be able to show patterns in the data therefore, outcomes can only be as good as the data that is inputted and as the question that is asked. This emphasises the importance of pre-

analysis checks which were run by the researcher to ascertain the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis. As discussed, the ideal sample size was not obtained within the parent sample, however other pre-analysis checks indicated that the data was appropriate for analysis such that the outcomes would be meaningful. What is more, some literature argues that even larger sample sizes than were aimed for in the current study are best practice to increase the reliability of the factor models (Field, 2013).

Furthermore, although the quantitative nature of the research may in some ways increase objectivity, there are still key decision points throughout the analysis which require subjective input from the researcher. This includes decisions regarding items to exclude, factors to extract, rotation method, and naming of factors. Steps were taken to reduce the subjectivity of such decisions through following factor analysis guidance and reviewing literature, and through other processes including the recaptured item technique for factor naming. However, ultimately final decisions were made by the researcher and the subjectivity of this cannot be completely eliminated. The researcher's interpretation should therefore be considered when reviewing findings, interpretations, and conclusions of the current research.

5.4 Implications for Future Research

The current research has achieved the intended aims to explore parent and practitioner attributions for challenging behaviour in the context of EYFS and the similarities and differences between the attributions of these groups. During the development and implementation of the research, several points arose which may have important implications and be of worth for future research.

As discussed, the phenomena explored is complex and so are attributions; it would be useful for future research to consider how qualitative data could be gathered alongside factors to increase the richness and depth of findings. This may be less restrictive for participants and may support in gathering a fuller picture of their views which may increase the validity of findings. This may include gathering information such as reasons for attributions or to give space for further attributions

to be added by participants. Qualitative data could be gathered using methods such as focus groups or interviews, or additionally adding space for participants to add qualitative responses within surveys.

It would be useful for the measure used within the current research to be more rigorously examined, with further work required to outline construct validity of the measure to enable it to be used more widely or for the validity to be improved if deemed necessary. For future research using a similar design, it would be beneficial to have more input during stage one of the research during the development of the measure through more focus groups or a larger pilot stage to ascertain whether the target population generally have a good understanding of the survey to increase confidence in the construct validity of the measure.

A further question that was raised during the research considered the effect of attributions on practice. The scope of the present study meant that it was not possible to consider the link between attributions and practice directly. It would therefore be important for future research to draw more direct links between attribution patterns and the actions of key groups towards children. Such research may use methodology including observations, or self-report methodology regarding practice.

Additionally, the identification of a lack of representation of male participants was acknowledged. Although the current sample seemed more representative of EYFS participants due to the gender imbalance in the workforce, this was not representative of parents. Future research should strive to target fathers more effectively to gain their perspective and to explore whether this differs from mothers and the potential implications of this, including for parent partnership within settings and the inclusion of fathers in key decisions and processes.

5.5   Unique Contribution

The aim of this research was to increase understanding of causal attributions made by key stakeholders relating to challenging behaviour in different contexts, in a setting and age group that has not previously been the focus of research. Previous

attribution studies have focused predominantly on secondary age groups, with some research into primary age, however a gap was highlighted with current research in EYFS in the UK. The importance of considering attributions in EYFS was emphasised during the literature review and rationale for the study which outlined the difference in culture in EYFS including greater emphasis on social and emotional development and on parent partnership, and the importance of the early years of education on future inclusion of children in schools.

Although research has considered practitioners' perspectives on behaviour, this has not been previously explored through the lens of attribution theory solely relating to the EYFS context within the UK. What is more, the systematic literature review outlined very few studies that have considered parents' attributions of behaviour in EYFS regarding behaviour. Little was previously known about whether parent and practitioner attributions relating to this age range differed or showed similarities, and what was seen as the most important factors by these groups. Thus, it was previously difficult to ascertain how these could be used to support school-home systems to work together to support children.

In addition, the research has produced an adapted attribution measure which is more relevant and appropriate to EYFS. This was updated from previous measures however with 4 items removed, 6 items reworded, and 9 new items added, showing the significant adaptations made to the measure. This represents a balance of setting, home, and child related items which are contemporary and context appropriate. With further work to ensure satisfactory construct validity, the measure could potentially be used in future research to explore attributions for challenging behaviour in EYFS further showing contribution to research instruments.

5.6   Conclusion

Overall, the current study met the aims outlined by the researcher to explore the proposed research question- '*What are the causal attributions held by practitioners and parents for challenging behaviour observed in pupils in EYFS (3-5-year-olds)?*'. The unique contribution of this study has been outlined, with the current study

adding to existing attribution research with a focus on a previously unexplored key stage. The viewpoints of both practitioners and parents were considered separately and in comparison to one another. Findings suggest that both groups viewed ineffective practice within the setting and adverse experiences at home as the most important factors in causing challenging behaviour in EYFS. This suggests that children's behaviour in EYFS is likely to be perceived as being due to external, situational factors rather than internal, dispositional factors. Findings differ from previous attribution research considering challenging behaviour in later key stages, whereby self-serving biases were observed in key stakeholders who did not readily acknowledge their role in influencing behaviour (Croll & Moses, 1985; Miller & Black, 2001; Miller, 1995). This may be due to the difference in the curriculum, culture, and values in EYFS, or the differing perspectives regarding younger children compared to older children (Dix et al., 1986; Johnston, Patenaude, & Inman, 1992; Phares, Ehrbar, & Lum, 1996).

The important influence of attributions on people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour point to the clear implications for practice of these findings. This includes areas to consider for priority development within individual EYFS setting regarding policies around behaviour management, training, and increasing parental involvement and collaboration. It is important to consider how effective support in EYFS can potentially alleviate negative consequences of labelling, and how this can impact children's future within school and beyond. Thus, the importance of increasing our understanding of these early attributions is key in ensuring that professionals, such as those working in EYFS and EPs, and parents can aim to support children in the most effective ways through preventative work, early intervention, and appropriate responses to ultimately increase inclusion.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Database searches conducted for the systematic literature review.

Database	Date	Search terms	Number of results
PyschInfo	25/11/21	(early AND year* OR eyfs OR reception OR preschool OR nurser* OR foundation AND stage) (behavio*) (causal AND attribution* OR perception* OR view* OR attribut*)	205
PsychInfo	26/11/21	(early AND year* OR eyfs OR reception OR preschool OR nurser* OR foundation AND stage OR kindergar*) (behav* OR conduct) (perception* OR view* OR opinion* OR construct*)	270
Web of science	25/11/21	(early AND year* OR eyfs OR reception OR preschool OR nurser* OR foundation AND stage) (behavio*) (causal AND attribution* OR perception* OR view* OR attribut*)	40
Web of science	26/11/21	(early AND year* OR eyfs OR reception OR preschool OR nurser* OR foundation AND stage OR kindergar*) (behav* OR conduct) (perception* OR view* OR opinion* OR construct*)	42
Scopus	25/11/21	(early AND year* OR eyfs OR reception OR preschool OR nurser* OR foundation AND stage) (behavio*) (causal AND attribution* OR perception* OR view* OR attribut*)	17

| Scopus | 26/11/21 | (early AND year* OR eyfs OR reception OR preschool OR nurser* OR foundation AND stage OR kindergar*) (behav* OR conduct) (perception* OR view* OR opinion* OR construct*) | 22 |

7.2 Table with details of excluded studies at full-text level in systematic literature review.

Study	Overview	Reasons for Exclusion
Shahinfar, Fox, & Leavitt (2000)	Parents of children attending a Head Start pre-school and their children reported on exposure to community violence, distress and behavioural problems. Findings showed that internalising problems correlated with witnessing violence and externalising problems correlated with being victims of violence.	• Participants were parents and children, not practitioners. • Focus was on behaviour out of an educational setting.
Chan, Bull, Ng, Waschl, & Poon (2021)	Teacher ratings of pre-school children on the CBRS were collected at three time points in a longitudinal study in an attempt to identify the factor structure at each level for the rating scale. Three factors were identified at the within level: basic interpersonal skills, advanced interpersonal skills, and learning-related social skills. Two factors were identified at the between level related to teacher and classroom characteristics.	• Focus of the study was to evaluate a measure, not to gather perspectives.
Poulou (2017)	The link between pre-school teachers' perceptions of their own emotional intelligence and students' emotional difficulties	• Focus of the study was on emotional intelligence rather than behaviour.

	and social skills was explored. Findings identified that teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence were important predictors of students' emotional and behavioural difficulties.	
Määttä, Ray, Roos, & Roos (2016)	Explored parent and pre-school personnel's opinions on factors influencing children's sedentary behaviours using a socio-ecological model. This focused on screen use at home and the daily agenda at school. Findings showed that personnel's motivation at school and lack of rules at home increased sedentary behaviours. The majority of participants shared an understanding that children in their care were not sedentary	• Focus on sedentary behaviours not challenging behaviours.
Gartstein, Putnam, & Rothbart (2012)	Primary caregivers completed the Early Childhood Behavior Questionnaire regarding 3 age groups- 3 to 6 months, 6 to 9 months and 9 to 12 months. Caregivers then completed the same questionnaire when their children were between 18 and 32 months. This aimed to examine the contributions of early temperament to toddler and pre-school age behaviour. Negative	• Age of children- babies and toddlers as focus. • Participants were only caregivers. • Focus on behaviour outside of an educational setting.

	emotionality was most closely related to behaviour problems.	
Tittmann & Rudolph (2007)	Exploring aggressive behaviour and sociometric status of pre-school children to ascertain attributions of responsibility and emotion in children.	• Full text could not be accessed in English language.
Male (2003)	Aimed to elicit teachers' perceptions of pupils' challenging behaviour including which behaviours concerned them, their responses, effective strategies, believed causes and stress caused by it. Findings revealed that teachers felt they were effective in dealing with behaviours but were frustrated, angry and upset by it. They recognised the communicative basis of behaviour but used strategies to diffuse rather than prevent.	• Age range of children was 5-11 year olds with no distinction in ages in findings.
Dadds, Fraser, Frost, & Hawes (2005)	A community sample of children were tested 12 months apart using the Antisocial Process Screening Device which considers early signs of psychopathy. This aimed to consider the predictive validity of callous-unemotional (CU) traits as a precursor for antisocial behaviour or conduct disorder. Results found that CU traits had	• Focus on predictive validity of a measure rather than perspectives. • Children as participants rather than parents or practitioners.

small but significant predictive

value for boys and older girls.

7.3 Weight of Evidence scoring criteria.

Each study was judged based on the following criteria. Studies were given a score of 2 for fully meeting the criteria stated, 1 for partially meeting the criteria, and 0 for not meeting the criteria. Studies were then given a score for WoE A, WoE B, and WoE C as follows:

WoE A: 0-5 (low), 6-9 (medium), 10-12 (high)

WoE B: 0-2 (low), 3-4 (medium) 5-6 (high)

WoE C: 0-3 (low), 4-5 (medium), 6-8 (high)

WoE D was then calculated from the average of these weightings to give an overall weighting of low, medium, or high.

Studies are numbered as follows:

1. *Jamil, F. M., Emerson, A., McKown, G., & Stephan, A. T. (2021)*
2. *Yoder, M. L., & Williford, A. P. (2019)*
3. *Major, S. O., Seabra-Santos, M. J., & Gaspar, M. F. (2018)*
4. *Dobbs, J., & Arnold, D. H. (2009)*
5. *Maniadaki, K., Sonuga-Barke, E. J. S., & Kakouros, E. (2003)*
6. *Zhang, X., & Sun, J. (2011)*
7. *Nungesser, N. R., & Watkins, R. V. (2005)*
8. *Kasik, L., & Gál, Z. (2016)*
9. *Al-Thani, T., & Semmar, Y. (2017)*

Weight of Evidence A- *Quality of execution* of the research methods of the included studies (within the requirements of that method)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Are the characteristics of participants clearly described?	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1

Is the sampling method described in detail?	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Are the main characteristics of the setting described?	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Are the measures used named and described?	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
Is the data analysis method described?	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
Are results presented clearly?	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2
WOE A overall score	7	10	10	9	8	10	6	7	8

Weight of Evidence B- *The appropriateness of the research methods* of the included studies (for answering the review question)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Does the study use a quantitative	0	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
design using a survey or questionnaire?										
Does the study use a Likert scale or ranking?	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	
Does the study use relevant data analysis including factor analysis or multi-variate analysis of variance?	0	2	1	2	2	1	0	1	1	
WOE B overall score	0	6	5	5	6	5	4	5	4	

Weight of Evidence C- *Relevance of the focus* of the application of the research method of included studies (for answering the review question)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Does the study focus on challenging behaviour?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Does the study consider	2	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	0

attributions directly?									
Does the study collect data from practitioners and parents?	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Is the study only within the Early Years?	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
WOE C	7	7	5	6	4	5	6	6	4

7.4 The 73 items (Raspin, 2019) which were presented to the focus group for adaptation.

1. Parents let their children get away with too much

2. School staff not noticing good work

3. Too much class work is given

4. Pupil is bored

5. Parents bully their children

6. There are fights and arguments at home

7. Teachers are too strict

8. Pupils do not like the teacher

9. Lack of consistency between home and school

10. Other pupils stir up trouble

11. Parent's behaviour sets a bad example

12. School staff not seeming to punish bad behaviour

13. Other pupils have intolerant attitudes

14. School staff are rude to pupils

15. Pupils' feelings about themselves

16. Changes in school routine

17. Government pressures on schools (budget cuts, attainment objectives etc.)

18. Pupil needs more help in class

19. Too many children with special educational needs in one class

20. Parents have no control over their children

21. Parental separation

22. Teachers seeming to have an unfair system of punishments

23. Parents not ensuring their children have appropriate opportunities and skills to communicate and interact with themselves and other adults

24. Teachers are not supported in the school

25. Too much homework is given

26. Teacher's workload is too high

27. Pupil does not want to stand out as good

28. Teaching Assistants are too strict

29. Other pupils wanting to copy work

30. Parents are uncaring

31. Pupil has experienced trauma

32. Class work is too difficult

33. Pupil has an intolerant attitude

34. Pupil wants to be in charge

35. Other pupils encourage it

36. Parents do not accept any responsibility for disciplining their child

37. Alcohol/drug abuse by a family member

38. Teachers are tired

39. Teachers are too soft

40. Pupils are picked on by teachers

41. Pupil likes misbehaving

42. Pupil is picked on or tormented by other pupils

43. Teachers give more time to pupils who misbehave

44. Pupil's overall physical wellbeing (e.g. diet, physical fitness)

45. Parents have intolerant attitudes

46. Teachers shout all the time

47. Pupil wants to fit in

48. Parents are not limiting their child's screen time at home

49. Teachers have a lot of time out of the classroom

50. Parents do not give their child attention of praise when they are good

51. Behaviour expectations are inconsistent among school staff

52. Pupil wants attention

53. School staff have intolerant attitudes

54. Parent's mental health

55. Pupil is unfairly blamed

56. Teaching Assistants are not given sufficient training

57. Nobody likes the pupil

58. School staff have favourites

59. Class sizes

60. Teachers and Teaching Assistants do not communicate well with each other

61. Problems at home

62. Teacher's general classroom management

63. Teachers have bad moods

64. Parents seek medical explanations to excuse, and to avoid addressing, challenging behaviour

65. Pupil's personality

66. Pupil is worried about other things

67. Parents do not show respect for others (teachers, police, other parents, etc.)

68. Teachers seeming to have an unfair system of rewards

69. Pupil is tired

70. Pupil does not know how to behave

71. Families do not have enough money to eat or buy clothes

72. School staff do not listen to pupils

73. School staff lack awareness of pupil's culture

7.5 Information sheet provided for recruitment of focus group participants.

I am a second year Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Nottingham, currently on placement with Birmingham Educational Psychology Service.

For my thesis research I will be exploring perceptions of challenging behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This work will build on previous attribution studies which has focused on primary and secondary age groups. It is hoped that the current research will capture the complexity of working within EYFS and go on to support a general understanding of patterns of attributions for challenging behaviour to promote early intervention and guide appropriate support which may ultimately prevent exclusions.

The main phase of my research will involve an online survey to explore practitioner and parent causal attributions. However, before I start this phase it is essential that the questionnaire is made as relevant to EYFS as possible through **virtual focus groups.**

Focus groups will consist of 3-5 Early Years leaders and will be approximately 1 hour long via MS Teams. Participants will be presented with the items on the existing questionnaire to review and to comment upon the relevance to the EYFS context. Focus group participants will be asked to identify any items that they feel should be removed or reworded, or any items that may need adding. The items will then be updated to reflect the focus group feedback for the main phase of the study.

Focus groups will not be recorded and any notes made by the researcher will be shared with participants. All responses will remain anonymous. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and even if you decide to participate you may withdraw at any point, including during the focus group. All data from the focus groups will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Information will be stored securely and in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

If you decide that you may be interested in participating, you will be sent a consent form and a convenient date will be arranged for April/May 2021. **If you are interested in taking part in the initial focus groups, or have any further questions, please contact me directly at rheanna.geoghegan@birmingham.gov.uk**

Thank you in advance,

Rheanna

7.6 Table outlining changes made to the items following the focus group.

Action	Items	Comments
Removed	1. *Too much class work is given*	24 items excluded
	2. *Parents bully their children*	following focus group
	3. *Pupils do not like the teacher*	due to irrelevance to age
	4. *Other pupils stir up trouble*	group/setting factors or
	5. *School staff not seeming to punish bad behaviour*	due to being
	6. *Other pupils have intolerant attitudes*	encapsulated in other items.
	7. *School staff are rude to pupils*	
	8. *Teachers seeming to have an unfair system of punishments*	
	9. *Too much homework is given*	
	10. *Pupil does not want to stand out as good*	
	11. *Other pupils wanting to copy work*	
	12. *Class work is too difficult*	
	13. *Pupil has an intolerant attitude*	
	14. *Pupil wants to be in charge*	
	15. *Other pupils encourage it*	
	16. *Alcohol/drug abuse by a family member*	
	17. *Teachers are too soft*	
	18. *Pupils are picked on by teachers*	
	19. *Pupil wants to fit in*	

	20. Teachers have a lot of time out of the classroom	
	21. School staff have intolerant attitudes	
	22. Pupil is unfairly blamed	
	23. Nobody likes the pupil	
	24. Teachers seeming to have an unfair system of rewards	
Reworded	*ALL ITEMS:* *Pupil(s)* changed to *child(ren)* *Teachers* changed to *practitioners*	ALL ITEMS: To account for age and language used in settings To include variety of practitioners with varying job titles including TA, nursery nurses etc.
	1. *Child needs more support (from Pupil needs more help in class)*	6 new items reworded or combining multiple items following discussion in focus group
	2. *Family mental health issues (from Parent mental health issues)*	
	3. *Parent's behaviour sets a bad example including intolerant or disrespectful attitudes (from Parents have intolerant attitudes AND Parent's behaviour sets a bad example AND Parents have intolerant attitudes AND Parents do not*	

show respect for others (teachers, police, other parents, etc.))

4. *Setting staff do not communicate effectively with children* (from *School staff do not listen to pupils*)

5. *Practitioners let external stressors affect them at work e.g. too tired, personal wellbeing* (from *Teacher's workload is too high* AND *Teachers are tired* AND *Teachers have bad moods*)

6. *Setting staff do find opportunities to notice good behaviour* (from *School staff not noticing good work*)

Kept	1. *Practitioners are too strict* 2. *Too many children with special educational needs in one group* 3. *Practitioners shout all the time* 4. *Behaviour expectations are inconsistent* 5. *Practitioners have favourites* 6. *Class/group sizes*	38 items kept in without changes except to terminology of pupil to child and teacher to practitioner.

7. *Practitioners do not communicate well with each other*
8. *General classroom/setting management*
9. *Staff lack awareness of child's culture*
10. *Practitioners are not given sufficient training*
11. *Practitioners give more time to children who misbehave*
12. *Changes in routine*
13. *Practitioners are not supported in the setting*
14. *Lack of consistency between home and setting*
15. *Parents not ensuring their children have appropriate opportunities and skills to communicate and interact with themselves and other adults*
16. *Parents are uncaring*
17. *Child has experienced trauma*
18. *Parental separation*
19. *Parents are not limiting their child's screen time at home*
20. *Parents do not give their child attention or praise when they are good*

21. *Parents seek medical explanations to excuse or avoid addressing challenging behaviour*

22. *Families do not have enough money to eat or buy clothes*

23. *Parents let their children get away with too much*

24. *Parents have no control over their child*

25. *Parents do not accept any responsibility for disciplining their child*

26. *There are fights and arguments at home*

27. *Problems at home*

28. *Child is bored*

29. *Child likes misbehaving*

30. *Child is picked on or tormented by other children*

31. *Child's overall physical wellbeing (e.g. diet, physical fitness)*

32. *Child wants attention*

33. *Child's personality*

34. *Child is worried about other things*

35. *Child is tired*

36. *Child does not know how to behave*

	37. *Childs' feelings about themselves*	
	38. *Government pressures on settings (budget cuts, attainment objectives, changes to curriculum etc.)*	
Added	1. *Practitioners do not want to sanction children*	9 items added following discussion in the focus group around what may cause challenging behaviour and these not being reflected in existing items.
	2. *The environment is not stimulating enough for children*	
	3. *Parents do not communicate effectively with their child*	
	4. *Lack of boundaries at home*	
	5. *Copying other children's behaviour*	
	6. *Child cannot regulate their emotions*	
	7. *Child's language skills*	
	8. *Child's social skills*	
	9. *Child's reputation*	

7.7 Information sheet and consent question presented at the beginning of the online survey.

An investigation of practitioner and parent causal attributions for perceived challenging behaviour in Early Years Foundation Stage.

Researcher: Rheanna Geoghegan (Trainee Educational Psychologist)
rheanna.geoghegan@nottingham.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr Nathan Lambert (Academic and Professional Tutor)
nathan.lambert@nottingham.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in a piece of research exploring the causal attributions held by practitioners and parents for perceived challenging behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Before you decide if you would like to participate, it is important that you understand what the research entails. Please read the given information fully and with care.

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. You will be presented with a list of statements, each of which represents a possible cause of challenging behaviour. You will be asked to indicate **how important you think each statement is as a cause of challenging behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage**.
All answers given will remain anonymous. Your completed questionnaire will be analysed along with other participants' completed questionnaires to determine which factors parents and practitioners think are most important in causing challenging behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The questionnaire should take around 10 minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and if you decide to participate you may withdraw at any point, including during the study. All data from the study will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Information will be stored securely and in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

If you have any questions before, during or after the study, please contact the researcher directly at the provided email address.

Do you agree with the following statement:

"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."

Yes

No

7.8 Demographic questions asked in the survey.

2. Are you a practitioner currently working with 3-5 year olds in a Nursery School or as part of Early Years Foundation Stage in a school (Nursery/Reception)?

OR

Are you the parent of a child who is aged 3-5 years old and is currently attending a Nursery School or part of Early Years Foundation Stage in a school (Nursery/Reception)?

I am a practitioner working in EYFS

I am the parent of a child in EYFS

3. If you are an Early Years Practitioner, please state your current job role.
Please state n/a if you are not an Early Years Practitioner.

4. Are you currently located in the United Kingdom?

Yes

No

5. Which country are you currently located in?

England

Wales

Scotland

Northern Ireland

6. Which of these describes your current age?

Under 18 years

18-24 years old

25-34 years old

35-44 years old

45-54 years old

55-64 years old

65 years or older

Prefer not to say

7. Which of these best describes your gender?

Female

Male

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

Other

7.9   The final 53 items included in the survey.

Please rate how important you perceive each of the following statements to be in causing challenging behaviour for 3–5-year-olds.

(Very Important; Quite Important; Neither Important Nor Unimportant; Not Very Important; Not Important At All)

*Please note that 'practitioner' refers to any member of staff working with children within the setting including teachers, teaching assistants, nursery nurses etc.

1. Practitioners are too strict
2. Lack of boundaries at home
3. Child is bored
4. Parents do not communicate effectively with their child
5. Behaviour expectations are inconsistent
6. Practitioners have favourites
7. Child has experienced trauma
8. Practitioners give more time to children who misbehave
9. Changes in routine
10. Too many children with special educational needs in one group
11. Practitioners shout all the time
12. Parental separation
13. Child is picked on or tormented by other children
14. Child's overall physical wellbeing (e.g. diet, physical fitness)
15. There are fights and arguments at home
16. Setting staff do not communicate effectively with children
17. Lack of consistency between home and setting
18. Problems at home
19. Child likes misbehaving
20. Parents seek medical explanations to excuse or avoid addressing challenging behaviour
21. Child's personality
22. Child is worried about other things

23. Family mental health issues

24. Child wants attention

25. Practitioners let external stressors affect them at work e.g. too tired, personal wellbeing

26. Parent's behaviour sets a bad example including intolerant or disrespectful attitudes

27. Practitioners are not supported in the setting

28. Parents not ensuring their children have appropriate opportunities and skills to communicate and interact with themselves and other adults

29. Staff lack awareness of child's culture

30. Practitioners are not given sufficient training

31. Child's social skills

32. Families do not have enough money to eat or buy clothes

33. Child's reputation

34. Parents do not accept any responsibility for disciplining their child

35. Child is tired

36. Government pressures on settings (budget cuts, attainment objectives, changes to curriculum etc.)

37. Class/group sizes

38. The environment is not stimulating enough

39. Parents are uncaring

40. Parents do not give their child attention or praise when they are good

41. Child's language skills

42. Parents are not limiting their child's screen time at home

43. Practitioners do not want to sanction children

44. Parents let their children get away with too much

45. Child cannot regulate their emotions

46. Parents have no control over their child

47. Child does not know how to behave

48. General classroom/setting management

49. Setting staff do not find opportunities to notice good behaviour

50. Child's feelings about themselves

51. Child needs more support

52. Copying other children's behaviour

53. Practitioners do not communicate well with each other

7.10 Email sent to schools and nurseries for dissemination of survey.

To whom it may concern,

I hope that this email finds you well 😊

I am a second year Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Nottingham, currently on placement with Birmingham Educational Psychology Service.

For my thesis research I will be exploring **perceptions of challenging behaviour in the Early Years Foundation Stage.** This work will build on previous attribution studies which have focused on primary and secondary age groups. It is hoped that this research go on to support a general understanding of patterns of attributions for challenging behaviour to promote early intervention and guide appropriate support which may ultimately prevent exclusions.

For the main phase of my research, I am looking for practitioners working in EYFS (nursery schools and school nursery or reception) and parents of children who attend EYFS (nursery schools and school nursery or reception) to complete a short online survey. This research aims to gather as many perspectives as possible across the UK. Thus, **it would be greatly appreciated if you could share this with all EY practitioners and with parents of children in EYFS to be completed**, and to complete it yourselves please if relevant.

I have drafted below a brief introduction that can be sent along with the link in an email to parents and practitioners but feel free to tweak this or to send this with your own message.

Are you the parent of a child attending an Early Years setting? Or do you work in an Early Years setting?

This is your opportunity to help us to understand what may cause challenging behaviour for young children by completing this short, online research survey:

https://nottinghampsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cZsytVRHvaYbdmm

The findings from this research aim to consider ways in which exclusions can be prevented and to enhance the support that settings can offer to young children.

Please note, paper copies are available upon request.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at rheanna.geoghegan@nottingham.ac.uk

Thank you in advance,

Rheanna Geoghegan

7.11 Example of message used on social media for dissemination of survey.

Hi all! I am looking for participants for my DAEP thesis research! I am currently looking for EYFS practitioners and parents of 3–5-year-olds who attend a nursery school or school EYFS to complete a short online survey. Any shares or completions would be hugely appreciated!

Please see link below:

https://nottinghampsych.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cZsytVRHvaYbdmm

7.12 Ethical approval letter from University of Nottingham Research Ethics Committee.

The University of Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

School of Psychology

The University of Nottingham

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

Ref: **S1311**

Wednesday 7th April

Dear Nathan Lambert and Rheanna Geoghegan
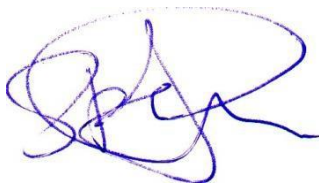
Ethics Committee Review

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research '*An investigation of practitioner and parent causal attributions for perceived challenging behaviour in Early YearsFoundation Stage*'

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. TheCodes of Practice setting out these responsibilities have been published by the BritishPsychological Society and the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concernswhatever 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. EthicsCommittee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certifythat they have been met.
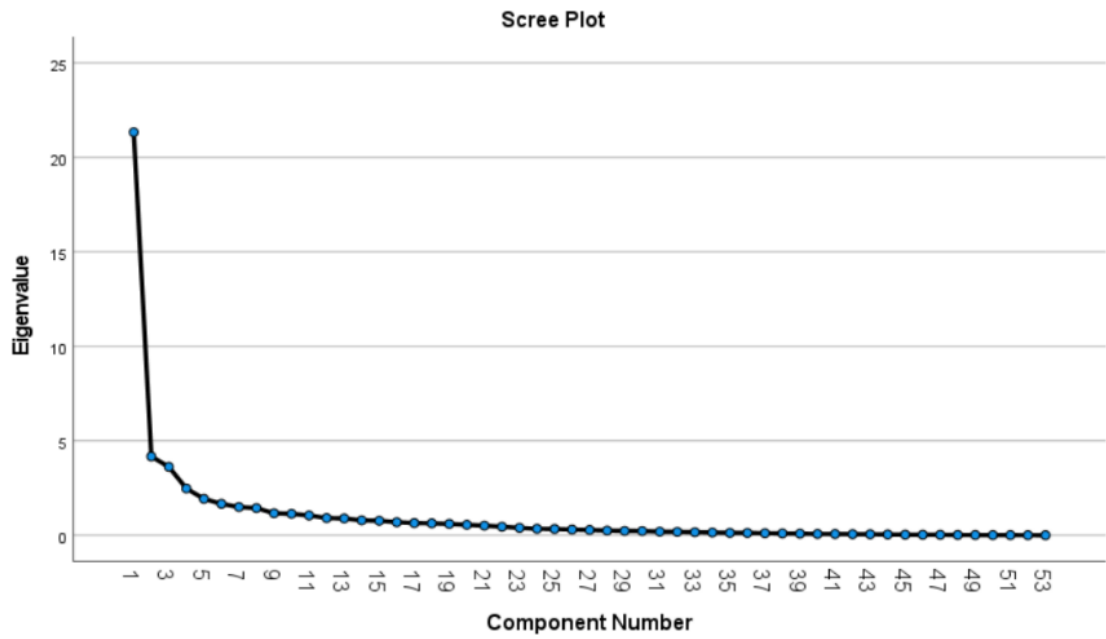
Yours sincerely

Professor Stephen Jackson   Chair, Ethics Committee

7.13 The scree plot from the exploratory factor analysis conducted with the practitioner data.
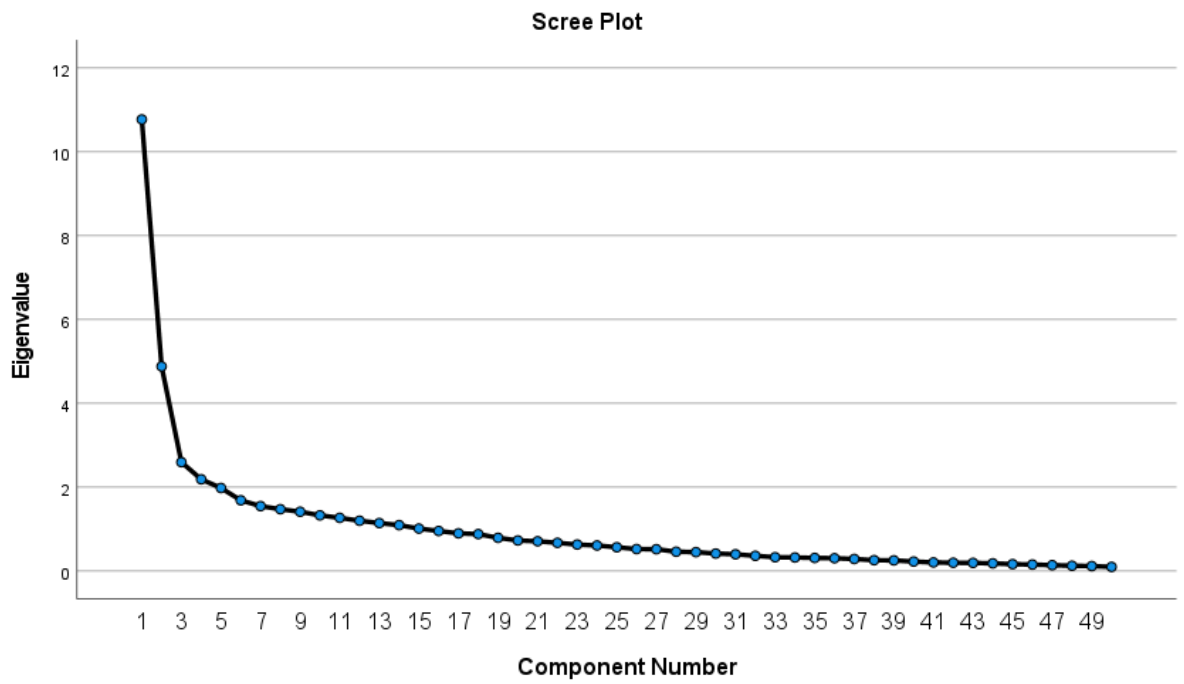
Scree Plot

7.14 The scree plot from the exploratory factor analysis conducted with
the parent data.

Scree Plot

7.15 A table to show the shared items between factors compared from the practitioner model and the parent model.

Similar factors		Shared items
Practitioner model	**Parent model**	
Factor 1 *Ineffective setting practice due to lack of practitioner skills/knowledge and unhelpful practitioner values, and the impact of this on the child's sense of self*	Factor 2 *Ineffective setting practice including management, training, support and interactions, and government pressures*	1. Practitioners do not communicate well with each other 2. Practitioners shout all the time 3. Setting staff do not find opportunities to notice good behaviour 4. Setting staff do not communicate effectively with children 5. Practitioners have favourites 6. Practitioners are not given sufficient training 7. The general management of the setting 8. The environment is not stimulating enough 9. Practitioners are not supported in the setting 10. The child needs more support 11. Practitioners let external stressors affect them at work e.g., too tired, personal wellbeing

Factor 2 *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*	Factor 1 *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour at home and in setting, and child's wellbeing*	1. Parents have no control over their child 2. Parents seek medical explanations to excuse or avoid addressing challenging behaviour 3. Parents do not accept any responsibility for disciplining their child 4. The child likes misbehaving 5. Parents let their children get away with too much 6. Parents' behaviour sets a bad example including intolerant or disrespectful attitudes 7. The child's personality 8. Parents do not give their child attention or praise when they are good 9. Setting staff do not find opportunities to notice good behaviour 10. Parents are uncaring
Factor 2 *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful caregiver values and poor modelling of behaviour*	Factor 3 *Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*	1. Lack of boundaries at home 2. Lack of consistency between home and setting

Factor 3 *Situational stressors, challenging home environments and resulting worries*	Factor 3 *Situational stressors, challenging home environments and unclear/inconsistent expectations*	1. There are fights and arguments at home 2. The child has experienced trauma 3. Problems at home
Factor 4 *Child's wants and current lack of skills*	Factor 1 *Lack of behaviour management at home, unhelpful values and poor modelling of behaviour at home and in setting, and child's wellbeing*	1. The child does not know how to behave 2. The child's lack of social skills