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**An exploration of non-native parents' experiences of
the UK education system**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science by
Research (Human and Health)

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Acknowledgement

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

Dedicated to my inspirational grandfather Mohammad Nawaz.

To my parents and siblings; thank you for your unconditional love and support. I would also like to express my gratitude towards Romessa and Zara, I am truly blessed to have you in my life!

Finally, to my supervisor Dr Jane Tobbell, I cannot thank you enough for all of your guidance, support and encouragement throughout this process.

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the experiences and histories of non-native parents' and their navigation of the UK education system. Framed on sociocultural understandings of human behaviour, the research employed an interpretative epistemology. An interview re-interview process was carried out with a sample of South Asian mothers. A comprehensive thematic analysis revealed a number of key themes which contribute to a greater understanding of diverse-heritage parental aspirations and involvement. Cultural differences and barriers to inclusion were explored with emphasis on implications for schools and policymakers. The research suggests that it would be highly beneficial in promoting interaction between the community and schools if more attention is paid to helping both parents and teachers alike.

Prologue

In the final year of completing my undergraduate Psychology degree I undertook the Psychology of Education module, which had a lasting impact on my interest within this field. Throughout the module, I developed a passion for challenging existing practises and promoting change. I carried out a case study and interviewed my mother about her 'learning story'.

Some may describe my mother and her 6 siblings as 'Generation 1.5'; an obscure term used to label those who relocated at a young age. They are neither first generation immigrants, nor were they born in the country in which they reside. (Asher, 2011). The literature, however, does not differentiate between labels; the general consensus is that children of immigrants will suffer academically. However, this did not ring true for my family. My aunties, uncles and older cousins had achieved high academically and established careers in a number of respectable fields.

This did not happen by chance. My grandfather, Mohammad Nawaz, migrated to the United Kingdom in 1964. He left behind his job as a science teacher with a BSc (Hons) in Chemistry to work in a factory in order to support his own family and his orphaned nieces. This is a common pattern that characterizes the migration of men in developing countries (Desai & Banerji, 2008). He was also seeking greater opportunities in education for his children. In those days, girls in Pakistan were not encouraged to pursue higher education, and boys were destined to become labourers in order to financially support the household. My grandfather was staunchly opposed to either of these outcomes for the future of any of his children. He therefore moved to England alone and began this new journey. Again, this was the norm as state policies worldwide encouraged solo male migration (Desai & Banerji, 2008). Yabiku, Agadjanian & Sevoyan (2010) explain that in many situations, men's labour migration is a 'purposeful family strategy'. My grandmother joined him in 1966 and came to live in England alongside him. She found the weather too harsh and the food too bland. It wasn't home, and it wasn't comfortable. She returned to Pakistan briefly but relocated to the UK permanently in 1979. This

marked a point in the Nawaz family's story that would have a lasting effect on the generations to come.

Of seven children, all but one (due to age) attended compulsory education upon arrival. Following this, five completed various qualifications which propelled them into careers of their choice. Three of the siblings reached higher education, to the family's delight. All of them managed their varying levels of education whilst juggling cultural expectations, such as getting married and having children. These children formed 'Generation 2' of the Nawaz family.

The literature review I conducted during the case study provided me with an insight into the dispiriting trends concerning immigrant parents and the academic achievement of their children. I am a part of generation 2 in the Nawaz family along with 20 of my first cousins. Every single one of my cousins (of age) have attended university, obtained a degree and achieved a career in a field they love. Such educational and career outcomes contrasted the general trends I was finding within the literature. Therefore, the aim in interviewing my mother was to understand the reasons behind the academic success of families such as mine. This piece of research identified a number of contributory factors to the notable achievements of so many members of my family. My mother and her extended family were found to have created an enabling community of practice within their new society and they also established a culture of success. The research challenged the view of diverse-heritage families and the effect on achievement; showing how influential the practices that these families employ can be.

Rationale

The current thesis aims to build upon these findings by exploring the experiences of other parents navigating the UK educational system. A synthesis of various subtopics will first provide an enhanced understanding into the area of diverse-heritage parents and their experiences, practises, involvements and understandings of the educational system. The research will then study the histories and accounts of these parents, interpreting meaning and exploring their accounts from a sociocultural

perspective. This rationale provides the justification for the following research questions.

Research questions:

- How do non-native parents understand the UK education system?
- How do these parents interact or otherwise with the education system?
- How do these parents view education and their children's participation in it?

Summary of Thesis

Literature Review

The literature review covers various factors that immigrants face, which may influence parental involvement. Socioeconomic status is characterised by a number of dimensions, such as parental education and deprivation (APA, n.d.). These elements are discussed in relation to diverse-heritage student's attainment. The achievement gap, parental involvement, aspirations and inclusion within schools are all topics covered in the literature review; explored using sociocultural explanations for human behaviour.

Methodology

The methodological approach for the research emerged from sociocultural understandings of human behaviour; with such ontology demanding an interpretivist epistemology. This allows exploration and meaning interpretations of rich datasets. (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Dieronitou, 2014). The methodology chapter outlines the interview process, with reference to ethical considerations and the interconnection of method with methodology.

Analysis

The analysis chapter presents the findings of the current study. Four key themes emerged, which are presented using direct quotes from the data. Meanings are interpreted using previous research, reference to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory and sociocultural theoretical frameworks for explaining behaviour.

Conclusion

The final chapter, the conclusion, summarises the findings and analysis. Limitations of the research are discussed, whilst recommendations for further research are provided. The conclusion also highlights implications for parents, educational professionals and policymakers with regards to diverse-heritage parents.

Literature Review

In the following chapter, relevant literature surrounding the UK educational system will be reviewed. Issues in areas such as immigration, achievement, socio-economic status, parental involvement and aspirations, inclusion and linguistic barriers will be explored in relation to diverse-heritage communities. This literature is important to the current study, as they are all factors that influence human development and learning. The topics that were chosen to be explored in this literature review interact with each other on different levels. Immigration can lead to education-related issues surfacing, socio-economic status can help explain educational disadvantage and parental involvement/aspirations can influence positive achievement and school success (Rogers et al., 2009; Fan, 2001). Sociocultural frameworks can also provide explanations for differences in behaviour between parents and the educational achievement of diverse-heritage children.

Immigration

International migration flows continue to expand simultaneously alongside the benefits and complexities for governments and policymakers (Hochschild & Mollenkopf, 2009). Relocation can be a traumatic experience for those experiencing it, with a number of theories outlining the processes that may transpire during the shift. However, there seems to be an anti-immigrant rhetoric in the post 9/11 political climate. Negative treatment of immigrants has been found to result in damaging outcomes and harm integration. Such interaction within the ecological system of an individual, according to Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework, can impede educational achievement and psychological wellbeing (Jensen, 2007). The following section will discuss, in depth, the issues immigrants may face within their new society.

Immigration is a complex phenomenon, defined as "the movement of non-native people into a country, in order to settle there" (Yakushko, 2009; Dictionary, 2012). This process can be a life crisis for people experiencing it (Choudhry, 2001). As of 2011, there are 7.5 million foreign-born/non-native residents in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2015). This equates to 11.9% of the population, a percentage that has only

increased since then. Official statistics reveal that 1 in 4 births in the UK are to foreign-born parents, which highlights the large part of society that 'immigrant' families truly are.

Researchers have studied the lives of individuals who are relocating and experiencing contact with culturally dissimilar influences. Intercultural contact leads to cultural change in one or both of the groups that come into contact with each other (Aretakis, 2011). This process has been termed 'acculturation' (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010). Assimilation may also take place, whereby an individual that is migrating will give up their cultural values in order to align their identity with the new, dominant culture (Aretakis, 2011).

The complexity of immigration is not to be underestimated; it is clear that various processes can transpire and influence those facing upheaval. The 'melting-pot' theory suggests that both the new and existing culture will adapt, with people from all cultures mixing or melting together in one big cultural pot (Shaul & Gramann, 1998). The metaphor came about in the early 20th Century, just as immigration in America was booming (Gloor, 2006). However, in later decades it was attacked, as it became apparent that the existing American public had no real regard for 'melting' with other races/cultures (Gloor, 2006). Following this, immigration policies in America adjusted and became more restrictive, which some labelled as state sponsored racism. Nevertheless, the melting pot theory has persisted, and for some it exemplifies the ideal model of immigration for America (Gloor, 2006).

Another philosophy defined as 'cultural pluralism' embraces and encourages cultural differences (Shaul & Gramann, 1998). However, researchers have found that in Britain, there seems to be very little support for multiculturalism and the preservation of different cultural customs (Heath & Tilley, 2005). They also discovered that their sample population were more favourable towards assimilation, whereby new members change their culture and customs to that of the new society. This is alarming, as it may loosely fit in line with the post 9/11 political climate, which has been exacerbated in recent times according to Krieg (2015). There was a 37% increase in hate crimes reported to the police in the fortnight within which the United Kingdom's European Union membership referendum took place (Katwala, Rutter &

Ballinger, 2016). In addition, Mark Potok, a senior fellow who monitors hate in extremism in the US claimed that he has witnessed a spike in hate crimes. The crimes included racist graffiti and attacks on women who were wearing the hijab (Sidahmed, 2016). Potok's opinion is that this sharp increase is 'absolutely, clearly' a result of Donald Trump's election win (Sidahmed, 2016).

An atmosphere filled with hostility and undertones of xenophobia can only influence the discourse on immigration in one direction (Yakushko, 2009). Great Britain has the longest history of diverse-heritage immigration and encompasses one of the largest and most ethnically diverse populations (Dustmann, Machin & Schönberg., 2010). However, in recent times the repertoire used within the immigration debate has a more sinister undertone. Parker (2015) found that in UK print media, asylum seekers were portrayed as unwanted invaders and criminals through use of various metaphors. Reicher (cited in Amer, 2015) calls out the potentially dangerous narrative that creates an "us" vs. "them", immigrant/non-immigrant group discourse.

With the immigration debate raging on, Dunt (2014) acknowledges that a voice you rarely hear from is that of immigrants, referencing a statistic that claims only 12% of all relevant articles actually contain quotes from immigrants. Karlsen and Nazroo (2013) found evidence for the political and social marginalisation of Muslims in Europe, which they themselves claim seriously affects their ability to feel at home in their new society. The researchers did not find evidence of self-segregation by these Muslims, who migrated to Europe from their home countries (Kalsen & Nazroo, 2013). The feelings of these immigrants can be somewhat explained by the way in which, linguistically, the media deals with the debate. There is a common consensus that immigration will only work if integration also works (Katwala et al., 2016). However, Dunt (2014) describes the irony within media coverage that seems to stress the importance of integration, but uses tone and language that pushes immigrants away and subsequently makes them feel 'less at home'. In addition, Katwala et al., (2016) believe that insufficient attention has been paid towards the way in which everyone, of all cultures, can live together. This may lead to 'separation', a strategy which negates integration, being employed by immigrants. If this happens, individuals retain their own culture completely reject any others (Leon, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a widely accepted theoretical framework for studying development (Neal & Neal, 2013). This theory places children's development in an ecological perspective, within the nested systems of their environment (Neal & Neal, 2013; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The interaction between biology, immediate family environment and the 'societal landscape' will influence development, with changes or conflict in any layer of environment affecting the rest of the layers (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). In light of the literature concerning immigration in Western society, this theoretical perspective spells disaster for any children involved. Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's theory; ethnicity, acculturation and societal influences are all part of the macrosystem of a child. Encounters with the different ecological systems will be shaped by the individuals' cultural and family-related differences (Paat, 2013). This suggests that their experiences will somewhat be influenced by factors completely out of their control, such as societal expectations and cultural roles (Stebleton, 2011). The consequences of this are not to be overlooked; Yakushko (2009) insists that the circumstances surrounding relocation carry repercussions, especially for immigrants arriving from third world countries. For example, Leon (2014) claims that acculturative stress, which is a risk factor related to immigration, has been linked to anxiety in both young people and adults. Furthermore, Yakushko (2009) notes that negative treatment of immigrants has been found to result in their increased vulnerability to anxiety-related disorders. In relation to education, the effects of acculturative stress have been observed in international students in higher education. Issues such as sleep deprivation, depression and academic failure as a result of acculturative stress are 'commonly seen' amongst this population; as they have no choice but to adapt in order integrate with the host culture (Luong, 2015). In this case, macrosystem influences have interacted with the individuals' microsystem, but rather than creating an environment that will 'mold' developmental pathways for them, the interaction has instead impeded their educational outcomes and psychological well-being (Luong, 2015; Jensen, 2007).

This section has introduced the issues that immigrants of all cultural backgrounds may face. The following section will briefly focus on South Asian parents in particular and their conceptualization of education.

South Asian Parents

This research aims to explore the way in which South Asian mothers navigate the UK educational system. Little existing literature focuses on these women and the experiences with the school system in England. Early research acknowledges the role that 1st generation South Asian women played in the 'reconstruction' of cultural traditions and their contributions towards the household economy (Ahmed, 2001). Such reports directly challenge stereotypical views of 'secluded, passive Asian women' (Ahmed, 2001). Another preexisting perception of South Asian women is that they are 'uninterested in education' (Bagguley & Hussain, 2016). However, this may not be a fair representation as Ahmed (2001) finds South Asian families to place a significant importance on the acquisition of academic qualifications. Participation rates of South Asian Muslim women are also steadily increasing (Ahmad, 2001). Dale et al. (2002) note a desire that South Asian parents have to ensure their children's success. There seems to be 'cultural value' to education amongst Asian groups, which has been considered an explanatory factor for high aspirations that these parents hold (Dale et al., 2002). Ijaz and Abbas (2010) consider the impact of an inter-generational change in attitude by South Asian Muslim parents on the education of their daughters. Regardless of generation, social class and ethnicity, there is a universal belief between Muslim parents of the importance of education for young women (Ijaz & Abbas, 2010). This may be due to the dynamism of family values and effort of parents socialising their daughters to construct 'British Muslim' identities (Basit, 1997). However, as the following section will explore, ethnic minority pupils have consistently been found to perform less well than their White peers (Bhattacharya, Ison & Blair, 2003). The next section will therefore focus on the achievement of diverse-heritage children, and investigate the various factors that can influence it.

Achievement of Diverse-Heritage Children

The literature that focuses on diverse-heritage and 'immigrant' children provides a stark picture of their educational success. The achievement gap, though on the decline, still exists and can be explained using the ecological systems theory, by understanding the various contexts that can affect achievement.

It is commonly suggested that youth who transition from one society to another, or have parents who were born elsewhere, will often experience education-related issues (Levels, Dronkers & Kraaykamp., 2008). This population will likely face various barriers to both enrolling and succeeding in higher education, according to Baum and Flores (2011). In support, Lin and Lu (2014) found significant educational differences between pupils with 'immigrant' and 'native' mothers, claiming that children with non-native parents may experience problems with achievement, without intervention. This research was conducted in Taiwan, where the experiences and achievement of immigrants will undoubtedly differ to those in the UK, which therefore poses problems for the generalizability of the results. However, it is still worthwhile noting that the narrative concerning immigrants and the achievement of their children is dispiriting worldwide.

Bhattacharrya et al. (2003) found that, on average, Bangladeshi, Black and Pakistani pupils 'perform less well' than their White peers during compulsory education. Pakistani children's numeracy scores in particular are said to deteriorate towards the end of primary school whilst for Bangladeshi pupils, both their numeracy and literacy scores decline (Ford, 2014). Furthermore, Pakistani and Bangladeshi adolescents have been found to achieve the fewest qualifications at the Further Education stage (Tackey, Barnes & Khambhaita, 2011). With regards to Higher Education, ethnic minority students are 'less likely' to achieve a first/upper second-class degree than their White counterparts (Bhattacharrya et al., 2003). Not only are there differences in the achievement of ethnic minorities versus 'Whites', Lymperopoulou (2015) notes that there is also a large difference in attainment between 'younger and older members' of ethnic minority groups. Specifically, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women aged 50+ are more than seven times as likely to have no qualifications than women of the same heritage in the 16-24 age bracket (Lymperopoulou, 2015). This is

understandable, as some of the older South Asian population may have migrated once they were past the compulsory school leaving age, but their children will have attended school from entry age. These adults, overall, are the most likely to possess no qualifications and they are also the least likely ethnic groups to participate in adult learning (Bhattacharrya et al., 2003).

There have been some changes to the ethnic inequalities in education, and the educational disadvantage of Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups did decline somewhat in the past two decades (Lymeropoulou & Parameshwaran, 2014). However, they admit that the disadvantage was still present and apparent in 2011. A similar sentiment is echoed by Ford (2014) who states that although progress in attainment of ethnic minority children has been made, these groups still face substantial disadvantages in further education and even employment. This raises an important question – why are diverse-heritage children facing disadvantages and consistently performing less well than their peers?

The ecological model may offer an explanation for such differences in achievement, and help with understanding the various contexts that can affect achievement (Becker & Luthar, 2002). As discussed, the child's environment consists of different layers or systems that interact and affect development. The macrosystem represents a distal level of the environment and encompasses core cultural beliefs and values of society (Stivaros, 2007). Becker and Luthar (2002) note that this level of the environment can exert influence over individuals in different ways. An example they provide is that of disadvantaged children potentially believing hard work and effort in school to be irrelevant to their academic outcomes, due to a history of experiencing prejudice and discrimination.

With regards to diverse populations, research suggests that children from ethnic minority communities, immigrants and refugees are much more likely to be unfairly characterized as being disaffected and are subsequently poorly served by their schools and teachers (Osler & Starkey, 2005). In line with theory, such treatment may influence this population's beliefs about their potential, and widen the achievement gap further. The implications for schools are clear; achievement gaps

between groups that are 'ethnically different' have the potential to cause social disruption and segregation (Dustmann et al., 2010).

The findings in this area highlight the multitude of factors that can affect achievement and result in the achievement gap. Educational disadvantage is seen as multi-dimensional, relating to issues within the home, school and community (Hanlon & Hayes, 2006). These are all factors concerning the socio-economic status of an individual. The following section will therefore address the different influences that may lead to a disadvantage for certain children and not others.

Socio-Economic Status

Educational disadvantage is multi-dimensional, and may be explained by the influence of socio-economic factors. Parental education and poverty; circumstances which children have no control over, are highly influential as determinants in their academic achievement. Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework can provide an explanation for perceived deficiencies in diverse-heritage children's learning and achievement; instability within the microsystem.

Bronfenbrenner views instability within the 'family life' microsystem as the most destructive force to children's development (Addison, 1992). Instability in family life can be caused by a number of stressful events or strains, which Eamon (2001) believes are triggered by economic deprivation. Varying levels of poverty are a factor of socio-economic status (SES). The SES of a family will influence children's developing macrosystem, and the impact may trickle through to the microsystem. SES is conceptualized as the class of an individual or group. It tends to be assessed as a combination of factors, such as education, income and occupation (APA, n.d.). SES is 'relevant' to education as a realm of social science and it is therefore unsurprising that a vast amount of research has focused on the influence of SES and educational achievement. A positive correlation between SES factors and children's educational achievement has been well established according to Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann, (2009). Furthermore, research has consistently linked lower SES to lower educational achievement and 'slower rates of academic progress', (APA, n.d.). However, Dubow et al., (2009) acknowledge the importance of differentiating between SES factors, rather than considering them as one, because some may be stronger predictors than others.

Parental Education

First generation immigrants decide to shift their entire lives for different reasons (Glick, Walker & Luz, 2013). They have varying levels of resources and qualifications/education when they arrive (Glick et al., 2013). Lee and Bowen, (2006) and Davis-Kean (2005) found that parental education is important in predicting children's achievement. Not only that, but they suggest that highly educated, middle-

class parents are more active in encouraging their children to develop their own aspirations (Dubow et al., 2009). Maternal education has been scrutinized in the literature, and it is reported to affect the 'reading readiness' of children (Raag et al., 2011). Long before this, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) established a link between maternal education and their children's subsequent 'intellectual outcomes'. They controlled for various other SES factors but maternal education was the only indicator with a significant link (Dubow et al., 2009). A mother without higher education is therefore commonly associated with lower academic achievement of their children. However, there is contradictory (albeit dated) evidence related to the effects of maternal education (Bornstein & Bradley, 2014). Rosenzweig and Wolpin (1994) found that an extra year of maternal education had a positive and marginally significant effect on children's achievement. A criticism of the research into parental education is that it is largely correlational, which does not necessarily prove causation (Magnuson, 2003).

Poverty

Poverty is a 'big impediment' and stumbling block in the way of educational attainment (Awan, Malik & Sarwar., 2008). Low income strongly predicts the educational outcomes of children facing this disadvantage (Hirsch, 2007). An example of the effect that poverty can have is shown in government statistics of GCSEs. Only around 25% of children that qualify for free school meals (FSM) will gain 'five good GCSEs/equivalent' (DfES, 2006, cited in Hirsch, 2007). However, this is an outdated statistic. Looking at the national 2015 GCSE results, achievement of 5+ A*-C (including English and Math) for FSM eligible children was 33.1% (DfE, 2016). This is an increase, however the sizeable achievement gap between this group and all other pupils still exists.

Family poverty is intertwined with a number of other 'co-factors', which may be determinants or mediators (Yoshikawa, Aber & Beardslee, 2012). A key factor in determining child poverty is the lack of opportunity available to parents with low qualifications/skillset (Hirsch, 2007). Such parents are unlikely to work and if they do, earnings will also be low (Hirsch, 2007). This is described as a co-factor of poverty by Yoshikawa, Aber and Beardslee (2012), who find that low attainment increases

the chances of raising children in poverty. This 'passing of traits' through generations goes a long way in explaining the persistent and unrelenting disadvantage that deprived children face in education (Goodman & Gregg, 2010). Much research has focused on the link between poverty and education and education has been found to reduce poverty in populations (Awan et al., 2011). In Pakistan, for example, the level of education achieved by the head of the household is the 'critical determinant' of poverty in that home (Awan et al., 2011).

Aside from the effects on attainment, there are a number of other ways in which disadvantaged children will be affected. For example, Hirsch (2007) argues that these children will have their attitudes to education shaped differently due to their deprived background. They are also more likely to feel 'anxious and unconfident' about school (Hirsch, 2007). Such findings provide implications for policy makers. Goodman and Gregg (2010) suggest that children from deprived backgrounds should be given help to develop the belief that their 'actions and efforts' can lead to higher education and better attainment. This outlook focuses more on what can be done to combat the effects of poverty from a young age, rather than accepting that the fate of these children has already been sealed.

However, they argue that disadvantaged children's aspirations and expectations for higher education should be raised from primary school, onwards. In recent times, Goodman and Gregg (2010) find that programmes proposing to raise educational aspirations will typically begin during secondary school. One popular programme in the UK was 'Aimhigher'; a university access scheme, which sought to increase the participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is worth noting that this particular scheme worked with young school children as well as university-age students (Boffey, 2011). The scheme was scrapped in 2010 by the government, with the Universities Minister announcing that there would be a £150m National Scholarship programme to replace it (BBC, 2010). In the same year, the Educational Maintenance Allowance was also removed. This was a grant that was paid to the poorest students at sixth forms/colleges (BBC, 2010). By 2012 the increase in tuition fees in the UK was implemented and maintenance grants were abandoned in 2016. These cuts and potentially sizeable debts may put off disadvantaged students

(Boffey, 2011) and therefore jeopardize aspirations and undoing the work that the schemes were accomplishing.

Income poverty rates vary, but are high amongst ethnic minority groups. Kenway and Palmer (2007) note that for Bangladeshis the rate is 65% and for Pakistanis it is 55%. These statistics, though increasingly outdated (2001 census: Kenway & Palmer, 2007) highlight the disadvantage that a large majority of minority groups have long faced; low income. Very few Pakistani and Bangladeshi families are on an average income, let alone an above average one (Kenway & Palmer, 2007). Such economic strain may lead to discord within the microsystem. This is because stressful life events appear to have an effect on the 'socioemotional functioning' of children within families that experience them. Those suffering will need to modify their behaviour in the face of such adversity, which may consequently produce psychological distress, erode parental coping strategies and even contribute to marital discord between parents (Eamon, 2001). This theoretical perspective suggests stresses the importance of parental involvement. The following section will therefore explore the numerous dimensions of parental involvement, with reference to cultural differences.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a contentious area of research when discussing achievement, as there are conflicting findings and some misconceptions in relation to diverse-heritage parents and their involvement. From the ecological systems perspective; proximal and distal influences within the layers of an individual's environment will affect their parenting style and overall involvement. There are implications for policymakers in highlighting the importance of the role of parents in children's development.

There is research to suggest that effective parental involvement is linked to higher achievement levels (Rogers et al., 2009). In promoting achievement, parental involvement (amongst other factors) is emphasized (Hill & Tyson, 2009). It is seen as an important strategy for advancing the 'quality of education' (Driessen, Smit & Slegers, 2005). The concept has been an 'important element' of effective and successful education for over 40 years (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). It is defined as a cluster of different 'behaviours and practices' (Georgiou, 2007). This includes the parents' attitudes, opinions, expectations and aspirations concerning their children's education (Georgiou, 2007).

Epstein et al. outlined the five dimensions of parental involvement (Unicef, n.d.):

1. Parenting
2. Helping with homework
3. Communication with school
4. Volunteering at school
5. Participating in school decision making

Georgiou (2007) acknowledges that though the concept and meaning is intuitive, the use of it within research has been 'vague and inconsistent'. Issues with the generalisability of the findings will therefore arise when different researchers use varying definitions, dimensions and methods to measure parental involvement (Georgiou, 2007). Nevertheless, in line with the dejecting narrative of low-SES, diverse-heritage parents; South Asian parents in Britain have been described as

being uninterested, having unrealistic educational expectations and having little to no relationship with schools (Crozier & Davies, 2006). They also found that educational professionals, including teachers and head teachers, labelled South Asian parents as 'hard to reach'. This is a phrase that the researchers admit holds negative connotations and is associated with difficult/obstructive behavior. In addition, it has been widely claimed that non-middle class parents are 'less effective' in intervening with school matters than middle-class parents (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009).

One frequent explanation for this is parents' own level of education, as discussed earlier. It has long been linked to more effective parental involvement within the literature. However, Finders and Lewis (1994) argue that there are a multitude of obstacles that may hinder involvement. In lieu of parental education, influential factors include cultural differences with the teachers, 'psychological barriers' due to their own academic failure (Georgiou, 2007) and their beliefs about themselves as parents (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007). These difficulties are all related to SES and are largely out of their control (Georgiou, 2007).

Katz, Corlyon, La Placa and Hunter (2007) suggest that the ecological model is a key theoretical advancement in the study of parenting. Bronfenbrenner's framework may therefore provide an explanation for ineffective involvement by diverse-heritage parents. The model, from a systems perspective, describes the influence that moves from distal 'societal' factors, to proximal 'familial' factors (Katz et al., 2007). For example, as a direct consequence of economic deprivation Eamon (2001) claims that parenting will be affected. It will result in inconsistent and harsh parenting style; with parents seemingly less involved and more emotionally 'unresponsive'. Eamon's (2001) suggestion highlights how influential the interaction between ecological systems can be on development. Such change or strain occurring within the macrosystem can seriously threaten harmony within the microsystem.

On the other hand, research has found that parents who possess enough money to feel comfortable raising their children are more likely to show an increased amount of warmth and affection (Driscoll & Nagel, 2010). Furthermore, Driscoll and Nagel (2010) note that these parents have greater communication with their children and are more democratic when dealing with them. They also placed more emphasis on

the development of creativity and independence, which are fundamental characteristics stressed by schools in the West. Not only do middle-class parents utilize their financial advantage and social capital to guarantee their children access to the best schools, but they also make use of the 'networks of acquaintances' they have built, and draw upon their knowledge in order to make sure their children are profiting from the most advantageous resources available to them (Katz et al., 2007).

Insight into parenting, and why style and involvement may differ between parents, can only be achieved once the interacting and interdependent factors within the ecological system are explored (Katz et al., 2007). Although parenting styles have been categorized by researchers and are seen to apply across cultures and classes, research has shown that lower-class parents are more likely to employ 'authoritarian' styles of parenting. According to Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1982), lower-class parents view their children's behaviour with a focus on the immediate consequences rather than investigating the motives and attitudes behind the behaviour, in the way that middle-class parents do. As discussed earlier, a financially difficult situation, which may be coupled with depression, anxiety and/or marital strain, has been found to result in harsher, less supportive parenting (Ryan, Fauth & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). These challenging circumstances are faced by parents of lower socio-economic status and Driscoll and Nagel (2010) argue that it is therefore understandable that their behaviour and parenting style may differ to those in a more financially comfortable position.

Researchers such as Kohn (1977) and Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1982) put forth an explanation for this crucial difference in parenting. After investigating the variances, Kohn (1977) connected them to the same characteristics that are also linked with level of parental occupation (Driscoll & Nagel, 2010). In line with this, Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1982) place particular emphasis upon the effect of the workplace on parents, claiming that it can affect both their perception of life and the way in which they interact with members of their family (Driscoll & Nagel, 2010). The direct consequence of this is that parenting styles will 'reflect' or mirror aspects of parents' work life (Driscoll & Nagel, 2010). These findings further illustrate the highly influential effect of interaction between distal and proximal layers of the environment.

The issue of parental involvement is therefore not as easy to solve as concluding that some parents are interested and others not due to their own education level. All parents are not the same, nor do they share the same 'needs'; which is a blanket assumption that researchers and policy makers of parental involvement seem to jump to (Crozier, 2001). Huss-Keeler (1997) found that Pakistani parents would demonstrate their interest and involvement in their child's education in a culturally different way than middle class parents would. The teachers misinterpreted this as a 'lack of interest' from the parents involved. As a consequence of this misunderstanding, the children were underestimated with regards to their learning and their achievement (Huss-Keeler, 1997). Parental involvement policies are known to fail in recognising the ethnic diversity between parents (Crozier, 2001). The nature of ethnic minority parental involvement differs (Kim, 2009), which we have seen can be misconstrued as disinterest (Huss-Keeler, 1997). Kim (2009) points out the numerous school-related barriers that can hinder involvement, such as teachers' perceptions and beliefs about minority parents, school friendliness/positive communication and school policies. Adjusting policies in line with all of this will lead to an improved mesosystem relationship between home and school, and guarantee the success of minority parental involvement (Kim, 2009). To strengthen this argument, Bronfenbrenner also argued that it would be in the best interest of society to promote both political and economic policies that highlight the importance of parent's roles in their children's development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Eamon (2001) agrees, arguing that the practices of parents, their relationships and their coping strategies will aid with selecting the most appropriate interventions for different families.

The literature overwhelmingly agrees on the importance of parental involvement. Fan's (2001) findings highlighted the long-term effect on academic development and growth that parental involvement produced. Parenting style is, according to the ecological framework, influenced by different factors within the environment. Although there are different explanations and findings relating to parenting, the concern lies where policymakers address these differences and tailor strategies to suit different parents. The following section will therefore explore inclusion within schools.

Inclusion

Inclusive education is a concept that cannot be detached from the notion of quality education. This signifies that education simply cannot be deemed 'good quality' unless it meets the needs of every single learner (Pinnock & Lewis, 2008). However, research has found that schools may not be meeting the needs of diverse-heritage parents with regards to their inclusion.

There is legislation in place in the UK that prohibits discrimination within education, and promotes inclusion. There are also regulations under international human rights law regarding inclusive education, which the UK must abide by (CSIE, 2013a). The Equality Act 2010 stipulates that it is unlawful for any education provider to discriminate against or between pupils on the grounds of disability, race, religion or belief, sex, pregnancy and maternity, or gender reassignment (CSIE, 2013b). Schools and other educational institutions must therefore work hard to be inclusive of people from all walks of life.

Research conducted in the area of inclusion within schools has brought interesting findings to light. Capper and Pickett (1994) found that pupils attending an inclusion-based school, seen as actively advocating the principles of inclusion, demonstrated increased acceptance, understanding and tolerance of individual differences. On the other hand, the students attending a 'non-inclusive', traditional structured school had the tendency to engage in stereotyping others, and held negative views of diversity and about pupils with disabilities. (Dyson, Farrell, Polat & Hutcheson, 2004). This highlights how crucial school policies and structural differences are, as they can have considerable influence over pupils and their perceptions of others.

There is research to suggest that schools may not be fulfilling diverse-heritage parent's needs when it comes to inclusion. Crozier and Davies (2007) argue that South Asian parents are not 'hard to reach', but rather they did not understand the education system and found it difficult to get involved. There are interventions in place that may have the right intentions behind them, but actually do more harm than good. An example is a recent intervention, which utilizes an A-D grading system for parents. These grades are based on parent's support of their children's education.

The strategy was formulated through the head teacher's 'frustration with parents' reluctance' in supporting their children (Ough, 2016). An aspect of the grading system that stood out was the fact that in order to achieve a 'B', parents' must 'work effectively with the school and understand its' work' (Ough, 2016). We have touched upon the struggles that ethnic minorities face in communicating with and understanding the school system, which is something that the intervention seems to ignore.

Research into interventions has almost always ignored 'broader contextual variables' that prevent minority parental involvement (Kim, 2009). However, such research would benefit from considering parents' connectedness with the local community and ease of access to local services (Katz et al., 2007). Furthermore, Katz et al., (2007) argue that research should address the way in which mainstream society can exclude these populations. The charitable organisation 'Save the Children' (Pinnock & Lewis, 2008) put together a report on making schools inclusive and conclude that much of the responsibility regarding inclusion and parental involvement lays with the education system. The main requirement of achieving inclusion in schools, they claim, is for schools/authorities to 'remove the barriers' that some children may experience. One of these barriers is, as previously discussed, lack of involvement from parents.

There has been little research into different strategies to encourage involvement of diverse-heritage parents. However, Abley, Jaffar and Gent (2004) investigated different initiatives to raise achievement amongst Pakistani and Muslim pupils. During their research, Abley et al., (2004) found that a lack of communication between the school and parents had an undesirable influence on the achievement of Pakistani pupils. This is in line with the ecological theory, which would cite a weak mesosystem link. The finding highlights the importance of a strong relationship between the two microsystem influences (home/school). The school in the research began holding gatherings/support sessions for diverse-heritage parents', in order to give them access to the school, the chance to discuss any concerns they may have had, and details of their child's progress. The meetings were fronted by bilingual teaching assistants so that the parents had an environment in which they could communicate in their 'home language'. (Abley et al., 2004). This was well received

by parents and showcases the type of inclusive practices that may be beneficial in helping struggling parents communicating more effectively with schools. Such outcomes strengthen the mesosystem parent-school link, which is vital as may support student success (Witte, 2015).

As discussed above, lack of inclusion is a factor that may result in a diminished mesosystem link, which would reduce home-school communication and parental involvement in school matters. Interventions have been seen as both successful and contentious. An obstruction in the way of progress in improving relations could be the linguistic barrier; an issue that will be explored in the following section.

Linguistic Barriers

Lack of communication and inclusion of diverse-heritage parents may obstruct home-school mesosystem relationships. Research has shown that the linguistic barrier can affect communication and inclusion within school environments, which may be extremely frustrating for parents and educational professionals. In line with the ecological systems theory, there are strong implications for school policymakers: it would be beneficial for everyone involved if positive home-school relationships were maintained in the face of linguistic barriers.

The statistics that show 'traditionally' lower levels of attainment for Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils, can be attributed not only to poverty/low SES, but also linguistic barriers (Runnymede Trust, 2012). There does, however, appear to be some sort of link between SES and degree of English skills. When visiting Pakistani families, Barron (2007) found that mothers often spoke 'little English' in the least affluent homes. 'Better English', on the other hand, was spoken by the more affluent mothers who wore clothes made out of richer fabrics (Barron, 2007). The consequences of linguistic difficulties on attainment have been made clear; educational trajectories for some children are at risk of being impeded by parental language barriers (Glick et al., 2013). This issue might actually affect more children than initially thought. DfE (2016) class children's 'First Language' as the one they are initially exposed to throughout early development and continue to be exposed to within the home. People within settings of the child's microsystem, such as immediate and extended family and members of the local community, may all speak this language. The government's definition of a first language does not necessitate that these children are fluent in this language or that they cannot speak English. With this in mind, the finding that the achievement of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) was lower than those with English as a first language (DfE, 2016) is alarming. It highlights the effect that the first language may have on achievement.

An explanation for this can be found within sociocultural understandings of human behaviour. Vygotsky widely claimed that children learn as they interact with people, objects and events within their environment (Haenen, Schrijnemakers & Stufkens, 2003). Development is 'embedded in and mediated by' relationships with peers

(Haenen et al., 2003). This is because cognitive development is said to occur in social interaction, with opportunities for learning being influenced by cultural norms and the behaviour of others. Naturally, the main influencers tend to be those most frequently interacting with the children, such as caregivers, siblings, teachers, extended family and peers. Prior to starting compulsory education, children within linguistically isolated households will mainly experience their mother tongue, and likely interact with their immediate family the most frequently. Linguistic isolation is defined by the U.S Census Bureau as all individuals in a household over the age of 14 speaking a 'non-English' language and having difficulty with English (Link, Mokdad, Stackhouse, Flowers, 2006). Instead, they speak their native tongue at home and to their children.

Barron (2009) carried out a field study focussing on White-indigenous and Pakistani-heritage children in a nursery. During instances of the children engaging in role-play, Barron (2009) noted that Pakistani-heritage children lacked the language or skills to participate, and therefore watched on as the other children played. If they did join in, they managed to 'upset' the both the White-indigenous children and members of staff by exhibiting offensive behaviour such as taking items without asking anyone for them (Barron, 2009). The researcher noted that this led to these children being 'othered' as incapable of understanding the correct way to behave. The children of Pakistani-heritage did not model the behaviour expected of them by the staff, and were therefore considered 'inappropriate' by both staff and other White-indigenous children (Barron, 2009). The issue, as Barron (2009) perceived it, was that unlike the White-indigenous children, very few of the Pakistani-heritage children could 'access and engage' with both English as a language and the expected behaviour of the nursery. Barron (2009) found that even where language did not prove to be a difficulty, there were still instances of experiences being culturally specific, and consequently not understood by Pakistani-heritage children.

There is further research that outlines the consequences of language barriers. Collins and Cook (2001) detail the case of a Bangladeshi mother with children attending a school with a third of its children hailing from Bangladesh. This school had only 1 Bengali-speaking teacher, no dual-language books and no classes to accommodate Bangladeshi natives. Collins and Cook (2001) state that a

combination of these factors strained the home-school relationship and made communication between home and school particularly difficult. The one Bengali-speaking member of staff did write targeted, individual letters home in Bengali; however, all of the general school letters were sent in English. Other ethnic minority parents at this school noted feelings of alienation and indicated feeling that the school was unaware and uninterested in their concerns and opinions. Collins and Cook (2001) deem this to be a high level of institutional neglect of issues relating to ethnicity, which was felt by the parents and mirrored in their perception of the school and its attitude to culture and religion.

Both family and school are two major structures within the microsystem of a child. Bronfenbrenner places a significant amount of importance on microsystems, as they are the layer closest to the child and encompass structures that they have direct contact with (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Lack of meaningful linkages between microsystems distinguishes an impoverished mesosystem link from a rich one; in which individuals in all systems work together effectively for the benefit of the child (Stivaros, 2007). Research has found that barriers and limited communication may lead to a disconnect of the mesosystem link between parents and teachers (Witte, 2015). Maintaining positive home-school relationships is therefore crucial, as Witte (2015) argues that it may encourage student success. These findings have undeniable implications for schools and the practice of teaching, according to Paquette and Ryan (2001). Schools and teachers have a responsibility to create and maintain an environment that is supportive and nurturing of all families (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

Although they may have difficulty communicating with schools, diverse heritage parents do not necessarily lack educational aspirations for their children's achievement. The following section will explore their aspirations and the influence, if any, on the subsequent academic success of their children.

Parental Aspirations

The more encouraging and positive findings relating to ethnic minority children are very rarely highlighted. Parents have been found to hold high aspirations for their children and place a significant amount of emphasis on education. Regardless, members of ethnically diverse groups have still been found to underachieve. Further research is required to establish whether there is an inverse link between high aspirations of diverse-heritage parents and their achievement of their children.

Asthana (2010) reports that the Asian community had the lowest permanent exclusion rates from school than any other group. Similarly, Bhattacharrya et al. (2003) found that out of all permanent exclusions in 2001/2002, the lowest percentage ethnic group was Asian (including Chinese). These statistics are remarkable when viewed in relation to the explanations of permanent exclusions and why they take place. Experiencing injustice, inequality and unfair treatment may lead pupils (or groups) to participate in violence against peers or the institution (Osler & Starkey, 2005). Furthermore, Osler and Starkey (2005) note that disaffection (loss of motivation) is a consequence of underachievement that leads to this reactive behaviour. With the low rates of exclusion seen in the Asian group, this implies that in spite of their treatment and underachievement, they have not become disaffected or unmotivated in school.

An explanation may lie within sociocultural understandings of familial factors and cultural norms. Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical framework accounts for differences in valued cultural activities and tools. Lightfoot, Cole and Cole (2013) found marked cultural differences in planning during a problem-solving task. Navajo children spent 10 times longer planning their route within a maze than European-American children did, because the Navajo culture places more emphasis on completing tasks thoughtfully rather than quickly. On the other hand, within European-American culture, speed in relation to mental performance is a mark of intelligence. The thoughtful planning carried out by the Navajo children resulted in them making significantly less mistakes than their European-American counterparts. (Lightfoot, Cole & Cole, 2013). This noteworthy example illustrates the way cultural values can both shape behaviour, whilst also providing concepts and tools to help navigate

society. In relation to the lack of disaffection in Asian pupils, there is research to suggest that a lot of emphasis is placed on education by immigrant parents. In a case study of Turkish/Kurdish refugees arriving to the country, it was found that the parents knew little to no English, had been here less than two years and on arrival knew virtually nothing about schools, jobs and housing (Collins & Cook, 2001). These parents, although completely inexperienced with the educational system, 'stressed the importance of education for their children', and had high aspirations for them (Collins & Cook, 2001). This would suggest that their culture encourages and values success in education; with children developing tools, such as high motivation, in order to try and achieve this.

Fan (2001) found that parent's aspirations concerning their children's educational achievement had a positive effect on their subsequent academic growth. Furthermore, Basit (2012) claims that aspirational capital is a 'strong motivating force' in cultivating and improving the life chances of ethnic minority youth living in Britain. It is therefore no wonder that diverse-heritage parents have high educational aspirations for their children, and tend to see higher education as a way to achieve social mobility and promotion (Shah, Dwyer & Modood, 2010). An example of this is the case of a Pakistani father who encouraged his children to pursue higher education because he did not want them to endure the 'deprivation' and manual labour that he suffered through (Shah et al., 2010). He was using his own experiences to form his attitudes toward education and his aspirations for his children (Shah et al., 2010). Furthermore, Shah et al., (2010) found that all Pakistani parents had aspirations for the high educational achievement of their children, regardless of their SES circumstances, such as their own education or income. Similarly, Abrahamsen and Drange (2015) found that ethnic minorities in Norway hold higher career ambitions than 'majority students'. They attribute the strength that minority students have in the development of their ambitions, and their efforts in pursuing educational qualifications, to ethnicity. They see it as a resource that can also undoubtedly be an obstacle at times (Abrahamsen & Drange, 2015). The extent of diverse-heritage students' motivation and aspirations is stressed by Bagguley and Hussain (2016), who found that young, South Asian women were successfully tackling influential obstacles on their path to studying their choice of course at university. Not only were they resisting 'wider community expectations', they were

also contesting their parents' desires and aspirations for them (Bagguley & Hussain, 2016).

However, members of ethnic minority groups have been found to underachieve, regardless of their 'high motivation and commitment', according to Strand, (2013). Children of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African descent are reportedly not satisfying the expectations of achievement at age 14, when considering the 'advantageous factors' they are reported to have. These valuable factors include the commitment to education by their families, students' educational aspirations, elevated levels of motivation and positive attitudes to school (Strand, 2013). This trend is not limited to children of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African descent. Research conducted in Belgium by D'hondt et al., (2016) found that students of Turkish and North African heritage convey 'optimistic attitudes toward education', but are still underachieving. This discrepancy is highlighted when their achievement is compared to their peers with Belgian parentage (D'hondt et al., 2016). The researchers find that these diverse-heritage children hold more positive and optimistic attitudes toward schooling than their Belgian peers do.

The issue of underachievement for those with high motivation has not been widely researched. However, Shah et al., (2010) found that Pakistani parents held educational aspirations for their children but struggled with actualizing ethnic capital, or using ethnicity as a resource, in order to fulfil these aspirations. For working-class parents, although education is important to them, they were not as proactive in establishing rules for study and leisure or evaluating important issues such as secondary school preference (Shah et al., 2010). On the contrary, middle-class parents were successful in actualizing ethnic capital (Shah et al., 2010). They managed to influence their children's aspirations and achievements through mobilizing both their economic and cultural capital (Shah et al., 2010). Their households were structured in a more accommodating manner for the demands of school and boosting educational performance (Ball, Bowe & Gerirtz, 1995).

This chapter explored literature regarding an array of topical factors in relation to diverse-heritage families. The overall narrative relating to immigrant parents finds that they may suffer from deficiencies and their children may be at a disadvantage.

Research into the achievement of these children has established the existence of an achievement gap and linguistic barriers, which has implications for governments and school policymakers. Although the review highlighted progressive practices within the UK educational system, it also flagged issues with existing practices. It has been suggested that more can be done to enhance the inclusion and involvement of diverse-heritage backgrounds in school environments. In line with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework, such practices would aid with maintaining rich mesosystem links. The perspective of diverse-heritage families who may have experienced and overcome difficulties whilst navigating the educational system may be beneficial to explore in future research. The reviewed literature therefore underpins the justification for the current study. A voice will be given to incoming mothers from South Asian backgrounds whose children successfully reached and completed higher education. The research will explore their experiences and navigation of the UK educational system.

Methodology

The methodological approach for this research emerges from sociocultural understandings of human behaviour. Such ontology demands an interpretivist epistemology, which allows for the exploration of participants' experience, and meaning interpretations. An interview and re-interview process was used here to collect rich and meaningful data. This chapter aims to explore all of these factors whilst demonstrating the interconnection of method, with methodology.

Ontology

There are vast differences between qualitative and quantitative research and their corresponding methodology. Ontological and epistemological standings are the determinant of which methodology and research design should be used. Therefore, prior to conducting any research, researchers should identify their ontological and epistemological position. (David & Sutton, 2004).

The ontology of the current study stems from sociocultural perspectives on learning and understandings of human behaviour. This ontological position views learning as an integral part of broader changes resulting from participation in a community (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Learning and growth occurs through social practices and interactions with others (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). When conducting educational research, this ontology provides an interpretative framework attending to cultural and historical contexts, and the details of social interaction (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Epistemology

Epistemology will address how reality is known and reached. It is concerned with study of knowledge and the relationship between the 'knower' and the 'known' (Maxwell, 2011). An example of a question epistemology might pose is: how do we know what we know? Methodology will answer this question, by drawing on and utilising specific practises in order to acquire knowledge of the 'reality' (Krauss, 2005).

Interpretivism is an epistemological paradigm for conducting qualitative research (Dieronitou, 2014). Research grounded in this epistemology seeks to analyse the deeper meaning and unmeasured characteristics of data, rather than quantifying elements of data that are physically present (Dieronitou, 2014). This stance is widely considered to place more of a focus on “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998: 67). Such qualitative methodology is also accommodating for change and transformation as new information emerges (Anderson, 2010).

Current Study

This research adopted a sociocultural ontological and interpretivist epistemological position. This approach most-appropriately aligned with the research aims, the theoretical framework for the research and the researcher’s desire to explore individual differences and contextual variation (Smith, 2015). In line with the ontology and epistemology of this research, an interview and re-interview process was carried out to collect the data. This ensured that the participants could give a full account of their experiences, and the researcher had the opportunity to ask further questions to clarify any points if necessary. Evaluating social interaction between home and school was an aspect to explore within the study. To achieve this, participant’s experiences were collected and then analysed. Details pertaining to participant’s cultural contexts, such as their beliefs and backgrounds were acknowledged during the interview process and participants were asked to elaborate where necessary. For example, the interview guide begins by the researcher probing for factual information about the participants, and opens with a statement rather than a question: “Tell me about your family”. Furthermore, the guide introduces statements such as “Tell me about a time you went into school”. The rationale behind this was finding out about participant’s experiences and social interactions, through their own voice and point of view. The rich dataset that was subsequently collected allowed for a deeper meaning to be analysed from a sociocultural perspective.

Method

Sampling Technique

Within qualitative research, sampling choices enable a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Blackstone, 2012). There are two main methods of sampling; probability and non-probability. In a probability sample, inclusion/exclusion is a matter of chance, as every single member of the wider population has an equal opportunity of being selected (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). For research projects with aims pertaining to in-depth understanding, non-probability sampling is more commonly used as it is more suitable than random sampling techniques (Blackstone, 2012). In a non-probability sample, certain members of the population will 'definitely' be included or excluded, based on particular criteria for selection (Cohen et al., 2007). It has been argued that such samples are not generalizable to the wider population. However, population representation is not at the top of the agenda for qualitative studies and Blackstone (2012) notes that non-probability samples are not obtained arbitrarily. Typically, these samples have a specific purpose in mind. This leads us onto the sampling technique employed in the current study.

The current study is an exploration of non-native parents' experiences with the UK education system. A non-probability sample is therefore more appropriate for the research aims. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, whereby the researcher chose participants in order to build a sample satisfactory to the specific needs of the research. According to Cohen et al., (2007) purposive samples are deliberately selective and have been described as being biased. However, this technique is utilised by researchers aiming to acquire detailed information from those in an appropriate position to provide it, which justifies the selection process (Cohen et al., 2007).

According to Blackstone (2012), a researcher will start with specific ideas in mind. They will have inclusion/exclusion criteria evolving from previous research that highlights perspectives they wish to cover. In the current study, the literature review illustrated the dispiriting trends concerning immigrant parents, the effect of maternal

education and involvement in school matters and the academic achievement of their children. Therefore, the researcher's inclusion criteria were as follows:

Criteria for inclusion

- Non-native mother living in the UK
- South Asian heritage
- At least one child entering, enrolled in or completed higher education

Initially, the researcher's family members that fit the criteria were offered the opportunity to take part in the study. Following their own participation, subjects were asked if they knew of anyone else that may be interested in taking part in the study. This is a form of chain referral sampling. According to Atkinson and Flint (2001), this strategy is most commonly used to find potential participants for qualitative-based research in which interviews are conducted. The sampling technique used worked well in finding suitable participants who were happy to take part and also met the inclusion criteria.

Participants

Participant 1

Participant 1 was born in the UK but stayed in Bangladesh (her parents place of birth) during her childhood and adolescence. She did not complete compulsory education in England as she relocated in her mid-20's. Participant 1 did not attend college or university in the UK, however she did obtain GCSEs and NVQs as a mature student. She is in full-time employment, follows the Islamic faith and is married with two children. The youngest is in primary school and the eldest will be entering university upon receipt of her results.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was born in the UK but spent her entire childhood in Pakistan before relocating at the age of 12. Upon arrival, she attended a reception centre for new arrivals to learn English. Following this she went to middle school briefly and then attended high school; attaining O Levels and CSE. She then married and had her first child before returning to Further Education and completing a BTEC qualification in nursery nursing. She is in full-time employment, follows the Islamic faith and is the mother of two children. Both of her children attended university; the eldest has achieved a degree and the youngest is in her final year of university.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was born in Kenya. Her father was also born in Kenya as his father moved there from India for employment purposes. Participant 3 self-identifies as South Asian (Indian) and her cultural influences are South Asian. She lived within a South Asian community and predominantly spoke Punjabi at home whilst living in Kenya. She completed O Levels, A Levels and training there before starting work as a teacher in a college. When she relocated to the UK at the age of 26 or 27, she got married and did not pursue higher education, but looked for a job instead. She is in full-time employment, follows Sikhism and is married with three children. The youngest is considering an apprenticeship, whilst the older two girls have graduated from university.

Participant 4

Participant 4's family relocated to the UK from Pakistan when she was young. She completed her O Levels and is currently in full-time employment. She follows the religion of Islam and is married with three children. The eldest child has conditional offers for university, the middle child is completing A Levels and the youngest is still in primary school.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was born in Pakistan and her family migrated during her childhood. She completed her education and went on to study two different diplomas (childcare,

counselling). She is currently in full-time employment and was a governor at her child's primary school. She follows Islam and is married. She has one son, who completed GCSEs, A Levels and then begun to work. He is now in the process of applying to universities.

Data collection technique – semi-structured interviews

The ontological and epistemological position of this research demanded a data collection technique that would provide data full of meaning which is open to interpretation. Although in-depth, unstructured interviews have more flexibility and exploratory benefits, semi-structured interviews are more directional and allow for focus on the domains of interest (Schensul, Schensul & Lecompte, 1999). The data produced by semi-structured interviews can be 'reliable, comparable qualitative data' (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). They make use of interview guides; which are formed and used by interviewers in order to aid with covering essential questions/topics. Interview guides also provide the interview with structure and direction. Although the interviewer will follow the guide, they can ask further open-ended questions and also pursue topical trajectories that arise, if appropriate. The opportunity to understand core issues in new ways arises through use of this style of interview, due to its flexible and adaptable nature. (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Alshenqeeti, 2014).

As with most data collection techniques, there are limitations to semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are acknowledged for their ability to give participants the freedom to offer their experiences in their own terms. However, 'interviewer effects' may take place during the interview. This bias will occur if the researcher guides the participant in a 'special direction' and/or does not put aside their personal views. If this were the case, the reliability of the data would understandably be compromised. Fortunately, this is something that can be controlled through awareness of the effect and effective training of the interviewer. (Opdenakker, 2006). The researcher in the current study had previous experience of using interview guides and during their final year project, had some informal training in the Cognitive Interview Technique. Previous experiences with interviewing should therefore limit interviewer effects.

The interviewer will typically take notes during the course of the interview. However, for ease and accuracy of transcription, audio can also be recorded with the permission of the participant (Opdenakker, 2006). Following the collection of interview data, researchers spend a considerable amount of time transcribing the recorded data. Bryman (2001) estimated that an hour long interview takes five to six hours to transcribe.

Not only can these interviews be time consuming but they may also be costly. The interviewer could possibly need to travel to destinations further afield in order to secure interviews with the required sample, on multiple occasions (Opdenakker, 2006). Utilising focus groups could limit costs from increasing, as the researcher can raise multiple topics for discussion by groups of participants (Smithson, 2000). However, an individual voice may dominate, deterring others from sharing their thoughts and opinion. In the current study, individual accounts and experiences are highly valued and so focus groups would not be suitable.

Telephone interviews are also less costly and can aid in contacting difficult populations and gain wider geographical access (Opdenakker, 2006). However, the issue with asynchronous communication of place is the lack of social cues such as body language and facial expressions. These social cues can be useful as added information for the interviewer to work with (Opdenakker, 2006). In addition, rapport building and 'interpretation of responses' is compromised (Novick, 2008).

The research aims in the current study necessitate a rich dataset in order to achieve the depth of understanding desired by the researcher. Although lengthy, semi-structured interviews can provide 'deeper insight' and familiarity with the data (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews were therefore the preferred method of data collection. The same interviewer conducted all interviews using the same guide. Issues concerning bias and validity can be minimised this way (Bryman, 2008).

The Interview Guide

The interview guide was split into three different topics. This provided the element of structure to the interview and made sure that the domains of interest were covered:

Topic 1: Factual information

- Tell me about your family.
- When did you arrive in this country?
- To what level is your education?
- To what level is your child's education?

The guide begins with basic, factual information about qualifications, family and heritage. The reason behind this was so that the researcher could gage appropriate questions to follow based on the answers received. It was also to ease the participants into the interview and build rapport with them. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), rapport is an essential component of the interview. This is because it creates a safe and comfortable environment for the participant to share personal experiences and attitudes; which was crucial in the current study.

Topic 2: The education system

- When did your children start in school?
- How did you get them into school?
- Tell me about when they were in primary school
- What activities did your child take part in?
- Tell me about a time you went into the school
- Did you meet any of the teachers?
- Do you remember if your child was given homework?
- Does school in the UK differ to the system in your country of birth?

Questions in the second topic related to navigation of the education system by the participants. In the literature review it was highlighted that South Asian parents'

involvement in school matters can sometimes be misunderstood. The guide therefore focuses on parental involvement and communication between parents/school.

Topic 3: Ambition and motivation

- Was the education of your children particularly important to you? Why?
- When you looked at your children, what did you want them to be?
- Did you have any desires for your children as they were growing up?

The motivation and high aspirations of South Asian parents was prominent from the literature review. The final topic therefore aimed to explore each participant's ambitions and desires for their children as they grew up and passed through the education system.

All of the questions in the guide were open-ended and allowed for participants to offer their thoughts, feelings and experiences freely. The guide also ensured that all participants were asked the same questions, which would provide comparable data and therefore support the analytical process later on in the study. The range of questions that the interview guide encompasses will ensure that the research aims are addressed.

Interview Process

Participants were emailed the information sheet for the study so that they could read and decide whether or not they wished to participate. Interview dates, times and venues were confirmed with each participant well in advance. Before each interview commenced, participants were invited to reread the information sheet, in order to refresh their memory over what the study entailed. Following this, they were given the opportunity to ask questions. Participants were then asked to read and sign the consent form. Initial interviews lasted around an hour, with the researcher following the interview guide. Following the interviews, participants were debriefed and given

the opportunity to ask any further questions. They were then thanked for their time and given the researchers email address to contact in case any issues arose. The second set of interviews were shorter as they were conducted over the telephone, lasting 20-30 minutes. All interviews were recorded for ease of transcription and later analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection could begin, ethical approval was required from the University of Huddersfield's School Research Ethics Panel (SREP). This panel assesses applications, ensuring that they meet ethical standards for research. A research proposal, supervisor report, risk analysis and management form, along with documents made for use within the research (information sheet, consent form, debrief) were all sent to the panel for review. The study was granted ethical approval and the researcher endeavoured to conduct the research in accordance with the terms of approval outlined by the SREP.

The BPS (2009) Code of Conduct was adhered to throughout the entire study. It was made clear to all participants that their participation was voluntary and they were also made aware of their right to withdraw at any point up until analysis. In line with ethical guidelines, all data was kept confidential. To maintain anonymity, transcripts were labelled using numbers (1-5), instead of names. Names mentioned by participants during the interview were either removed or replaced with alternative pronouns such as 'he/she'. Recorded data from the transcripts of all interviews was only ever discussed with the researcher's supervisor and destroyed following completion of the study.

The obligation to manage any ethical issues that emerge due to differences in methods, participant populations and the nature of relationships with participants, lies with the researcher (Stivaros, 2007). Throughout the current study, the researcher was uncompromising in their respect for all participants. The researcher acknowledged the individual, cultural and role differences between participants and strived to not only respect these differences, but also embrace them. Integrity was

also of paramount importance to the researcher, and in line with the BPS Code of Conduct (2009), everyone involved in the study was treated with fairness and all interactions were honest and accurate.

An ethical dilemma that arose for the researcher was personal/emotional involvement due to sharing the same ethnic and religious background with the majority of participants in the study. Such close interest, according to Stivaros (2007) shapes elements of the research; from formation of research aims to interpretative accounts. It is inevitable that all researchers will possess characteristics that affect research activities. These characteristics will immediately, eventually or maybe never become apparent (Stivaros, 2007). Rather than be discouraged, subjective involvement should be embraced through reflexivity. Stivaros (2007) claims that reflexivity demands 'immediate, continuing and dynamic' self-awareness on the researcher's behalf, in order to understand how their subjectivity has impacted on the research process. The researcher in the current study therefore utilised a reflexivity diary, which would be completed after each interview and reviewed before the next. Reflexive logs are useful to enhance learning and thinking; allowing for self-evaluation of practice (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008).

This chapter discussed the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the current study. The most appropriate method, an interview process, was chosen in order to meet the aims of the research and collect rich data for meaning interpretation. The next chapter will detail the key themes that emerged through the thematic analysis carried out on the data. The themes will be interpreted using research and sociocultural explanations of behaviour.

Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

The following chapter will explore the way in which the thematic analysis was carried out and the various themes that emerged from the dataset, considering previous literature and theories of development relevant to the epistemology and ontology of this research. The first theme is parental involvement, and further analysis of this theme identifies several influential factors to also be investigated; cultural differences, religious influences and pressures on children.

About Thematic Analysis

Once the data had been collected and transcribed into Word documents, thematic analysis could begin. There are numerous qualitative analytic approaches, but Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is the foundational method. They state that this method is used to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes within data. It is also said to provide core skills, beneficial when conducting other forms of qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible approach, independent of theory and epistemology. This means that unlike techniques such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, it is not limited in the way it is applied nor is it tied to any specific theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Critics may argue that anything goes during thematic analysis. However, the same has been said for qualitative research as a whole, with added claims of it being 'airy fairy' and not 'real' research (Laubschagne 2003). Therefore, the same response used to defend qualitative research can also apply to thematic analysis. Theory and method should be used rigorously and there is a checklist of criteria that can be used in order to determine if a good thematic analysis has been produced or not (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are also suggestions that those who lack the skills or knowledge to perform more sophisticated methods conduct thematic analysis. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) dismiss this by advocating that a rigorous thematic approach can provide an insightful analysis and has every potential to present a rich, detailed and complex account of the data. This technique is widely used within qualitative research and is effective in interpreting various aspects of the research topic. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

High parental aspirations

A prominent theme that emerged from the dataset was the high aspirations that all of the mothers possessed for their children. This is in line with previous research, as Shah et al. (2010) found that Pakistani parents had aspirations for the high educational achievement of their children, regardless of SES circumstances. In the present study, every participant disclosed their aspirations they held for their children:

Participant 1:

*[...] all I ever wanted her to do was experience college life
[...] I want them to achieve in whatever field they want*

Participant 2:

*I wanted them to do well [...] and be successful
[...] my goal was for my son to get to university. Because that was the reason
I came to England, that was the sole purpose*

Participant 3:

I wanted more for them...

Participant 4:

I wanted them to have more of an education than I did...

Participant 5:

*I really did want him to go to university...
I wanted him to [...] achieve high*

Cultural differences

Such high parental aspirations have long been associated with a subsequent positive effect on children and their academic growth (Fan, 2001). From a sociocultural approach to parenting, parents will develop goals that emphasise their children attaining culturally valued skills and characteristics (Yamamoto & Holloway,

2010). Inevitably, these goals will differ culturally and may range anywhere from academic success and financial circumstances to religious affiliation and marriage. In the West, one measure of success is academic achievement and career opportunities, with 76% of parents in a sample of 1006 finding it very important that their child obtains their dream job (OneFamily, n.d.). In addition, a study of 1000 parents in the UK found that their top concern was their children's academic progress. A lower percentage of these parents raised issues such as bullying and unhappiness as a high priority concern (Heath-Abbott, 2016). On the other hand, from a sample of parents and grandparents belonging to the Samburu tribe in Kenya, the most frequent response to questions about parental aspirations related to their daughters getting married (Swadener, Kabiru & Njenga, 2000). Furthermore, in South Asian culture, although higher education and professional employment is encouraged, professional women are still expected to manage domestic tasks (Butt, MacKenzie & Manning, 2010). This balance between work and family life is termed 'superwoman syndrome' and is an aspiration that South Asian parents hold for their daughters (Butt et al., 2010).

The mothers in the current study, although of South Asian heritage, did not fully conform to any specific parental aspiration norm. One participant acknowledged the usual perceived narrative of South Asian parents pressuring their children in pursuing advanced degrees (Thakore, 2016):

Participant 1:

[...] there was a phase in our area where everyone was like 'my daughter's gonna be a doctor, my son's gonna be a lawyer'.

Nevertheless, she went on to distance herself from this popular cultural parental aspiration, in favour of placing emphasis on the happiness of her children:

Participant 1:

But I'm not fussed really as long as they're happy and they're doing what they want

This was the case for the majority of the participants, as they all shared similar sentiments regarding their aspirations for their children. Each mother mentioned a desire for their children to pursue what they want:

Participant 1:

[...] just whatever they wanted to be. I just thought 'as long as they get to uni and have good jobs, and can stand on their own two feet... that's it'

Participant 2:

[...] I never, you know forced them to do something they weren't really confident in. I just let them decide what they wanted to do

Participant 3:

[...] When I see them all going through school I will notice what they're doing well in but it is down to them. With my eldest his teachers always told me that his strengths were in the sciences so [...] I kind of like steered him that way and told him to stay focussed and think about what he wants to do and what he enjoys. [...] you know like kind of guide them but leave them to the open choice

Participant 4:

Yeah, just... just... I wanted him to be happy and achieve high

Sociocultural theory emphasises both the influence of culture on development and the differences that exist between cultural norms. Not only do the women in the current study acknowledge their 'own' cultural norms; explaining them and understanding that they exist, they similarly seem to have adapted to the norms within their new society. They mention having aspirations that are typically linked to varying cultures; academic achievement, career opportunities and happiness. This could be due to the interconnection of cultures these women face. According to Lim and Renshaw (2001) the intermixing of cultures is a result of globalisation. As cultures continue to adapt and change, an increased amount of focus may need to be placed on what it means for development. In this case, it seems to have resulted

in the creation of an open-minded view of success and the generation of goals that fit in line with both their existing and new cultural norms.

Actualising ethnic capital

Existing literature does not dispute that non-native/immigrant parents have high aspirations for their children's academic achievement. However, it has been claimed that they are unable to actualize ethnic capital in order to fulfil these aspirations. This is reportedly because they are not as proactive in establishing rules for study or evaluating important school issues, e.g. secondary school choices (Shah et al. 2010). The current study reveals findings to the contrary. One mother detailed the continual struggle she faced with her daughter when trying to speak to her/give her advice. She was having little luck in persuading her daughter to enroll in college, and eventually decided to bring in reinforcement:

Participant 1:

[...] so what I did was I brought my sister and my nieces, family wise, I got them involved and I said 'individually, can you all speak to her...

This strategy worked, as her daughter took the advice from her cousin and accepted an offer to study at the college her mother initially suggested. In another instance, this daughter refused all help from her mother in trying to devise a revision timetable before her exams:

Participant 1:

If I tell her to set a timetable, do this, do that, she's a bit like 'no, I know what I'm doing'.

The parent did not give up her pursuit of establishing rules for study and was successful through involving other members of family:

Participant 1:

I got my sister round and said, you put your foot down. And she did. They looked at a revision timetable together and put in specific times for everything

This somewhat challenge the conclusion made by Shah et al., (2010) that non-native parents cannot fulfil their aspirations through actualizing ethnic capital. The above example illustrates one case of a parent successfully establishing rules for study through realizing the need for and organizing an intervention by family members. The desired outcome was reached and the child benefitted academically. However, Shah et al. (2010) did find that working-class families could mobilise some other aspects of economic capital. A combination of factors which reinforce norms and values relating to education are employed by these families, which can support their children's achievement. Although participants in the research conducted by Shah et al. (2010) were Pakistani and participant 1 is Bangladeshi, this may go some way in explaining the difference in findings.

Religious influence on aspirations

An interesting angle that emerged which ties in with parental aspirations is the religious influence that the parents feel. This influence surfaces through the language used by participants; almost always uttered in conjunction with aspirations, expectations or expressions of perceived success:

Participant 1:

"Insha'Allah she will get her results and get into university."

- (God willing)

Participant 2:

"my target was just to educate him and make him a good person. [...]"

Only Allah (God) will be the judge of how I've done."

Participant 5:

"He was always a good boy Alhamdulillah and I'm not just saying that because he's my son."

- (Praise be to God)

The reoccurrence of religious phrases highlights the importance of religion for these parents. Although some may consider culture and religion as completely separate, Cohen (2011) proposes that religious groups are cultures in their own right. Religion is argued to shape cultures and contribute to cultural universals (Cohen, 2011). From a sociocultural perspective religion is seen as a source of moral and ethical values (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The intensity of religious beliefs varies between families; with some adhering to their beliefs more casually than others (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Religious orientation, values and beliefs fall under the domain of the macrosystem within the ecological systems theory. This is the largest sphere of influence upon cultural groups (Weinberger-Litman et al., 2007). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner (1977) claimed that the macrosystem maintains a vast influence in shaping lives. Collier (2005) interviewed Senegalese-American women entrepreneurs in their hair-braiding shop in Philadelphia. The women used the following phrase when discussing their hopes for work; InshaAllah, today there will be work. Collier's research has clarified that phrases such as InshaAllah (God willing) can serve as a plea for desired outcomes. The findings in both the current study and Collier's research demonstrate how religion functions fully as a macrosystem within their environment. Religious beliefs influence various aspects of parents lives, including approaches to parenting (Howarth et al., 2008). They surface in times of hope for achievement, reflection on their parenting and in relation to their children's educational success. Only one parent followed a religion other than the Islamic faith (Sikhism) and she did not touch upon religious influence throughout the course of the interview.

Though it is within a small sample, this finding suggests that there may be an overlooked link between Islam and aspirations for educational success. There is little research on religious terminology and its use in an educational context, however Coles (2008) is clear that the achievement of Muslim pupils in the school system is reliant on the recognition of faith as a 'key determinant' of their lives and identities. Religion and education are both integral parts of life for these participants and their language seems to be an illustration of this. Psychologically, it serves as another demarcation between White British and Muslim South Asian culture, as the schools in the UK are predominantly secular. It may therefore be valuable for schools to

implement practices that represent diverse populations, such as those families who hold religious beliefs. Teachers can be advised of the integration between education and religion, in order to fully support pupils and parents with such beliefs. It may also help teachers to create a more open and understanding line of communication with these parents if they understand their belief system and identity better. Further research into the area is required in order to establish whether religious beliefs, surfacing through the use of phrases/terminology, may influence aspirations or serve as tools for navigation of the educational system by parents of faith.

Pressure on children

It was encouraging to find that all of the mothers relentlessly encouraged educational success, whilst simultaneously underlining the importance of choice, enjoyment and happiness. This may be the ideal balance in terms of parental aspirations for academic achievement. Too much pressure and emphasis on academic outcomes/grades has been argued to cause stress, anxiety and low self-esteem (Mohan, 2016). Research has found that children may perform better and have higher self-esteem if they are reassured that failure is a normal part of learning and if there is less pressure to succeed at all costs (Mohan, 2016). Although the majority of parents did not mention their children being stressed or anxious in relation to school or university outcomes, there were instances of tension recalled:

Participant 3:

Oh yeah, she used to be upset all the time. We used to say, you know 'don't be upset. If you wanna further your education, go study something. If you feel that this is not for you, go into something completely different' [...] we didn't want her to feel as though, you know, she doesn't have a job and feel depressed. So we just said to her, 'what are you worrying for? You don't have to pay the mortgage, it's fine, we're not asking you for anything'

On this occasion, there was no evidence of pressure from the parents. However, successful academic/career choices are claimed to influence one's self-esteem and confidence and so the upset felt in this case may have arisen from high self-expectations or unachievable societal expectations (Powell, 2009). This graduate

was deeply upset about their unsuccessful job search and this highlights the career and success-based pressures that can be felt by students. In another case, participant 1 details her daughter's disappointment at not receiving a place at the sixth-form she wished to attend:

Participant 1:

And then when she came back she was like really deflated. She was like completely like 'no I'm not doing it – I'll get an apprenticeship' [...] Yeah it brought her down, completely brought her down [...]. I think she just looked at herself to be a complete failure

The sixth-form refused participant 1's daughter a place to study as she did not achieve her predicted grades. In both cases, neither of the parents applied pressure on their children. However, the weight and importance placed on children's educational outcomes is naturally accentuated by schools as they are predominantly evaluated by standards of achieved grades (Heath-Abbott, 2016). This pressure felt by schools has implications for their relationship with both parents and children. It can be said that communication between schools and parents tends to be achievement-oriented. However, Heath-Abbott (2016) argues that schools have a responsibility in ensuring they do not subsequently apply direct pressure on parents. Such pressure will likely have an effect on parent-child interaction; which could potentially disrupt the child's microsystem. For harmony in the microsystem and a rich mesosystem link, discussions centred around children's happiness and limiting pressure placed on them may be beneficial (Heath-Abbott, 2016). In agreement, Mohan (2016) notes that a direct implication of increasing amounts of stress on children is the need for parents and teachers to communicate more effectively with each other and the child. Although the requirements used for acceptance into academic institutions are unlikely to change, for the welfare of all, the manner in which the staff communicate with parents and students may benefit from being addressed. Andersson (2002) found a relationship between children experiencing problems in school and subsequent discord with the home-school mesosystem link (communication issues). This highlights the importance of the welfare of students and the knock on effect that functioning in school can have on the harmony of different levels within the ecological system.

To summarise, high parental aspirations are held by South Asian parents, however the nature of the aspirations were not in line with any specific cultural norms. The parents in the current study also employed strategies to realise these aspirations; strategies which may have been mediated by their cultural beliefs. The religious influence they face presented itself when discussing aspirations for their children which may highlight a need to represent different populations properly within schools. The parents' acknowledged pressures felt by their children and this poses implications for schools regarding the wellbeing of students.

Discussion of parental aspirations and parent-school interaction sets the tone for the next theme that emerged from the dataset; effective parental involvement. Parental involvement is a predominant topic for discussion which surfaces where academic achievement is concerned. Analysis of this theme will explore the involvement of these parents and whether or not it was effective.

Effective parental involvement

There is evidence to suggest that non-native parents are less effective in intervening with school matters. More specifically, South Asian parents have been described as being uninterested and having little to no relationship with school (Crozier & Davies, 2006). However, a key theme that emerged from the data was the effective parental involvement in school matters that the parents all demonstrated. All of the interviewees expressed overwhelming interest in their children's education and actively sought to intervene if necessary. In relation to the five dimensions of parental involvement, all of the parents demonstrated effective involvement:

1. Parenting

Participant 5:

[Education] was really top priority for me... But unfortunately, I think as the years progressed, partly due to his illnesses, he wasn't that academically inclined. He struggled a lot at school and I think, you know I even got him a maths tutor and tried to support him as much as possible but he just didn't seem to catch up

2. Helping with homework

Participant 3:

*Yeah I always helped them with their homework [...]
I think most of the time they got on with it themselves, but if they needed help they would come and ask. I think it was just Maths and English. Then we would work through it together*

3. Communication with school

Participant 1:

He didn't need the help. But, since I didn't help him I would always ask the teacher how he's doing. Because I think that if he's not doing it or doing it to a certain standard then they need to tell me.

4. Volunteering at school

Participant 5:

I was a governor at that school [...] just to support the school

5. Participating in school decision-making

Participant 4:

[On researching potential schools]

I did, and I looked at the Ofsted reports for both schools, yeah

This evidence directly challenges previous research that seems to downplay immigrant parental involvement. Crozier and Davies (2006) acknowledge the perception of South Asian parents in Britain as uninterested and having little to no relationship with schools. However, it is clear to see that school matters are of paramount importance to these parents; demonstrated through unrelenting communication with their children's schools. In relation to the research aims, the parents navigated the educational system engaging in involvement and interaction with their children's schools. Furthermore, they executed it in the effective manner which the literature implied was reserved for native, middle-class parents.

Prolonged parental involvement

In all cases, parental involvement by parents in the current study surpassed primary and high school, reaching college/university level and beyond:

Participant 1:

so I took her to college... We had a chat and I said 'look, we can get you a place in here, this, that and the other'. She said "no, I don't want to do it" and she walked out'. And then I left her. [...] She wanted to do something apprentice-based so I said 'right – here are the websites, here are the places, go'

Participant 2:

Then he went to college and he had bad company there but I was always on his back. I always went to see his tutors and said 'if he ever misbehaves you've got to call me' before he even started.

Participant 3:

that's what I'm like with my eldest, I will send her any jobs I come across

Participant 5:

We had to drag him through A Levels

Such involvement is typically unheard of in Western culture, with parents usually allowing their children to find their way and become independent. Ascher (2015) argues against parents stepping in and rescuing their children from academic failure. Instead, Ascher (2015) believes that dealing with the consequences will develop resiliency in students; a skill which is crucial to them launching successfully. 'Failure to launch' is a popular way to describe the difficulties that young adults may face during the transition into a phase of development involving increased development and responsibility (Rudloff, 2017). If they have failed to launch, students will find themselves back at home, unsuccessful in navigating college and lacking the skills needed to become independent (Ascher, 2015). However, not all cultures value the same skills when it comes to human development. It is clear to see from the interview data that parents in the current study preferred to stay involved and rescue their children from academic failure; "we had to drag him through A Levels".

There are striking, marked cultural differences with regards to human development, across communities. For the benefit of current and future generations Rogoff (2007) places importance on understanding cultural bias of our communities. For example, Efe Pygmies live in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and children as young as 11 months are trusted and skilful in using machetes. Parents in the United States, on the other hand, would not trust a 5-year-old with a knife (Rogoff, 2007). However, the needs of the Efe Pygmies demand the use of knives for hunting across rivers and foraging through the forest (Wilkie, Morelli & Gilda, 2000). It is therefore clear there is no catchall way in which children of different cultures develop (Rogoff, 2007). The parents in the current study extended support for their children beyond typical Western norms, but this does not necessarily mean that the children have failed to launch. It is simply a cultural difference; whereby independence is valued at varying levels and times.

There are regularities or patterns that are consistent across a variety of cultures. Rogoff (2007) uses age-segregated institutions to illustrate this point. Children are usually organised by age in communities and spend their time partaking in child-focussed activities (Rogoff, 2007). This pattern can be seen in both nomadic and settled communities, but specific norms will still vary between cultures. For example, hunter-gatherer children have immense freedom to play and their childhood is 'easy and playful'; but adolescents are expected to hunt for food (Christakis, 2013). In Western communities, children participate in a level of education based on their age and adults are expected to provide financial support. In both communities, the sociocultural concept of guided participation will occur. Hunter-gatherer adolescents will be instructed and assisted with hunting before internalising the activity and being afforded independence. Similarly, in the West, the skills practised in schools may closely relate to those required for subsequent participation in the economic/political establishments within their society (Rogoff et al., 1993).

These examples illustrate the differences in expectations between communities; with each community defining their own normal stages of development. In South Asian culture, family is extremely important. It is anticipated that elderly relatives are cared for at home as placing them in care/nursing homes is viewed negatively and generally frowned upon. This stems from the sense of duty that children of this culture feel towards their parents (Manzoor, 2014). For South Asian parents, their goal in life is to get their children educated and wed. Unmarried children, regardless of age, will usually live with their parents (South Asian Concern, n.d.). Manzoor (2014) finds this to be common among South Asians but relatively rare for White Britons. As we have established, living at home after college/university is typically classed as dependency and a failure to launch in the West. However, in South Asian culture, reliance on family members and strong familial values seem to be more important than self-reliance related skills.

An explanation for the prolonged involvement of these parents may therefore lie within the cultural differences between South Asian and Western norms. Pakistani parents' interest and involvement in their child's education has been identified as culturally different than White middle-class parents (Huss-Keeler, 1997). Furthermore, South Asian parenting style is often misunderstood and seen as

controlling (Navsaria, 2012). However, Navsaria (2012) found that South Asian mothers had goals pertaining to the success of their children and did not seek to dominate them. Their goals and values simply differ from Western norms, as they are heavily guided by their own cultural upbringing and sense of identity (Navsaria, 2012). Naturally, they rely on the personal concepts they retain from their South Asian heritage and culture. They will apply their beliefs within various contexts and define what is appropriate based on their culture (Navsaria, 2012). An interconnection between cultural parenting norms and the alternate beliefs values regarding independence may therefore explain the finding of prolonged parental involvement. Parents in the current study demonstrated involvement from primary school through high school to university and beyond.

Marginalisation

Another dimension of the parental involvement theme was marginalisation felt by the parents whilst they were navigating school matters. Two participants in particular experienced this within school settings:

As a parent at a school parents' evening meeting

Participant 4:

I thought... she opened my eyes actually, that, you know... she viewed me as somebody different... you know... lower than her... that I didn't know anything. And I felt as though I was brainless.

Communicating with a teacher about a school matter

Participant 5:

She just wasn't culturally sensitive at all. I wish I had been stronger and stood up to her now but it's hindsight. [...] She was just horrible

These experiences support the research findings where non-native parents have reported feeling alienated by schools (Collins and Cook, 2001). This may constitute a level of institutional neglect of issues concerning ethnicity within schools, according to Collins and Cook (2001). There are clear examples of this in school regulations today. Standardised testing calls for emphasis on rote learning in English, which

disregards children's native languages (Tamer, 2014). This is the case in the majority of compulsory schools in the UK and US, regardless of the fact that immigrant youth are best supported when schools adopt bicultural identities. This enables the children to navigate multiple cultural worlds effectively and encourage positive race-relations within schools (Tamer, 2014). Though beneficial, schools have not yet established strategies in favour of this cultural straddling/crossing of cultural boundaries (Tamer, 2014). An implication of this finding is the need for development of an educational programme that would serve to reduce the alienation of parents and promote their support of school efforts (Chavkin, 1993).

In summary, this theme highlighted evidence for effective parental involvement during navigation of the educational system by all participants. Involvement by these parents surpassed high school and continued on to university and beyond, which could be due to differing cultural norms and values. Parental involvement has found to have a positive influence on achievement so it may be worthwhile for schools to recognise where varying cultural beliefs cause a difference in behaviour and implement strategies which work to encourage them regardless. The mesosystem link between microsystems will only strengthen if cultural differences are celebrated and parents are encouraged to support school efforts.

The next theme addresses challenges faced by non-native parents in relation to inclusion. Factors ranging from language difficulties to cultural and religious insensitivity will be investigated, with implications for policymakers.

Barriers to inclusion

Religious sensitivity

Another theme that emerged from within the data was that of inclusion, and the different barriers the parents faced. Although the question of inclusive practices within their children's schools was not on the interview guide, it was a topic of conversation that arose in the majority of interviews regardless.

Parental involvement helps to establish continuity across the many aspects of students' lives (Sacramento, 2015). However, this can only occur if there are no direct barriers in the way of inclusion (Sacramento, 2015). Barriers lead to marginalisation, which is something that diverse-heritage families face within schools. McCreery, Jones and Holmes (2007) found that overall, Muslim women interviewed believed state schools to be insensitive to the needs of Muslim children. Participant 5 reiterated this feeling when she recounted an incident with her son's primary school teacher:

Participant 5:

All he was doing was just reading about pigs [...] and it just got a bit tiresome. [...] Isn't there anything else he can progress to? And erm, I spoke to her and she said 'if he doesn't read this he's not gonna learn to read' you know, basically saying that if he didn't read that he can just pack up and go home, it was that book or nothing.

[...] I was really upset about it, because it was like pig, pig, pig all the way through

[...] She just wasn't culturally sensitive at all.

According to sociocultural theory infants are 'cultural apprentices' who are guided by their caregivers (Rogoff et al., 1993). Naturally, caregivers influence infants' development and growth with information that is deeply informed by their own personal cultural knowledge. In this experience, participant 5 raises her issue with her son being exposed to a book concerning pigs, which she found forced and repetitive in nature. To non-Muslims, this may not seem so much of an issue, aside

from perhaps concern over progression to more complex reading material. But for Muslims who abide by the rulings of their religion and have developed under historic cultural understandings and sensitivities it is likely to cause discomfort. The Quran, the central religious text in Islam, stipulates that the flesh of the swine is impure and therefore prohibited from consumption by Muslims (Stacey, 2009). A cultural misconception that has arisen, predominantly from South Asia, is that this animal is forbidden in all forms (Wainwright, 2003). This may include books, pictures, TV programmes about the animal, and even uttering the word 'pig'. Sociocultural theorists explain that individuals participate in activities and maintain concepts that are common practice and valued within their cultural community (Siegler & Alibali, 2005). The mother's feelings of discomfort are therefore understandable, with such frequent exposure to the animal. Although the view is of cultural significance rather than an official Islamic ruling, a member of the Muslim Council of Britain recommends that sensitivity is respected and parents are not mocked (Wainwright, 2003).

Andersson (2002) claims that one condition for teachers to be successful in their role is to have good relations with the parents of their students. Parents and teachers see different sides of their child and by working together, can get a more complete picture (Andersson, 2002). Maylor, Read, Mendick, Ross and Rollock (2007) found that the main challenges for teachers in developing shared understanding was their knowledge, experience and confidence dealing with certain discussions. In participant 5's experience, the teacher's approach was not particularly flexible to the child's needs or sensitive to their cultural background and beliefs. She felt the teacher was insensitive and left her feeling 'angry, drained and upset' over the situation. It resulted in feelings of marginalisation and leaving her unable to voice her opinion further; 'I wish I had been stronger and stood up to her'. Had the parent and teacher worked together to identify the child's needs, participant 5 may have felt less angry at the situation and a more positive outcome could have been achieved, with the mesosystem link staying intact.

An implication of this finding is the need for policies that address religious and cultural sensitivity within schools. Policies and programmes of the government are macro-level factors (Gardner, 1981). The education system as a macro level

influence encompasses regulations, legislation, training and strategies (Hadjitheodoulou-Loizidou, 2012). At this wider level, teachers have been encouraged to use materials which reflect cultural differences and diversity (Maylor et al., 2007). There is one piece of research that investigates the use of cultural-sensitivity training courses in medical schools. This research was conducted by Lum and Korenman (1994) across the US; they found some use of such courses and suggest the need for more widespread training. They also stress the importance of further research in this area as the population changes and different beliefs and values emerge.

An example of an education-based resource that is intended for use by the whole school community is provided by the Department for Education and Skills (Great Britain, 2005). Arslan (2009) places the responsibility of working collaboratively with staff, parents and the wider community in order to create a culturally sensitive school setting. However, some schools may be more successful than others in supporting inclusion and achievement (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2008). Research into the implementation of inclusive policies may therefore be beneficial (MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath & Page, 2006).

Reading schemes are devised in conjunction with literacy experts. Children learn to read at different rates and there are a variety of texts to develop their reading range at each stage (Dimbylow, n.d.). The advice from the teacher in the situation mentioned above; that a book about pigs was the only way the child would learn to read, is therefore contradictory to the very nature of reading schemes. It is a Piagetian way of thinking that stages of development cannot be skipped and must be passed through in order to progress. This does not align with the sociocultural approach as Vygotsky (1978) rejected claims that maturation was enough to allow for progression to higher thinking and activity. Instead, the interaction of children with peers and caregivers within the zone of proximal development will provide progressive understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, not all schools implement reading schemes, with one head teacher of a primary school in London arguing real books to be more 'stimulating' than those used in the schemes. He argues that reading ability will flow when children enjoy reading (Dimbylow, n.d.). Participant 5 recalls seeing a difference in her son whilst he was in this class:

Participant 5:

if you compare my son's school photographs from when he was in different classes he's bright-eyed, perky, he's got a smile on his face... the picture in her class... erm he just looks terrible, he looks sad and like he's gonna cry

“Happiness is the soil in which intelligence grows” (Pond Park Primary, 2013: 1). The UK's Department for Education spokesman claims that good schools will recognise the importance of children's wellbeing on their subsequent attainment and promote both mental and physical development (Donnelly, 2015). Not only is Britain behind other Western countries in terms of academic standards, studies have also suggested that child development is also languishing (Donnelly, 2015). There is a gap in the literature investigating cultural insensitivity and mental health problems within schools. However, perceived social exclusion from important groups may contribute to anxiety (Leary, 1990). The ecological approach emphasises the importance of social inclusion and institutions within communities as essential to development (Pierson, 2009). This framework implores schools to consider factors across both the community and family level (Pierson, 2009). Failure to do so may result in the feelings of anger expressed by the parent and upset seen within the child in this situation. This could be classed as a negative encounter which disrupts home-school co-operation and affects the mesosystem link. On the contrary, children experiencing positive encounters within school have been found to ‘learn easily’ and enjoy school, which lead to good relations and close contact between parents and teachers. (Andersson, 2002). This is definitely something for parents and teachers to strive towards, and for policymakers to take note of.

A school which may have been more successful in its inclusion strategy was the primary school that participant 1's son attended. She spoke about the differences between her children's primary schools:

Participant 1:

I am happy with my son's primary school [...] they do extra things like on Eid and Diwali which goes a long way in making parents feel a bit more included. It helps.

When discussing her son's primary school, participant 1 highlights the celebration of religious festivals as a reason she was 'happy' with the school. There is a gap in the literature considering the influence of cultural and religious celebration, however, participant 1 claims that it facilitates parents feeling 'more included'. This further illustrates the importance of religious observance as discussed in the first theme and highlights the benefit of implementing practices that work towards properly representing different populations within schools.

The Anti-Defamation League states that holiday celebrations of any kind are an excellent opportunity to offer insight into different cultures and provide understanding about different groups of people (ADL, 2014). These celebrations can also reinforce and encourage the diversity of everyone and their experiences. However, there are implications for schools to consider when organising celebrations of holidays and festivals. The ADL suggest that public schools remain neutral; being careful to avoid endorsing or promoting specific customs over others. To refrain from offending any students or parents and their beliefs, the opportunity to decline participation can be offered in a way that prevents marginalisation. (ADL, 2014).

Importance of communication

Participant 1 goes on to recall that her son's school also had bilingual members of staff working there, though her daughter's primary school did not:

Participant 1:

They have bilingual staff there so if I did need that it would be there. Whereas my daughter's primary school didn't offer that, and back then is when I would have maybe needed that more so than now.

Participant 1 feels as though she would have benefitted from being able to communicate with bilingual staff when her eldest child was at school. As discussed in the literature review, a lack of communication between the home-school microsystems has been found to have an undesirable effect on the achievement of Pakistani pupils (Abley et al., 2004). This could, in turn, weaken or disconnect the

mesosystem link. The addition of bilingual staff could help with inclusion, but may not always be possible in every school or go far enough in combatting the issue entirely. Again, it may be beneficial if teachers are provided with resources in preparation for dealing with culturally diverse classrooms and families. Skerrett (2006) conducted a reflective piece of research on the impact of her biography (race, ethnicity, gender, age, social class background, and prior personal/professional experiences) on her teaching. She found that elements of her biography influenced her expertise, confidence in teaching and students (negative) perceptions of her competence. The implications that Skerrett (2006) outlines are clear: as school populations become increasingly diverse, teachers can benefit from engaging in this reflective process. It may strengthen their awareness of their teaching, change the perceptions of their students and hopefully create a strong mesosystem link between home-school microsystems.

Feelings of difference

One key area which was discussed in all of the interviews was whether or not the mothers felt different to other parents due to their heritage. Participant 4 was very forthcoming in expressing how different she felt:

Participant 4:

I felt different. I definitely felt different, in the sense that 'how will the teacher communicate with me?' compared to a White, English mother or parent. I thought they would see me differently, definitely see me differently

Not only did she anticipate being treated differently, she also felt that she experienced it in an interaction with a primary school teacher at parents evening:

Participant 4:

I went to a parent's evening and he was so excited that I was going, he thought he was doing really well, I went in and sat there and she said 'I don't know where to start'. She didn't show me any books or anything, just said that and said he was very disruptive and all the negative things about him... Not one thing said was positive

'he's not progressing, he's not doing this, he's not doing that' I was so gobsmacked at the time, I didn't know what to say... She just complained about him and I was stunned, I didn't know how to react at the situation...

she opened my eyes actually, that, you know... she viewed me as somebody different... you know... lower than her... that I didn't know anything. And I felt as though I was brainless.

This incident took place in a school which is a learning environment expected to encourage positivity and inclusion. Participant 4 felt that the teacher viewed her as somebody 'different' and she also felt 'lower than her'. A number of studies have emphasised the detrimental effects of negative treatment on both the physical and psychological welfare of immigrants (Yakushko, 2009). Experiencing discrimination can lead to depressive symptoms; one of which is a feeling of worthlessness (McGirr et al., 2007). Participant 4 notes feeling 'brainless' and that she 'didn't know anything'. These beliefs may fall under the 'feelings of worthlessness' category as a symptom of depression. There are major implications for the way in which schools and teachers communicate with parents, so not to discourage or distress them.

Such feelings of exclusion or marginalisation within schools in the West may have inadvertently contributed to the recent rise in Islamic schools. There has been an increase in the number of children attending Muslim faith schools in the UK (McCreery et al., 2007). There are various reasons or 'anxieties' behind parents' choice in sending their children to faith schools. Muslim parents feel as though consistency between home and school life is better maintained if they attend an Islamic school. This includes the provision of Halal food and perceived tolerance to customs pertaining to their culture such as children eating with their hands on occasion. This is a custom specific to both culture and religion but in a non-Muslim school it may be classed as social immaturity (McCreery et al., 2007). Furthermore, the parents in support of enrolling their children into Muslim schools liked the idea of Islamic Fiqh (understanding of Islamic law) being supported (McCreery et al., 2007). This may have influenced participant 1's decision in choosing the Islamic high school for her daughter to attend. She explains:

Participant 1:

We both said, maybe this is the right path for her, because it will give her lessons of life slightly different to normal school.

With my daughter, part of sending her to the Islamic school was because I wanted her to know things that I couldn't teach her. So I wanted school to pick up on that as well, Islamically.

Participant 1 also touches upon her expectations relating to the Islamic school:

Participant 1:

To say she went to an Islamic school and all the teachers were Muslim, it was hard interacting. I would prefer it the other way. Seriously, in the other schools if I had a problem I could bring it up and talk to them. But Islamic school was hard

This quote is important in relation to the earlier discussion. Participant 1 did not receive the expected enhanced interaction from the Islamic school her daughter attended. However, the very belief she would might have been a contributing factor in her decision to send her there. This strengthens the implication for schools to pay attention to diverse-heritage communities, their feelings and to increase their support for them. This finding also has implications for faith schools; they may not be doing enough to maintain a culture of inclusion that does not exclude any parents who decide to send their children there.

Language barrier

In response to being asked if she had any issues integrating or settling when she moved to the UK from Kenya, participant 3 recalled one particularly poignant story. She reflects on the cause of the shyness she initially felt when she began working in the UK for the first time. The linguistic differences between herself and colleagues was highlighted by others, creating an insecurity:

Participant 3:

I think I was quite shy, just like my kids trying to speak Punjabi, they get embarrassed. My way, some of the words were quite different and I always mix my W's and V's, you know the way I say... And I wouldn't notice that but somebody else would say 'what you saying?' you know... it put me off speaking in public then

The role of language in human development is a vital part of the Vygotskian framework (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Sociocultural theory claims that learning second or foreign languages is situated and therefore unfolds in different ways, under different circumstances (Lantolf, 2013). Every individual, including participant 3, will have their own history. Their personal development will have taken place through participation in cultural, linguistic and historically formed settings (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). It is widely accepted that second language (L2) learners will struggle grammatically with the new language. Both teachers of foreign languages and L2 learners acknowledge this themselves. Turuk (2008) notes that it is unreasonable and would be a mistake to assume that L2 learners acquire the new language in the same way that children acquire their first language. In the example above, participant 3 is referring to English as a language she learned at school in Kenya. However, she seldom conversed in English in comparison to Punjabi and Swahili. She claims English was rarely spoken at home:

Participant 3:

No I wasn't confident, because we never actually spoke English. We spoke Swahili or Punjabi

At home we were always speaking Punjabi and with other people we would speak Swahili so English was just like... [a school thing]

Rather than learning English through the pursuit of personal interest, participant 3 was acquiring this foreign language at school in Kenya through necessity. It is possible that within her learning context, progress was not facilitated through explicit instruction and coaching, leading to issues with pronunciation. It could also be that she suffered the attrition of her foreign language skills through lack of use (Weltens, de Bot & van Els, 1987). Regardless, her English was not perfect and Reihl's (2000: 55) statement that "language is a key mechanism for both oppression and

transformation” may ring true in this case. Although participant 3 recalls this experience from within the workplace, she said ‘it put me off speaking in public then’. Participant 3’s interactions with others left her feeling hesitant and reluctant to speak English. This finding has implications for those interacting in various social settings with non-native individuals. In schools, a language barrier may result in a weakened mesosystem link and subsequently pose problems for the inclusion of parents and the achievement of children.

In another example of how the language barrier can present itself, participant 4 recounted a time when her husband had to attend parents evening on her behalf. Their child also went to the event in order to translate for his father and teacher.

Participant 4:

[...] there’s no translator that speaks our language in either school. I think I was in hospital one time when it was parents evening so my son went with my husband [...] he asked the questions on behalf of his dad, and if he struggled he was there

Although participant 4 describes it as ‘nice’ that her son was able to do that for his father, this experience still raises questions about school inclusion of non-native parents struggling with English. She explains that her husband left communication with school to her and did not get involved as much:

Participant 4:

I always got involved more, he always pushed me forward because obviously he struggled communicating...

The fact that this father felt uncomfortable liaising with school due to a language barrier is not surprising. Thao (2009) does not differentiate between nationality when explaining that immigrant parents may feel embarrassed and uncomfortable participating in school matters and talking to teachers. However, we can see the marginalising effect that a language barrier can create. Although participant 4’s family is not technically classed as linguistically isolated because she speaks English, there are non-native families who are living in completely linguistically

isolated households in the UK. Research has found both academic advantages and disadvantages for children living in this situation. However, little research has focused on parents and the wider societal effects they face because of it. Vygotsky is adamant that individuals cannot learn in isolation and researchers contend that without guided participation and social interaction, development will likely be hindered (McKenzie, 2000). Parents struggling to participate and interact within the wider school/community, as seen in the example above, may therefore benefit from assistance. Unassisted, they will not be able to participate or develop in their new society or be able to adapt to different cultural norms. Thus, it would be in the interest of schools if policymakers provided constructive strategies to combat this. It is not reasonable to expect every school to employ a body of bilingual staff fluent in every possible language. However, there are alternative ways to encourage participation by parents who struggle with English. Some schools can be heavily populated with diverse-heritage children from similar backgrounds, e.g. South Asian or Eastern European. Therefore, employing a translator fluent in clusters of regional dialects could aid with improved communication between parents and teachers.

Parents may also benefit from being encouraged to learn English or improve their existing skills. Linking English classes to schools is one way to facilitate language skills, communication and parental involvement. The sociocultural framework is firm in the belief that individuals learn from each other, so holding English lessons at school would be a progressive, sociocultural-based practice. The parents would hopefully feel more comfortable with both the language and the school environment and this strategy therefore has the potential to increase the type of participation and involvement valued by schools.

There has been research to support the implementation of events specifically aimed at diverse-heritage parents. A school began holding gatherings for diverse-heritage parents in order to provide them 'access to the school', the chance to discuss any concerns they may have, and details of their child's overall progress. Bilingual teaching assistants fronted the meetings so that the parents had an environment in which they could communicate in their home language. This was well received by parents and showcases the type of inclusive practices that can be put in place to help struggling parents in order to build a richer mesosystem link (Abley et al., 2004).

A number of potential barriers to inclusion of diverse-heritage parents have been covered in this theme. The findings offer implications for educational institutions to support their teachers with resources in order to promote interaction between the community and schools and cement strong mesosystem links. The following theme will analyse the ways in which the participants in the current study navigated the struggles their children faced at school.

Navigating issues within school

“Docile, uninterested in education and destined for arranged marriages”; this is the prevailing perception of South Asian women (Bagguley & Hussain, 2016: 1).

Participants in the current study strongly challenge this stereotype and provide evidence to the contrary. A theme that emerged throughout the initial interviews and the scenario responses, however, was the initiative these women would take when it came to navigating issues within school:

Scenario 1 - Participant 1:

I'd probably want to speak to the head teacher if they were around [I would] Challenge the way the teacher put things across. Ask them when they tried to contact me. When he made all these disruptions and everything, what actions did you put in place?

Participant 2:

I went and I said “well, you’ve got to address this issue”. The school had to address the issue, because obviously they weren’t dealing with it.

Scenario 3 - Participant 3:

I would have complained about that member of staff not giving enough support. If they are there to support that young person and if they’re not giving that support, I would have complained to the seniors

Participant 4:

I looked at other schools in the area [...] and I looked at the Ofsted reports for both schools

Participant 5: [On being a school governor]

I did that for 10 years and I feel I did put my points across and make a difference. You know, being a part of that community and encouraging other parents to do the right thing

Decision-making

The above quotes are a mixture of actual actions and responses to hypothetical scenarios. There is a gap in the literature concerning diverse-heritage parents' involvement in school decision-making; though Crozier and Davies (2007) found that schools did not monitor the attendance or participation of immigrant parents at events such as parents evening. However, unlike Reza's (2013) findings in which none of the Pakistani parents' interviewed were part of decision-making processes within schools, one of the participants in the current study was a governor for 10 years. She reported that she was able to 'put her point across and make a difference'. It is vital that more diverse-heritage parents from an array of ethnic backgrounds have the opportunity to make their voices and opinions heard. The sociocultural approach would suggest that schools could learn from diverse-heritage parents and their input, as the importance of culture in learning and development has been established. According to Vygotskian ways of thinking, these parents have tools provided by their culture that they use to adapt to the world. Immigrants will likely have multiple cultural affiliations and identities and develop concepts about the world through the multiple cultures they have navigated (OECD, 2016). It therefore seems reasonable to not only provide guidance to these individuals, but actively seek guidance from them, too.

For the rest of the parents who have not taken active decision-making roles on school governing bodies, this could be for a number of reasons. Previous negative experiences may have tainted their view of the school or made them feel unwelcome (Reza, 2013). They were all, however, extremely forthcoming in approaching the school when issues arose; both hypothetically and in real life situations. They had no reservations about getting in touch with school staff, with most of them wanting to 'go straight to the top' (head teacher). This not only shows motivation and involvement; but it also illustrates the importance of education to these mothers. Furthermore, it suggests that the schools may have created a culture of inclusion whereby these parents felt comfortable enough to liaise with teachers and other members of staff. The mothers are willing to spend their time working with school to achieve their desired outcome/resolution.

Intervening in issues

According to the literature, bullying and peer victimization are major social problems (Hong & Espelage, 2012). There were not many cases of bullying recalled by participants in the current study, however there was a situation involving participant 2's son around the time of 9/11:

Participant 2:

He went through a rough period around the time of 9/11. [...] there was all that tension in the schools. He took it all personally, he used to have a fight with anybody if anybody said anything. [...] I don't think it was like attacks to him personally but he would take remarks very personally. He would fight for the whole of the Muslim Ummah (community), in his mind. He didn't know how to else to go about it. [...] In my eyes, he was getting picked on, because he was the one who lost his temper. But the others didn't, because they just started it and then backed away.

Participant 2 narrates the ongoing issues her son faced following the 9/11 attacks in America and there are two main points of concern that emerge from the details of this account. Both points pertain to the failure of the school in effectively intervening to control the situation. The first is the lack of support the school provided for the student and his family. Participant 2 implies that her son felt as though it was him against the rest of the school; singlehandedly trying to defend his religion and beliefs. This led to participant 2 taking matters into her own hands:

Participant 2:

the school weren't doing enough in my eyes. I talked to him all about it and that's when we started having that 'boys group', you know so him and his cousins could kind of find out more about their religion and improve their own understanding. Then they could defend it with their words rather than their fists.

She organised a religious group for the boys in her family so that they could support each other and 'improve their own understanding'. The school, on the other hand,

did not intervene or effectively resolve the problem, in participant 2's eyes. She felt as though they were not dealing with the issue and suggests that they were not protecting her son the same way they were looking after other children, which is the second point of concern:

Participant 2:

They should've been looking after all the students, from all angles and protecting each one, and I said 'clearly you're not doing that'. Especially at such a tense time for the whole world. If the staff were encouraging it, then that's wrong.

Schools have a duty, by law, to never discriminate against anyone on the grounds of their religion or beliefs (CSIE, 2013). However, participant 2 implies that she felt the staff were encouraging the discrimination against her son; 'if the staff were encouraging it then that's wrong'. Kruzykowski (2007) raises an important point: the human race will not be able to sustain itself without teaching children tolerance. Globalisation has established the presence of many cultures in communities across the world, including schools and classrooms (Aguis & Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, 2003). Cross-cultural understanding is therefore imperative for a healthy learning climate within all schools. Aguis and Ambrosewicz (2003) describe multiculturalism as an opportunity to educate for harmony, tolerance and peace. This is in line with the sociocultural approach, which would discover the opportunity to learn from social interactions with people from different cultures, as opposed to isolating anyone. Schools are the institution in which students not only gain knowledge but also develop attitudes and academic concepts. Therefore, schools may benefit from promoting justice and equality, whilst simultaneously rejecting discriminatory views and influencing their students to do the same. (Aguis & Ambrosewicz, 2003). Regarding participant 2's situation, the school implementing a strategy to combat feelings of marginalisation by Muslims around the time of 9/11 may have eased tensions. It may also have helped to maintain strong mesosystem links and keep open lines of communication with parents of these children. As previously discussed, negative encounters within school boundaries only cause children and home-school co-operation to suffer (Andersson, 2002).

Throughout their navigation of the UK educational system, participants in the current study remained motivated in their communication with schools. They sought appropriate solutions and did not shy away from approaching the school when necessary. Bartlett, Rodriguez and Oliveira (2015) provide an explanation for this, based on sociocultural approaches to migration and education. Often, despite obstacles to inclusion, immigrants developed strategies in order to secure their desired schooling opportunity. This may be because they hold the view that higher education is a way to achieve social mobility and promotion (Shah et al., 2010). With regards to the current finding of parents intervening where school staff do not; this may be due to their aspirational capital (Bisit, 2012) resulting in them employing strategies to resolve school matters and facilitate academic growth. The aspirations and needs of parents are important to assess, as Chavkin (1993) notes that educational programmes will better serve parents if such components are taken into consideration.

To summarise, the South Asian parents in the current study were able to successfully navigate issues within school; from decision-making to intervening in difficult situations. The women all offered similar advice and strategies when questioned about how they would handle tough school matters. They cited communicating with the school and 'escalating' the issue at hand. Furthermore, participant 2 stresses the importance of both educating and protecting her child, in ways that she felt the school did not. The specific issues raised in this theme have implications for macro level policies.

The final chapter is the conclusion, which aims to summarise the findings, outline the main implications, suggest areas for future research and address the limitations of the current study.

Conclusion

The final chapter will summarise key findings from the thematic analysis that was carried out and also offer implications for policy makers and educational institutions. Limitations of the present study will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be put forth.

Key findings & implications

The current study aimed to explore diverse-heritage parents' experiences and navigation of the UK educational system. There were four key themes identified from within the dataset. These themes addressed the research questions and provided a number of implications for researchers, schools and government policymakers to consider.

High parental aspirations

Parents in the current study held high aspirations for the educational achievement of their children, in line with previous research. They did, however, hold culturally different aspirations that did not align with any particular cultural norms. This may be due to the interconnection of cultures the women have experienced. In regards to actualising ethnic capital to realise their aspirations, the existing literature has found non-native parents unable to do so. This did not seem to be the case for parents in this research as one participant in particular demonstrated successfully establishing rules for study. The majority of parents in this study exhibited religious influences on their aspirations for their children's success. This influence was showcased through the participants recurring use of religious phrases. Although they maintained high aspirations they also valued the importance of happiness and did not apply pressure on their children. When their children did face difficulties with pressure, expectations and disappointment in school matters; these parents would assist and guide them.

Implications

It may therefore be valuable for schools to implement practices that represent diverse populations, such as families who hold religious beliefs. In addition, addressing the integration of religion and education with teachers in secular schools may help to strengthen the home-school mesosystem link. To further promote a strong mesosystem link, discussions between parents and schools that center around children's happiness and limiting pressure placed on them may be beneficial.

Effective parental involvement

The next theme highlighted evidence for effective parental involvement during navigation of the educational system by all participants. Previous research has found evidence for cultural differences in involvement and parenting style. The parents in this study demonstrated strong mesosystem links through their effective involvement. Their involvement was in line with all five dimensions set out in the literature. However, involvement by these parents surpassed high school and continued on to university and beyond. An explanation of this finding can be provided by the sociocultural approach, which accounts for cultural differences in norms, values and behaviour. South Asian communities value close familial ties over self-reliance related skills. During contact with school, some parents reported feelings of marginalisation.

Implications

Misconceptions may arise if schools do not work to acknowledge and encourage cultural differences in parental involvement.

Barriers to inclusion

There were a number of barriers to inclusion identified within the dataset. One participant felt as though a teacher was insensitive to her religious and cultural beliefs. Another barrier in the way of inclusion was the issue with communication

between parents and schools, which can lead to a weak mesosystem link. Some of the parents felt different and marginalised by their experiences within schools. There was also evidence of the effect of the language barrier. One participant, after feeling 'embarrassed' about her pronunciation, felt as though this had an effect on her confidence in speaking in other public contexts. Furthermore, participant 4's husband is not fluent in English and would struggle at school events without someone there to translate.

Implications

The findings relating to inclusion pose implications for educational institutions to consider factors stretching across both the community and family level. It may be helpful on a macro level to introduce guidance for teachers to support them in dealing with cultural and religious sensitivity. This will promote interaction between the community and schools. Strategies such as providing staff with such resources and teachers engaging in the reflective process may go some way in maintaining strong home-school relationships.

Not all schools can offer the provision of employing bilingual members of staff. However, the experiences of participants in the current study highlight the need to employ strategies that combat the language barrier and work toward building rich mesosystem connections between the microsystems.

Navigating issues within school

The perception of South Asian women with regards to education is unfavourable. However, the women in the current study challenge the prevailing stereotype of them in the way they navigate and deal with issues within school. One of the participants was part of school decision-making processes on the governing body for 10 years. Furthermore, they all spoke about the way in which they have and would intervene in difficult school situations concerning their children. They were motivated and

relentless in their communication with schools and sought what they felt were the most appropriate solutions.

Implications

Schools could benefit from promoting justice and equality whilst simultaneously rejecting discriminatory views and influencing their students to do the same (Aguis & Ambrosewicz, 2003). This may help to alleviate tension and encourage a culture of inclusion within schools.

Addressing the research questions

How do non-native parents understand the UK education system?

This research question could have been answered better. There was little interview data that focused on their conceptualization and understanding of the education system; grading, key stages, qualifications and so on. The interview guide may therefore not have been comprehensive enough with regards to the research questions. However, the participants demonstrated their understanding in their answers to different interview questions. For example, when discussing their child attending university, participant 1 mentions changes to the A-Level grading system. Although this highlights an understanding of the UK education system, further probing with other participants would have been useful for in-depth analysis.

How do these parents interact or otherwise with the education system?

This research question helped to mould the interview guide. Participants exhibited effective involvement with school matters, which was in line with the five dimensions of involvement outlined in the literature. They were relentless in communicating with schools and intervening when they thought it to be necessary. However, their interaction with the education system does differ, as involvement surpassed high school and continued on to university and beyond. This research question was

further answered through the re-interview process, where participants were given scenarios in order to discuss what they would do in similar situations. Overall, addressing this research question allowed for a number of implications to arise.

How do these parents view education and their children's participation in it?

Participants in this study were identified as having high educational aspirations for their children and had desires for their academic success. They place emphasis on the importance of education for their children. Although they view education in this way, barriers to inclusion and feelings of marginalization were highlighted by parents. Addressing this question with the analysis of key themes leads to this research stressing the importance of policymakers considering factors that stretch across the community and family level and promote interaction.

Hopefully the findings in the current study go some way in diminishing the stereotypes concerning South Asian women. They are capable, highly motivated individuals who navigate the educational system to the best of their ability and stress the importance of education for their children.

Limitations of the research

The current study had a relatively small sample size (5 participants interviewed twice). There is a perception that more interviews are 'better', when in fact the quality and care taken to analyse the data may be important (Baker and Edwards, 2012). A small number of interviews may, however, hinder comparisons across particular groups (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Baker and Edwards (2012) note that the purpose of the research plays a significant role in identifying the appropriate number of interviews to conduct. Although interviewing more participants may have enhanced understanding, the current study aimed to explore non-native parents' experiences of the UK educational system rather than compare ethnically diverse populations.

The researcher utilised a personal reflexivity journal that can help to address bias in qualitative research. A point raised by the researcher during this process was sharing the same ethnic background and religious beliefs as the majority of the participants in the study. Previous studies note that different perspectives within the analysis can emerge through choosing researchers of different 'races' (Maylor et al., 2007). Future research into the area may therefore benefit from selecting interviewers of a different background. Sharing a similar ethnic background to the participants may have increased the researcher's cultural sensitivity and contributed to the good rapport within all of the interviews. The researcher can understand and converse in Punjabi and/or Urdu if necessary, which offers the added benefit of translation. Furthermore, sharing the same religious beliefs as four of the participants provided the researcher with the ability to understand and interpret Islamic phrases and terminology with ease.

The study did not explore the socioeconomic status of each participant in depth. This is an aspect that could have been included in the interview guide and pursued further in the interviews. Discussion of SES factors may have enriched understandings of the parents' navigation of the educational system further.

Recommendations for future research

The current study recommends an increased focus is placed on the effect of parental education in relation to their aspirations. The participants all possessed varying levels and types of qualifications but not one of them went on to pursue high education. They did all mention that they wanted 'more' for their children which could suggest a link between parental education and their aspirations for children. All of the mothers in this research were employed full-time. However, information about their employment history and roles/responsibilities in their current positions were not discussed within the interview. Research into this area may provide an enhanced understanding of the way these parents navigated the education system. The study found that religious observance might exert an influence on parental aspirations. This emerged through the use of specific terminology and phrases when speaking about goals and desires. However, further research is required in order to establish

the influence of religious beliefs on parents' aspirations for success. It may be beneficial to investigate educational strategies for inclusion before implementing them in order to make sure that they are appropriate for use with the target population. Review of strategies already in place may also be constructive as it can identify room for improvement. One of the participants in the current study detailed the struggles her husband faced due to his level of English. Research has explored the academic effects of linguistically isolated households, however more attention could be given to parents and the wider societal effects they face because of it.

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Appendices

Interview 1

First of all, I'd love to know a bit about your family.

Okay, erm, so family of four. That includes a 17year-old girl and a 10year-old boy, my husband and myself.

What is your daughter currently doing education-wise?

Right. So she's in her final year of college, and in her first year she retook her Maths GCSE. That's what they advised her as she wanted to study Psychology and Law, with the aim of carrying that on at university. This year Insha'Allah she will get her results and get into university. It was Maths more than anything that she struggled with at school.

I see, so she does have hopes of going on to university?

She does at the moment and she has applied. When she got her GCSE results, with the grading everything changed and it really threw her. She didn't get the results that she wanted.

Yes... My sister was telling me the system has completely changed from when I was in school. It's now based on points?

Yeah so she missed out on her first choice of sixth form by a couple of points, and then she decided she didn't want to study. It was an absolute nightmare that year. That time of year was awful.

Was it?

Because she didn't wanna study. It threw her. Because she went to school after her results and they just said "well... not really, can't help you" She got a place Sixth Form based on her predicted grades but missed out. They just went "no".

How did you feel when she missed out on her preferred place of study, by a couple of points?

It's hard isn't it, when they change the grading in the middle of the term and they just think "this is how we're gonna grade it now". Your child's done well in their own way, the way they knew...

And you don't judge them on their grades, so it's hard when someone's telling you different...

Yeah, effectively saying that she's not good enough... But at the same time, had they not changed her grades, she would've got in

Right, so they remarked her?

No they changed the whole grading system for Maths, every child that was predicted a C was coming out with a D. It was the way they changed the whole system, the grading of Maths.

Yeah

And that changed her scoring.

So she got a D was it?

Mm.

Was that upsetting for her? Because I don't see a D as a 'negative' grade. I really don't.

But she couldn't get in, so it was negative. If she still got in, then I guess it wouldn't have been negative.

Yeah

I don't know exactly what happened in school because she didn't take me with her. She went with some of her friends.

Oh okay

And then when she came back she was like really deflated. She was like completely like 'no I'm not doing it – I'll get an apprenticeship'

That's interesting that going into the school didn't uplift her, it kind of brought her down

Yeah it brought her down, completely brought her down. I then took her to college myself and they said it's not a problem you can do what you want to do and you just resit Maths.

Was she happy with that advice?

Well, technically no, because she then didn't want to do it. She was just completely deflated and didn't want to do it. I walked in there with her and walked out with them offering her a place and she didn't want to take it up.

It might have been a self-esteem issue maybe...

Oh it definitely was – it just went down. It just went completely down because I think the reality of life struck her

Yeah

And it did at one point look like it was a failure. Complete failure. I think she just looked at herself to be a complete failure. But then I took a step back and said 'fine. If you want to do an apprenticeship, then you take an apprenticeship'.

At first did you try and persuade her in any sort of way?

Yep. I tried to persuade her, so I took her to college... We had a chat and I said 'look, we can get you a place in here, this, that and the other'. She said "no, I don't want to do it" and she walked out'. And then I left her. I thought, as a mum I'm not gonna leave – I'm gonna leave her alone. She wanted to do something apprentice-based so I said 'right – here are the websites, here are the places, go'

So you still helped her to pursue this alternate route?

Yeah. But then there were stages when I would try and take a step back. Like when she was looking at places and she had to get there – I took a step back and said 'you get there yourself'

Oh okay, so you really did think about the approach that you took?

Yeah because I don't wanna hold her hand and take her there

And do everything?

Yeah, because at the end of the day, she made that decision to go into doing an apprenticeship. An apprenticeship is like a job.

Yeah

I'm not going to hold your hand. She had to do it herself. And I think the first couple of places she went herself and I think it wasn't what she wanted. But she couldn't say anything...

Because she had made the decision, she wanted to stick to it?

Exactly. So what I did was I brought my sister and my nieces, family wise, I got them involved and I said 'individually, can you all speak to her in different stages?' And they did.

Were your nieces a similar age to her?

No they were older and they were successful in their lives and everything. I guess in some way it was me trying to show her that, without studying, you're not really gonna get anywhere.

Okay

So what we did was, I took a step back, but tried to research the apprenticeship stuff she wanted. But at the same time I got the rest of the family talking to her. As it wasn't too late to change her mind about college.

I see

So my niece, one of them, in her own way she tried. She said 'I'm taking you back to college and we're accepting the offer.

Right

And she did. She came back happy and said "I've enrolled at college". And I just said 'oh, cool'

You didn't put any pressure on the situation and let her come to that decision naturally.

Yeah

That's a really good idea

Well it was an awful time, I can tell you that much. Honestly, all I ever wanted her to do was experience college life. If you don't like it that's fine, it was never for me. I wasn't one to study, I was always more hands-on. My sister studied, while I was hands-on.

So you didn't take that route, but you still wanted her to...

...to experience it. Yeah. At least. It all ended well. So Hopefully, Insha'Allah she will get her grades, continue studying and pursue her education further at university.

What are you like in terms of your children's studying? Are you more hands-on or do you take a back seat?

I take a back seat. She's like "I know what I'm doing". I don't know if it's just teenagers now but they're very much like 'I know it all' and it is hard to break into the children that think they know it all. But it's kind of like what do you know? If I tell her to set a timetable, do this, do that, she's a bit like 'no, I know what I'm doing'.

So you maybe advise her but you don't get too involved.

No, exactly.

Sometimes me and my daughter do clash.

Which mother and daughter don't at some level?

Because she thinks she knows it all, I think okay then I'll leave you to it. But she wouldn't admit it. This time around, before her exams, I got my sister round and said, you put your foot down. And she did. They looked at a revision timetable together and put in specific times for everything

So really structured?

Yeah and she was okay with that. But if I did it, she would flip.

Right... I wonder why that is...

There's a barrier, she puts it up and it does frustrate me. So I'll get my sister, because she will put her foot down and there's no messing about.

That's interesting. So one of your strategies seems to be getting help from your family...

Oh yeah. I rely on my family. I just take a step back and speak to my brothers, my sisters, even my younger generation... my nieces, my nephews, because they are a similar age. Whoever it may be, and I ask them what they think or tell them to deal with it. I say my piece to her and then carry on. Or I'll talk to them in front of her, while she's there, I'll tell them her side and my thoughts and then ask them what they think.

And they usually back you up?

Yeah

I suppose as well, when girl cousins her age, who she probably looks up to, are saying the same things as you, she might take notice

Yeah. That's exactly when she listens. It's really ironic because her dad has studied and has degrees and she still doesn't listen. She knows it all, don't worry about it.

But as soon as she's told the same thing by cousins, she listens?

Yeah

It's like when your younger and your parents bribe you to do something, like eat, because 'look – your cousin is being so good and eating' and then you would.

It's exactly that.

I'm learning so much already from you about techniques you've used. Everything has a reason behind why you do it and it seems to work out well for you.

It is hard don't get me wrong. I'm having to use her own tactics against her.

The most important thing to remember is that you always want the best for her and you are doing what you believe is in her best interest.

Exactly. I was joking with my husband saying that we need to get her married off just before uni so that headache is someone else's and not mine •laughs•. She is hard work some days

I think that's just this age. I was probably like that too but now I can see my mums point of view so much more.

Now I want to jog your memory to when you were growing up.

I was born here but I actually went abroad back to Bangladesh for most of my childhood and school years so I didn't actually get any qualifications here initially. I missed high school completely. My whole family went, but they all came back and I was the only one that stayed but I was fine with that. I was having the time of my life. Until I got back, and that's when it dawned on me and I realised I needed to do something.

What did you do?

I went into training and stuff. I did a fair bit of training and got my NVQs. There was a lot of training around in them days.

What was your English like back then?

It wasn't what it is now. I wasn't completely confident. I did take my GCSEs after a few years of being back. I decided I needed to do them for my own sake.

Do you remember how old you were taking them?

Yeah, I was 30years old. And I did it actually so I could show my children, look, even at 30 I can do this. I didn't want them to think 'you know what, I don't need to study'.

Yeah

And my daughter was another case to be honest, I don't know if I made a mistake with her or not.

No, from what I can tell, your approach was really easy going but still persuaded her in the direction you were both happy with.

I've had the rebellious act of "you want me to do good so you can tell everybody this that and the other..." but I'm really not that type of mum. I couldn't care less about what other people think. Because I never did it myself. So I guess I'm pretty chilled out with that. Because if you truly want to do something in life, you can. You go for it from whichever angle you can and I did it with my GCSE's at that age, but the question is, 'can you do it?' And that's the question I put to her. But that's a different ball game because she's not like me. I am very strong-willed and I go for what I want but she's not as confident as I am. She's really not confident.

Why do you think that is?

In the back of my mind, I think, I did it to her. She was fantastic when she was in primary school. And then I sent her to an Islamic Girls High School. I think that's when I knocked her confidence.

What do you think went on at the Islamic School that affected her so much?

Because they ran it differently to normal schools. They always expected girls to be more mature, calmer and not let anything out. And I think I did it to her by sending her there. The school itself, I mean I understand where they're coming from. But that kind of stuff comes anyway with age. But they were embedding it into a child who was carefree, chilled-out and loud...

Do you think it changed her as a person?

Yeah and I think it knocked her confidence.

Okay, and in other aspects was sending her to that school a good thing?

I do think it's beneficial, because obviously they cover Islamic knowledge, Namaz... But from what I knew of her, and I spoke to my husband about this, would I be able to handle sending her to a normal school? We both said, maybe this is the right path for her, because it will give her lessons of life slightly different to normal school.

Yeah. So what was the process of sending her to the Islamic school like?

It's independent from the council. So I went for a visit, they had an application form and we filled it in. But it wasn't very well organised. They did have the lessons and timetable structure similar to a normal school. They had recently got a new head teacher and she seemed quite nice.

So did you have direct contact with the head and other staff at the school?

You could have direct contact with it being such a small school. You knew every single teacher and who they were and what they were teaching. The biggest class one year I think was only about 25 pupils, they didn't even have massive classes. But I think, generally I would say that the governing body and the teaching quality was crap.

Right okay. So you weren't happy with that?

It was paid as well so you kind of expected a certain level

Did you go into it thinking she would get a better education?

Better. Because I was paying and my niece went there previously and Alhamdulillah she did really well, and came out with all A's. She didn't really have any issues there and it didn't affect her at all. But I think my daughter went in with an attitude of 'I'm not gonna like this'

Oh okay

And that didn't change throughout. She mellowed, she mellowed but that didn't change throughout.

So if you asked her if she was happy with her high school experience what do you think she would say?

No she wouldn't say she was happy with it

Did you ever consider as a family, moving schools?

Erm to be honest with you, at one point I did but on the other hand I thought... 'She's there now' and I had a chat with my husband and he was like "well leave her now because she's getting through it" and it was a bit of a risk in case she didn't like the new one. It's a hard one. Had I have known when she got to year 11, that the teaching would be so bad, I would've taken her out. For months on end they didn't have a Maths teacher. Obviously that had a knock on effect on her grades

How did it make you feel knowing that she wasn't necessarily the happiest at that school?

You know, she never showed it. She was always 'okay' going, coming back. But in the back of my mind I could see it and I knew it so that had an impact on me.

I can understand that. Just going back from high school to primary school... Were you involved much with the homework your children got given?

Not as much with my daughter. If I had to compare my son and my daughter, their schools were completely different.

What made you make the decision to send them to different schools?

I learnt from our experience at my daughter's school, and so I sent him to a better school. Don't get me wrong she did well in her primary school – clever girl – but I think she could have done better. The school started changing and taking a lot of erm traveller students and everything in and the quality of teaching went downhill. Because they knew that the existing children has flourished and done well so far, they stopped paying attention. They were a lot more bothered about the new children that were coming in and what to do with them. I don't have an issue with that but they should never have neglected children in the class already, it should be consistent even with the addition of new children. There were a couple of head teacher changes as well and it just got really annoying

Disruptive?

Yeah and erm staff themselves were changing mid-term and it's like, 'hold on a minute, this is ridiculous'. She had like two changes in year 6, which was the most important year of primary school, and would have an impact on high school.

So that impacted on your decision to send your son to a different school?

Yeah

Was his primary school better then, were you happy with it?

Day and night. So different.

Did they have a lot more homework?

He had a lot of homework. They would get homework every week, like on Maths and English they could do. I didn't always help him because he's a cheeky sod and would say "I've done it already, I know what I'm doing". If you ask him and say 'let's read it together', he would say "I'll read the pages and them come back to you" whereas when he was younger he used to read to me.

Laughs He doesn't need the help?

He didn't need the help. But, since I didn't help him I would always ask the teacher how he's doing. Because I think that if he's not doing it or doing it to a certain standard then they need to tell me.

Yeah

So then I can go back to him and say, 'I am helping you now'. But Alhamdulillah he's doing well.

Does he take part in any activities?

Everything... He's completely different to her, completely.

What do you put that down to?

Part of me wants to put it down to the difference in school. Part of me. If they truly wanted to help, they could. They can. It's nothing new. To say that kids can't flourish in whatever setting they are in is wrong. I don't think you need private school. I think it's more about the teaching and the quality side of teaching that's delivered. The difference between my kid's primary schools is day and night. He's more active, more involved. Technology wise they are more advanced and her school was never interested in homework and stuff. So you never really bothered. Once a week you got a book, that's fine, not a problem. I used to take her to the library but it was hard getting her into it because she never was into reading.

Yeah

Whereas with my son it's different, he's into reading. It's hard not to put part of it down to the school. He'll read two book a week and go online and read them, through the school's system. Then he will do his English and Maths tests online. There's so much technology nowadays

That's probably was gets him more interested, it's more exciting to be able to use the iPad or the computer

Yeah. And the maths and things they compete with other students online so it is fun for them and there's the intrigue of doing better. Whereas her school was different.

Can you remember what the school system in Bangladesh is like?

Erm, there is a system, as such. It's quite different to here actually. I think they've got Primary, High School, College and Uni's but what they don't have is nurseries and stuff. So you start straight at like 5 or 6. There isn't an age, like a statutory age when everyone has to start, it's like whenever parents feel like it. But both my kids went to nursery here obviously.

Okay. So when you had your children, and you looked at them, what did you want them to be?

Erm, to be fair I just wanted them to be themselves. I know there was a phase in our area where everyone was like 'my daughter's gonna be a doctor, my son's gonna be a lawyer'. But I'm not fussed really as long as they're happy and they're doing what they want. I think the only thing I would say with my son, is that in the back of my mind I always wanted him to do Hifz (*Arabic Memorisation of the Qur'an*).

Okay, so your aspirations were more Islam-based?

Yeah, I think so. I wanted him to... Because we lead two lives really don't we? We lead one life and then there's the other life, the Islamic side as well

Yeah I would agree with that

And I kind of always wanted him to follow that. Because I think in the back of my mind I wanted him to read my Janazah and everything. (Salat al-Janazah – Islamic funeral prayer).

You want him to know what to do. We know there is a life after this so you wanted him to work towards that as well?

Yes. And I think in some ways I want, in them both, I want them to know everything and both sides. With my daughter, part of sending her to the Islamic school was because I wanted her to know things that I couldn't teach her. So I wanted school to pick up on that as well, Islamically. Because it is my duty to teach her but if I'm working full-time, when do I have the time? And for my son, I think I wanted the same thing. So Alhamdulillah he has started his Hifz...

Ah Mashallah. Did they both go to the masjid (mosque) for lessons whilst growing up?

Yeah. He's still going to the normal class for now at our local mosque. At the moment he's doing Hifz in the mornings getting used to it because in September he will be going into the proper class for it.

Have they both finished reading the Qur'an?

My daughter has and my son is on 20 Para (20th Chapter).

At 10 years' old that is really good Mashallah

It's not bad but he could be further along if he stopped chatting *laughs* With the Hifz they said to start him off early because the younger he is the more he is going to remember and retain... erm, so I'm hoping Inshallah, he starts in September, he's in year 6... by year 8 or 9 he should finish. Before his GCSE's. That's the aim, that's the goal.

Have you thought academically what you want him to do, following his GCSE's?

Erm, I haven't but when we've spoken before, he says he is going to be a pilot, an engineer, an architect... I just said go for whatever you want, I'm not fussed

You don't put any pressure on it?

No

That's good

I said if you want to fly around the world, you fly around, make sure I've got a free ticket *laughs*

Laughs Was their education always particularly important to you?

It is important, and that's why I want them to achieve in whatever field they want, because it broadens their horizons and not only that but the confidence that they build from just going to college or uni... and it will be how they set their life up

Yeah. I'm just trying to think what I wanted to ask you next... Taking it back to primary school again, how did you deal with any struggles you had?

Honestly, my family

Yeah. I know you mentioned asking your family for help now, so it was the same case then?

Yeah totally. When my daughter was born, I went back to work quite quickly. I literally did nothing for her apart from breastfeed her. That was the only time that I was useful... I had so much family there, that I never had time or the chance to pick her up. So I went back to work. But when it came to school and everything... I sent her to day care twice a week, at about a year old. And then when she was 3 and a half I sent her to normal school nursery

Right

Because my nephew was already going, so I dropped them off and then someone else picked them up so I always had help with lifts. My family did help a lot because me and my husband were working similar times and were in and out at the same time. That went on for a bit, until my son was born. He then got a job at Royal Mail and that changed things

Ah, night shifts?

Yeah he was then doing night shifts, which meant I would do the drop off to school and he would do the pickup, and it's still the same now. He would look after my son on the one day he wasn't at nursery... Because I wanted his dad to be hands-on as well.

Hands-on yeah... Does he get involved with the school side of things?

Yeah. He wasn't born here but he went to uni himself a few years back and got a degree... don't ask me in what though

So he must have an interest in how they're getting along at school?

He does, but he takes a step back. He's laid back and he's like 'well they can choose what they want'. He says "if they need anything they know where we are". We both say that we will guide them. Because when my daughter said she wasn't going to go back to college, he said "well it's her decision..."

But how did he feel when she eventually did decide to go back to college?

It was a relief for both of us

A relief

Because we both held our breath, and we were thinking 'this can't be happening'. I'm not against apprenticeships, but it was what she was giving up. If she started the apprenticeship, that would've been it. It would've been hard for her to come out of that and go back into studying. You get used to the money and everything, however low it is.

In your culture, would you say there was an expectation for our kids to go to university?

Erm, to be honest with you, our lifestyle is a bit different, because all of my brothers have got restaurants and they're doing well.

Business, yeah...

So their focus has never been education as such. The only two out of my six brothers and sisters who have actual jobs and are working is me and my sister. The others have businesses and are self-employed. But saying that one of my brother's kids haven't followed his footsteps at all, they have studied and gone to uni and done it that way. So I guess it's a mixture of both routes

Yeah whereas with us its more clear-cut

I think in the back of my mind I always wanted them to better themselves

But you don't mind either way?

No, because I guess the way I look at it is that you will find a way of surviving, always

That is a good way to look at it, because I'm sure your daughter, the same as many kids, will have thought her life was over after not getting a place at sixth form

Well, she wouldn't talk, locked herself up for like two days and wouldn't talk or anything. And then we did have quite a heated conversation. Because looking back, I always thought she could have done better but I didn't push her...

It's that balance

Exactly, that balance of 'it's your education, you need to do it, I can't be telling you' and when I did tell her, she would go the other way

Yeah, as much as my mum is super relaxed, I also know that I've not really pushed her. If I hadn't have gotten into sixth form when she had every expectation of me to get in, I know we would have had a similar situation as you, where she would've said the same thing 'I know you can do better than this'.

I remember talking to you mother about this last year probably talking her ear off, I was like 'what do I do?!' I don't know what happened at school that made her come back and shut everything out. Because I know something happened. She wasn't like that before, so why did she have that change of heart? All of a sudden she didn't want to go to uni or do this or that... I don't know what they did to her that was so bad that knocked her so much, that she didn't want to pursue anything anymore. Something happened. And it took us, the whole of the family...

Before she was happy to go back to studying?

Yeah and I asked her recently, she has a problem where she freezes when it comes to exams. I do that as well so I know where she's got that from. I never passed anything first go, because I always freeze the first time and then I can do it. So I guess in some ways that might be why I don't put too much pressure on her, because I know what I'm like

You can empathise with her?

Yeah, I can see myself in her, yeah. My driving test I passed second time round. My theory as well. I tell her, I know where she's coming from because I'm like that myself but she still doesn't understand that I can be like that

You can empathise with her but she will struggle to empathise with you because you're her mum, she thinks you're the strong one. She can't imagine you ever being upset or...

Failing. Not getting it right the first time. Yeah it is that

I'm the same with my mum, I honestly think my mum is like superhuman, if I ever have any type of problem I feel like she will always be able to solve it and your daughter will feel the same

Yeah, it's pretty scary but that's how our kids see it.

I wanted to know as well if you ever felt different due to your heritage, being Bangladeshi? Interacting with any teachers or schools?

To say she went to an Islamic school and all the teachers were Muslim, it was hard interacting. I would prefer it the other way. Seriously, in the other schools if I had a problem I could bring it up and talk to them. But Islamic school was hard because it would get their back up straight away

They were more offended and defensive?

Oh man, I used to think 'what is going on here?' One year, I think she was in year 8, and erm they were supposed to give us a list of uniforms and everything. Her sports uniform was just black, and the previous years they tried to provide it. But anyway, September came and I'd gone into, I don't know, Sports Direct or wherever and I got her a full outfit: Nike. I thought it's was the smallest sign you could see and it was all black...

I already know where you're gonna go with this...

And she went in and the P.E teacher said she couldn't wear that because it had Nike on it...

Nike, yeah...

So I went in, and I said I want to speak to the head teacher, I wasn't going to speak to the P.E teacher

You went straight to the top?

I just thought 'I don't think so' and I went in and I said to her 'can you show me what's wrong with this outfit?' and she said 'why?' So I said to her, 'your P.E teacher said to my daughter that she can't wear this because it isn't appropriate, but what is wrong with this? There's only two signs, one on the trousers and one on the tracksuit top, two signs... very faint. I got my daughter that, what is the issue with it? Why did she say she can't wear it?' and she said 'oh... I apologise, I apologise'. But it was such hard work with that school. So petty. I'm not a branded person but I wanted my daughter to have something nice because she was going to school and it was for the full year...

And like you said she wasn't that confident...

Yeah and I just thought you know what... I wanted good quality for her. But I'd be happy if they said 'we're providing the P.E kit, you can buy it from us'. I would be cool with that.

Is there any Muslim or Bangladeshi teachers at your son's primary school?

I think there are a mixture of teachers. He might have one this year that's Muslim but he's not had any previously. But Alhamdulillah he's doing so well...

You don't have any concerns or anything?

No, no...

What are his parent's evenings like?

For his school you book it on the system, book yourself in and they will go through the stages of where he's at and what he should be achieving and what's expected of him. And Alhamdulillah, he's exceeded expectations this year, even though the grading changed last September. So they had a whole new year of the new system, however he still exceeded. The school is pretty good.

Is there anything you think to yourself 'I would change this about the school my child went to, so I felt more comfortable'?

I would say communication. At my daughter's school there was just no communication at all. It was their way or no way. That was a complete different attitude. Especially to say I was paying for it...I am happy with my son's primary school though as they cover whatever is on the curriculum but they do extra things like on Eid and Diwali which goes a long way in making parent's feel a bit more included. It helps. They have bilingual staff there so if I did need that it would be there. Whereas my daughter's primary school didn't offer that, and back then is when I would have maybe needed that more so than now.

So overall you think the school now is better with communication?

Definitely. To be fair, we had an issue last September and my son was going to have the same teacher for the third year in a row and a lot of the parents were experiencing the same thing so they got together and went to see the head teacher about it and asked for change.

Did you get involved in that too?

To be honest with you, I didn't have to because when I spoke to the other parents... Some of them took that leadership role and went to speak to the head teacher with the rest of our support and feedback.

So you got the result you wanted by getting involved and having your say...

Yeah. We tend to get together in the playground before school and have a chat and what have you. I try to get there as much as possible, I think it's important to get to know other parents. One of his friend's mum text me and said the kids wanted to go to watch film and I said 'yeah, fine'...

You're making friends, he's making friends...

Exactly

I think that's everything for now, and I've used your whole lunch break

God, that's gone fast

Do you have any questions for me? Or anything you would like to add?

No not really, let me know if you've got any more questions for me

Interview 2

Tell me a bit about your family.

I have a son, who is 29 years old and he is currently working as a personal trainer. He has a degree in media and business, he graduated a while back. And I have a daughter who is 21 and is in her final year of university studying nutrition.

And to what level is your own education?

Btec in nursery nursing. It's equivalent to two a-levels

Did you do that straight after your GCSE's or was it later on?

It was later on, I had already had my first child at that point.

Did your children both attend nursery?

Yes, they did. My son was two when I started studying

My next question was about the process of getting them into school and how you found it?

Well nursery for my son was attached to my course so childcare was provided and so he went to nursery and then education nursery after that, so yeah. Even following that, with school, I knew about the process of getting them into school because of the nursery nursing. I had placements at different schools and learnt things that way. From that I knew which schools were good and which I didn't want to send them to and what the procedure was. Otherwise I would've been confused I think

Do you remember much about when they were in primary school? Did they take part in any activities?

Yeah I pushed them for everything, didn't I? I used to push my son for cricket, taking him to Headingley before he was even 5.

So you were big on sport?

Big on sport, I wanted them to be busy busy busy

Why did you think that was important?

To keep them out of trouble and hanging around with bad company, that was the main purpose

What about in terms of achievement?

Yeah definitely. I think it gave them focus

Did their primary school give them much homework that you could help them with?

Oh yeah, I did always. It was reading every day and then spellings. Just 15-20 minutes every day and I always got involved with that

Can you remember any time you might have gone into school to deal with something relating to them?

Hmm. In nursery my son was quite naughty. In the early years, yeah. He used to bite people, hit, kick, punch. So I was summoned. They just would say 'he's done it again' and I would say okay I'll have a word with him

Was there anything like that for your daughter ever?

Never, no

Did that kind of behaviour carry on?

No he was fine in education nursery and reception and then obviously we went back to Pakistan when he was in year 1/2.

And he attended primary school there?

Yes he did, he went for three years. I still made sure he went

What was the school system like? Were there any major differences?

Loads more homework, and I ended up doing some of it for him because there was so much. I used to say to him, 'if you do the Urdu, I'll do the English' and vice versa so he was still doing both. It was always – whatever he did in class, he had to repeat it at home. So he had the same number of books at school and at home and then everything had to be copied out. It was just copying out

Do you think it was more intense in Pakistan then?

Definitely. And not in a good way, because the way they were doing it was just copying. What was the purpose of that? He wasn't learning anything and I used to copy some of it out for him and they didn't even realise. They just wanted to see it had been done. They used to put CW is HW, every day. That meant that classwork was also homework and it was nonstop, for every single subject that was written in the diary. Classwork is homework, classwork is homework.

So what was the reason you came back?

For his education. For a better education. Because as he was growing up...

His education was important to you?

Very

But otherwise, when you went there you were planning on staying there?

Yep, which would've been a nightmare long-term.

So when did you come back?

When he was in year 5. He had his ups and downs in high school but he was okay. Then he went to college and he had bad company there but I was always on his back. I always went to see his tutors and said if he ever misbehaves, you've got to call me, before he even started.

Even at college?

Even at college.

Why was there education so important to you?

Because I wanted them to do well and have an easy life after... and be successful and professional

What do you mean by successful? Did you have a goal in mind, like university?

Definitely university, because for me, my goal was for my son to get to uni. Because that was the reason I came to England, that was the sole purpose

Did you not see that happening in Pakistan?

No, no... I didn't value the education there so I said if he's going to go to university and to England I've got to be with him and that's why I decided to move, even with his father staying over there

And what about your daughter?

She just did everything herself, she didn't need any pushing or persuading, she just did it herself. She was quite committed to everything anyway. But just I just kind of took her there, and she did it all.

So it was easier with her?

A lot easier

So when you looked at them both, when they were young, did you want them to be anything specific?

No... just whatever they wanted to be. I just thought 'as long as they get to uni and have good jobs, and can stand on their own two feet... that's it'. That was it, to make them independent.

Was it the same for both of them? Nothing differed?

Oh yeah, no no no... whatever they wanted. My daughter could've gone into dentistry, she could've gone into medicine, but I said 'whatever you're enjoying'

So you didn't try and persuade her in any sort of way?

No, I didn't. Her dad did... he wanted her to be a doctor... and she tried but she didn't like it, so that was it.

From knowing her very well, I think she's glad she didn't go down that route...

Yeah, but it's a status thing with Pakistani's, isn't it? The status of doctors... that's the only success they see. Engineers and doctors... all the others are nothing. But I wasn't bothered at all. As long as they could feed themselves, have a roof over their head... that was good enough for me

Mmm... did you have any desires for them besides their education?

Being independent, being able to look after themselves and their family... and being good people. That was the main thing for me, being good people. I don't care what they're doing for themselves, but I want them to be nice to others as well and I drilled that into them

And are you satisfied?

No I'm not satisfied yet! *laughs* I'm not satisfied, I'm never satisfied. But I want them to make a difference. I try to drill that into them all the time. You think of others more than you think of yourself. Don't be selfish, be selfless. That's my motto. And if they ever say 'oh no, somebody's doing this...' I'd bite their head off

You said you wanted them to go to university. What lengths were you willing to go to, in order to see that happen?

I was so determined for him to go to uni. So he left school with his GCSE's and went onto sixth form. At that school they knew him, they knew what he was like and they knew me. He then went onto Technology College, and I went in to see them before he started. I said 'I want him to do well'. I went to see his tutors, erm, on the opening day and I said 'this is my son, and this is what I want from him. I'm here only for his education. And if he ever misbehaves, or steps out of line, I need to know... here's my number'. And I left my number with them. Then, about... He doesn't know this, don't tell him... Erm, about three months into the course, they called me in and said he was mixing with the wrong kind of crowd and they could see him being influenced. They said 'we know how much this means to you and how hard you're working for him', that's what they said, it was a female and a male member of staff. They said 'we're just going to move him to a different group'. It was the same course but just a different group, to get him away from that influence. They said to me "he doesn't know why, we're just telling you" and I said 'that's fine' and he was over 18, so they didn't have to tell me or do that, but they did. I think because I went in and made my feelings clear at the start. So anyway, I said 'yep that's fine, go ahead and do it', so they did. He came home fuming

Really?

Yeah

You just pretended you didn't know anything?

Yeah I just pretended I didn't know anything about it. He said "why have they moved me? I had loads of friends in that group..." *laughs* "...and now I don't know anybody! They said there's no space in the other one but why did they move me and nobody else?" He was so annoyed. So I said 'well they must have their reasons... it doesn't matter, you'll make some new friends' *laughs* and so yeah, he was fine. It worked out for the best and I was really grateful and appreciative for what those tutors did.

So you did find yourself getting involved even up until college?

Yeah and he did okay and then he got into the uni following that. Even there I was kind of checking up on him all the time...

Were you?

Yeah

Like getting involved with the tutors?

No... I couldn't really do that, I think he would've kind of killed me if I did, but I did phone up a few times and just say 'by the way... how is he doing?' you know... that kind of thing... so yeah

Very involved. Was this more so because he moved out?

Mmm... Yeah. I always had his friend's numbers, so people he was staying with. And if he didn't ring me every day I would call them and say 'he's not answering his phone, where is he?'

How many years did he move out for?

I think about two years. First and second, and then he wasted one year didn't he, in the middle...

And then he resat?

He resat that one, mm.

I see, did you have any other issues that you had to resolve with school?

Hmm, let's see... there's plenty of stories involving my son. He went through a rough period around the time of 9/11.

Oh did he?

Yeah... he hated that.

At school?

At school... obviously there was all that tension in the schools. He took it all personally, he used to have a fight with anybody if anybody said anything, he would thump them

Did people say things directed at him?

I don't think it was like attacks to him personally but he would take remarks very personally. He would fight for the whole of the Muslim Ummah, in his mind. He didn't know how to else to go about it. He actually threw a chair at somebody once.

How did you deal with that?

I was called in... I went and I said 'well, you've got to address this issue'. The school had to address the issue, because obviously they weren't dealing with it. They should've been looking after all the students, from all angles and protecting each one, and I said 'clearly you're not doing that'. Especially at such a tense time for the whole world. If the staff were encouraging it, then that's wrong.

Were the people making remarks getting told off as well, or was it just him for reacting in that way?

In my eyes, he was getting picked on, because he was the one who lost his temper. But the others didn't, because they just started it and then backed away. So I think he was on report for a week after that. I remember that, piece of paper

That's not long at all compared to some kids, they can be on report for months

Really? Well for him it was awful, I really hated it. I thought that was the worst thing that could ever happen. And I made him feel like that as well. You know, 'it was the worst thing that could happen to our family', that's what I said. I said, 'nobody's ever been on report before you and nobody ever will again'

Did that make him change?

Oh yeah, mm, yeah he did think about it. He begun to control his temper after that, because he knew how bad it was. I said to him, 'next time you're on report we're going back to Pakistan – what's the point of staying here? If you're not going to try'

How did the situation change you? Did it make you get more involved with school?

Not really, I was more concerned about managing his anger and making sure he wasn't rising, because the school weren't doing enough in my eyes. I talked to him all about it and that's when we started having that 'boys group', you know so him and his cousins could kind of find out more about their religion and improve their own understanding. Then they could defend it with their words rather than their fists.

Was this at the beginning of high school?

No it wasn't right at the start, but in the first year he was beaten up

Really?

Mmm, I was driving down Thorn Lane and there was a fight in the middle of the road and in the middle of all that was my son and this other boy

Was it a racial attack?

No, no... I think they were just trying to stand up to each other and er, take control

Did you see him then?

I stopped the car in the middle of the road and ran out and said 'get yourself off him!' There was a crowd around them, my son was on his own against this group. I told him to get in the car and I said in front of everyone that I was calling the school, and I was calling the police. And they all ran away.

Did you call the school and the police?

I called the school but not the police. I brought him home and he was fuming. He was on his own which made it worse, he wanted to get his uncles and cousins involved because he thought it was unfair. But nothing else did happen with that situation, it didn't escalate any further thankfully.

They didn't have any more run-ins?

No they didn't, luckily. He said he thinks it's because he stood up to him, that he backed off. Otherwise, the boy would've kept on picking on him, but he wasn't going to let that happen. So he defended himself and everyone saw him as strong after that.

Was he hurt or anything?

No, no. There were no cuts or bruises, it was more of a scuffle. I think I came at the right time Alhamdulillah. So yeah, it is hard work, having kids.

But you've done a good job

No I haven't

Even just seeing how involved you were in college, in making sure he stayed on the straight and narrow...

I wouldn't even leave him now! Somebody phoned after his interview, and I told her that he wasn't in, he was at work. And she said 'I just wanted to give him some good news following up from his interview', so I said, 'I'm his mum, can I take the message?' and she said 'oh yeah, he's been offered this, this and this'. I said, 'oh that's really good, how did he do in the interview?!' *Laughs* I said, 'he'll kill me for

asking, but how was he?' and she said he was the best candidate, and I said 'really? He came back saying that it wasn't good at all...' and she said 'no honestly he's really good and he's very popular wherever he goes, all the sports centres wanted him, so that's why I've had to put him in three different centres because they all wanted him'. I was so pleased

***Laughs* still babying him at 29!**

Still doing it *laughs* I shouldn't really, but when he gets married it will be over to her. From one nest to the other.

Is there anything else you want to add?

I think my target was just to educate him and make him a good person. I wanted the balance and I worked my socks off to do that. And that's it really. Only Allah (God) will be the judge how I've done. Because your kids can take you up there or down there *laughs*

Interview 3

Were you born in this country or abroad?

No, I was born in Kenya, Nairobi

Oh wow, and when did you move here?

I moved here... gosh... in 88... 87?

So how old were you?

I was around 26 or 27 when I moved here.

So were you educated in Kenya then?

Yeah

What's the system like there?

Erm... hard. It's different. And you know, back in the day, and where we lived... it was just assumed that you get to a certain point – you do your O Levels and then...

That's it?

That's it

For women...? Or for everyone?

For women. And you know, that's it. It's time for you to get married and you know, you're not doing anymore studying. But my parents were quite broadminded, and I did my A Levels there as well. And after my A Levels I went to work over there

What kind of job was that? Similar to what you're doing now?

Erm no, it was completely different... I started off with teaching in college

So you didn't need to go to uni to pursue that?

No, no... I just did some training and then started working in the college

Did you not want to carry on teaching when you got here?

Hmm, no, I thought... it was hard, because I came here, got married and I needed a job. Because my husband was living with his brother and we needed a house and wanted to move out. So there wasn't that thing – maybe if he had his own place and was set up here... you know... he had just come here as well. Maybe then I could've thought about doing something I liked, you know. But when I got married we were living with his brother and then when my first daughter was born, we were still living there

Ah right

So we didn't have a place of our own and we just wanted a job so we could buy a house

And be independent?

Yeah

Okay. Were your parents born in Kenya as well?

Right let me have a think... My dad was born in Kenya, Nairobi and my mum was born in India... yeah and they moved to Uganda, so my mum came from Uganda and my dad came from Nairobi. But my grandad came in 1914 I think, when they were building the great railway. So they brought all these people from India, to build the railway. But he wasn't building the railway, he worked in the Met department, you know, telling about the weather and all that. So he had quite a good post, and that's where he was but he moved around East Africa. He had 10 children, so my dad had lots of siblings. They weren't all born in Nairobi, he stayed there a few years and then he moved to Tanzania, Arusha... And then Uganda. So all of his kids were everywhere.

I see... Have you been back since you moved here?

I've been...

Because 26 is not long ago, that must still feel like home for you?

Yeah it is still home. When I first came here I really missed it. Because the weather there is beautiful, we didn't have to... work was more like pleasure and not for bills. It wasn't a headache and pressure to go and work to pay bills. It was just like pocket money for me really because my dad took care of me in that sense. I've been back four times I think...

Oh wow, have the kids ever been?

Yeah, they all have but when they were very young we took them for a holiday for about 3 weeks. We went all over, the safari parks and such. Because both mine and my husband's family were still there. The first time I went was when my mum was really poorly so I went to see her erm, when she was in ICU. Then I went... My dad kept saying "since you've been married you've never been with your husband and kids", so we went for a holiday after that. Then... it was like a week... we had just come back on the Friday and on the Friday my dad passed away

Aww...

So I hadn't even like unpacked properly, so, just packed my bags and I was off to Kenya again. And then after that I went for my brother's wedding. Then, the last time was when I took my son with me, he was just a few months old. Now he's 16, so the

last time I went was about 15 years ago. There was two weddings then as well. But yeah those are the only times I've been back really...

Have you got any plans to visit again any time soon?

Erm, I don't know...

Because you've been to India more recently right?

Yeah that was about 5/6 years ago. Time just goes doesn't it. But with Kenya, it's just like... with my mum and dad not being there, it's not the same. Such a big house and they're not there. What would we do there? Stay inside?

It's probably changed quite a lot since you were last there

Yeah, it has. So I haven't really thought about going but I probably will eventually for a little holiday when I can afford it *laughs* I still have to get a visa if I want to go and then on top of flight prices, it gets expensive.

You don't have dual-nationality?

No, they don't do it over there. I don't know what it's like in Pakistan for you guys, do you get a card or something?

Yeah you apply for a national ID card, and with that you don't have to pay for the visa on entry. It saves a lot of money in the long run, as they last for around 10 years I think. I got mine recently.

Yeah that's good

So, let's see... next questions... You got your A Levels, but what about your children? You're oldest two have both been to uni right?

Yeah, my first daughter did Human Geography at uni, like regeneration planning and all that.

Ah, did she enjoy it?

She did, but she didn't get a job out of it

She didn't? What kind of job was she looking for?

No, well she did get one for about 18 months, like project work. But after that the funding finished.

Is she still looking in that sector now?

Yeah she is looking. She did get a job offered, a few days ago in York, but she's had to... It was only for two months. She doesn't want to leave her current job in Tesco, because if she leaves that, after the two months, they won't take her back

Even though she's been there a while? Would they not let her just for two months?

No, no... they're very, no. Plus we added up the travel costs and everything and the tax and what not. We thought it's not worth the stress, we sat down and decided that she should decline it. There was a possibility that they would extend it beyond the two months but now she's getting married...

Congratulations by the way

Thanks *laughs* so we thought there was no need for the extra stress

Is she working full-time at Tesco?

No, no, just part-time. They don't give you full-time there but she will take overtime if there is any. It's hard, you know. She's got work experience with a big company. She's going in September for a month, they called her in. Because every interview she goes to, when she asks for feedback, they're like "you had a very good interview but you don't have the experience that the other candidates have. So she started looking into getting that, and Keepmoat have offered her the experience.

Brilliant... And your second daughter, she's doing a Masters now?

Yeah she's finishing that in two weeks

And how is she finding it?

Hard, you know...

Yeah, what was it she did her degree in?

She did Psychology and Society and now she's doing the Psychology Masters because I think she wants to become an Educational Psychologist but I think there's something after this she has to do

Oh right, has she been getting experience in schools as well?

Hmm, not really, I think because she's been so busy working as well, 6 days a week. She leaves home at 10am and doesn't come back until 2am

No way, that's such a long day

Yeah, because she says she can't concentrate at home so she does it all in the library. She's more of a night person, she prefers to do it then. She's always had a job so she's used to it. But it is hard because she comes home and she's so tired. She will have a break for an hour or so and then she says "I'm off to uni". So I make her dates with almonds

Ah yeah, they are really good for prolonged energy, which is why we have them so much in Ramadan when we're fasting. They really kept me going this year

Yeah she loves them, so I made her them to keep with her to keep eating when she's on the go

Yeah, that's such a good idea. Just going back to when you moved here. What was your English like? Did you learn it over in Kenya?

I did, yeah. Because English was compulsory, so our language that we had to learn was Swahili. But English was actually our first language.

So Swahili was second?

Second, yeah. It was compulsory but English was your first language there. So they worked on the same system as here, because it was a British colony. You know, if anything changed here, it would also change there. Like GCSE's and other curriculum changes.

I see, so would you say that you were fairly confident speaking English once you came here?

No I wasn't confident, because we never actually spoke English. We spoke Swahili or Punjabi

Yeah

At home we were always speaking Punjabi and with other people we would speak Swahili so English was just like

Like a school thing?

Yeah, so I wasn't really confident when I came here

Yeah... so when you had your first child and you were ready to apply for school places, were you more confident?

Oh yeah, yes, especially working with the council. I started working there soon after I moved here.

How did you feel applying for that job?

It was hard. Before moving to Leeds I was in Leicester, and I joined a temping agency. I was doing all sorts of jobs, anything really.

Yeah. So did all your children go to nursery before school?

Yeah

And can you remember the process of getting them into school?

I didn't get the first school we wanted

So did you appeal or anything?

Let me think... Yes, we did appeal for my first daughter and we still didn't get it. It was just that... We were living in the old house and they were both the same distance. But because people were saying it was a good school and I had it in my mind that right next to it is the high school I wanted them in...

Were you still happy with the primary school as a whole?

Yeah, yeah...

Did they take part in any activities or anything like that?

I know my son did, he played Dhol but I can't remember what the others did. They will have done but I can't really remember. All I can remember is my youngest going for the Dhol lessons and paying for them *laughs*

Has he carried that on?

He has, yeah, he plays on and off, yeah

That's good. Can you remember if you ever had to go into the primary school for anything in particular?

The only time I can remember is when we wanted to go to India for a month and it was Easter holidays. I wanted to take my son out of school for an extra two weeks, he was in reception. Was it Mr. *****? He rejected, and said "you're not taking them out". Whereas, my daughter was in high school, in year 7 or 8, we applied the same and they just signed it off. So that's when I went to see the deputy... Erm I went into school to see the head but he was off sick, so I met with Mrs. *****. He was off sick, so she had to... I had to write a long, long letter you know

Did you?

I put it all about... religious stuff... I had to put loads about how their grandma wanted to take her grandson to Amritsar, you know...

Yeah, yeah

You know, we had to put a lot of stuff in

But you got in sorted in the end?

Yeah, she... I spoke to her, high school they gave and not reception? Luckily the head was on sick so we asked her and said 'we haven't got a response' but the airfare was going up, so we had to chase them about a response. So she said "right, I will find out what I can do", and she approved it, but she said she spoke to him as well, over the phone. But it was a nightmare

Did you get involved with other school related things, like the kids' homework?

Yeah I always helped them with their homework, I think they got a normal amount compared to some people I know. My husband's nephew gets loads of work, so much, but the work he does is more higher level than my son, and he is younger than him as well. That's what I noticed, things that my son hadn't even learned yet.

Did they ever come to you for help with certain subjects?

I think most of the time they got on with it themselves, but if they needed help they would come and ask. I think it was just Maths and English. Then we would work through it together

Yeah... And did you ever read to them or anything like that?

Er, yes. I read to them when they were younger. I remember, as they grew older, technology changed. With my son, we did very little because by the time he was growing up there was so much technology, so

Yeah that's true. Can you remember the main differences between school here and in Kenya?

Yeah, getting whipped *laughs* yeah, punishment was way worse. Or if you were naughty you go and clear the field, picking litter up

Did that ever happen to you?

Oh yes, once I remember the whole class was on detention, so we were all over the field picking litter up

How old were you?

It was secondary school

So like teens?

Yeah, I can't remember exactly...

You can't imagine that happening here can you... It just wouldn't

Yeah... and I can't really remember primary school... all I remember is that I used to not want to go and I used to get told off by my dad everyday

Laughs

He would say "you have to go, you have to"

He valued your education?

Yeah, a lot

Can you remember if your kids had any issues at school, maybe where they had detention or anything like that?

Hmm, yeah for my son. The girls were okay but I think boys are a bit more... There were a couple over the years that I can remember, yeah

Was it anything serious or was it resolved easily?

Resolved easily... yeah

Were you more defensive over him or did you want to speak to the school about it?

I always wanted to speak... and ask them 'why?' because I knew whatever he would tell me would be the truth, because he knew that if he told me porkies or anything then there would be no way I could help. He would tell us what had happened and what I was going in for so I knew a bit about the situation and I would go with an open mind and hear what they were saying

But you would get involved in the situation?

Yeah we've always been... I know my relative they say 'we've never been to parent's evenings, because we thought there was a problem' but problem or not, I've always... we've always... one of us has always been to the parent's evenings for the kids. But the school is good in that sense because I know if you don't sign up they will text you or ring you up and say 'you haven't signed up'. I remember once we didn't put in for one subject and they sent a message saying 'you haven't booked a meeting for this', which is good that they do that

Yeah it's changed a lot from being paper-based and if you lost that piece of paper with all the times of meetings... But they text parents now to keep them updated. Do you feel like you are in the loop with what's going on at school?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. Because text... I get a text and immediately I forward it to my son and he says he knows but I still send it to him so we both know what is happening. I don't have any complaints about either school to be fair

Was your daughters' education particularly important to you?

Oh it was... Because I always felt that I've reached this point... I've done A Levels... But I wanted them to do more

More, yeah...

I know the older two have, and my son, he might take a different route and might not go to uni. I think we will respect his choice, if he says that apprenticeship is for him and uni is not for him.

You'll probably help him still, with that alternate route. I know my mum always forwards me any opportunities she thinks I might be interested in

Yeah, yeah... that's what I'm like with my eldest, I will send her any jobs I come across, so...

So when you looked at them when they were really young, did you ever want them to be something specific?

Erm... not really, not really. I never, you know forced them to do something they weren't really confident in. I just let them decide what they wanted to do

A lot of emphasis is put on the sciences, did you ever try and sway them in that sort of direction?

Hmm, well with my eldest, when she was applying, we did look at the top sector jobs, you know, and the degree she did did come in the top sectors, but now when we look at it, it's nowhere to be seen. Now it's mostly finance, IT, medical stuff that is at the top. But the degree she did, when we looked at it originally, it was one of the top degrees.

So how did you deal with the fact that she was struggling to find a job? Was she upset?

Oh yeah, she used to be upset all the time. We used to say, you know 'don't be upset. If you wanna further your education, go study something. If you feel that this is not for you, go into something completely different'. Because it wasn't as if we were asking, you know she didn't have to pay the mortgage or anything. With her wedding, we're funding it ourselves. It would have been nice if she was working full-time as well, but there was that thing where we didn't want her to feel as though, you know, she doesn't have a job and feel depressed. So we just said to her, 'what are you worrying for? You don't have to pay the mortgage, it's fine, we're not asking you for anything'

Yeah, so you didn't put any pressure on her to find that job?

Yeah, there was no pressure at all. Even now, there's no pressure to find a job. If she finds it then that's great but if she doesn't -

-you're still there for her?

We're still there and we will remortgage the house *laughs*

Let me see if I've got any other questions... Did you have any other desires for your children as they were growing up? What did you want from them in life?

Apart from education, because you know I wanted them to have a good education...

Yeah...

I always felt that maybe they should do something else, like on the side. With my eldest we did quite a lot, because she was the first born, so we took her to karate lessons and she learned how to play the harmonium. She did swimming and there

was something else she did... So our week, we used to come from work and it was just like doing things with her. And then I think it was getting too much for her. She was doing all these extra activities outside of school, and we thought 'right, we need to stop doing that' because we're putting so much pressure on her. So I think she stopped the karate after a year... But swimming they both got gold, erm, the highest. So then with my second oldest girl we didn't... she just went swimming. With my son he didn't want to go swimming. But yeah, I was thinking, maybe they should do something extra, and they used to learn Punjabi as well

Oh did they? Do they all speak it?

Yeah, they speak it but they're not very fluent. Because of grandma they understand and speak it but they aren't very fluent, they don't know half the words. They understand what's being said but my eldest is the only one who is probably fluent.

Yeah, erm, I was going to ask, did you put emphasis on your cultural side?

Just Punjabi, we wanted them to learn Punjabi... My eldest did go and do a GCSE in that. The other two did go for lessons but they didn't take it up, we never pushed them *laughs* they just weren't interested. With school work and with us working there wasn't the time really. Maybe if we were working part-time or something, I don't know...

Yeah, you could've taken them and stuff. I think that's most of my questions covered... Did you know about the education system here because of your job?

Yeah because I worked for the council

So like getting your kids into school, you weren't worried because you knew the system?

The system, yeah

Did the fact that you moved here in your 20s ever pose any issues for you? Integrating or settling?

I think I was quite shy, just like my kids trying to speak Punjabi, they get embarrassed. My way, some of the words were quite different and I always mix my W's and V's, you know the way I say... And I wouldn't notice that but somebody else would say 'what you saying?' you know... it put me off speaking in public then

Interview 4

So... Again, you don't have any questions or anything before I start do you?

No, no, that's fine, go ahead

So I want to know a bit about your family... But even before that, about you. Where were you born?

Born in Pakistan but I moved here when I was young

Do you have many brothers and sisters?

Yeah I have 2 brothers and 5 sisters

Oh wow, mashallah, big family

Yeah

Okay, so... to what level is your education, if you don't mind me asking?

I think it was O Levels then, which is like GCSE standard I think

Do you remember what subjects you did?

I did History and Geography, oh now you're asking *laughs* History, Geography and the general one and then for language I did German

Oh wow... Do you remember any German?

Just bits and bats of it, but not really. I just did not grasp French at all

Tell me a bit about your children...

I have 2 boys and a girl

And how old are they?

18, 16 and my little girl is 12. She just started year 8 today

Ah right, how did she find year 7?

She loved year 7, she loved every minute of it

That's good, I love when kids enjoy school. It can be quite scary for them

Absolutely, and if they enjoy it they're gonna do well

Exactly. And then your son that is 16, has he just done his GCSE's?

Yeah, just done his GCSE's, with your sister

Oh right! They're starting sixth form today?

Yeah he went in at 9:30 this morning

Was he excited?

Oh, I don't know... I said 'get back to reality, you're going to school this morning' but I haven't actually seen him properly as I start here at 8, but I rang home and he said, yeah, he's gone

Aw, and how did he do in his GCSE's, did he do well?

He did well, he got 2 C's, 1 A and 5 B's, so he got his 9 GCSE's

That's really good, well done to him. How hard did he work for them?

D'you know, it surprises me. I would tell him to revise and I would get "oh I'll do it tonight" and he used to start at 10 o'clock at night

Oh no

And that's how he was and he was up until 2/3 in the morning so I don't know how he was doing it, because I can't stay up every night. I would say to him 'you've got the day' but he would do everything he wanted to do in the day, relax, chillax, and then revised at night! Having said that, I think he still came out okay. But he needed a B in Maths and he got a C

Right, for one of his subjects he needed that? Or just to get into sixth form?

For Chemistry he needed that B, so he couldn't do Chemistry

So that must've been... Was he a bit upset about that?

He was, yeah... He was a bit disappointed that he got a C

Especially when you have your heart set on certain subjects

Yeah, he's doing Biology and Geography. He got an A in geography, he loves Geography so he'll just sail through it, little effort, just sail through it. But through his erm Sciences, he did very well, so he is doing Biology. But I went into school and I pushed that he takes Chemistry cos that opens... you know if he wants to go into Pharmacy, that's what he wants to do at the moment, so... and they said "no, no no"

Really? So after he got his results, you went in and they said no?

Yeah, they said no because he got a B in, no he got a C in Maths "and we require a B" but they said that loads of kids that get A's and B's in Maths drop out of Chemistry in the first year

Hmm

So I said well, you know, I don't know

Have you had any other times when you've had to deal with school?

Well I had to go in one time because I thought it was ridiculous that my son, the one that just did his GCSE's, had two exam based subjects and a BTEC course. But you know, to go to uni, they want three A Levels

Yeah

You know, they would ultimately turn around and think, 'he's done two exam based, why a BTEC course?' So I had to go in and argue my corner and show my interest with that issue

What was the BTEC?

Well they're saying, the Applied Science BTEC. But then they said 'go away and have a look at what your uni course requires' and I said 'well I have looked... uni's do not look at erm BTEC courses in the same way as standard ones'

Yeah, they might ask him to do a foundation course or something before the actual degree

Exactly, and they suggested that he do that and look into different routes to get in erm but that is just prolonging it...

Yeah

So I really pushed for it, it took half an hour...

Well at least you tried

But yeah that was the only other time I can't remember having to go in for anything like that

Yeah, but otherwise you went in for the parent's evenings and what not...

Always parents evening, always the information evenings and erm always presentation evenings, I've been there

Yeah... do you think it's important to know how your children are doing?

I think it's very important, yeah to go in. It's like, when you go into these parent teacher evenings... subject evenings... and then you know how well your child is doing and how well that teacher knows your child

Yeah, that's such a good way of thinking about it.

Oh yeah, definitely, I always go to see how well that teacher knows my child. And if they know my child how I know my child, then I know that my child will do well and progress. I hear that with my son sometimes, you know, about the teachers but you don't really know until you meet them. That was the other thing... I've had a lot more dealings with them than the other two schools my children went to

Ah did they go to different schools?

Yeah my eldest went to grammar school. But my son that didn't, he was doing very well in Science, but they underestimated him and put him in a lower group

Hmm

So they had him in a lower group, this is what he was telling me, he was in a lower group but they were teaching him the higher

Just him out of the class, or the whole group?

Just him! Because they didn't have any space to put him into the higher... And he was saying that he's not progressing because the class was moving at a slower pace than he was. So I emailed, I said 'come on, give me the email of your teacher' and I emailed the science teacher Mrs. Snow, and she said 'unfortunately, that we will make sure that he does the higher element of the paper'

Yeah cos they do foundation and err, linear?

Yeah, and she said 'we don't have any room in the other class so we're keeping him there'. So she had this full class and then you had my son. But I think they underestimated him in a lot of subjects...

Which isn't nice to know...

Which isn't nice but when he did his tests he was performing well above what they expected

That's a hard one as well because as a mother... Because regardless of if the class is full, if he is at that level then he should be in there

He should be in there, absolutely. So I had to communicate through that, with the school

Yeah, you went straight to the teacher

Yeah

So your eldest son...

Yeah he was just doing his A Levels but he'll be going to university

What course is he doing?

Erm, biomedicine, it's a new one

Ah, and how did he do in his A Levels?

He got BCC, he struggled a bit

A Levels are really hard. But uni is a totally different environment

Is it? That's what I've heard

Yeah, I wouldn't worry, he will do well

Oh that's good

Just going back to primary school, did they start out at reception?

They all went to nursery and then reception, yeah

Can you remember the process of getting them into school? Was there any difficulties or was it quite straightforward?

I think with my eldest, he went to nursery and ultimately I wanted him to get him into the same primary. But that was quite a battle...

Hmm...

Because they were saying it didn't come into our catchment area... So I looked at other schools in the area

Did you have a few you could have chosen from?

It was very limited, what I could choose from... There wasn't much of a choice, yeah... It was just to do with catchment areas and that went through to my youngest. But, I didn't actually go for the school within my catchment area. I actually went outside of my catchment area, for a different one and that wasn't in my catchment area but the only reason they allowed me to go there was because they had spaces

Right... did you do your research on both schools?

I did, and I looked at the Ofsted reports for both schools, yeah

And once they were in primary school, can you remember if they took part in any activities or anything?

Er, yes... My eldest joined the after school football club, chess club

Oh wow

Yeah he loved that, and cricket club

So he was busy?

Yeah and my younger son was never the sporty type, he never, I did always push him but through his own choice he wasn't interested in taking part in anything. He always wanted to come back to his comfort zone... and my daughter, she's in the rounders club, competing with other schools since year 7. She's very sporty, sportier than her brothers are and she's also joining the hockey club

She's a busy one as well

She really is

Can you remember going into primary school for any issues in particular?

Yes... With my eldest one, erm, I went to a parent's evening and he was so excited that I was going, he thought he was doing really well, I went in and sat there and she said 'I don't know where to start'. She didn't show me any books or anything, just said that and said he was very disruptive and all the negative things about him... Not one thing said was positive

Was he with you?

No, thank God. He would have been devastated, as a child. He was in year 4

Really young

Yeah and erm, 'he's not progressing, he's not doing this, he's not doing that' I was so gobsmacked at the time, I didn't know what to say... She just complained about him and I was stunned, I didn't know how to react at the situation... I just sat and listened and when I came away I thought to myself, 'I could've said this, or that'. But I thought to myself, she didn't show me any books or targets or anything whatsoever. I know that he was doing some tuition work and I was putting him forward for the grammar school test and he did and he passed and he went forward into grammar school. So it was a complete contrast to what school and that teacher was telling me

Yeah

So I had to go back and I was trying hard to meet the head teacher but she was so busy I didn't get to meet her

What do you put that down to? What the teacher was saying

I think, erm, it must have been the teacher herself. Just not a positive kind of person. That kind of negativity from a teacher can devastate a child and thank God he was not with me, he was waiting in the car with his dad

Kids never went in did they, especially in primary school

Absolutely, and when I went back he was so excited and he was like 'what did the teacher say about me?' and I said 'well she said you're doing very well' and I just left it to that and spoke to my husband later

Hmm

And I can remember a point when my younger son was at primary and they were combining year 3's and 4's and they were experimenting... And I thought to myself 'this is his prime foundation, this is where they learn and progress further' I went into a parents meeting, and there were two Maths teachers sharing the class, teaching different halves of the week. I went in there and asked how we was doing in Maths, and they both looked at each other and they were clueless. I went back and looked at the Ofsted reports and what they were saying about the school, and it wasn't positive whatsoever. So I knew by the time he was getting ready to leave for high school, he might not be ready like his other peers. They weren't keeping track, there were no handover notes, just not keeping track, you know or recording. So if I didn't go in and ask the right questions, I wouldn't have known

Did you do anything to help catch him up?

Well I used to ask at home time, how he was doing and pop in to the class for a 5-minute chat.

Did they give him much homework?

No, hardly any. Exactly, parents started to demand to see more homework given

Did he want it at that age?

Yeah he never said he wanted it but my daughter said she wanted more. We got a good head teacher at one point there, I've forgotten her name now but she turned the school around and got the Ofsted score from a 4 to a 2, which was good.

I can kind of tell that your kids' education was always important to you

Yeah definitely, I thought I'd give them a chance that I never had. I wanted them to have more of an education that I did. If I had a choice I think I would've gone further with my own education but marriage and kids, as lovely as it is, was kind of a hindrance of progressing further in the education field. Maybe because I didn't have the chance, we thought let's give them that chance.

Did you ever want them to be something specific when you looked at them?

No not really, my middle child, when I ask him what he enjoys... When I see them all going through school I will notice what they're doing well in but it is down to them. With my eldest his teachers always told me that his strengths were in the sciences so I knew instantly that it was the medicine field so I kind of like steered him that way and told him to stay focussed and think about what he wants to do and what he enjoys. You know, 'do you like working with people or on your own?' you know like kind of guide them but leave them to the open choice

Yeah

Whereas with my other son, let's see how he does with his A Levels. I don't know where I stand with him... He's quite bright but you know... whereas my daughter she's brilliant she's the opposite to the other two. She always has her bag ready the night before and is always on time

My mum said that too, with my brother you would be lucky if he had a pen but with my sister she would have a pencil case full with everything you could ever need and more *laughs*

laughs exactly, opposites

So after biomed will he do medicine?

Yeah that's a full 3 year BSc honours degree course. He was going to do something else at Bradford and then go straight into Leeds, but that's no guarantee. And he would just have a clinical degree at the end of it, but this one is better prospect-wise if he doesn't carry onto medicine. He wants to do molecular medicine, so he can either go to pharmaceutical companies after doing a Masters or go on and do a further 4 years and become GP

Did you have any other desires for them?

No really, I don't think so, because I know that there's so many things out there. You know, Asian parents are like... the only two things Asians think about is Engineer, or Doctor. But there's so many things out there, we're so lucky in this country

Did you fit that stereotype of wanting them to follow that engineer/doctor path or did you feel as though they could make that decision and you would be happy either way?

Exactly that, I never said they had to be anything like that

You must be really proud of them all for doing so well. The last kind of topic I wanted to cover was, culture and language...

I will say... with their dad, he's not a fluent English speaker. He does understand it but he will ask his children what they mean *laughs*

How did he find it education wise? Not being a fluent English speaker?

Erm I've never asked him really... I always got involved more, he always pushed me forward because obviously he struggled communicating...

Yeah, I can imagine because the whole education system is built for English speakers

Exactly. And there's no translator that speaks our language in either school. I think I was in hospital one time when it was parents evening so my son went with my husband, which was nice because then he asked the questions on behalf of his dad, and if he struggled he was there

Yeah, did you ever feel any differences or similarities to other parents, being that you are of a different cultural background?

I felt different. I definitely felt different, in the sense that 'how will the teacher communicate with me?' compared to a White, English mother or parent. I thought they would see me differently, definitely see me differently

Mmm. Did you ever feel they treated you differently?

Erm, er I think with the incident with my son... I think she viewed people the way she wanted to view them. At that particular time, I thought... she opened my eyes actually, that, you know... she viewed me as somebody different... you know... lower than her... that I didn't know anything. And I felt as though I was brainless. I know I didn't say much and I didn't speak much but I was really shocked and it was an eye opener. I thought, next time I go to parents' evening I want to know the teacher. It's always nice to know, because I always listen to my children when they come home and say they don't like a teacher or that they can't control the class... You know, I hear it all. And I try and listen to them because I think it's quite important

They know they can speak to you

Exactly. And sometimes I hear my youngest, when they were both at the same high school, talking to her brother about it and asking him. I pick things up because he doesn't speak about anything

Interview 5

So I really want to know a bit about you and your family. Where were you born?

I was born in Pakistan. But we came here when I was still little

To what level is your education?

I have a diploma in childcare and a diploma in counselling, which is in between a degree and A Levels

Okay

I've also got a certificate in adult education, but that's years old

And do you have any children?

I've got one son

And to what level is his education?

A Levels

Is he planning on going on to university?

He is, he has been working but is applying for universities at the moment

Right okay. I want to take you back to when he was at primary school, and even before. Did he go to nursery?

He went to part-time nursery

And then obviously into reception and so on... can you remember the process of getting him into school? How was that for you?

It was very easy, not back then it wasn't too hard. It was harder when it came high school. He didn't get into the high school he wanted to, because it wasn't in the catchment area but primary education was fine

For high school did you appeal?

Yeah and I lost the appeal

How did that make you feel?

Well I think it had a massive effect on where he is today. I think if he went to the school I wanted him to go to, I think he would've gone straight on to university and I think because of that, the school he was at, didn't do anything for him. I think it had a big impact on his way of thinking and his attitude

Sorry back to primary school, I keep flitting, but when he was there, can you remember if he did many activities or anything like that?

No it's fine, well it was hard because he was quite a poorly child, so he missed quite a lot of primary education, he was in and out of hospital and what not

Oh okay

Sometimes he would be off for weeks

Can you remember, I don't know, maybe going into school for anything in particular?

Yeah loads of times. I had problems with one of his teachers... yeah... Massively, she was just a horrible bully. She was an NQT, she was newly qualified... the head teacher didn't do anything, I went in over and over again to speak to him about her. He just listened but didn't do anything about it erm and she was just a horrible bully. She was a bully to my son basically...

Aw, in primary school?

In primary school... she was horrible. I mean if you were the brightest kid in the class, and you know, a certain... you fit her tick box then you were fine but if you didn't then... because if you compare my son's school photographs from when he was in different classes he's bright-eyed, perky, he's got a smile on his face... the picture in her class... erm he just looks terrible, he looks sad and like he's gonna cry. He was only 6 or 7... I should've fought harder for I, but it was hard

Did you try to speak to her?

Yeah, yeah... but no she was a bully to me as well, she was horrible

Did you think it was for a certain reason?

To be honest, I don't know... one of the problems was... there was a reading scheme he was on and in one of the books, there was a character and the character was a pig. Erm, he was just over and over, on the same book all the time. All he was doing was just reading about pigs all the time and it just got a bit tiresome. It just was like... isn't there anything else other than pigs? You know?

Yeah of course

Isn't there anything else he can progress to? And erm, I spoke to her and she said 'if he doesn't read this he's not gonna learn to read' you know, basically saying that if he didn't read that he can just pack up and go home, it was that book or nothing. The head teacher was no good as well, it just got... really angry and drained about the whole situation. I was really upset about it, because it was like pig, pig, pig all the way through

I know what you mean, being muslim... I would never even say that word I would be too scared so I would spell it out. As a kid, you think you're doing something really wrong. She should've been more sensitive really

She just wasn't culturally sensitive at all. I wish I had been stronger and stood up to her now but it's hindsight. She was his form tutor and because it was a one form entry it would've meant him moving to another school and I didn't really want that, to upheave him. She was just horrible

Not good memories with her

No

Did you erm, feel like any of the other teachers were culturally insensitive or was it just her?

No, it was just her, everything else was fine. I was a governor at that school and it put me in a really difficult situation because I didn't want to be seen to be pulling rank or anything, erm, but I think... if I remember rightly there were other murmurs of parents not being happy with the way she was. She was just ignorant and it was an issue with her rather than the entire school or other teachers. I think even the head teacher was scared of her. I've never actually asked my son about it now that he's all grown up, I don't know... I might ask him but I might not because I don't wanna rake all that up for him

Yeah... Being a governor, was that just in primary school?

Just in primary school yeah

What were your motives going in for that?

Just to support the school... because I went there, it was mine and my brother's primary school and then my son went there and you know, it's a lovely school so I wanted to support the school

Yeah, can you remember the system with homework?

Yeah, yeah I mean it was a decent amount. I reckon it was alright, yeah

Have you been back to Pakistan at all?

No, prior to 2003, before that I used to go all the time. But then I got married again, second time, erm and after that I only went back one and it was 2005 and I haven't been back since. But to be honest with you I don't really wanna go, I don't fancy it and I used to love going every year and seeing family and doing things

Have you got much family there?

I have yeah, but it's just not the same anymore

No I can understand that... Was your son's education particularly important to you?

Oh it was top priority for me, it was really top priority for me... But unfortunately, I think as the years progressed, partly due to his illnesses, he wasn't that academically inclined. He struggled a lot at school and I think, you know I even got him a maths tutor and tried to support him as much as possible but he just didn't seem to catch up with the other kids, erm and it was really hard, and looking back, you know, you do think 'oh I could've done things differently and I could've supported him in this way'.

Yeah

After primary the school he went too.. it was the worst thing ever for him. He was this close to slipping off the rails and maybe going into bad company, but he was always a good boy. He didn't really do anything bad bad. And then he left high school with only 1 GCSE, it was terrible, and not wanting to do A Levels or go to university or anything. But then college basically kind of saved his life at that point.

Oh right

They took him on and he basically started from scratch. It took him two years to do his GCSE's there and it was a massive jump to A Level, which he managed to do. He was actually one of the oldest pupils to leave there, he was 19/20 when he left. He was totally burnt out after that, because he was there about 4 years

Yeah

Because obviously they don't normally keep kids on that long, but they were great with him

That's really good

And they said they'll keep him

Did you go in and sort that out for him?

Yeah, yeah... I mean towards the end he was losing interest. We had to drag him through A Levels

Did he pass them?

He did, I can't remember what he got but he got there in the end

Back to high school briefly, you know you said he was close to going off the rails... did you find yourself having to go into school much?

Not that much, no. He didn't get into trouble, trouble. There was one blip but apart from that one blip I had to go in for, he was alright. He didn't really hang out with the bad bad boys

Yeah

But there was a lot of peer pressure going on

No of course and it's really hard to steer clear of that, because then they might seem like the outcast. With the blip... did you find yourself really involved in sorting it out?

Yeah no me and my husband went in and sorted it out

Yeah... what were the teachers like?

Yeah they were great, the deputy was really good and erm yeah it was resolved

That's good, he must know he can rely on you

Yeah and come to me... and he does

Even now that he's older?

Yeah... We're close because obviously I was a single parent for a long time, until he was 11/12 it was just me and him

You must have a close bond then

We were very, very close and then I got married. But I didn't remarry until I got my son's approval. I said 'I'm not gonna marry him until you meet him and you like him'

Aww, yeah

And in the beginning there were a few teething problems but now my son sees my husband as his dad... that's his dad

That's nice

You know, he doesn't feel any different

Yeah, he's raised him from 11

11, yeah and my husband thinks of him as his son. He doesn't have any other children, no kids at all and he's been an amazing father. He's done a better job than I think his actual father would've ever done and they're very close, yeah

That's sweet. Do you think that helped when he was having issues at school?

Yeah, because he was in high school when I got remarried... but the thing is I wish I met my husband a bit earlier, so that he was with with my son through primary education

When he was ill and whatnot?

Yeah, so that by the time he got to high school, he could've had more of a positive influence. Because my husband comes from a very high achieving family, really high achieving... like overwhelmingly high achieving. They're all really like... dentists and lawyers and professors...

And that can be a bit daunting

Very daunting, they're all like very high achieving and my husband is one of five brothers and all his brothers are high achieving in terms of Mensa, high IQ's... so if he had been there from before high school I reckon my son would've gone straight into university... because you know, all the kids in their family go to university and it's a given. They all pass with high honours, you know...

In your opinion, do you think that going onto university is what defines success or achievement?

I really did want him to go to university straight away, I had high expectations and I really wanted him to go... My husband was the one that said 'look, university isn't for everybody'...

Yeah, even coming from his high achieving family

Yeah, he said that it just might not be for my son, he told me to look at what he's been through and he said 'if he goes to university now, it's just going to be for you, not for himself... let him decide when or if he goes'... because he said that if he did go he would get even more burnt out and come out hating everything and life... so he was like 'let him be and find his own way and he might go back to uni' and look at him now

Yeah it's never too late... I was going to ask you, when he was dealing with GCSE's, and A Levels, was your husband pushing him in the same direction you were?

Yeah, I mean my husband wasn't really familiar with the schools like I was, I knew about this college and I knew that was the place he needed to go. When he left school with literally nothing, what do you do with a child like that? It was... it was horrible. There was no way I was going to send him to some of the other colleges, because I've heard some of the stuff that goes on there and it just beggars belief... But I knew that this one was well respected because it's got discipline... you know it's a Catholic college and a lot of the Catholic values are very similar to Islam and the way we are with our families and children... some parents might disagree but that's what I see. It is a very coveted place

Mmm

So it was great for him but I just wish I'd picked a different high school for him

Yeah, how did you feel on results day?

It was sad... sad

And how did he feel? Was he expecting more?

I'm sure he was disappointed, but he was just knackered... and he couldn't wait to get out of there

Yeah the school has a massive effect

But college was great for him, there was a lot more freedom and flexibility with his lessons and things but there were a few teachers there he didn't get along with. But we would go in for meetings and talk through any issues that he had with anyone...

Yeah

There was one teacher that he didn't get on with and it was hard but you know, we went in and spoke to his other teachers and tried to find strategies to deal with it

Right, okay

But again, towards the end he just couldn't wait to get out, he had had enough. But this particular teacher that he didn't get along with had had a stroke... and he'd come back to work after having a stroke, but he had a speech impairment. It was the teacher that was probably getting frustrated with himself because he couldn't talk properly and it was, you know, it's nice for the college to take him back but I think my son just probably didn't know how to deal with that. The teacher just couldn't talk properly, I was finding it difficult to understand him, so yeah it was a challenging time for him

Yeah, I can imagine... so when you looked at your son from a young age, what did you want him to be?

Erm, I think the usual Asian dream... Doctor... Lawyer *laughs* solicitor *laughs*

Laughs

Yeah, just... just... I wanted him to be happy and achieve high.

Yeah, besides education, did you have any other desires for him?

I think because he was erm quite a poorly child from an early age I just wanted him to be healthy, I wanted him to be well and enjoy life without having to worry about you know his illness and be able to lead a normal life like other kids... just what other kids take for normal, just for him to be normal so that was my aspiration and anything else was a plus really. He did have his struggles

Yeah

But when he left college, he really came into himself. He changed a lot for the better

Scenario 1 - Participant 1

I was stunned. I didn't know how to react. I thought of so many things I could've said, once I got home. But in the moment, the way the she was speaking to me, I felt lower than her... I felt brainless. It was parents' evening for an 8-year-old. She didn't show me any evidence, classwork or targets to back up her complaints that my son was disruptive and not doing well at school. I didn't have the heart to tell my son all the negative and unhelpful comments his teacher had made. I told him he was doing great. What else do you say to a little boy, so excited to know what his teacher had said about him? He would've been devastated.

What are your feelings about that scenario?

Erm, gosh... If it was me I would've bombarded her with questions really

Yeah

Where's his progress report? Where's the evidence? What actions have you taken and why am I only being told now? You can't just throw a bombshell on someone now that they've come to see you. How am I involved? If he's so disruptive... what are the reasons for it? What have you tried? You know...

How does it make you feel knowing that she felt so low and 'brainless'?

Well angry, really, because it sounds as if the teacher had made their mind up as to how they were going to approach this and not give a fair chance

And have you ever experienced anything like that?

No, love... (laughs)

You say it how it is; you wouldn't have tolerated that!

No I wouldn't, and I think sometimes, my personal view is that, sometimes they use parents as dummies and act like we don't know. Teachers have a power complex sometimes... they know it all thought don't they? And the thing is, with the Asian market, they don't always seem to think we do enough for our kids anyway. They already have the perception in their minds, yeah

How else would you react in this situation, aside from what you've already told me?

I'd probably want to speak to the head teacher if they were around

So you think it is something worth escalating?

Oh, definitely, definitely, I would want to know more about my child and why I was treated the way that I was treated

Yeah

And for me, if that my my son, I'd be asking to see his books and for them to show me what he's done. If he's not achieving anything then you're not doing your job right

What would your advice be to a mother in this situation?

Several things. Challenge the way the teacher put things across. Ask them when they tried to contact me. When he made all these disruptions and everything, what actions did you put in place? Who knows about it? Is it just you and your class that know about it or is the head teacher aware? And if so, why wasn't I informed? What the hell is going on there?

Scenario 2 - Participant 2

They underestimated him. They had my son in the lower group, but eventually started teaching him higher level stuff. The class was moving at a slower pace than he was. The teacher said that there was no room in the higher class, so they were keeping him there. Is it a good standard of teaching if they're teaching one student one thing, and the rest of the class another? My son was in the wrong science class. Regardless of if the class is full, if he's at that level, then he should be in there. What do I do? They didn't seem to take it seriously.

What are your feelings about that scenario?

I just don't think that is fair of the school to do, I think being around similar ability pupils would push children to work harder. It might make him lose motivation if he's not working to his full potential. It's really not fair and I wouldn't be happy either.

How would you have reacted in that scenario?

Personally, I would have asked for a meeting with the student's teacher and tutor to see if there was anything they could do. Erm, I would make sure that at home he was still pushing himself with the higher-level work and if I felt he could progress more, I would get a tutor if I had to. If a child was disruptive or not doing well they would make sure they had help and would move classes. So why is it so hard to get pupils in the right class who are doing better than others?

How does it make you feel knowing that she felt they didn't take it seriously?

It annoys me, as parents are made to feel like they don't have a say in these matters and that they are usually over-reacting. I feel like teachers can usually be dismissive of parents concerns as they are busy, but it ends up being your children who fall through the cracks as a result.

And have you ever experienced anything like that?

No, (laughs). My son had a very relaxed approach to studying and did everything last minute so the teachers were usually the ones chasing him and not the other way round. On the opposite scale my daughter was always in set one and put a lot of pressure herself to stay in those classes so wasn't a problem I had.

So do you think you would take a dismissive response?

No, it's sad but if the teachers don't have a good relationship with you or if the child doesn't speak up they tend to brush these issues away. So if a mother had a language barrier or didn't have the confidence to keep pursuing it, they don't take the issue seriously.

What else would you do?

Erm, If I didn't feel it was taken seriously I would probably take it higher up and ask

to meet the head teacher.

So you think it is worth taking further?

In my opinion, yes. The higher class being full is something head teachers have a say in. Teachers should not make parents feel like they don't have a voice that is what has happened here. At least the next time this parent has a concern the teachers will know to listen.

Okay...

I think it's important for parents to feel important and not undermined with their child's education.

What would your advice be to a mother in this situation?

Erm (pauses) even though I haven't been through it myself I would say to this mother to chase it. Ask the teacher what they have done, have they asked the higher class if they have space? Have they highlighted the issue to the head of year? Ask her to keep it in writing and chase a result. I would recommend getting it in writing so they know you would take it higher up if you have to. Make sure you keep regular contact?

Scenario 3 - Participant 3

She was one grade off being accepted into her preferred choice of sixth form. They wouldn't let her in. They just went "no". It was so negative. I don't know what they said to her. I don't know what happened. She was really deflated when she came back. It completely brought her down. She wouldn't talk, locked herself away for two days. All of a sudden she didn't want to go to university. I don't know what they did to her that knocked her so badly. It took my whole family to convince my daughter to carry on her education beyond her GCSEs.

So how does that story make you feel?

Well, just deflated, you know, for the girl. And just disappointed with the school system. They hadn't really done enough, they could have done something for her and given some career advice and helped. You know, there's so much out there. I know not everything is possible at the same school, but they could have given advice. They have careers advisors on school site at times like this, they should have given her the advice. And maybe the mum should've gone with her daughter

Yeah, she said that at first her daughter just wanted to go with her friends, but as soon as she came back and they realised what had happened she got involved and went with her to try and get into college and what not. Have you ever experienced anything similar?

Erm, let me think... No, not really, no.

If you can put yourself into that mother's shoes, how do you think you would have reacted in that situation?

Similar to what I've explained, I would explain to the school. How they should have given her more avenues to explore rather than to put her off everything completely and shutting her down.

Would you have escalated it as an issue to the school, or not?

It's a difficult one, unless you're in that situation you just really don't know. I would have complained about that member of staff not giving enough support. If they are there to support that young person and if they're not giving that support, I would have complained to the seniors... because they're there to help the young person progress and you know, if they haven't done that and they're negative... Alright if they can't offer the place over there but they should be able to help the young person and tell them exactly where to go and what they can do with their grades rather than what they can't

Yeah of course... what advice would you give to the mother or the daughter?

Erm, I think, go with a parent... So the parent knows the situation and exactly what's happened

Yeah... Did you always go with your children to results days?

Results days, no, no... they didn't want me to.

At that age they just want to go with their friends

Yeah they just wanted to go with their friends, so no not on the results day. But maybe these parents should have gone with the daughter when she went to find out what options she had. Parents know these days what is out there so they could have supported her better than the school did.

Scenario 4 - Participant 4

My son was in Year 2 and following a reading scheme set by the teacher. She kept him on the same book for the longest time. She was asking him to read the same story over and over and over again. He was reading it at school, he was reading it at home. The main character was a pig. The book was about pigs. Pigs, pigs, pigs. Isn't there anything else other than pigs? Another book he can progress to? You know? Why the same book over and over? I was told that if my son didn't read this book, he wasn't going to learn to read. It was the book about pigs or nothing.

I just want to know about your thoughts on the story?

Well, erm, my thought about that is that it is unfair to say that they have to go over and over and over it again because it bores children and children switch off.

Yeah, have you ever experienced anything similar to that kind of story?

Not really no, when my children were in school it was the biff and chip book and they covered a variety of stories.

This mother did express to me that she found it more uncomfortable because as a Muslim the book about pigs over and over... If you were in that situation, as a Muslim how would you feel?

I would feel the same way... if there was something going on with the school and the parent and then the scenario you just explained I would really be offended. And I would question why it was being forced to read the book over and over again. It will switch the child off and I would think that there was something going on

Do you think you would make contact with the school or the teacher if this happened to you?

Yes I would definitely I would question why this book is still in the book bag of the child and why hasn't he changed? I would see it as patronising. It would be overpowering and I don't feel that every parent would go in and confront the teacher. I think in a way she's patronising but even if she did say something the book would remain in the child's book bag for so long and would make him read it and not give another chance to move on. And that child wouldn't get the chance to explore other books which is the while point that he enjoys the reading

Yeah

This is enforcing it on the child, and bringing the child down in a way that you're not worth progressing forward until you learn the word pig. And if you are a Muslim it can be patronising.

Have you ever felt in any school that you've sent your kids to that you've been patronised?

Yes I have definitely my sons teacher at parents evening I felt really patronised and the teacher looked down on me and that I don't know anything and my child is brainless and it's pointless for him to come. I felt very patronised at one point.

If you were to give any advice to another mother who felt similar to how you felt at that parents evening, and how would they move on?

The advice that I would give, erm, and if you ever go to a parents evening, is that if you ever go to a parents evening not feeling confident speaking English or asking questions is that take someone along with you. Erm, just as a second back up and then after the meeting you feel the same way and make sure they felt the same way after the meeting.

Yeah because they aren't always translators

Yeah exactly and if you're not happy don't sit on it and think why, why, why when you come out sometimes you're not in the right frame of mind and maybe then take it up with the head teacher or the year leader. Don't drop it in a way. If it happened to your child it can happen to another child. It needs to be brought to the attention of the school that something isn't right here

Do you think in this situation it would be appropriate escalating it to the head teacher?

Definitely, I would say so it's brought to attention.

Scenario 5 – Participant 5

He went through a rough period around the time of 9/11. There was tension in school. There were remarks being made, remarks he was taking personally. The school weren't addressing the situation and the staff didn't seem to be discouraging it. In his mind, he felt he had to fight for the whole of the Muslim ummah. He threw a chair once. I was called in, because apparently my son was the one with the issue. They weren't dealing with it. They should've been looking after all the students. And they should've been fulfilling their purpose: educating.

So that's the end of the scenario. How do you feel about it?

It's interesting. To be honest, it rings true, because my son was actually around the high school age when that happened

Yeah

So, erm, we used to talk about it, when he came home, we sat down and we would talk about it and we would talk about how he felt. I think he used to keep himself out of... But it did have an impact on him and I just felt helpless really. I think everybody at that time tried to come to grips with it and understand what was happening...

Yeah

You know, the parents, the schools... the government, everybody... you know, what was happening? How to deal with it... and everything was a bit of a knee-jerk reaction. Erm and I think, like everything you just need time to settle down and reflect on it and then kind of deal with it. But you know, that kind of thing is just unprecedented really wasn't it

So did you son deal with similar issues to those in the story?

Yeah, I mean he's very calm and he just kind of internalised it, didn't talk about things, just kept it to himself and bottled it up. But if you sit with him and take the time to talk to him he will slowly open up and talk about things. He's just not the type to blurt things out straight away. I knew that there was stuff going on obviously, I kept an eye on him but it was frustrating... I think for a lot of young Muslim people they didn't really know was going on

Yeah... The boy in the story felt like he needed to defend his religion and was very very offended by what comments were being made...

...I'm sure my son was offended too, I think he just doesn't show it in a physical manner you know and throw a chair or get angry or start fights, he was just more insular and he would look at things and take things in and absorb them, erm... But now at this age when I see him getting angry it does scare me as a mother, you just want to protect them. So I am pleased he didn't get too involved in what was happening back then

The mother also said that she didn't feel as though the school handled it correctly, do you feel like the school your son went to handled it better?

2001... I'm just trying to think... he would have been in year 7. He was so young, so so young and I don't actually think he was ready for high school

Right

He was grappling with just being at high school and all of that I think. He did used to talk to his cousins about it though, it was good they had each other

How would you react if you experienced the exact same situation? How would you deal with it?

I would be very angry. I probably would've gone to school and spoken to the principle. You know, I would be very upset. But I would have to stay calm and show him how to react, and try to deal with it in a calm manner. Because if we start shouting what is it showing them? And the teachers are just gonna think it's another parents mouthing off...

The mother said that she helped to organise a boys Islamic group so they could learn more about their religion and to defend it with words instead. What do you think about that?

Oh, absolutely. I was thinking of that. I'll be honest, it's not something I would personally do. You know, I could set up a focus group, get the community and the local mosques and local councillors involved, organise community events to show solidarity and all of that stuff. But the truth is, it isn't something I thought to do at the time. Maybe because my son wasn't as badly affected by it where it was turning physical and what not. If it escalated further and got out of hand, I probably would have done those things. Also, it depends on what else is happening in your life at the time, you need the energy and the capacity to be able to do that

You were a governor at the primary school

Yeah I suppose you're right, I did that for 10 years and I feel I did put my points across and make a difference. You know, being a part of that community and encouraging other parents to do the right thing...

If you had any advice to a parent in a similar predicament, what would you say?

I would say, you know, you need to always take a deep breath and sit down and think about how you're going to tackle the situation. Being argumentative with the school isn't going to get you anywhere, and your child is going to look at you and think it's okay to behave in a similar way. Whatever you do, will make an impression on them. Just be very careful about how you do things, you know you don't want to pump up his confidence in doing things in the wrong direction. From the minute you know about something happening like this, every minute counts. You have to make sure you're doing the right thing and taking the right steps. Give him some time away from the school and the area, because peer pressure is enormous. Try to calm him

down and distress him. It just depends how big the problem is really, because obviously it's not encouraged to take kids out of school during term time. But if it had the potential to explode into something massive then it's worth thinking about. I would say you just need to make sure you have a grip on your own child, you don't want the ripple effects. It's important to keep cordial relationships with the school and with other parents as well. Every parent is going to look out for their own child and that's just life.

So do you think a situation like this is worth escalating further?

Absolutely, I would take it to the top because sometimes it just doesn't get addressed when it's at a lower level. They just brush it under the carpet. I would go to the top I always do but if I can't I would go to the deputy. I wouldn't leave it at lower level, no. Teachers don't have the power, and it's something the head should know about, take on board and deal with. Especially if the harmony and peace of the school is being affected.