

**“THE ADVANTAGE OF DISADVANTAGE” - A STUDY ON LIVED EXPERIENCES  
OF DISABLED TEACHERS**

By

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## **Dedication**

For disabled teachers everywhere who bring so much positive advantage to their workplaces, who inspired my journey and this study.

For my daughter, Anvi, who fills me with pride and joy.

For my husband, Praveen, who never fails to make me feel cherished and loved.

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## Abstract

This study explores the personal lived experiences of eight disabled teachers through semi-structured interviews to understand their developmental interaction with environments around them and the influences these environments have had on their lives. Building on narratives of disabled teachers, it highlights the role their life experiences have had in their choice of profession and the impact their environments have had on them. A multiple case study research design was used to enable the analysis of the biographical experiences of disabled teachers to understand the 'lived aspect' of disabled teachers' complex life journeys, their personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as teachers. This study draws on two theoretical frameworks, WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health framework and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. Data generation was done using questionnaire, four semi-structured interviews and critical incident form. The interviews were based on four themes, early childhood & schooling experiences, University & higher education experiences, employment/Teaching experiences and disability experience.

Data analysis utilizes poetic transcription, a creative arts-based research method along with reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to interpret the rich data that was generated. 'Found poems' were crafted from individual participant transcripts to authentically represent their experiences as well as to create an emotional connect

with the reader. Identified themes were clustered, structured and defined according to the five systems of the Bronfenbrenner bioecological systems theory (2005). Main findings of the study include developmental role of grandparents, early signs of disability missed due to stereotypical understanding of disability, experiences of self-doubt, stressful complicated diagnosis journey, negative recruitment experiences, precarious employment history, being a role-model for students, bureaucratic barriers in accessing disability support. Findings also include suggestions and recommendations participants have for the future which accounts for their lived experiences.

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## **Abbreviations**

|        |                                                                               |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ADHD   | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder                                      |
| BPS    | Biopsychosocial Model                                                         |
| DSA    | Disability Support Available                                                  |
| DWP    | Department of Works and Pensions                                              |
| ICF    | International classification of functioning, disability, and health framework |
| NASUWT | National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women teachers                 |
| PGR    | Post Graduate Researcher                                                      |
| QTS    | Qualified Teacher Status                                                      |
| RTA    | Reflexive Thematic Analysis                                                   |
| SENCO  | Special Education Needs Co-ordination                                         |
| UK     | United Kingdom                                                                |
| UNCRPD | United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities          |
| WHO    | World Health Organisation                                                     |

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Overview of the thesis**

This thesis presents a research project undertaken in completion of a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Birmingham. The research adopts a multiple case study design to explore lived experiences of eight disabled teachers. The thesis highlights my personal journey of exploring, analysing, and interpreting experiences participants shared during data generation. The main aim is to explore individual experiences of each participant, their life journey, their interactions with people around them, their participation in social activities, their own struggle with their impairments. The research questions as well as entire thesis adopts language of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (WHO 2001) taking into consideration barriers and enablers experienced by participants in their environments. This research was carried out over a period of four years from 2019 to 2023.

The thesis contributes to research on disabled teachers through the lens of two theoretical frameworks ICF and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. This approach helped identify potential factors that act as barriers or enablers to participants' functioning as disabled teachers in mainstream education as well as understand influence of environmental factors. Along with reflexive thematic analysis, I also used the art based creative technique of poetic transcription to create 'found poems' from individual participants narratives. This was done with the intention of authentic narrative representation to create emotional connection with the reader as



well as to support interpretation of participants' experiences. This research sought to make an original contribution to disability studies as very little research has been conducted on disabled teachers.

## **1.2 Personal context and interest in this topic**

I identify as an Indian immigrant woman, who experiences feeling othered in my own country as well as my adopted country due to intersectional marginalising factors like mixed heritage, body image, ethnicity, gender, religion, citizenship status, ability, and language. My mother and my aunt have been two constant influential role models in my life. My mother completed her entire higher education post marriage with two children and currently leads a reputed teacher education institution in India. My aunt is the only disabled teacher I know personally, she was born without her left arm. She currently leads the economics department of a reputed junior college in India. Though my family never gave my aunt's disability a second thought, I often observed that society treated her differently. As a child, I wondered why the world did not see my aunt for the amazing teacher that she was, but only as a disabled person. It was heart-breaking to witness how ableist attitudes of people, head teachers, colleagues, at times students affected my aunt. I grew up hearing stories about how my grandparents had to fight and advocate for my aunt to attend mainstream education. Probably the seeds of this research were planted in my sub-conscious during my childhood itself.

Because I belonged to a family of academics, the fact that I chose teaching as a profession was no surprise. In 1996, when I began my teacher education, inclusion was at its infancy in Indian education. That same year, the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act was passed by the Indian parliament (Government of India, 2005), it became the hallmark of a new era for the education of disabled students in India. An important influence of this legislation was the emphasis on the integration of disabled students into regular schools (Das & Shah, 2014). After working for a few years as a Maths and Science teacher in India, following my mother's footsteps, the next professional progression was to become a teacher educator. The policy initiatives in India in the late 90's, made various efforts to improve the infrastructure and accessibility of schools to increase enrolment numbers of disabled children within mainstream education. This new drive towards inclusion meant new teachers needed to learn about inclusive teaching (Singhal, 2006; Das & Sharma, 2005). In 1999 when I started as a teacher educator, I was asked to teach Inclusive education which had recently been introduced in the teacher education curriculum in India. Though policies were in place I never knowingly had a special needs student in my class as a schoolteacher, nor later as a teacher educator. Having limited experience of teaching disabled students, realisation dawned that I needed to first educate myself to best support my student teachers.

Because the expectation was that I teach this subject which I knew nothing about, I tried to learn as much about the subject from every source possible. I researched and read everything I could find about inclusive education. While researching online I stumbled upon the social model of disability and advocacy of disability groups

worldwide. I read about how the disability movement led by disability activists in the UK gained prominence in the 70's highlighted social oppression and understood how environmental barriers (Shakespeare, 2010) were encountered by disabled people in their lives. Thus began my journey towards learning more about disability experiences and how inclusion was being achieved worldwide. My only exposure to inclusive education in action was while working closely with a group of inclusive schools during practice teaching. Here I witnessed disabled students often being pulled out of mainstream classrooms into special education resource rooms. Often disabled students who did not fit criteria set by the schools would not even be enrolled. Even though I had limited exposure to inclusive education, these practices felt more like exclusion than inclusion.

After years of continuing to update my own knowledge and teaching student teachers, I still felt like an imposter. Which is why when my husband got transferred to the UK, I took the opportunity to enrol for a postgraduate degree in inclusive education at the University of Birmingham. This opened a whole new world of knowledge and motivated me to pursue this doctoral study. Given my interest in teacher education, I was keen to explore experiences of disabled teachers globally. On exploring the subject further, I realised that though many international policies laid emphasis on inclusive education, there was very limited emphasis on disabled teachers (Ware et al. 2021; Jeffress, 2019). Although these policies have made mainstream education accessible for disabled children, the policies had not filtered to teachers. I soon realised that this was a global phenomenon not just limited to India. Worldwide, disabled teachers were

invisible in the teaching workforce (Ware et al., 2021). I wanted to find out about why disabled teachers opted for teaching as a profession, like my aunt, did their own schooling experiences motivate them to become teachers? I wanted to understand whether disabled teachers were more inclusive in their classrooms? What were the barriers they encountered in their functioning as teachers? Were there any positive experiences? I strongly believed that disabled teachers would be an advantage to inclusion given their unique life experiences. To find out answers to these questions and explore the lived experiences of disabled teachers, I decided to pursue a doctorate in this topic.

The proposal and planning for this research began in late 2018 before getting selected for this Doctoral program which began in October 2019. In the first year of Doctoral studies, I completed the taught component requirements and submitted the Ethics proposal. Since the number of participants in the study was going to be small, a multiple case study research design seemed apt. This research would use qualitative inquiry with a constructivist paradigm to explore lived experiences of participant disabled teachers. Being a new researcher, conducting a pilot study in the beginning of the second year felt essential. The first pilot study was conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021. It helped streamline interview questions and was helpful in improving my confidence. The research received full Ethics approval on 15 April 2021. The process of recruiting participants began on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Data generation took place between June and August 2021. I utilized the second year and third year of the doctoral program for data generation and analysis. Being fully aware of biases that might arise since I

was the sole researcher, I decided right from the onset to be transparent and honest with my participants. This aspect of being transparent, honest, and keeping participants informed at every stage of data generation and findings was very important to me. This aspect is discussed further in chapter 4.

In the third year of the study, in November 2021 I attended a webinar organized by the University of Bath on using podcasting in action research and applying the sonic elicitation technique on interview data. The webinar enlightened me about an innovative way to rework interview data and participant experiences into data poems. Though I had previously come across poetic expressions of experiences of ableism by academics (Brown & Leigh, 2020), the webinar made me aware that data from interview transcripts can be converted into poems. Attending the webinar was a serendipitous moment in this research journey. Specifically, because at this juncture of my research, I was debating how best not to dilute individual narratives in collective data analysis. I felt a sense of responsibility towards authentically representing each participants' lived experience. I found the poetic transcription aspect within poetic inquiry, crafting found poems from participant transcripts would help retain individual participant experiences within collective data analysis. The data generation process was immersive, and I developed a strong connection with each of my participants. To gain more insight and learn from other creative researchers, I joined a poetic inquiry group to learn more about this creative research method. A second literature review was carried out to gain understanding of applying poetic inquiry in qualitative research. After crafting a few found poems, on advice from supervisors, a decision was made to

conduct a second pilot study, on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2021. An audience poll whether to include found poems in the thesis was carried out while presenting at an education conference. Feedback from the second pilot study confirmed how powerful the found poems were (Appendix 25) and a decision was made to include them in the thesis. I felt by including found poems I could authentically represent participants' individual narratives while the collective themes helped highlight commonality of experiences, identifying barriers and enablers in disabled teachers' lives.

Covid hit in the first year of this research journey, this meant that almost all the data generation needed to be carried out online. Though the pandemic phase was personally stressful it did provide many opportunities to attend various online conferences which might not have been possible in person. The pandemic forced me to use online resources and create new networks. I presented papers, posters, made collaborative presentations with fellow PGR's (Appendix 29) and it has been a fulfilling experience. During this research journey, I learnt new technologies and incorporated innovative presentation techniques while presenting at conferences. This included using Padlets, Prezi presentations, creating Sways with fellow PGRs for collaborative presentations. I started writing a blog to share my research experiences. The highlight of this research journey came when I was invited to present a 'Research in Progress Seminar' conducted monthly by the School of Education, University of Birmingham on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022 (Appendix 28). The seminar provided an opportunity to showcase my research findings as well the poetic transcription aspect to academics and PGRs in the department. It was a proud moment for me to be recognised and provided with this opportunity by my department. This research journey has been a journey of self-discovery, of discovering personal strengths and weaknesses, sharing, and learning

from fellow PGRs, providing support and being there for others, making life-long connections. I began this journey alone and became part of a thriving, supportive, welcoming community.

### **1.3 Aims of the research**

The main aim of this study is to explore narratives of disabled teachers highlighting the role their life experiences have had in their choice of profession and to gain an understanding of the enablers and barriers they encounter. The study intends to identify barriers disabled teachers experience in seeking employment and investigate if 'ableism' is the reason why disabled teachers are almost invisible even amongst most marginalised minorities (Pritchard, 2010; Campbell, 2009) in academic settings. The study aims to identify reasons why disabled teachers are underrepresented in the teaching workforce, is it because of discriminatory practices during the employment process due to deep rooted 'ableism' that prevents them from having access to equal opportunities? The study wants to understand the reasons disabled teachers have chosen the profession of teaching and explore the connection between their lived experiences and their choice of career. The thesis includes an arts-based research method known as poetic transcription to create found poems from participant transcripts. The main aim for including found poems is not only to highlight authentic individual experiences of each participant, but also to create an evocative storyline that forms strong and powerful connection with the reader. By using found poems, the intent is to evoke emotional response in the reader and to create resonance with participants' lived experience.

The study aims to answer the following research questions

1. How have their early childhood, schooling and university experiences influenced disabled teachers' choice of profession?
2. How do disabled teachers describe their experiences within academic settings?
3. How do disabled teachers describe the critical incidents of their life that they feel have influenced their disability experience and shaped their identities?
4. What were the barriers and enablers encountered in the process of becoming a disabled teacher?

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented in nine chapters. Chapter 2 provides a contextual background on the research topic. The writings that inspired the direction this research will follow to explore participants lived experiences are discussed. The theoretical frameworks that are the foundations of this research are highlighted. The language used in the research as well as researcher positionality is clarified.

Chapter 3 focusses on a critical review of existing relevant literature on disabled teachers and was carried out at the beginning of this research. The wider purpose of carrying out the literature review was to refine my research questions, inform methodology, data generation and data analysis strategy that this research study would utilize. Besides identifying empirical research studies, the aim was to identify



relevant publications on disabled teachers which would inform new ideas and directions for this research.

Chapter 4 provides the rationale for the methodological approaches followed in this study. The methodology chapter begins by discussing the philosophical assumptions this study is built on, followed by an overall justification for the multiple case-study research design approach followed in the study. This is followed by explaining the two pilot studies carried out as part of the study. The selection criteria as well as the sampling methods used are highlighted. The data generation methods used by the study are explained. The data analysis process involving reflexive thematic analysis and poetic transcription utilized in this study are highlighted. The cross case synthesis of all eight cases is discussed. Details of the ethical considerations the study makes as well as an explanation of the procedures utilized for data generation are given.

Chapter 5 provides a general overview of the participants of the study. A case background for each of the eight participants is provided with the intention to familiarize the reader with the context of each participant. I felt it was important for the reader to be familiar with individual participants' backgrounds to reflect and relate to their found poems.

Chapter 6 presents part one of the findings of this study. The five main themes identified are structured and presented using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. Chapter 6 includes the themes within the proximal systems, the microsystem

and the mesosystem. Applying the ICF framework (WHO, 2001), enablers and barriers were identified and discussed within relevant themes. The found poems form an integral part of presenting the research findings across the identified themes.

Chapter 7 presents the second part of the findings within the distal systems, the exosystem, the mesosystem and the chronosystem.

Chapter 8 discusses three aspects of the findings which are unique to this research.

Chapter 9 summarises the main findings of the study and explains the findings in terms of the theoretical frameworks the study is based on. The research questions are answered by relating the findings to wider literature. Recommendations drawn from participant suggestions regarding changes they would like to foresee in the future based on their lived experience are included.

The final chapter 10 contains concluding thoughts, limitations of the study, my reflection on the entire research process as well as suggestions for further research on this topic.

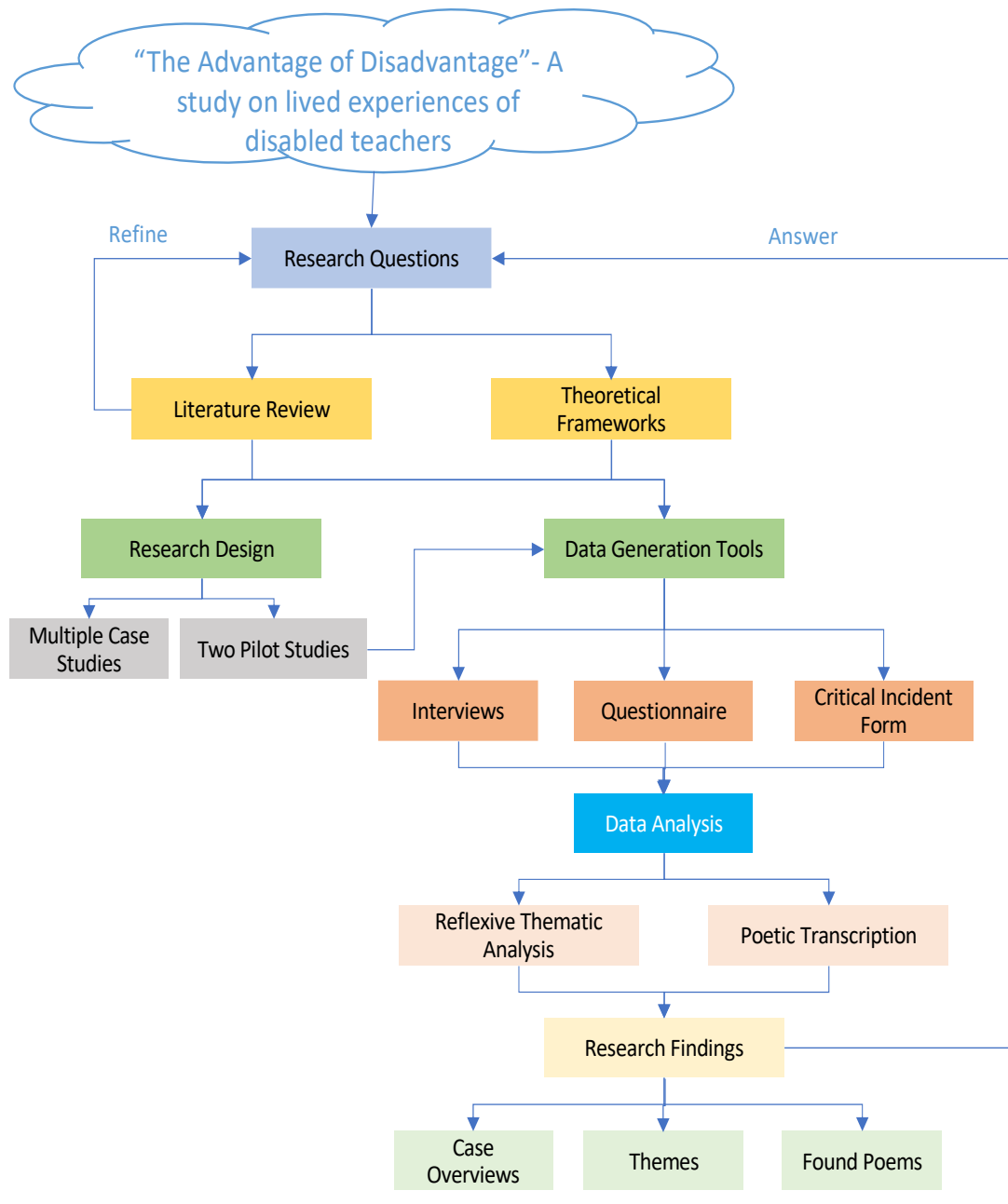


*Figure 1 Components of the research process in this study*

The sequential and emergent nature of the research process followed in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented an introduction to my doctoral research. I have outlined the contextual background of my interest in this topic. I have explained how my interest in inclusion and teacher education experience inspired me to pursue this doctorate. I have described my research journey during the four years that this doctoral project has been conducted. The aims of this research and the research questions were discussed. This study aims to highlight the role developmental life experiences have had on the choice of profession made by disabled teachers. The study aims to explore the impact developmental environments have had on disabled teachers. This study will focus on biographical experiences of disabled teachers, their personal experience of living with an impairment while functioning as teachers. This study aims to develop an understanding of the 'lived aspect' of disabled teachers' complex life journeys. The structure of this thesis and the contents of each nine chapters presented was highlighted. This study will use semi-structured, biographical timeline interviews to generate in-depth data. The interviews will explore, early childhood and schooling experiences, university and higher education experiences, employment and teaching experiences, and disability experiences. The chapter included a diagrammatic representation of the sequential and emergent nature of the research process this study will follow. The study will draw upon two theoretical frameworks, WHO's ICF framework and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. Since very little research has been conducted on disabled teachers, this study intends to make an original contribution to disability studies.

## **2 Research context and theoretical foundations**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a contextual background on the research topic. The writings that inspired the direction this research will follow to explore participants lived experiences are discussed. The theoretical frameworks that are the foundations of this research are highlighted. The language used in the research as well as researcher positionality is clarified.

### **2.2 Contextual background on research topic**

According to the WHO, about 15% of the world's population currently lives with some form of disability, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in functioning (WHO 2020). The potential of such a huge number of people is being underutilized by excluding them from economic participation. The recent rise in global estimates has also been attributed to the rise in an ageing population, spread of chronic diseases as well as improvement in data collection methods used to measure disability (WHO 2020). But living with an impairment has its own costs, because disabled people often have disability-related expenses like medications, assistive devices, professional services and therefore may need more resources compared to a non-disabled person. Many countries across the world do not have adequate social care benefits and disability support services in place therefore the disability related expenses can add to financial burden and can cause a vicious cycle of poverty. It is evident therefore that having an impairment can itself lead to certain limitations and extra expenses on the disabled. Living with an Impairment in a disabling society with many barriers while

juggling with issues of 'self' makes understanding disability experiences a very complex problem to study.

While pursuing a degree in inclusive education, I was astonished by the fact despite being a teacher educator for many years, and besides my aunt, I had not encountered many other disabled teachers. When I tried to find statistics on the number of disabled teachers in various countries, it became evident that many countries did not even collect data specifically on disabled teachers. In the 2017 census England reported 0.5% disabled teachers (DFE, 2017) were employed in education. A survey conducted in US in 2018 reported 4.6% people working in primary and secondary education identified as disabled (Bureau of Labor statistics USA, 2018). The recent census in England reported that data was not consistently reported by 50% of schools on the number of disabled teachers employed (DFE, 2021). I could not find any other country specific statistical data on disabled teachers. This truly solidified the statement that disabled teachers are invisible worldwide (Ware et al., 2021).

Policies worldwide are in place to prevent discrimination against disabled employees and employers are obliged by law to make reasonable adjustments - in the UK, the Equalities Act 2010, and the PWD Act in India. Research shows that despite such policies, "Disabled teachers are underemployed, face higher rates of precarious employment, and experience significant barriers in rising through academic hierarchy" (Brown 2021; Ware et al., 2021; Brown & Leigh; 2019; Jeffress, 2018; Lepkowska, 2012). A survey on equality and employment rights reported that 77% of disabled members of NASUWT faced discrimination while 81% reported harassment and

bullying (NASUWT, 2017). 53% disabled members reported that their schools had failed to put reasonable adjustments in place. 17% of disabled members reported that they had been threatened with capability procedures. At a conference conducted by NASUWT many disabled members shared their experiences of taking legal action to contest wrongful termination (NASUWT, 2017). I wondered could this be the reason that disabled teachers are invisible, because they either do not disclose disability due to fear of discrimination or are forced out of their profession?

The global education monitoring report 2016, recommends that more disabled teachers are needed to reduce marginalisation of disabled children in classroom (UNESCO, 2016, p.10). Research validates the importance of role models in developing strong positive self-identities (Coffey, 2001; Roberts, 2002). In my professional experience as a teacher educator the collaborative process of teaching learning in a classroom has always been fascinating, especially how teachers incorporated their own self identities, and life experiences into their pedagogy. I have often emulated inspirational teachers encountered in my life. Often, role models in our lives are not heroic or fantasy characters, but rather everyday people leading everyday lives. This made me wonder about the role-models disabled students have if they do not see other disabled people around them in regular, everyday professions. How does a lack of representation of disabled people in education systems affect disabled students? This makes one question the whole idea of inclusive education; is it only limited to the special education needs of students? In a recent publication on autistic teacher experiences, the question is posed:

“How can inclusion become a reality for children if it doesn’t take into account whether it exists for people who teach them” (Wood et al., 2022, p.21).

Sustainable development Goal 4 talks about increasing diversified teacher workforce to cater to increasing diverse student population (UNESCO, 2016). Why do these diversity discussions not include disability (Ware et al., 2021)? These were precisely the questions I was grappling with. All these questions led me to this doctoral research project. My interest in the topic originated as a teacher educator wanting to find out the reasons disabled teachers were under-represented in education.

### **2.3 Theoretical foundations of this research**

Because I had so many questions, I felt that my research needed to be structured on strong theoretical foundations. The need for disability studies to be better structured is advocated by disability activists Jenny Morris, Sally French, Liz Crow, Bill Hughes, Kevin Paterson, and Tom Shakespeare. They advocate that while environmental barriers and social attitudes are a crucial part of disability experiences, disability studies also need to acknowledge “the personal experience of physical and intellectual restrictions, of illness, of the fear of dying” (Thomas, 2014, p.13). Disability studies need to challenge the socially constructed notion of the abled/non-abled dichotomy as well as the use of deficit terminology surrounding disability. Disability activist Carol Thomas advocated,

“The personal experiences of living with both impairment and disability (and the interaction of these) should be on the disability studies agenda” (Thomas, 1999, p.275).



In her writings Professor Carol Thomas proposed a new approach for understanding disability experiences. Going beyond a medical and social model ideology, she advocated an approach that goes beyond just describing impairments or talking about societal barriers (Thomas, 2019). She advocated a new conceptualisation of disability that does not equate disability as a label belonging to a person, rather one that acknowledged the dynamic complexities of living with a disability. She suggested that in order to understand disability experiences it is important to consider the interaction between societal barriers, personal biological barriers of the impairment, along with personal characteristic of the individual, and other environmental factors (Thomas, 2019).

In agreement with Carol Thomas, this research aims to explore the 'lived aspect' of disabled teachers complex life journeys to understand the interaction of multiple factors. After reading multiple personal accounts of disabled teachers in identified literature it became imperative that I explored limitations impairment put on participation in society in conjunction with the social barriers that exist in society as well as their own self- identity. It was felt that complexities of disabled teachers' lives could be better understood by analysing individual experiences of disabled teachers, their life trajectory, their interactions with people around them, their participation in social activities, their own struggle with their impairments. To address these complexities of disabled teachers lived experiences, strong theoretical foundations were needed that not only acknowledged these complexities but helped understand

them. After a thorough review of many frameworks, it was considered that the biopsychosocial (BPS) model of disability best suited as a theoretical foundation for this research. The ICF, which was developed based on the BPS, was considered along with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. This chapter describes why these frameworks were chosen as well as providing a justification for selecting them.

### **2.3.1 Biopsychosocial Model of Disability**

The disability movement led by disability activists in the UK which gained prominence three decades ago in the 1970s highlighted the social oppression and environmental barriers encountered by disabled people in their lives (Shakespeare, 2010). The social model is credited with freeing the term 'disability' from the clutches of doctors and medical professionals who held the belief that 'disability' was either the impairment itself or in the restrictions caused by the impairment and reconstructing the meaning of 'disability' in terms of the social exclusions experienced by disabled people (Thomas, 2012). This radical interpretation of disability as an entirely socially caused phenomenon which was created by social disadvantage and exclusion that disabled people faced in all areas of their lives became the focus of disability studies thereby replacing the traditional medical and welfare models with 'the social model of disability' (Oliver, 1990). The social model was instrumental in driving the disability movement and generated social change in form of changes in public transport, improving accessibility in buildings, as well as 'liberation' of disabled people by improving self-esteem and creating a 'collective identity' (Shakespeare, 2010, p.6; Thomas, 2012). The entire focus of disability changed from lying within an individual's limitations to

external barriers and attitudes of the society that disabled them. Rather than feeling self-pity, disabled people realised that society was to blame, and that society needed to change not themselves - it developed a pride in disabled identity and angst against a society that in effect created these so-called barriers.

Though the social model can be credited with bringing momentum to disabilities activism, legislative changes and becoming a slogan for a disability political movement there are many critiques of its separation of 'disability' from personal impairments to projecting it as a societal creation (Thomas, 2014; Shakespeare, 2010). Because the social model totally rejects the notion that impairment itself can be a barrier and suggests that disabled people are disabled by society and not their bodies, it was critiqued as not understanding the pain and discomfort caused by chronic degenerative conditions, totally rejecting learning disabilities and ignoring the negative aspects of having an impairment (Thomas, 2012). The social model is also accused of being controlled by a small group of male disability activists with mostly physical impairments and of having a narrow understanding of disability (Thomas, 2014; Shakespeare, 2010). The social model seems to try to minimize complexities by projecting all the problems onto society and totally ignoring personal experiences of disabled people. By separating the link between impairment and disability, the social model overlooks the effects impairment has on individuals and rejects personal experiences. This is aptly emphasised by Thomas (2014) when she quotes disability activist and feminist writer Jenny Morris:

“There is a tendency within the social model of disability to deny the experience of our own bodies, insisting that our physical differences and restrictions are entirely socially created. While environmental barriers and social attitudes are a crucial part of our experience of disability – and do indeed disable us - to suggest that this is all there is to deny the personal experience of physical and intellectual restrictions, of illness, of the fear of dying” (cited from Thomas, 2014, p.13).

Despite its shortcomings the social model did lead to many changes in legislation and international policies. One of the most important international policies in terms of disability rights, was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006. The UNCRPD is considered a milestone in protection of disability rights world-wide. The participating nations had to ensure that disabled people were provided with equal rights and benefits by implementing robust legislations and policies as well as laws. Complying nations had to move away from excluding disabled people from society, to have more inclusion in education, provide vocational training and employment, and most importantly improve access to the general services and access to employment opportunities (Parmenter, 2011). Evidence from around the world reflected that many disabled people did not have full-time employment, were often unemployed and often exploited earning lower wages (UNCRPD, 2013). The UNCRPD ensured disabled people had employment rights and brought about legislations like reasonable adjustments into effect, and discrimination against disabled people became punishable by law, which increased the numbers of disabled people employed in various sectors. Historically, disability has been defined in deficit terminology under the medical model, until the UNCRPD that set disability in the context of discrimination, poverty, diversity, denied access and human rights (UNCRPD, 2006). The UNCRPD perspective implied that disability is a more complex phenomenon than medical labels and that disability could be better understood as the

result of an interaction between characteristics of the environment and the person (UNICEF, 2014).

The social model of disability, more than forty years on, is still highly debated. Though developed as a political intervention, the problems and successes of the social model are paradoxical (Shakespeare, 2006). Although the social model did achieve political gains, many argue this has been at the cost of disabled people's identities (Hughes & Patterson, 1997, Shakespeare, 2006). The social model has been accused of focussing mainly on physical impairment, excluding embodied experiences of disability, especially those of the learning disabled (Allan, 2010). By presuming that all disabled people experience oppression, the social model ignores the lived experience of impairment (Owens, 2015).

The social model has been referred to as an outdated ideology in need of further development (Owens, 2015, p.385). After more than forty years, there is urgent need to revise the social model, to expand it to improve its explanatory power (Corker, 1999; Finklestein, 2001) in order to make it more relevant to the lives of all disabled people (Shakespeare, 2006). Even Mike Oliver himself expressed disappointment with the way the social model has not been successfully applied as a "tool to alter circumstances of disabled people or to foster better inclusion" (Allan, 2010, p 605).

"I wish people would stop talking about it. The social model is not some kind of conceptual device to debate. The social model is a tool that we should use to try and produce changes in the world, changes in what we do. What I hoped from that was that people would start using it and what we would actually see was not 'what are the theoretical underpinnings of the social model?' ... but 'this is what I actually did with the social model. This is how I took it into a particular school or a particular social work agency. This is what we did with it and this is whether it worked or not'. (Allan & Slee, 2008, cited from Allan, 2010, p.605)

Another major critique of the social model of disability is that it lacks definition and is not really a model given that it only considers two components: oppression and disability (Altman, 2001). Because it does not take difference into consideration; the social model creates a hierarchy of impairment (Corker, 2002 ; Morris,1991). which excludes disabled people with chronic illness, cognitive impairments, fluctuating impairments (Owens, 2015) limiting the understanding of disability (Williams, 1999).

Many new approaches to explore and understand disability experiences have been attempted since the 1970's to move away from the medical model towards a more comprehensive way to address the complexities of disabled people's lives. In 1980, George Engel proposed an approach to counteract against biological reductionist description of mental illness (Shakespeare, 2019; Cromby et al., 2013) and proposed a more wholistic approach. While attempting to study lower back pain Engel instead of considering only the biological factors decided to also consider psychological and social factors that might be causing the illness Though the original theory of Engel was widely cited and considered influential it was not empirically tested; neither did it try to explore the interactions between biological, psychological, and social factors (Chigangaidze, 2021; Shakespeare, 2016). It is considered the origin of biopsychosocial approach because it was the first time an approach considered multi layers factors and their influence on an impairment (Waddell, 1987).

Gordon Waddell was the first to use the term 'biopsychosocial' in the 1980's. Their main argument being that though the medical and social models have some validity, each of them only addresses part of the story (Waddell, 2006, p.77). Dr Gordon Waddell, an orthopaedic surgeon, and Dr Mansell Aylward, a former Chief Medical Officer for the Department of Work and Pensions, developed the BPS approach while working at the centre for Psychosocial and Disability research, Cardiff University. They loosely based it on Engel's work, with a special focus on social and psychological factors rather than biological factors to understand impairment. It is more 'individual-centred' (Waddell, 2006, p.77) which considers the individual, their social context, and their health problem. BPS was used as the conceptual framework for redefining disability in the UK (Shakespeare, 2016). Waddell and Aylward brought together elements such as medical and related professional care, personal effort from disabled people, and social modifications, including work alterations aimed presenting a multi-layered view on disability (Petasis, 2019).

Carol Thomas similarly advocated for considering the impact of impairment on an individual's daily functioning, participation in social activities as well as psychological effect of the impairment on the individual. She defined 'Disablism' as,

"The social imposition of avoidable restrictions on the life activities, aspirations and psycho-emotional well-being of people categorised as 'impaired' by those deemed 'normal'. Disablism is social-relational in character and constitutes a form of social oppression in contemporary society – alongside sexism, racism, ageism and homophobia. As well as enacted in person-to-person interactions, disablism may manifest itself in institutionalised and other socio-structural forms. The recent political environment in the world the shift to right wing ideology, the increase in hate crimes, the nationalism rhetoric all this is 'disablism' active in today's society

which affects the lives of everyone whether they are able bodied or disabled (Thomas, 2019, p.1).

In the UK the recent cuts in public spending and reduction in social care funding has created an environment which can also be termed as disablism, with the vast majority of disabled people without adequate social care and struggling with coping with daily life, leading to further exclusion of disabled people (Thomas, 2019). She goes on to define 'Impairment effects' as

"The direct and unavoidable impacts that 'impairments' (physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional) have on individuals' embodied functioning in the social world. Impairments and impairment effects are always bio-social and culturally constructed in character and may occur at any stage in the life course" (Thomas 2019, p.1).

While the social model concentrates on the oppression and exclusion of the disabled by society, the fact that having certain impairments creates barriers of its own also needs to be acknowledged, the fact that if someone is suffering from a chronic degenerative disease which causes tremendous pain in movement that itself will be a barrier in the person's participation in social activities. The simplicity of the social model is also its undoing (Shakespeare, 2010) because it does not consider the fact that living with an impairment not only has biological ramifications but also has psychological impact on the disabled person (Thomas, 2014).

I strongly felt that to understand the lived experiences of disabled teachers, there is the need to look at various aspects wholistically. Along with social barriers, one also needed to take into account barriers raised by the individual's impairment as well as



personal factors like motivation, aspirations, goals, determination along with environmental factors like family, and home.

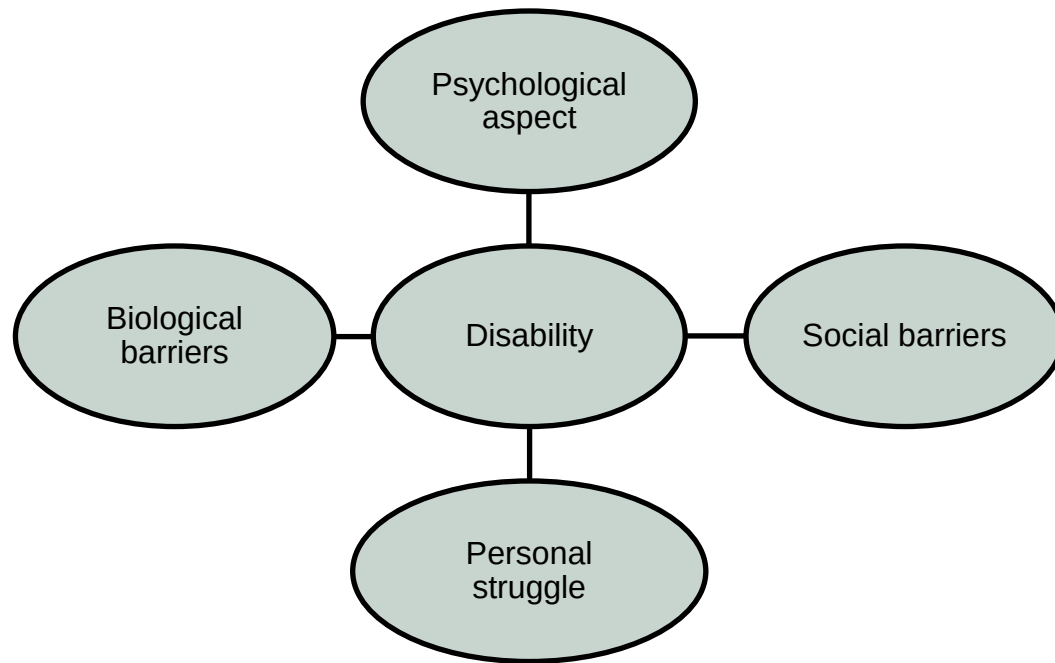


Figure 2 The researcher's approach to Biopsychosocial model of disability

The individual experience of the disabled person, their life journey, their interactions with people around them, their participation in social activities, their own struggle with their impairments are a large part of their self-identity which is totally overlooked by the social model, and which is what I want to explore. The limitations a person's impairment puts on their participation in society in conjunction with the social barriers that exist in society as well as the persons' own self-identity all together needs to be looked at as a theoretical framework, ignoring either part would not be providing a clear understanding of a complex concept.

Carol Thomas wrote about how "impairment effects and disability interlock in unique and complex ways" (Thomas, 2004, p. 42), that impairments have direct and restricting

impacts on disabled people's social lives. She explains that restrictions caused due to socially accepted norms are to be distinguished from the restrictions, exclusions and disadvantages that people with impairments experience as a result of disability. So, if disability is social exclusion on the grounds of impairment,

“This means that disability involves a nexus of social relationships between those designated impaired and those designated non-impaired or normal, relationships that work to exclude and disadvantage the former while promoting the relative inclusion and privileging of the latter. The theoretical challenge is to understand what gives form to and sustains these relationships, however and wherever they are manifest – in social structures, organisational practices, systems, policies, ideologies, discourses and inter-personal relationships” (Thomas, 2004, p. 42).

Some argue that by considering impairment effects along with social barriers and psycho emotional factors over-complicate an already complicated situation (Shakespeare and Watson 2010), given that it can be hard to distinguish between the boundaries of impairment effects and disability (Owens, 2015). I feel by trying to understand how this 'nexus of social relationships' work in my participants' lives, through the bioecological lens and applying the ICF, will help address these complications.

In agreement with Carol Thomas's writings, I decided that following a biopsychosocial approach would be the best approach to understand the complex lived experiences of participants. The participants of this study being disabled teachers, how they describe their impairments affecting their participation in everyday activities is something I wanted to explore. This model is best suited for this research because the intent is to

explore the lived experiences of disabled teachers wholistically considering their environmental influences, their personal struggle with their impairment and their functioning as teachers. The biopsychosocial model is an interdisciplinary and multifaceted model that explores the interrelations among the biological, psychological, and socio-environmental influences on health and disease (Chigangaidze, 2021). The fact that this approach considered 'individual' experience of disability along with environmental factors resonated with me, (as mentioned in chapter 1), because of my strong belief that by wholistically exploring 'personal lived experience' of individual disabled teacher can create a better understanding of disabled teachers lives. Since this research is entirely built on participant narratives, applying the biopsychosocial lens will provide the breadth to represent these experiences and add criticality to the views participants offer. Hence the first framework I apply in this research is the World Health Organizations International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) which is developed using the BPS as its basis (Petasis, 2019; Shakespeare, 2016; Waddell, 2006).

### **2.3.2 International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) - applying the language of enablers and barriers**

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) was adopted by the World Health Organization in 2001. It is based on the biopsychosocial model, which defines disability as the interaction between personal factors and those of the environment around the person. ICF assesses disability in terms of body functions and structures; activities (execution of tasks or actions) and participation (involvement in a

life situation); and contextual factors (WHO, 2002). The ICF 2001 was a conceptual shift similar to what Carol Thomas was suggesting in the way that the framework included” functioning as a universal human experience that can be classified in three dimensions; body function and structure, performance of personal activities and participation in communal life” (WHO, 2002). The ICF gives importance to individual personal experiences of people who have impairment and provided a practical way of understanding the complexity of disability (Shakespeare, 2006, p.59). The WHO beginner guide on ICF mentions that the framework is based on ‘biopsychosocial model’ which is an integration of the medical and the social model (WHO, 2002).

This theoretical framework was chosen keeping in mind the importance of language used while talking about disability and considering disability related complexities. The framework was chosen because it distinguishes between impairment and consequence of that impairment. The ICF 2001 included functioning as a universal human experience that can be classified in three dimensions; body function and structure, performance of personal activities and participation in communal life” (WHO 2002). ICF focusses on individual personal experiences of impairment and provides a practical way of understanding complexities of disability (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 59). The biopsychosocial model of disability adopted by ICF acknowledges that the ‘person – environment’ interaction is not just about defining health of individuals but understanding the role environments play in an individual’s human experience, just like Carol Thomas advocates in her writings.

The ICF emphasizes that needs of disabled people are not just medical but more broadly, social, educational, and functional in nature (Simeonsson et al., 2012). Simeonsson et al. (2012) identifies issues related to application of the ICF to measure disability in childhood. They recommend development of measures to be framed from a children's rights perspective. The Douglas et al. (2011) large scale survey explores mobility and travel behaviour of 960 visually impaired in UK. The research utilizes ICF terminology of enablers and barriers in framing interviews questions, data analysis and presentation. The findings of Douglas et al. (2011) highlight the range of barriers and enablers experienced by the visually impaired participants. Like Douglas et al. (2011), who have used the ICF in developing their interview schedule, I too will use ICF terminology for framing the interview questions as well as in presenting the research findings. This will ensure that appropriate language is used to describe participants' complex life experiences.

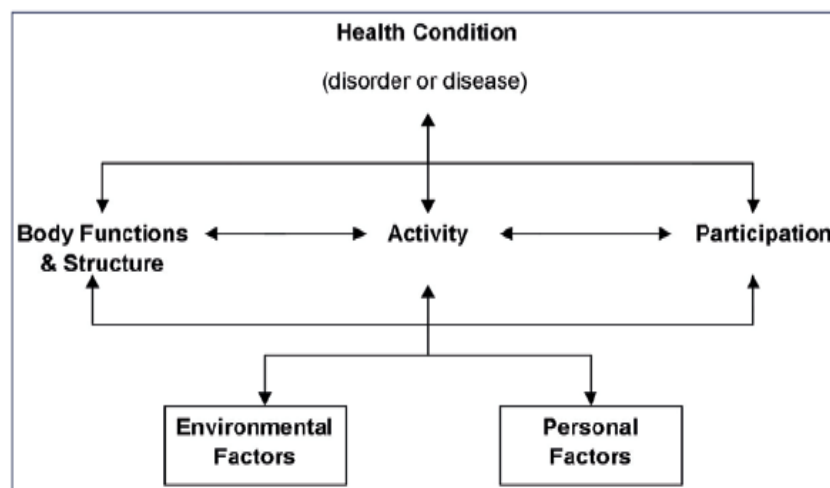


Figure 3 International Classification of Functioning (ICF), Disability and Health framework (Source WHO,2002)

The biopsychosocial model of disability adopted by the ICF acknowledged that the person – environment interaction is not just about defining the health of individuals but that of groups and the role that environments play in an individual's human experience. The biopsychosocial model of disability emphasizes that the needs of disabled people are not just medical but more broadly, social, educational, and functional in nature (Simeonsson et al., 2012). Several researchers have used the ICF framework in their empirical studies (Simeonsson et al., 2012; Douglas et al., 2011). Using the ICF will allow me to explore the 'lived aspect' of my participants complex life journeys, their personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as disabled teachers. I planned to use ICF terminology in framing the questionnaire for the semi-structured interviews with participants similar to the Douglas et al. (2011) study to explore how they describe their struggles and whether they frame it as socially based or individually based.

The apparent lack of the subjective experience of participation as well as not clearly defining participation are sources of critique of the ICF (Piskur et al., 2014). There is also not much clarity on how the distinct domains of the ICF integrate and affect each other. The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of disabled teachers by using explicit questions framed using ICF terminology of barriers and enablers to identify the factors that affected their lives positively (enabling) or negatively (by creating barriers). I have attempted to address these criticisms of the ICF by underpinning the research questions and qualitative methods considering the subjective and personal lived experiences of disabled teachers. The ICF therefore

offered the language and theoretical underpinnings upon which this research could be based. The aim is to develop an understanding of disability that respects both the impairment and the other factors that restrict or enable activities and participation in life, reflected in the research questions and the methodology. Like the ICF, the second framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory also relates to environments and their developmental influence on an individual's life.

### **2.3.3 Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner defined his bioecological theory as "an evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time" (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p. 6963). The theory evolved from 1973 to 2006 starting as an ecological model to evolving into a bioecological model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The central premise of Bronfenbrenner's theory is to understand the influence of social environments on the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The theory consists of a framework of five environmental levels – the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. Each of these levels interact with the individual as well as with each other. The individual is placed at the centre of the framework with each system depicted in concentric circles embedded next to each other. The larger systems affect the smaller systems which in turn affect the individual at the centre. The factors that together influence development are broadly divided into those that are close to the individual (proximal) and those that are distant (distal). The microsystem, the closest proximal level includes immediate environments such as family, friends, and neighbourhood. The mesosystem is interconnection between two microsystems,

it captures the communication between players in the different microsystems, e.g. a teacher and a parent communicating. The mesosystem recognises that microsystems interact in multiple ways with each other for example a student who is has an unhappy home experience which affects their school experience, or a disabled teacher who has had a tough day at school which might affect their home environment. The individual is an active participant in both the microsystem as well as the mesosystem, which is not the case in the next level the exosystem. In the exosystem disabled teachers are influenced by what is happening around them without actively being involved in them for example an individual teacher has no control over school policy, yet it affects their classroom interaction. The macrosystem is farthest from the individual and includes political ideologies, cultural factors, and social beliefs. The theory has been modified several times since its conception (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Though Bronfenbrenner did not specifically elaborate on how to conduct bioecological research, he did illustrate how the bioecological theory could be applied through the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). I have based my research on this latest version of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory with the emphasis on the influence of proximal processes on individual participants development, considering the context and time. Though my study is not longitudinal, the data generated has a life span approach to explore the development of individual participant over their lifetime. In the latest version of the Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, the focus was to show how individual characteristics, in conjunction with aspects of the context, both spatial and temporal, influence



proximal processes, referred to as the “engines of development” (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p.118). Bronfenbrenner defines processes as

“Especially in its early phases, and to a great extent throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to hence forth as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1993, p. 317).

Bronfenbrenner emphasized that the change in terminology from ‘ecological’ to ‘bioecological’ model was due to taking into consideration the role played by the individual in their own development. The proximal processes are the “driving forces of human development” (Bronfenbrenner,1999; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and are mutually influenced by person characteristics and by the environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The term ‘bio’ was introduced, meaning ‘connected with life and living things’, to ensure that the individual at the centre is viewed as an essential part of the ecology (McLinden et al., 2023, p.55). Bronfenbrenner argued that the developmental power of proximal processes would also be increased if they occurred among people who developed a strong emotional relationship (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

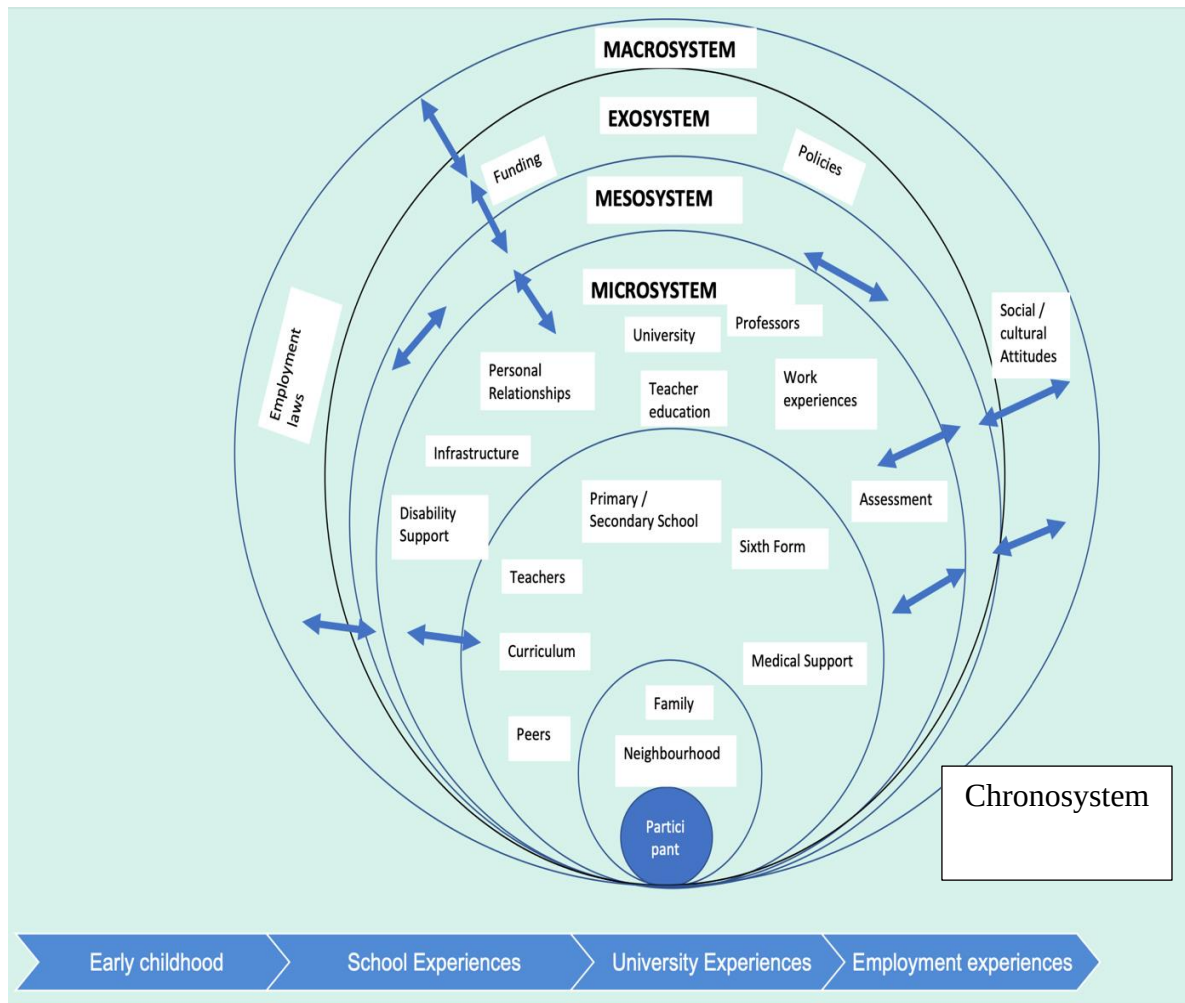


Figure 4 Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory (Created applying Bronfenbrenner, 2005)

The individual plays an active role in their own development and are influenced by their motivation, personality, levels of activity etc (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The chronosystem acknowledges that, as the individual moves through stages of their life interacting with various changing systems in their environment, the individual is affected by changes in environments around them in their lifetime (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In other words, the chronosystem considers how occurrence of major events influence individuals' life trajectories. The chronosystem has major implications

for this research because it helps highlight profound effects, challenges and struggles have had on individual participants lives. These continue to reverberate within experiences in the micro and mesosystems (proximal systems) as well as challenges brought about by factors beyond the participants control in the exosystem and macrosystem (distal systems). The developmental growth of the participant within their life span and the impact surrounding environments have had on their life, when explored through the lens of the chronosystem would provide deep insight into disabled teachers life trajectories from their own point of view. The application of bioecological systems theory influenced the way the data generation strategy was designed for this study requiring each participant disabled teachers to recall life experiences recalling different transitional stages of their lives in a chronological manner.

Many researchers have previously applied Bronfenbrenner's framework for data analysis, and data presentation. Anderson et al. (2014) applied it to understand relationships SEND students develop with their peers and teachers in inclusive education. Panopoulos and Drossinou-Korea (2020) applied the bioecological systems theory to highlight the importance of teaching interventions. Dobson & Douglas (2018) was of greater relevance because they applied the bioecological systems theory to understand how developmental environments have influenced teachers to opt for the SENCO role in schools. Hewett et al. (2017) applied the bioecological systems theory to interpret experiences of visually impaired students, examining how accommodations made facilitated participation. McLinden et al. (2016) utilized it to examine personal preparation of vision specialist teachers. McLinden et al. (2023) applied it to illustrate how intervention approaches for learners with vision impairment can be structured over

an educational timeframe to promote equitable curriculum access. Though the above-mentioned studies applied the bioecological systems theory they often exclude the chronosystem. In this research the chronosystem plays a pivotal role, because of the temporal nature of data generation and analysis (explained in detail in Chapter 4). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory is essentially a more sophisticated application of the BPS, without the disability focus which the ICF has. By applying the bioecological systems theory makes it possible to explore lived personal experiences of disabled teachers through the lenses of direct experience (microsystems), or links between microsystems for example encouragement from home as well wanting to join a best friend who has decided to attend teacher education course, or due to some outside factor which influenced the decision (e.g. extra funding available for teacher education courses). Building the research on the strong wholistic foundation of the BPS, by applying a language of barriers and enablers used by ICF and by exploring life trajectories of disabled teachers through Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory lens will provide a scientific structure to this research making it a comprehensive study of disabled teachers lived experiences.

## **2.4 Researcher positionality and Language used in this research**

Before continuing, it was considered that including my researcher positionality as well as terminology used in this research should be clarified. Even though I do not have personal lived experience of disability, my interest in this topic is genuine both professionally and personally. The research does not aim to focus on gender related disability issues nor any distinct disability. The participants are referred in a gender-

neutral manner to maintain anonymity. The term 'disabled teacher' is used in the broadest sense to describe teachers with varied diagnoses with mainstream teaching experience. The language used to describe disability is a contested topic. People-first language versus disability-first language has been debated in research. Being aware that disability labels and terminologies play a vital role, the disability description in this research uses the identity-first language rather than person-first language. This decision was made after considering participant preference as well as personal inclination not to use person-first language.

In my experience when it comes to teaching ecosystems, there is often a tendency to homogenise and normalise ways of working. There is limited scope to embracing difference in the workforce. The teaching ecosystems appear to embody 'disablism' (Campbell, 2009, p.4) by making assumptions (conscious and unconscious) and embraces practices that promote differential, unequal treatment of the disabled workforce. The teaching ecosystems seem to encourage ableism wherein anything other than the so called 'normalised' way of doing things is treated as a disadvantage. By teaching ecosystems being ableist, I mean that it subscribes to,

“a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human” (Campbell 2001, p.44).

The expectation from teachers is that they need to conform to some ideal 'normalised' practices creates an environment where disabled teachers struggle to survive and

thrive. I am interested in exploring how participants make sense of their experiences as disabled teachers in teaching ecosystems. Given that disabled teachers are under-represented in the teaching workforce, therefore, in this research I have taken the liberty of using 'disabled teachers' as an umbrella term to refer to participant teachers with varied diagnoses such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorders, fibromyalgia, autism, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, stammering, physical disabilities, and other invisible conditions. This may be regarded as oversimplification but in this research, I focus on how my participants who identify as having a visible or non-visible disability describe their lived experiences of functioning as teachers in mainstream settings. I firmly believe that everyone is unique, with different abilities and we need more acceptance of individual needs,

“Perhaps the maintenance of a non-disabled identity...is a more useful problem with which to be concerned; rather than interrogating the other, let us de-construct the normality-which-is-to-be-assumed” (Shakespeare, 1999, p.28).

How can teaching ecosystems claim to be inclusive of students if they are not inclusive of teachers (Wood et al., 2022)? I believe that disabled teachers bring many positives to the workplace and that teaching ecosystems can benefit from treating these positives as assets rather than deficit.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the contextual background on this research topic along with the theoretical foundations of this research. The chapter highlights the two frameworks that this research is based upon also justifying the choice of each

framework. Researcher positionality and language used in this research is highlighted. By having a strong theoretical foundation, I hope to make a positive contribution to disabilities studies and the understanding of disabled teachers' lived experiences. In chapter 3 a critical review of existing literature on this topic is discussed.

## **3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a rationale for carrying out this research study by critically reviewing relevant literature. The purpose of carrying out the literature review was to inform the framing of my research questions, the methodology and data generation strategy that this research study would utilize. Besides identifying empirical research studies, the aim was to identify relevant publications on disabled teachers which would inform new ideas and directions for this research. The literature review identified that there was limited research into developmental influences and their specific impact on lived experiences of disabled teachers. The review helped me refine my research questions as well as informed my decision on how I must carry out this research, the research design to adopt, the data generation tools to utilize. This chapter begins with explaining search criteria used to identify existing literature included in this review. Next, five main themes identified in existing literature are discussed to provide a comprehensive background to this research. I explain how the review helped me identify the focus of the study, what exactly was I researching and why? I explain how the review helped refine my research questions, justify my data generation strategy.

### **3.2 The literature search strategy**

The literature review was carried out in three phases, in the first phase I used search terms to identify relevant literature on the research topic using electronic databases and search engines, the second phase involved an iterative process of looking at



references included in literature identified in phase one and the third phase was to include book publications on disabled teachers that were published during the period that this research was being carried out. The first phase of the literature search began in January 2020 while I was completing the taught components of this doctoral program. The literature review progressed along with the research study, the final phase three ended just prior to starting to write up this thesis in September 2022.

I began the first phase on this literature search by utilizing various search engines to identify relevant literature on disabled teachers, namely: Google, Google scholar, Research rabbit, as well as electronic databases likes University of Birmingham findit@bham ,University of Birmingham eThesis repository, UK eThesis repository, ERIC (USA), and the worldwide eThesis repository. I used various combinations of search terms while searching for relevant literature on disabled teachers. Search terms used were:

- teachers with learning disabilities
- teachers with dyslexia
- teachers with visual impairment
- teachers with physical disabilities
- teaching with disability
- disabled teachers
- teaching with hidden disability
- teaching with invisible disability
- teaching with sensory disability.

Initially I used the exact search terms listed above, I also tried different variations of the search terms, e.g. dyslexic teachers instead of teachers with dyslexia to see if that search helped identify further literature not already identified. I applied the following inclusion criteria during phase one of the search:

1. Research participants must be disabled teachers in any educational settings
2. The search was limited to publications between 2000 till April 2022.
3. The publication must focus on experiences of disabled teachers
4. Any empirical study irrespective of the methodology followed was shortlisted
5. The publications needed to be in English

The strategy I followed involved looking for search terms in the title and abstract of each paper. It was evident during this first phase of searching that disabled teachers were indeed under-represented and invisible in research (Anderson, 2006; Pritchard, 2010; Campbell, 2009). During this first phase, just N=29 articles that focused specifically on disabled teachers were identified.

During the second phase of literature search I followed an iterative process. I looked at the references included in already identified literature and utilised these to facilitate retrieval of additional relevant journal articles. I further carried out author searches to locate any further research conducted by previously identified authors. As it became clear that little research specifically focused on disabled teachers, I decided to widen the search to include any published work on any stage of disabled teachers lives, including teacher education experiences. including literature that mentioned

perception or opinions of students, head teachers of disabled teachers. I excluded literature that did not focus on above-mentioned criteria from this review. N=23 further publications were identified. The intent of including above-mentioned criteria was to acquire a thorough and comprehensive understanding of existing literature on this research topic. Final phase of the review was to include book publications on disabled teachers that were published during the period that this research was being carried out. Three recently published books which compiled self-narratives and autoethnographic personal accounts of disabled teachers were included. This led to N=48 autoethnographic self-narratives that were added to the literature review. In total, 105 documents published in English from multiple countries USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Israel, Ethiopia, Nepal, Finland, Malaysia, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia are included in the literature review.

### **3.3 Analysis of Identified literature**

Due to large variations in the scope of identified literature, in terms of research designs involved, nature and number of participants, nature of publications, carrying out a full systematic review was not possible nor desirable. To ensure that a thorough critical review of every aspect of identified literature was carried out, a meticulous systematic process was followed. The analysis of identified literature is provided in this section.

48% of the empirical research identified N=23 was conducted in USA, and 28% N=13 in the UK. Of the 105 documents identified 55% were autoethnographic self-narratives N=58, 30 % were qualitative studies N=32, 9% were quantitative studies N= 9, 6 %

were mixed method studies N=6. The qualitative studies mostly used interviews for data generation. The nine quantitative studies identified as well as the six mixed method studies were on perception of disabled teachers. These were mostly surveys on opinions of non-disabled students, head teachers and administrators.

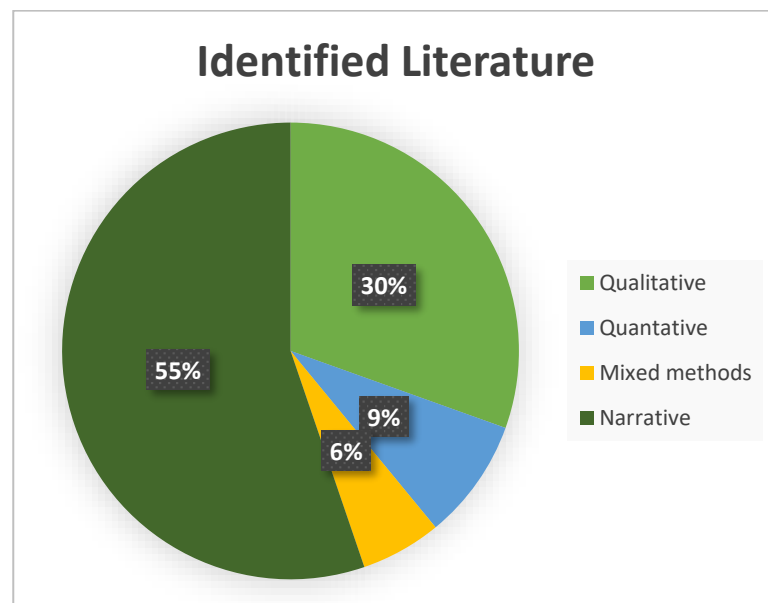


*Figure 5 Identified literature (N=105)*

*Table 1 Methodological analysis of Identified literature (N=105)*

| Study                                    | Total | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------|-------|------------|
| Autoethnographic self-narratives/ essays | 58    | 55         |
| Qualitative                              | 32    | 30         |
| Quantitative                             | 9     | 9          |
| Mixed methods                            | 6     | 6          |

Of 105 documents identified, 29% of literature N=30 specifically focussed on disabled teachers with learning disabilities, prominently dyslexia. 21% N=22 dealt with perception of disabled teachers. 20% N=21 did not focus on any specific disability. 17% of identified literature N=18 discussed experiences of teachers with sensory disabilities, mainly Visual and hearing impairment. 13% N=14 focussed on physically disabled teachers.

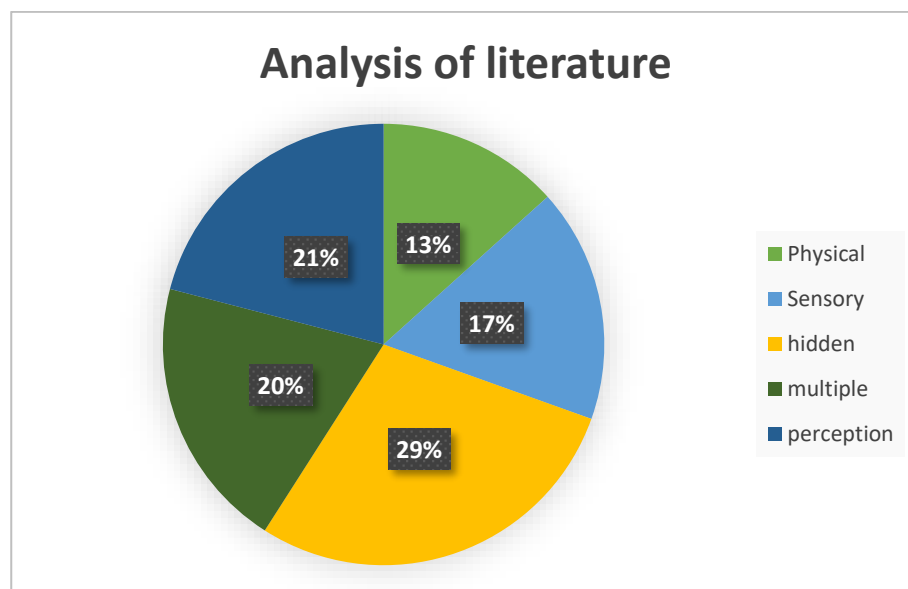


*Figure 6 Analysis of literature (N=105)*

*Table 2 Disability focus in identified literature*

| Study Focus                             | Number of studies identified | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Learning disabilities                   | 30                           | 29         |
| Perception of disabled teachers         | 22                           | 21         |
| Not focussed on any specific disability | 21                           | 20         |
| Sensory disabilities                    | 18                           | 17         |
| Physical disability                     | 14                           | 13         |

The identified literature was organized into five main themes: employment experiences N=39; teacher education experiences N=24; perception of disabled teachers N= 20; early education experiences and choice of profession N=11 and teaching practices and impact on students N=11.

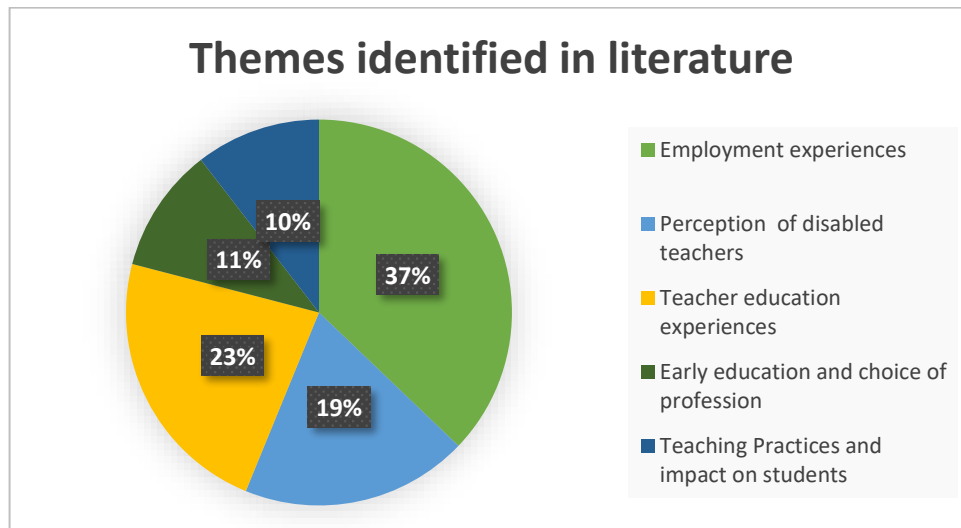


Figure 7 Themes Identified In Literature (N=105)

Table 3 Themes identified in literature

| Themes                                              | Number of studies | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Employment experiences                              | 39                | 37         |
| Teacher education experiences                       | 24                | 23         |
| Perception of disabled teachers                     | 20                | 19         |
| Early education experiences and choice o profession | 11                | 11         |
| Teaching practices and Impact on Students           | 11                | 10         |

In the next section each identified theme is discussed in detail.

### **3.4 Theme 1- Employment experiences; barriers and enablers**

Thirty seven percent of identified literature discussed challenges disabled teachers faced within their workplace environments. The auto ethnographical literature identified, almost entirely spoke about barriers and precarity of employment. Evidence from studies suggests that disabled teachers often encounter higher proportion of precarious employment, underemployment, unjust dismissals, capability measures and experience significant barriers in achieving academic promotion (Ware et al., 2021; Brown, 2021; Jeffress, 2018). It was apparent from personal experiences in ethnographic publications that disabled teachers encounter unjust ableism and prejudice (Brown and Leigh, 2020; Campbell, 2009) within their employment or during the recruitment process itself (Brown, 2021; Jeffress, 2018). Literature highlighted prevalence of ableist attitudes, prejudice, discrimination, burnout, lack of resources, lack of adjustments, lack of awareness and fear of disclosure (Ware et al., 2021; Brown, 2021; Brown and Leigh 2020; Jeffress, 2018; Vogel & Sharoni, 2010; Riddick, 2003; Ferri, 2001; Duquette, 2000).

Ableism encountered within academia had been the focus of three recent publications, Jeffress (2019) in the USA and by Brown and Leigh (2020) and Brown (2021) in the

UK. The Michael Jeffress book contains 17 self-narratives of disabled teachers from around the world. The book "Ableism in Academia" by Nicole Brown and Jennifer Leigh (2020) is a compilation of 13 narratives of disabled academics from UK who were part of a disability conference. The second book, "Lived experiences of ableism in academia", edited by Nicole Brown (2021) includes twenty-two self-narratives of disabled academics.

The narratives in these books highlight how the intolerable demands academia makes on disabled teachers impedes on their personal and career progression. The personal narratives often expressed frustrations regarding systemic barriers within academia which made it difficult to progress in their profession. The experiences highlight a lack of awareness about how structural transformations in academic settings disproportionately affects disabled teachers. Structural transformations directly affected disabled teachers' workload thereby increasing employment precarity. The self-narratives explain the impact pressures at workplace and lack of adjustments have on health and well-being. Similar experiences of lack of empathy from colleagues, and stereotypical understanding of disabilities encountered within workplaces are also mentioned in the case study by Bargerhuff, Cole and Teeters (2012). The need for raising disability awareness amongst colleagues, especially managers and head teachers is recommended by some researchers with focus on strategies to eliminate stereotypical understanding of disabilities and awareness needs to be created regarding prejudicial conduct (Bargerhuff, Cole, and Teeters 2012; Riddick 2003; Smith 2000). The fact that disabled academics in higher education encounter lack of



progression, lack of support, lack of recognition is mentioned in the qualitative study carried out by Damiani and Harbour (2015).

Sharon Smith, a disabled academic with hidden disabilities, mentions the importance of language and how it affects perception of disabled people (Smith, 2021). The point made is that often language used to refer to disabled teachers followed a deficit model terminology. This point specifically resonated because it is something that has always been a point of personal contention for me. Sharon Smith recommends that, to overcome this perception a societal shift in understanding disability is needed and that focus of disability awareness needs to be balanced towards providing support rather than attaching labels to individuals (Brown 2021, p.87). Accessibility issues raised in research, especially inaccessibility of educational buildings and its effect on physically disabled is highlighted in autoethnographic literature raising importance of reasonable adjustments, access to work needs and partnerships. Nicole Brown in her chapter mentions that disabled teachers with sensory disabilities feel excluded by colleagues leading to withdrawal, social isolation, and loneliness (Brown, 2021). She goes on to highlight challenges faced by hearing impaired teachers, how lack of adjustments and support leads to loss of academic achievement. Often these issues are unreported and eventually the disabled teacher drops out of academia.

The stigma and fear of disclosure of disability at workplace especially consequences of disclosure on progression in career was another major factor highlighted by many

studies (Valle et al., 2004; Riddick, 2003; Duquette, 2000; Vogel and Sharoni, 2011). It was observed in auto ethnographic narratives that disabled teachers were hesitant to disclose disability. This was a complex issue, teachers with hidden disabilities, it was noted, were specifically reluctant to disclose their disabilities. Studies like Ware et al., (2021) advocate for more 'Access to work' and Inclusive employment practises. Underrepresentation of disabled teachers in the workforce is mentioned in studies like Anderson et al. (2018) and Pritchard (2010) highlighting disabled teachers are invisible even amongst other minority teaching workforces. One of the major factors for underrepresentation could be due to failure to disclose disability making statistics around disabled teachers in the workforce incorrect.

In contrast, positive experiences within workplace, with successful access to work partnerships, availability of resources, supportive co-workers though few were observed in the identified literature, though not consistently. Participants in the Ware et al. study (2020) reported positive experiences of having an empathetic line manager. Mention of positive experiences in self-narratives were also observed like good partnerships with support staff, strong access to work partnerships, getting inspired by the success of disabled colleagues (Jeffress, 2019; Brown, 2021). The sparse mention of positive experiences emphasizes the prevalence of ableism in academia.

Most of the literature that led to identification of this theme was auto ethnographic and personal narratives. Few of the empirical studies specifically focussed on employment

experiences of disabled teachers. A handful of qualitative studies mentioned workplace barriers but superficially. This highlights the need for more empirical research specifically focussed on this aspect of disabled teachers lives. The literature in this theme emphasizes need for a shift in societal understanding of disability, attention to language used, importance of disability awareness strategies, need for empathy and support. The commonality of disabled teachers' experiences across geographical boundaries was shocking to discover. This highlights that existence of barriers is not only systemic but also global.

### **3.5 Theme 2- Teacher education experiences**

The second major theme identified revolved around teacher education experiences of disabled teachers. Literature in this theme mainly focussed on two key areas: lack of support during teacher education and concerns with disclosure of disability while seeking placement. A Survey conducted in Scotland by Macleod and Cebula (2009) explores experiences of disabled student teachers during their initial teacher education phase. The survey focussed on disclosure of disability and student's experiences with seeking employment. The study reported that though a high number of disabled students did enrol into teacher education courses they faced issues with access, attending classes, and adjustments.

The findings of a quantitative study conducted in Ireland by Keane, Heinz, and Eaton (2018) on disabled students in primary teacher education reported that disabled

students were significantly less likely to be accepted into undergraduate primary teacher education programs. Very few student teachers with sensory disabilities and learning difficulties even applied for initial teacher education programs. Some studies point out that teacher education still operates on the medical model perspective and there is a need to shift more towards a social model outlook (Parker and Draves, 2018; Antilla-Garza, 2015). Evidence suggests that teacher education programmes are not equipped to provide adequate support to disabled student teachers.

Similar issues with disclosing disability mentioned in the earlier theme were observed in teacher education experiences. Disabled student teachers were reluctant to disclose their disability for fear of not getting a teaching placement (Keane, Heinz and Eaton; 2018; Macleod & Cebula, 2009). Most disabled student teachers reported discrimination and doubts raised by institutions regarding their competence to teach, while some reported their struggle with completing paperwork, others reported their difficulty to complete the entire stipulated time allotted for placements as there is no reasonable adjustments made regarding the duration of the placement it is the same for all students irrespective of ability. The teacher education programmes attributed the fact that appropriate support could not be provided to disabled student teachers due to reluctance to disclose disability diagnosis (Sokal, Woloshyn, and Wilson, 2017, Griffiths, 2012). This was a double-edged sword, support could not be provided because of non-disclosure of disability and often disabled student teachers dropped out of the programs (Keane, Heinz and Eaton; 2018; Sokal, Woloshyn, and Wilson 2017; Griffiths, 2012; Macleod & Cebula, 2009).

The flip side was that disclosing a disability caused dilemmas for school boards and forced them to make decisions regarding whether they could and were willing to provide adequate accommodations (Clayton, 2009). The school boards often grappled with issues like what resources were available, costs involved, potential difficulties in providing adequate accommodations (Clayton, 2009). Many practising schools often raised concerns regarding quality and standard of education (Sokal, Woloshyn, and Wilson 2017; Clayton, 2009). Griffiths (2012) case-study which interviewed six dyslexic student teachers advocated listening to students' voices to provide individual support they needed. The Griffiths (2012) study spotlights the unacknowledged strengths dyslexic student teachers brought to their placements despite challenges encountered.

Studies in this theme reported some positive findings, student teachers with learning disabilities were reported to get highest placements. Mention of positive experiences during teacher education were rare, the Griffiths (2012) includes few positive experiences of support participants encountered while seeking placements. The Glazzard and Dale (2015) study on dyslexic student teachers experiences in primary teacher education highlights how negative experiences affect self-esteem and self-confidence. The student teachers in the study share both positive and negative encounters during teacher education and how these affect their self-esteem. The lack of empathy and patience is something that deeply affects their self-concepts (Glazzard and Dale, 2015). The positive teachers they encounter become role models and inspire them to pursue their goals and act as motivators (Glazzard and Dale, 2015). Besides

lack of empathy, other studies indicate that teacher education faculty often do not understand the requirements of disabled student teachers and hence fail to provide adequate support and accommodations (Bargerhuff, Cole, and Teeters 2012; Baldwin 2007). Research in this theme recommends that there is a need to develop new guidelines that faculty can follow especially while supervising disabled student teachers (Antilla- Garza, 2015). Recommendations made were that teacher education programs need to be better tailored to support disabled student teachers. Often many student teachers decide to drop out because of barriers they encounter during teacher education (Vogel & Sharoni, 2010; Riddick, 2003; Ferri, 2001; Duquette, 2000)

Literature in this theme suggests that though enrolment of disabled student teachers is increasing, teacher education programs need restructuring to adjust to the needs of disabled student teachers. Evidence suggests need for more training for faculty in teacher education programmes so they can provide adequate support to disabled student teacher. There is need for further research specific on how teacher education programs can support disabled student teachers. This theme in literature influenced the methodology of this research, and a decision was made to include participants teacher education experiences during the interview process.

### **3.6 Theme 3- Perception of disabled teachers**

The third theme comprised of nineteen percent of identified literature which dealt with perception of disabled teachers. This included perception of disabled teachers from

the points of view of mostly their students (Wood and Happe, 2021; Martin, 2020; Sheridan and Kotevski, 2014; Bryant and Curtner-Smith, 2009; Hayashi and May, 2011, few included perspectives of head teachers , administrators (Sokal, Woloshyn, and Wilson 2017; Lamichhane, 2016; Baldwin 2007; Griffiths and Cooper, 2002, Newton et al., 2018; William and Jeffress, 2018), only one study partially referred to parents' perspectives (Lewis et al., 2003). Most of the studies were quantitative studies using questionnaires to collect data, none of the qualitative studies dealt with this theme.

Bryant and Curtner Smith (2009) conducted three studies in the USA on the perception of disabled physical education teachers amongst middle and high school students. The findings of this study highlight students were socialised into believing that sports, fitness, and athleticism is for the able bodied, which affects students' perception of the physically disabled PE teacher. Older students were found to have more negative beliefs regarding disabled teachers than younger students (Bryant and Curtner Smith, 2009) which is a promising sign for the future. In contrast, studies like Lamichhane (2016) conducted in Nepal reported no difference in student perception of disabled teachers' competence. The study reported that students valued the good communication skills disabled teachers had and appreciated the strong social and moral lessons provided by them (Lamichhane, 2016). This difference in findings of Bryant and Curtner Smith studies in the USA and the Lamichhane study in Nepal can be attributed to different cultural and societal norms in both these countries. More such promising findings are reported by the study carried out in Australia where students in

tertiary education mentioned that disabled teachers provided better learning opportunities related to life skills, social and moral values more than non-disabled teachers (Sheridon and Kotevski, 2014).

Research on the perceptions of head teachers and administrators report that those who had more contact with disabled teachers expressed positive attitudes towards recruiting disabled teachers (Griffiths and Coopers, 2002). The Griffiths and Cooper (2002) study was the largest conducted with 125 administrators in teacher education programs in USA. The Baldwin (2007) study collected data from 60 directors of teacher education programs in USA. Findings indicate teacher education programs were willing to provide accommodations only if it did not change the standards of the program, and pressurised disabled student teachers to demonstrate competence in having essential skills required of a non-disabled teacher (Baldwin, 2007, p 138). Teacher education programmes even when obligated by laws often failed to comply citing ethical challenges. Student teachers with learning disabilities reportedly struggled with licensure formalities and finding fieldwork placements (Baldwin, 2007). Some of the recommendations made by the Baldwin (2007) study were ableist in nature especially recommendations made to exclude and prevent disabled student teachers especially with learning disabilities from entering teacher education programs in the first place. Parents perspectives were not included in any of identified research in this theme except for a brief mention in Lewis et al. (2013) study.



The effect of cultural perspectives on disability could be a major factor which studies in this theme do not consider, the societal norms and cultural influences on perceptions are overlooked. The literature in this theme suggests prevalence of societal bias towards disabled teachers, this bias seemed to lessen when people had previous exposure to disabled teachers. the positive findings in various studies strongly suggest that having more disabled teachers would be beneficial to promoting more inclusivity and acceptance of disabled people in society.

### **3.7 Theme 4- Early education experiences and choice of profession**

Eleven percent of the identified literature dealt with challenges disabled teachers encountered during their early schooling and how their own experiences have contributed towards their choice of profession. The early education experiences reported were mostly negative. These negative early experiences had long lasting effect on self-confidence of disabled teachers. The narratives included references to support offered by family and personal resilience. The research consistently mentions negative experiences throughout education, with low expectations from teachers, participants reported how they felt stigmatised and isolated in school (Vogel and Sharoni, 2011; Riddick, 2003; Duquette, 2000). Many of the narratives highlight the shame participants felt in being identified as special needs students. The feelings of isolation from other students and attempts to hide that they were special needs students was mentioned. Research also highlights how these early education experiences contributed to low self-esteem and confidence (Glazzard and Dale, 2015; Vogel and Sharoni, 2011).

Some of the literature suggests correlation between negative early education experiences and choice of teaching as profession. Despite the negative experiences during early schooling years, these low expectations became motivating factors to become better teachers themselves and provide better educational experiences to students (Dvir, 2015; Riddick, 2003; Ferri, Keefe, and Gregg, 2001; Duquette, 2000). The motivation to be different teachers from the ones they had as children is very clear in the narratives. The main reason for the choice of teaching as a profession was mainly attributed to a feeling of social justice and being a role model (Ware et al., 2021; Ferri et al., 2005) and becoming the teacher they felt they had deserved as children. Some disabled teachers claimed that they brought additional qualities to inclusive teaching practices because of their own personal experiences (Duquette, 2000). Disabled teachers mentioned attributes like being empathetic (Glazzard and Dale, 2015), more inclusive, having high expectations from students and being positive role models (Ware et al., 2021). Other reasons for opting for teaching as a profession was attributed to pragmatic reasons likes number of holidays, working hours, steady pay (Ware et al., 2021).

The only source of positive support and a key factor attributing to their success was family support. Narratives clearly mention, though not in much detail the support received from family and social networks, not only in childhood but throughout life (Grenier, Horrell, and Genovese, 2014; Vogel and Sharoni, 2011; Duquette, 2000). This aspect of family support and developmental influence is not explored in depth in

the literature, which I felt was an important aspect to explore in this research. The negative educational experiences as students have influenced disabled teacher own teaching practices, specific mention that the motivating factor was to become teachers they themselves did not have (Vogel and Sharoni, 2011). Literature in this theme suggests that choice of profession is linked with personal experiences of education, persevering in the teaching profession despite challenges, disabled teachers feel that they are being role models towards creating more acceptance of disabled people in society.

### **3.8 Theme 5- Teaching practices and impact on students**

The last theme comprised of 10% of the identified literature and were all qualitative studies. All participant teachers in the Vogel & Sharoni (2011) study viewed themselves as successful and were proud of their chosen profession, one of the teachers specifically mentions “My success as a teacher amazes me each and every day” (Vogel & Sharoni 2010, p.488). Some disabled teachers in the identified literature attributed that confidence in their professional skills contributed to their success as teachers (Grenier, Horrell, and Genovese 2014; Burns and Bell 2010, 2011; Vogel and Sharoni 2011; Riddick 2003; Duquette 2000). Disabled teachers strongly expressed themselves as successful teachers, competent and confident in their teaching practices. They expressed pride in their achievements as teachers and pride in the inclusivity of their teaching practices. Sometimes there is a note of frustration in the narrative regarding extra effort required because of barriers caused by their disability and systemic barriers like for example more time spent on marking assignments or

exams (Damiani and Harbour, 2015) or lack of assistive technology or personal support like interpreters or assistants (Hankebo, 2018).

Another key aspect highlighted was that disabled teachers display tremendous self-resilience and perseverance to succeed (Burns, Poikkeus, and Aro, 2013; Griffiths, 2012; Vogel and Sharoni, 2011; Solis, 2006; Duquette, 2000). Disabled teachers describe using strategies and persevering to overcome barriers like attitudes as well as physical barriers they encounter in teaching (Lamichhane 2016; Burns, Poikkeus, and Aro 2013; Duquette 2000; Griffiths 2012; Vogel and Sharoni 2011; Solis 2006). Specific areas of challenge were lack of resources like specific assistive technology, and provision of support staff and assistance in carrying out certain tasks, accessibility of education buildings and public transport, need for better awareness of disability related support (Damiani and Harbour 2015; Lamichhane 2016; Lewis et al., 2003; Riddick 2003).

The dire need for raising disability awareness amongst colleagues to prevent prejudice and stereotyping disabled people is highlighted in literature (Brown & Leigh 2020; Bargerhuff, Cole, and Teeters 2012; Riddick 2003; Smith 2000). Research identified challenges and areas that need improvement especially with regards to lack of availability of resources and need for awareness to mitigate the stereotypical understanding of certain disabilities. The narratives highlight prejudice, ableist attitudes mainly from managers, head teachers and colleagues (Brown & Leigh 2020;

Bargerhuff, Cole, and Teeters 2012; Riddick 2003; Smith 2000). Research highlights contributions of dyslexic teachers in strengthening inclusion in schools by using better differentiated learning activities and empathetically supporting students in their classrooms (Griffiths, 2012; Burns & Bell, 2011). Dyslexic teachers were referred to as 'agents of change' (Glazzard and Dale, 2015, p.179) because of their teaching practices that actively supported inclusive education.

Their own experiences of education influence their teaching practices, especially in terms of expectations they had from students, teaching strategies they used, their classroom environments. Research on teachers with learning disability specifically mentions strategies they used in classrooms were often strategies that they themselves used as students, it came from their own personal experiences (Hickman and Brens 2014; Burns, Poikkeus, and Aro 2013; Griffiths 2012; Solis 2006; Gabel 2001). The strategies used were mostly to help with learning related difficulties encountered by students with learning disabilities. Strategies mentioned were using more visual communications, using specific games like blocks, doodles to overcome spelling, memory, and organization issues (Burns, Poikkeus, and Aro, 2013). The strong commitment towards teaching and inclusivity of disabled teachers teaching strategies was highlighted in literature (Hankebo 2018; Thorpe and Burns 2016; Glazzard and Dale 2013; Griffiths 2012; Riddick 2003; Duquette 2000). Some studies focus on contributions of dyslexic teachers in strengthening inclusion in schools by using better differentiated learning activities and empathetically supporting disabled children in their classrooms (Griffiths, 2012; Burns & Bell, 2011). The literature in this

theme strongly highlights advantages disabled teachers bring to education. In the foreword of his book Jeffress (2018) says

“Disabled instructors don’t just teach content, they also teach important life lessons- they embody messages of disability acceptance, disability rights and inclusion. They teach with, through, and, as a result of their embodiment. They earn trust, open safe spaces for sensitive discussions and their classrooms exemplify best practices in accessible education. They empower disabled students and stimulate disability pride..... being disabled often makes a person a better teacher. A disabling society disrespects this talent at its own risk” (Jeffress 2018, p.9).

Reading experiences shared in blogs I became aware that often disabled teachers face hostility within classrooms especially in higher education settings. A disabled academic discussed their experience regarding encountering hostile attitudes from students and how these directly impacted their teaching evaluations. Disabled teachers share that often student comments in feedback expose wider cultural, political, and institutional patterns of disablism (Jeffress, 2018). Experiences of few disabled teachers were the exact opposite. They highlight that sometimes their students expressed that they the disabled teachers’ classrooms are more open, inclusive and inspirational. Many teachers with invisible disabilities reported that they preferred to hide their disabilities to avoid discrimination (Khattari et al., 2018; Jeffress, 2018; Valle et al., 2004).

Along with identified literature, I also read many news articles and disability blogs, and this knowledge also contributed to my understanding of the context of this study. Currently, diversity is considered the new slogan in education, and disability is

considered a major indicator that adds to campus diversity (Jeffress, 2018). Higher education institutions have reported in recent years a huge increase in enrolment in term of numbers for students with disabilities. In 2017, the Higher education funding council for England reported that the enrolment of students with a known disability rose by 56 percent in 2015-2017 as compared to the figures from 2010-2011 (Jeffress, 2018) which is encouraging, but administrators have been struggling to provide accessible and barrier free campuses, adequate instructional resources, and make reasonable adjustments because of recent budget cuts and pressures of competition and results (Lepkowska, 2012). Research also suggests that disabled students find adjusting to their new universities and campus environment challenging, and often drop out due to frustrations and constant struggles (Hong, 2015, p.210). I wondered if this aspect would be something participants of the study would also have experienced.

A personal experience documented in the Curran and Runswick-Cole (2013) book depicts the struggles of a disabled girl growing up and trying to fit in with other teenagers, she explains her feelings of insufficiency and growing up believing that she could never have a normal life, never have a family of her own or even kids, because growing up she believed disabled people cannot have children, are not meant to have partners. In her account she shares how her self-identity and acceptance of her own disability changed when she went to college and read about disability movement and self-advocacy (Curran and Runswick-Cole, 2013). This encouraged me to look at personal experiences and introspective aspect of participants experience of their own

diagnosis. I included questions in the interview related to aspirations role models participants had during teen years in their research

In her doctoral study, a disabled teacher from the USA who has a speech impairment mentions that initially she often rehearsed all her lessons and tried to hide her disability as much as possible especially during recruitment stages, but she felt dishonest and often found her classroom children more accepting of her disability than employers and administrators in general. She states that by ultimately embracing her disability and openly acknowledging it has made her a better teacher and provides a better message to her students who are more tolerant and even celebratory of her (Hauk, 2010). In her study she also mentions that she found her students more accepting of her disability than the school administrators and colleagues. In her search for employment the teacher explains her struggles to hide her speech defect and rehearse her answers, she explains the reluctance of administrators to hire her because they felt she will not be able to control a class of teenagers.

In an article printed in The Guardian UK on November 12, 2012, Dorothy Lepkowska laments about how schools are struggling to recruit and retain disabled teachers because they cannot afford the extra costs entailed in providing the reasonable adjustments they might need. The article also mentions that the Department of education in UK reports that less than 1% of the teaching workforce has a disability but, Lepkowska refutes this claim and says that statistics are unreliable because “Not



everyone admits to being disabled when completing forms and questionnaires” (Lepkowska, 2012), a claim which is repeated in other literature as well ( Jeffress, 2018; Riddell and Weedon, 2014; Hauk, 2010; Macleod and Cebula, 2009) . In the article she shares a story about a profoundly deaf teacher who taught Drama in a special needs school and wished to teach in mainstream education for which he was training to be a teacher, he shares his struggle to find teacher training institutions that were willing to accommodate him. The teacher shared concerns about passing the verbal reasoning part of the skills tests which is a requirement for all trainee teachers. Though the said teacher did manage to get a placement in a mainstream school the cost of adjustments and special interpreters has forced him to return to his original teaching role in a special needs school. The report suggested that such incidents end up depriving students with and without disabilities within mainstream education of important role models. The aspect of disabled teachers being a role model and whether participants of the study considered themselves to be one, intrigued me and questions relating to this aspect were also included in the data generation.

In Lepkowska’s article a retired disabled teacher educator mentions that “successive governments had not encouraged disabled people to apply to teach, which has led to thousands of highly qualified people with disabilities not considering teaching as an option.” (Lepkowska, 2012). The teacher educator shares how she has seen student teacher disabled trainees get frustrated by the lack of accessibility in schools and drop out of teacher education because of the constant struggle to access classrooms. The

barriers participants encountered during the teacher education process was something identified as needing special focus in data generation.

The costs of reasonable adjustments are also a concern. Lepkowska mentions a case of a disabled teacher being offered a settlement by a school because they considered that cheaper than spending money on adapting and buying specialist equipment. The profoundly deaf teacher who taught drama also mentions difficulties with costs because schools complain that hiring interpreters is expensive, it was estimated that sixty thousand pounds was the cost of interpreters and note takers for the duration of the teachers teacher training year alone. A quote in the article is very apt; it says, “New schools are built to accommodate disabled pupils, but not teachers’ (Lepkowska, 2012). The article was revealing because it highlights the barriers a teacher with disability faces at every stage, the unwillingness to accommodate, the political indifference, the costs, the dilemma of schools in terms of budget cuts, the inaccessibility every step of the way seems like a new challenge and struggle. It’s the disabling surrounding that add more difficulties rather than the person’s individual disability, a quote comes to mind,

“The problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (Davis 1995, cited from Curran & Runswick-Cole 2013, p.136).

I wondered if participants of the study would have had litigation with their schools or had encountered similar situations.

It was observed that most of the literature was largely focussed on learning disabled teachers, mainly dyslexic teachers with a lack of focus on other disabilities. The studies were not built on any theoretical frameworks, lacked robust data generation/analysis strategies and the sample sizes were limited. A few of the studies were qualitative in nature (Qualitative = 32, Quantitative= 9) they mostly relied on short interviews to generate data and lacked sound theoretical foundations. The recent publications (Jeffress, 2018; Brown & Leigh, 2020; Brown, 2021) contain auto ethnographic narratives of academics with varied disabilities and do not focus on any one disability. The contributors of these publications had varied teaching backgrounds and different geographical locations. Despite widening my search, I discovered that literature on disabled teachers was not a specific focus in inclusive education research. Research with specific focus on disabled teachers' experiences was scarce, fragmented and lacked depth. This scarcity of research on disabled teachers has resulted in the lack of information regarding their lived experiences, their needs, their struggles, actual data on number of disabled teachers in employment, or any information regarding gender, ethnicity and other factors.

This review provided a comprehensive background of existing literature on disabled teachers including recent publications. In the next section I discuss how the review helped me identify the focus of the study, what exactly to research and how do I go about researching the topic. I explain how the review helped refine my research questions, identify research design, data generation strategy and how the review helped me formulate the interview schedule.

### 3.9 Research questions

The comprehensive review of existing literature on disabled teachers provided key insights to the direction and focus my research should take. The review confirmed the focus of my research topic was a good one. While identified literature in this review highlights struggles disabled teachers encounter, there is not much emphasis on understanding interactions of impairment and ‘personal self’. There is a clear gap in literature in terms of exploring life trajectory, personal experience of living with impairment, psychological effect of living with an impairment and functioning as disabled teachers. The studies did not follow any theoretical frameworks, nor did they focus on developmental environments and their influence on the lives of disabled teachers. The literature review clarified that the focus of my research should be on understanding the influence of developmental environments on disabled teachers lived experiences.

The review gave a strong steer upon the way I wanted to frame *the questions* and how I wanted to undertake the research. The ‘how’ to conduct this research emerged through the review but was developed and finalised afterwards and is presented in the Methodology chapter that follows. In short, drawing upon the literature identified in the literature review and my own positionality, values and interest, it became clear my research would be highly interpretive, collaborative and qualitative. The review helped me decide that instead of one short interview, I would interview my participants over multiple interviews following a timeline from early childhood to present time. The review

helped me formulate the interview schedule and frame my questions for the four timeline interviews. Reflecting upon the methodologies used by studies included in this review, a multiple case study approach with small number of participants to ensure in-depth focus on individual experiences as the research design was decided as apt for the research focus of this study.

The aims of this research were formulated based on this literature review as well as the research context. The literature review ensured that my final research questions to explore lived experiences of disabled teachers were appropriate, clear and focussed.

1. How have their early childhood, schooling and university experiences influenced disabled teachers' choice of profession?
2. How do disabled teachers describe their experiences within academic settings?
3. How do disabled teachers describe the critical incidents of their life that they feel have influenced their disability experience and shaped their identities?
4. What were the barriers and enablers encountered in the process of becoming a disabled teacher?

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a thorough exploration of existing literature relevant to this research topic. This review identified fragmented literature on disabled teachers. There is a theoretical gap as well as methodological gap in the identified literature. Few researchers addressed factors that created barriers for disabled teachers, and to a lesser extent, factors that enabled their functioning as disabled teachers. No specific

research exploring life trajectories using any specific theoretical framework was identified. The literature review provides a justification for this research and the need for this research to be carried out. The majority of the literature on disabled teachers is descriptive in nature, by applying the selected theoretical frameworks this research will generate new insights in exploring disabled teachers lived experiences. The review helped me refine my research questions as well as informed my decision on how I must carry out this research, the research design to adopt, the data generation tools to utilize. In the next chapter I discuss the methodological approaches followed by this research.

## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides details on methodological approaches applied for data generation and analysis in this research. The research focus is to explore lived experiences of disabled teachers, highlighting the role life experiences have had on individual participants' choice of profession and the impact environments have on their life. Data were generated with eight disabled teachers using semi-structured timeline interviews. To generate in-depth, rich narratives individual interviews were complemented by utilizing a questionnaire, and critical incident form. This qualitative research adopts a multiple case-study research design to explore each participants lived experience in depth. This chapter provides detailed account of philosophical assumptions this study is built on, multiple case study research design employed, recruitment strategy, and protocol followed for data generation. Further discussions include data generation methods utilized in this study and how data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic analysis and poetic transcription. Final discussions include ethical considerations made within this study. The next section includes discussion on the philosophical assumptions of this study.

### **4.2 Philosophical assumptions of the study**

This research is built on the premise that knowledge can be gained by analysing disabled teachers lived experiences. At the heart of this research is the concept of trying to understand worlds and lives by interpreting 'lived experiences', a method advocated by Paul Ricoeur (Lindseth & Norberg, 2021, p.885). Ricoeur wrote, "If I want

to understand this phenomenon, I must look inwards and feel how I am moved by my will” (Lindseth & Norberg, 2021, p.886). Therefore, my own assumptions highly influence my interpretations. The ontological position I as the researcher hold, the ‘worldview’ I have, my belief systems, the way I think, the way I conduct this research, will be the lens through which ‘knowledge will be filtered’ (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p.6). Ricoeur wrote about narrating life stories as an act of expressing what we remember (Lindseth & Norberg, 2021, p.886) so when participants are narrating their stories, they bring together moments that can be experienced as a unified story in the present. Hence, participant narratives are “concrete, viewable and even touchable” (Lindseth & Norberg, 2021, p.884). This is a phenomenological study (Saunders et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2018; Bryman, 2016) totally built on participants ‘concrete reflection’ (Lindseth & Norberg, 2021, p.884), which requires them to not only recall crucial life experiences but retell their stories coherently. The aim is to gain an understanding of disabled teachers lived experiences by interpreting these ‘concrete reflections’. This study is entirely based on interpreting participants narratives which are of fundamental importance to this study. I hold a relativist ontology, which believes that no objective knowledge can exist independent of the ‘knower and their social context’ (Harvey, 2012). Since objective knowledge is not possible there is no single truth to discover. Therefore, any knowledge generated is contextually located and produced during interactions. Meanings assigned will vary depending on time and context the knowledge is generated (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.176).

It is important to acknowledge that observing and understanding human experiences is complex. People are not only complicated and unpredictable, but they also modify



their behaviour and only share what they want to (Rosenberg, 2012). The researcher is aware that participants will share their perspective on their own 'authentic lived experiences' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.301), recalling and narrating these during data generation. Participants are recalling 'their experiencing life as a disabled teacher', since they are living with this phenomenon which is the focus of this study makes their stories 'concrete' (Lindseth & Norberg, 2021, p.883). Therefore, no attempt to verify and validate participants narratives was felt necessary precisely because participant perspectives on their own experiences are valued. Because I strongly believe that human interaction generates knowledge, that by analysing individually constructed realities truth can be explored. Hence all knowledge is considered to be socially constructed and cannot be considered absolute which supports a social constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. In social constructivist research "investigator and the object of investigation are interlinked so that findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.207). Interpretivists focus on understanding social behaviour to develop contextual knowledge with the assumption that social reality is subjective, multiple realities exist (Harvey, 2012).

Four axioms by Lincoln and Guba provide guidelines for constructivist/interpretivists studies. The first one states that prediction should not be the aim of such studies, the focus is mainly to understand realities that exist in multiple forms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.37). Which is true for this study because the main aim is not to predict, rather to explore multiple experiences to gain understanding of disabled teachers life trajectories and effects developmental environments have on their self-identities. The

second axiom explains that the researcher and the participant both influence each other and are equally part of this study. The focus is on trying to understand participant lived experiences without attempting to change them. The researcher and participants developed trust, rapport during the study. Because realities cannot be understood in seclusion from their contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.39), I tried to gather as much contextual data regarding participants' lived experience as possible. Therefore, the data generation process follows a chronological timeline from early childhood until the present. The final axiom explains that because I as the sole researcher am the primary data generation instrument, participants are co-producers of knowledge and I must understand and interpret these complex experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.39). Knowledge generated by interpretivist research is reflexive, often contextual and experiential (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Relativist ontology strongly advocates that ethical/values have a deep impact on the knower (Hugly & Sayward, 1987, p.278). Therefore, it is essential that interpretivist/ constructivist researcher be Reflexive in nature. Knowledge generation thus becomes a subjective process, the researcher 'influences' the research, researcher subjectivity is an essential resource in creating knowledge. The epistemology of this research is Subjectivist because I am trying to understand and construct knowledge by analysing multiple participant narratives from my point of view. Subjectivist research requires the researcher to construct an impression of the world the way they view it, strong emphasis being that the world is unknowable (Ratner, 2008).

“Viewing subjectivity as something valuable, rather than problematic, is a key aspect of qualitative sensibility” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.12). Being a reflexive researcher, means acknowledging that any assumptions held true will affect the research process, analysis, and findings because I need to use my own personal interpretive framework consciously to develop new understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure reflexivity in the research, I made every effort to accommodate multiple point of views in the way interpretations occur in this research. Hence, data generation and analysis are messy, chaotic processes prioritising depth of engagement with generated data rather than being fixated on accuracy or reliability (Clarke & Braun, 2021). The researcher’s philosophical stance influenced methodology, research design as well as data generation and analysis in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Crotty, 1983). Reflexivity challenges the notion that knowledge generation can be independent of the researcher who is producing it, accepting that knowledge production is a subjective process. In keeping with my interpretivist stance, I endeavour to understand the multiple realities participants share by analysing their subjective experiences, which makes this study qualitative in nature (Cooper & White, 2012). Because this research is focussed on exploring participants life experiences through their narratives, meaning making process, generating knowledge, acceptance that multiple points of views exist, all of these make the study Experiential Qualitative research with a ‘hermeneutics of empathy’ (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.159).

The discussion on the philosophical assumptions indicates that this study has a Relativist ontology, Subjectivist epistemology, a Social Constructivist/Interpretivist

paradigm and is truly qualitative in nature. The next section explains the reasons multiple case study was chosen as the research design for this study.

### **4.3 Multiple Case-study Research Design**

Research design is defined as “a way of organising a research project ... to maximise the likelihood of generating evidence that provides a convincing answer to the research question” (Gorard, 2013, p.8). The researcher designs the study by anticipating and planning beforehand to ensure that research is carried out in an integrated manner (Blaikie, 2010, p. 15), it involves careful attention to detail to ensure overall ‘workability’ (Blaikie, 2010, p. 16) of the design. Having a well thought out research design ensures that research questions are unambiguously answered (De Vaus, 2001, p.9). The research questions itself can provide important clues regarding which research design would be appropriate (Yin, 2009, p.10). Being an interpretivist researcher who envisions knowledge is generated by interacting with others and in-order to study participants ‘life’ as they have experienced it would require understanding participants “meanings, interpretations, activities and interactions” (Prus, 1996, p.9). This qualitative research wants to answer the question ‘how’ do disabled teacher describe their own lived experiences, and how do they narrate their own life stories. Particularly focussing on how participants make sense of their “life situations” (Prus, 1996, p.10) and how do they describe their experiences in conjunction with people and environments around them. The endeavour is not to manipulate the environment in any way, there is very little intention to generalize the findings to larger populations (Merriam, 2009; Sutter, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Crotty, 1998). Because case-studies are aimed to

determine answers to the 'why' or 'how' about a social phenomenon (Yin, 2009, p.4), and explore significant aspects that are characteristic of the phenomenon that is being investigated. Given that the main aim is to explore and highlight lived experiences of participants, it was decided that case study as a research design was the best suited approach for this research.

Case study is defined as "in-depth analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p.38). The primary purpose of using a case study design is to generate in-depth understanding" (Thomas, 2016, p.10). The focus of this research is just one object, that object being lived experiences of each participant disabled teacher. The researcher is attempting to explore participants experiences from every possible angle and in great depth. "Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied...By whatever methods, a researcher chooses to study *the* case either analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods- by concentrating, at least for the time being, on the case" (Thomas, 2016, p.9). In this study each disabled teacher becomes object of the study and the basic unit of analysis, each participant disabled teacher is treated as an individual case. Each participant's lived experience is studied wholistically. Applying a case study design will help generate contextual data; wholistic understanding of each case which will help me answer the research questions (De Vaus, 2001, p. 50). Case studies can either be single, focussed on just one case or multiple, which is a collective case study of more than one case (Merriam, 2009). For this research, it was felt that by collectively studying more than one case would help

generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. A maximum of eight and minimum of six participants was thought to be adequate to carry out a multiple case study (Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2009). By analysing multiple cases this research aims to arrive at powerful and compelling understanding of disabled teachers lived experiences.

Evidence from multiple case study designs is more compelling than single case designs because there is the possibility of direct replication resulting in powerful analytical conclusions (Yin, 2009, p.47). This is precisely why a multiple case study research design was the right choice for this research. Each individual participant was treated as an individual case and this multiple case study was carried out sequentially. So essentially, this research wholistically studies eight individual cases. In this multiple case-study participants hold the 'knowledgeable position' (Cohen et al., 2007, p.115). Each participant was selected because of their 'lived experience' of the phenomenon under study (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, p.29). Participants who fit the set criteria of selection are collectively considered as 'multiple cases' (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study eight disabled teachers, though treated as individual cases, when considered collectively, bound by their lived experiences, are considered to make up a multiple case study (Stake 2005; Thomas 2011). This was done "to provide in-depth understanding of the topic to generate knowledge and understanding" (Simmons, 2009, p.21). While experiences of each individual participant were unique, all the participants did share a common dual struggle of living with impairment/s and functioning as disabled teachers in mainstream educational settings. Because of the

philosophical assumptions held by the researcher, adopting a multiple case study approach was best suited to answer the research questions.

Multiple sources of evidence for data triangulation, to improve reliability and validity are often advocated by case study methodologies (Yin, 2009; Merriam 2009). A questionnaire was used to collect basic information from participants before main interviews and a critical incident form was available to participants to add any further details. This was not done with the purpose of triangulating the data, but rather for convenience. A major critic of case study research design is the lack of generalizability. Because the main aim of this research is to understand the phenomenon under study rather than generalizing the findings hence, a multiple case study research design was apt and in keeping with the philosophical assumptions discussed previously.

In the identified literature discussed in Chapter 3, two multiple case studies were identified. The first study carried out in Israel utilized in-depth interviews to generate data from disabled student teachers (Dvir, 2015). The findings of this study are worded from a social model perspective identifying challenges in the social environment around the participants. The second study interviewed six dyslexic student teachers in the UK (Griffiths, 2012). The findings suggest strong perseverance shown by participants to overcome attitudinal barriers encountered in teaching. The study also highlights contributions of participant dyslexic teachers in strengthening inclusion by using better differentiated learning activities and empathetically supporting students in

their classrooms. These studies were instrumental in the choice of multiple case study design because it allowed exploring each participant's narrative in detail. Though these studies used interviews to generate data, it was felt that a short on-shot interview would not be enough to gather in-depth lived experiences. Hence, a decision was made to utilize four interviews to generate enriched in-depth narratives. The aim of analysing eight case studies sequentially, is to develop rich detailed understanding. Collectively analysing multiple life stories of participants will help identify common barriers and enablers encountered on their life journeys. A multiple case study research design fit perfectly with my philosophical assumptions as well as the aims of this research.

After justifying the choice of multiple case study research design, the next section includes description of the two pilot studies carried out in this research

#### **4.4 Pilot studies**

“A pilot study is defined as a small-scale methodological test conducted before the main study to ensure that methods and ideas would work in practice” (Kim, 2010). Being a first-time researcher, conducting a pilot study was vital because of the opportunity it provided to adjust and make changes to study design before carrying out the main study (Kim, 2010). A major benefit of conducting a pilot study is that it provides researchers with the opportunity to make adjustments and revisions to the main study (Wray et al., 2017; Kim, 2010). Two pilot studies were conducted in this research. First pilot study was conducted before the main study, and the second pilot



study was conducted after data analysis (Figure 7). Though none of the literature reviewed in Chapter three carried out pilot studies, I did find a few qualitative studies that included a pilot study Investigative interviews study on free recall memory (Sternberg et al., 1999), Korean study on Alzheimer's patients and carers (Kim, 2010), benefits of carrying out pilot study (Wray et al., 2017). Often also referred to as feasibility studies (Wray et al., 2017), pilot studies can help test research protocol, data generation method, sampling techniques, procedural issues as well as self-reflection by the researcher. Piloting interviews beforehand helps researchers who are inexperienced in using interviews to collect data (Majid et al., 2017). As mentioned earlier, intent was that carrying out a small pilot study before the main study would help identify problems in data generation methods, or procedural issues. The understanding was that a pilot study might help a first-time researcher like me practice my interview techniques and get experience with managing technical difficulties that might arise during data generation.

#### **4.4.1 First Pilot Study**

For the first Pilot study two fellow PGR friends were recruited. They were selected because of their personal experiences with disability. The interview schedule was methodically planned. One-hour condensed interviews were conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and 26<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Feedback from the pilot participants was sought regarding interview technique and suggestions to improve the process. The lessons learned by conducting this pilot study improved my confidence and contributed to deeper understanding of data generation process. The feedback from pilot participants not only helped identified certain modifications

that needed to be made to the interview questions and technique, but it also helped me introspect my role as a researcher. The pilot study helped practising the transcription process. A thematic analysis on data generated by the pilot study helped with understanding analysis process. It helped me decide that I enjoyed analysing the data manually rather than using NVivo. Though the data generated by the pilot study is not included in the main study analysis, insights generated by the pilot data helped me understand influence of developmental environments on participants. The pilot study was critical because it provided the opportunity to learn from the challenges that arose and avoid making them in the main study. Though time consuming, the pilot studies proved a huge learning opportunity not to be missed by first time researchers.

#### **4.4.2 Second pilot study**

The second pilot study though was not originally part of the plan was conducted to trial the poetic analysis technique incorporated in this study. On the supervisor's suggestion a decision was made to present found poems at an education conference on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and conduct an audience poll. The aim was to gauge audience response and reaction to the crafted found poems, and to gather feedback from the audience. The response of the conference audience was overwhelmingly in support of the creative technique used (Appendix 25). The powerful effect of found poems on the conference audience and their feedback were instrumental in the decision to include poetic inquiry and crafted found poems in the final research.

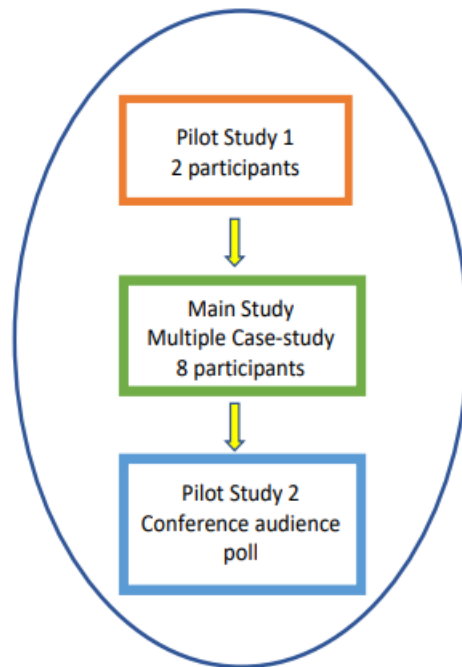


Figure 8 The overall structure of the Main study and two pilot studies

The two pilot studies in this research are integral part of my research journey and contributed immensely to an efficient data generation and analysis process. In the next section the main study is discussed beginning with highlighting participation criteria followed by explaining the recruitment process.

#### **4.5 Participation criteria for the main study**

Keeping in mind that population of disabled teachers in UK is less than 0.5% of the teaching population (DFE, 2019) and the fact that this study was carried out during the pandemic it seemed practical to broaden the recruitment criterion. This was done to ensure that the set limit of eight participants could be recruited. It was decided after a lot of contemplation to use 'teacher' as an umbrella term to include variety of education settings, schoolteachers, further education teachers, university lecturers, academics,

and disability skills tutors with mainstream teaching experience. This was a choice made to include participants from multiple mainstream educational settings. Each criterion was decided keeping in mind sensitivity towards language associated when conducting disability studies. To be part of the study participants needed to meet the following recruitment criteria;

- Identify as disabled person (with visible or non-visible disability)
- Above 22 years of age
- Minimum six months of teaching experience as a disabled teacher within any educational settings they could be teaching assistants, schoolteachers, university professors or educators in any format anywhere in the world
- Be able to give informed consent
- Be able to complete a short online questionnaire
- Be available for four online interviews

The criteria for participation were decided after contemplating over all the studies included in the Literature review in chapter 3. The University Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee granted full ethical approval for the study on 15 April 2021. Process of recruiting participants began on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021. In the next section the sampling and recruitment process followed are discussed.

#### **4.6 Sampling and Recruitment**

A maximum limit of eight participants was set for the study. The advocated sample size is between six and ten cases for a multiple case-study (Yin, 2017; Thomas, 2016, p.9).

Generalizability is not the intention of this study rather the focus is on in-depth analysis and generating rich contextual understanding of disabled teachers lived experiences. Because this study was carried out during the pandemic, the recruitment and data generation process was going to take place online. Discussions with fellow PGR's helped plan online strategy. As there was no precedence to carrying out research in a lockdown, these discussions proved vital and became a support network to rely on. Duckett and Pratt (2001) highlight the importance of 'getting people out of the woodwork' (p.825) to access opinions of 'hidden' people. In the context of disability studies, they say

“[...] it seems unsatisfactory not to seek the opinions of people whose views are more often left unheard, as this would be more part of the problem than the solution.” (Duckett and Pratt, 2001, p.825)

The participation criteria were intentionally kept broad, removing geographical boundaries became possible because of the online data generation process. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. The main intention was to generate a purposeful sample which would include 'good' informants who are articulate, and reflective, willing to share with the interviewer (Morse, 1991). Applying the snowball, chain, or network sampling strategy (Merriam, 2009) which involved posting the call for participants on Twitter, asking help from twitter users and existing networks if they could forward (retweet) the call to prospective participants. By asking large number of people who else to contact, “the snowball gets bigger and bigger” (Patton, 2002, p.237), accumulating prospective participants.

#### **4.6.1 Magical Recruitment phase**

I would like to record that the recruitment phase of this research and my own experience of the entire process as truly magical and surreal. Because of the demanding nature of the data generation process of this research and the huge amount of time commitment sought from participants. I had been warned multiple times by fellow PGR's and supervisors about not getting hopes up on recruiting requisite eight participants. When all information/participant leaflets were recreated on Qualtrics, they contained all the information regarding the research, researcher, participant criteria, maintaining complete transparency from the beginning was important. With many doubts and trepidations, the Call for participants was posted on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at 12.30pm (Appendix 14). The post included links to information leaflet (Appendix 6), Recruitment Leaflet (Appendix 4, Appendix 5) and Participation Information Leaflets (Appendix 6). Prospective participants were asked to complete a contact form. The word that comes to my mind while describing the recruitment phase of this research is 'magical'. The academic network formed on Twitter during the pandemic proved extremely helpful in this process. To provide a brief glimpse into this 'magical phase', the call went online on 12.30pm on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The response from the academic Twitter network was unbelievable, I received many encouraging direct messages of support for the research. It was amazing how fast social media messages reach different corners of the world. Direct messages were received from many different countries. The call for participants got retweeted hundreds of times, it even got retweeted by 'The Tom Shakespeare'. By 7pm that evening two prospective participants had already completed the contact form. Some part of my research diary is included in Appendix 15 to share the magic that took place during the recruitment

phase of this research. I had planned to contact gatekeepers and educational institutions via email (Appendix 14) if the requisite numbers had not been recruited via social media. But the response on social media and from networks of friends was astounding and very successful. I attribute the positive response to my call for participants to the previous lack of research interest specifically focussed on disabled teachers. The messages received conveyed that there is a willingness on part of disabled teachers to share their stories and genuine interest in this research topic, which does not explain why research on disabled teachers is rare and fragmented as the literature review demonstrated.

Once a prospective participant completed the contact form, they were contacted to set up an 'initial meeting' which was conducted online as per their convenience. Because I wanted to generate life history data from participants, the relationship between me as the researcher and the participant needed to be one of trust, responsibility, togetherness, and pursuit of a common goal (Kouritzin, 2000). Since recruiting participants was through social media, and there was no former contact, it was essential to create a rapport with the participants (Paterson & Bramadat, 1992). The initial meeting was utilized to create a general rapport with the participant. It was important that the participants felt comfortable taking part in the study, that transparency was maintained, and all their doubts were clarified before they provided consent.

In this 'initial meeting' questions were answered and explanation regarding what participation in the study entailed was discussed. Discussions also included explaining nature of the study, the procedure that would be followed, how the interviews would be conducted, answered any queries participants had, discussed time commitments, assured them that they would be in total control of what information and how much they wanted to share and promised to maintain anonymity. Participants were assured access to all their transcripts from interviews for their approval. Each prospective participant who agreed to be part of the study provided informed consent (Appendix 7, Appendix 8). All eight participants were recruited quickly, in fact the date of the first interview was June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Six of the recruited participants were from UK and two were from overseas. As mentioned in chapter 2, for this research it was essential that the participants identified as having either a visible or non-visible disability, hence participants recruited had varied diagnoses and the research does not focus on any particular disability/impairment group. All eight recruited participants had varied challenges Dyslexia, ADHD, Fibromyalgia, Autism, Depression, Physical impairment, Stammer, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, hearing impairment. Five participants had multiple diagnoses. The recruitment and data generation phase of this research overlapped, interviews with participants who provided informed consent began from June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, before the threshold of eight participants was reached on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021. Once the requisite number of participants provided informed consent, another tweet was posted thanking everyone who had sent in encouraging direct messages and retweeted the call for participants. Finally, all the recruitment leaflets on Qualtrics were closed.

In the next section, the data generation methods utilized in the study are discussed.



#### **4.7 Data generation methods**

While planning for data generation and analysis strategy, advice Braun & Clarke (2021) provide to new qualitative researchers was implemented. The way qualitative research is conceptualised provides both underlying research values as well as which tools and techniques to apply (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.21). Because this research is entirely governed by the researchers' qualitative paradigm, avoiding "methodological incoherence" (Braun & Clarke, 2020) and staying true to constructivist values was extremely important. Braun & Clarke (2022) argue that data triangulation, credibility checks, intercoder reliability and data saturation are postpositivist influences that make for 'fuzzy' qualitative methodology and are highly critical of use of what they refer to as 'quantitative positivist terminology'.

"Quality depends not on notions of consensus, accuracy or reliability, but on immersion, creativity, thoughtfulness and insight. It depends on moving beyond the obvious and superficial meaning in the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.268).

Braun & Clarke (2022) suggest that for methodological integrity of qualitative research, the onus lies entirely with the researcher and maintaining reflexivity at every stage of the research is crucial. A reflexive researcher needs to have a "deliberate and thought-through strategy to systematically generate, compile and prepare data for analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.27). I followed this advice while planning and executing the data generation phase of this research. Because the researcher is the primary instrument of data generation and analysis in this case-study (Thomas, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009), the way data generation and analysis was carried out is heavily

influenced by researcher's philosophical assumptions and interpretivist beliefs. Though multiple sources were utilized to generate data, it was not for the purpose of data triangulation but to ensure participant convenience. It was important that data generation was a collaboration between me and my participants. Transparency and communication were maintained throughout the process, and participants were involved in every step. As mentioned earlier, during the 'initial meeting' every aspect of data generation process was clarified with each participant. Multiple sources of evidence, questionnaire, interviews, and critical incident form were utilized to make the data generation process convenient for participants. Each instrument used for data generation is discussed in detail in the next section.

#### **4.7.1 Questionnaire**

Many studies included in the literature review in Chapter three; especially mixed-method studies used questionnaires as main data generation method. Though the questionnaire is not the main data generation method utilized in this study, the decision to use one was more to be a precursor to interviews. The questionnaire was used to collect basic background information regarding participants' qualifications, their disability, present geographical location, current occupation, where do they teach, at what level did they teach, years of experience, whom did they wish to contact in case they need support during the interview, whether they need any assistive device or interpreters for the interview etc (Appendix 9, Appendix 10). The reason for collecting this background information was because these were common details needed from all participants. The questionnaire would be the simplest way to gather this information.

The questionnaire was advantageous in minimizing interview fatigue, since each participant was to be interviewed over a span of four one-hour interviews. Once participants had provided consent; Qualtrics link were sent to complete the questionnaire online. This questionnaire approximately took ten minutes to complete. The responses to the questionnaire helped select the questions to be included in individual interviews. For example, if a participant had completed a post graduate qualification, then their second interviews included questions regarding their postgraduate university experiences. The details participants provided in the questionnaire helped with planning for support in their location in case they needed to use it if they became upset during the interview process (a requirement of ethical approval for the study). The data generated using the questionnaire were collated for each participant and stored in individual documents, collated together after interview data were generated and stored together.

#### **4.7.2 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Qualitative interviews have been used by innumerable researchers exploring the voices and lived experiences of the “ignored, misrepresented or suppressed” (Silverman, 2006, p. 6). Specific studies on disabled teachers like Ferri (2001), Duquette (2000), Riddick (2003), Vogel & Sharoni (2010) used interviews to collect data from their participants.

“We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions, the purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p.341).

The main aim of using interviews as the data generation method was because I wanted to explore lived experiences of participants from their own perspectives. Nunkoosing (2005) emphasizes that the interview method is important because,

“It enables individuals to think and to talk about their predicaments, needs, expectations, experiences, and understandings” (Anyan 2013, p.1).

Interviews are the best method to use when conducting in-depth intensive studies about a few selected individuals (Merriam, 2009). Since this study is based on lived experiences, emphasis being on life trajectory of each participant and autobiographical nature of the data that needed to be generated, interviews were the best way to do so. Interviewing participants allowed the construction of reality from individual experiences they shared during the interview process. Selecting ‘information rich cases’ (French, 2001, p.96) for the research increased the potential for generating large amount of rich data and understanding.

Initially, I contemplated using un-structured interviews, where the interview would be free flowing with no structure imposed on it (Creswell, 2009, Bryman, 2008). I chose semi- structured interviews because there is an outline structure to every interview yet flexibility to deviate according to flow of the conversation (Bryman, 2008). Using semi-structured interviews ensured consistency, that all participants were asked about the same content within each interview. The first pilot study consolidated that semi-structured interview was best suited for this research. Researchers should put themselves in the participants’ position to ensure that questions are relevant, contextual, and answerable (Bryman, 2008). Being non-disabled and with limited

personal experience of disability, I struggled to completely envision participants many struggles as disabled teachers. All I had was the understanding I had gathered from reading identified literature and theory. Interview schedules can be created using 'concept -driven' themes to guide questioning, driven by literature, theory, or experience (Kvale, 2007). Hence the interview schedule was prepared based on theoretical frameworks, mentioned in chapter 2, and observations made from identified literature (Appendix 2). It was decided that to gather lifetime lived experience information from participants interviews shall begin with early childhood experiences, moving on to educational experiences, teacher education experiences, and employment experiences.

To ensure appropriate data were generated, I contemplated extensively on 'what' to ask and 'how' to ask these questions. It was important questioning allowed for in-depth responses be generated during the interview through progressive clarification (Gilham, 2000). The way the questions were ordered in the interview was given a lot of contemplation. The decision was made to begin with more factual straight forward questions in the beginning and then progressing to more open-ended question to make participant feel at ease. The terminology used was extensively based on the ICF and the chronological questions were framed to generate in-depth data regarding participants developmental experiences. The four semi-structured interviews (Appendix 16) followed a timeline.

First Interview – early childhood and school experience

Second Interview – University and Teacher education experiences

Third Interview – Employment and Teaching experiences

Fourth Interview – Suggestions/opinions what should change in future

After each interview, the transcript was shared with the participant for their approval. All the interviews were recorded. I felt it was important to gather suggestions from participants regarding changes they would like to see in the future. The interview schedule for each interview for each participant was pre-planned according to their questionnaire responses. To generate in-depth data, and to avoid interview fatigue each participant would be interviewed four times. Each interview was for a duration of one hour. The interviews were conducted mostly on Zoom. Adjustments were made for two participants. One participant preferred to be interviewed on Microsoft Teams. Another participant who wished not to be video or audio recorded requested interview questions be emailed via a Word document and they sent in typed responses. Two of the participants were from overseas, their interviews were arranged according to their geographical times zones, which required me to get up very early in the morning or be up late in the night.

#### **4.7.2.1 Balancing power dynamics during interviews**

Kitchin's (2010) study on opinions of disabled people about how disability research should be carried out mentioned participants favoured a partnership approach wherein disabled participants have control in the research process and that their participation

is not just 'tokenistic' (Kitchin, 2010, p.38). I wanted to emulate this equal partnership with my participants. Recognizing and acknowledging that participants are experts on their own circumstances and their contribution is fundamental to the study. The participants occupy an 'insider position' because they have their own individual practical experience of living with an impairment and functioning as disabled teachers whereas the researcher occupies the 'outsider position' based on her theoretical knowledge and research skills (Kitchin, 2010, p.39). By ensuring a shared equal partnership made the study more representative as well reflexive addressing the unequal power dynamics within the research process and recognising that participants are experts of their own lived experiences. Power within interview settings is constantly shifting between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale, 2006). Researcher is the expert on research techniques and methods, wanting to gather knowledge of experiences from the interviewee, which the researcher wants to study. The interplay of power continues throughout the process right from the time of seeking consent from a participant who has the power to accept or refuse participation till all interviews are completed. The interview process was not one-sided, both my participant and I negotiated the level of information generated within the interview, the participants own the knowledge and controlled what they say, how they say it and how much of the information do they opt to share. The fact that "both the interviewer and the interviewee are constantly seeking to (dis)equalize their respective authorities" (Nunkoosing, 2005, p.699) makes qualitative interviews different from other conversational data generation methods.

I wanted participants to feel in control and at ease during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a non-formal conversational manner after having created some rapport with the participant during the initial meeting. The intention of the interview was to explore each disabled teachers' personal interpretation of their life trajectory and disability experience. This was achieved by using open ended semi-structured questions, encouraging the participant to share as much detail in their accounts as they felt comfortable. The intent was not to extract information from the participant rather a collaborative process of co-constructing and collectively discovering that knowledge, by discussing their learning journeys and events attempting to explore the influence these events have had on the participants identity formation and professional choices. The participant had the ultimate power to stop the interview if they so choose and to leave the study if they so wished. It was a collaboration rather than it being an interrogatory process. The duration of the shortest interview was 21:43 minutes and the longest interview was 98:45 minutes. Average interview duration was 46:16 minutes. The interviews generated 319 pages of transcripts (single line space; Arial font size twelve).

#### **4.7.3 Critical Incident form**

An optional online critical incident form (Appendix 11, Appendix 12) was designed for the eventuality that while reading transcripts participants recalled any incidents missed during the interview. The form was available on Qualtrics, and details were shared with each participant during the initial meeting as well as when transcripts were shared with them. They could access this link anytime during data generation phase to record any



detail they wished to include in their narrative which they might have missed in the interview. Critical incidents do not necessarily mean extraordinary or sensational events involving a lot of tensions or turmoil, rather these are events that participants justified as having significant influence on their disability experience and choice of profession.

The Critical incident technique was developed in 1980s and was initially used for school improvement purposes (Angelides, 2001) it was an efficient method to generate rich qualitative data to help understand various social processes within the context of schools and understanding the role of culture in school improvement (Angelides, 2001). It became a popular method in social sciences because it allowed the researcher, who is essentially an outsider to the situation, to quickly collect rich data, investigate specific incidents which would otherwise need a long time (Angelides, 2001). Critical incident technique was utilized because it provides an opportunity for the participant to be reflective and introspect their own experiences. This was mainly done based on my own personal experience, often after an interview I would recall details missed during the interview. Because the transcript of each interview was shared, it was highly likely that participants might recall further details regarding an incident. As discussed in chapter 2, because of the temporal nature of data collection it was important that no detail was lost. Because in the interview's participants are recalling details that have occurred many years prior, it was likely that when they read the transcripts, they would recall further details or even details completely missed during the interview. The advantage of critical incident technique is that it allows the participant to reflect on incidents have had on their lives and make their own

interpretations. This is a very inductive and flexible process which is very motivating. Because main emphasis is the context of the incident, and the participant is not asked to give opinion but to reflect and analyse that context of the entire incident with reference to its consequence on their lives. It is a very apt technique to use to generate a comprehensive understanding of lived experiences of participants. The online form gave participants the opportunity to include details missed during the interview in their narrative. This was done to ensure that no detail was lost.

#### **4.7.3.1 How the critical incidents were integrated in the main data**

During the initial meeting with each participant, the entire process that I would follow during data generation was discussed in detail. During these discussions, I explained that each interview transcript will be emailed to them along with the link to access the critical incident form on Qualtrics. The purpose of the critical incident form was explained regarding how the participant could include details of incidents they might have missed to mention during the interviews. The participants were shown the structure of the critical incident form and each aspect was explained to them in detail. The critical incident form I had created followed a simple layout (Appendix 11).

Four participants made use of the critical incident forms to share incidents they wanted to include in their narrative and had missed to mention during the interviews. The critical incidents that participants shared included details regarding when and where the incident took place, the age of the participant at that time and a detailed description of the incident. The participant was asked to include, how the incident affected them and whether they sought any support to mitigate the situation. Once a participant

submitted their critical incident data, Qualtrics would send me an alert. I would then read the incident data shared by the participant and add it to their interview transcript data at the appropriate point in their timeline. For example, participant A shared an incident regarding experiencing visual stress in secondary school and how they used to walk out of a classroom when they felt completely overwhelmed and nauseous. Participant 'A' recalled that often they would feel confused and unable to cope with the visual stress adding to their self-doubt. This data was included in the first interview transcript of participant A in the part where the participant had shared their secondary schooling experiences. This ensured that the data retained a chronological order over the participants' timeline. I made a note in the transcript that this data was included via the critical incident form.

The incidents shared by all four participants were included in their respective transcripts in the appropriate time-line order. The data shared by each participant via the questionnaire, interview and critical incident form was all collated together and analysed in its entirety. Though all the participants did not make use of the critical incident forms, I feel that it provided an opportunity to include details that would otherwise have been missed and would not have been part of the data. Though the use of this form was conceptualised based on my personal experience of recalling details after an interview was over, I wanted to ensure that my participants had the opportunity to include any further details they recalled later. The format of critical incident form was kept simple and explained in detail to each participant during the initial meeting as well as in the email sent while sharing the interview transcript with them. Crucial incidents missed during interviews shared via the critical incident form

were integrated into the respective participant narrative. I feel this ensured that every detail the participant wanted to include in their narrative was collected providing an in-depth detailed picture of each participants' life journey.

This technique worked well; participants used the Qualtrics form to add further details to their narrative. Data generated from critical incident forms was added to the transcribed data to maintain continuity of the narrative for each participant. Data generation was completed between May 28<sup>th</sup> and August 16<sup>th</sup> 2021.

#### **4.7.4 Maintaining Anonymity**

Given that there are very few disabled teachers in academia, maintaining anonymity was important for some participants of this study. Participants were assured during the initial meeting that I would do everything possible to safeguard their identities. To ensure this data is reported using only alphabets to identify each participant. The focus of this research is not gender specific; hence it was prudent to report data in a gender-neutral way which was another way to ensure participant anonymity. Precautions were taken to not reveal geographical locations, names of education institutions, names of individuals while reporting data. Transcripts of interview were shared only with the respective participant; diligent care was taken in storing data following university guidelines and protocol. Only once the final findings report was ready which adhered to all the above-mentioned precautions, was it shared with all participants for their approval and feedback. By taking these measures I fulfilled my assurance to my participants regarding maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.

## **4.8 Analysing the data**

While reading the transcripts it became evident that the autobiographical memories participants recalled held rich and in-depth data of events in their lives. The way the participant recalled and narrated an event reflected the influence that event has had on the person's life. During the interview the participant does not just recall and narrate an event, it involved recreating an image of the event accompanied with verbal explanation according to their own perception and deciding how much they want to share. Biographical interviews are known to manifest "bright, essential, important and crucial events" (Rebrina & Shamne, 2018; Charatsari, 2014) from the participants past. While recalling 'bright events' these are mostly positive experiences that the participant is the focus, they are the main actors (enabled position) in this event, descriptions would be like "I did" or "I achieved". Important events are when the participant recalls an event in an inspiring and reflective manner describing it as an event that has had consequences in later life in the event the participant is not the main actor but rather is inspired or influenced by someone else or what is happening with the event words used could be 'I looked up to', or "I admired" or 'I followed their work' etc. Essential event is recall of aspirations, goals, motives or personality traits, these events hold personal meaning and have direct influence on the participants personality or self-image and can cover a long period in their lives, for instance when they talk about professional growth or career paths etc. 'Crucial events' are often when the participant describes change in self, so the narrative will include description before the event and change in themselves after the event, so key moments of individual development, self-

identity, words like “I changed after that”, ‘I used to be ....before but after the event happened I ....” (Rebrina & Shamne, 2018; Charatsari, 2014). During the analysis process I began noticing these aspects while studying the interview data.

Autobiographical memory is much more than just remembering events or experiences, the word ‘autobiography’ literally means ‘life script’ in Greek (Charatsari, 2014). Therefore, instead of simple retrieval of episodic events when a participant recalls autobiographic knowledge of their lives, the memory they recall is because the event they remember is of significance to their ‘self’. By linking past self with current self, autobiographical memory is fundamental in formation of ‘self-concept’ (Charatsari, 2014) through which individuals make sense of the self in relation with their family, community, and their culture. An individual’s self-identity is a combination of the individuals physical, behavioural, and psychological characteristics also referred to as personal identity and their autobiographical identity (experiencing of individual life events) (Rebrina & Shamne, 2018). So, when participants share their memories, they are in fact sharing their individual experiences as a disabled person, their life journey, their interactions with people around them, their participation in social activities, their own struggle with their impairments which constitute their self-identity. Though the life story the participants co-create during the interview is entirely based on their version of events, I strongly believe that by analysing these versions will help to develop a fairly accurate understanding of the ‘lived aspect’ of participants’ complex life journeys.

In this research, the data analysis was carried out applying two strategies: Reflexive thematic analysis and poetic transcription. In the following sections I explain each of

the data analysis strategy applied, the rationale for using each strategy and the process followed while carrying out the analysis.

#### **4.8.1 Data Analysis - Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2020) was chosen to inductively analyse the rich, in-depth, and vast interview data. Paradigmatic, epistemological, and ontological assumptions inescapably inform analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.4). RTA was chosen because it is a very flexible approach which considers researcher subjectivity to be 'analytic resource' (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.3). RTA was the best suited approach in accordance with my constructivist philosophical positioning (Braun & Clarke, 2021) as well as the theoretical frameworks chosen by this research. Being a 'reflexive researcher' means being aware of 'how' the researchers influences their research, how researchers bring their own insight and are an integral component of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.10). It is important that researchers who carry out RTA inductively articulate and identify their theoretical assumptions that inform their analysis explicitly. The flexibility RTA offered emphasising importance of researcher subjectivity as analytic *resource*, and reflexive engagement with theory, data, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.4) was why it best suited this research. The decision to opt for RTA was also because that it allowed me the flexibility to structure identified themes post hoc applying Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. RTA was carried out manually because I thoroughly enjoyed immersive-ness and chaotic nature of the process. Initially I did try NVivo but found carrying out the thematic analysis manually best suited

me. I confess, the use of NVivo enables greater transparency and rigour. But I found it is a little tricky to learn and irritating to use at times (it benefits from a very big screen, and it demands a lot of mouse work that I find difficult). For me carrying out the RTA manually best suited my preference of being more involved, working closely and being tactile with the data. RTA gave me the opportunity to read, reflect, question, imagine, wonder, write, retreat, return to the data at my own pace (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.5).

Each individual case was analysed separately, following which a cross-case synthesis was done. The themes identified were structured post hoc using Bronfenbrenner's five systems of the bioecological systems theory similar to that used by Dobson & Douglas, (2020). The six phase RTA process to thematically analyse data (Figure 8) was followed. (1) Familiarize with the data: Transcripts were read, re-read multiple times. I watched the video recordings of interviews with participant multiple times. This process was extremely immersive. By listening to participants narrative multiple times, getting familiar with their voice, tone, gestures, pauses, silence, laugh, it almost felt like reliving their experience through their narratives. I started crafting found poems from individual participant transcripts (2) Assign appropriate codes: While listening and reading transcripts, and crafting found poems, I began highlighting and assigned appropriate codes in the word document. A code is the analytic unit researcher uses to develop themes. A code captures a single facet, or a single observation, when multiple codes are structured to form rich multifaceted observations, they become themes. RTA makes clear distinction between 'codes' and 'themes'. No pre-set codes were used rather the codes were identified using a general 'bottom up' approach after closely examining the data. The process of listening, reading, highlighting, coding was repeated many times till no more codes could be assigned. (3) Cluster the codes into



themes: Codes were transferred into an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix 21), where I clustered the codes into themes (Figure 9). there was a lot of going back and forth between transcripts to re-evaluate, revise and refine codes. Making the process chaotic and messy at times. Codes that captured common overarching observation or common experiences or revolved around a central relation were organized into themes for example all codes that related to family experiences were clustered together, all experiences of bullying in schools were clustered together. (4) Review the themes: In the beginning, many codes were identified. As more data was coded and compared similar codes were combined and identified as broader themes (Figure 10). I reviewed the themes and kept doing so till I felt that data could not be clustered any further. The clustering and refining process of grouping codes under themes was repeated till I was satisfied that data could not be compressed any further. (5) Themes were clustered, structured: Identified themes were clustered, structured and defined using the Bronfenbrenner bioecological systems theory (2005). The raw data was reviewed multiple times to ensure that all details had been included and fit in the themes that had been identified. (6) Report was generated: Individual case themes were collated; this cycle was repeated for each of the eight cases. A cross-case synthesis process was carried out to collate the themes generated from all the eight cases. After cross case synthesis was done the findings were written in a report. The checklist Braun & Clarke (2021) suggest ensuring that the RTA process had been carried out rigorously was utilized to check the robustness of the analysis process.

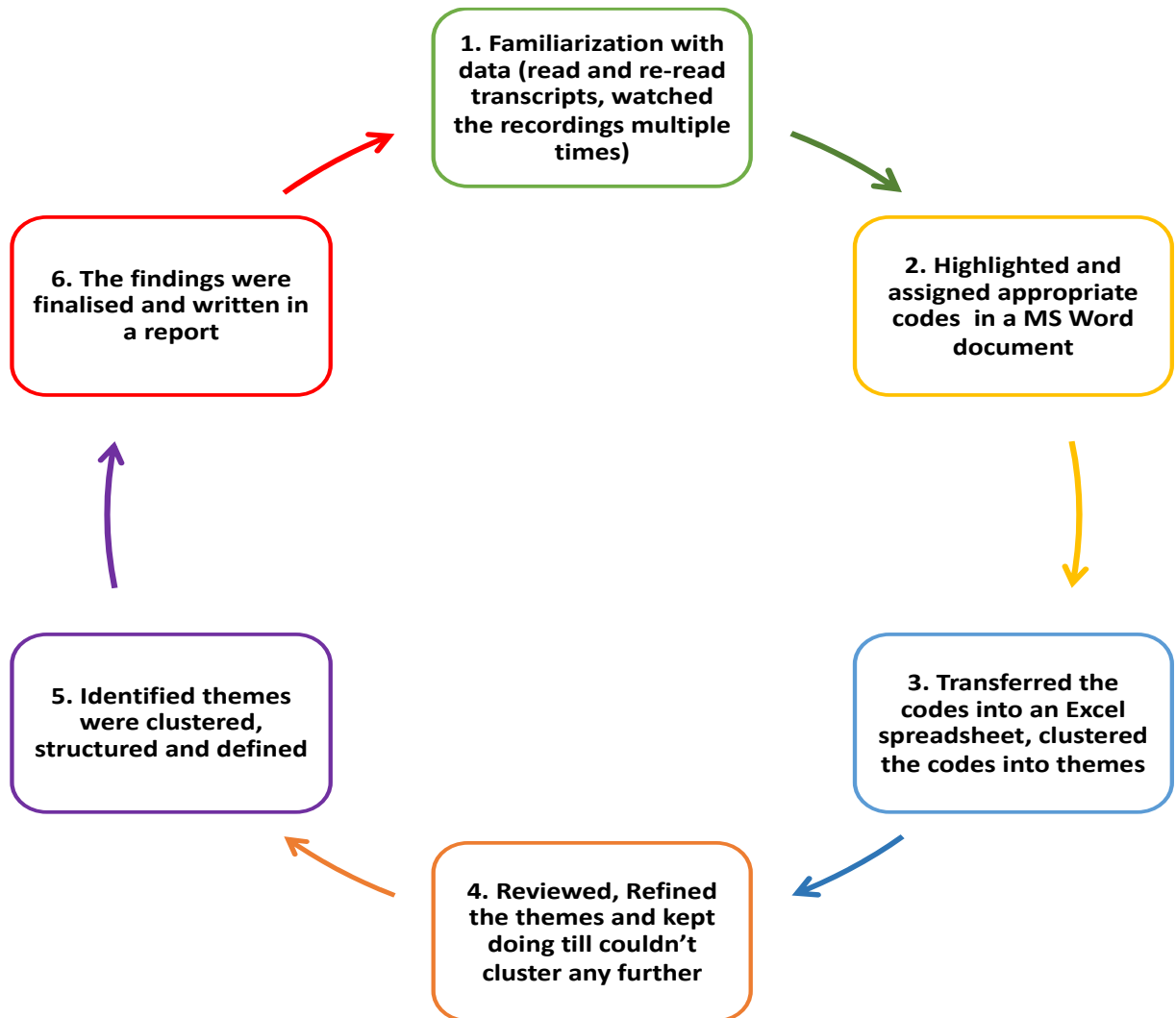


*Figure 9 Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) six step process for each individual case  
(Created from Braun & Clarke, 2021)*

#### **4.8.1.1 Reflection of RTA process**

The RTA approach followed was governed by my constructivist paradigm. The six phases though distinct were recursive, requiring repeated moving between phases while interpreting the data. The similarity of participants experiences became very evident before the data generation phase was completed. Because by the time the final participant interviews were being conducted, I had begun the process of familiarization of data of the first few cases. The analytic process shifted from initially

being semantic to a more latent approach. During the data familiarisation phase hundreds of codes were identified, but I soon started noticing connections, similarities and began clustering the codes which reduced the number of codes significantly (Figure 10).

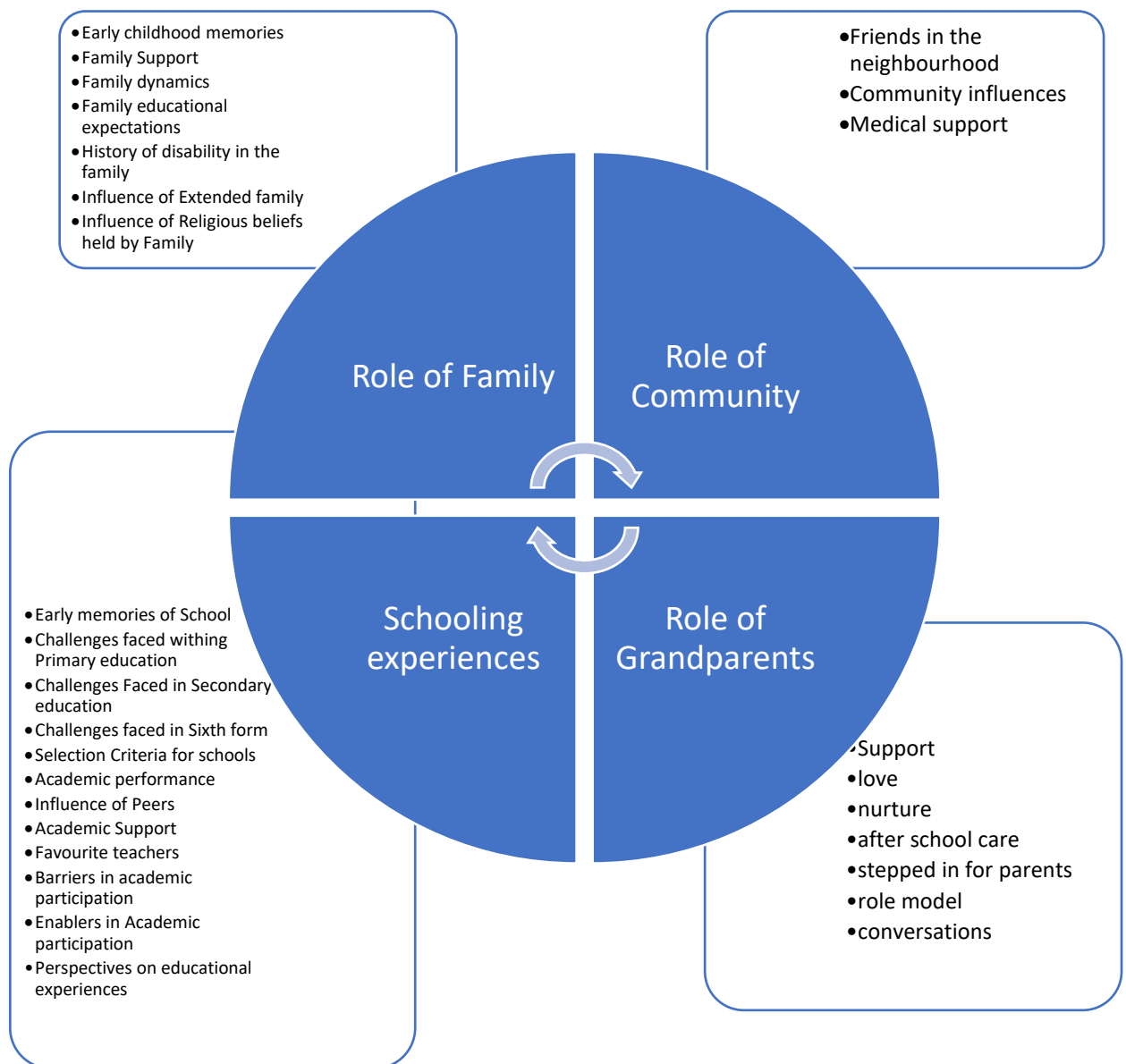


*Figure 10 Clustering codes*

While clustering codes into broader themes, I noticed that analytical thinking was more latent than semantic in this phase, where in I drew upon my own interpretations from the data set, theoretical frameworks, and literature. There was a lot of switching between inductively and deductively identifying codes.

#### Role of Family

- Early childhood memories
- Family Support
- Family reaction to disability
- Family educational expectations
- History of disability in the family
- Influence of Extended family
- Influence of Religious beliefs held by Family

#### Role of Community

- Friends in the neighbourhood
- Community influences
- Medical Support

#### Schooling experiences

- Early memories of School
- Challenges faced within Primary education
- Challenges Faced in Secondary education
- Challenges faced in Sixth form
- Selection Criteria for schools
- Academic performance
- Influence of Peers
- Academic Support
- Favourite teachers
- Barriers in academic participation
- Enablers in Academic participation

#### Personal Attributes

- Personal traits
- Goals and aspirations
- Coping strategies
- Self-Doubt
- Personal struggle with disability

#### Disability Support

- Medical Support
- Funding
- Seeking DS
- Barriers encountered

#### Transition to University Life

- Reasons for Gap year
- Selection criteria for university
- Accommodation while at university
- Family support
- Challenges encountered

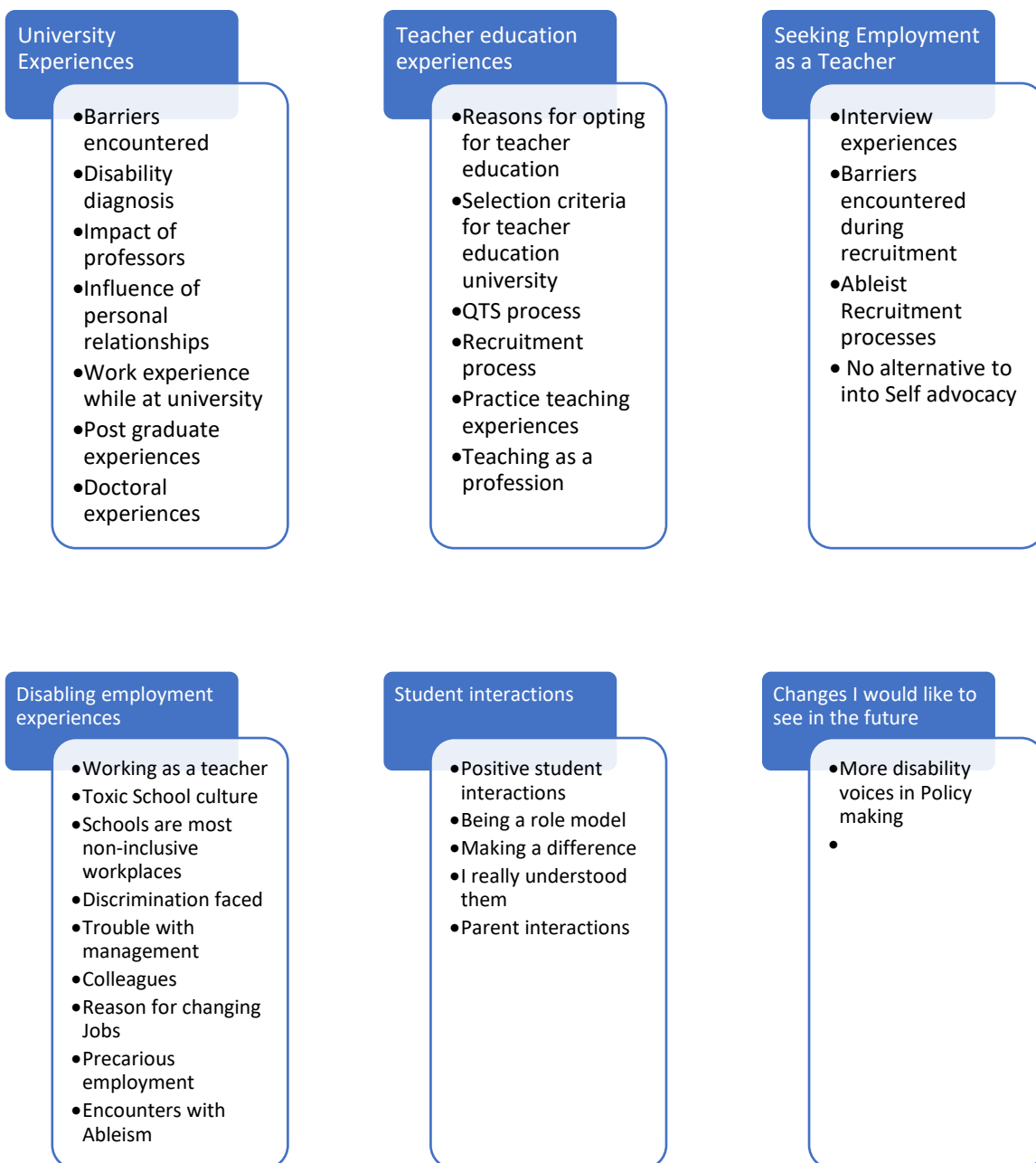


Figure 11 Identifying broader themes

Often, I found myself finding connections and insights even while going about my daily routine, my most deep insights and eureka moments happened while cooking daily meals for my family. It felt like I carried participants' narratives with me all the time. This prompted me to always keep my reflection diary with me. Once the themes were identified and clustered, a final report was drafted. The reflexive thematic analysis process began first week of August 2021, till May 2022. While naming the themes, I incorporated terms from the transcripts that best represented that theme. The final themes were encapsulated and structured according to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory.

*Table 4 Final themes structured using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory*

| <b>Bronfenbrenner system</b>                                | <b>Themes</b>                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Microsystem (influence of immediate environments)           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family dynamics</li> <li>• Perspectives on Learning environments</li> </ul>                                                                      |
| Mesosystem (influence of interacting multiple environments) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Me and my Disability</li> <li>• Me, my family and my learning environments</li> <li>• Me, my family and my disability</li> </ul>                 |
| Exosystem (Factors beyond my control)                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My recruitment experiences</li> <li>• My encounters with Ableism</li> <li>• I did not take legal action</li> <li>• My students and me</li> </ul> |
| Macrosystem (influence of social policies)                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment policies do not work</li> <li>• Disability support and funding available to me</li> </ul>                                             |
| Chronosystem (suggestions for the future)                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I want them to know</li> <li>• My hope for the future- my wish list for change</li> <li>• Looking back at my life- I wish</li> </ul>             |

I preferred to work with the data in a tactile manner using printouts of transcripts, word documents and spreadsheets. RTA is a slow, immersive process and cannot be hurried. I found that changing physical environment and taking breaks and returning to the data prompted new insights. During the familiarisation phase, replaying the videos and repeated reading of transcripts evoked strong emotional connection with participant through their narratives. At times, I felt like “I had walked in the participants footsteps”. This also led to a sense of deep responsibility. When the data got intensely immersive it affected my state of mind and mood. At times, I had to stop and return after an overnight break to resume. As I began coding, these strong connections with the participants led to realisation that analysis needed to capture both the semantic as well as affective aspect of the data. This led to inclusion of poetic inquiry aspect into analysis to highlight the affective aspect within the data. I felt responsible towards representing and highlighting individual participants experiences. Given that I was almost at the end of my fulltime study and was in the middle of the thematic analysis process. I felt it was possible to include found poems in the research. In the next section I explain the rationale for poetic transcription, providing a brief explanation of how it is applied by other qualitative researchers and detail the process I followed to craft found poems from participant transcripts.

#### **4.8.2 Data Analysis – Poetic Transcription**

The desire to use found poems through poetic transcription came from several places, including: my dissatisfaction with the rather cold thematic analysis, after an immersive data generation process and a genuine creative interest on my part, and inspiration



which came from the reading of the literature. I wanted to create the found poems to represent individual participant narratives more authentically and to offer a methodological contribution as part of the thesis.

The use of poetic inquiry is popular amongst qualitative researchers because it allows creative thinking while exploring complex psychosocial processes, generating emotional connect with the reader (Haberlin, 2017; Patrick, 2016; McCullis, 2013; Ward, 2011). Poetic inquiry is used as an umbrella term (Haberlin, 2017) for poetry associated with research. The terminology used to refer to poetic inquiry is varied, 'data poetry' (Sullivan, 2000), 'poetic transcription' (Smart, 2014; Glesne, 1997), 'found poems' (Prendergast 2009; Ward, 2011; Leavy, 2015) and 'research poetry' (Langer & Furman, 2004). Using poetry allows researchers to think more clearly, with richer expressions and make research more accessible (Haberlin, 2017; Patrick, 2016; Ward 2011). It allows researchers to honour the rhythm, tone and pauses observed in interview transcripts to accurately represent participants lived experiences in poetic form (Sparkes et al., 2003). Applying poetic inquiry allows researchers to move away from dichotomous thinking to more divergent thinking (Görlich, 2016), exploring the richness of data, resulting in depth understanding of human motivation and experiences (Haberlin, 2017).

Pendergrast (2009) suggested that researchers mainly use poetic inquiry in three ways.

- Researcher-voiced poems (*Vox Autobiographia/ Autoethnographia*) written from field notes, journal entries or autobiographical autoethnographic reflective writing created using researchers' own words.
- Literature-voiced poems (*Vox Theoria*) written from or in response to existing literature or theory in any field or sometimes poems about poetry.
- Participant-voiced poems (*Vox Participare*) created from interview transcripts or sometimes elicited from the participants in an action research format. Another term for participant voiced poems is Found poems/ Poetic transcription. "Found poems take existing texts and reorder them and present them as poems", often used to represent the lived experiences of research participants.

Participant-voiced poems also referred as Poetic transcription/ Found Poems (Prendergast, 2009, Leavy, 2015) which is what I am applying in this research, involves use of poetry in research both to analyse data and for representation. It is a way of giving participants ownership of their own stories (Patrick 2016; Prendergast, 2009; Leavy, 2005). The procedure for poetic transcription involves reading the transcripts multiple times, to familiarize with data. It involves selecting words and phrases from an interview transcript and using participants own words to create poems that capture the 'whats', 'whys' and/or the 'hows' of experience (Owton, 2017). The researcher looks for phrases, emotional statements, strong sentiments, eloquent expressions in the transcript that capture the feelings and emotions of the participant. The process essentially requires the researcher to sift 'intuitively' (Harberlin, 2017) through the transcript, selecting words, phrases, sentences that resonate meaning (Glesne, 1997; Haberlin, 2017). The method demonstrates a way to 'bring forward the participants message' (Ward, 2011) so that it is not lost in the researcher led analysis nor the

collective representation of multiple participants experiences in the form of themes. This is precisely the approach followed in this research, participant-voiced found poems were crafted from interview transcripts.

In social work, poetic inquiry is often used as a tool to advocate for the marginalised. Carroll et al. (2011) used poems to highlight the realities of marginal housing of 40 people living in informal dwellings in New Zealand. Researchers exploring sensitive topics use poetic inquiry to encourage open expression, Rooyen et al. (2021) used it to explore lived realities of transwomen in Namibia. Researchers exploring social stigma use poetic inquiry to create empathy in the reader regarding how it feels to be stigmatized by society. Amsterdam and Eck (2019) used poetic inquiry to highlight how obese female employees manage weight related stigma at work. Bhattacharya (2017) argued that participant voices often get lost in academic processes and justifies her use of poetic inquiry to capture experiences of Indian Students pursuing graduate studies in the US in their own voices. Sjollem et al. (2012) used found poetry to examine experiences of homelessness and precarious housing amongst immigrant women in Canada. Görlich (2016) used it to understand experiences of youth on the margins of education. McAllister (2022) used ethnopoetic analysis to create poetic rendering of asylum seekers and refugees who sought access to higher education in UK. This research will use poetic transcription to explore disabled teachers lived experiences.

Traditional form of presenting qualitative data analysis uses extracts picked from transcripts to support an argument within an identified theme. I feel these extracts often do not evoke emotive responses in the reader (Sparkes et al., 2003). Research, like the present study which deals with sensitive topics, exploring lived experiences and personal stories, such topics 'lead into affective experiential domain' (Prendergast, 2009, p.541). The rationale for using poetic transcription as data analysis and representation allows the researcher to generate deeper understanding from the data. Another important reason for using poetic transcription is the way participants voice and ownership of their own narratives is retained by the method. The method allows researchers to include the language, the rhythm, the tone of every individual participant, in a way 'it retains 'the signature of the research participant' (Butler-Kisber, 2005).

#### **4.8.2.1 Why include poetic transcription?**

Poetical analysis is an analytic method (Johnson et al., 2013) based on the premise that researchers who apply this approach write primarily for the reader, inviting them to experience new feelings and understandings (Lahman et al., 2019). In qualitative social science research, the researcher is positioned to speak for or about the participants which gives the researcher the power to craft narratives. Using poetic inquiry limits the ways researcher might obstruct the voices of participants (Freeman, 2016), thereby "crafting more complex images of human life and lived experience" (Ohlen, 2003).

Poetic transcription involves “the creation of poem-like compositions from the words of interviewees” (Glesne, 1997, p. 202), as the researcher takes sections of text from transcripts to create a composition (Simpson & Quigley, 2016) that still retains what the participant said in an interview. The researcher neither adds words nor manipulates word order and syntax, which can impart new meaning. Though poetic transcription may look poetry-like, it is not poetry (Glesne, 1997); the meanings are typically more explicit than implied and language can feel more forensic than lyrical (Day, 2015). The poetic transcription process places participant voices in the “center of inquiry, analysis, and discussion rather than on the margins” (Tillman, 2006, p. 282). Poetic transcription affirms a participants’ voice (Glesne, 2006) and supports the possible recreating of participants’ lived experiences that can evoke emotional responses in the reader.

The strengths of poetic inquiry have also been highlighted as its weakness (Connelly, 2010), especially participant-voiced poems, that it lacked rigour, contained little analysis, they reflect only the researchers’ experience of the stories. The constructed nature of found poetry has been criticised as reductions of participants’ stories (Connelly, 2010, p. 38), and that poems do not represent research. These criticisms have been addressed by researchers who use poetic transcriptions by “upholding and documenting the conceptual, emotional strengths and rigour of their processes” (Van Luyn, Gair & Saunders, 2016, p.85). Researchers applying poetic transcription justify it as a form of research which transparently reflects in their research findings which include “the level of emotions conveyed by the storytellers” (Connelly, 2010, p.39). it is argued that research processes that seek to explore subjectivities and attempt to

understand the non -linear, ambiguous ways lives are lived” (Connelly, p.39). The use of poetry in research transcends the researchers’ limited interpretations and allows the reader an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences (Furman et.al, 2007, p.312).

Instead of considering found poems as a reduction of large interview transcripts, in its condensed form, found poems can ‘amplify’ participants’ narratives (Sjollem et al., 2012, p.206) provoking emotional reactions in the reader creating critical awareness (Connelly, 2010).

Poetic transcription prevents participant stories to be ‘overshadowed’ (Ward, 2011, p.7) by collective interpreting and analysing their accounts. It addresses the authoritarian aspect within data analysis. Found poems enables representation of participant voices making them central to data representation and is not overwhelmed by researcher interpretations (Evelyn, 2004). Following this approach will enable me to -

1. To highlight authentic individual experiences: The ‘essence’ of individual disabled teachers experience will be captured using found poems crafted using participants own words. By presenting experiences in a condensed manner, by selecting resonating phrases, maintaining the rhythm and emotions (Ely, 2007; Glesne, 1997), makes found poems more engaging and evocative. It will honour the narratives participants shared while staying true to their voice. It will enable a broader understanding (Görlich, 2016) of individual lived experiences of

participants, because readers can draw their own inferences from these poems thereby creating a more nuanced way of interacting with data.

2. To create a coherent and evocative storyline: This approach is also a practical way of organizing and presenting participants life stories in a coherent manner. Sometimes participants stories are not shared in a chronological manner during the interview process. Presenting found poems related to each theme will help create a coherent as well as an evocative storyline.
3. To form strong and powerful connections with the reader: The reader can engage with data in a more connected manner, because reading found poems generates emotional responses. The text will allow readers to make their own interpretations of the shared experiences and connect to these experiences on their own level. Readers can 'get inside' and 'reflect', in a way 'walk in the participants shoes'. Reading found poems will create resonance with disabled teachers' experiences generating a 'connection' with readers, thereby evoking an emotional response.

Experts recommend that researchers who wish to use poetic inquiry need to express clearly why they are drawn to it (Faulkner, 2007). During the familiarization phase of RTA, I was struck by the tonality, lyrical nature, and individuality within each participants' narrative. Individual participant narratives haunted me. I felt compelled to include poetic inquiry in the form of found poems in my research to highlight individual participants authentic narrative. Positioning myself as an emerging qualitative researcher in the process of completing a multiple case study. I joined a poetic inquiry group that comprised of researchers who use poetry from across the world which met

twice a month. Interactions with group members and support they provided gave me confidence and motivated me to go ahead with poetic transcription. The goal in creating found poems is searching for “salient, valuable words, phrases and settling these nuggets aside as an act of mining, panning and sifting through words for small piece of gold” (Lahman & Richard, 2014, p.345). Portions of transcripts were selected based on the content in the narrative and ways it lent themselves to creating poems (contained phrases that evoked imagery and emotion). Such research poems are different to literary poems (Faulker, 2020), the style is more organic and connected to the themes identified in the data. I acknowledge that writing poetry requires specific skill sets, I followed advice given by Leavy (2015) that emerging poetic inquiry researchers should be fully present and fearless to develop the knowledge and skill required.

#### **4.8.2.2 Process of crafting ‘found poems’**

When crafting the found poems and representing the voices of participants, it is important to consider the question: “how do I do representation knowing that I can never quite get it right?” (Pillow, 2010, p. 176). In poetic transcription, the researcher takes on the role of writer/composer, by using participants words to formulate found poems to represent data (Patrick 2016). Constructing found poems calls into question the “accuracy” or trustworthiness of the data thereby researcher reflexivity “becomes important to demonstrate one’s awareness of the research problematics and is often used to potentially validate and legitimize the research precisely by raising questions about the research process” (Pillow, 2010, p. 179). In crafting found poems directly from transcripts, this unavoidably



implicates the researcher in the representational exercise (Macbeth, 2001), thereby making reflexivity key to ethical research.

Following Glesne's (1997) principles of poetic transcription I used participants' own words from within transcripts to craft the participant-voiced found poems. Glesne recommended to pay attention to participant syntax, participants language, emphasis on tone, the pauses and rhythm in the voice. Focussing on essential events in the narratives where participants used emotional laden terms to speak about their disability experiences. Participant-voiced poetic inquiry is an inductive approach. Although it is me who crafts the poems, these are still the participants' original words, utmost care was taken not to change, add any words or distort the meaning of participants experience. To demonstrate the procedure of crafting a found poem I have selected a paragraph from my research journal.

I looked at the **themes** I have **identified**, and they **make perfect sense** if I look at them **through** the **theoretical lens** I have chosen. **Yet**, there was **something missing**, the themes **lack the soul**, the **essence** of my participants **individual voices**. I have **listened to** each **interview multiple times**, **read the transcripts multiple times**, I **felt their struggle**, I **heard** their **voices tremble** as they spoke, or **laugh** when they shared something funny. I heard the **pauses** and the **silence**. I **watched** the **emotions on their faces**, the **gestures**, the **uncomfortable shuffles**, the **smiles**, the **nods**, the **eye contact**, or **lack of**, **multiple times**. I **watched** them **struggle to remember** every nuance of an incident, **the reliving of it all**, **multiple times**. All this is what I find missing. The **themes** I have **identified help answer my research questions yet** seem too technical **devoid of human emotions**.

Guided by the rhythm of the language, key words that resonate the experience are highlighted. Highlighted portions were then copied into a Word document, and portions were merged to form a coherent 'found poem'. None of the words were altered staying true to the narrative. The title is crafted from the found poem, selecting the best fitting phrase that resonates the experience that is being shared. From the above sample the following found poem was crafted.

*Themes seem devoid of human emotions*

Themes identified  
Make perfect sense  
Through theoretical lens  
Yet, something missing  
Lack soul, essence of individual voices  
Listened to interviews multiple times  
Read transcripts multiple times  
Felt their struggle  
Heard voices tremble  
Laughter sometimes  
Pause, silence at times  
Emotional faces, gestures, uncomfortable shuffles,  
  
Smiles, nods, the eye contact or not  
Struggle to remember every thought  
Watched the reliving of it all  
Themes identified  
  
Answer research questions  
  
Yet, seem devoid of human emotions

A similar process was followed to craft found poems from participant transcripts. To craft the poetic transcriptions, I limited the extraction of phrases from the transcripts to

those that represented the theme from one participant's transcript at a time. To create each poem, I selected the phrases which embodied the identified theme and eliminated certain words. This included eliminating words that directly discussed names, locations, identity markers which would distract from the theme in focus. Staying true to the rhythm and style of participants spoken language, not altering the words, staying true to the experiences shared and not adding any of my own words were the rules followed to craft found poems from transcripts.

I re-read the found poem couple of times, sometimes repeated a word for poetic effect until confident that the final poem conveyed essence of the shared narrative. I returned to the found poem after a couple of days for a final check. Since English is not my first language, it was important that while crafting participant-voiced found poems, the words used were the participants', and not to change the meaning of the experience in any way. I kept working on each poem until I was satisfied that it captured the essence of the participants' narrative. Poetic transcription process was carried out on other participant transcripts. After crafting poems for each participant, some were condensed into 'poetic clusters' (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009) based on commonality in participant experiences. Each poem in the cluster can be read as a standalone piece, but when combined the cluster provides a nuance glimpse into commonality of experiences of disabled teachers (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). To maintain anonymity names, locations, and gender identity were edited. The found poems were shared with respective participant for their approval and feedback. Each found poem was used only once in the findings chapter.

#### **4.8.2.3 Reflection of poetic transcription process**

The poetic process blurs the lines between the researcher and the researched, revealing the entanglements researchers have in the data (Clough, 2002) and making these entanglements more explicit. Themes were developed through thematic analysis of the data related to participants' lived experiences. From the thematic analysis, the themes identified merited further exploration within the data due to the immersive nature in the data and representing of participants' contexts. Hence, poetic transcription was used to further explore participants' narratives and lived experiences related to the identified themes.

I began crafting found poems while familiarizing with the participants' narratives which helped me refocus better when I returned to the synthesis process. The poetic transcription process made me feel more connected with data, making deeper insights and interpretations possible. The creative process made it possible for me to delve deep into the heart of participant experience generating deeper understanding and knowing. Poetic transcription also allowed the capturing of participants emotional experiences. I believe that including the found poems in the findings infuses a level of creativity into academic discourse (Faulkner, 2020; Patrick, 2016). There was a feeling of vulnerability I felt when I questioned whether the crafted found poems were "good enough" to be considered as research poetry (Lahman et al., 2019). As an someone with limited exposure to literary writing, and with English as my second language I often

questioned whether I was appropriately using the language associated with writing poetry.

After crafting the poems, I shared them with individual participants for their feedback and opinion on whether to include their found poems in the thesis (Appendix 23). The feedback from participants was affirmative (Appendix 24). The second pilot study mentioned in point 4.4.2 took place on advice from my main supervisor to pilot the found poems with a conference audience. I was crafting found poems as well as beginning cross case synthesis.

#### **4.8.3 Cross-case Synthesis**

Yin (2009) suggests that there are different ways case study research can be analysed: pattern matching, explanation building, time- series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Cross-case synthesis best suited this research. In the cross-case synthesis each individual participant is treated as a separate case-study, findings from each individual case-study are then grouped across the multiple cases (Yin, 2009). Each case- study was analysed sequentially following the 'holistic multiple-case study' Yin (2009) approach. Yin (2009) argues that a researcher needs a predetermined analytical strategy before case study data is analysed; such a strategy guides the researcher in crafting the story of each case by treating the evidence fairly, producing analytic conclusions, and ruling out alternative interpretations. Each individual case was analysed holistically, thoroughly, and inductively using RTA. After individually analysing each case, cross-case synthesis as carried out to identify common themes that would answer the research questions.

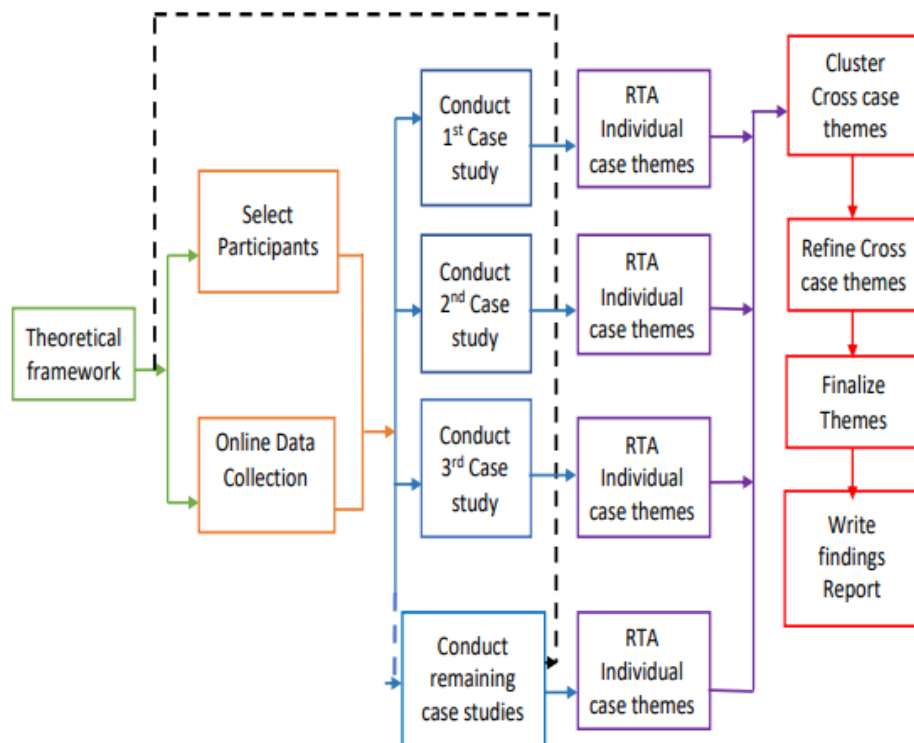


*Figure 12 Cross Case Synthesis (Source Yin,2009, p.50)*

While doing the cross-case synthesis, the similarities within participant experiences became evident. The found poems also had commonality in experiences. The life trajectories of eight different individual cases, had so many similarities in terms of common struggles, barriers encounters, experiences with ableist behaviours, non-effectiveness of disability employment policies. Initially the researcher had concerns regarding whether cross case analysis would be possible and whether it would be difficult to cluster themes that were identified by holistically analysing each case. But in this study, cross-case synthesis came about very organically because of the similarity of participants' disability experiences. The cross-case analysis provided a synthesis of disabled teachers lived experiences. This synthesis does provide in-depth understanding of participants unique lived experiences, barriers they encountered,

their struggle with their impairments and functioning as disabled teachers. The cross-case synthesis explores the similarities of life trajectories of participants as well as highlights barriers that they encounter. The final findings report was drafted in May 2022. The RTA analysis report was shared and discussed with main supervisor for their inputs.

#### **4.9 Ethical Considerations**

This section is presented in three parts, ethical considerations I endeavoured to hold during the entire research process, in data generation process and analysis process.

In research process: The core principles in Article 3 of the UN Convention on Human Rights (UNCRC) specially mentions ethical evaluation of researching disabled people, that the researcher needs to ensure equality, effective participation, respect differences and ensure accessibility (National Disability Authority, 2009). Keeping in mind guidelines provided in various handbooks about carrying out disability research I ensured that this study strictly followed these guidelines. UK Government Office of Disability guidance on social research advocates designing research that is accessible to and inclusive of people with different impairments. The suggestion is that by enabling disabled people to participate in your research will improve the quality of your data by reducing the risk of excluding groups of interest (Farmer & Macleod, 2011). This study was designed keeping these principles in mind. It was important to me that I followed these principles throughout the research process. To ensure equality, inclusion and avoid the risk of excluding certain disabilities, the study was designed to be inclusive of participants with any disability. The entire research methodology was

designed 'to fit' the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the research. I followed strict personal ethics in maintaining transparency throughout the research process by maintaining a research blog. Keeping supervisors informed every step of the way, incorporating their feedback helped maintain research quality. Sharing ideas with fellow PGRs, discussions and collaborative learning helped gain new perspectives. Immersing in research networks on twitter, exchanging ideas, attending conferences, presenting in conferences, learning from other presentations helped gather varied inputs which enriched the research quality.

In data generation: The ethical considerations during the recruitment and data generation process followed similar guidelines. I was conscious that being a non-disabled person I held an outsider position in researching experiences of disabled teachers. The decision to be entirely transparent and honest with participants was made right at the beginning of the study. All the recruitment information leaflets held information regarding the purpose of the research, my ethnicity, my being non-disabled, my educational background, the theoretical frameworks the research would follow to maintain transparency. During the initial meeting, all these aspects were clarified along with any questions participants had. Another important aspect clarified during the initial meeting was seeking participant preference regarding disability language preference, how anonymity would be maintained in the research process was discussed. Maintaining complete transparency and taking participants choice into consideration was important to me. Each participant gave Informed consent to be part of the study. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study up to two weeks after



the final interview was completed. Participant preferences were given priority in terms of choice of online platform to conduct interviews, accommodating and making adjustments when required. Accessibility and flexibility were given utmost importance, accommodating participant requirements, during data generation. Flexibility in terms of scheduling of interviews and accommodating all change of date requests, as per participant convenience was ensured.

Research was carried out in collaboration with participants (Duckett & Pratt, 2001), treating them as co-researchers, communicating with them regarding every stage of the research. I was careful not to impose ideas or opinions on participants. Trustworthiness of this study comes from researcher reflexivity and integrity. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout the analysis process as well as a research blog to document the experiences on this journey. Protocol advised by Haigh & Witham (2015) listed in their guidelines for Distress Protocol for qualitative data generation (Appendix 17) was implemented if participants appeared distressed during interviews. Participant feedback was sought to improve the process, after the first interview, participant feedback was sought if they required any changes. Feedback from participants and their suggestions were incorporated. Transparency was maintained throughout data generation by sharing transcripts and discussing with participants. Working collaboratively with participants and open communications helped improving research integrity.

In data analysis: I took time to engage with the data. The analysis phase was the longest phase in this research, RTA from August 2021 to May 2022, poetic transcription from November 2021 to April 2023. Transparency and communication were maintained even in the data analysis process. During the analysis I ensured trustworthiness by maintaining authenticity, truthfulness, and quality. Drawing the findings from the rich data, following where the data led. I tried to represent the findings in a truthful, cohesive, and authentic manner. I kept participants informed of the research progress. Discussing findings with supervisors and fellow PGRS, helped develop further insights. The final analysis report was shared for input from participants. Initially only found poems crafted from their own transcripts was shared with respective participants. Their permission was sought to include poems in the analysis and share with other participants. Only when a participant provided consent were their poems included and shared with other participants. Feedback and validation from participants were very important to me. All the data generated was safeguarded following university guidelines. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Throughout this research, I engaged in “thorough and persistent reflexivity” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.176) by maintaining a reflexive journal, allowing time for deep thoughtful and creative data engagement. Reflexivity was maintained by ensuring rigour in the analysis process by approaching it in a recursive and systematic manner. Maintaining a record of every step.

All the data were stored following university guidelines and kept safe and confidential. Anonymity of participants was meticulously guarded. Throughout this research journey

I endeavoured to have utmost reflexivity and integrity. It was extremely important that I discuss, work collaboratively, share ideas, and have open communication with supervisors, fellow PGRs, participants, and research networks. Maintaining transparency and working collaboratively with participants was given utmost priority. Researching with participants was the key to co-creating and generating rich data. Maintaining open communications, incorporating participants suggestions and their inputs added to quality and authenticity to the research. Following what the data, staying true to narratives participants shared, keeping theoretical assumptions and research questions in mind makes this research authentic, trustworthy and collaborative.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided a descriptive account of philosophical assumptions, the multiple case-study research design, criteria for participant selection, data generation and analysis process. A multiple case-study was conducted on eight individual disabled teachers from different geographical locations. Participants were selected based on selection criteria and recruited using Twitter. After providing informed consent, participants answered an online questionnaire before engaging in four interviews. Critical incident forms were available to participant to include any details they might have forgotten during interviews. Transcripts were shared with participants for their approval. Generated data were analysed, and themes identified using RTA. A cross-case synthesis of eight individual case studies helped cluster themes, and a final analysis report was prepared. The process of how found poems were crafted from

individual participant transcripts is explained. Finally, the ethical considerations made within the research process are explored.

## 5 Findings: Case overviews

This section provides a contextual overview of each of the eight participants in this research. All the participants met the selection criteria mentioned in Chapter four. The participants have been assigned letters (A to H) as pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. Participants' gender identity as well as geographical locations and other identifying markers have been kept anonymous which can sometimes make the grammar appear a little awkward. The sections below comprise an overview of each case with a table which consolidates the questionnaire responses of each participant.

### 5.1 Case One: Participant 'A'

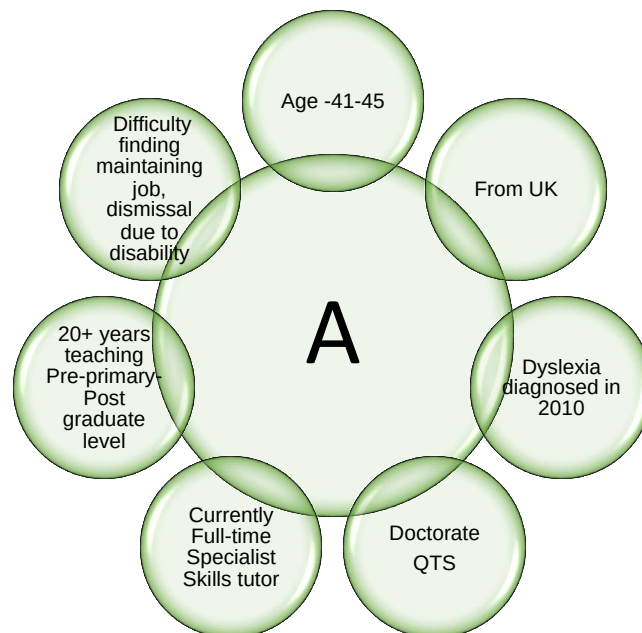


Figure 13 Case Overview Participant A

'A' reported having a nurtured childhood growing up in a middle-income family. Had Tourette's as a child and was bullied by other children when they started school.

School was hard, A recalled the trauma of studying for hours for spelling tests yet getting very low scores. Mum helped them study, the overall environment in the family was not to pressure in terms of education. Despite there being a history of dyslexia in the family, parents never suspected that A might have dyslexia. Was bullied throughout school. Whenever they mentioned bullying at home, the message was that it is something everyone experiences and is part of life. They recall their best friend ‘dumping’ them in secondary school to be part of the ‘popular’ group. The school never picked on struggles with reading and writing. Experienced visual stress and often walked out of classrooms. Had to do an extra year after sixth form because they did not have the requisite grades to move on to university.

*Table 5 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant A*

|                                        |                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location                               | United Kingdom                                                                                               |
| Disability                             | Dyslexia                                                                                                     |
| How long have you had disability?      | All my life, although I was only formally diagnosed in 2010 (when approximately ?30?)                        |
| Age                                    | 41-45                                                                                                        |
| Educational Qualification              | Doctorate                                                                                                    |
| Qualified Teacher Status               | Yes                                                                                                          |
| Place of employment                    | University                                                                                                   |
| Current job description                | Specialist Study Skills Tutor                                                                                |
| Working hours                          | Full-time                                                                                                    |
| Subjects taught                        | Study Skills - but I work with students who are studying a variety of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees |
| Year groups taught                     | Pre-primary, Primary, Secondary, Undergraduate, Postgraduate                                                 |
| Number of years of teaching experience | 20 plus years                                                                                                |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | Yes                                                                                                          |

|                                      |                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reasons for gap in employment?       | Various - moving location, difficulty gaining and maintaining employment, dismissal due to disability. |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier? | Yes                                                                                                    |

'A' did an integrated program giving them a teacher qualification with a degree in Arts. Adjusting to university life was tough, confusing, finding rooms was difficult, felt confused and homesick. Academically struggled at university. Despite working hard, long hours and missing out on all fun activities, they could not get good grades. Developed self-doubt and blamed themselves for being unable to do well academically. While studying about different learning disabilities as part of their teacher education, they realised that they might have dyslexia. Approached Disability services in their fourth year at university. Was assessed that they did have dyslexia yet because they were at the end of their course were advised there was no reason for adjustments or a formal diagnosis. Having a conversation with their family about their dyslexia assessment, they found out that while in junior school 'A' was identified in need of special reading writing intervention. Sibling was also diagnosed with dyslexia and received all adjustments during university years.

After completing university, struggled to find a job, interviews were tough, sometimes 'A' misunderstood interview questions. Ended up joining a teaching agency and doing supply teaching for many years. Eventually found work as primary school teacher, becoming a unit head after working there for many years. Due to new changes, work pressures suddenly increased leading to longer working hours. Their dyslexia made paperwork extremely hard. Collapsed one day from exhaustion and was advised to

take time off. Spoke to head teacher formally about their dyslexia, though it had been mentioned casually earlier. Consequently, was demoted as unit leader and began receiving low grades on lesson observations. Realised that the school was making a case for dismissal. To stop this got a formal assessment of dyslexia, the school then referred them to occupational health. During this time the teacher unions did not help at all. Eventually the school was informed that they had breached the Equality Act, but never reinstated 'A'. Disillusioned, financially broken 'A' became a bus driver. 'A' reports that the bus company was more inclusive and helpful than their school. Eventually got financial help from their grandmother and trained to become a dyslexia tutor. While working as a dyslexia tutor 'A' completed a Master's degree followed by a doctoral degree. 'A' reported their dyslexia diagnosis and study skills knowledge helped them achieve better grades during their Master's and doctoral studies .

After completing their doctorate moved on to becoming an academic. Learning to navigate their dyslexia and finding strategies to cope with academic work made them excel and get top grades. A misunderstanding with a colleague led to 'A' feeling that history was starting to repeat itself. And before things got worse, left the job and took up dyslexia tutoring again giving up being an academic. This was extremely painful because this had been their goal, they had enjoyed it. While talking of their teaching experiences, mentioned that their dyslexia became their strength when it came to helping students. They felt they truly made a difference; students often appreciated their work. 'A' was approachable, friendly, eager to share their experience. They provided detailed responses and were very animated in their responses. They were enthusiastic in their participation and made me feel at ease while talking to them. The



most poignant take away from A was that the bus company turned out to be more inclusive and supportive, by providing dyslexia skills support to help A learn the bus routes. The ableism 'A' experienced as a primary school teacher and later in academia suggests that it exists at all levels.

## 5.2 Case Two: Participant 'B'

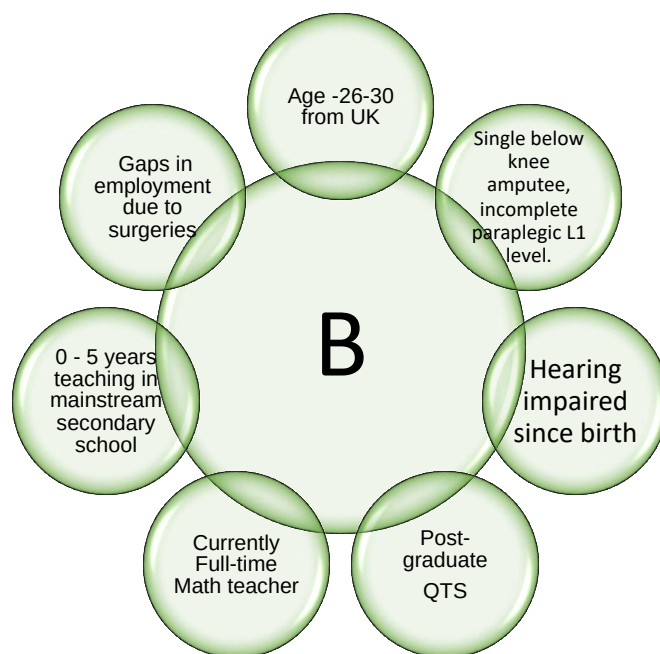


*Figure 14 Case Overview Participant B*

'B' reported growing up in a small family close to maternal grandparents. Has childhood memories of playing in the neighbourhood, couple of vacations abroad. Family life was complicated by elder sibling's behavioural challenges. Parents were overwhelmed by elder sibling's challenges, mum tried best to shield 'B'. Has total hearing loss in the right ear since birth which family never acknowledged or accepted. When 'B' was fifteen they got formally diagnosed after self-approaching their doctor. Attended private primary school later changed because of financial burdens. Mum kept them busy, out

of the family home enrolling them in extra classes. Developed a passion for music, is accomplished in various musical instruments, played in a school band.

Excelled academically and did not feel challenged. They would request teachers to let them sit in the front of the class because they could not hear. Though the teachers would allow B to sit in the front of the class, they did not recommended any support for the hearing impairment. Had challenging behaviour at school because of what was happening at home. Due to a spinal injury in their teenage years, was forced to use either crutches or a wheelchair. Got bullied by students at school who would tip their wheelchair, teachers walked past without helping. The school provided no accommodation, classes were not moved. 'B' was expected to study for some subjects on their own. Received no support from home, who considered their condition 'make believe'. Moved away from home, becoming financially independent since sixteen. Enjoyed maths, often helping other students in the subject.

*Table 6 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant B*

|                                   |                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location                          | United Kingdom                                                                       |
| Disability                        | Single below knee amputee, incomplete paraplegic L1 level. Hearing impaired.         |
| How long have you had disability? | Spinal injury - 11 years<br>Amputation - 5 years<br>Hearing impairment - since birth |
| Age                               | 26-30                                                                                |
| Educational Qualification         | Postgraduate                                                                         |
| Qualified Teacher Status          | Yes                                                                                  |

|                                        |                          |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Place of employment                    | Mainstream school        |
| Current job description                | Teacher of Mathematics   |
| Working hours                          | Full-time                |
| Subjects taught                        | Maths & Business Studies |
| Year groups taught                     | Secondary                |
| Number of years of teaching experience | 0 – 5 years              |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | Yes                      |
| Reasons for gap in employment?         | Surgeries                |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier?   | Yes                      |

First in their family to attend university, deferred entry by one year because of surgery. They had hard time commuting in a big city. Public transport with wheelchair was a daily struggle. Finding accessible accommodation during undergraduate years was problematic, moved six times in three years. Completely isolated from their family, except for their paternal grandmother who they considered closest member of their family. Became interested in physical fitness and training in preparation for amputation surgery. Received funding for a prosthetic leg. Participated in many sports competitions, became a motivational speaker. Worked freelance through their undergraduate years. Financially sound by the time they graduated, bought their own flat. Completed a post graduate degree through open university to avoid commuting hassles, continuing being self-employed.

The reason they chose teaching was because they needed a steady income for mortgage purposes. They never thought of it as a career option because they had not seen any teachers in a wheelchair. Their prosthetic leg made access easy, decided to

do a teacher education course. Recently started working in a secondary school as a Maths teacher. During teacher education advocated for more disabled friendly toilets, which did happen but after they completed. They hold assemblies in school to share their experience and encourage students. Try to be the teacher they never had in their life, caring and empathetic. They have never experienced discrimination in teaching but had as a wheelchair user in other jobs. They feel that school buildings are designed keeping disabled students in mind but not disabled staff. They mention lack of disabled parking spaces and disabled toilets. 'B' is measured in their responses. Was approachable, friendly but initially guarded. By the second interview was bit more at ease and spoke more freely. The fact that they lived with a hearing impairment without any support through their formative years and indifference by the school especially with bullying was shocking. 'B' exhibits strong resilience, independence and perseverance.

### 5.3 Case Three: Participant 'C'

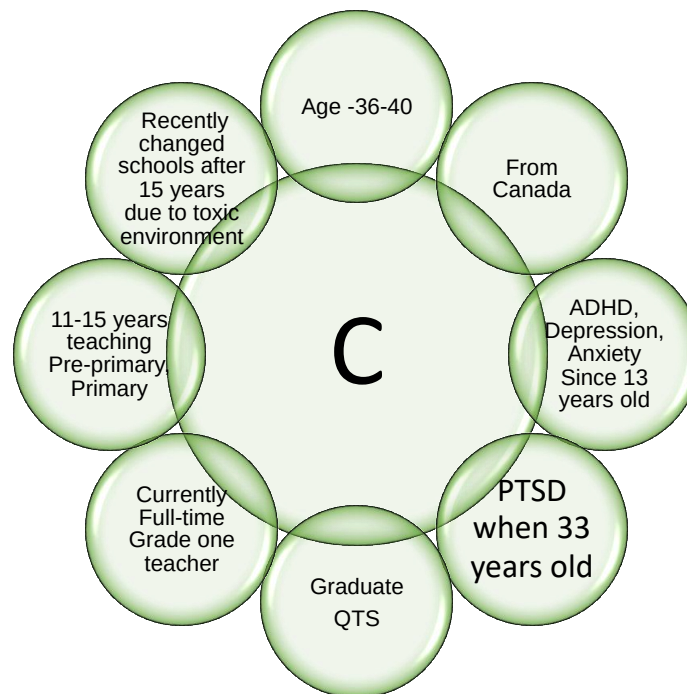


*Figure 15 Case Overview Participant C*

'C' reported growing up in a close-knit family in Canada. Younger sibling is diagnosed with learning disabilities. Has a large extended family on the maternal side with many cousins, recalls fun playing as a child. Close to aunt and grandmother. Parents gave a lot of importance to education; father was a teacher. Grew up in a tight-knit neighbourhood kids playing in the backyards, attending neighbourhood schools. Parents always mentioned that the children were their investment. Did not enjoy school, bullied for being large and tall. Always trying 'fit in' but never 'belonged'. Always wanted to be a grade one teacher.

Attended private high school on a bursary. At 13 was diagnosed with depression and put on medication. Has struggled with depression and anxiety all their life. Spoke about pressure they put on themselves to excel at school. A solid 'B' student, worked hard, because of a sense of responsibility towards parents. They later found out that their mother and grandmother had a history of depression, never discussed in the family. Had a religious upbringing, currently working in a Catholic independent school as a grade one teacher. School was tough, they never fit in. Watching their younger sibling struggle with learning disabilities in school made 'C' want to become a teacher.

*Table 7 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant C*

|                                        |                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location                               | Canada                                                                                          |
| Disability                             | I have diagnosed ADHD, depression, anxiety, and developed PTSD after a medical procedure at 33. |
| How long have you had disability?      | ADHD, Depression, Anxiety since I was 13<br>PTSD when I was 33                                  |
| Age                                    | 36-40                                                                                           |
| Educational Qualification              | Graduate                                                                                        |
| Qualified Teacher Status               | Yes                                                                                             |
| Place of employment                    | Private mainstream school                                                                       |
| Current job description                | Classroom teacher - I teach grade one (6/7 year olds)                                           |
| Working hours                          | Full-time                                                                                       |
| Subjects taught                        | I teach: Language Arts (English) Math Social studies Science Religion French Art                |
| Year groups taught                     | Primary and Pre-primary                                                                         |
| Number of years of teaching experience | 11 – 15 years                                                                                   |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | No                                                                                              |
| Reasons for gap in employment?         | -                                                                                               |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier?   | Yes                                                                                             |

Attended local university commuting from home, working small jobs. They believe there was less bullying at university because of a more liberal atmosphere unlike the 'all girl school microcosm' where everything was focussed on clothes and looks. Their first day of university was 9/11 which was a surreal experience. Did an integrated program that qualified them as a teacher. Enjoyed being in the classroom with students, felt like they 'belonged'. Graduation day was hard because 'C' wanted to share it with their grandmother who wanted 'C' to become a teacher. Their grandmother attended the graduation but had Alzheimer's, 'C' knew their grandmother would not remember anything.

Anxious when they could not find a job, but eventually found one at a school they used to volunteer. 'C' loves teaching and is an empathetic, supportive, caring teacher. They never disclosed depression, anxiety, and ADHD diagnosis, for fear of stigma and discrimination. Recently 'C' got diagnosed with PTSD. In the days prior to re-joining work, they were so anxious and worried. They have been taking depression medication their entire life. Being at the highest dose right now, they struggle with medication. Had tried to stop taking medication, felt suicidal and had to revert. They speak of the exhaustion they experience every day, and how they collapse at the end of the day, only to get up and go to work the next day.

After the PTSD diagnosis, finds it extremely difficult to keep up at work. Recently shared details of the traumatic incident and depression at school. 'C' had worked in

this school for fifteen years as grade one teacher. They were done hiding. The head teacher, who was a friend now became their tormentor. The head teacher's behaviour became antagonistic and caustic towards 'C'. Though superficially cordial the head teacher made 'C' a target, picking on small mistakes and telling them off in front of colleagues. The situation became unbearable 'C' left the only workplace they have ever known to do supply teaching. Has recently found a new permanent job teaching second grade.

'C' still lives close to home, near their parents, is very close to their siblings speaks with them every day. During this research 'C' had a breakthrough moment at home when they discussed how they were feeling with their parents. There were many tears shed, their parents were unaware of the internalised trauma, anxiety and pressure 'C' had been experiencing since childhood. 'C' does not want to hide anymore and said that people have this incorrect stereotypical image of depression and ADHD in their mind.

I felt an instant connection with 'C'. As someone who has also battled with self-image all my life, I could relate to their struggle of trying to 'fit in' and never 'belonging'. As someone who had also been bullied my entire life, I felt strong empathy for 'C'. 'C' was very easy to talk to, uses lots of hand gestures and had very animated facial expressions while speaking. Though there was a huge time difference between Canada and UK, they were very accommodating. They were enthusiastic in their participation; it was the first time they had spoken about their experiences candidly.



#### 5.4 Case Four: Participant 'D'

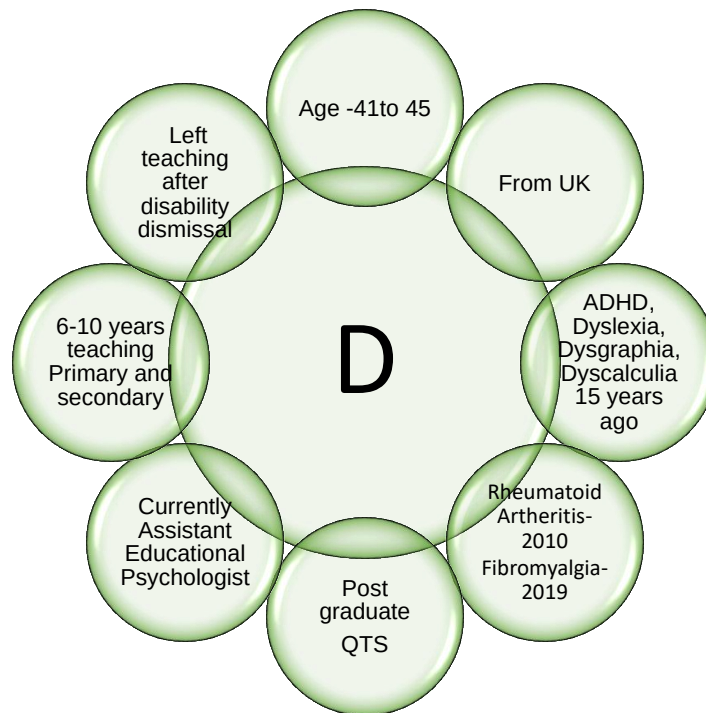


*Figure 16 Case Overview Participant D*

'D' reported growing up in a family with mum, dad, and two siblings. Because they constantly moved due to dad's work was always the new kid in class. The constant moving had long time effect, they never made close friends in school. 'D' suspects that their father might have been Autistic or had Asperger's. 'D' shared memories of spending hours with their dad in the shed taking about steam engines. Has a complicated history with mum, and younger sibling. They think their mum hates them and this has affected them their entire life. Parents separated when 'D' was in their teens, with mum moving out of the family home.

Enjoyed school, loved reading, writing and created small stories. Was sent to boarding school which was extremely difficult. There was no pastoral care and there was bullying. There was no one you could turn for support, and to survive, 'D' became part of the bullies. Adjusting to a life in boarding school has led to attachment problems. Eventually family brought them home to attend the local sixth form. Again, they had trouble adjusting, home atmosphere was complicated. Mum moved out, though living in the same town did not have any contact. 'D' spoke of an incident when their mother walked past them and a group of school friends in the town centre without acknowledging 'D'. Though the relationship with their mom is cordial now, the treatment they received from their mom has affected 'D'.

*Table 8 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant D*

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location                          | United Kingdom                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Disability                        | I have rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia which both cause fatigue and can flare up I can struggle with mobility and find some tasks that challenge my dexterity. I can be tired and in pain. I have ADHD and dyslexia which also influence my concentration and mood |
| How long have you had disability? | Since about 2010 for RA, fibro found out last year and ADHD found out about 10 -15 years ago                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Age                               | 41-45                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Educational Qualification         | Postgraduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Qualified Teacher Status          | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Place of employment               | Mainstream school                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Current job description           | Assistant Educational Psychologist                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Working hours                     | Full-time                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Subjects taught                   | I was trained to teach Primary but taught in special needs and worked across the ages and taught everything                                                                                                                                                           |

|                                        |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Year groups taught                     | Primary and secondary                            |
| Number of years of teaching experience | 6 - 10 years                                     |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | Yes                                              |
| Reasons for gap in employment?         | Three years gap after sixth form, lived overseas |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier?   | Yes                                              |

Though 'D' did well academically they could not do well in exams. Teachers often commented 'D' could have got much better grades. Took a gap from studies when about 18 and went travelling, returning after three years to take care of their dad. Was unable to go to university due to financial constraints. They did attend university later when they received funding as a single parent. Loved university and thrived. They would struggle with processing information at times. While studying about learning disabilities recognised some signs and decided to get screened. Approached disability services received multiple diagnosis of ADHD, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia. University provided support in the form of technology, funding, tutors, and scribes. Has recently been diagnosed with Rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia. These combination of various diagnosis at times compounds confusion, they struggle to recognize the symptoms.

Worked as a support worker for special needs students, eventually got qualified as full-time special needs teacher, has worked at primary and secondary level. Has worked with students with extreme behavioural challenges and thoroughly enjoyed teaching these students. They refer to the atmosphere in schools as toxic. They say the competitiveness and leadership styles make a lot of impact on the way schools are

run. Has had various experiences with discrimination and outright health and safety violations. The last school they worked for, led to 'D' getting hospitalised twice, one due to health and safety violation. The school refused to accommodate their requests for breaks to take medication, and because of other issues the school referred them to occupational health. Though 'D' reported being advised that they would win if they took legal action, they did not have the energy to fight. Got accepted for a doctoral program, so left teaching. The only regret was they absolutely loved being in the classroom with their students and felt they made a lot of difference to their students' lives.

'D' voiced strong opinions about having formal training for head teachers and leadership, as well about having more proactive disability support in universities. They made a point regarding the delay there is to get support in place before term starts. Because of their complicated relationship with family, has attachment issues which affects all relationships in their life. Their multiple diagnosis makes things extremely complicated for them. Was very upfront and honest in their responses. They are passionate about teaching and the difference they made in their students' lives. Spoke of their teaching experiences with joy and pride in their voice. They were heartbroken with the toxic atmosphere and unnecessary competitiveness cultivated in schools. Speaking with 'D' was a revelation regarding living with multiple challenges and navigating them with lot of resilience.

## 5.5 Case Five: Participant 'E'

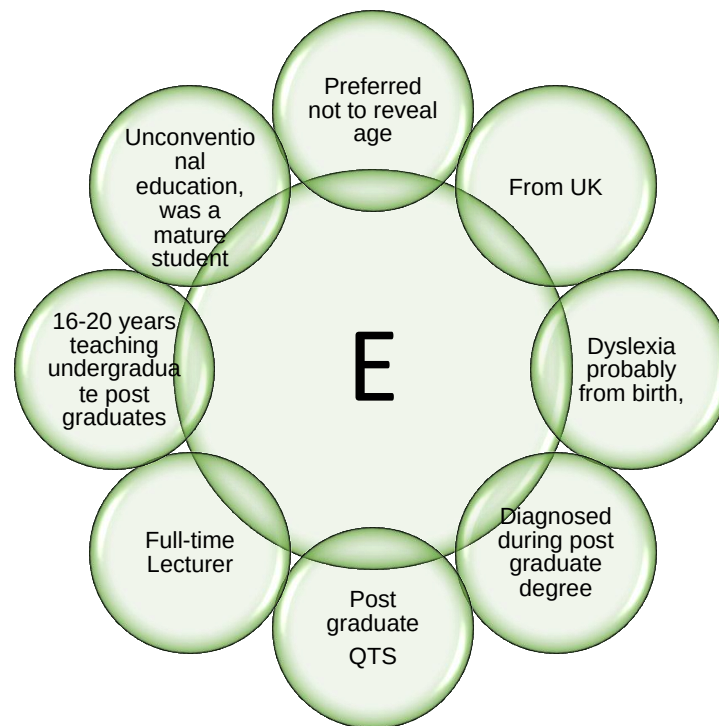


*Figure 17 Case Overview Participant E*

'E' reported growing up in a large family, with religious and strict upbringing. The family owned a business, the children were expected to help. Their family did not give much importance to academic pursuits. 'E' shares memories of spending after school time with their grandma whom they were very close to being grandma's favourite. Was bullied in school because they had to wear an eye patch for a health condition. The bullying at times was so severe that parents were called. Had trouble reading and writing at school. Was put in a special class which did not help because nothing constructive was done in these special classes. In fact, because they were taken out of regular classes to attend special classes, ended up missing out on content taught in the regular classrooms. 'E' particularly disliked the way history was taught loved Math. Had a passion for football, would often referee games because they were considered

knowledgeable. Often did not complete homework, even when parents were called by the school, they continued with not completing the work.

*Table 9 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant E*

|                                        |                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location                               | United Kingdom                                                                                  |
| Disability                             | Dyslexia                                                                                        |
| How long have you had disability?      | Probably from birth diagnosed while I was doing my postgraduate degree                          |
| Age                                    | Prefer not to say                                                                               |
| Educational Qualification              | Postgraduate                                                                                    |
| Qualified Teacher Status               | Yes                                                                                             |
| Place of employment                    | University                                                                                      |
| Current job description                | Lecturer                                                                                        |
| Working hours                          | Full-time                                                                                       |
| Subjects taught                        | The field of Business                                                                           |
| Year groups taught                     | Undergraduate and postgraduate                                                                  |
| Number of years of teaching experience | 16 - 20 years                                                                                   |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | Yes                                                                                             |
| Reasons for gap in employment?         | My Education wasn't conventional, I was a mature student, I wasn't employed during that period. |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier?   | Self-employed owned a business                                                                  |

In secondary school started retaliating to the bullies and often ended up in fights. It was their way of surviving. Spent weekends working in family shop. During their final year in school, had to leave school to take care of the family business due to fathers' illness. Engaged in business activities for many years and thrived financially. Decided to return to academia to do their undergraduate degree much later in their life. Attended a foundation course in a local university. Enjoyed being back in academia. Though

they still struggled with some aspects but began using technology to support themselves with academic work. 'E' is tech savvy and knowledgeable, has deep knowledge of pedagogy. After graduating, went on to pursue post-graduation, it was during this time that their spouse suggested 'D' get screened for learning disabilities. This led to a formal diagnosis of dyslexia.

After postgraduation, started working on contract basis at the same university. Took them ten years to get professional qualification as a lecturer because they were on a contract. 'E' admits there were other quicker pathways, they chose one best suited for them. Attributes the lengthy nature of contractual employment to being dyslexic.

Instead on content they try to develop skills in their students to equip them to work at their own level. Stressing on pedagogical skills and technology, 'E' mentions supporting not only disabled students, but even international students. They advocate at academic meetings that while changes are to be implemented the disabled student and the international student perspectives needs to be considered. 'E' stressed how universities can benefit from investing in more disability friendly technology that works for everybody and not just the disabled.

'E' brought in new perspectives in their answers to my questions. Although they did not share their age, they appeared to be the most senior of my eight participants. At first, I found them very intimidating, but gradually we developed a rapport. They were calm in their responses, spoke with deep knowledge and understanding. Their love for

teaching and being able to develop life skills in their students was evident in their narrative.

## 5.6 Case Six: Participant 'F'

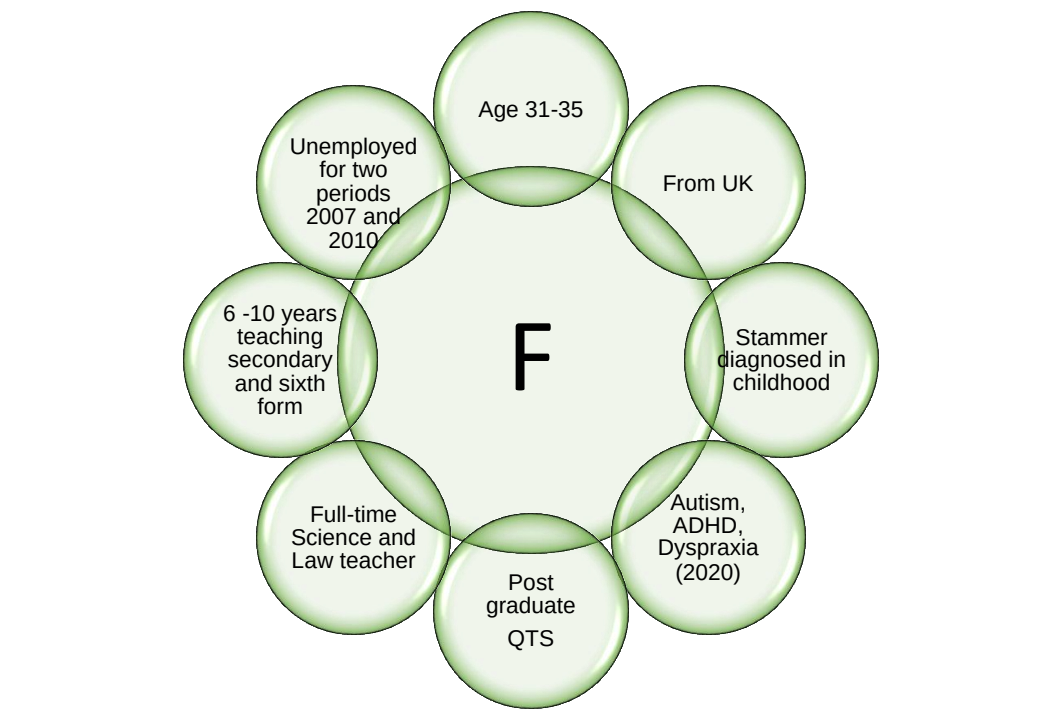


*Figure 18 Case Overview Participant F*

'F' reported growing up in a loving and nurturing family. Diagnosed as a stammerer in childhood. Their dad had a stammer as a child offered lot of support and care. They were an awkward child, stubborn, finicky eater, with fixed preferences. Liked to play on their own, sometimes playing with neighbourhood children. Preferred own company as a child, reading, playing video games. Began receiving speech therapy early as a child until late teenage years. Their dad took them to London for therapy. Parents once had to do a 'sit-in' at their local GP to get the funds for therapy. Enjoyed school,



until an incident of bullying by their grade one teacher left them traumatised. Their grade one teacher would not let 'F' answer the roll call. The bullying by this teacher was so adverse that other students were complaining to parents regarding the teachers' treatment of 'F'. Despite parental intervention the school took no action against the teacher and 'F' endured bullying the entire year. To escape the bullying 'F' started making excuses to get sent home. They say the damage that teachers' behaviour caused their self-confidence was irreparable.

*Table 10 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant F*

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Location                          | United Kingdom                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Disability                        | Multiple disabilities: Stammering, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia. I have formal diagnosis as a stammerer from childhood, an adult diagnosis from (2020) and am self-diagnosed for ADHD and for dyspraxia. I am on the waiting list for ADHD diagnosis, with my autism diagnosis report having commented that I display features consistent with ADHD. I have yet to discover any NHS diagnosis pathway for dyspraxia and cannot afford private assessment |
| How long have you had disability? | From birth                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Age                               | 31-35                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Educational Qualification         | Postgraduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Qualified Teacher Status          | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Place of employment               | Mainstream School                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Current job description           | Teacher of Science and Law                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Working hours                     | Full-time                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Subjects taught                   | I currently teach: - KS3 and GCSE Science (all variants) - BTEC Level 3 Applied Science (all variants) - A-Level Law I have previously taught: - A- Level Chemistry - Extended Project Qualification                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Year groups taught                | Secondary and sixth form                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

|                                        |                                             |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Number of years of teaching experience | 6 – 10 years                                |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | Yes                                         |
| Reasons for gap in employment?         | Unemployed for two periods in 2007 and 2010 |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier?   | Yes                                         |

Developed a strong sense of ethics and fairness their family often discussed these aspects in society. Developed an interest in politics, family was involved in local politics. The idea of a fair, equal, and just society was ingrained early on in 'F'. Their love for reading helped them develop wider understanding of international and human rights matters. Currently pursuing a post graduate degree. Bullying experiences continued throughout school life. They were very close to their grandfather would visit them daily after school. Shared memories of spending hours talking about various topics with their grandfather, especially cars. 'F' suspects their grandfather was on the spectrum because of fixated behaviours. The fact that they got the chance to talk topics which nobody else was interested to listen to with their grandfather helped them as a teenager.

Though signs of autism and ADHD were present in their childhood they were not picked up on. Attributes this to stereotypical ideas regarding these disabilities and because 'F' did not fit those boxes, they were missed. Excelled academically in school which is also why they think that signs were overlooked. Socially found it difficult to fit in, always got along academically in school. Decided to live in university accommodation. Family

helped them prepare for the move by buying basic stuff and helped them move in. The social aspect of university life was difficult, felt lonely and did not make any friends. They made use of a travel bursary to attend various political events. They took some book-keeping classes since becoming treasurer in a political organisation. To help themselves communicate better would often force themselves to do things they were not comfortable doing. This was to check where the line with society was, and to build confidence. They worked at a place where they were required to talk to many people in a day.

Despite a Law degree, could not find a job, ended up doing admin work in a school. Has always experienced discrimination and explicit prejudice during interviews. While working in the school, liked the environment. Was always good in chemistry, so decided to get a degree from open university. Their chemistry teacher in school had suggested teaching as a career. At that time because their stammer would make even completing a sentence difficult, 'F' had rejected the suggestion. But now that they were working in a school, had good control on their stammer 'F' decided to opt for teacher education. They experienced discrimination in teaching interviews and in practice schools, but also met supportive people. Recalled an incident in a practice teaching school where a child who had a stammer told 'F' "how good it was to see a teacher in the school just like me".

As a teacher encountered bullying from students, in one incident the bullying was carried out by an entire class. This affected 'F' seriously, their anxiety levels shot up,

they started doubting themselves. The situation with the class got so bad that senior leadership had to intervene. After the incident was told to leave the school and look for another job. The school blatantly said they should give up teaching. Managed to get another teaching position. Has excellent success record with student achievements. But bullying incidents do occur especially with teenagers. At their recent school there was another incident where a student not someone 'F' taught started publicly making fun of 'F', mocking at every opportunity. Though the student was reprimanded by the head teacher, it did not stop. At this time, 'F' did act and reported the student to the Police, because the student refused to be stop. The police intervened, spoke with the parents and the situation was controlled. 'F' feels that it was important to take a stand before things escalated like their prior school.

'F' aspires to pursue a doctorate and has a drive to bring change in society. Got formally diagnosed in university, diagnosis pathways for some disabilities by dyspraxia were difficult. The Open University had offered better support with assessment process. 'F' pointed out the complications and hassles of paperwork demands while seeking disability support and has strong opinions of what is just and right. They were straight forward in their responses. Spoke candidly about their life experiences and vulnerabilities. They are passionate about teaching and take the responsibility of being a role model seriously. Has a deep understanding of education and pointed out faults in the present SEN system like lack of funding and trained personnel in schools. Had strong suggestions regarding disability policies and changes they would like to see in the future.

## 5.7 Case Seven: Participant 'G'

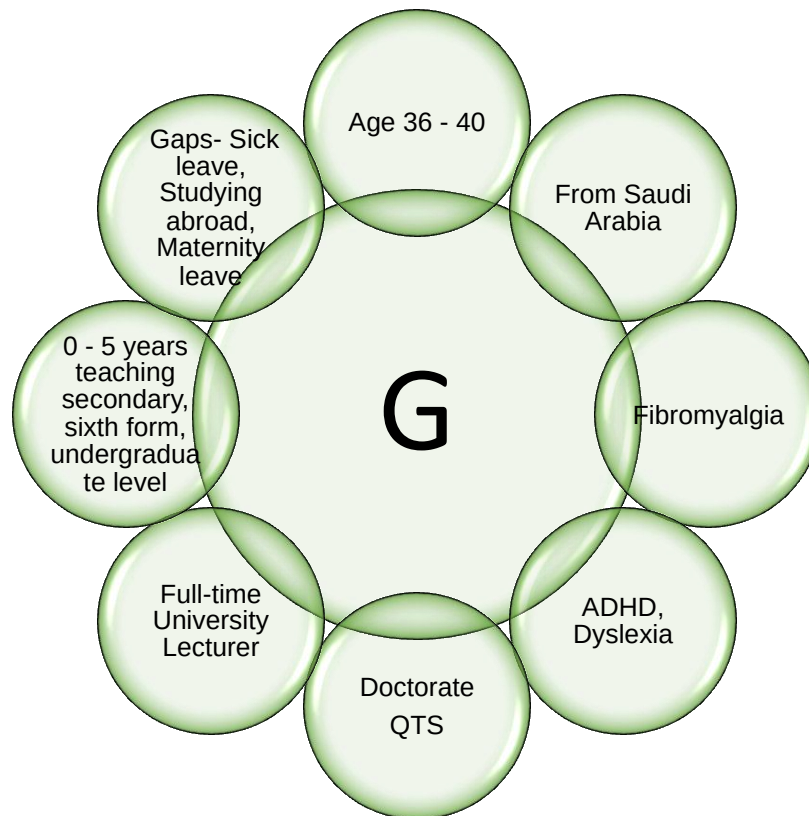


*Figure 19 Case Overview Participant G*

'G' reported growing up in a small village in Saudi in a large middle-income family. They were diagnosed when they were pursuing postgraduate and doctoral degrees in the UK. They are currently working as an academic in Saudi Arabia. Was an active child, loved to play with siblings. Happy memories of picnics in the mountains, playing with cousins and siblings. As a child they were very independent and liked to do everything very 'quick'. Loved going to school. Was good academically, very bright. When 'G' was small their mother had trouble coping with studies and taking care of the children because their father was working abroad. Was sent to live with their

grandmother. Though 'G' was good in studies, they took time to write, when their favourite teacher went on maternity leave and the new teacher would not give 'G' extra time to write, rebuking them in class. 'G' refused to go to school, their grandmother would hit them to make them go to school. Always struggled with reading on their own but could learn better if someone read to them. Though there was no formal diagnosis in place yet because 'G' required extra time to read and write, during exams their parents would request the school to allocate 'G' extra time. Sometimes the school accepted the request and provided extra time, sometimes they did not. 'G' reported that they were the brightest student in school, winning many awards which sometimes made other students bully them.

*Table 11 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant G*

|                                        |                                                       |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Location                               | Saudi Arabia                                          |
| Disability                             | Invisible disability Fibromyalgia<br>ADHD<br>Dyslexia |
| How long have you had disability?      | More than 15 years                                    |
| Age                                    | 36 - 40                                               |
| Educational Qualification              | Doctorate                                             |
| Qualified Teacher Status               | No                                                    |
| Place of employment                    | University                                            |
| Current job description                | University Lecturer                                   |
| Working hours                          | Full-time                                             |
| Subjects taught                        | Communication skills Learning and thinking skills     |
| Year groups taught                     | Secondary, sixth form and undergraduate               |
| Number of years of teaching experience | 0 - 5 years                                           |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | Yes                                                   |

|                                      |                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reasons for gap in employment?       | Sick leaves<br>Finding the right job<br>Studying abroad<br>Leave due to carer responsibilities |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier? | Yes                                                                                            |

Attended a larger school after their family relocated to a big city. A bullying incident by their teachers left them traumatised and disillusioned. 'G' had written a play to participate in a large national competition, the teachers changed important aspects of it, 'G' voiced that the changes were not in keeping with the theme of the competition. The teachers took offense to 'G' voicing their opinion against them, soon began a campaign of belittling and verbally abusing 'G'. They locked 'G' in a room and no student or teacher was allowed to intervene for hours. The incident affected 'G' deeply, they changed from a bright, active student to a dull, disinterested one. Requested their family to change the school, but the family refused because all the siblings attended that school. Rest of the time in the school, 'G' just kept their head down and completed their years. Their father did go and talk to the school administration regarding the incident, but nothing came off it.

'G' qualified for a medical program at university. Family arranged for a car and driver for daily commute to the university. 'G' struggled in university because all teaching and learning was completely in English. Struggle with reading writing continued, had trouble reading complicated biological terminology despite working very hard, found was not able to cope. Friends advised that if only they tried harder, which did not seem

to work. At the same time, they started feeling physical pain and fatigue, could not manage an entire day in university. Needing rest, they would try to find empty rooms, or go to the end of the classroom to lie down. Approached student advisors and medical support at university, either they were required to fill forms or given generic advice. Because of social and cultural norms, was advised that maybe they were not interested in studies and should get married instead. Family was perplexed by the change in them, 'G' had always been independent and active. The family did not understand the tiredness and exhaustion, the difficulty with academic work. 'G' approached the university course coordinator and was shockingly advised to drop out and get married. This caused more disillusioned and doubt whether medical was the right pathway for them. Dropped out of medical course and switched to humanities studies which they regret today.

When 'G' got an offer to do postgraduation abroad, family refused to let them go on their own. The cultural norms and rules of their country meant they could not travel abroad alone without a partner. So 'G' got married and travelled to the UK. Felt isolated, their spouse was not very supportive. Symptoms became worse, exhaustion and tiredness were persistent. Academically found it hard to cope. They were confused and did not understand what was causing the symptoms. Their diagnosis journey began with them approaching their local GP. The pressures at home with very unsupportive spouse and the physical challenges caused a meltdown and was hospitalised. Took a break and returned to Saudi to recuperate. Their marriage broke down, leaving them a single parent of a young child. Returned to the UK alone to complete their studies, leaving their young child with family. Received disability support



from the university after formal diagnosis in the form of technology and support worker. Often had to advocate for themselves. They had a change in supervision team in their doctoral studies. Because of their personal struggles the university asked them to leave the course. 'G' advocated until university complied and offered them a new supervisory team with adjustments. Has passed their Viva, is now back in Saudi. They are working on getting better disability rights in their country. They struggle financially as a single parent, but their family has been a strong support for them.

'G' brought a different perspective; the cultural norms and societal beliefs of their country complicated their educational aspirations. G's description of the experience of collective bullying by teachers was shocking, though I was aware of similar instances in my own home country. After the bullying incident 'G' felt like they transformed from a warrior to a survivor. I personally feel that 'G' is a warrior and fought their battles with lot of strength and personal conviction. Understanding and identifying their disabilities, getting appropriate medical help and medication has made lot of changes to 'G'. I found 'G' very forthcoming and eager to share their story. They spoke and gave deeply detailed accounts of the events of their life. They were accommodating of the time difference and very supportive of my study.

5.8 Case Eight: Participant ‘H’

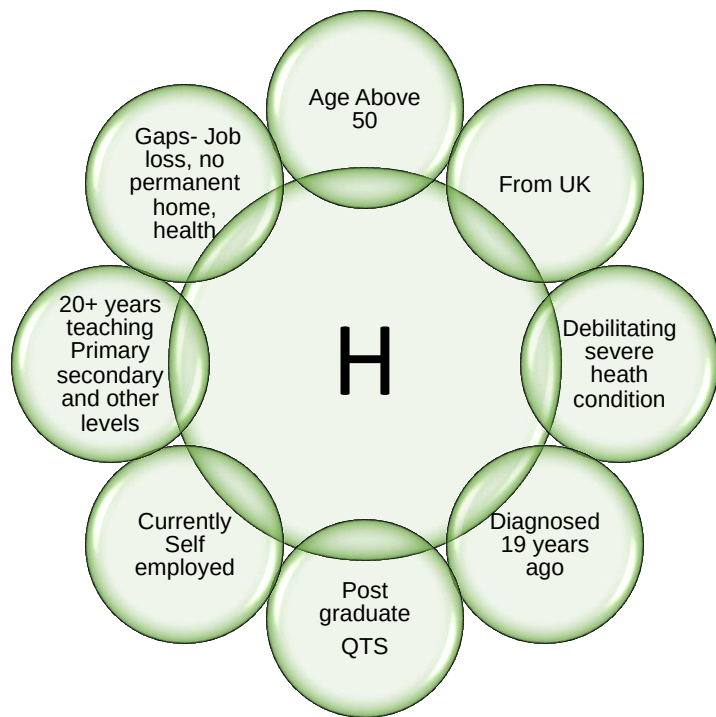


*Figure 20 Case Overview Participant H*

‘H’ was the only participant who sent in written responses to the interview questions. They were concerned about being recorded and maintaining anonymity. They believed strongly about the significance and importance of this study. Because their responses were typed as compared to the other participants whom I created a rapport with by meeting them four times and having conversations with them, it was challenging to analyse their responses.

*Table 12 Consolidated questionnaire responses for Participant H*

|                                   |                                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Location                          | United Kingdom                       |
| Disability                        | Debilitating severe health condition |
| How long have you had disability? | 19 years                             |
| Age                               | Above 50                             |

|                                        |                                                              |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Educational Qualification              | Postgraduate                                                 |
| Qualified Teacher Status               | Yes                                                          |
| Place of employment                    | Other- self employed                                         |
| Current job description                | Director                                                     |
| Working hours                          | Full-time                                                    |
| Subjects taught                        | Professional development                                     |
| Year groups taught                     | Other, have previously taught at Primary and Secondary level |
| Number of years of teaching experience | 20 plus years                                                |
| Do you have gaps in employment?        | Yes                                                          |
| Reasons for gap in employment?         | Recession<br>Job loss<br>No permanent home<br>Health         |
| Were you employed elsewhere earlier?   | Yes                                                          |

‘H’ is currently self-employed in UK. They reported growing up in a large low-income family. Their family worked long hours in low paid industries. Their family was focussed upon children’s education and getting them settled. ‘H’ was very close to their older sibling, mum and grandmother. They were an active, playful, friendly and talkative child. They recalled fun memories of playing with lots of toys and going out playing with neighbourhood children. They had a large extended family with lots of cousins who visited often. Their family was strict, children were not allowed to go visit friends’ homes. ‘H’ attended the same school their elder siblings attended, they enjoyed school and were a bright student. There were certain restrictions growing up, they could not do all the things they wanted like play football or climb fences.

'H' was considered a good student, a bit talkative in class. They had a slight speech defect in their childhood, they recall vividly the day they started speaking clearly. The family expected the children to focus on studies and not get distracted. The focus was that education will take you far so do not be lazy, do your best. 'H' was a fast learner and often helped other students. Puberty was emotionally hard for 'H' it affected their studies at one stage. They say they were more of a 'drifter' in secondary school, less comfortable than when in primary. There was a bit of bullying in secondary school.

'H' always wanted to pursue higher education. They attended a sixth form their elder sibling and another friend also attended. They loved playing netball and volleyball. No one in their family had ever been to university, for 'H' it was an opportunity to move out of the family home. Their health struggles started in their early twenties. The diagnosis of their health condition took seven years, the diagnosis came as a shock and broke their personal relationship. They mention that other members of their family, siblings and cousins, have also been diagnosed with the same health condition.

'H' struggled with academic pressures during graduation years, there was a lot of learning and a lot to read. Some subjects were very complicated to understand. In the third year at university 'H' struggled with difficult flatmates and sought support from a spiritual organisation. 'H' changed universities for their postgraduation. They had a very supportive study group and good peer support. 'H' reported that the behaviour of certain professors was very unsupportive when they sought extensions due to their

health condition. They chose the teaching profession because they liked learning, change and conversations and got to do all these three in teaching. They enjoyed teacher education there was new learning and an interesting research project. They did not like activities which were set up as highly competing with peers, they preferred more collaborative approaches.

“H’ already had a senior lecturer post and did some freelance work as well after completing teacher education. They experienced bullying from a line manager. They never revealed their health condition diagnosis while seeking work because they were sure that it would have lessened their chances of getting the role. Their employer referred them for workplace assessment after a sick leave. The workplace was advised to provide reasonable adjustments and to buy some equipment. ‘H’ reported that they felt unsupported when their line manager asked them to improve their sick leave record because it was affecting the departments leave numbers. ‘H’ was left feeling distressed because they had always put work first. They took a few days off decided to ultimately leave because of the psychological impact of the bullying. Though ‘H’ themselves did not take any legal action, they did contribute to giving evidence in a case against the line manager.

‘H’ says that they think about the decision every time whether they should disclose their diagnosis. They fear that people would judge and that they would not get the job. They also felt that their diagnosis is something private. ‘H’ was honest in their

responses. Their belief in the study and wanting to be part of this study despite reservations is highly appreciated by me.

## **Summary**

The current chapter includes an overview of each of the eight cases that constitute this multiple case study. I have included a description of the participants childhood, their schooling experiences, their further and higher education experiences, as well as teacher education and employment experiences. I have tried to provide a brief glimpse into each of the participant's narrative and reported experiences. There are many similarities and many differences in each narrative. Four of the participants were dyslexic, four were diagnosed with ADHD, two had a diagnosis of autism. Some participants have multiple diagnosis. The brief description provided within this chapter is my attempt to familiarize the reader with my participants as they recalled and explained their experiences. This also provides a basis for the next two chapters where I present an analysis of these narratives through the lens of the bioecological systems theory and the ICF.

## **6 Findings: Analysis of the participant experiences (Part 1)**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This study posed the following questions:

- (1) How have their early childhood, schooling and university experiences influenced disabled teachers' choice of profession?
- (2) How do disabled teachers describe their experiences within academic settings?
- (3) How do disabled teachers describe the critical incidents in their life that have influenced their disability experience and shaped their identities?
- (4) What were the barriers and enablers encountered in the process of becoming a disabled teacher?

The main aim was to explore narratives of disabled teachers highlighting the role their life experiences had on their choice of profession. The study intended to identify barriers disabled teachers experience in seeking employment. The study wanted to understand reasons disabled teachers had chosen the profession of teaching and explore the connection between their lived experiences and their choice of career. Qualitative data in the form of questionnaire, interview transcripts and critical incident forms were generated to build the data set. Found poems were created from participant transcripts. Themes were identified in the data set following the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) process (Braun and Clarke, 2020) guided by theoretical frameworks this research is built on. I have incorporated found poems in combination with quotes from participants into the chapter while describing identified themes. Identified themes are structured and defined using the five ecological systems/levels – the microsystem,

the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory

*Table 13 The themes identified using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory*

| <b>Bronfenbrenner system</b>                                | <b>Themes</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Microsystem (influence of immediate environments)           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family dynamics</li> <li>• Perspectives on Learning environments</li> </ul>                                                                                              |
| Mesosystem (influence of interacting multiple environments) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Me and my Disability</li> <li>• Me, my family and my learning environments</li> <li>• Me, my family and my disability</li> </ul>                                         |
| Exosystem (Factors beyond my control)                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disability employment schemes are a codswallop</li> <li>• My encounters with Ableism</li> <li>• I did not take legal action</li> <li>• I do make a difference</li> </ul> |
| Macrosystem (influence of social policies)                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment policies do not work</li> <li>• I availed of Disability support and funding</li> </ul>                                                                        |
| Chronosystem (suggestions for the future)                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I want them to know</li> <li>• My wish list for change in the future</li> <li>• Looking back at my life - I wish</li> </ul>                                              |



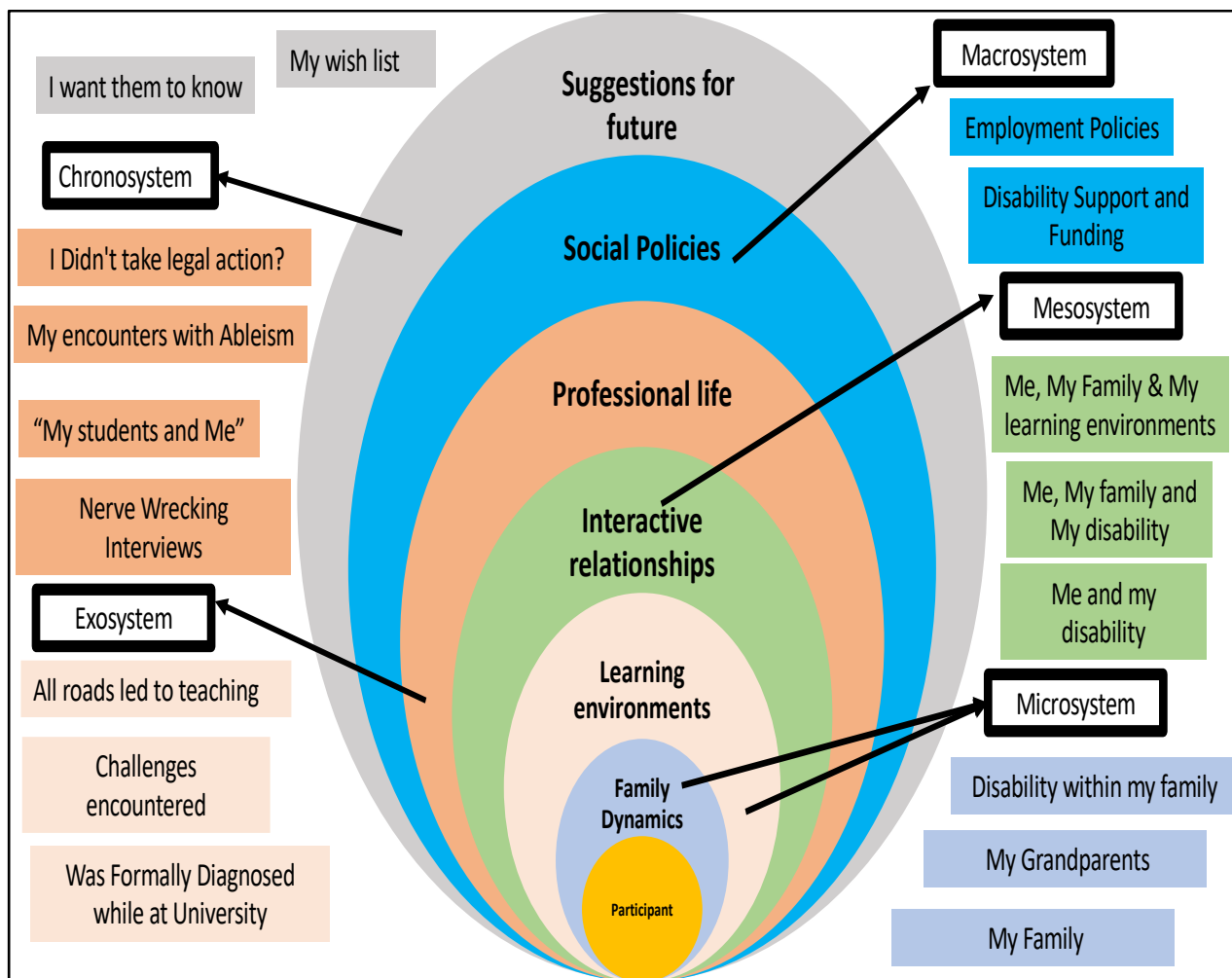


*Figure 21 Themes identified using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory*

The findings generated from analysing participants experiences are presented in two parts. In this chapter I discuss the findings within the proximal systems, the microsystem and the mesosystem. The primary reason I have split the findings chapter is for convenience, the chapter would be too long if findings for all ecosystems were included. Given the holistic nature of the bioecological systems theory, it is rather arbitrary how the chapters are split. Nevertheless, authors using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory have commonly made a distinction between proximal and distal systems (e.g., McLinden, 2017), where 'proximal' are situated close to the learner, and 'distal' are situated away from the learner.

## 6.2 Microsystem- “Influence of immediate environments”

According to the bioecological systems theory, family being the closest environment to the individual has a lot of direct influence on their development. This was very evident when participants spoke about their early childhood. The experiences participants shared are presented under the main theme ‘Family dynamics’ with subthemes, my family, my grandparents and disability within my family.

*Table 14 Themes identified in the Microsystem*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Family Dynamics:</b> Closest environment to the participant <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>My Family:</u> Influence of immediate family</li><li>• <u>My Grandparents:</u> Important role of Grandparents</li><li>• <u>Disability within my family:</u> History of disability within family</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Learning Environments Perspectives:</b> Educational experiences of participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>I struggled, had self-doubt:</u> Participants academic struggles, bullying experiences and gaps in their studies</li><li>• <u>Was formally diagnosed while at university:</u> Participants self-identified, their diagnosis journey was complicated</li><li>• <u>All roads led to teaching:</u> Though participants had different reasons for choosing teaching as a profession, they all agreed that it was the best decision.</li></ul> |

### 6.2.1 Family Dynamics

All eight participants grew up in a traditional middle-income family set up of mum, dad, and siblings. Conversations included family setup, parent’s professions, home life growing up, the current relationship they share with family members and holiday memories. Participants often smiled and laughed when they recalled fond childhood

memories. The childhood experiences shared by most participants paint a picture of nurtured secure childhood surrounded by family, extended family, and neighbourhood friends. The subthemes identified were my family, my grandparents and disability within my family.

#### **6.2.1.1 My family**

The role family environments have on the development of the child is well documented in research. Bronfenbrenner specifically mentions the influence of family being the closest and the strongest influence on a child's development. The data corroborates this fact with all participants acknowledging familial influence on their lives. The early developmental influence of a loving, nurturing environment with parents and siblings, the effect of religious beliefs of the family had on the participants was observed in the narratives. The impact these beliefs have on child development is also reflected in the experiences participants shared. Participants family setup and early childhood experiences are depicted in the following cluster of found poems.

#### **Poem 1 Early childhood memories**

##### **A**

Ripknickers dad nicknamed me  
Always running stumbling around things  
Working class family of four  
Mum, dad, brother and me  
Nurturing mum  
Engineer Dad, funnily never grew up always up to mischief  
Very close to grandparents even now  
Not much money

Yet doing things together  
Picnics  
Cups of soup in flask  
Lived in a Cul-de-sac,  
Young kids and parents around  
Wandering and playing with best friend few doors down

B

Lived in same house till eighteen  
Mum, dad, older brother and me  
Grandpa Grandma were quite close  
Still speak with grandma every couple of days

C

I'm oldest of three  
Every holiday, birthday  
Still get together  
Mum secretary  
Dad teacher  
Movies, Playdates with cousins  
No big vacations  
Just drives to the lake or nearby city  
Parents worked hard so we didn't want for school  
Mum n dad say "their investment is us...my siblings an me"  
Always felt comfortable with mum's sister, my aunt  
She did babysit us  
She is always there for me even now

D

Dad, mum, me and my sister  
Older brother wasn't close  
Can't remember him ever being there  
Moved a lot, dads' job  
Always considered odd new in class  
No extended family visited us  
Head in a book, read a lot  
Liked Imaginary play

Loved animals  
Creative doing craft

## E

Mum, dad and six siblings  
Different strict moral upbringing  
No television on Sunday  
No swearing  
No alcohol  
Church four times a week  
Grandma's blue-eyed favourite  
School holidays spent at grandma's house  
Or working in parent's factory

## F

Standard nuclear family  
Parents, younger brother and me  
Pretty stable lower middle class  
Family belief in ethics and being fair  
Went camping, good fun  
Very close to maternal grandparents  
Off and on saw Aunts. Uncles and cousins  
I was a bit awkward, bit stilted, stubborn child  
A fussy eater, non-sleeping baby a bit of a pain  
My family happily fill me on details  
Wasn't particularly outdoors  
Read books a lot, was largely independent

## G

Grew up in a small village  
middle class family  
My dad, mom, seven siblings  
Active, naughty, wanting to learn everything  
Picnics near mountains  
Remember hiking, playing with cousins all day

## H

Big family  
Worked in low paid industries  
I was active, playful, friendly, talkative  
Loved playing board games, sports with cousins  
Play with friends around our house  
Extended family visited often

Developmental influences gathered from analysing early childhood experiences of participants' support Bronfenbrenner's observations of familial influences. Direct influence of growing up in a nurturing environment where the child feels love, care and stability was observed in the narratives. Parents' professions as well as financial situation of the family had direct impact on participants' lives. For D constantly moving due to her fathers' employment meant they were always the new child in class, this led to a desperate need to 'fit in', please people and try not stand out. D attributed having trouble with attachments in relationships and avoiding making long-term friendships to those early childhood experiences and complicated relationship with their mother. E who has had a strict religious upbringing and was forced to work in their family business is not very close with their family anymore. Opposite to that it was observed in participants who lived in same location had more positive community interactions in their life, like long term friends in the neighbourhood, interactions with neighbours, a sense of belonging to community around them, kids playing together. B still has the same best friend from childhood, and (n=6) participants mentioned they are very close to their family even now.

Parents' financial situation affected leisure activities what type of vacations they took, which toys participants had, where the family shopped. Participants parents worked in

varied middle/low-income professions; participants reported that families would often spend money cautiously. The values and beliefs the participants held also reflected their familial influences, for F their deep focus in fairness and ethics in their own lives comes directly from their family beliefs. For C the feeling because their parents worked so hard to provide for them, often made them feel responsible being the eldest in the family.

Contact with extended family, interaction with cousins, visits and holidays spend with large extended family had strong role in participants childhood. Participants who had regular interactions with extended family shared feelings of attachment, lots of fun family memories and visits. Participants who did not have regular contact or at times no contact with extended family reported feeling isolated. Impact of tension within family due to relationships problems between parents had direct impact on participants as can be seen in case of B and D. There are long term effects like attachment issues in relationships, feelings of isolation. While sharing details about certain family dynamics like tensions between parents, not getting along with siblings or tension between extended family, it was observed that participants often paused, became pensive, at times teared up. Even after so many years recalling these details seem to have an emotional effect.

#### **6.2.1.2 My Grandparents**

A recurring aspect that was observed across participants' narratives was the influence grandparents had in the developmental years. In some cases, even in adulthood.

Seven participants spoke of the influence their grandparents had on them in childhood as well as adults. The support and carer roles that grandparents played in their lives is highlighted in the found poem cluster below.

Poem 2 Relationship with grandparents

A

Really lovely relationship with grandparents  
Quite unusual both sets got along very well  
Mum's dad, Grandpa sweetest guy  
Always could muck around them  
Still very close to both grandma's  
Mum's mum, my grandmother bless her  
Lent me money  
When I got pushed out of teaching  
And was completely broke

B

Mum's parents lived an hour away  
Spent a lot of time at their place  
Eating homemade chips grandma made  
Grandma always came to school concerts  
When I was in the band  
Remember a lot of love  
Close to dad's mum, my other grandma now  
Speak with her often now  
She's my closest family member now

C

My grandmother helped raise me  
Looked after me as a new-born  
When mum had to go back to work  
Grandmother always wanted me to be a teacher  
She and I were very close  
By the time I graduated



Grandmother had Alzheimer's  
Though she came, looked happy at my graduation  
She wouldn't remember it, I know  
That was really hard  
I was so proud  
Wanted to share that moment most with her  
Made me a bit sad inside

F

Maternal grandparent helped with our care  
Mum worked nights  
Dad worked long hours  
Grandparents been together long time very happy people  
That kind of stability good for a child  
Spent a lot of time with them  
Particularly close to my granddad  
Would drop in on the way from school  
He was willing to listen to me  
He would listen to stuff nobody was interested in really  
Chatting about weird, wonderful things  
Was really helpful for me

G

Mum was struggling with me  
I was lazy in the morning  
Took more effort with me  
Mum was studying you see  
Dad was away working in a different country  
Mum sent me to live with her family  
My grandmother took care of me  
My grandmother was tough  
She'd hit me...(sighs)  
Hit me until I go to the bus stop

As depicted in the cluster poem "Relationship with grandparents" participants spoke of happy times spent with grandparents. The role grandparents played in participants'

lives by taking custodial care, the support and encouragement participants' received from grandparents had deep influence on the participants' emotional development. . The emotional support grandparents' offered, especially for F, by just listening and allowing F to talk about any topic, when no one else would played a very important role in helping F to gain control over the stammer. The continuing support offered by grandparents even in adulthood, like financial help from their grandmother in case of A, and support for paternal grandmother in case of B shows the care and nurturing relationship grandparents had with the participant even later in life. Grandparents stepping in to take over as care givers when parents could not provide much needed stability and support for participants. In case of F who because of their stammer avoiding speaking in school. Though they were not diagnosed then, there were early signs of autistic monotropic interests in topics nobody else seemed interested in. For their granddad to just listen to F and allowing them to talk about topics of interest helped F build up confidence and feel supported. The role grandparents play in early childhood was not mentioned in any of the identified literature and can be topic for further research.

#### **6.2.1.3 Disability within my family**

The next sub-theme identified within family dynamics was the presence of disability in immediate family members. The participants were asked during the first interview if any of their family members had a disability. Except for one participant, seven reported that at least one member in their family had a disability, five reported that family members had same disability as themselves.

“Relation from mum’s side “is also dyslexic and they were quite severely dyslexic. And my grandmother used to do a lot of work with them, ..... in the end both my mom’s siblings were dyslexic so it’s a whole family thing” – ‘A’

“My sibling had learning disability, my parents had to manage that, and it was tough for them”- ‘B’

“My youngest sibling definitely had ADHD and attention problems and auditory processing problems. My grandmother had depression; my mom sometimes suffers depressive episodes. We don’t talk about it....” – ‘C’

“My dad was clearly autistic or Asperger’s. He was very, very clever. And we would sit in the shed and talk about steam engines” - ‘D’

“My dad has a stammer himself, which was very acute in childhood. So, he was aware of my own issues. And obviously, he had a strong desire to kind of help” - ‘F’

Disability in close family members had a direct effect on participants’ lives, for B the behavioural challenges of their sibling impacted home life a lot, their mum tried their best to shield B and keep them busy with extra classes. C mentioned that they felt responsible for protecting their younger sibling who had learning difficulties in school. C also mentioned that the one of the reasons they wanted to become a teacher was to be the kind of teacher their sibling never had. It was observed in the data that families never spoke about history of disability in the family, often participants shared that they learnt about this only after they had been diagnosed as adults. C was themselves diagnosed with depression and put on medication at the age of thirteen, their family did not mention the depression history in the family. C discovered this fact much later through family conversations. There could be various reasons for hiding or non-discussion regarding disability it could be stigma associated with these disabilities, denial, and non-acceptance of the fact that their child might also have similar challenges. There is no mention of this aspect in any of the identified literature. Reflecting on their childhood experiences, D spoke about spending hours discussing

steam engines with their father in his shed, because that was his special interest and no one else in their family would do so. Looking back at that experience, they suspect their father might have been undiagnosed autistic. F suspected that their grandfather might have had autistic traits as well, will monotropic interest in buggies (small cars).

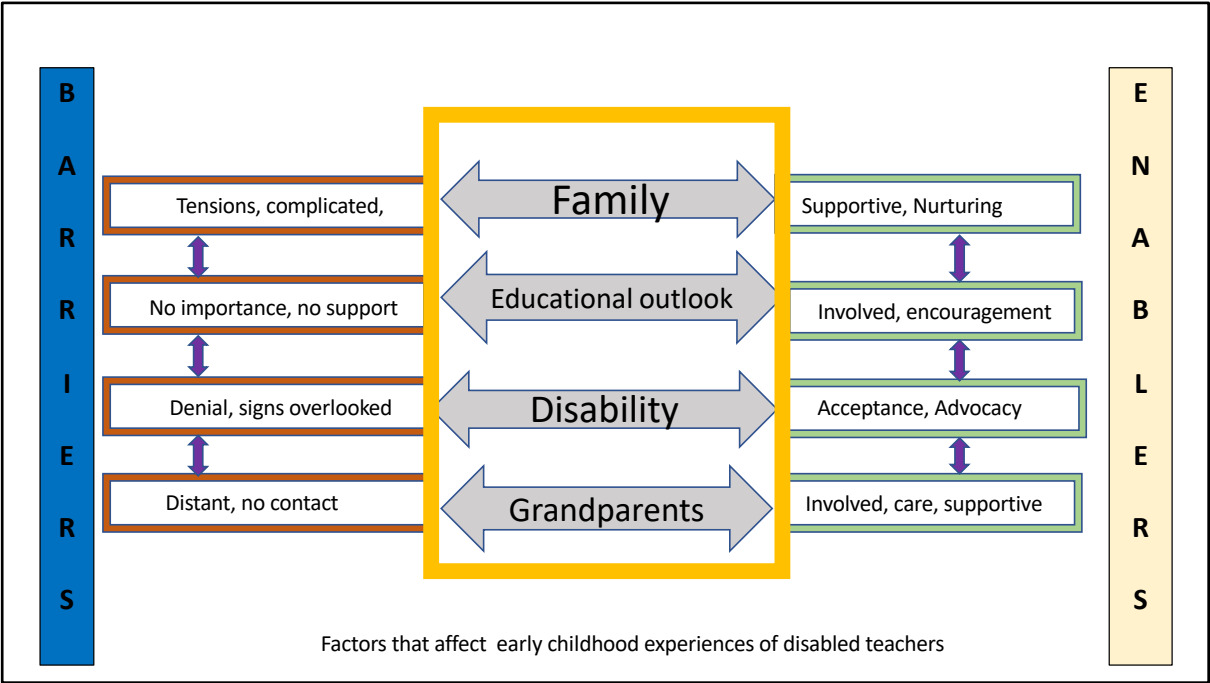


*Figure 22 Enablers and barriers in early childhood experiences*

Supportive and nurturing family environments, proactive involvement, encouragement to do well in educational pursuits, along with acceptance of disability and advocacy from the family to seek support for their child were identified as enablers in early family influence of my participants. Involvement and care from grandparents, support and time spent with grandparents was identified as an enabling influence of participant development. While tensions within the family, complicated family relationships, education not considered important, and lack of support in educational pursuits, along with denial in accepting participants disability and overlooking early signs were

identified as barriers to development. No relationship with extended family, especially non-involvement and no contact with grandparents was identified as barriers.

### **6.2.2 Perspectives on Learning Environments**

Learning environments collectively represents all schooling, further education, and higher education experiences of participants. The subthemes identified were “I struggled, had self-doubt”, “Was formally diagnosed while at University” and “All roads led me to teaching”. When asked about their earliest memories of school, some participants recalled their first time going to school, shared memories of that day.

#### *Poem 3 Memories of first day at school*

‘A’

Mum tells this story  
First day, happily went to school  
Didn't even look back  
Mum offended by that  
Had a Lovely day, came back  
Mum says had to go back tomorrow  
And again  
And keep going till I am 18  
Apparently,  
I burst out in tears then

‘B’

Patchy memories primary school  
Pretending  
Marching younger kids around  
Left right left  
Remember  
Just doing that

‘C’

Earliest memory  
Kindergarten  
Tell my teacher  
More than one time  
Exciting news,  
Aunt getting married  
Teacher annoyed,  
“Yeah, we get it, stop telling us that”

‘D’

Moved around a lot  
Always new, odd child  
First memory  
New school with swimming pool  
First day Swimming lesson  
Never been swimming freaking out  
I can’t swim the other kids can

‘F’

First day at school  
Lined up against the wall  
Mum clicks  
Typical school uniform picture  
Almost everybody has  
Reception teacher lovely  
Really nurturing to be fair

‘G’

First day at school  
Very excited  
Not scared at all  
Familiar with school  
Often visited there  
Elder siblings attended

They spoke of the activities they enjoyed doing in primary school, like playing in playhouses, or playing with plasticine. Looking back at that time some noticed that the curriculum during their primary years was much less structured as compared to today. It was evident from the narratives that challenges began early on when it came to formal learning environments. Participants spoke of academic challenges like difficulty in reading and writing, some spoke of pedagogical challenges and not liking the way certain subjects were taught. Seven participants reported experiences of bullying while at school, sometimes even by teachers. B who was the only participant with physical impairment reported challenges with access and infrastructures. Resolving access problems was ignored by school as well the university completely. Some participants though were able to do well academically they felt that other struggles especially their learning disabilities were overlooked because they did not fit the stereotypical notions. The first subtheme identified under learning environments was named “challenges I encountered”.

#### **6.2.2.1 “Challenges I encountered”**

While sharing the challenges they encountered within learning environments, participants reported academic struggles, being bullied by peers and at times by teachers. They shared that at times there were gaps in their studies due to health conditions or, not having requisite grades to move to the next level. At times the gap was also because the participant returned to higher education after being employed for some time to do a masters or doctorate.

#### 6.2.2.1.a I struggled, had self-doubt

Though participants in this study had been diagnosed as adults, they did share negative experiences of learning environments. Three dyslexic participants reported that they struggled throughout their education with reading and writing. They shared that the trauma they experienced made them feel ‘lesser’ and different from other students.

##### Poem 4 Trauma of spelling tests

Spelling tests primary school  
Remember not being happy  
Was a measure of how bad I was  
Remember  
Mum saying, “Go sit down, got to practice”  
Worked so hard  
Hours revising  
Yet  
One out of ten  
Zero out of ten  
Not happy I rebelled  
Why spend hours revising  
Why bother  
Yet  
Kept working so hard  
Got two out of ten  
Mum said, “That’s nice, that’s two more than last time”  
Not happy  
Was a measure of how bad I was

“Trauma of spelling tests” reflects how A was trying to work hard and yet not able to achieve well in the spelling tests. The effect of this on ‘A’s self-view has long term



consequences, leading to self-doubt. E recalled a similar experience captured in the found poem below

Poem 5 Special reading class

One day in primary school  
Called into a meeting  
Discuss issues around my reading

We didn't read books at home  
We had defined tasks around the household

At the meeting was asked to spell  
Remember just picking random letters  
I didn't know how to spell  
I was put in special reading class  
That meant I was different  
In special reading class  
We didn't really read, we only played  
Missed out on happenings in usual class  
Went back had no idea what they're talking about  
I was getting further and further behind

For E it is very clear that the special reading class was not helping, and it made them feel 'different' which later led to them being bullied in school. Unlike A who was supported in their studies by their mother, E had no support from home, their family did not give much importance to education. For E being put in special reading class resulted in lagging academically because they missed regular classroom activities. E eventually stopped attending these extra classes. This lack of adequate and proper support being available is mentioned in the Riddick (2003) study. D was sent away to boarding school after primary education.

Poem 6 Struggled in boarding school

Primary school didn't have too many sensory challenges

Mother managed my things better

Wasn't allowed a number of things

Followed healthy diet, rigid routines

Struggled in boarding school

Didn't know how to organise things

How to manage homework, filling timetable

Too much noise

Could cope with some not so much with others

Split second temperament

I shut down

As depicted in the found poem above, the change in environment and with their mother no longer taking care of them directly causes D to struggle, sensitivity to noises and change cause D to at times "shut down" or "react with a temper".

Poem 7 I struggled in exams

I struggled in school

With my dyslexia and stuff

Everyone else thought I should be getting A\* and 90%

When it came to exams I struggled

D struggled to do well in exams, they failed to understand the reasons for their failure. They were only able to understand why they struggled during examinations, when they were diagnosed with multiple impairments as an adult. The school and teachers did

not pick on the early signs that D had with her many struggles. The repercussions of early signs of disability not being identified resulted in participants struggling throughout their schooling, sixth form years and transitioned into university unaware of their disability. They had no support, no strategies to cope with the barriers their disabilities raised, and often led to self-doubt. There are also aspects of feeling of being abandoned by their mother with whom they have had a complicated relationship, which led to lifelong personal consequences.

'E' decided to stay at home to save money and attend local university. The academic struggles continued into university, with participants sharing feeling overwhelmed with academic expectations and work, depicted in "Just keep working, working, working". Social anxiety of trying to fit in and cope with university life, no one to talk and share their struggles and lack of support are all evident in participants' narratives. The frustration of not being able to do well, get adequate grades, or struggling to keep up is tangible in the narratives. The fact that signs were missed in school and that almost all the participants (n=7) ended up getting diagnosed as adults meant that they spent most of their formative academic years coping on their own and finding their own ways to manage their struggles within academia. This led to a lot of self-doubt and thinking that 'oh it's just me' 'I can't do well'. This was reported repeatedly by different participants. The feelings of self-doubt and overwhelming feeling of 'not being good enough' affected them the most. In the found poem crafted from 'A' university experience, the tangible and chaotic nature of trying to do their best is evident. The feeling of being lost, homesick, confusion, self-doubt is poignant.

Poem 8 Just keep working, working, working

Feeling very disorientated  
Sort of homesickness feeling  
No idea where rooms were  
Kind of out of sorts, bit unsettled  
Baffled, confused by work expected  
No idea how to write an essay  
No concept of how to do a presentation  
Or any of these kind of expectations at university  
Probably a typical dyslexic story  
Feeling everybody else understood  
The code  
How to do work, how to get the grades  
Didn't know what that code was  
Worked my ass off all the time  
Yet constant low grades  
Thinking, well, hang on, I've been working three times as hard!  
Frustration developed straightaway  
Pretty average at things, that's just who I am  
Embarrassed to admit my low grades  
Everyone else seemed to get higher grades

Get up at seven start working  
Working till about 10/11 at night  
Worked seven days a week  
Friends would be like  
Do you want to go into town?  
Do you want to go out for the night?  
Always say, I've got to get this essay done, I've got to do this and that  
There comes a point, you just get so frustrated with it  
Embarrassing stress meltdown  
Throwing my books around

At the beginning, it was just keep going and going and keep going kind of mentality.  
Sort of meltdown frustration point in the end

You do develop a lot of resilience  
When you've neurodiversity with dyslexia  
You have to just keep working your ass off to get anywhere in life  
Whether it's education or the workplace  
You just have to keep working, working, working

The participant shows resilience, constantly working long hours, giving up going out with friends yet failing to meet expectations, the comparison of their grades with others, affects their self-view, cause frustration and melt down. For A this continued throughout their undergraduate years. G became so overwhelmed with the academic pressures, unable to understand why they were always tired and in pain why they were not able to process information they read. They tried to get support from the university but did not get an adequate response.

*Poem 9 Just changed my major*

Feel this pressure on my shoulders  
My back aches  
Feel tired, exhausted all the time  
Just want to lie down all the time  
Go to the back of the class  
Just to lie down  
Friends supported once or twice  
Fed up, they give up on me  
They feel I have become negative  
Not active anymore  
My body, my soul, my mind on strike  
Sought help  
Was told nothing wrong with me  
Was told I was not interested in studies  
Was told I should get married instead  
Shocked

I withdrew from the course  
Felt I had no motivation left  
Ultimately left medical college  
Just changed my major  
And I left

The social and cultural background in this case also influenced the way university treated them. G ended up leaving the course and completely changing their major, which is a major regret in their life. Throughout this experience G kept blaming themselves and thinking that they were not intelligent enough or less capable. G who was diagnosed as having fibromyalgia as an adult, shared that when they did receive that diagnosis, they were so relieved to finally have a proper diagnosis. Self-doubt was observed consistently in participants. Because the participants in this study were not diagnosed while in school it was observed that despite evidence of them struggling academically, they did not receive any support from teachers or their schools. Transitioning to university life came with its own challenges, for B, the only participant with wheelchair, it was to find accessible accommodation, which was difficult they had to move six times in three years during undergrads. Their experience is depicted in the found poem below.

Poem 10 How can I get in? How can I get out?

Big building, lovely lifts  
University on top two floors, beautiful views  
Nice, good, wheelchair accessible, I applied  
Gap year surgery, deferred entry  
That year university changed location  
Now on cobbled street, atop hill steep

Really narrow, barely fit a bike steep  
Four storey Victorian building with one lift  
Not the building, I remembered!  
Hill was Yep, very steep  
Stop at an angle, I step up in wheelchair, call reception  
Somebody comes around, opens door, lets me in  
Conversations  
How can I get in? How can I get out?  
Ground floor student 'zone wasn't accessible at all  
Out the lift and you're pretty much straight at a door  
Pull first door, a second door metre afar  
Try pulling a door while holding another door and a wheelchair  
Just was strange, just very strange  
Email received, just so you know, the lift isn't working  
Okay, it's not working. So, what are you going to do?  
Are you going to change my lecture hall to the ground floor?  
No! the lifts not working  
We're just telli'ng you it's not working  
It was awful  
Every day

The universities offered no adjustments to B, their undergraduate years were entailed with many access barriers. Travelling was a major barrier as can be seen in the found poem "Grimy City" yet there is a sense of independence and pride for B.

Poem 11 Grimy city

Getting away from tiny town I grew up in moved to big city  
Finding accommodation was challenging, six in three years,  
looking for somewhere to settle in a bustling city.

On public transport had arguments with conductors.

On non-accessible routes took wheelchair on escalators.  
People would say, oh! you can't do that. You can't do that!  
Get out of my way, please! Well, I need to go, had to do that!  
Yeah, I just enjoyed that.

The ability to just get on a bus and go wherever I wanted to.  
Enjoyed challenging the staff. And that freedom too.  
Yeah, that was really nice.

That fast pace I liked because in my wheelchair I'm very fast .  
Get going, overtaking people, I'm just really fast.  
People see people at 'this' height and then you're at 'this' height.  
People didn't even see you, invisible to their line of sight.

Push, like 100 meters, hands are just black and sticky.  
A wheelchair user, in a dirty grimy city.

"Grimy city" highlights the experiences of commuting in a wheelchair, inaccessible stations, causing safety concern for B having to use escalators with a wheelchair. B highlighted the fact that wheelchair users because they are lower to line of sight of pedestrians, causes problems while commuting. Also, the fact that hands get grimy from pushing the wheelchair on roads. Other participants reported that transitioning to university life especially accommodations and getting along with roommates, the social aspect of it was at times stressful. Two of the participants opted to stay at home and attend university because they felt more comfortable being at home rather than moving away. The findings are presented under three sub themes Academic struggles, bullying experiences and gaps in studies. Another recurring observation in the data was that if participants were academically able to do even marginally well then early disability signs were often overlooked by the schools. Though this aspect is mentioned in studies like Grenier et al. (2014) and Burns & Bell (2010), it is suggested that there



is need to improve disability awareness measures in schools, it does not feature in other identified studies.

The struggles with coping with academic expectations and not having adequate peer support as well as the barriers caused by their disabilities acted cumulatively. Unsupportive behaviour from teachers/professors was repeatedly mentioned during university experiences, “sometimes, professors would come in and hand out some papers, read this, and we will discuss”. A mentioned that despite requesting professors to share any reading material for discussions in lectures to be shared beforehand, professors often ignored the requests repeatedly. The feedback on assignments would be harsh, negative and ‘pretty depressing’. G struggled with understanding why they were constantly tired, friends tried to encourage, but for G it felt more like pressure.

*Poem 12 Feels more like pressure to me*

Struggling, isn't easy to finish study  
Not able to complete, try to summarize key points  
Tired, distracted, spent too much time on details  
Feel like I am running with time

It's different for my friends  
They tell me,  
If I work harder  
They tell me I am clever,  
Please work harder

I am trying, I am working hard  
Don't know why I cannot meet  
'This potential'

Friends and teachers have of me  
I know they want to motivate me  
But it feels more like pressure to me

Despite the challenges participants show a lot of resilience and persistence in their education journeys. Some participants (N=2) had doctoral degrees, while one had just started their doctoral journey, and another was planning to do one soon. The participants reported that after their diagnosis and receiving disability support with learning skills, they began to do well academically as depicted in the following found poem from G.

Poem 13 A massive change

Made a fresh start  
Previously was told I am stubborn  
Previously was told I don't listen  
Language does affect  
Now was being told  
We have faith in you  
You are determined and resilient  
Positive support changed my life  
What massive change acceptance makes?  
What massive change positive feedback makes?  
Not just pointing out the negative  
Nice to hear the positives as well

The effect of positive support and use of positive language is depicted in the found poem above. This has implications for language used around disability and in communication. The next subtheme identified was bullying experienced by participants in their learning environments.

#### **6.2.2.1.b “I was bullied”**

This was a common experience across participants, they not only reported experiences of being bullied by peers, but often by teachers. The fact that in some cases blatant bullying was overlooked by teachers was disturbing for me, because I have experienced bullying throughout my life. Bullying by peers often was in the form of making fun of the participant, at times intimidating participants by pushing in the corridors, and in two cases physical aggression was reported by participants. The blatant forms of bullying reported during primary and secondary schooling experiences were tough to read. The more subtle and microaggression form of intimidation was reported later at university and employment phases. C reported microaggression in the form of comments from extended family members regarding their body type and choice of profession. A few found poems are presented in a cluster to highlight bullying experienced by participants.

#### *Poem 14 I was bullied*

‘A’

Was bullied quite badly  
Get picked on in school, if ‘different’  
Had Tourette’s  
Nodded my head a lot  
Blinked my eyes a lot  
They would mimic me  
Chant my name  
Steal stuff off me  
All sort of crappy stuff  
When complained,  
Teacher said, “sit down and do your work”  
Mom said, “that’s what kids do, ignore them, they’ll go away”

Didn't 'go away'  
Till I left school when seventeen

'B'

They would tip me  
In my wheelchair  
Just tipped me off  
I'd be lying there  
On the ground  
Me in my tipped wheelchair  
Teachers would walk by  
Just pass me by  
Never offered to help  
Never anything like that  
I'd be just sad  
That they haven't....  
Didn't even....

'D'

In secondary got sent to boarding school  
Got bullied first couple of days  
Made fun of, locked in the toilet  
I cried, hid, pretended it would go away  
Kind of breeds toxicity  
Either got to be strong  
Or make someone else weaker person  
Desperate to fit in  
I conformed, became one of the mean girls  
Used to do things to get a reaction  
Terrorized teachers, ruined lessons  
Got blamed for things I didn't do

'E'

Primary school wasn't enjoyable  
Bullied for being little bit special  
For wearing treatment eye patch under my glasses  
Secondary school learnt to survive

Remember someone older  
Just came up and hit me  
Fought back, never touched me again  
Became very tough  
Someone jumped and thumped me  
Had to fight back  
Ended with a black eye  
Became one of the cool kids

C was bullied in school because they often blurted out secrets and got in trouble and ostracised by peers. The bullying at school led to a thirteen-year-old C getting diagnosed with depression and anxiety. C was immediately put on anti-depression medication without trying other options which led to many complications into adulthood. The fact that bullying caused the depression and anxiety seemed to have been overlooked. A similar incident was recalled by D who attended boarding school. They got bullied because they revealed a secret when they had initially started boarding school. They also shared that they could not report the bullying because there was no pastoral care available. D reported that they were so desperate to fit in and that the environment in boarding school was so toxic that at times to save themselves they ended up becoming part of the bullies, picking on weaker students. This was a way of self-preservation on the part of the participant. Other participants also had similar experiences of being bullied by their peers and having to toughen up to defend themselves.

Besides bullying by peers, it was shocking that participants also shared experiences of getting bullied by teachers. G reported an incident depicted in the following found poem

Poem 15 All I did was give my opinion

Interschool competition  
Wrote a play  
Teachers took over the play  
Made changes  
I spoke out  
“Not in keeping with the theme”  
Found myself banished the next day  
Because “I put my nose in stuff I should not have”  
Got Punished  
Got screamed at  
They Insulted me  
They locked me up  
Left alone, I cried for six hours  
“No one was allowed to talk to me”  
“No one came to my aid”  
All I did was give my opinion

G was traumatised by this event. After this incident they were targeted at every opportunity with even a school prize taken away from them. The cultural and social influences are seen at play in this case, where the norm is that students are not supposed to contradict the teachers or voice their opinion. The fact that G had spoken up was looked down by the teachers and school as problematic. F recalled an incident from first grade, they specifically mentioned that that incident caused lifelong damaging effect on their self-confidence.

Poem 16 Teacher behaviour was disgraceful

Traumatic incident in first grade  
Teacher would not let me  
Answer my name for daily register  
Apparently other pupils complained to their parents  
That the teacher was being mean to me  
My parents confronted the school  
Nothing really happened  
The teacher's behaviour was disgraceful  
Worst thing to do to a stammerer  
Making them self-conscious

The age of the participant at the time, and behaviour of the teacher towards a child in primary class, the inaction of the school had long term effect on F. Despite the incident having taken place many years ago, F said this incident left a lasting effect on them.

Often resistance to the bullies came with repercussions. A reported a bullying incident they experienced during university years, where A reprimanded their roommates for making fun of a friend. The repercussion was that they were henceforth ostracised, and the roommates did not get them tickets to the year-end gala which they ended up missing and were really looking forward to. 'F' shared that because they were considered 'weird' no one in their dorm socialised with them and they felt very lonely. Subtle forms of microaggression were observed in the narratives relating to behaviours of teachers and friends at times. C recalled such an incident in primary school when upon complaining that another student was repeatedly poking and making fun of them, the teacher had replied, "just ignore". The bullying persisted and despite intervention

from C's parents, the school failed to take any action. The teachers' response was "well, you should have just moved the desk away". Other instances of microaggression from teachers in comments like "oh, you are almost there, if you only tried a bit harder" or "you should be doing better in the exam". When participants were struggling to cope with information overload and unable to cope with academic pressures and turn to their friends for support, the comments from friends "of you just need to work harder" was often hurtful. Or sometimes when participant shared that they could not go out because they were catching up with studies the comments from friends like "oh come on don't be you" or "come on get over yourself", affected the participants deeply. Such behaviours I have termed as microaggressions because they are done unknowingly unlike bullying which is intentional. I classed low expectations by teachers for the participants as microaggression similar to Andreou et al. (2021) and Lett et al. (2020). One particular incident was with A who loved Art in school but totally ruled out pursuing it because a teacher told them that if they became an artist, they would end up working in a McDonalds. Because the participants struggled in some academic subjects, teachers tended to have low expectations from them in those subjects because they excelled in others which in turn affected the participants' self-view.

Teachers ignored and did not believe the participants were being bullied which was also at times shocking, as depicted in earlier cluster of found poems "I was bullied". 'Teachers walking past the tipped wheelchair without offering any help or support, neither taking any action against the bullies. B attributes the behaviour to the fact that the school did not believe their ailment was real, long term. This is complicated with the fact that B had no parental support to advocate for their needs.



Poem 17 They thought I was lying

At 16, surgery left me with spinal cord injury  
Sometimes I could walk  
Sometimes would have to use crutches  
Most of the times I'd be in a wheelchair  
At school some people  
Were quite nasty, really mean  
Teachers thought I was lying  
They didn't believe me  
Science Classes would be on higher floors  
I requested  
I'm in a lot of pain  
I can't walk at all  
School refused accommodating  
They said 'oh you can't do science then'  
They said "here's a book, come sit in the office and learn science"  
I told them my condition is likely to remain the same  
It is not like I have broken an ankle and it will heal in a few weeks  
I offered to climb the stairs in my crutches  
They said, 'can't do that health and safety.'  
For my whole GCSE Science  
I just learnt science on my own from a book

The refusal by the school to provide adjustments is atrocious and unlawful. For B this creates barriers at multiple levels expecting them to manage own curricular needs from a book. The aspect of bullying and microaggression are mentioned in identified literature but fleetingly and with not much detail. These experiences have left a lasting impact on participants and caused irreparable damage to their self-image and confidence. This was evident from the hurt and pain in their voices while discussing these incidents.

### 6.2.2.1.c Gaps in Studies

Participants spoke of gaps in studies for various reasons, if they did not meet the entry grade requirements, or they went back for further studies after being employed for some time or they took a break to travel overseas, or they were pushed out of teaching and decided to pursue alternative courses or medical reasons. In one case the participant took an enforced break from studies because of lack of adequate disability support and disagreement with university.

“Well, actually with me the gap was at the end of my GCSEs. So, I didn't get enough GCSEs I needed to go on and do my A levels. So, the first year I was retaking my GCSEs. And I, (pauses) also did some weird qualification.”  
- ‘A’

“Essentially, I was told I was leaving school and going to join the family business. Which I did at the age of 15.”-‘E’

“Basically, the heartbreak came after I came out with a degree and really found myself unemployed, because I couldn't get work anywhere, so I would volunteer my services. Ended up doing a very short two month bookkeeping course. So, yeah, you're in that situation of trying to find alternative route'. So that's what I was doing. And while I was doing that trying to branch out into routes, I was taking up admin work in different places, including the school, so I changed direction”-‘F’

“Between the master's and PhD, I had a gap year gap. During my PhD I failed an exam, I had recently been diagnosed with fibromyalgia. The university said because of all the pressures I was feeling they think the good decision is to suspend or to stop the study. I tried to resist but I was told I am not being realistic, that I had weak language skills and weak research skills and 95% chance that I would fail. So, I took medical leave.”-‘G’

The gap of a year due to not meeting requisite grades made ‘A’ feel like they were not good at studies, for E dropping out of school to take care of family business, led to decades long gap in studies. In the case of F they were unable to find employment, so to find alternative routes, they would take up courses like accountancy to help get quick employment, volunteer their services. After graduating they did volunteer, did a

accountancy course got an admin job in a school. Decided they liked being in school did another degree in chemistry and completed teacher education.

Poem 18 This isn't the end

They said I need to stop, suspend PhD  
They said I have too many issues with my health  
They said wasn't ethical to continue  
I refused, I argued, I fought  
It's this system  
Not designed for people like me  
They said covert to MPhil not PhD  
They said we cannot support you anymore  
They said I have weak language  
They said my research skills were weak  
They said 95% chance I will fail  
Even my friends said, "accept it"  
"Not the end of the world"  
So, I took medical leave  
My friends gave me a farewell  
My friends gave me parting gifts  
I was thinking this isn't the end?  
I was only taking three months break  
I will be back  
This isn't the end!

When G was struggling during their doctoral studies, the university suggested they take a break. The language used by the university made G doubt themselves and they applied for medical leave. The behaviour of their friends depicted in the found poem "this isn't the end" is micro aggressive. The fact that they gave G a farewell with gift implying that this was an end of their doctorate while infact they were just taking a three-month break.

Two participants had gap of more than ten years, A because they had started working and went back to get a doctorate after many years in E because they had to stop their education to take care of family business and returned to academia later. The gaps taken due to lack of meeting grades to move to the next level only added to the participant self-doubt and low self-esteem.

#### **6.2.2.2 I was Formally Diagnosed while at university**

As mentioned earlier, participants reported those early signs of disability were missed during schooling. This was attributed mostly to the fact that they did not fit the stereotypical notions of disability like cannot sit still or not able to do academic work. Except three participants C diagnosed with depression at the age of 13, F was diagnosed as a stammerer in very early childhood and B with physical impairment from age of 16, though they were undiagnosed hearing impaired in one ear since birth. The remaining participants reported that they were formally diagnosed while they were in university. Some of the participants have multiple diagnosis, which happened when they were adults.

##### **6.2.2.2.a Self-Identified**

While sharing their experiences of formal diagnosis, all the participants reported that they self-identified and self-approached professionals for formal diagnosis. Two participants reported that they noticed they had similar signs when they were studying

about learning disabilities as part of their teacher education courses, three mentioned that they noticed they were struggling in university and decided to seek professional help. Two participants reported that family members were undergoing some training and pointed out to the participant that they had the signs which made them seek professional medical diagnostic services.

During this phase participants discussed with family members, which led to revelations of history of similar diagnosis in the family. A mentioned that when they discussed with their mom, they discovered that when they were very young, they did attend special classes for support with reading. D discovered that there was a history of depression in their family which was kept hidden and never talked about. After A self-identified and got diagnosed as dyslexic, they encouraged their younger sibling who had similar struggles to get support before starting university. A mentioned that their brother received dyslexia support through university unlike A who did not get any support because diagnosis came in their last year at university.

The fact that participants as adults had to self-approach for diagnosis was found in n=7 participants. The early signs were often overlooked during schooling by family and school mostly because participants did not exhibit stereotypical signs of disability, specifically not able to study or not able to sit still in class. Schools overlooked academic struggles if participants managed to survive academically and cope with studies. Participants when they were in university self-approached once they started recognising signs themselves when they were themselves learning about learning

disabilities or someone in their family pointed it out. Only D mentioned that a lecturer pointed out to them that they might have signs of dyslexia and should approach disability support at university.

This finding is unique as compared to existing literature that all participants had been diagnosed as adults and had self-identified. The recent publications by Brown (2021) and Wood et al. (2022) does include experiences of disabled academics who were diagnosed as adults though the diagnosis journey was not the focus and was not described in detail.

#### **6.2.2.2.b Diagnosis Journey**

The participants' diagnosis journey has been long, stressful and full of complications. In the case of B they had complete hearing loss in one ear since birth, that was ignored by parents and school captured in the cluster poem 'There is nothing wrong with you' (Poem 31). B self-approached when they were 16 and received formal diagnosis. (N=6) participants have more than one disability diagnosis. Their journey to get diagnosed was complicated, stressful and at times took many years.

Participants with multiple diagnosis reported that often they are unable to decipher which disability is causing the pain. Participants who got screened almost at the end of their university course were often advised that it was no use to seek any adjustments because they were already at the end of their course. Which meant that they later had

to seek formal diagnosis when they did require adjustments to be in place for employment or further studies. Some participants reported that costs of these screenings and limited NHS pathways led to lengthy waits and complications.

**Poem 19 There is nothing we can do**

‘A’

Pretty sure you are dyslexic  
Given the screening  
But as you are in fourth year  
No point trying to get you any help  
With DSA or anything like that  
Okay, great. (laughs) Cheers  
Ended up not really getting any help anyway

‘F’

During undergraduate struggles  
Talked to university disability support  
I qualified for absolutely nothing  
I wasn't even tested for anything  
Had a chat, was told,  
There is nothing we can do  
Slightly better approach  
At another university pursuing another degree  
They screened me for various things  
Slightly better investigation  
Same answer  
Still said nothing we can do  
I persisted  
Another university, postgraduate degree  
Did an autism screening  
This one was quicker  
And they were able to do something about it

A later faced a lot of discrimination at work and because they did not have a formal diagnosis in place. Participant G got diagnosed during her doctoral studies in the UK, there had been signs much early on during secondary and university years where they did try to get medical support but were ignored mainly due to social and cultural beliefs in their country. They not only got fully diagnosed with dyslexia, ADHD and fibromyalgia but received appropriate adjustment and support from university. The entire process did take many years which took their toll on G's personal life. Their marriage did not survive because their partner refused to be supportive of G.

*Poem 20 My healing journey*

My PhD journey  
Turned from learning to a healing journey  
Used this opportunity to fix all the busts  
I accepted support, I needed it  
Had positive impact  
Got diagnosed with fibromyalgia  
To be honest I was relieved  
At last, I had an answer  
Learnt new things, assessed everything  
Received specialist help  
Joined support group for fibromyalgia  
Connected with people across the globe  
We all had the same issue  
No one listened to us  
So, we listened to each other  
We supported each other  
My healing Journey had begun

Participants commented that while signs in schools were ignored or not picked up on, at university, they felt it was easy to at least approach disability support while at



university. Though often this approaching DSA did not lead to anything of importance at first until participant persisted. But often this was too late to get adjustments in place and ultimately not very helpful to the participants. Only (n=3) participants said that they did avail of disability support in terms of technological support, extensions in submissions and some disability tutor support while at university.

### **6.2.2.3 All roads led me to teaching**

The reasons why they had opted for being in the teaching profession varied for participants. C and H always wanted to become teachers very early on, A said they ended up trying it because a friend was interested initially, and they ended up loving teaching and being in the classroom. B mentioned that they always enjoyed teaching but had not thought of it as a career choice because they had never seen a teacher in a wheelchair. Later when they did not have financial strain they opted for teaching because they always liked teaching in the first place. E mentioned that they ended up teaching part time during university and ended up loving it and continued full time. F, and G mentioned they had no aspirations of becoming teachers, had turned to it by as a viable option. A, C and H selected university integrated undergraduate courses which provided them with a teaching qualification as well as a graduate degree. Another observation from the narratives was that some participants had not even considered teaching as a profession initially because they mentioned that they had not seen any disabled teachers. Especially B with physical impairment as well F with stammering problems mentioned that they ruled the profession out initially.

Poem 21 I laughed at it

‘F’

My GCSE chemistry teacher  
Suggested I might want to be a chemistry teacher  
I laughed at it  
That's never gonna happen  
I can barely string a sentence together  
You are expecting me to stand in front of a class  
To control a group of people  
It's never gonna happen  
That was “aspiration deficit” on my part

‘B’

I always wanted to be a teacher  
Couple of things stopped me  
My mobility issues  
I've never seen a teacher in a wheelchair  
Had a real drive to earn a lot of money  
Teacher's salary  
All that training to have next to no money  
Why go through that?  
Finished postgraduate degree  
Earned quite a lot of money  
Through motivational speaking, sponsorships, and things  
I started to realise; money isn't everything  
I started thinking well,  
Why not teaching?

C shared that they wanted to change things in education so that other people would not have to struggle the same way they did in school.

Poem 22 I wanted to change things for people like me

Threw myself into university  
Completely absorbed myself into my studies

You just start growing as a person  
You meet all these people  
Who have same values, same interests?  
It made me want to change things for people  
I started realising  
I didn't want people like me to go through school and struggle

The most important aspect was that two participants B and F initially ruled out teaching as a profession because they had never seen any disabled teachers like themselves growing up and hence thought it was not a career option for them. This highlights the importance of having disabled teachers as role models and representation of disabled employees in schools. The reasons for opting to be in the teaching profession were not consistent in all participants, they all ended in the profession for different reasons. But all eight agreed they enjoyed teaching and being in the classroom. Seven participants agreed that they felt that they acted as role models as disabled teachers, they felt they understood students, especially disabled students better and enjoyed teaching. There was a dimension of social justice and making a difference in the being in the teaching profession.

The participants were asked about their experiences of the QTS process during interviews. Many recollected barriers they encountered during the process. Some mentioned the amount of paperwork was staggering, difficulties encountered during practice teaching were recalled. E recalled that their lecturer qualification process took a very lengthy time because of their employment status. They were working on a

temporary contract for many years which affected the qualification process at times. Some participants mentioned that they faced barriers within practice teaching schools due to attitudes of teaching staff in those schools. F reported having trouble getting accepted into practice teaching schools because of their disability and felt discriminated against. They also mentioned that often they would have to point out that the schools were breaking the law by being discriminatory. Four participants reported that they did not get adequate support from teaching mentors.

Getting on to a teacher education course was a struggle for some participants, they found the interview process difficult to clear.

“It was, again a battle to get a place in a training course. And there was one I went to in, which was a school-based training, I did a whole thing of, and they gave me a reason for why they didn't give it to me, which didn't kind of tally with what actually happened. It wasn't ...it's felt like a pretext. And you could kind of get a feeling when you're doing interview when someone you can get a feeling when someone's not quite comfortable with you... is feeling awkward.”- F

Five participants reported that the paperwork during teacher education was exhausting. Three participants shared that the feedback provided on classroom observations was at times judgemental and not evidence based.

“There was a lot of a lot of paperwork, proving what you've done, which is not ideal. Do the other side is the same thing, which sometimes be the same thing with a performance review process is, but things tend to be heavily focused on individual observations. So individual high-pressure moments Which, which is quite an artificial environment, it doesn't replicate teaching day to day, doesn't really judge teaching date day, and some schools are moving away from it. But it's sometimes the things you're judged on, I feel are kind of not, not based on evidence”. -F

Research in this area highlights that disabled student teachers are reluctant to disclose their disability for fear of not getting job opportunities (Gilbert 1998), this concern was reported by two of my participants C and H who mentioned that they never disclosed their disabilities for fear of discrimination. Studies like Macleod & Cebula (2009) also mentioned that disabled student teachers especially those with hidden disabilities often were reluctant to disclose their disabilities. The study also mentioned struggles with access, paperwork and meeting adjustments was delayed. This is also corroborated in participants of this study. B who was the only participant with physical impairment specifically mentioned access issues and lack of disabled friendly toilets.

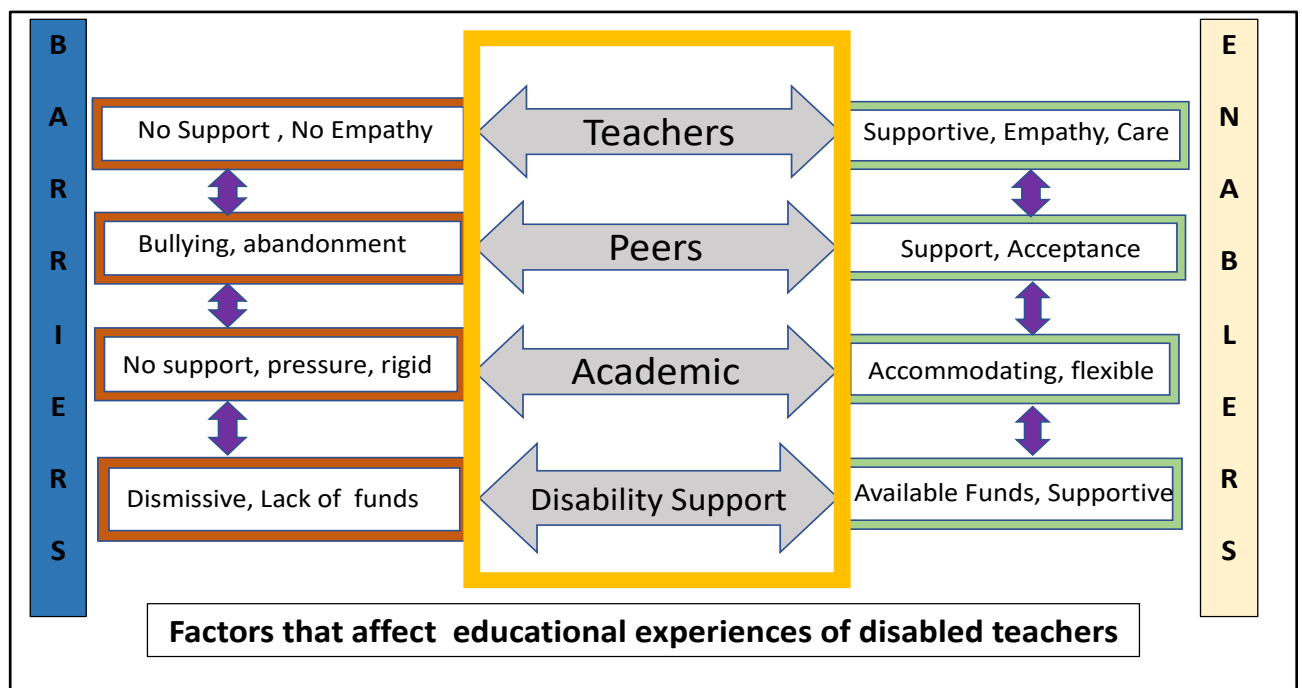


*Figure 23 Enablers and barriers in educational experiences*

When it came to teaching, supportive teachers who were caring and empathetic, peers who accepted the participants and were supportive of them, academic curriculum that

was accommodating and flexible were identified as enablers in the data. Disability support, which was easy to approach, availability of funds were enablers. Teachers who lacked empathy were unsupportive, peers who were bullies, or abandoned the participant were identified as barriers. Academic curriculum that was rigid, added a lot of pressure on the participant and unsupportive were barriers. As well as Dismissive disability support services, lack of funds were also identified as barriers.

### **6.3 Mesosystem – “Influence of interacting multiple environments “Interactive relationships**

The ecological model states that the mesosystem is interaction between two or more environments around the individual. These interactions between various environments have developmental influence on the individual. These interactions are explained by Bronfenbrenner as where the individual operated in more than one setting like school, and home, indirect interaction where link could be through another person, like medical professional, and there is communication between various environments like communication between school and parents. The multiple environments considered in this research are the family, the learning environments, and participants disability. The mesosystem which comprises links between two or more environments around the individual is actually a system of many microsystems (Härkönen, 2007). Mesosystem was defined as a layer that produces connections between individual microsystems, like the connection between school and parents or between parents and neighbourhood (Härkönen, 2007). The combined influences of these interactive relationships were identified in the data and are presented under the mesosystem. I

tried to structure the interactive relationships by considering influence of the disability on individual. These were identified as self-doubt experienced by participants, the coping strategies they utilized, and often the self-advocacy participants had to take on in order to overcome barriers. The analysis highlighted developmental influences of interactions between different microsystems like learning environments and family on the individual, especially in choice of school individuals attended and influence of familial outlook on education. The interactive influence of family on disability experience of the individual and its long-term effect on individual participants where early signs of disability were missed and how family supported participants by advocating on their behalf.

*Table 15 Themes identified in the Mesosystem*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Me and My Disability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Self-Doubt</u>: unaware of disability during schooling years led to participants doubting their abilities</li> <li>• <u>Coping Strategies</u>: participants used various coping mechanisms to deal with confusion and stress</li> <li>• <u>Self-Advocacy</u>- participants were often forced to advocate for themselves</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Me, My Family and My Learning Environments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Choice of Schools</u>: which school the participant attended was often decided by their family</li> <li>• <u>Family outlook towards education</u>: Education experiences were affected by how much importance family placed on education and academic expectations family had from the participant</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Me, My Family and My Disability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Early Signs were missed</u>: despite there being a history of disability within family early signs were missed</li> <li>• <u>Family support and advocacy</u>: after diagnosis participants did receive support from family as well as family often advocated for their child</li> </ul>                                  |

### **6.3.1 Me and my disability**

As mentioned earlier chapters, living with a disability is a complex multi-layered experience which has biological, psychological as well as social ramifications on the person. Every individual participant had their own journey in terms of understanding their disability, trying to cope with barriers the disability caused for them as well as trying to advocate for themselves every step of the way. In this theme I collated all the disability experiences shared by the participants in terms of self-doubt they had, the coping strategies they used and their self-advocacy.

#### **6.3.1.1 Self-doubt**

The participants with hidden disability (n=6) often had tendency of self-blaming which often resulted in them doubting their abilities. The tendency to just ignore signs by thinking “oh this is just the way I am”, “I can’t do well in studies because oh I am just me”. This often resulted in self-doubting own capabilities, especially since all the participants had received formal diagnosis as adults. In formative years this self-doubt had a huge impact on the way participants viewed themselves. Especially during schooling days, despite there being signs of their struggle with academic learning, their disabilities were not identified. This caused them to question themselves and view themselves as less than others. This self-doubt and lack of support to manage their learning disabilities, made coping with academic demands extremely difficult. Despite the participant working hard, they did not seem to achieve the grades they wanted to, which was a major reason for them to think less of their own abilities. The disability



experiences of participants is captured in the following cluster poem, in which the anguish experienced by participants is palpable.

Poem 23 I just knew I'm not normal

‘C’  
Loved going to school  
Socially, very awkward  
Over six feet always the tallest in class  
Shy  
Definitely had symptoms ADHD, anxiety  
Was big  
So, I got bullied  
That was no fun  
Never felt quote, unquote, normal  
Don't know what normal was  
I just knew I'm not normal  
‘G’  
Thought that I am not enough  
Not enough student  
Not working hard  
Maybe I'm stupid,  
Sometimes I blamed my culture  
My family  
My history  
They didn't prepare me well  
In my mind  
All my success in primary and secondary school  
It was all fake

For C though they enjoyed learning and were committed to being a good student, their experiences of bullying made them feel socially awkward making going to school difficult. This bullying later led to anxiety and depression for C. In the case of G they

blamed themselves for the difficulties they encountered academically. This categorizing themselves as a failure to do well led them to eventually struggle throughout their undergraduate and postgraduate years. A specifically reported that when they did begin to do well academically it was 'weird' for them, they had never done well in undergrads, struggled throughout school years and when they started receiving good grades in their postgrad, they doubted them at first assuming that the professors were just being nice. The long-term self -doubt A had developed led them to question whether they really were capable of getting good grades.

Poem 24 Annoyed on getting higher grades

Really weird, strange experience  
When started getting good grades  
Thought  
They're being nice to me  
Sounds daft  
Started getting cross  
Annoyed on getting high grades  
Took a while  
Reflecting  
Challenged my perception of myself  
As not very academic  
Someone not very bright  
Always pretty average

The effect of self-doubt is evident here, even when they are doing well. They tend to question the grades and deflect their achievement thinking that the grading is generous. The tendency to doubt own abilities affected the participants adversely in every aspect of their lives and for long time. The barriers their disabilities caused in

coping with academic tasks and being unaware that they had learning disabilities affected participants' self-view. The frustration of not able to excel, and lack of strategies to help them make academic studies manageable often led some participants to have meltdowns. Each participant had their own way of coping with the stress they experienced. In my participants, the impact of self-doubt and low esteem has long term consequences. It affects every aspect of individual participants lives. The self-doubt affected personal life aspect of participants, the self-view they held of themselves affecting close personal relationships.

*Poem 25 The fire spread everywhere*

I wanted my partner to fully know me  
I'm slow, try to avoid stressful discussions  
Don't like to be forced to do things  
If you put too much pressure on me  
I just stop and become like ice  
I won't communicate, won't participate, won't do anything  
My partner totally opposite  
Wanted everything to be done quick  
More practical, not emotional  
Won't support me  
Wanted to control me  
In my heart I knew  
Not the right person for me  
I don't know why I continued  
Scared of change?  
Maybe got used to being with them?  
Maybe was worried for our child?  
Delayed the decision as much as I could  
Issues, disagreements, control  
Asked family for help  
Instead of helping, fought amongst themselves

Felt like I had no voice  
Like the fire spread everywhere  
No way to stop it now, it's everywhere

G described the struggle they experienced adjusting to the demands their husband made of them, their marriage subsequently did not survive. F shared that they would like to settle down but finding a partner has been difficult. C similarly blamed themselves for relationship breakdowns. E mentions the trauma of their long-term relationship collapsing sent them down a spiral making their depression worse. The complete breakdown affected their work, their health, their relationship with their parents. Like the found poem mentions, “the fire spread everywhere”, it was observed that participants blamed themselves for their relationship issues even though that was not true. This self-blame observed in the data I feel is caused by the self-doubt and self-view participants had developed all their lives, this belief that they were the reason that relationships did not work. The self-doubt crept into every aspect of participants life, their self-view, their work, their family life, their social life.

#### **6.3.1.2 Coping strategies**

Each participant had their own ways of coping with stress caused by their disability. Because they were not diagnosed during schooling years, they managed the stress, confusion and often frustration caused by their academic struggles in their own ways. Some participants who were advised to ignore bullying as its part of life” reported that sometimes when they saw others especially younger kids getting bullied, they would often intervene and tell off the bullies. They often faced the repercussions of telling off

bullies. A said that often when they felt overloaded with information and stresses, they would just walk out and leave the classroom. A recalled the trauma caused when their best friend 'dumped' them to be part of the popular group. They had been friends since childhood and the sudden abandonment during teen years made the participant feel very lonely and sad. B, D and E said that they themselves started acting out, behaving badly to cope with the confusion and stress.

F reported that after the bullying incident by their first-grade teacher, they would often fake medical problems to go home. As an adult F often forced themselves to try and do things that were uncomfortable to overcome their communication limitations.

*Poem 26 Bit of Vain Hope*

Biggest problem  
When communicating is so utterly exhausting  
you haven't got time for anything else  
neither do the people listening to you

Worked at a place  
spoke to people, day in, day out  
Essentially force yourself do the things you're not so good at  
That's what I did

Began to get more control,  
more experience  
with the way  
people respond

Part of that is building credibility  
Push myself to do things not so good at, really enjoy it  
Some discrimination  
but you push yourself and you just do things

Process of confidence building,  
process of kind of learning where the line with society is?  
Wondered, is it possible?  
May have been bit of vain hope

F forced themselves to overcome communication barriers caused by stammering, to see how people responded to them, they wanted to build their confidence, and tried working at a place that required constant communication with strangers. They reported that it often felt that they did this in vain, causing them to often lose hope. G mentions that when the university asked them to take enforced medical leave for their PhD, they walked for hours without knowing where they were going because they felt so depressed and frustrated with the whole situation. Some participants reported that they just shut down and would daydream or create imaginary stories in their minds to escape the situation. Three participants reported that daydreaming, creating imaginary worlds and stories in their minds was their way to cope. Three participants reported they preferred their own company and avoided getting attached to any one group of friends. Two participants reported they preferred to make friends with other students who like them were considered 'weird' or 'different' to feel secure and cope with bullying. Some participants recalled that their behaviour in schools became challenging, they often misbehaved or had bursts of anger due to frustration and feeling ignored. B shared that his sibling who had adverse behavioural challenges was often violent at home, to escape the situation at home they took extra music classes to keep away. Music became their escape and a way to cope with the stress in their life. F mentioned that they would often make excuses of feeling unwell to get away from things and they feel that was their coping mechanism.

Poem 27 A coping mechanism

‘D’

Turned into this terrorist  
Ruined teacher’s classes  
End up sent out of class  
Spent most lessons sat outside  
Sometimes,  
Would just walk into a room  
Would get blamed for everything  
Reacted, didn’t really help myself  
Someone else spoke  
Teacher would say it was me  
I would explode  
No it wasn’t me

‘A’

Used to walk out of lesson  
It must have been  
A coping mechanism  
Always going to the school nurse  
Sent home unwell  
Exhausted, nauseous, dizzy  
Now looking back  
I know  
They were symptoms of visual stress

The biological reaction of nausea, exhaustion and dizziness because of visual stress also demonstrate the physical ramifications of participants disabilities which they had to cope with. F who has a stammer since childhood, spoke of therapy they received as a child where their therapist took them out in public places and pretended to have stammer so F can watch how people responded. When F was younger, they said they

would often worry about how they would be perceived by others, which in turn made them more self-conscious and anxious. F shared that they have had to 'harden themselves' as a management strategy of their stammer, kind of stop caring to do their job, which is their way to cope with their stammer.

Poem 28 Things quickly disintegrate

Have to harden yourself  
It's not very pleasant  
You kind of have to  
If you care too much  
How other people are gonna feel  
You're not gonna be able to speak  
You have to learn not to judge yourself  
Undermine that self-coping strategy  
Then things quickly disintegrate  
have to build themselves up again  
to kind of come across as normal  
work on a regular basis  
under the seams to kind of manage this ability

in the above found poem, F feels they need to steel themselves, harden themselves and not care about people's reactions to their stammer. For 'F' their stammer is something that they constantly need to work on, and every time they have bad experiences, they have to rebuild their confidence. In a way it is like masking their stammer, trying to hide it from people. Findings in this section substantially reinforces the focus of this research that the psychological aspect of living with an impairment and the consequence of it on the individual is prolific and long term



### 6.3.1.3 Self-Advocacy

In coping with barriers their disabilities posed, often it was observed in the narratives that the participants had to self-advocate. Whether it came to self-approaching disability services for screening, or to seek the support that they required. Many a times participants needed to make a case for themselves with universities when mitigating support requirements, having adjustments in place on time. This role of self-advocacy that the participants had to take on often took a toll on their lives in terms of delays for the support to be made available or time spent in mitigating with support services

“I'm going in September, I still haven't got my disabled student stuff set up, because you can't do it until you get your ..ummm.... like you've enrolled properly. So, I know my support won't be there in September. So, these are the issues. And I know that's it's hard how you get around that one, because you have to be a registered student to get support. But the support takes so long to set up my disabled student's stuff isn't set up. And it's probably not going to be set up till Christmas. So, for the first three months I'm going to email Student Services today and see what I can do about trying to sort it out”- D

“So, I was like, how can you have a disabled toilet without the proper disabled toilet facilities? So, I did end up talking to the facilities manager about it. Not while I was there? They did a year later”- B

“I was constantly getting people disbelieving that I could do things. And it was constantly time and time again...you can't do that. Well, yes! and it was constantly a case of proving you can do even basic things, just to be treated with respect.”-F

“I complained I spoke with the dean of school, wrote short email that I'm not satisfied about the treatment. I am now in fifth year of this PhD. I feel that I was discriminated against my health in this faculty and then they opened an investigation like they had to hold a meeting with me. The head of the school asked me what's going on. So, I spoke up I said this, this this and happened.” The participant had to hold their ground and get the support they required.-G

The frustration, stress and anxiety to constantly advocate to get access to disability service, fight bureaucracy, take a toll on participants well-being. It was observed in the

data that often they were huge delays to get provisions in place before course started, as D mentions that for three months into their course they did not have the equipment and services in place due to bureaucratic delays. For them to self-advocate at every step of the way to avail services due to them. The delay in provision of disability services and accommodations was common across participants. For B who is a wheelchair user, during teacher education they did not have access to disabled toilet facilities, they did have discussions regarding this with the university facilities management. Unfortunately for them these facilities were incorporated after they had completed their course. The constant need to advocate for their rights, and adjustments was exhausting for participants. This role of advocating is enforced upon the participants, and they often mentioned that it is tiresome, time-consuming and causes tremendous stress.

F pointed out that there is a lack of respect in way they are treated, people disbelieving in their ability to do basic things. F experienced judgmental bias regarding their capabilities and had often been frustrated and anguished having to prove them wrong. Frustrations with dealing with disability services, it was observed in the data caused lot of stress and anxiety to participants. The role of advocating was not particularly a choice but rather enforced on participants. This self-advocacy continues through the employment phase as well which is discussed in later sections where participants had to at times get into legal conflicts.

G who was an international student in UK and got formally diagnosed during their studies here. They felt that the university did not adequately support them, and they were forced to go on medical leave. But eventually G had to advocate to get heard and eventually received the support they needed from the university. Accessing disability services and delay in provision became an additional barrier to overcome for participants, which forced the role of self-advocacy on them. Findings on this aspect provide insight into participants struggle to access and get timely disability support.

### **6.3.2 Me, my family, and my learning environments**

The interaction between participants, their family and their education environments are explained in this section. The decisions parents made in terms which school the participants would attend, the support they provided the participants with education, at times participants reported parents often intervened with schools specially to report bullying of their child or schools invited parents for discussions when the participants had academics problems. These interactions between different factors had direct influence on participants lives.

#### **6.3.2.1 Choice of school**

The reasons for selecting a particular school for their child had various reasons, for primary/secondary schools the reasons were mostly proximity or if a sibling studied there, neighbourhood school, sometimes religious faith, personal wishes of the parents, reputation of the school. The choice of schools often was made by parents especially during initial schooling where the participants did not have much say. When

it came to higher education as well it was observed parents largely had a say. When it came to university choices, besides grades the family was found to help participants make decisions by visiting various universities to help them decide.

Poem 29 Schooling

‘A’

Primary

Whichever school was local  
particularly with infants and juniors  
Everyone in neighbourhood went to

Secondary

Where my elder sibling went

‘B’

Parents wanted me to go to private school

Quite fortunate

I was able to go there

secondary

Just the local school

‘C’

Local primary school to grade six

Private school from grade seven

Same school grade seven to grade 12

Private catholic school

Parents wanted me to attend

‘D’

Moved school all the time

Probably once a year

Always new odd child in class.

Sent to boarding school for secondary education

Moved to local sixth form after that

‘E’  
Primary school  
Was largely around proximity  
Probably about three or 400 metres  
From where we used to live at the time  
Secondary Education eight or nine miles away  
Used to get a bus  
All students in our area went there

The family played a major role in formative education experiences that participants received by choosing the schools they would attend. Selecting universities for undergraduate studies, families often accompanied participants to recce prospective universities. In some cases when parents could not grandparents stepped in to accompany participants to view prospective universities. Two participants opted to attend universities closer to home, while the rest went away from home to attend university. The participants selected the universities they attended based on their own choice and subjects they wanted to study.

Choice of school decisions parents made reflected their personal preferences for their child, proximity of the school, in some cases financial situation of the parents affected school choice. In the formative years participants did not have much say in which schools they attended; the choice of university was made by the participants.

### 6.3.2.2 Family outlook towards education

It was observed that in formative years of education especially primary and secondary schooling parental influence on educational experiences were in terms of academic expectations from the participants, how much importance family gave to education, the support family offered with academic struggles. Six participants reported that their families expected them to do well in studies and gave importance to education. One participant shared the family did not give much importance to education and other participants reported that their family did give importance to education but had no expectations that they do well in studies.

#### Poem 30 Never felt a lot of pressure

‘A’

Parents always valued me  
Us, my sibling as well  
Valued us for the things we did  
Don't think they saw academic ability to be above my ability  
I never felt a lot of pressure from them

B’

Expectation was that I do well  
and go to university  
I am first from my family  
To go to university

‘C’

Definitely education was  
Sort of job number one  
It wasn't like  
If you don't get an A, you can't come home  
It was, as long as you're always doing your best

Trying your best  
We love you no matter what  
But you always need to be giving forth a good effort  
Because this is important

‘F’  
“I wouldn’t say  
there was a target to be met  
But expected to work hard  
That’s perfect to have  
That ethic expected to study  
But the kind of expectation  
you must get this grade  
Was never an issue

For E their family gave more importance to family business, and education of children was not considered very important. Four participants reported that their parents especially mum or at times elder sibling helped them with their studies during primary and secondary school. When it came to expectation that participants go to university, Six participants reported that their family expected them to attend university, but they did not feel pressurised. ‘C’ reported that though their family did not put pressure for them to do well academically, they felt anxious and put pressure on themselves. This was also because being the eldest they felt their parents worked hard to provide for the family and the participant felt obligated to do well in studies and not let their parents down. Family outlook towards education and expectations did have an impact on participants.

### **6.3.3 Me, my family and my disability**

The interaction between the participant, their family and their disability are included in this section. The support or lack of support from their family, the advocacy some families had to do to get support for their child. Sometimes early signs were missed or overlooked by the family.

#### **6.3.3.1 Early signs were overlooked**

As mentioned earlier, most of the participants (n=6) had no diagnosis of any disability in their childhood, F had a diagnosis of stammering for which they received support while B who had a complete hearing impairment was not diagnosed till, they were 16. It was observed in the data that despite their being signs and a history of similar disabilities in the family, these early signs were not acted upon by the family.

“And to be honest, my mum often said she never knew either. She didn't think that was a problem, so I don't think it was so much of an issue. But it's interesting because, both my mums' siblings were dyslexic so it's a whole family thing, so it is always quite strange that my family didn't recognize it. Although, interestingly, my mum told me when I was older that when I was being diagnosed dyslexia, that I was in the special infant school, but I had no idea. And apparently, I used to have extra support for first speech and language as well, which makes sense thinking back, but I had no concept of that.”-A

A struggled with reading writing throughout their schooling, at times their mum helped them with studies. These signs were not picked on despite there being a history of dyslexia in the family. The participant's sibling was also diagnosed with it after A



received their own diagnosis. B reported a similar experience of family ignoring their hearing impairment.

**Poem 31 There's nothing wrong with you**

Mom didn't want anything wrong with me  
Said, "there's nothing wrong with you  
It's fine. Just carry on"  
Wasn't until I was 16  
I went to the doctors myself  
Told them haven't been able to hear much my whole life  
Okay, let's go get a hearing test

In this case the parent already had an elder child with severe behavioural challenges, which 'B' recalled was very difficult to manage for his family. Though it does not explain denying 'B' or getting any support for his hearing impairment. Though school was also aware of the problem, all they did was allowed 'B' to sit in the front during classes. For A and B the family for whatever reasons did not act on the early signs.

C who was diagnosed with depression at 13 never knew about the family history of depression because it was never discussed. The signs of depression in C were immediately recognised by their family who sought immediate support for C. C was put on depression medications from the age of 13. C regrets that other methods were never tried.

In participant G, the family sought religious interventions because of social and cultural norms. The family did not have knowledge and understanding of learning disabilities and tried to resolve the situation through religious interventions.

Poem 32 My family was confused

My situation  
Was confusing for my family  
My family took me to some religious people  
Read religious books  
They thought  
I may have evil eye  
Something bad happened to me  
They need to heal me”

Findings observe that families did show advocacy and active support to help participants cope with the situation in any way they can which is the next sub theme.

### **6.3.3.2 Family support and advocacy**

Even if early signs had been overlooked, families did offer a lot of support and at times advocated on behalf of their child, once formal diagnosis had been received. The support families offered varied from monetary support when participant needed, to offering help in person, or stepping in to mitigate situations and by just being there to offer support. ‘F’ reported that his parents had to stage a ‘sit in’ at the doctors to get the therapy the participant needed.

Poem 33 My parents staged a sit in at the GP

My parents staged a sit in at the GP  
Until they agreed to pay for speech therapy  
At that time  
You had to do it  
That was very helpful  
My dad acute stammerer himself  
Was aware of my issues  
Had a strong desire to help me  
Took me for speech therapy  
From when I was 9 till 17

D reported that when they had mobility issues due to Rheumatoid arthritis their sibling would drive them to university which was a 45 min drive. And that their mother was source of support and someone they can talk to about their Rheumatoid. When A was in financial trouble because of being pushed out of teaching, their grandmother offered to pay for the course they needed to do to get further employment. 'E' shared that their spouse was a constant support for them. B shared that their mom protected them from the stressful home situation because of elder siblings' behavioural challenges, by keeping them busy and taking them to extracurricular music classes. Family support and advocacy was reported by participants.

Poem 34 Mom tried to shield me

Mom tried to shield me  
Kept me very busy  
I played piano  
Big outlet for me  
Played the clarinet  
School finished at 3.30

Music group till 4.30  
School club till 5.30  
Mom picked me up  
Mom tried to keep me away from home

Parents mitigated with schools and tried to advocate for their child often when there were bullying situations, actively seeking support, and standing up for their child, (n=4) mentioned this fact. G mentioned that their parents stood strongly by them and supported them through bullying instances by teachers. They mentioned that their father went to the school to mitigate the situation. They further mentioned that when they had personal relationship problems their family stood by them, and their father accompanied them to UK to help with childcare and offer support during difficult time in their life.

In this chapter I have presented the themes and found poems for the proximal systems, the microsystem and the mesosystem. In the next chapter I shall present the findings of the distal systems, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem.

## **7 Findings - Analysis of participant experiences (Part 2)**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter included the findings within the proximal systems, the microsystem and the mesosystem. This chapter includes the findings within the distal systems, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem.

### **7.2 Exosystem – Professional life (Factors beyond my control)**

The ecological model states that in the exosystem the individual is indirectly influenced by external factors. Though these factors are beyond the individuals control they do have impact on their everyday professional experiences. The exosystem is composed of links between numerous environments where the individual is not directly an active participant in, yet these environments have influence of development like recruitment processes and policies, institutional climate, legal processes and laws. Under the main theme 'Professional life' comprised of all employment related experiences of the participants. From seeking employment, to working in academic environments, their experience of ableism withing academia, their interaction with students and how they resolved conflicts withing professional employment. This section begins with recruitment experiences. While talking about their recruitment experiences, five participants reported challenges with interviewing process, three participants had limited interviewing experience while one shared that they usually are good at interviews. The participants who reported that facing interviews was tough mostly

spoke of anxiety, difficulty recalling details in spur of the moment, processing under stress, not understanding the expectations during interviews, at times explicit prejudice and discrimination they encounter within interview situations because of their disability.

*Table 16 Themes Identified in the Exosystem*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Recruitment experiences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Nerve wrecking interviews:</u> for participants interviews became barriers to getting employment, they were often stressful and blatantly discriminatory</li> <li>• <u>Disability employment schemes are a codswallop:</u> The schemes did not seem to have any positive effect on the recruitment experiences of participants</li> </ul> |
| <b>My students and me</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>My disability became my advantage:</u> participants feel that their disability experiences became an advantage in their teaching</li> <li>• <u>You truly make a difference:</u> participants stressed on the positive difference they made in their students' lives</li> </ul>                                                                 |
| <b>My encounters with Ableism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Prevalence of toxic work environment:</u> disabled teachers encounter frequent ableist behaviours from head teachers, colleagues</li> <li>• <u>Precarious employment:</u> had serious effect not only on the employment history, but also on the personal aspirations of the participants</li> </ul>                                   |
| <b>I did not take legal action</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Teacher Unions were useless:</u> lack of support in mitigating employment disputes from unions</li> <li>• <u>Did not have the energy to fight:</u> Participants often did not have the financial resources or the energy to pursue legal battles</li> </ul>                                                                           |

### 7.2.1 Recruitment experiences

The participants reported that they usually searched for employment opportunities on government websites, or on the internet. Participants with learning disabilities mentioned that paperwork during the application process and written work was difficult to manage. The recruitment experiences are presented in two sub themes beginning with nerve wracking interviewing experiences

### 7.2.1.1 Nerve wracking interviews

#### Poem 35 Nerve Wracking Interviews

'A'

Two-fold struggle.

Application forms. Lot of written work

Personal statements, two sides of A4.

Quite terrible.

Didn't know how to do better

Nerve wracking, anxious, nervous interview situation.

Brain wasn't really processing.

Blurt out an answer, no relation to what had been asked

Interviewer thinks, "hmmm, clearly they don't understand".

Question asked, "how do I create a safe environment for the children I work with?"

Challenges with words and language; heard the word 'environment',

instantly thought physical buildings

It was ridiculous,

Obviously didn't get the job.

People don't understand your diversity, just sit there and watch.

Think clearly doesn't know the job, doesn't know what they are doing.

Good interview, interviewer understood me as a dyslexic person.

Later found out they were also dyslexic

Made sure could say what I knew, tried to get information out of me.

Real barrier for a lot of people with dyslexia is getting through the interview process.

'E'

My first interview wasn't very good at all

Pretty much hit by two things

One

I was still learning about own disability

Two

I hadn't ever had a formal interview  
Lack of adjustments  
Processing under stress  
Trying to remember  
It was very strange

'D'  
Couple interviews recently,  
Those I didn't get  
Found quite hard to present  
Timescale important than actual content  
Just five minutes didn't finish on time,  
Presentation had so much content

Find hard to recall and write down these four letter things,  
What did you do, your experience, that kind of thing.  
It sounds lazy, I'm really not!  
Really struggle with doing that.  
Read all research, legislation, prepare everything,  
Can't pull out certain things. back through my brain,  
Never understand what they want from you in an interview.  
Overshare, even before I apply,  
Stop telling everyone everything  
Need to counsel self.  
Just tick the box,  
If it comes up, only then tell.

Lack of feedback was often mentioned, though the participant felt they had done well in the interview, they did not get the job neither were they provided with any feedback.

The participant with learning disabilities reported that they often misunderstood the questions and ended up giving the wrong answer. The interviewers often interpreted this as incompetence, rejecting the participant consequently. The expectations from presentations to be made as part of interview process was unclear. Often interviews



became the barriers to getting employment. Participants with learning disabilities and communication barriers reported that they were unable to secure jobs for long periods of time and often ended up finding temporary work, like supply teaching or other part time jobs. Two participants mentioned that disability employment schemes are not helpful. E attributed being at the same workplace on contractual basis for many years, because recruitment interviews were a barrier for them.

#### **7.2.1.2 Disability employment schemes are a codswallop**

Often participants had to self-advocate to get an interview in the first place. Three participants reported that disability confident employment schemes often do not even guarantee an interview, the participant had to call and question the employer only them to be put on the interview list. D shared that they have not once got an interview based on the guaranteed interview scheme. They have always had to call or email to even get called in for an interview. Often the emails and calls were ignored, and participants never got any reply.

#### *Poem 36 Disability confident employment things a codswallop*

Guaranteed interview,  
Ticked the box  
Not once did I get an interview  
Emailed back, meet the criteria,  
Can you explain that?  
Disability confident employment things a codswallop  
Didn't get shortlisted called them up  
Complained  
They apologised

Will put you into the pile  
Then job got put on hold  
Didn't even get to interview stage.

In terms of adjustments within interviews, E shared that they had requested set of questions prior to the interview because of their learning disability, which the employer did comply and send the questions prior to the interview. But on the day of the interview a totally different set of questions were asked and when inquired the participant received no rationale or explanation. Participants (n=5) mentioned that they often contemplated whether to disclose their disability prior to interviewing, because of their previous experiences of not even getting called for an interview. D shared that they often overshared or called up to check whether the employer would consider someone with their disability and was advised against doing so. Often participants reported it made them feel angry and left feeling 'why should I have to hide?'.

Poem 37 Regarding disability employment schemes

I've applied for jobs in institutions  
Where they've had the Disability Employment scheme  
Supposed to guarantee an interview  
As long as you cover all criteria  
Applied to so many jobs  
Never ever get an interview

A mentioned that interviews never went well for them, hence they had to join an agency to start getting supply teaching work. They were fresh out of university and just been

told that they had dyslexia. When asked if they had disclosed during the application process, they mentioned that:

“I don't think at that time, I would have perceived it as a disability or perceived any reason to disclose it. Yeah, cuz that was sort of shortly after I pretty much just been told, yeah, you're probably dyslexic when I was at university, but not much we could do about it. So, I didn't really see it so much as a thing or, you know, I don't think I especially didn't see as a disability”.- A

E recalled a recent interviewing experience where because of their dyslexia they had requested for list of questions in writing, but on the day an entirely different set of questions were asked during the interview, which also included a time-based task which was not even mentioned earlier. E did not get that job. Another instance E was told that it was an informal interview a relaxed chat, which turned out to be a full-on host of questions. Again, E did not get that job. E shared that both times they never challenged after the interviews were done. Five participants preferred to disclose their disability during recruitment once they had received formal diagnosis while three participants reported they preferred not to. In case of 'C' because it is not mandatory in their country to reveal diagnosis, G because they had only recently found out and were already employed and H preferred not to disclose. F said that they preferred to stay in a job for long period of time because it is 'less hassle'. They have done forty applications for teaching positions of which they reached interview stage for only ten. Of all the participants F had the most difficult interviewing experiences because of their visible stammer more than their invisible disabilities. F reported experiences of blatant discrimination and prejudice within interview settings.

Poem 38 Explicit precedent explicit prejudice

Societal ignorance about my condition; Snap judgments  
Explicit precedent explicit prejudice  
Interview walking around the store with a manager  
At the end, I can't give you the job.  
You won't be able to communicate with your colleagues.  
Well, I've been having this conversation with you the whole time.  
It was just outrageous.

There was someone who actually sat in front of me looks at me and says,  
Perfect CV, Perfect for the job, brilliant, intelligent,  
would employ you, but..  
You stammer, won't manage phones.  
Never discussed about managing phones at all.  
Clear snap judgement.  
Desperate for a job, humiliated myself by not challenging.

Teaching interview, question deliberately prejudicial,  
Kids wouldn't be able to handle a stammering teacher.  
Pointed out prejudicial by law, got an apology from the school, no job.  
Suspect others held similar views, clever enough not to share,  
Sense someone testing second view of you, can kind of tell.  
Recruitment set-up reinforces bias against non-able bodied.  
My confidence of people taking me on, giving me a chance is not particularly high.

F reported at times they were so desperate for a job they did not challenge discriminatory behaviours. At times when they did point out that the behaviour was prejudicial or broke the law, F would receive an apology but not the job. They shared that interviewing was difficult for them and often they could sense the interviewer's discomfort. The recruitment experiences of my participants were full of barriers in terms of lack of adjustment, the disability employment policies did not seem to make any

impact. The recruitment experiences of my participants have made them weary of the recruitment process, often lack of feedback and no explanation as why they did not get the job left them with more self-doubt. In the next section I move on the teaching experiences of my participants.

### **7.2.2 Me and my Students**

During the third interview participants spoke about their teaching experiences especially about how they felt about being in the classroom and teaching. Participants spoke of how comfortable they felt in the classroom with students. Participants had varied experiences of teaching at different levels.

“I've always been more comfortable in the classroom with the kids because kids don't judge you”- ‘A’

“Absolutely belong in the classroom, you get to create 'your classroom climate, and your kids are there. They don't know hate” – ‘C’.

C reported they never felt they ‘belonged’ they tried to ‘fit in’ but they stressed very strongly that they always felt they belonged in the classroom. The two sub themes identified were “my disability became my advantage” and “you truly make a difference”.

#### **7.2.2.1 My disability became my advantage**

The experience participants had acquired navigating barriers during their academic studies, recruitment, even in everyday life became an advantage when it came to

understanding their students. Participants repeatedly reported that because they processed information differently it became an advantage for them in their teaching.

*Poem 39 Being a Dyslexia Tutor is Incredible*

To become a schoolteacher  
Taught to teach rote  
Like a conveyor belt  
Taught, do this, this  
Children will learn this and this  
Classic banking system approach  
How we were taught to teach  
Didn't know any different  
Few times when challenged  
Instantly told not doing right  
You are incompetent,  
Pressured to teach a certain way  
Pressured to be a certain way  
Freedom as dyslexia tutor incredible  
First time learnt how to teach properly  
My brain works weirdly  
Like doing things weirdly  
Can sit with bunch of play bricks  
Teach students essay planning tricks  
Draw stupid pictures, silly animation, to help memorization  
Incredibly liberating realization  
Of other, better ways to teach  
Not just because students deserve that truly  
This way we are teaching for students really.

Another aspect of being a disabled teacher was about being a role model for their students. B reported that they did not even know that teaching was a career option initially because they themselves have never seen a teacher on a wheelchair. They felt

that it was important to show students that “they’re able to achieve anything, whatever happens you can overcome it and do amazing things”. Creating a safe environment in the classroom was shared by participants, classroom as safe places for their students to feel that they belong and comfortable to share anything.

Poem 40 I am a role model

‘D’

As a disabled teacher

I’m role model

To show children that they can achieve whatever they want

To show teachers

that children shouldn’t be signed off just because they’ve ADHD

I’m an advocate

I’m very child centred

If there was a problem with the way they were learning or doing something

I observe things

Pick up stuff like that

I would be able to say, look,

This is what would help them

I am very good at finding solutions

‘E’

Do things differently in my teaching

Think of things very differently

Set up things very, very different

Separate away homogenous processes from more cognitive

Homogenous processes something like sticking a cherry on a cake

Anybody can learn that

What has value to me

How people can understand

How they understand what they’re doing

Why they’re doing it

That has so much more value to me

Whether they understand limitations of what they're doing  
That comes from my dyslexia  
I understand disabled students  
I understand international students  
Most of my students are international  
Don't know whether or not they've been assessed for any disability  
Learning a second language similar to being dyslexic  
I use the same approach for them  
Except for translation aspects for them  
As they do for somebody dyslexic  
or has other communication needs

This understanding the students struggles and able to offer alternative ways to work around their problems, came through their own experiences. So, their disability which was a disadvantage at times during their own academic studies, now helped them understand their students' struggles and pick up on them earlier. Also because of their own experiences during schooling and in academia in general, the participants reported that they understood the student struggles better.

#### **7.2.2.2 I truly make a difference**

Another aspect that was identified from participants teaching experiences, was that their students often felt it was easy to discuss personal struggles with the participants because they 'understood'. 'A' while discussing about their students mentioned, "I was wondering, and debating whether to share my own experiences, being dyslexic with the students. And then I just started doing it. And I always do. And I think they've often said various occasions, you know, it's, it's good, because you get it. And I like the fact



I can talk to you about things that sounds dumb and stupid, and you get it, there's no, you know, and I think being able to share my experience really works as well".

Poem 41 I understand students

'A'

Shared strategies  
I used to manage my own dyslexia  
Students found that very useful  
Show them the notebooks I used to use  
This was quite nice to do  
They change and adapt things  
Choose what works for them  
I think that works well

'D'

As a Special needs teacher  
Able to identify struggling students  
Help with strategies  
Especially children with ADHD  
Attribute this mainly to own experiences  
Can spot things quite quickly  
Good at like building relationships with children  
Good success with severely anxious children  
Been out of school, really like school phobic  
Able to build a relationship with them very quickly  
Get them back into school  
Actually just listening to them  
Trying to look at it from different sides  
That's definitely my strength  
My ability to build relationships and work with children

'F'

There's a certain amount of empathy  
That you have for people  
Who have the same similar condition

Which is difficult to have  
If you've not been in that position  
Sometimes I've higher expectations of them  
The key is understanding  
Sometimes understand each other on a different level

F makes a point about misconceptions and stereotypes that exist around disability labels, and that at times it is just about trying to understand different point of views.

Poem 42 The narrative around autistic people

One thing I find interesting  
The narrative around autistic people  
Not having sufficient empathy  
Not understanding people  
The key is understanding neurotypical people  
Autistic people understand each other quite well  
Quite nice experiences  
Did some time in the SEN room during lockdown  
Just got that nonverbal understanding with a child  
About what's good, what's going on  
Expert in the room clueless to it

Similar experiences were reported by G who stressed on connecting with students, having open channels of communication and empathy. They also stressed that sharing with students their own struggles helped create a 'human bond' with their students.

“Even though my teaching experience didn't end on a positive note at the end, I absolutely loved everything I learned from working with those children. And I know I was really good at building relationships and helping

children with anxiety access learning. It's just the structures within education need smashing".-'D'

"It is nice to be don't always recognise when you are being a role model. Because teenagers don't always tell you. But occasionally they do. And that is nice. So, when I was doing my teacher training, I covered a lesson. And a person came up to me just absolutely ecstatic that they had a stammer too, Yeah, that's really, really nice. I've had, there's someone I've taught all year, in our first second lesson they disclosed that they also have a stammer, we shared stories, which was quite nice". -'F'

The overall sentiment that they make a positive difference in their students was reported by participants. The ability to be empathetic to students who are struggling to cope and in general having higher expectations of their students was reported by participants. Their own experiences helped participants not just to listen, understand and be empathetic to the students but also to offer strategies that they themselves had used which benefitted their students.

### **7.2.3 My encounters with Ableism**

Working as a disabled teacher in mainstream settings participants reported numerous 'ableism' encounters they had experienced. The commonality of participants work experiences in different academic setting was identified in the data. Participants referred to academia and schools as 'toxic workplaces' in which they had encountered countless ableist behaviours by colleagues, superiors at times students. The precarious nature of their employment history as well as its prevalence was reported by many participants.

### 7.2.3.1 Prevalence of Toxic work environment

When speaking about their employment experiences participants often referred to the environment in academic settings as 'toxic'. They recalled experiences of feeling pressured in terms of behaving in certain ways, time pressures, unhealthy competitive behaviours of colleagues, lack of empathy and understanding, pressured to comply with rules they often did not agree with. Participants A, C, D, F, and G spoke of feeling exhausted and of feeling burned out. One statement that stood out was that "schools are the most non inclusive places to work" which 'A' stated. Of all the eight participant 'A' had encountered ableism multiple times in various mainstream academic settings, when they were teaching at primary level for 14 years, were forced out of teaching by an ableist incident and became a bus driver for some years. They then trained and started working as a dyslexia tutor in a junior school and later as an academic in a university. Their experiences of ableism at various mainstream settings makes their case stand out because other participants have mostly worked at the same academic level.

#### Poem 43 I was pushed out of teaching

Worked five years in same school  
Managed six staff members as well  
Big catchment, Unit head, it was swell  
New system, different procedures  
Through the roof went paperwork  
Usual coping strategy, put longer hours at work  
From seven till six thirty at work  
Work at home till 2 am completing paperwork  
Exhausted, collapsed, diagnosed with stress related condition  
Off work for three weeks sick, literally because couldn't speak

Decided to confide in head teacher  
Had mentioned dyslexia jokingly earlier  
Explained my exhaustion, my dyslexia was serious  
“Thank you for letting me know”, said the head  
Next day, walked into my class, told me I was no longer the unit head  
Next lesson observation graded me ‘Fail’  
Next week pulled all the stops gave my best  
Yet the grade was still a ‘fail’  
Something bad is going on I felt

Contacted my Union, absolutely useless bunch  
Basically, walked off leaving me in the lurch  
While school was collecting evidence for dismissal  
I panicked, incredibly difficult time, my anxiety was abysmal  
Graded outstanding three times, my reckoning would be Ofsted  
No need to turn up for Ofsted said head, stay at home instead  
Can they do that, Union ‘Yes they can’ said  
Received disciplinary procedure letter two weeks to respond quick,  
Complete meltdown, advised to keep job sign off sick  
School forced to send me to Occupational Health  
Amazingly told the school had breached Equality Act  
Needed to invite me to come back in fact  
Waiting for the email to arrive  
Disillusioned with all the hypocrisy  
If system treats teachers, this way  
Are supposed to understand inclusion  
How can we say we are in education?  
To be honest completely lost faith  
Had to get back on my feet  
So went on became part of a bus driving fleet

D mentioned that they found ‘schools toxic’ as work environments, where there is professional jealousy, competitive behaviours and ‘cloney’ behaviours from teachers to act the same way are encouraged. Colleagues get ‘bitchy’ and judgemental in their comments. D felt because they did not fit in that mould preferred to do things differently,

refused to be a 'robot' in the classroom, management were not in favour. When they were working as an NQT, D mentioned that they felt there was lack of autonomy in the school they worked, ideas were dismissed, there was groupism in the teachers, it was controlled by one person 'like a dictatorship'. The school environment was very toxic. D felt they were perceived as a 'troublemaker' and they felt the school targeted them for their disabilities.

Poem 44 I left teaching

I was targeted  
I disclosed  
I have a disability  
I felt targeted literally  
It was a personal thing  
Management lacked understanding  
About disability requirements  
Would not accommodate lunch breaks for medication  
Nor alternate formats for submitting daily lesson plans  
School deemed me 'unfit'  
Got referred to occupational health  
I left teaching  
I didn't belong in teaching  
I belonged with the children  
You just feel like you're a failure  
You're failing the kids  
You just spiral  
Really, you Haven't Done Anything Wrong  
Apart from trying to teach

This was a recurring experience reported by 'C', 'E', 'F' and 'H', where senior management and head teachers were unsupportive and at times very ableist in their

conduct. C mentioned change in behaviour of their head teacher towards them after C experienced a traumatic incident in their life.

Poem 45 Actions Say Otherwise

When you work in religious setting  
Think everyone is going to be kind and forgiving and everything  
Darn well, they're not

Recent trauma in my life  
I fell apart  
Essentially broke down  
Had to go back to work,  
Be the sunshine teacher in class  
Would go home and cry , cry , cry,  
Didn't want to get out of bed  
Didn't tell anyone  
Didn't want anyone to know  
Didn't want the judgement  
Didn't want to deal with that  
Got to the point  
It was affecting me  
Started therapy

Decided to tell at workplace  
Talked to superior privately  
They said, "oh, it's all water under the bridge, we are all good"  
But their actions say otherwise  
I get treated differently now  
Little things other teachers get away with  
Anything I do gets blown out of proportion

We used to be friends  
No longer treats me same  
I get ignored  
We used to be like family,

Doesn't talk to me anymore  
I have gotten to the place,  
Where it's just like, it's their problem  
I couldn't hide it anymore  
My own secret trauma almost killed me  
Had to let other people know

Read a book, own your secrets, be vulnerable  
It is going to hurt, not going to be comfortable  
But they can't use that against you anymore  
I am working on it  
It takes away that secrecy  
It's about owning who you are  
So, I told people  
And others shared with me  
"I have experienced that, I am going through that too"  
That's what made me comfortable to even do this

Before the incident they were more friends and got along well. The head teacher was judgmental of C which caused their behaviour change. C who already was diagnosed with Depression and Anxiety says that the trauma left them angry and suicidal, but the head teachers' lack support and understanding made it even harder. For C who works in a private independent faith school, there is no support from unions. They find themselves totally left on their own to cope with their struggles. They do avail of therapy as part of their health care. The head teacher's behaviour in this case is very blatant, and they play favourites. C used to be a favourite but now is not and other colleagues are aware of this:

"It's like an abusive relationship where you just do it, because you just don't want to get in trouble. And then even if you do something but there's no forgiveness, there's no gentleness." – 'C'



E spoke about how they felt that students and admin staff were more accepting of their disability than colleagues. They reported that they often challenged ‘the environment of normalism’, by which they mean that, when taking decisions, education institutions do not think of disabled students or staff. For example, when a new system was being implemented, E had to question the appropriateness of the implementation process, whether it had been designed keeping disabled people in mind. They shared that because they often ask questions, they are deemed as problematic by their employer. A mentioned their initial struggle when they transitioned into working as a academic in a university.

*Poem 46 Being a Dyslexic Academic*

Dyslexia is misunderstood  
People think affects you only as a kid  
No relevance to workplace or adulthood  
It's not just about reading and writing  
Dyslexia is very challenging  
Because weak working memory processing  
Has multiple ways of affecting  
Hate workplace staff meetings  
No clue what was happening  
Too much information, everyone talking  
Seems like pointless time wasting  
Invariably ended up stupid sounding.

Moved on to being an academic,  
First six months felt inadequate, lost  
Discussions with bunch of colleagues  
End up always saying  
“Sorry not sure I grasped what you are saying” or  
“Give me a few moments to think”,  
Couldn't process what was going on or was being said

Biggest challenge going off on a tangent

But when shared my dyslexia experience with students  
Discussed about acknowledging these things  
Allowed them to stop going, "God I thought was just me"  
They said "having these conversations actually helps me"  
"Like the fact we can talk to you about dumb and stupid things"  
"It is good, because you get it"  
Sharing my experience with students really works well  
I really make a difference

A observed that when they transitioned from being a dyslexia tutor to academic lecturing, they noticed a certain level of 'arrogance' amongst their colleagues a constant looking down at teachers, sarcastic comments about dyslexia tutors who often worked with international students. A observed that colleagues spoke in term of 'pedagogical this and that' without actually having practical first-hand knowledge of school teaching. They share an incident regarding a departmental teaching award meeting.

"I just had a curiosity is this also open to professional services staff, and they looked at me, I said' Look, you know, obviously, we've got a lot of teachers, it's professional service, we've got the dyslexia team, we've got LC with academic skills, it'd be great if they can apply for this as well. One of my colleagues genuinely looked at me and went no, because this is all about teaching excellence". -A

This experience was unique to A none of the other participants reported similar experience, but I felt including this aspect in this subtheme was important because it reflects the division and compartmentalised views withing academia. Here A points out the invisible bias and discriminatory behaviour where some colleagues are not considered equal, at the same level as others.

H reported that when they were working part-time and were given reasonable adjustments for their health condition. They recalled instances of unsupportive behaviour from their line manager regarding 'days off' due to health condition because the line manager wanted to 'get the sick leave numbers down' for their department. The line managers unsupportive and ableist behaviour felt like a 'kick in the teeth' because despite severe health complications they always had always made work their priority. The commonality of experiences about the widespread nature of toxic work environment in academic mainstream settings was observed in the data. The ableist behaviours of senior management, head teachers, line managers, colleagues made the work environment unsupportive and stressful for the participants.

Ableism encountered within academia has been the focus of many recent publications, namely two by Brown and Leigh (2020, 2021). The similarity of experiences participants reported reflected experiences compiled in the various narratives in these publications. The fact that despite the Equalities Act, disabled teachers encounter frequent ableist behaviours from head teachers, colleagues. These experiences had such a lasting effect on their work experiences, and any signs of them repeating often make the participants move from the job before things escalate for fear of history repeating itself. Which leads to the next aspect of findings: precarious employment history.

### 7.2.3.2 Precarious employment

Another commonality that was observed is the precarious employment history of the participants. The repeated pattern of encounters with unsupportive colleagues, time pressures, pressures to conform, burn out, getting pushed out of teaching, fear of getting another job, jumping from job to job was evident in the experiences participants reported. As described in the earlier sub theme, the toxic environment was difficult to work in, it led to a lot of stress and at times severe health complications for some participants (A, C, D, F, G and H). All these participants have been diagnosed with one or more invisible disabilities.

#### Poem 47 Cup that easily overflows

What I could get were supply teaching jobs  
Always difficult, changing schools  
Different ways of doing things  
Different rules and expectations  
Different standard of behaviour  
So many different things

Literally turn up at 7.30 am  
Few bullet points, teacher going  
I like to do this, this and this.  
In my head, I am like  
Okay, that's great.  
Where do I find that?  
What did you teach yesterday?  
What's going on?  
So much information to absorb,  
Short period of time.  
Top that with kids' behaviour,  
Trying to get eyes at the back of my head.

My dyslexic brain cup that easily overflows,  
Desperately trying to learn rules, routines  
No more room to think about  
What I was doing  
What I was teaching  
Cup overflows  
Gain the reputation  
Bit scattered, bit forgetful.

Really challenging.  
Hidden disability, Dyslexia  
People rarely think, Aha! Dyslexic!  
Always think incompetent, careless, lazy.  
Get the eye rolls  
All that sort of thing.

As described earlier A began working as supply teacher initially for many years, finally landing a permanent job which they were ultimately forced to leave. They became disillusioned with the education system and became a bus driver. A commented that the Bus company was more inclusive than the schools they had worked in, and more supportive of disabled employees. The Bus company was extremely supportive of A they provided a dyslexia tutor for them to learn their bus route. The dyslexia tutor was instrumental in providing A with strategies to learn. This motivated A to train to be dyslexia tutor themselves and pursue a doctorate.

“My doctorate became my revenge that became a way of getting back look, you know, I proven I am a good teacher, I prove, and I can do this”.- ‘A’

Unfortunately for A they faced similar toxic environments and ableist unsupportive behaviours from colleagues throughout their career, which given their earlier

experiences often forced them to leave and seek employment elsewhere. This has led them to jump from job to job, relocate and give up their dream job of being a lecturer in higher education to go back to being a dyslexia tutor.

Poem 48 I'm gonna walk away

Because of previous experience with my school  
Part of me thinking do I stay and fight  
Other part knew exactly which direction it was gonna go  
Because of what had happened previously  
Was working throughout the morning  
Was putting all nighters  
I was exhausted  
I kind of went  
I'm not gonna put myself through this again  
I'm gonna walk away  
I still get pangs of being gutted  
I worked my ass off to become a lecturer  
I was in a position of lecturing  
I had to kind of give that up  
Which still smarts occasionally

Because the previous incident had caused so much trauma and chaos in their life, that any hint of same thing recurring causes the participant to be weary. Thinking it is better to move on than to continue. In this case A had worked hard to get to the level of an academic and had ambitions of progressing. But they opted to leave and took up a job at another university, went back to being a dyslexia tutor giving up on their dream. D has experienced similar burnout and left their teaching job; they had worked as special needs support teaching assistant for many years before qualifying as a special needs teacher. They enjoyed working with the children, it was the toxic environment they did

not like in schools, the lack of support and refusal to adjust their needs had health ramifications for them. The school even refused 'shielding' for D who was extremely clinically vulnerable. They worked with student who had severe behavioural challenges and at times there were safeguarding issues which led D to be hospitalized twice. After the school bullied, treated them like a 'social pariah', D became more ill and left the job.

E worked on temporary contract at their university for more than ten years, they went from hourly paid to term time only contract and then indefinite contract which they are still on. F has a more complicated employment history, they initially graduated with a law degree, could not find a job. Worked many temporary jobs, seasonal contract jobs, agency work. They were unemployment periods in between because they failed to secure a permanent job. They did various courses like book-keeping, they hold two graduate degrees in law and Chemistry, they are currently pursuing a post graduate degree while holding a teaching job. Last job they had prior to qualifying as teacher was an admin job in a school for many years.

"I stayed at the school for as long as I did was probably because of how difficult it was to get that job in the first place. I just didn't have the belief. I'm still not entirely convinced. The belief that I could get a job elsewhere, because of the experiences that I had when I was first applying". -'F'

For F interviews are difficult as highlighted earlier in the found poem "Explicit precedence explicit prejudice. So, they stuck to a job fearing they would be unemployed and unable to support themselves. H had shared bullying experiences from a line manager ended up leaving the job due to psychological stress, feeling

distressed with lack of support. 'C' who has worked in their current school for all of their career which is in a small town has contemplated leaving because of the stress.

"I'd like to move on to public school, where I would be under some sort of protection, because there really is none right now. Other than the basic labour laws."-C

The only exception to all participants is B who has only started their teaching career. Because of their prosthetic leg they do not require any adjustments they do not appear to have any disability. Even though they are hearing impaired in one ear they do not seek adjustments. They say they have never faced discrimination in teaching but had experienced when they used to be a wheelchair, when an employer refused them leave for surgery. B was self-employed while they were studying. They said being self-employed and free lancing made it possible to do it while they were studying and avoid commuting.

Having to move from job to job has serious effect not only on the employment history, but also on the personal aspirations of the participants. The fear of having to go through ableist experiences, as well as to avoid going through the trauma again, it was observed that participants preferred to leave and move on to another job at the risk of giving up on personal aspirations and goals.



#### **7.2.4 I did not take legal action**

When asked about whether they had taken legal action against the discriminatory behaviours they had encountered. The participants A, D, E and F reported that initially they had sought support from teachers unions which they were members of. but eventually decided not to take legal actions mainly for two reasons: the unions were not very helpful and that the participants felt they did not have the energy or financial resources to fight.

##### **7.2.4.1 Teacher unions were useless**

I have used terminology used by A for this subtheme because it conveys the angst they have experienced in a powerful way. A mentioned that after during the ongoing incident with the primary school, they had approached their teacher union. They had been a member of the teachers union ever since their student teaching days.

##### *Poem 49 Teacher Union was absolutely useless*

Contacted my union  
Spoke to them what had been happening  
Union was absolutely useless  
Been a member since was a student teacher  
They basically said dyslexia wasn't covered under the Equality Act  
Which I know it is  
They said I had no case for any sort of reprisal  
They said there was nothing they could do  
Basically  
They left me in the lurch

A received support from their dyslexia assessor and GP, got signed off on sick leave to prepare themselves. The school was forced to send them to occupational health, which they had refused so far. More than the union, the occupational health were helpful A says. "Occupational health were amazing, turned around to the school and said, told them they were in breach of the Equality Act by their actions. And they needed to invite me back to work. Put all these support measures in place". Which the school never did, and A ended up leaving.

D had similar experience, after a safeguarding incident at school the Union got involved. The union told D that " , they don't think I'm well enough to fight it. And I'm better off, just walking away". Occupational health were more helpful to D and pointed out the school had breached Equality Act. E is currently in conflict with their employer regarding their contract as well as discriminatory behaviours hence they could not comment on the details. C mentioned that because they work in a private independent faith school, they do not have any union support. But if they do change jobs, they would love to have that support.

The fact that teacher unions failed to stand up for the participants, did not offer any support or legal helped the participants to feel unable to legally challenge their schools. They were left alone, to fight their own battles.

#### **7.2.4.2 I did not have the energy to fight**

Of all the incidents mentioned in the preceding sub theme, the participants did not take legal action mainly because they did not have the energy left to fight and they were

also afraid on the financial ramification a legal battle would have. A discussed with people she trusted who dissuaded them from taking legal action mainly because they felt that would not be worth the anxiety and stress it would cause. A had already been through so much that year and felt they did not have the energy to take legal action. The cluster poem below captures the feeling of regret for not taking action.

Poem 50 That sting of injustice

‘A’

The worst thing  
That sting of injustice  
You just want to get justice  
You want them to realise  
What they've done is wrong  
Eventually decided to move on  
Leave it  
Was painful at the time  
Still moments years later  
Think back  
Gosh, should I have challenged them?

‘C’

Spoke with two solicitors  
Wanted to take up my case  
I wasn't emotionally strong enough to do it  
I didn't want it  
Years waiting in the courts for it.  
Potentially I would have won  
Because of everything that they've done  
I kind of agree  
Better off walking away  
Kind of put it behind me

F mentioned they often experience bullying incidents while teaching teenage students because of their stammer. In one incident the class of teenagers collectively acted as bullies making fun of F's stammer, and it progressively got worse. The situation became unmanageable and required intervention from senior management by threatening exclusions for the entire class. The incident affected F adversely, they had a nervous breakdown causing anxiety, and the school ended up suggesting that F should consider leaving teaching. F had to leave and found another teaching job, they recalled they were in such a delicate condition, their confidence levels were so low at that point that they decided not to take any legal action against the school.

Recently in another incident a student 'F' did not know began mocking them in front of other students at the school gates during arrival time. Despite repeated warning, the head teacher intervening, the student continued on various occasions to do the same, was even excluded yet the student persisted mocking F even in public spaces. This time 'F' did act and referred the incident to the police despite the school's reluctance. Though the school was very supportive in acting against the student in terms of expulsion and offering support to 'F'. The decision to go to the police was motivated by earlier experiences. F did not want the situation to escalate and cause another breakdown.

The regret of not challenging and not taking legal action was visible in the participants demeanour while talking about this aspect. The toll these incidents had taken on them is palpable in their voice, every time similar incidents occurred the participants'

recollected prior experiences, and mostly decided to change jobs before things escalate. This was a pattern of behaviour in 'A', 'D', 'F' and similar pattern of thought emerging in 'C', 'E'. 'B' and 'G' have just started their teaching career and as mentioned earlier have not experienced any discrimination in teaching. H mentioned that they left the teaching career because of the distress it caused them to become self-employed.

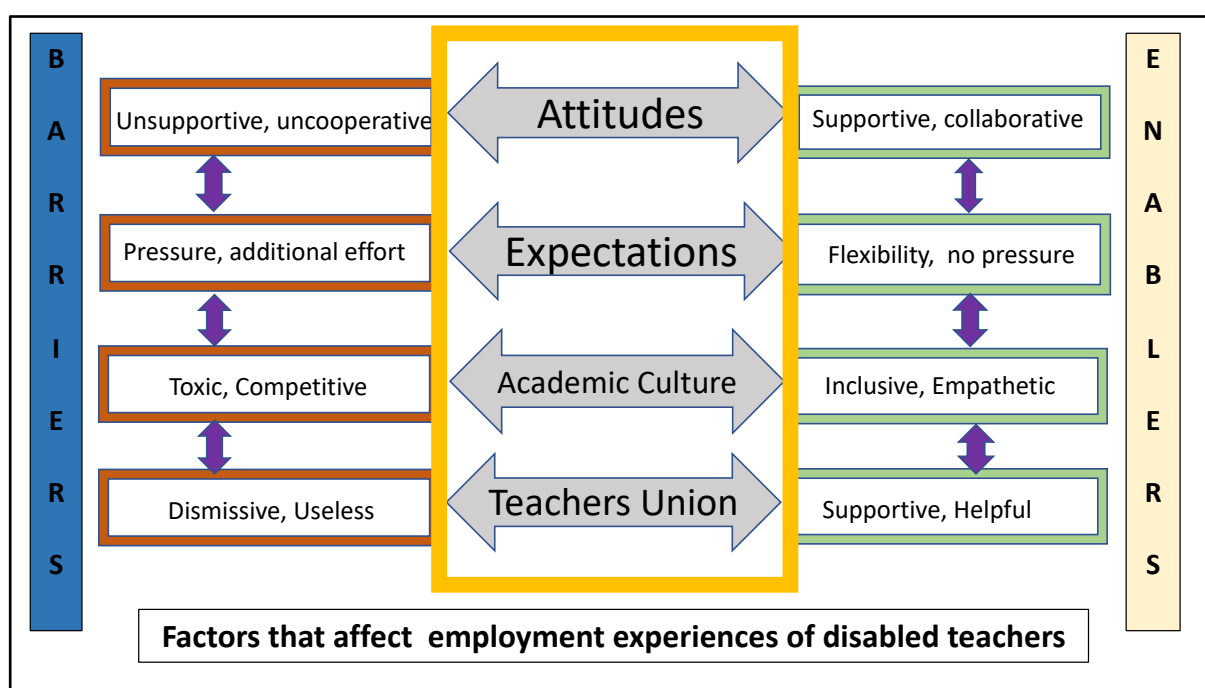


*Figure 24 Enablers and barriers in employment experiences*

The key factors that affect employment experiences were identified as Attitudes of colleagues and head teachers, Work Expectations, Academic culture in the institution and teacher unions. Enabling factors identified were Supportive and collaborative attitudes of colleagues, flexibility and no pressure in work expectations, Academic culture that was inclusive and empathetic and teacher unions that offered support at the time needed. Barriers identified were unsupportive, uncooperative attitudes of

colleagues and head teachers, work pressure that demanded additional effort from participants, toxic and competitive academic culture and teacher unions that were dismissive and not helpful.

### 7.3 Macrosystem – influence of social policies

The Macrosystem comprises of larger cultural context in terms of societal belief systems, cultural norms, ideologies, that indirectly influence the individual. The influence that certain policies have had on the participants lives in terms of employment policies, certain disability support policies, funding that was available, at times technical support that they could avail of because of disability support policies was observed in the data. All those experiences were collated under two sub themes employment policies and disability funding. Though this aspect was only touched upon in the narratives I felt it was important to include them in the themes because it corroborated with the ecological model regarding the influence of social policies on individuals lives.

*Table 17 Themes identified in the Macrosystem*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Employment Policies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants experiences reflect employment policies often just implemented on paper they do not seem to work</li> </ul>                                  |
| <b>Disability Support and Funding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants shared delay in provision of disability support, the lack of funding, the stressful demands for evidence and paperwork</li> </ul> |

### 7.3.1 Employment policies

The participants living in the UK discussed about their experiences with the Disability Confident Recruitment Scheme as well as availing disability support funding. Participants mentioned that in their experience employment policies often have not had much advantage for them. The Disability Confident scheme was launched in November 2016 by the DWP in UK aiming to encourage and support employers to recruit, retain and develop disabled employees (DWP, 2018). It is a voluntary scheme comprising of three levels of support organisations who sign up for the scheme offer their employees. Employers who have signed up to the scheme commit to offer an interview to disabled candidates who meet the minimum criteria of the job. The scheme is not legally binding in the UK and is voluntary. There are many exceptions that employers can claim this could be the reason most of the participants reported that they never ever get called in for an interview. Though the scheme has been declared a success with the number of employers who has signed up for the scheme have gone up to 19,000 in the UK, almost half of them (49 %) claim to have recruited at least one disabled employee (DWP, 2022). Independent research carried out by global hiring platform Indeed found out that 68% of disabled employee believe employers need to do more to support them, and 58% mentioned that finding a new job is difficult. During recruitment as well as in employment, despite claims like equal disability employer and guaranteed interview schemes, participants mentioned that they have had to self-advocate and proactively inquire or question when they did not even get called for an interview. These experiences were depicted in the found poems “Disability confident employment things a codswallop” (Poem 36) , “Regarding disability employment” (Poem 37).

The participant experiences highlight that though these schemes are in place, because they are voluntary, and employers are not legally bound often these schemes do not seem to work. Despite the high number of employers who have signed up for the scheme, I do not agree it can be called a success if 51% of the employers have only signed up for the scheme and not even recruited a single disabled employee. For C because they have only worked in one school did not have much recruitment experience. G who was another overseas participant is actively advocating for more disability rights and policy changes in their country.

The other policy that participants mentioned repeatedly was the Equalities Act in the UK. The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. The Act protects disabled people from discrimination in the UK, employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. Participant experiences highlight the fact that education institutions despite being aware of Equality Act breach it repeatedly to push disabled teachers out of teaching depicted in the found poem “I was pushed out of teaching” (Poem 43) and “I left teaching” (Poem 44). It was observed that the senior management and head teachers plan and strategize to build a case of ‘incompetency’ to get rid of disabled teachers. This was observed in ‘A’, ‘D’, ‘E ’and ‘F’. The prevalence of disabled teachers getting pushed out of teaching and the pattern that schools seem to follow to do so is captured in the found poem below.



Poem 51 The prevalence is terrifying

Six dyslexic teachers,  
Exactly same experience  
Being called incompetent  
Do not submit paperwork on time  
Aren't good enough  
Bad lesson observations suddenly begin  
Like there's a rulebook  
'How to dismiss dyslexic teacher'  
You do this, this and this,  
I swear they give it to head teachers  
The prevalence is terrifying

Dyslexic relative got dismissed  
Unemployed most of life  
Another relation, same working pattern as mine  
Jumping from job to job to job to job  
Don't like this system not set for us  
When we sit quietly in meetings  
Trying to process information  
People assume we are not listening or not engaging  
We don't then get put up for promotion  
If you're not quick and sharp on the way you speak  
Oh, they don't know what they're doing  
If you make a mistake in an email  
Considered careless or lazy or whatever  
Employers don't see behind the scenes  
Our journey trying to keep up  
Working way more than anyone else  
Like a swan seen floating on the water  
Invisible frantic legs underwater  
That's how we viewed education  
That's exactly how workplace is as well

Instead of being enablers these policies often become barriers and are used to make a case for dismissals which is what the participants mentioned. 'A' reported that they

personally knew six teachers who had dyslexia like themselves, who have experiences same pattern of dismissals, they are deemed as not submitting work on time, called incompetent.

Poem 52 The Equality Act

Find the Equality Act to be quite pointless  
When it comes to supporting people in the workplace  
All managers will do is say  
“Well, we put the reasonable adjustments in for you  
And you're still failing”  
The Equality Act  
It doesn't seem to be worth the paper  
It's written about a lot of time  
The Equality Act  
To challenge any discrimination  
You have to know  
The Equality Act  
Really well  
You have to show self-efficacy  
To challenge the discrimination

It has been a different experience for B; they mentioned that the Equality Act had been helpful as well as Access to Work which helped them acquire some equipment they needed for work.

C recalls many safeguarding guidelines were breached by the school,

“...with health and safety of special needs children as well as their teachers were put at risk by their education institution.” they've clearly broken the law on many, many things, even things like health and safety, like I got electrocuted. And I don't mean just like, you know, like a static shock, it tripped, the whole building lights out. And they had to be rewired. Because the wires were hanging out the walls, and I tried to turn a light on, and the building had been deemed unsafe for children to be in. They'd all be moved across to the other building. And I've been put with the children who were not safe enough to be in that building, with me and a TA. So, they put like six children, who were the most complex children in the county, in the building that was not safe for children to be taught in with us. And there were loads of health and safety things like we had no phone, we had no computers”- ‘C’

In case of H though they had been allocated reasonable adjustments as per Equality act, they still faced microaggression from the line manager to improve their leave record because they wanted to ‘get the sick leave numbers down’. In this case though adjustments were made as per law, ‘H’ was pressurized to lower the number of days they took leaves because of extreme pain caused by their health condition.

The participants experiences reflect employment policies often just implemented on paper they do not seem to work. The findings in this theme discuss only those policies that participants mentioned during the interviews. Though I am aware of further policies that do impact disabled teacher employment, a decision was made to only discuss policies the participants highlighted in their narratives.

### **7.3.2 Disability Support and Funding**

Six participants reported to have availed of Disability Support while at university, in the form of technology, of funding with fees, travel and at times with support personnel.

Though support provided was helpful to the participants, they reported difficulty in accessing the support and the time delays to have the support in place. Participants specifically highlighted that bureaucratic processes made it harder to access disability support facilities.

Five participants availed of disability funding in form of fees, travel bursaries, bursaries for books, technology support with computer and software, personnel support like scribes for lecture notes, support workers or tutors. Participants reported that having the support in place helped them tremendously. The barriers that arose in accessing the support and having it in place on time was noticed in the data.

“while it's taken a while and it's still I'm still finding my feet with how to ask the right support for what you need. Because when you go in September, and they say, what do you need? You say, oh! I don't need anything and then afterwards, you're like, why didn't I think of that but I'm kind of getting there”. – ‘D’

‘D’ said though it was very helpful sometimes the support offered did not work well with their needs. ‘D’ mentioned couple of instances where they ended up feeling more annoyed and not gaining anything after sessions with support work. The university in this case did mediate and arrange for another support worker that was more matching to ‘D’'s needs.

F reported that though the disability support they have availed was extremely useful, the way the system works is problematic. The bureaucratic system, the paperwork demands and the stress it causes was often a barrier.

“The fact that there is a bit of legislation that covers disable people and give you rights and discriminated against was useful because it can focus people's minds. It doesn't work brilliantly. The awkward things associated with that is sometimes the expectation to prove your disability or people having a conception about what disability is, or, not kind of getting things? I think that's the problem. I think, proof is a real problem”.-‘F’

F highlighted the disparity of disability support at various levels of education, they mention that at school level the lack of funding is shocking

“In terms of kids in school, I think it's shocking, really how many pupils who have needs that don't get recognised, there simply isn't the funding to Properly do special educational needs? and disabilities? when you go beyond that basic point of access, when you're trying to enable someone to be the best human being that they possibly can really you need properly trained, well respected well paid people. . Because the funding isn't there. And it is kind of it is deprioritize, it's done on the cheap. The basic learner support system starts at the lowest rung of the support scale, or the support pay scale. You don't need any qualifications; your training requirements are virtually nil”.- ‘F’

G got diagnosed while they were studying in the UK recently, reported they received disability support from their university once they were formally diagnosed. Though their journey to get formal diagnosis was long and extremely stressful, they shared positive experiences of disability support they received in the form of software, online learning support in the form of a tutor who helped them with proofreading and academic writing. They received adjustments during their Ph.D. viva. Which was similar experience for ‘A’ who also received adjustments during their Ph.D. viva. F pointed out that at times certain disabilities are focussed more and there is more awareness while some

disabilities there is a lot of ignorance and misconceptions. And they pointed out that at times there are attitudinal barriers caused by limited diagnostic pathways that are available. E mentioned that funding available for access to work can be so low and the delay caused by bureaucratic systems add to the stress. They shared an example regarding getting a support worker, the delay in email communications caused so much stress. They also mentioned that the rigid system and limited funding also affects. The funds allocated for support work is so low. The unnecessary delays caused because of system clashed between access to work and university policies meant a delay of weeks just to get a response to a question.

“The access to work process that have gone through and managed to get funding for a support worker, and funding for the support worker, is to make documents into accessible documents for me. Yeah, that's because people aren't doing it. But there was no list of places that were available for me to go contact to go and find somebody who will be my support worker. And I'm not allowed to employ one. So, I've gone through this process of managing to get one and then managing to find one. But Access to Work haven't been great because they gave me a three-week period to do it. Now, University has a policy where people only have to reply to emails in three days. Yeah. So, it can take you a week before you actually get an answer to a question”. - E

The barriers participants encountered to accessing disability support were: delay in provision, lack of available funds and stressful demands for evidence and paperwork. The lack of resources for various disabilities while others getting prioritised is highlighted by my participants' experiences. At times the dismissive nature of disability support, looking at only immediate benefits and not long-term consequence for the disabled person was problematic.

## 7.4 Chronosystem – Suggestions for the future

The Chronosystem captures the progressive nature of development over time; in this study participants look back at the course of their life introspecting on their own development over time. This aspect of drawing upon their own lived experiences to provide suggestions for the future, is what makes this research unique and insightful. These suggestions are coming from the collective experiences of the participants and hold tremendous value. The fourth interview involved the participants looking back at their life to identify the enablers and barriers they had encountered in their life journey. The interview also revolved around suggestions and hope participants had for the future. Based on their own lived experiences, what would they like to tell friends and family, employers, policy makers and society in general. The two sub themes identified were enablers and barriers in my life and my suggestions for the future.

*Table 18 Themes identified in the Chronosystem*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I want them to know</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To friends and family: “I am doing my best, understand I am exhausted”</li><li>• To employers/head teachers: “Listen to disabled employees”</li><li>• To policymakers: “Include disabled voices in policymaking”</li><li>• To Society: “Think beyond themselves- need more understanding, acceptance ad empathy”</li></ul> |
| <b>My hope for the future-My wish list for change</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In education: “More Flexibility”</li><li>• In workplace: “Embrace Difference</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Looking back at. My life – I wish</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The participants wished their disability could have been identified earlier</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

When asked about aspects in their life that have been a source of support in their lives participants spoke about familial support, friends who have been solid pillars of support, professional support like therapists, doctors, disability support services provided by university, technological support. Participant also spoke of support in the form of legislative support in terms of healthcare, sick leave legislation, reasonable adjustments. Interesting point made by 'A' that understanding their disability better and seeing the advantage in the way their brain functions differently became their most enabling support for them as well as communicating sharing ideas with wider dyslexic community. 'A' also mentioned having supportive colleagues, friends, family who understand and are willing to learn have been extremely helpful.

Barriers participants identified were rigid systems, unsupportive attitudes from family, friends, colleagues and employers, financial strain, lack of funding, misconceptions and ignorance about their disability, work pressure demands, psychological damage caused by ableism, paperwork hassles, lack of technical support to make maximum use of technology provided, delay in having disability provisions in place on time, no safety net and having to self-advocate all the time. Rigid systems that expect everyone to act in a certain way were the biggest barriers according to A.

When asked what they wished they had done differently looking back in their life, participants had varied responses. A common point made was they wished they had been diagnosed earlier and received appropriate support much earlier in their life, yet



at the same time participants mentioned that they are what they are because of the trajectory that their lives had followed.

“I don't think I would change anything, per se, it's a great believer that we will, you know, what happens it happens for a reason, in a sense, it's kind of like that little tapestry of life, you start tugging on those threads, and everything starts going. So yeah, I would probably keep things the way they are”.- ‘A’

C wished they had not been put on medications in their teenage years, they wished that had not been the first step that was taken. They wished alternatives could have been tried first like therapy, they wish they had the chance to communicate with other teens who were experiencing same things as them.

‘D’, ‘E’ and ‘G’ wished they had more support in understanding their disabilities early on, it would have made it much easier for them. It would have avoided the confusion and stress they went through without being aware of their own diagnosis. G particularly wishes that they had more support when they were studying medicine, they feel their life would have been different.

#### **7.4.1 I want them to know**

When asked what they would like their friends/family, employers, or family members to know and what suggestions they would give them, participants were reflective in their responses. They spoke of wanting more patience, understanding and support from family and friends, more empathy and advice to listen to when a disabled

employee speaks about their concerns, have a dialogue with them from employers. To policy makers, get more disabled people on your team, who have actual lived experience. The subthemes identified were suggestions to friends/family, to employers/head teachers, to policymakers and to society.

*Poem 53 They don't understand*

When you say you've got ADHD  
People look at you like a naughty child  
If I tell different people different things, get treated differently,  
ADHD, quite a negative perception  
Oh!, know someone whose got it, won't sit still, never does this and that  
If I say I am Autistic, get treated like I am stupid  
Now I say have a Neurodivergent profile  
Sounds better, sounds posher  
People don't make too many jumps from that  
Infer what they want  
Really, they don't understand.

**7.4.1.1 To friends and family- "I am doing my best- understand I am exhausted"**

The participants mentioned that even while families were supportive, at times there was frustration shown when participant had to put in extra time because of their disability to complete tasks.

'A' said "that the fact that in any job I've ever done throughout my career, I've always had to work way longer hours than anyone else. And the same with studying, I've always had to work way long ways to study. And, you know, I've always worked weekends, I've always worked evenings, even as a bus driver, I used to spend time driving routes and learning things. But I think that very much frustrates my family, because they're always kind of, well, you know, we never get to see you, or when can we see you? And I'm

having to sort of really say, well, I've got to finish this off, like, and, and then it's working so far hard, why you work? You don't have to do that. You shouldn't have to do that".

A wants their friends and family to understand the impact their disability has on their daily activities; they want their family to be a bit more accepting of that fact.

For friends, A says sometimes friends jokingly mention somethings which actually was hurtful. Like about them being a 'bit scattered' or a 'bit ditzzy'. A shares its incredibly frustrating, because when they have a delayed reaction to something, when friends joke about stuff like that though A takes it as a joke at that moment, it still affects them.

*Poem 54 Simple tasks become monumental*

If I have to go out  
Who is going to be there?  
Am I comfortable around them?  
Do I really want to go?  
How's that gonna affect my mood?  
I think about  
How that's gonna affect me?  
Even now just talking  
I have millions ideas up here  
Trying to put it in coherent language  
Better writer than a speaker  
Get tongue-tied  
Simple tasks seem monumental  
Kinda like the duck paddling in water  
You can see the duck  
Not the little feet going hundred miles a minute underneath  
That's how my brain always is

I'm always thinking about things  
I don't think my brain ever really rests  
Its hard for me to sit and watch a movie  
Its hard for me to relax  
Probably why people say  
I am a little bit workaholic

E wanted acceptance from their family and friends, because sometimes they felt awkward. "It's just acceptance. Just acceptance that, you know, they've known me for long enough and most of them do accept me. And no, I'm very awkward. Yeah, I am. can be awkward. Because, they'll say one thing, and sometimes I've just can't help myself when I take the devil's advocate viewpoint. And it's just, it's just my nature, who I am." E goes on to say that when they are tired, they want their family and friends to understand that they want to be left alone, because sometimes they just want to close out the world and try and find some peace.

'F' wants their family and friends to know that all they want really is to be treated same as everyone else. One of the most frustrating things is to constantly educate people on why it is not okay to treat someone that way.

The participants all had a common message to friends and family, they just want them to know that they are trying to do their best to live their lives the way they feel works for them, they expect a bit more acceptance and understanding of that. They want to be treated like everyone else.

#### **7.4.1.2 To Employers/ Head teachers- “Listen to disabled employees”**

The importance of dialogue and really listening to disabled employees, having open conversations, more empathy and understanding, to respect and be supportive and not judgemental. The fact that the disabled employee has lived experience, their opinions should hold more importance.

“Genuinely listening and having a dialogue with your employees, because it still baffles me that so many people out there perceive themselves to be an expert on somebody else's disability, when they've never lived with it, when they've never experienced that. And I mean, even as somebody with dyslexia I never assumed to know how dyslexia impacts another person. And I've always asked them and talk to them and, you know, gain the understanding that way. I think it is absolutely vital that employers are talking to their employees, about their experiences and maintaining that conversation as well. Not just going well. You told me you needed this, this and this tick, tick. There you go, you find out. But just maintaining that conversation” – ‘A’

#### **Poem 55 Everything merges into one**

People at workplace don't understand, the fatigue  
They don't understand, ADHD, your working memory  
When I butt in, they think 'rude'  
They forget I can't prioritize things; I have no ability to prioritize  
Loads of trouble with sensory stuff  
Find it really hard, all these noises going on  
Can't cope, I don't know which one to listen to  
Yeah, I find that quite difficult  
Recently got diagnosed with fibromyalgia  
Used to think it was a psychosomatic kind of made-up thing  
Sometimes all my various things merge into one  
Don't know what is my ADHD? What is my Rheumatoid and what is what?  
The feeling and the pain and everything  
And the tiredness, that's the main one  
My friends and family can tell  
When I am getting overloaded

They say I literally shut down, just freeze  
When I get anxious, I speak louder and faster  
People close to you can sense, see the signs

B mentioned that employers needed to have a more inclusive approach towards disabled employees. They mentioned that disability parking spaces is a key area of concern employers need to investigate. Be more accommodating towards disability related time-off. Similar to 'B', 'C' wanted employers to be more kind, caring and accepting towards disabled employees. They want employers to understand without prejudice when a disabled employee take a sick day off.

"As a teacher, you would rather you know, come in sick. But if you can't come in sick, now you've got the extra guilt that you know, you've put somebody out off...., you put a burden on someone else, and you don't want to..... But it's like, you'd rather just kind of come in and survive the day and then go home. ....And that builds up and builds up and builds up until your body will say no more and you get more sick in the long run. So it's either you either take the one day now Or you're going to have to pay for it, you know, with the flu or something else, you know, in three days." – 'C'

'C' wanted employers to know that despite common belief that disabled employees have challenges, they also bring in many positives to the work they do. "You also get different strengths that maybe the other people don't have,..... you know, that attention to detail, that creativity, that ability to connect with the kids and an even, you know, and just want the understanding".

D wants employers to treat disabled staff with respect, listen to them and be supportive. They want employers to get rid of the prejudice and discriminatory attitude towards disabled employees, stop treating them as 'less of a person', that they are not capable because of the disability they have.

Poem 56 Tired of Hiding it

I take medication  
I am in school early  
By the end of the day  
Medication is wearing off  
I am physically tired  
My brains tired  
I just want to go to bed  
I work work work work through the week  
I just crash on the weekend  
I am so tired  
I think a lot about the activities I do  
Who I see  
I think lot more than the average person  
I just don't want to be misunderstood  
I don't want to deal with those negative feelings  
I didn't want people to know  
I have been 'Hiding' it since I was thirteen  
I am always thinking  
Is it showing?  
If I make a mistake or forget something  
Are they gonna think there's something wrong with me?  
I don't want anything extra for revealing that I have this  
But I am dealing with a different brain  
I am not neurotypical I know, I'm not  
It's really hard  
When in your profession demands  
Consistency and follow through  
Have to be there every time  
When you know you have forgotten your meds  
When you know it's not going to be a great day  
When you hope for the best  
It's hard  
You're trying to be, typical  
And you're not

Similarly, E mentioned, “stop perceiving disabled employees as a cost, instead think of them as a benefit, empower employees with right support, to progress in their role. Stop creating an environment where people are afraid to disclose disability because they would be considered extra cost. Recognize the value of having disabled employees.”

F suggested that employers need to be re-educated and that explicit discriminatory behaviour should be regulated by law. They stressed that intentional and knowingly done acts of discrimination, not treating employees equally cannot be overlooked. They want “that a lot of training courses on recruitment, do try to change this we do not try to challenge unconscious bias. And, I mean, that obviously should be more readily available and more widely, used”. G also suggested more training and awareness especially regarding rights of disabled employees. They also want employers to have clarity on the work a job description entails. They feel sometimes they are made to administrative work which is not part of their job description. ‘H’ also advocated for more education for employers regarding various health conditions.

#### **7.4.1.3 To Policymakers- “include disabled voices in policymaking”**

The participants wanted policymakers to include more disability voices in their team, people with lived experience of disability. To not make tokenistic policies to maintain status quo but actual policies that truly benefit disabled people. Suggestion that policy makers have dialogue and conversations with disabled people to understand their struggles and translate that into policy.



A said I suppose that the advice to policymakers would be to get people with disabilities on your team advising you. Because there's only so much you can learn from reading, whatever, you know, you've got to get real life experiences. And I think that's the problem of a lot of policies. They'll always be this kind of little loopholes written into them. And these, you know, things that kind of, you know, it's almost kind of tokenistic. I would say to the policymakers to talk to people with disabilities, and with a variety of disabilities, to genuinely understand what's going on and to listen and to incorporate that into to policy."

B wanted more active recruitment push for disabled teachers and also for more accessible schools, even for disabled staff.

Including more disabled voice in policy making and more recruitment drive for disabled people was also what D suggested. D also wanted more transparency in support provided and how it is offered. Accessing support should be made easier, barriers created due to demands for evidence and paperwork needs to be reduced, possible a easier assessment pathways, without demands for letters from hundred different sources. To make things simpler and not complicated to seek support. 'D' also wished that there could be a push for a more centralised system that disability service providers could access to get evidence they needed instead of the disabled person having to stress about obtaining paperwork from many sources to provide that evidence every time they approach for support.

Poem 57 What's actually being done?

Even though we all work in education  
Don't think lot of people have an idea what ADHD really is  
Stereotypical idea seven-year-old running around, not listening  
Adults have a better grasp of something like depression  
But the ADHD part is hard to explain to people  
Unless they have a child with it or if they know somebody directly  
My desk at work, I call it organized chaos, keep it really clean  
I don't usually talk too much about it  
I don't want that feeling, that I am gonna blame ADHD for it  
We make adjustments for say someone with a broken leg  
But there are no adjustments for people with mental health issues  
We are the ones who have to step up, have to advocate for ourselves  
Because no one is pre-emptively or proactively making adjustments for us  
No one says, "yeah it falls under this, if you need a day off for mental health  
You can take a sick day off  
We give a lot of lip service, we talk about it, but what is actually being done?  
Not a hell of a lot  
It gets tiring, to keep advocating for yourself  
It'd be nice if we had help from people, regular people  
Let's just do it for everybody right?

While E suggested that policymakers need to focus on creating maximum impact in providing support to disabled people. They pointed out that "the proportion of individuals that are disabled and successful entrepreneurs is proportionately higher than the populace at large. And only through their sheer determination to do something. Is that and pushing through those barriers is that they're succeeding and contribution to the country. And I would ask that question, you know, having given that context, what would happen if people that are disabled, or supported more? Could it mean that we are even more successful as a nation?"

F because they have a background in Law, suggested an update in law, bringing the UNCRPD into law to comply with international treaties. They pointed out that the definition of disabilities in UK is restrictive and needs reconsideration. They feel that there is no proactive approach to the Equalities act as compared to Race Equality act. They also feel that the fact that disabled people have to self-advocate all the time is frustrating and suggest there was need to establish a regulatory body that could support with litigation and legal advice to disabled people. They feel often disabled people are burdened with costs of legal battles and hesitant to because of these factors and the lengthy nature of seeking justice.

'F' said "when as a disabled person, you internalise this, that you internalise ableism so well and so easily that you end up blaming yourself. And I think there just aren't the proactive watchdogs available to be able to say proactive, but relatively, to basically reduce the transaction cost of challenging these things. I think that's the single biggest thing.

H pointed out that policymakers need to make regulatory limits to the duration of time diagnosis is made. They pointed out there are many years of delay in getting a diagnosis due to bureaucratic processes and this needs to stop.

#### **7.4.1.4 To Society- "Think beyond themselves- need more understanding, acceptance and empathy"**

The participants wanted people to know how exhausting it is to live with a disability. The constant feeling of having to catch up with things, remember things, its constant

exhaustion in every aspect of their life, be it home, work or education. There is actually “no time-off” says A, the brain is always trying to catch up all the time.

‘B’ and ‘C’ both commonly wanted to get rid of stereotypical ideas about disabled people. ‘C’ wanted people to know that depressed people are not ‘in bed all day’, they have jobs, they put on a brave face and go to work every day. They wanted society to show more kindness and empathy. They wanted more acceptance and just not be treated as ‘different’. ‘C’ wanted more open conversations about mental health and depression. They also wanted the stereotypical depiction of depression in media to change.

D wanted people to know the emotionally draining aspect of living with multiple disabilities. They want people to know that challenges only multiply for disabled children into adulthood, disabilities do not magically ‘become better’. Perceptions of certain disabilities are barriers in the way people treat disabled people. ‘E’ wants more acceptance, understanding and empathy. They also spoke of how exhausting it is to live with challenges that impairments raise, and that most of the time disabled people try to overcompensate trying to do their best at work which is very tiring.

E wants people to think beyond themselves, they say “ we can all be me, me me, think broader than just themselves. Ultimately it is about acceptance and knowing. The more you know about ‘others’, the more you realise you really don’t know.” On a similar note F would like society to be less judgemental and accept that people think differently.

They also pointed out that “people can sign up to these things in theory, but when it comes to the practical application, suddenly it becomes too much work. It's about knowing there's more to being aware of disability than just being aware it's being willing to make adjustments or make changes. And sometimes that involves putting yourself at a disadvantage, because disabled people will do that all the time. And finding some way to find a happy middle ground is just the respectful thing to do.”

The point F makes about reaching a middle ground and signing up to ‘understanding’ disability resonates and their suggestion comes from experience of people often talking about disability rights, but not actually doing anything about it.

#### **7.4.2 My hope for the future- my wish list for change**

At the end of the final interview, participants were asked what they wish should change in education, in the workplace and in society to make the journey of future disabled teachers easier. The next sections present the suggestions participants had for the future.

The participants had varied responses in changes that they would like to see in the future, while some were idealistic, some practical they all stemmed from everything the participants had endured in their life journey. Though at times they did seem sceptical whether the things they suggested would ever become a reality.

#### **7.4.2.1 In education- “more flexibility**

The suggestion that education move away from making individual adjustments to a more inclusive form of education that welcomes variation and variety. By providing students with options rather than having one standard acceptable way of doing things. Giving all students more options to learn the way that works best for them. B wanted schools to think of disabled staff as well especially when it comes to infrastructure, more disability parking spaces for disabled staff. They commented that school buildings are designed keeping students in mind, but not disabled staff, so teacher areas are mostly inaccessible. Adopt technology to limit barriers to access, like E mentions use technology to overcome language barriers for international students so they can access information in their own language for better understanding. They go on to stress that in education institutions the focus is still on ableism. There is a lack of support for staff in terms of unions and defending staff rights.

“For instance, in universities at the moment, a lot of what we do, in terms of materials needs to be accessible. very static isn't if implementing that isn't supported by the union. Management aren't pushing it. Staff just go. It's not happening. So, it's these multiple layers of barriers, whether it's a union, whether it's, school level, faculty level institutional level, everybody's going, no, that's got to change. It's interesting, they do change some things. But they're the easy things to change”.

A pointed out that education system not only forces teachers to comply to particular ways of teaching, but enforce compliance to the ‘so called norm’ of behaviour on students, which needs to change and is captured in the found poem below.

Poem 58 Crappy Education System

Young kid in my class  
Not diagnosed, quite severe  
Loved science, obsessed with it  
Lesson on circuits  
Co- teaching, open plan classroom  
Kid first to complete the circuit  
Turn the light bulb on  
Kid's face lit up  
Fantastic, amazing  
Let's try with two light bulbs

Superior walks in  
"Actually, needs to write up the experiment now"  
I watch the kids' face fall  
This kid who has  
For the first time  
Been first in the class at something  
Why force to write?  
Who gives a toss about how much the kid can write,  
Kid understood science behind it, why isn't that alright?

New system introduced at school  
Teaching phonics  
Counterintuitive to everything I know  
Throwing flashcards really quickly  
What's this card? What's this sound? What's this word?  
All about speed  
Kids struggling  
I try to argue  
Face backlash galore

One day flashing cards in class  
Observe a little kid  
Trying to shuffle slowly back  
Further and further back  
Until hands at Lego box

Trying to build behind back  
Me sitting there thinking  
Know what? Carry on building  
Going to learn more doing that  
Realisation, doing wrong,  
not supportive, feeling helpless

Not able to challenge  
Starting to lose hope with  
Excuse me, the crappy education system

The point E makes about institutions just making changes to tick the box that adjustments are being made but they often take the easiest route or implement the easiest things that they can do in a tokenistic manner.

“How we create a learning environment impacts on our students, rather than saying, You are the problem, you've got this medical issue, you know, in how you interact with the learning environment. So, it's that level, if we can understand it, we can change it” - E

Some participants wanted better diagnosis and recognition of early signs in schools for students who have early signs. Based on their own experiences where early signs were missed which led to a lot of personal turmoil to understand and identify their own disabilities. Many participants when asked what they wished to change in their life, mentioned that they wished their disability was identified earlier in their life so that they could have had the support they needed at the right time.



#### **7.4.2.2 In workplace - 'embrace difference'**

Participants repeated that there is need for more acceptance and empathy in the workplace, but they also said that 'acceptance cannot be legislated'. This makes it more a personal attribute, and therefore difficult to ensure within workplaces. Attributes like treating people with respect and trying to support them to do their roles effectively, working together to help employees work smarter. In the workplace embracing the fact that different people work differently, allowing people that flexibility that allows them to be more productive and more effective.

"I struggle to work in an open plan office, because of the noise when people are talking and can work in that way. So, I found a way of finding other quiet spaces around the building in which we worked to go and work. You know, I had one line manager who was absolutely happy with that. Another line manager that straightaway went, No, you can't do that you need to work in an office. - 'A'

'D' proposed that head teachers receive management training. 'D' mentioned that they had observed head teachers who were excellent teachers, when promoted to head teachers often had no knowhow to deal with management and employee issues.

"It should be compulsory that head teachers do a management course..... Because I've had had teachers who were the most awesome in the classroom. They were absolutely outstanding EPS, exceptional teachers. Fantastic. They were just awful managers, and they were put in to soon. And they've got no management skills, and then they're pressurised by like academies. ....And they should be sent on a management course".

E suggested that even when institutions are aware of problems, they tend to take the easy way out and make tokenistic efforts just to tick the box. If institutions were

strategic in providing effective support to employees, it is more beneficial in the long run than just immediate tokenistic gestures.

“It's interesting, they do change some things. But they're the easy things to change it really easy for them to getting an interpreter for sign language. That's easy. Yeah. One person in pass it. That's easy, very visual, miserably visible. It's those visible signs to people to say we're doing it. They don't tend to do like the documents. You can't see whether a document is accessible. You can't feel it. You can't touch it, if you're not engaged In it. But you can see an interpreter. on here you can see somebody that's, you know, signing in a meeting, you can see it. Therefore, people think we're doing it.” – E

What E proposes is learning environments need to broaden their outlook, instead of looking at things to benefit a particular disability, why not think of improving things for larger differences which includes cultural differences like international students. Accommodating difference and offering support that improves working conditions at the workplace is important. Minimising delays caused by bureaucracy and rigid university policies need to be investigated.

#### **7.4.3 “Looking back at my life - I wish”**

The final question to my participant was what they wish had been done differently, most of them mentioned that they wished their disability could have been identified earlier. The delay in getting diagnosed and getting the support to manage their impairment could have been avoided. They felt that they would have done better academically if they had support in place earlier. They also thought that they would have been in a better position to cope with the low self-esteem and self-doubt they felt.

F wished the incident with the first-grade teacher bullying them never happened, because that incident left such a huge impact on them. It took a long time to recover from the damage it caused them to overcome their self-consciousness while speaking. The fact that despite the incident having taken place almost thirty years ago, the impact on the impressionable first grader was lifelong. Though 'A' mentioned they would not change anything, they went on to say that if they had received early diagnosis and support maybe they would have higher aspirations from themselves which they did not. They regret that they were forced leave their primary school teacher job and later lecturer position due to ableist behaviours. They felt they might have been in leadership positions now.

For C a major regret is that they were put on depression medication in their teens without trying any other solutions. It has life changing effect on them because they have been on medication their entire life and are now at the maximum dose. 'D' wishes it had not taken so long to identify their various disabilities, and personally they wish they did not take so long to do things. Similarly, 'E' wishes they had more support, and a period of stability in terms of their job. They mentioned that their life feels like "I keep trying to put things nicely, neatly in tidy box, and something happens, somebody gets hold of my box, shakes it and throws everything on the ground".

G wishes that when the bullying incident with the teachers happened, they wish their father had agreed to move them to another school. They regret that they did not get support when they sought it during medical school, they feel their life would have been

very different if that had happened. 'H' feels that they wish they had the opportunity to discuss with other people who had similar health condition as them.

None of the identified research included suggestions from their participants. This is the unique contribution of this research; participants took this opportunity to look back at their life and provide practical suggestions with the hope that things will improve in the future. The regret that early signs were missed and that they were diagnosed much later in life was reported by all participants.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

The findings of this study have shown similarity with some aspects mentioned in identified literature, specifically around employment experiences and ableist attitudes within teaching ecosystems, precarious employment history and the positive effect disabled teachers have on students. Yet, many of the findings are unique and highlight certain aspects within research on disabled teachers that needs more focus. In this section the unique findings of this study are summarized within each system of the bioecological systems theory.

Within the Microsystem, unique findings revolving around their grandparents' role in developmental years, signs being missed during early schooling years, stereotypical understanding of disabilities, bullying and macroaggression by teachers, delays caused by bureaucratic diagnosis systems, lack of representation of disabled

employees highlight the need for more focus on these aspects in future research. Within the mesosystem findings, the psychological impact of disability became evident, the self-doubt, low self-esteem, coping strategies that participant disabled teachers used to overcome stress were identified. The choice of schools and the impact this has on participants, family outlook on education and its impact, family acceptance of disability, overlooking early signs, support and advocacy role of the family all these findings highlight the interaction between the different ecological systems and how it affects the individual.

The findings within the Exosystem identify that recruitment experiences are tough for disabled teachers, that the disability employment schemes do not seem to work which leads to precarious employment causing lot of stress and instability in disabled teachers' lives. Toxic work culture, ableist and blatant discriminatory behaviours were identified in participants' professional lives. Lack of support from teaching unions and the stress of financial legal burdens results in participants not taking any legal action against workplaces because they do not have the energy nor resources to fight. The participants report positive impact on their students. They report that their disability became their strength in teaching. These findings suggest that for inclusion to succeed, there is a need for more disabled teachers in education.

The macrosystem findings regarding employment policies, the Equality act not being implemented appropriately, delay in getting disability support and lack of funding are

key areas of focus that were identified and need immediate attention if things are to change in future.

The most important contribution of this study are the findings within the chronosystem. The suggestions from participants are heartfelt and come from a place of deep angst and personal experiences. The plea for more acceptance, empathy and understanding is heartfelt. The key message of 'listen to disabled voices' to employers and policy makers is vital. Participants request more flexibility and need to embrace difference within education settings. Findings highlighted some of the reasons disabled teachers are under-represented in teaching ecosystems and provides some suggestions how things can possibly improve in the future.

## **8 Three important aspects of the findings**

The data generation strategy applied in this research turned out to be a major advantage. By applying the time-line interview strategy where each participant was interviewed four times to generate chronological life span data, not only was rich data generated but it helped identify unique aspects in the participants' lived experiences. In this chapter I highlight three such important and unique aspects that were identified in my findings. These three aspects were not observed in any of the existing literature discussed in Chapter three. Hence, these three aspects specifically stand out as the most original and unique contributions to knowledge emerging from my research findings.

- a. The role of the grandparents
- b. Barriers and enablers to becoming a disabled teacher.
- c. Why disabled teachers do not take legal action when they have legal grounds to do so.

In the following sections I discuss each of these aspects individually.

### **8.1 The role of grandparents**

A recurring aspect observed across all the eight narratives was the influence that grandparents had on participants during their developmental years, sometimes, even into adulthood. Participant narratives highlighted the role that grandparents played in their lives, especially in their formative years. Participants shared how their grandparents often stepped in as carers for parents who were busy, therefore providing "custodial care" (Neely-Barnes & Dia, 2008, p.93). For participants with working

parents, grandparents taking over custodial parenting responsibilities meant that participants spent after school hours and holidays with their grandparents. Participants fondly recalled the support and encouragement their grandparents provided by attending school events when parents could not. Time spent with grandparents had a huge positive impact, specifically for a few participants. For participant F, the emotional support they received from their grandparents was invaluable. For this participant, for whom communication was a problem and often people would not let them complete sentences or lost patience with them, to have their grandparents listen to them discuss topics when no-one else seemed interested played a very important role in that the development of that participants' confidence during their childhood. For B, the strained relation with their parents was compensated by their paternal grandmother who is their closest family member to date. The nurture, care, attention, stability, love and acceptance participants received from their grandparents was valued and had a long lasting effect on them.

While an extensive amount of research has been conducted on the impact of childhood disability on parents, particularly mothers, the literature on custodial grandparenting is not as extensive (Lee & Gardner, 2010, p. 494; Neely-Barnes & Dia, 2008, p.93). The developmental influence grandparents have on a disabled child was not adequately mentioned in any of the identified literature discussed previously in this thesis. When specifically searching for literature on role of grandparents in disabled children's lives, I was able to identify few disability studies that mentioned support provided by grandparents. A study on Intergenerational Familial Solidarity (IFS), with a specific focus on the relationships between mothers and grandparents of disabled children



highlighted the importance of support provided by grandparents in custodial parenting (Trindade et.al, 2020). Grandparents can offer practical, emotional, and/or financial assistance to families with disabled children (Lee & Gardner, 2010, p.492). Though studies including Lee & Gardner (2015), Yamashiro & Matsukura (2014), Neely-Barnes & Dia (2008) and Trindade et.al, (2020) mention that having grandparents involved in daily lives of disabled child and taking over custodial care responsibilities is an important source of support for mothers, the focus of the above-mentioned studies is more on how taking care of a disabled grandchild affects the grandparents, rather than on how the disabled grandchild benefits from these custodial relationships.

Importantly, my participants' narratives specifically highlight the positive developmental influence custodial grandparenting relationships have had on their lives. The nurture, care and support grandparents provided, the stability and acceptance, and the security and protectiveness within these relationships had positive influences in the participants' lives. This is an important and unique aspect that my findings have identified. The custodial support, nurturing relationships that participants shared with their grandparents during childhood, in some cases carried on into adulthood. In adulthood, the support was monetary in the case of A, when they were 'pushed out of teaching', or a relationship of care in absence of support from parents like in the case of B. In the case of C, their choice to become a teacher was influenced by their grandmother's wish, who helped raise them. In case of F, the stability and emotional support they received from their 'happy' grandparents helped them gain self-confidence. The support offered and carer roles that grandparents played in their lives and the happy times spent with them is captured in the found poem

cluster “Relationship with grandparents”. Though this constitutes a small aspect in my findings, it is a significant finding from this research. I feel that additional longitudinal research may provide further insight regarding the developmental influence that grandparents’ involvement and support has on disabled children’s lives (Lee & Gardner, 2010).

In the next section, I elaborate on the barriers and enablers to becoming a disabled teacher.

## **8.2 Barriers and enablers to becoming a disabled teacher.**

A major focus of my research was to identify the barriers and enablers that participants encountered in their journey to becoming a teacher. By applying the ICF, specifically taking into consideration the environmental factors, the intent was to identify enablers and barriers that participants encountered. The aim was to specifically focus on experiences related to participants’ formative years, their education experiences and their employment experiences, to identify and highlight a range of barriers/enablers experienced by them. The timeline data generation strategy helped to identify the factors that affected participants’ lives positively (enabling) or negatively (by creating barriers).

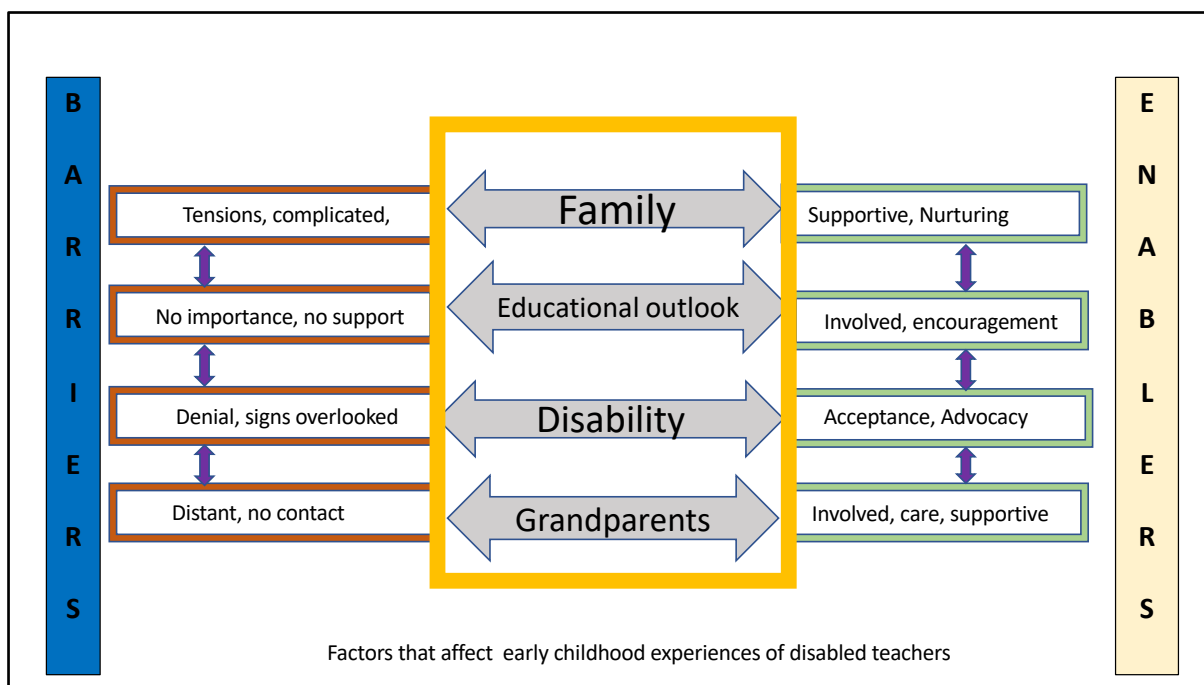


*Figure 25 Enablers and barriers in early childhood experiences*

Within early childhood experiences four main themes were identified, namely family, education outlook, disability and grandparents. I observed that supportive and nurturing family environments, proactive involvement, encouragement to do well in educational pursuits, along with acceptance of disability and advocacy from the family to seek support for their child were enabling factors. Involvement and care from grandparents, and support and time spent with grandparents was identified as an enabling influence. While tensions within the family, complicated family relationships, education not being considered important, and lack of support in educational pursuits, along with denial in accepting participants disability and overlooking early signs were identified as barriers to development. No relationship with extended family, especially non-involvement and no contact with grandparents was also identified as a barrier. Participants with complicated family relations and not having contact with extended

family or grandparents had long term effects; some participants shared they had problems maintaining relationships and connecting with people. Participant D shared how, because they relocated frequently in their childhood, they have difficulty developing long term friendships. For E, their family's disregard for education forced them to drop out of education to take care of family business and they only returned to education after a long gap. For B, their family's denial to accept their hearing impairment meant they had to go through their entire education without any support. But for F the way that their family advocated for them staging a sit-in at the GP to get speech therapy lessons became an enabling factor. It was observed that each theme became a barrier or enabler depending on human behaviour and attitude.

When it came to learning environments four themes identified were teachers, peers, academic and disability support. Enabling factors identified were supportive teachers who were caring and empathetic, peers who accepted the participants and were supportive of them, and an academic curriculum that was accommodating and flexible. Disability support which was easy to approach, and access to disability funds were enablers. Figure 26 depicts the barriers and enablers identified in educational experiences of my participants.

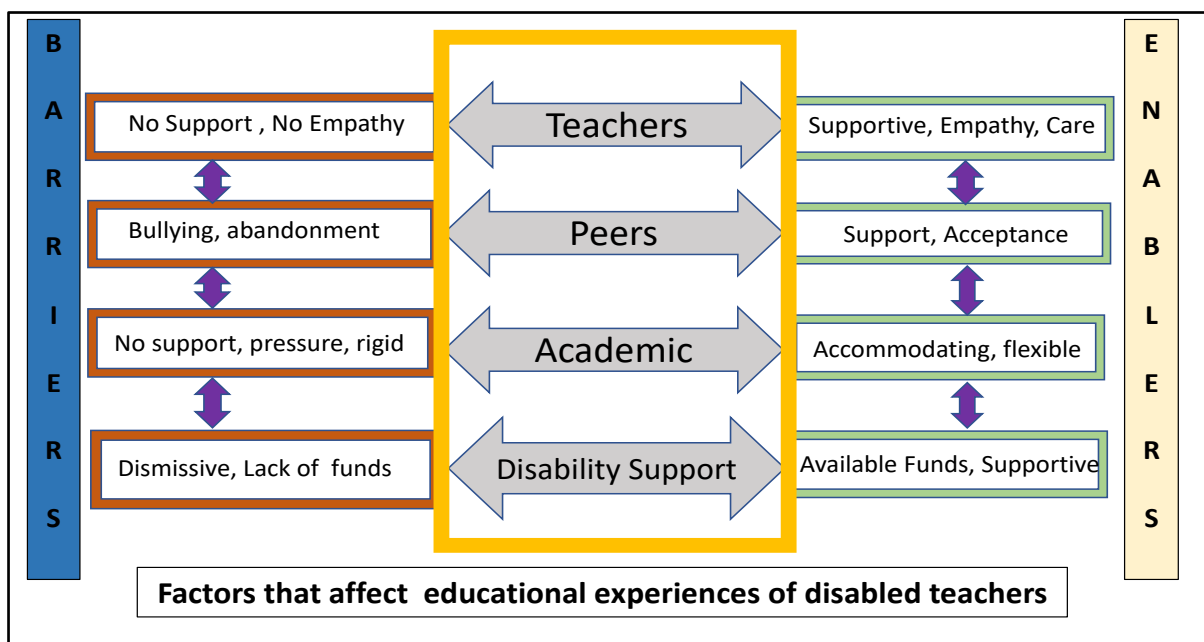


*Figure 26 Enablers and barriers in educational experiences*

The environmental factors identified in my overall findings were mostly human behaviours (supportive or unsupportive); teacher behaviour when it is supportive, empathetic and caring became an enabler. But when teacher behaviour was the opposite, it became a barrier. This aspect was common across all educational years across primary education, secondary education, university and teacher education. The impact of these human behavioural aspects from teachers and peers had a huge impact on participants' educational experiences. Access to timely disability funds and resources in a consistent manner was identified as an enabler, conversely, disability support that was dismissive and lack of funds was identified as a barrier. When access to disability support was inconsistent or non-existent, participants had to spend additional time and effort to gain access to learning which added to the stress of being a disabled student. Especially during teacher education experiences, the lack of support, the pressure to comply to rigid requirements, and the stress of interviewing

for placements were identified as barriers. Teacher education experiences were mostly negative, with limited support, not much mentoring, with participants having to navigate and find their own way. The qualifications process involved struggling with completing paperwork, others reported difficulty to complete the entire stipulated time allotted for placements as there is no reasonable adjustments made. Participants reported that often they never received adequate feedback from mentors. In one case the mentor never even visited the placement school. Discriminatory questions, and lack of adjustments in placement interviews were also identified as a barrier. While at the same time when, appropriate support was available, requirements were flexible and teacher educators were empathetic, these became enablers.

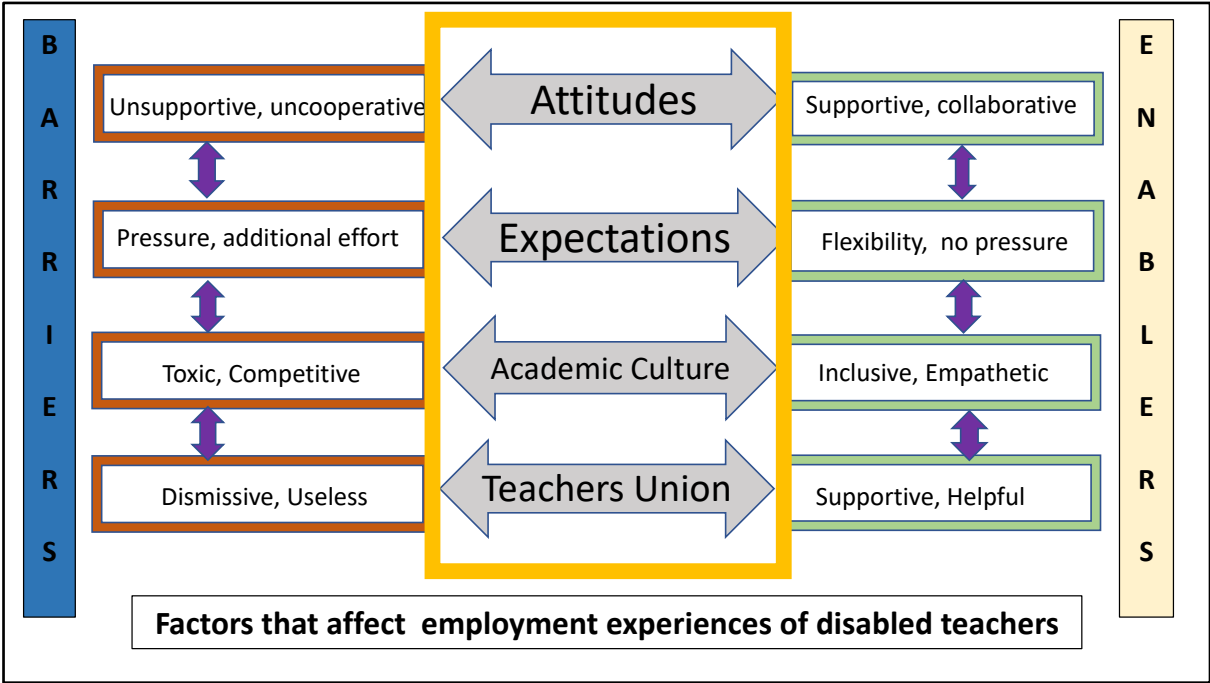


*Figure 27 Enablers and barriers in employment experiences*

The key factors that affect employment experiences were identified as attitudes of colleagues and head teachers, work Expectations, academic culture in the institution

and teacher unions. Enabling factors identified were supportive and collaborative attitudes of colleagues, flexibility and no pressure in work expectations, academic culture that was inclusive and empathetic and teacher unions that offered support at the time needed. Barriers identified were unsupportive, uncooperative attitudes of colleagues and head teachers, work pressure that demanded additional effort from participants, toxic and competitive academic culture and teacher unions that were dismissive and not helpful. Recruitment barriers are mentioned in “Nerve wracking interviews” (Poem 35), “Disability confident employment is a codswallop” (Poem 36) and “Regarding disability employment schemes” (Poem 37). Prejudice and discriminations experiences in interviews were identified in “Explicit precedent, explicit prejudice” (Poem 38). Toxic and competitive academic culture was captured in “I was pushed out of teaching” (Poem 43), indifference by colleagues in “Actions say otherwise” (Poem 45) and “Being a dyslexic academic” (Poem 46). Ableism barriers and lack of support from unions highlighted in “Teacher union was absolutely useless” (Poem 49) and “That sting of injustice” (Poem 50). The rigid nature of academic culture is reflected in “Crappy education system” (Poem 58) and “What’s actually being done?” (Poem 57). The attitudinal barriers encountered by participants in their employment experiences led to precarious employment histories. The repeated pattern of encounters with unsupportive colleagues, time pressures, pressures to conform, burn out, getting pushed out of teaching, fear of finding another job, jumping from job to job was evident in the experiences. It was observed that in order to avoid repeating previously experienced trauma, participants would leave a job at the first sign of ‘history getting repeated’.

The ICF considers behaviour, either supportive or unsupportive as attitudinal factors. Environmental factors can become barriers or enablers based on human elements and behaviour. As seen in the identified themes depicted in the above figures, for example in the theme 'Family', when family behaviour is nurturing and supportive it becomes an enabler, within the same theme, when there are tensions and complicated relations within the family it became a barrier. The findings discussed within this section confirm the inter-dependence between the identified barriers and enablers. I feel that these findings are the most significant and unique contribution of my research. By identifying these factors and highlighting the human attitudinal behaviours that can become enablers or barriers within educational settings has major significance in understanding disabled teacher experiences.

The final unique aspect identified within my findings was that despite having solid legal grounds, disabled teachers did not seek legal action against their employers. In the next section, I discuss the reasons my participants opted not to seek legal action.



### **8.3 Why do disabled teachers' not take legal action when they have legal grounds to do so?**

The employment experiences of my participants revealed their encounters with discriminatory behaviour, unjust dismissals, breaches of the Equality Act, and health and safety violations they experienced. Participants reported that their employers often breached the Equality Act and used it to make a case of dismissal to push them out of teaching. The toxic work environment made it difficult to work, it led to a lot of stress and at times severe health complications for participants (A, C, D, F, G and H). When asked about whether they had taken legal action against discriminatory behaviours they had encountered, the participants reported that though initially they had sought support from teacher unions, they eventually decided not to take legal action. This was mainly for two reasons. The teacher unions were not very helpful, and participants felt they did not have the energy or financial resources to fight.

#### **8.3.1 Lack of adequate support from teacher unions**

It was observed that after encountering discrimination and dismissal action from their employers, participants sought support from teacher unions. Participants mentioned that they did not receive enough support from teacher unions and most of the times teacher unions were dismissive. Three specific incidents stood out. When A was pushed out of teaching, they reported that despite being a member of the teacher union since their student days, they received no support and incorrect advice from their union. In the case of D, the health and safety violation incident led them to seek support from their union, though they did advice that the school was in breach of the Equalities Act, legal support was not provided. For H, the line manager bullying experiences and

lack of support from their union led them to eventually leave their job. In these cases, the teacher unions failed to stand up for the participants, did not offer any support or legal help, and this led the participants to feel unable to legally challenge their schools. They were left alone, to fight their own battles. These experiences are previously discussed in *sections 7.2.4*.

Despite being members of the teacher union for many years, participants shared that they felt let down by their unions. In fact, A and D mentioned that they found that 'Occupational Health Services' were more helpful than their unions. Participants mentioned that unions often instructed them that they did not have a case for reprisal or that there was nothing they could do to help. D reported that the union told them that "they don't think I'm well enough to fight it. And I'm better off, just walking away". So, in a way unions discouraged participants from taking legal action against their employers. Participants reported that the lack of support from the teacher unions only magnified the trauma and stress, eventually leading them to feel that they did not have any more energy left to put up a fight.

### **8.3.2 Lack of energy and financial resources to take legal action.**

After being discouraged with the lack of support from the unions and having gone through the stress of mitigating with their employers, participants felt let down. People close to the participant discouraged them from taking further action against their employers mainly because it was felt that it would not be worth the anxiety and stress it would cause. After they had already been through so much stress, participants felt they did not have the energy to take legal action.

The participants mentioned they were afraid of financial ramifications of a legal battle. Having just been pushed out of their jobs, and getting no legal support from unions, the financial burden of legal action was too much for the participants. Some reported they were scared they might lose their teaching qualifications which they had worked so hard for. All these fears meant that the participants preferred to walk away, find a new job and carry on, rather than challenge the situation. The participants spoke of the regret they feel and that the 'sting of injustice' is experienced every time they think about those times. A few shared that they regret not taking legal action despite having legal grounds to do so but felt that it was too painful at the time and even years later.

This aspect of taking legal action against injustice has not been dealt with in depth in existing literature. Self-narratives in recent publications (Brown and Leigh, 2020; Brown, 2021; Jeffress, 2018) do shine a light on existence of ableism within academic settings, but the effect on employment history and the lack of support from unions is not the focus. I found various accounts of unlawful dismissals published in newspapers and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) reports (2015, 2016, & 2019). This was an important aspect identified in the findings, as several participants highlighted the need for access to legal support and strict action against discrimination of disabled teachers. My research findings show that disabled teachers do not take legal action because they do not receive adequate support from teacher unions, do not have energy nor the financial means for long drawn legal battles.

## **8.4 Conclusion**

In this section I have discussed three unique aspects within my findings which constitute an original contribution of my research. These three aspects stand out not only because they are unique findings emerging from this research but also because they highlight the importance of these aspects in disabled teachers' lives. The positive influence of grandparents' roles in their lives, the custodial parenting roles grandparents play, the nurture, care and stability these relationships provide has been highlighted in these sections. The barriers and enablers identified in early childhood, educational and employment experiences and the interdependence of environmental factors were highlighted. And finally, the reasons disabled teachers' do not take legal action due to lack of support, lack of energy and lack of financial resources were discussed.

## **9 Discussion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore lived experiences of disabled teachers highlighting the role their life experiences had on their choice of profession. The study intended to identify barriers disabled teachers experience in seeking employment. The study wanted to understand reasons disabled teachers had chosen the profession of teaching and explore the connection between their lived experiences and their choice of career. Eight disabled teachers shared their life journeys highlighting their developmental early childhood experiences, their struggles with academic structures, early signs of disabilities being missed leading to self-doubt, bullying and microaggression experienced during schooling, long diagnosis process, and ableist attitudes experienced while working as teachers. Found poems created from participant transcripts, provide a glimpse into individual participant experiences, the cluster poems created highlight the commonality in disabled teachers' experiences. The fact that participants came from varied demographics, yet the similarity in ableism experienced, barriers encountered suggests that this is a widespread problem within teaching ecosystems. Findings also corroborate the theoretical underpinnings the research was based upon discussed in chapter two. In this chapter, evidence from the findings is summarized and further discussed in relation to the theoretical underpinnings in the research, followed by discussion on the research questions. This chapter concludes with recommendations and implications of findings are discussed.

## **9.2 Summarizing the findings**

Some of the findings of this study corroborate with those discussed in identified literature, but what makes them stand out is the depth and detail in the rich narratives. While certain aspects like family influences have been discussed previously like in studies by Grenier, Horrell, and Genovese (2014), Vogel and Sharoni (2011), Duquette (2000) the findings of this provide deeper insight into developmental influences in participants' lives on every aspect from childhood experience, educational experiences, recruitment experiences, teaching experiences simultaneously identifying barriers and enablers in each Bronfenbrenner subsystem.

In this section the findings under each theme are summarized and discussed.

### **9.2.1 Microsystem- “Influence of immediate environments”**

The findings corroborate that family being closest environment to the participant had a lot of direct influence on their development. Participants had a nurtured childhood, in traditional family set up of parents and siblings. The first sub-theme identified in the Microsystem was ‘family dynamics’.

#### **Family Dynamics**

Early developmental influence of a loving, nurturing environment with parents and siblings, effect religious beliefs of the family had on the participants was observed in the data. The values and beliefs participants obtained because of familial influences were reflected in their narratives. Findings highlight that parents' professions as well

as financial situation of the family had direct impact on participants lives. Contact with extended family, interaction with cousins, visits and holidays spent with large extended family had a strong influence. Impact of tension within family due to relationships problems had direct impact and long-term effects like attachment issues in future relationships, feelings of isolation. The recurring aspect observed across data was the influence grandparents had on participants during developmental years, sometimes, even in adulthood. The role grandparents play is often not adequately mentioned in research and is a unique finding of this study. The role grandparents played in participants' lives, stepping in as carers for parents who were busy, the support and encouragement grandparents provided by attending events and the emotional support by just listening and being there for the participant when no one else seemed interested to listen to them has played a very important role in participants lives. Disability history within family was found in seven participants. It was observed that often families did not discuss disability history within the family, especially nonvisible disabilities like mental health and learning disabilities. Participants mentioned that they had been diagnosed as adults. Despite the participants' struggle with reading and writing throughout school years, these early signs were not recognised by parents nor by teachers. The fact families were reluctant to even discuss challenges reveals the stigma that still exists in society with respect to hidden disabilities. Of the identified literature discussed in Chapter two, very few studies focus extensively on developmental influences of families on disabled teachers. Only mention of family is found in the Ferri (2001) study and the Vogel & Sharoni (2011) study where few participant teachers reported that they felt supported and encouraged by family members who believed in them.

## **Learning environments**

It was evident from the narratives that challenges began early for participants in formal learning environments. Participants with learning disabilities spoke of academic challenges like difficulty in reading and writing, some spoke of pedagogical challenges and not liking the way certain subjects were taught. During schooling days, despite there being signs of struggle with academic learning, participants disabilities were not identified. Participants reported that early signs of disability were missed during schooling. This was attributed mostly to the fact that they did not fit stereotypical notions of disability like 'cannot sit still' or 'not able to do academic work'. This aspect is of concern, the fact that because participants did not display stereotypical misconceptions around disability, those early signs were missed. Six participants self-identified and were formally diagnosed while at university. In existing literature there is mention of having low expectations from participant disabled teachers (Hankebo, 2018; Vogel & Sharoni, 2011; Riddick, 2003; Duquette, 2000).

Blatant encounters of bullying were reported during primary and secondary schooling experiences. Besides bullying by peers, participants also reported experiences of getting bullied by teachers and in some cases by family members. Subtle forms of microaggression in the narratives from teachers and friends were observed, instances of microaggression from teachers in comments like "oh, you should have tried harder" or "if they are troubling you, move your desk away from them" was mentioned. When



participants were struggling to cope with information overload, unable to cope with academic pressures and turned to their friends for support, comments from friends “you have so much potential, you just need to work harder” were often hurtful. Sometimes when participant shared that they could not go out because they were catching up with studies comments from friends like “oh come on don’t be you” or “come on get over yourself”, affected participants deeply. Experiences of bullying were troubling aspects to discuss during the interviews, and the long-term effects it has on participants self-confidence is undeniable. Because participants struggled in some academic subjects, teachers had low expectations from them which affected participants’ self-view leading to self-doubt. There were gaps in their studies due to health conditions or, not having requisite grades to move to the next level. At times the gap was also because the participant returned to higher education after being employed for some time to do a masters or doctorate. No mention of gaps in studies was found in identified literature.

Transitioning to university life came with its own challenges, for participants with physical impairment it was to find accessible accommodation, commuting was a hurdle. Participants reported transitioning to university life, getting along with roommates, social aspect of it was stressful. Unsupportive behaviour from teachers/professors was repeatedly mentioned during university experiences. Despite challenges participants showed resilience and persistence in their education journeys. Participant diagnosis journeys have been long and full of complications. The reasons why they had opted for being in the teaching profession varied for participants. Two

participants reported they always wanted to become teachers, one mentioned that they followed a friend who wanted to be teacher, ended up loving it. Two participants reported that because they had never seen any disabled teacher growing up, they never considered it as a career option as teenagers. This highlights the importance of having disabled teachers as role models and representation of disabled employees in schools. Participants stressed that they were role models, they felt they understood students, especially disabled students better and enjoyed teaching. There was a dimension of social justice and making a difference in teaching. Barriers encountered in QTS process were paperwork demands, difficulty getting accepted in practice teaching schools, discrimination due to their disability, lack of adequate support from mentors.

### **9.2.2 Mesosystem – “Influence of interacting multiple environments”**

The mesosystem is interaction between two or more environments around the individual. These interactions are explained by Bronfenbrenner, where the individual operated in more than one setting like school, and home, indirect interaction where link could be through another person, like medical professional, and there is communication between various environments like communication between school and parents. The multiple environments considered are the family, the learning environments, and participants' disability.

## **‘Me and my disability’**

Every individual participant had their own journey in terms of understanding their disability, trying to cope with barriers disability caused for them as well as trying to advocate for themselves. Participants had a tendency of self-blaming which often resulted in them doubting their abilities. The tendency to just ignore signs by thinking “oh! this is just the way I am”, “I can’t do well in studies because oh! I am just me” was consistently observed in the findings. Especially during schooling days, despite there being signs of struggle with academic learning, their disabilities were not identified. This caused them to doubt themselves and view themselves as less than others. This self-doubt and lack of support to manage their learning disabilities, made coping with academic demands extremely difficult. For participants, the impact of self-doubt and low esteem had long term consequences, it affected every aspect of their lives.

Each participant had their own ways of coping with stress. Some would just walk out of the classroom due to ‘visual stress’, some made excuses to be sent home, some had behavioural challenges misbehaviour or bursts of anger due to frustration and feeling ignored. For one participant music became their escape, few said day dreaming was their way of coping. It was observed in the narratives that participants had to self-advocate, whether it came to self-approaching disability services for screening, or to seek the support that they required. Many times, participants needed to make a case for themselves with universities while mitigating support requirements. This role of self-advocacy was enforced upon the participants, and they often mentioned that it is tiresome, time-consuming, and caused tremendous stress. Evidence of self-doubt and

low self-esteem are found in studies like Ferri (2001) and Glazzard & Dale (2015), where participants mention that negative schooling experiences contributed to their low self-esteem.

### **‘Me, my family, and my learning environments’**

The interaction between participants, their family and their education environments are explained in this sub-theme. The decisions parents made in terms of which school participants would attend, the support they provided with education. Parents often intervened with schools specially to report bullying of their child or schools invited parents for discussions when participants had academics problems. These interactions between different environments had a direct influence on participants lives. The choice of schools often was made by parents during initial schooling where the participants did not have much say. When it came to higher education as well it was observed parents largely had a say. When it came to university choices, the family helped participants make decisions by visiting various universities to help them decide. It was observed that in formative years of education especially primary and secondary schooling parental influence on educational experiences were in terms of academic expectations from the participants, how much importance family gave to education, the support the family offered with academic struggles. Family outlook towards education and expectations did have an impact on participants.

### **‘Me, my family, and my disability’**

It was observed that despite there being signs and a history of similar disabilities in the family, these early signs were not acted upon. Families did offer a lot of support and at times advocated on behalf of their child, once formal diagnosis had been received. The support families offered varied from monetary support when the participant needed it, to offering help in person, or stepping in to mitigate situations and by just being there to offer support. Parents mitigated with schools and tried to advocate for their child often when there were bullying situations, actively seeking support, and standing up for their child. One participant mentioned that their parents once had to stage a ‘sit in’ at the doctors to get the therapy the participant needed. Participants never felt pressured by their families regarding academic achievements, and often were a positive support even when coping with academic barriers caused by their disabilities. Family support and advocacy is identified in literature as well in studies such as, Vogel & Sharoni (2010), Ferri (2001), Riddick (2003) and Duquette (2000) which specifically mention this in detail.

#### **9.2.3 Exosystem – Professional life (Factors beyond my control)**

The bioecological systems model states that the exosystem indirectly influences the individual. Though these influences are beyond the individuals’ direct control, they do have impact on their everyday professional experiences.

## **Recruitment experiences**

The findings highlight that recruitment experiences were difficult, participants spoke of anxiety, difficulty recalling details in the spur of the moment, processing information under stress, not understanding expectations during interviews, at times explicit prejudice and discrimination they encountered. Participants with dyslexia reported they often misunderstood questions and ended up giving the wrong answer, interviewers often interpreted this as incompetence, consequently rejecting the participant. Lack of feedback was often mentioned, though participants felt they had done well in the interview, they did not get the job neither were they provided with any feedback. Some mentioned discrimination and at times blatant prejudice within interviews. Often interviews became the barriers to getting employment. Participants with learning disabilities and communication barriers reported they were unable to secure jobs for long periods of time and often ended up finding temporary work, like supply teaching or other part time jobs. Often participants had to self-advocate to get an interview in the first place. Participants reported disability confident employment schemes often do not even guarantee an interview, they always had to call or email to even get called in for an interview. Often emails and calls were ignored, and participants never got any reply. Many shared that they have not once got an interview based on the guaranteed interview scheme. In terms of adjustments within interviews, even when the participant had requested questions prior to the interview because of their learning disability, on the day a totally different set of questions were asked and when inquired the participant received no rationale or explanation. The recruitment experiences of participants were

full of barriers; lack of adjustment and disability employment policies did not seem to make any impact. Studies like Ware, Singhal & Groce (2021) do advocate for more Access to work and Inclusive employment practices, others like Macleod & Cebula (2009) highlight the recruitment barriers faced by disabled student teachers.

### **‘Me and my students’**

The participants spoke about how comfortable they felt in the classroom with students. The disability which had acted as a barrier participants had to navigate and struggle with when it came to academic studies, recruitment, even in everyday things seem to turn into an advantage when it came to understanding their students. Participants repeatedly commented that because they processed information differently it became an advantage for them in their teaching. Another aspect of being a disabled teacher was about being a role model for their students. Participants created a safe environment in their classrooms for their students to feel that they belong and comfortable to share anything. This understanding of students’ struggles and able to offer alternative ways to work around their problems, came from participants own experiences. So, their disability which was a disadvantage at times during their own academic studies, now helped them understand their students struggles and pick up on them earlier. Also because of their own educational experiences, participants reported they understood student struggles better. It was identified from participants teaching experiences, that their students often felt it was easy to discuss personal struggles with participants because they ‘understood’. Students often commented on various occasions, “you know, it's good, because you get it. And I like the fact I can

talk to you about things that sound dumb and stupid, and you get it". The overall sentiment that they make a positive difference in their students experience of education was reported by participants. The ability to be empathetic to students who are struggling to cope and in general having higher expectations of their students was reported. Their own experiences helped participants not just to listen, understand and be empathetic to their students but also to offer strategies that they themselves had used which benefitted their students.

This aspect is very heavily explored in identified literature, are similar to findings in this study. Studies like Horrell & Genovese (2014), Vogel & Sharoni (2011), and Burns & Bell (2011) mention that disabled teachers regarded themselves as successful professionals with competence. Some studies mention of how their participants use strategies to overcome attitudinal barriers with resilience and perseverance (Lamichhane, 2016; Griffiths, 2012; Vogel & Sharoni, 2011; Duquette, 2000). My participants stressed on the positive difference they made in their students' lives, they emphasise that they are in a better position to offer support and identify students who are struggling, because of their own experiences.

### **'My encounters with Ableism'**

Working as a disabled teacher in mainstream settings participants reported experiencing numerous 'ableism' encounters. Participants referred to schools as 'toxic workplaces' in which they had encountered countless ableist behaviours from colleagues, superiors, at times students. They reported feeling pressured in terms of behaving in certain ways, time pressures, unhealthy competitive behaviours of colleagues, lack of empathy and understanding, pressured to comply with rules they



often did not agree with. One statement that stood out was that “schools are the most non-inclusive places to work”. Often participants felt helpless because they were unable to challenge non inclusive practices in schools. They reported receiving backlash on questioning the non-inclusive policies. Participants reported the Equality Act being breached to push them out of teaching, of schools making a case of dismissal to force them out. One participant mentioned that they found ‘schools toxic’ as work environments, where there is professional jealousy, competitive behaviours and ‘cloney’ behaviours from teachers are encouraged, colleagues get nasty and judgemental in their comments. Because the participant did not fit in that mould, preferred to do things differently, refused to be a ‘robot’ in the classroom, management were not in their favour. In this participants case, there is health and safety violation by the school which left the participant hospitalised twice. Yet the participant was labelled a troublemaker by that school and referred to occupational health. One participant got so disillusioned with their schools behaviour they left teaching and became a bus driver, they reported that “the bus company was more inclusive than their school”. The commonality of experiences about the widespread nature of toxic work environment in educational mainstream settings was observed across data.

The ableist behaviours of senior management, head teachers, line managers, colleagues made work environment unsupportive and stressful for participants and led to precarious employment history. The repeated pattern of encounters with unsupportive colleagues, time pressures, pressures to conform, burn out, getting pushed out of teaching, fear of losing their QTS, jumping from job to job was evident

in experiences participants reported. This led to a lot of stress and at times severe health complications for some participants. Ableism encountered within academia has been the focus of many recent publications (Brown, 2021; Brown & Leigh, 2020).

### **‘I did not take legal action’**

When asked about whether they had taken legal action against discriminatory behaviours they had encountered, the participants reported that initially they had sought support from teacher unions, but eventually decided not to take legal action. Mainly for two reasons the unions were not very helpful, and participants felt they did not have the energy or financial resources to fight. Participants mentioned that they did not receive enough support from teacher unions and most of the times unions were dismissive. Participants also mentioned that they did not have the energy left to fight and they were afraid of financial ramifications of a legal battle. Some reported they were scared they might lose their teaching qualification. Participants often regret the injustice of it all because they had been told that they had grounds to take legal action.

“The worst thing is, is that sting of injustice, you just want to get justice, you want them to realise what they’ve done is wrong. I eventually ended up deciding to move on and leave it, which was painful at the time. And there's still moments years later, I used to think back and gosh, should I have challenged them on it?”. – ‘A’

This aspect of taking legal action against injustice has not been dealt with in depth in literature, the recent publications do shine a light on existence of ableism within academic settings, but the effect on employment history and the lack of support from

unions is rarely focussed on. There are many accounts of these in newspapers and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) reports (2015, 2016, & 2019). These reports also mention the negative impact work pressure has on disabled teachers physical and mental health, which is corroborated by my participants experiences.

#### **9.2.4 Macrosystem – influence of social policies**

The influence certain policies had on participants lives like employment policies, disability support policies, funding that was available, technical support offered by disability support policies was observed in the data. Participants mentioned that in their experience employment policies often have no advantage for them. The fact that education institutions despite being aware of Equality Act, breached it repeatedly to push disabled teachers out of teaching was repeatedly observed in data. Participants' experience suggests that senior management and head teachers planned and strategize to build a case of 'incompetency' to get rid of disabled teachers. Instead of being enablers these policies often become barriers and are used to make a case for dismissals. Experiences reflect employment policies often get implemented on paper in a tokenistic manner and they do not seem to work. Many participants availed of disability support processes and associated funding, in the form of technology, of funding with fees, travel and at times with support personnel (e.g. Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) and/or Access to Work). Though these have been extremely helpful for participants, they reported difficulty in accessing support and time delays to have that support in place. Participant experiences highlight bureaucratic processes made

it harder to access support facilities. There is delay in provision of disability support, lack of funding, stressful demands for evidence and paperwork making the process stressful. At times dismissive nature of providing disability support was observed, looking at only immediate benefits and not long-term consequence for the disabled person was problematic and harmful to the participants. A lack of consistency in provision of disability services was observed, while schools participants attended overlooked or missed early disability signs, universities failed to make adjustments, help with diagnosis or provide timely support. Participants were often forced to take on the role of self-advocacy to fight for provision adding to their stress. Underrepresentation of disabled teachers in the workforce is a topic mentioned in some studies like Anderson et al. (2018) and Pritchard (2010) study shows that disabled teachers are invisible even amongst minority teaching workforces.

#### **9.2.5 Chronosystem – “Suggestions I have for the future”**

Bronfenbrenner suggested that the chronosystem helps highlight profound effects, challenges and struggles have had on individuals, this was corroborated while analysing data. I felt the best way to apply the chronosystem in presenting the findings would be to gather suggestions and hopes participants had for the future looking back at their own life trajectories. When asked about aspects in their life that have been a source of support in their lives participants spoke about familial support, friends who have been solid pillars of support, professional support like therapists, doctors, disability support services provided by university, technological support. Participants

also spoke of legislative support in terms of healthcare, sick leave legislation, reasonable adjustments.

**To friends and family- “I am doing my best- understand I am exhausted”**

When asked what they wanted their friends/family members to know, participants mentioned that even while families were supportive, at times there was frustration shown when the participant had to put in extra time because of their disability to complete tasks. The participants all had a common message to friends and family, they just want them to know that they are trying to do their best to live their lives the way they feel works for them, they expect a bit more acceptance and understanding of that. They said they wanted to be treated like everyone else.

**To Employers - “Listen to disabled employees’**

The importance of dialogue and really listening to disabled employees, having open conversations, more empathy and understanding, to respect and be supportive and not judgemental was suggested. The fact that disabled employees have lived experience, their opinions should hold more importance was repeatedly mentioned. “Genuinely listening and having a dialogue with your employees, because it still baffles me that so many people out there perceive themselves to be an expert on somebody else's disability, when they've never lived with it, when they've never experienced that”. Participants mentioned that employers needed to have a more inclusive approach towards disabled employees. One mentioned that disability parking spaces is a key area of concern employers need to investigate and be more accommodating towards

disability related time-off. Another suggested that explicit discriminatory behaviour should be regulated by law. They stressed that intentional and knowingly done acts of discrimination, not treating employees equally cannot be overlooked.

### **To Policymakers- “Include disabled voices in policymaking”**

The participants wanted policymakers to include more disability voices in their team, people with lived experience of disability. To not make tokenistic policies to maintain status quo but actual policies that truly benefit disabled people. Suggestion that policy makers have dialogue and conversations with disabled people to understand their struggles and translate that into policy, wanted more transparency in support provided and how it is offered. Accessing support should be made easier, barriers created due to demands for evidence and paperwork needs to be reduced, possible easier assessment pathways, without demands for letters from hundred different sources. To make things simpler and not complicated to seek support. They suggested there could be a push for a more centralised system that disability service providers could access to get evidence they needed instead of the disabled person having to stress about obtaining paperwork from many sources to provide evidence every time they approach for support. The participant with a background in Law, suggested “an update in law, bringing the UNCRPD into law to comply with international treaties”. They pointed out that the definition of disabilities in UK is restrictive and needs reconsideration. They feel that there is no proactive approach to the Equalities act as compared to the Race Equality act. They also feel that the fact that disabled people have to self-advocate all the time is frustrating and suggest there was need to establish a regulatory body that

could support with litigation and legal advice to disabled people. They feel often disabled people are burdened with costs of legal battles and hesitant to because of these factors and the lengthy nature of seeking justice.

**To Society- “Think beyond themselves- need more understanding, acceptance and empathy”**

The participants wanted people to know how exhaustive it is to live with a disability. The constant feeling of having to catch up with things, remember things, its constant exhaustion in every aspect of their life, be it home, work or education. They wanted to get rid of stereotypical ideas about disabled people in society. They want people to understand that challenges only multiply for disabled children into adulthood, disabilities do not magically ‘become better’. They pointed out that perceptions of certain disabilities are barriers in the way society treats disabled people. They wanted people to think beyond themselves, ultimately it is about ‘acceptance and knowing’. “The more you know about ‘others’, the more you realise you really don’t know.” They would like society to be less judgemental and accept that people think differently. They also pointed out that “people can sign up to these things in theory, but when it comes to the practical application, suddenly it becomes too much work. It's about knowing there's more to being aware of disability than just being aware it's about willing to adjust or make changes. And sometimes that involves putting yourself at a disadvantage, because disabled people will do that all the time. And finding some way to find a happy middle ground is just the respectful thing to do.” The suggestion about reaching a middle ground and signing up to ‘understanding’ disability resonates and their

suggestion comes from experience of people often talking about disability rights, but not actually doing anything about it.

### **‘My hope for the future - My Wishlist for change’**

The participants wish education had more flexibility, that education moves away from making individual adjustments to a more inclusive form of education that welcomes variation and variety. By providing students with options rather than having one standard rigid acceptable way of doing things. Giving all students more options to learn the way that works best for them. They wish education institutions would think of disabled staff especially when it comes to infrastructure and disability parking spaces. They commented that educational buildings are designed keeping disabled students in mind, but not disabled staff, so teacher areas are mostly inaccessible. They pointed out that institutions often take the easiest route, implement the easiest things that they can do in a tokenistic manner or just to ‘tick the box’. Some participants wanted better diagnosis and recognition of early signs in schools for students. They wished that workplaces could embrace the fact that different people work differently, recognising that allowing people that flexibility that allows them to be more productive and more effective. Some participants wished that learning environments would broaden their outlook, instead of looking at things to benefit a particular disability, think of improving things for larger differences which includes cultural differences like international students. Accommodating difference and offering support that improves working conditions at the workplace is important. None of the identified research included suggestions from their participants.



The summary of findings helps understand the developmental influences environments around disabled teachers impact them across all the five levels of the bioecological systems model. The next section looks at the findings taking into consideration the theoretical lenses applied by this research.

### **9.3 Explaining the findings considering theoretical frameworks**

I followed a biopsychosocial (BPS) approach in this research to explore disabled teachers' complex lived experiences. Based on the writings of Prof Carol Thomas, the BPS approach applied took into consideration how participants describe the associations between their impairments and their participation in everyday activities. The intent was to explore lived experiences of disabled teachers wholistically considering their environmental influences, their personal struggle with their impairment and their functioning as teachers. To achieve this, I applied two theoretical frameworks the ICF and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. The findings have identified many factors which influence disabled teachers' experiences, either negatively (barriers) or positively (enablers) in various phases of their lives, including in childhood developmental experiences (Figure 22), learning experiences (Figure 23), and employment experiences (Figure 24). While ICF helped focused on participation of disabled teachers in environments around them, applying Bronfenbrenner provided a lens to understand lived experience by focusing on development of participants over a period of time, by placing individual disabled teachers at the centre of the bioecology

system. By combining language of the ICF and structuring the findings using the bioecological model provided a clear understanding of not only the barriers and enablers encountered, but how participants viewed their own development over a long period identifying critical incidents and their effect on their life. This aspect of collaboratively generating life experiences data during interviews along with participants provided me an opportunity to observe the participant as they reflect on the critical incidents of their lives. This was not just answering questions, it involved participants reflecting on long forgotten aspects, revisiting old trauma, negotiating, and deciphering experiences, at times helping resolve conflicts for some participants. The found poems add another dimension of depth to the findings, they depict how “a nexus of social relationships between those designated impaired and those designated non-impaired or normal, relationships that work to exclude and disadvantage the former while promoting the relative inclusion and privileging of the latter (Thomas, 2004, p.42). When reading the found poems, for example “They thought I was lying” (Poem 17) where the school made no accommodation and did not even believe that the participant indeed had a physical impairment, “The prevalence is terrifying” (Poem 51) which talks about dyslexic teachers experience, “Teacher behaviour was disgraceful” (Poem 16) where the participant was not even allowed to answer the roll call because of their stammer, one can relate to what Carol Thomas speaks of when she talks of ‘exclusion’ of the disabled person by the ‘privileged other’.

The biopsychosocial (BPS) aspect of disabled teachers’ experience is evident in the findings. The biological aspect of disability experiences of participants varied from visual stress, sensitivity to loud noises, exhaustion caused by medications or working

extra hours due to dyslexia, tiredness and mental fatigue. The psychological aspect was self-doubt, anxiety, anger, frustration, burnout. Participants shared their struggles in personal relationships, of relationships not lasting due to lack of understanding or support from partners and how that affected them. I observed that participants held themselves responsible for their personal relationship troubles. The self-blame can be connected to the psychological aspect of living with a disability. The BPS approach helped me develop insight in the interconnective nature of the various aspects. These findings, though not unique, have prior representation in identified literature but not through the BPS lens. When the experience is considered holistically, the findings of validate that participants' disability experiences are interconnected as suggested by the BPS model.

The ICF provided the language used in formulating interview questions and helped identify various barriers and enablers in childhood experiences, learning experiences and employment experiences of participants. The ICF considers activity and participation relevant to the research focus, helped decipher participation barriers and enablers. The ICF states that "the factors which cause 'activity limitations and participation restrictions' (barriers) can be removed by the implementation of 'facilitators' or 'enablers'" (WHO 2001, p.9) which is exactly what my findings suggest. The environmental factors that affected participation; positively (as an enabler) or negatively (as a barrier) are closely related. But the ICF on its own did not help look at the development over time in participants and that is where applying the bioecological systems framework worked well. I strongly believe that the strength of this research is the theoretical frameworks applied by the study to analyse and interpret lived

experiences. The BPS lens of wholistically trying to look at disabled teachers' experiences and applying the ICF, and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory helped gain deep insight into participants complex lived experiences. The combination approach also helped provide structure to the way findings were presented. The findings highlight inter connections between barriers and enablers that were identified, while applying Bronfenbrenner's bioecological system provided the wider structure to look at these interconnected factors in depth. The analytical approach of looking at disabled teachers' experiences in a timeline manner, taking into account the environmental influences in their life from childhood to present, helped gain deep insight into developmental influences at the different stages of participants' lives.

The findings helped identify supportive and nurturing family environments, proactive involvement of family, positive outlook towards education from the family, disability acceptance and advocacy from the family as enablers in early childhood. Positive involvement of grandparents, care and nurturing support, time spent with them had enabling influences on participants. Barriers in childhood experiences were identified as family tensions, complicated family relationships, negative outlook towards education, lack of support in education, denial of accepting disability, overlooking early signs. The lack of any relationship with extended family was identified as a barrier. Within educational experiences, supportive empathetic teachers, and peers, accommodating flexible academic environments, easy access to disability support and availability of funds were identified as enablers. Barriers in educational experiences were identified as lack of support from teachers, bullying from peers, teachers, family and schools, rigid academic environments, dismissive disability services, bureaucratic

processes, and lack of funds. Supportive, collaborative attitudes of colleagues, flexibility in workplace, inclusive academic culture, empathetic teacher unions were identified as enablers in employment experiences. Unsupportive, uncooperative attitude of workplace, work pressure and demands for additional effort from participants, toxic competitive academic culture and dismissive teacher unions were identified as barriers in employment experiences in the findings.

The mirrored nature of barriers and enablers identified in the findings was also visible in the found poems, for example in the found poem “Teacher behaviour was disgraceful” (Poem 16) the unsupportive and hurtful behaviour damaged the confidence of an already vulnerable child, yet when teacher behaviour was supportive and empathetic as depicted in “A massive change” (Poem 13) this became an encouragement for a participant who was ready to give up on their studies. In a way it also represents how personal characteristics, like motivation, resilience, perseverance, can alleviate the context of negative dysfunctional influence (Bronfenbrenner, 2001) into a positive.

The findings depict that for disabled teachers what society considers as barriers of impairments, participants think of these as advantages. Their belief that because “their brain works differently” helps them organise varied and creative learning opportunities for students. Their personal lived experiences help them identify students that are struggling, their empathy for students who are struggling helps them connect better with them. There is this strong belief that they make a difference and have a lot to offer

to make schools more inclusive. Not to forget the role model aspect of being a disabled teacher and the importance of disabled students to have these role models around them. Personal traits of participants like perseverance, resilience, motivation, ambition, empathy for students, love for the profession, act as enablers encouraging participants to carry on despite the numerous barriers identified in the findings that beset them.

The findings substantiate what Bronfenbrenner meant by the developmental power of proximal processes would increase if they occurred among people who developed a strong emotional relationship (Bronfenbrenner 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The influence of strong emotional relationships and their positive influence on participants development are visible in the found poems 'Mom tried to shield me'(Poem 34), 'Never felt a lot of pressure;'(Poem 30), 'My parents staged a sit-in at the GP'(Poem 33), 'My healing journey'(Poem 20) 'Early childhood memories'(Poem 1), 'relationship with grandparents'(Poem 2). These found poems depict how familial support, care, nurture have positive developmental influence on participant lives. Bronfenbrenner spoke about when one of the factors in proximal process are dysfunctional or negative, how personal characteristics can become a positive which is reflected in a few of the participants' experiences. The found poem 'This isn't the end'(Poem 18) the participant spoke about how they were forced to take a break from their studies and had to rely on their own resilience and persistence to overcome the situation. In 'The Grimy City' (Poem 11) the participant despite encountering access issues on their wheelchair still thrives because of their independent spirit. In 'Being a Dyslexia Tutor is incredible' (Poem 39) the participant spoke about how they use novel strategies to make learning easy for their dyslexic students.

By applying the BPS lens and structure provided by the ICF, and Bronfenbrenner is the unique aspect of this research and its strongpoint. The findings of this study are detailed and rich with insight. The depth of the findings was successful in answering the research questions and delves into deeper understanding of lived experiences of disabled teachers. In the next section, research questions are discussed based on the findings of the study.

#### **9.4 Research question 1: How have their early childhood, schooling and university experiences influenced disabled teachers' choice of profession?**

This research journey began with questions, based on my own personal experience. I had the assumption that disabled teachers opted for teaching as a profession because of their own possible negative experiences in education. The findings of the study did not completely corroborate this assumption. This aspect of choice of teaching as a profession has been explored extensively in identified literature. Studies like Ferri et al. (2005) and Riddick (2003) suggest that personal schooling experiences motivated disabled teachers to take up teaching as a profession with a strong belief in being role models and social justice. In the case of my participants the reasons for opting for the teaching profession varied.

Only two participants reported that they chose the profession because of negative experiences they had during their and their disabled siblings' schooling. Another

reported that they entered the teaching profession with the intentions of making it easy for students who struggled like they had during school years. This is highlighted in the found poem “I wanted to change things for people like me: (Poem 22). The findings show that because participants had not come across any disabled teachers growing up, they did not even consider it as a career option, which highlights the importance of disabled teachers as role models. In chapter one, I discussed the importance of having role models in everyday life. Because there were no disabled staff in schools where participants grew up (to their knowledge/recollection), they did not even consider it as a career option for them, which is showcased in the found poem “I laughed at it” (Poem 21). Each participant had varied reasons for being in the teaching profession. Some stumbled into it following friends and ended up liking the profession, some took it up because opportunity became available, or as a part-time option for financial reasons similar findings are reported by Ware et al. (2020). But all the participants agreed that they loved the profession, and they consider themselves to be role models depicted in “I am a role model” (Poem 40). The importance of the representation of disabled teachers in schools is highlighted by the findings. Not just for disabled students, but for all students the importance of having disabled teachers in everyday school environments is reiterated by the findings.

Because of their own academic difficulties, participants mentioned they tried to support their students and had empathy for students who were struggling. They reported it was easy for them to identify students who were struggling because of their own experiences. Their own negative academic experiences do affect the way they organize their own teaching learning activities, by using creative learning experiences,



supporting diverse needs of students, sharing their own learning strategies to help students. These aspects were captured in the found poems “I understand students” (Poem 41) and “Being a dyslexic tutor is incredible” (Poem 46). There are lot of positives that disabled teachers offer to schools through inclusive practices they use in their classrooms. Though the original assumption I had was not corroborated by the findings, they do show that disabled teachers bring many positives to their workplaces. There was some interrelationship between personal negative education experiences and choice of teaching profession. Evidence of how negative educational experiences are motivating factors to providing better educational experiences to their students are reported by Vogel and Sharoni (2011), Riddick (2003), Duquette (2000).

The findings emphasise that disabled teachers use more inclusive teaching learning strategies in their classrooms. They create inclusive environments in their classrooms, where every student feels supported. They have empathy for students’ struggles, and because their own lived experience helps them to identify students who are having difficulties. Specifically autistic participant disabled teachers and those with ADHD claimed that they understood the needs of autistic students also those with ADHD sometimes more than the special needs experts in the schools. This was because they were able to connect with the student and understand their perspectives. In autistic non-verbal students/participants who are autistic themselves claimed to be able to be able to communicate and understand the students highlighted in “The narrative around autistic people” (Poem 42). These findings are similar to autistic teachers’ narratives compiled in Wood et al. (2022). Participants diagnosed with dyslexia claimed that sharing strategies that worked for them personally, with their dyslexic students seemed

to help the students work out strategies of their own similar to findings of studies by Griffiths (2012) and Burns & Bell (2011) on dyslexic teachers. Disabled teacher participants also had high expectations from their students irrespective of labels and motivated their students to reach their potential. It is important for schools to recognise these positives that disabled teachers have to offer and capitalise on these abilities to provide better inclusive practices. Their own experiences of education influence their teaching practices, especially in terms of expectations they had from students, teaching strategies they used, their classroom environments which is advocated by Wood et al. (2022). Participants with learning disability specifically explained strategies they used with students were often strategies that they themselves used as students; it came from their own personal experiences. The strategies used were mostly to help with learning related difficulties encountered by students with learning disabilities. Strategies mentioned were using more visual communications, using specific games like blocks, doodles to overcome spelling, memory, and organization issues. These findings are similar to the findings in Hickman and Brens (2014), Burns, Poikkeus, and Aro (2013), Griffiths (2012), Solis (2006), and Gabel (2001). Findings reflect that participants portray tremendous self-resilience and perseverance to succeed in their teaching profession similar to Burns, Poikkeus, and Aro (2013), Griffiths (2012), Vogel and Sharoni (2011), Solis (2006) and Duquette (2000).

To answer the research question, though the reasons that participants chose to become a teacher vary, there is no denying the positives they have to offer to schools. Disabled teachers brought additional qualities to inclusive teaching practices because of their own personal experiences. Findings highlight that by using better differentiated

learning activities and empathetically supporting disabled students in their classrooms disabled teachers brings many advantages to education. The findings related to choice of profession do not completely corroborate with identified literature where some studies mention that negative experiences during early education became the motivating factor to become better teachers themselves (Dvir, 2015; Riddick, 2003; Ferri, Keefe, and Gregg, 2001; Duquette, 2000). Academic struggles documented in existing literature discuss negative experiences throughout education, low expectations from teachers, at times participants themselves (Hankebo, 2018; Vogel & Sharoni; 2011, Riddick; 2003; Duquette, 2000) had low expectations of themselves (Glazzard & Dale, 2015). Though the rich data collected from participants in this study implies that their reasons for coming into the teaching profession varied and the lack of disabled teachers in their own lives growing up made participants feel that it was not even a career choice for them. This highlights the importance of having disabled teachers in school environments not just for the many advantages they bring into schools, but also because of the role model aspect disabled teachers represent.

## **9.5 Research Question 2: How do disabled teachers describe their experiences within academic settings?**

The research findings consistently identified negative learning experiences throughout education across participants with low expectations from teachers. Participants reported feeling stigmatised and isolated in school. Participants had complicated academic experiences, with struggles starting as early as primary education. Because early signs of disability were overlooked or missed which made academic struggles

more profound and confusing for participants. This was attributed to stereotypical understanding of disability in some cases, for others there is blatant oversight from schools not to take any remedial action to mitigate participants academic struggles. And if remedial action was taken it was not really helpful but in fact detrimental to the participant. In some cases, because participants were good in some subjects, the fact that they struggled in other subjects, or that participants struggled with examinations were overlooked by teachers. Signs like visual stress, monotropic interests, problems with reading and writing, behavioural outbursts, were repeatedly overlooked or disregarded. Because early signs were missed, and no support in place participants struggled to cope with academic pressures. Often, they grew up with a feeling of being 'different', 'lesser', 'not smart', "I am not academically good" leading to self-doubt which had long term consequences. The findings emphasise how these early education experiences contributed to low self-esteem and confidence in participants which had lifelong consequences for them.

Another finding which was of concern was non action on bullying, and micro-aggressive behaviour from teachers. The cluster poem "I was bullied" (Poem 14) demonstrates how this is a common experience across participants, in some cases it carried on for entire schooling years. Specific found poems like "They thought I was lying" (Poem 17) and "All I did was give my opinion" (Poem 15) depict troubling and at times unlawful behaviours of schools. Bullying by teachers was extremely traumatising and often had deep long-lasting effect on participants self-confidence, depicted in "Teacher behaviour was disgraceful" (Poem 16). The long-term effects of bullying, of which I have personal experience, is often life-long. It not only affects self-confidence,

but the damage caused to self-esteem and self-view are at times irreparable. For a few participants, bullying incidents were experienced even during university years. A gap in studies were identified in the data due to lack of requisite grades to move to next level, dropping out or medical leave.

Academic struggles continued when participants transitioned to university, at times making participants felt lost and confused. Failure to acquire requisite grades reflected in “Just keep working, working, working” (Poem 8) led to further self-doubt issues. Participants self-identified and self-approached DSA while at university. Sometimes seeking help did not work out for participants as captured in “Just changed my major” (Poem 9) leading participants to drop out of a course because they were unable to cope. Diagnosis journeys were complicated with NHS pathways being complicated and participants could not afford private pathways. Some participants had difficulty with the social aspect of university life, left them feeling isolated and lonely. For B, finding accessible accommodation and commuting were barriers depicted in the found poems “Grimy city” (Poem 11) and “How do I get in? How do I get out?” (Poem 10). Despite their academic struggles participants show a lot of perseverance and resilience. Many participants held multiple qualifications, postgraduate and doctoral degrees. Though few participants did utilize DSA support to avail of technologies and support workers, the process of accessing these funds were stressful, time-consuming and required self-advocacy. There was no consistency between DSA provided by different universities. Often provisions were delayed, were provided months after a course had already started. Getting access to DSA was bureaucratic, complicated and stressful, with no flexibility. Disability support experiences were captured in “There is nothing we

can do” (Poem 19), the relief of finally having an understanding of their disability is reflected in “My healing Journey” (Poem 20). Findings on the diagnosis journey were not particularly discussed in detail in identified literature.

The participants reported a lack of adequate support during teacher education which is similar to the findings of the Glazzard and Dale (2015) study. Participants were left to navigate and find their own way. The qualifications process involved struggling with completing paperwork, others reported difficulty to complete the entire stipulated time allotted for placements as there is no reasonable adjustments made regarding the duration of the placement it is the same for all students irrespective of ability. Participants reported that often they never received adequate feedback from mentors, in one case the mentor never even visited the placement school. Discriminatory questions, and lack of adjustments in interviews to find placements with schools were identified as a barrier. The findings regarding the lack of support offered to disabled students within teacher education programmes corroborate the findings reported by the Parker and Draves (2018), Sokal, Woloshyn, and Wilson (2017) and Macleod & Cebula (2009) studies.

On working in schools as teachers, findings identified intolerable demands academia makes on disabled teachers, the work pressure, the pressure to comply with norms and not deviate, sudden transformation changes led to chaos. Findings highlight how there is lack of awareness about how structural transformations in academic settings disproportionately affect disabled teachers. The experiences highlight how there is

lack of awareness about how structural transformations in academic settings disproportionately affects disabled teachers captured in “I was pushed out of teaching” (Poem 43). Structural transformations directly affected disabled teachers’ workload, leading them to work extra hours, causing exhaustion, burn out thereby increasing employment precarity. Employment precarity impedes on their personal and career progression depicted in “The prevalence is terrifying” (Poem 51). Participants expressed frustrations regarding systemic barriers within academia which made it difficult to progress in their profession. The impact pressures at workplace and lack of adjustments had on health and well-being of the participant are evident in the findings captured in “Actions say otherwise” (Poem 45). Findings also highlight experiences of lack of empathy from colleagues, and stereotypical understanding of disabilities encountered within workplaces highlighted in “The narrative around autistic people” (Poem 42). Often participants felt excluded by colleagues, leading to isolation, loneliness and withdrawal from teaching reflected in “I left teaching” (Poem 44). Findings depict the lack of progression, lack of support, lack of recognition of contributions disabled teachers make to education. A few positive workplace experiences were reported by the participants. These positive experiences reported were: successful supportive access to work partnerships, availability of adequate accessibility resources and supportive co-workers. This suggests that these elements vary from one education institution to the next and are not consistent.

To answer the research question, the research findings of this study emphasise that participants describe having negative experiences in academic settings across the various phases of their life: as students in schools; when they transitioned to

university; in teacher education; and even when in employment. Barriers were consistently identified in each of these stages.

### **9.6 Research Question 3: How do disabled teachers describe the critical incidents in their life that have influenced their disability experience and shaped their identities?**

Certain incidents had long term life changing consequences for participants. the personal damage these incidents caused the participant in terms of physical stress, anxiety, frustration, anger, exhaustion was life altering. There were multiple incidents in each participants life. For A the incident where they were pushed out of teaching, left them disillusioned with education, they gave up teaching for a few years because of that incident, depicted in the found poem “I was pushed out of teaching” (Poem 43). The incident cause physical exhaustion leading to hospitalisation, mental well-being issues, unable to fight and take legal action left them feeling frustrated and angry. But the worst aspect of that experience was that any small hint of the same problem repeating caused them to leave the job and give up on everything they worked hard for captured in “I am gonna walk away” (Poem 48). For ‘B’ they did not get any support for their hearing impairment from their parents, they lived their entire school years without hearing properly and no support, until at 16 they told their GP captured in “There is nothing wrong with you” (Poem 31). The incident where the school refused to provide any adjustment for ‘B’ and they had to study GSCE science from a book sat in a room, reflected in “They thought I was lying” (Poem 17) is shocking and unlawful. The intense drive observed in ‘B’ to be independent from a very young age stems from



these incidents, wanting to be able to support themselves when they did not get any support from their parents.

‘D’ walked out of teaching after the health and safety issue with their school because they complained they were labelled as a ‘whistle blower’ and targeted by the school. The incident not only caused physical trauma, but ‘D’ moved on completely leaving the teaching profession depicted in “I left teaching” (Poem 44). They themselves admitted that they were very good with special needs students and enjoyed connecting and working creatively reflected in “I understand students” (Poem 41). ‘D’ is completely disillusioned with schools and calls them “most toxic places to work”. Though they had grounds to take legal action they opted not to because they had no energy left to fight. Participants shared their frustrations at not taking legal action in “Teacher unions was absolutely useless” (Poem 49) and “That sting of injustice” (Poem 50). ‘C’ after the traumatic incident with the head teacher, has since left their fulltime teaching job they had for thirteen years with the same school and began working as a supply teacher. ‘E’ was made to leave school by their family to work in the family business, returned to academia after thirty years to complete their graduation and teacher qualification. They have been on a temporary contract for more than ten years with the same education employer which they are contesting currently.

‘F’ the incident in first grade depicted in “Teacher behaviour was disgraceful” (Poem 16) left long term self-confidence issues. The prejudice they encounter in recruitment interviews has left them weary of leaving a job reflected in “Explicit precedent explicit

prejudice” (Poem 38). For “F’ who experiences extreme prejudice in interviews because of their stammer makes academic progression difficult for them. The fear of interview makes them pass on career opportunities. Being self-conscious of the stammer is a daily struggle depicted in “Things quickly disintegrate” (Poem 28). ‘F’ because they had encountered discrimination quite often in education, holds strong opinions about legislation and laws. Motivating them to take on advocacy role to work for disability rights and a more inclusive society.

For ‘G’ a major regret is giving up on the medical pathway and changing their major during under graduation highlighted in “Just changed my major” (Poem 9). They feel that that incident changed the course of their life. The bullying incident from teachers when they were locked up for hours still traumatises them, “All I did was give my opinion” (Poem 15). Personal trauma of their relationships failing was a pivotal moment in their life, “The fire spread everywhere” (Poem 25) where their family support was beneficial for them to carry on with their studies. Positive critical incidents in their life when they were in UK and got diagnosed, “My healing journey” (Poem 20). The relief they shared that when someone believed them, and they finally had a concrete diagnosis why they were feeling the way they did was life changing. They received support from DSA and were able to complete their studies successfully reflected in “A massive change” (Poem 13).

For 'H' the traumatic long painful years to get their diagnosis caused them to leave their job. The bullying from a line manager caused mental well-being issues. the decision to leave work and become self-employed stemmed from the bullying incident.

The self-narratives in identified literature in Brown (2021), Jeffress et al. (2019) had compilations of similar experiences. For participants the impact of these incidents on their personal well-being, physical health, the toll on their self-confidence, trauma and heartache caused, frustration and anger of not being able to take action, on their employment history, on their personal relationships is inconceivable. What I found was that along with resilience, motivation, drive, perseverance there was this agonising subtle tone of self-blame in the narratives. That was the extent of damage the traumatic incidents caused participants.

To answer the research question, participants of this study because they were not diagnosed early on struggled throughout their schooling and university experiences. The inability to comprehend why they were struggling despite working hard led to self-doubt and self-blame affecting their self-view captured in "I just knew I am not normal" (Poem 23) and "A coping mechanism" (Poem 27). The self-doubt was so profound that even when participants did do well, they were in denial depicted in "Annoyed at getting higher grades" (Poem 24). Everyday struggles are depicted in "Things quickly disintegrate" (Poem 28) and "Simple tasks become monumental" (Poem 54). Disability experience is reflected in "They don't understand" (Poem 53), "Everything merges into one" (Poem 55), "Cup that easily overflows" (Poem 47) and "Tired of Hiding it" (Poem

56). Participant disability experiences were that of encountering many barriers in every stage of their life, which they overcame by showing perseverance, determination, resilience and persistence.

#### **9.7 Research Question 4: What were the barriers and enablers encountered in the process of becoming a disabled teacher?**

Many barriers and enablers were identified in the findings. Within early childhood experiences supportive and nurturing family environments, proactive involvement, encouragement to do well in educational pursuits, along with acceptance of disability and advocacy from the family to seek support for their child were identified as enablers in early family influence of my participants. Involvement and care from grandparents, support and time spent with grandparents was identified as an enabling influence of participant development. Early experiences were captured in “Early childhood memories” (Poem 1). Developmental influences of grandparents are reflected in “Relationship with grandparents” (Poem 2). Parental influence on education is reflected in “Schooling” (Poem 29), “Never felt a lot of pressure” (Poem 30), parental advocacy in “My parents staged a sit-in at the GP” (Poem 33) and families trying to cope with participants’ disabilities captured in “My family was confused” (Poem 32), “Mom tried to shield me” (Poem 34). While tensions within the family, complicated family relationships, education not considered important, and lack of support in educational pursuits, along with denial in accepting participants disability and overlooking early signs were identified as barriers to development. No relationship with

extended family, especially non-involvement and no contact with grandparents were identified as barriers.

When it came to learning environments supportive teachers who were caring and empathetic, peers who accepted the participants and were supportive of them, academic curriculum that was accommodating and flexible were identified as enablers in the data. Disability support, which was easy to approach, availability of funds were enablers. Early schooling experiences were captured in “Memories of first day at school” (Poem 3). Early struggles in primary school were captured in “Trauma with spelling tests” (Poem 4), and “Special reading class” (Poem 5). Other academic struggles like difficult in exams was captured in “I struggled in exams” (Poem 7), adjusting to academic environment in “Struggled in boarding school” (Poem 6). Accessibility problems are reflected in “How do I get in? How do I get out?” (Poem 10) and “Grimy city” (Poem 11). Teachers who lacked empathy were unsupportive, peers who were bullies, or abandoned the participant were identified as barriers. Academic curriculum that was rigid, added a lot of pressure on the participant and unsupportive were barriers. As well as Dismissive disability support services, lack of funds were also identified as barriers. The barriers in education experiences were captured in “I was bullied” (Poem 14), bullying by teachers was highlighted in “All I did was give my opinion” (Poem 15), “Teacher behaviour was disgraceful” (Poem 16). Indifference by school was reflected in “They thought I was lying” (Poem 17). Dismissiveness of DSA was captured in “There is nothing we can do” (Poem 19).

The key factors that affect employment experiences were identified as Attitudes of colleagues and head teachers, Work Expectations, Academic culture in the institution and teacher unions. Enabling factors identified were Supportive and collaborative attitudes of colleagues, flexibility and no pressure in work expectations, Academic culture that was inclusive and empathetic and teacher unions that offered support at the time needed. The barriers identified were unsupportive, uncooperative attitudes of colleagues and head teachers, work pressure that demanded additional effort from participants, toxic and competitive academic culture and teacher unions that were dismissive and not helpful. The recruitment barriers were depicted in “Nerve wracking interviews” (Poem 35), “Disability confident employment is a codswallop” (Poem 36) and “Regarding disability employment schemes” (Poem 37). Prejudice and discriminations experiences in interviews were reflected in “Explicit precedent, explicit prejudice” (Poem 38). Toxic and competitive academic culture was captured in “I was pushed out of teaching” (Poem 43), indifference by colleagues in “Actions say otherwise” (Poem 45) and “Being a dyslexic academic” (Poem 46). The ableism barriers and lack of support from unions highlighted in “Teacher union was absolutely useless” (Poem 49) and “That sting of injustice” (Poem 50). The rigid nature of academic culture is reflected in “Crappy education system” (Poem 58) and “What’s actually being done?” (Poem 57)

There is some interconnectivity identified in barriers and enablers. It was identified that barrier in one system became an enabler in another. While negative learning experiences were identified as barriers in childhood, these became motivation to become better teachers. Essentially the barriers experienced, became a road map for

participants to exactly know what not to do as teachers. Participants who had no support from family that became the motivations to become self-reliant and independent. These denote a positive outlook amongst participants, nature to persevere and drive to succeed. This ability of participants to turn disadvantages into advantages inspired the title of this research. Similar aspects regarding self-advocacy and family advocacy have been reported in some of the studies identified in the literature review Vogel and Sharoni (2011), Ferri et al. (2005) and Riddick (2003), though none of these studies apply ICF terminology of 'enablers' and 'barriers'.

## **9.8 Recommendations**

This section comprises of recommendations I would like to put forth drawn from the discussions with participants during the final interview and my research findings. Participants were pragmatic in the discussions I had with them, and I have included every suggestion they recommended.

1. Include disabled people in policy making: I strongly recommended that any policy making, especially disability-focused policies and policies around SEN provision are formulated, must include disabled teachers' voices. This suggestion was made by all the eight participants. It is recommended that policy makers hold open dialogue and conversations with disabled people to understand their struggles. These discussions not only need to be translated into policy, but it is recommended that there needs to be transparency in how disability support is provided. I believe that by including

disabled teachers' voices in policy making will ensure that policies are not just drafted in a tokenistic manner, but with a strong intent to bring about positive changes.

2. Centralised system for disability records: A centralised system which maintains disability records, similar to how NHS maintains health records is recommended, this will make accessing support easier for disabled people. Such a centralised system would reduce the barriers created by replicative demands for evidence and paperwork endured by disabled people and possibly could ensure easier assessment pathways. Such a system will reduce demands for records from hundred different sources on disabled people and disability service providers would have centralised access to the evidence they need. Having such a centralised system in place would eliminate the stressful process a disabled person has to go through to obtain necessary paperwork from many sources to provide evidence every time they seek support.

3. Proactive regulatory body for support with litigation: I recommend that a regulatory body be established to support with litigation and provide legal advice to disabled people. Participants were hesitant to take legal action against employers because they could not afford the costs of legal battles and the lengthy nature of seeking justice. It is recommended that there be a more proactive approach to the Equalities Act something like the Race Equality Act, to make discrimination against disabled employees punishable by law.



4. Improve support for disabled students in teacher education: I recommend that teacher education institutions improve provision of support for their disabled students, that there be more flexibility and reasonable adjustments regarding demand and compliance with excessive paperwork. I recommend adequate support be provided to disabled students during placement interviews and additional training be provided to teacher educators to sensitize them regarding diverse needs and alleviate stereotypical understanding of disability.

5. Better Infrastructure: I recommend that infrastructure of education buildings be made more disability compliant, especially when designing new education buildings or updating existing buildings, special attention be given to disability staff parking, disabled staff toilets, and disability access.

6. Effective School leadership: I recommend head teachers and school leadership to ensure better communication with disabled employees, having open conversations with them. I recommend head teachers and school leadership treat the disabled employees as assets, recognizing their positives contributions, and make optimal use of these assets for the advantage of the whole school. I believe that effective school leadership which acknowledges and makes optimal use of the positive contributions of disabled employees would create a more inclusive environment in the whole school.

7. Stop tokenistic treatment of disability policies: I recommended head teachers and school leadership ensure that Disability Employment Policies are robustly implemented and not just as a box that is to be ticked. I strongly recommend that Disability Employment Policies be regulated and discriminatory behaviour in recruitment process be penalised by law.

8. Recommended changes in Education: I recommend education practices be made flexible to accommodate diverse needs. It is essential that education looks wider from making individual adjustments to a more inclusive form of education that welcomes variation and variety. This could be achieved by providing students with options rather than having one standard acceptable way of doing things. Giving all students more options to learn the way that works best for them. I recommend education practices move away from forcing students to meet standards that are considered 'normal' to one that encourages creativity and diverse ways of doing things.

9. Robust information on number of disabled teachers: I recommend robust statistical data collection strategy to be implemented so as to gather accurate and relevant information about number of disabled staff employed in educational settings. The data collected needs to include all disabled school employees, to get a clear understanding of actual number of disabled people employed within education. If this data collection strategy were to be carried out on a larger scale, by every country, this could generate robust statistical data on disabled people employed in education worldwide.

These recommendations have been put forth in collaboration with my participants. The plea for acceptance, empathy and understanding in the recommendations needs to be addressed. The key message amongst these recommendations to employers and policy makers is to 'listen to disabled voices'. The request for flexibility and embracing difference within education settings is genuine and needs immediate action.

## **10 Conclusion**

### **10.1 Reflection of the research process**

This research originated from a strong personal interest and desire to explore the lived experiences of disabled teachers, their developmental interaction with environments around them and the impact these environments have had on their lives. There is no question that the Covid-19 crisis resulted in a sudden and unexpected disruption to the study. The pandemic forced a review of original plans for the thesis and required mitigating actions to tackle barriers that now stood in the way of carrying out this study successfully. Not only did original plans need to be modified to carry out the data generation online, but entire recruitment strategy also needed to be altered. The participation criteria were reworked, made broader. The pandemic experience taught me that research can never fully be planned out in a linear manner, given how the future is always uncertain. Many opportunities became available because of the pandemic which illuminated new knowledge, collaboration and avenues involved in undertaking this doctoral research. My experience of the pandemic was that embracing uncertainty and flexibility within research is generative, enriching and essential. The trajectory that this study ended up taking was a direct result of the new knowledge and techniques learnt during the pandemic.

Crafting the found poems was extremely satisfying and reflective. They helped me understand individual participants' emotions, as if participants had allowed me a glimpse into their world. I wish I had been aware of poetic inquiry earlier on in the research. In this research I limited the use of this creative method only to create found

poems, but I would have loved to carry that forward and try applying poetic inquiry to create poems from the theoretical perspectives, using *Vox Theoria*, (Pendergrast, 2009) and bring my own perspective as the researcher in poetic form. But I hesitated because I was new to the format, time was a constraint as well as finances were limited to extend the study. But I am determined to keep working on poetic inquiry and to carry on applying this beautiful, creative method in the future.

A life lesson learnt during this entire research journey is to embrace uncertainty and an openness to becoming a researcher. The discovery of poetic inquiry, though serendipitous, was the culmination of the pandemic experience for me personally. If it had not been for the various conferences and workshops that suddenly became available because everything became accessible online, this element would never have been part of this study. The immersive experience I had during data generation and thematic analysis made me feel immensely responsible to authentically represent participants experiences. I felt I was diluting individual stories by collectively representing them as themes. Poetic transcription and creating found poems became the answer to my dilemma. Including found poems along with themes helped highlight individual experiences, create coherent evocative storyline and form strong powerful connections with the reader.

As a researcher I wondered how participating in this research would affect my participants. While seeking feedback from the participants on findings and poetic inquiry, my participants shared how taking part in the research had been helpful for

them. C reported this was the first time they have shared their story by taking part in this research. Talking about their life experiences was cathartic, having open discussions with their family has been beneficial for C. It gave them the courage to confront the toxic situation at their workplace and finally take the step to remove themselves from that environment. C has now changed jobs and found a better environment to work in. Other participants reported that taking part in the research made them analyze their life and reflecting on their journey was helpful to them. These emails from my participants and their feedback are the most treasured feedback I received in this journey. The trust and belief my participants showed in my research became a driving force and a responsibility I carried with me throughout this journey. This responsibility motivated me to include found poems along with collective themes.

The entire research process and analysing participant experiences has had a deep impact on my life. The commonality of experiences of my participants only strengthens the argument that disabled teachers across the world encounter common barriers and struggles. The findings highlight the role their life experiences have had in their choice of profession and the impact their environments have had on their disability identities. The analysis of biographical experiences of disabled teachers helped understand complex life journeys, personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as teachers. The changes that participants would like to see in the future need special focus, because these suggestions came from their lived experiences. These recommendations have implications for policymakers, administrators, teacher education institutions, head teachers and colleagues. The microsystem findings hold implications for school administrators and teachers, not only regarding identification

and mitigating the special needs of students, but being aware of micro-aggressive behaviours teachers and headteachers themselves possess. The very fact that most of the participants were diagnosed as adults, despite having various challenges in their school years highlights this. Recommendation that disabled voices be included in policy making that my participants make is valid and needs urgent attention. The findings hold implications for every level of education, from schools to universities, teachers to university professors, from head teachers to policymakers.

## **10.2 Limitations of the thesis**

Given the context of this study, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. First, there were only eight participants in this study hence the findings are not generalizable, yet the richness and vast nature of data generated provided in-depth understanding into disabled teachers lived experiences.

Secondly, time and context were constraints in this research. The data were generated over a period of two months because of the pandemic. This might have been improved if this inquiry were extended and was done over a longer period to avoid researcher fatigue. Data generation could have been done using various other methods, like biographical diaries, conducting poetic inquiry on multiple levels which would have added nuanced perspectives.

Thirdly, the coding was done manually because of personal preference. Though using electronic tools such as NVivo have the capacity to increase the depth and transparency of the analysis process (Thomas, 2017, Basit, 2003). But these tools take time to learn, and this was especially difficult in the pandemic when removed from colleagues and supervisors as was the case from much of this doctorate.

Finally, found poems were created by me. I stumbled upon poetic inquiry almost in the middle of the research study and this was not part of the original plan. By asking participants to create poems in collaborative writing sessions, adding some theory-based poems and poems from researcher perspective could have led to deeper understanding. I think greater reflection would have been possible if I could have created found poems collaboratively with my participants, this could not be done due to time and financial constraints.

### **10.3 Further research**

The completion of this thesis has revealed further research opportunities that could build upon this study. One of the limitations above provides the first opportunity for further research which could be a large-scale study at a regional or national level with a larger number of participants (Ware et al., 2021). Another possibility could be a comparative study on lived experiences of disabled teachers from varied education settings.



Research on grandparents' role and developmental influence on lived experiences of disabled people could provide insight into a topic rarely explored in literature.

A comparative study on lived experiences of disabled teachers who have retired with disabled teachers who are currently employed would also be interesting research. The findings could reveal whether the lived experiences are different in any way.

In terms of poetic inquiry, a different way of analysing data using just poetic analysis possibly could possibly lead to different findings. Carrying out poetic transcription in collaboration with participants (McAllister, 2022) would also be fascinating.

#### **10.4 Final thoughts**

This thesis has presented a multiple case study exploring personal lived experiences of eight disabled teachers through semi-structured timeline interviews. The findings highlight developmental interaction with environments around them and the impact these environments have had on their lives. Findings also suggest there is a link between their life experiences and their choice of profession. Participants discussed the impact their environments have had on their disability identities. The interviews were based on four themes: early childhood and schooling experiences; university and higher education experiences; employment/teaching experiences; and disability experience. This generated rich data which led to the creation of found poems. The analysis of the experiences of disabled teachers demonstrated the 'lived aspect' of

disabled teachers complex life journeys, their personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as teachers which was accomplished by applying two theoretical frameworks, WHO's ICF framework and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory.

The study used reflexive thematic analysis as well as poetic transcription to analyse and represent participant experiences. Found poems were crafted from individual participant transcripts to authentically represent their experiences as well as to create an emotional connect with the reader. The found poems and the in-depth analysis of participant experiences provide insight into the life experiences of disabled teachers. Capturing disabled teachers' perspectives and experiences through poetry allowed for an evocative and nuanced look into their lived experiences, while the structured themes provide a comprehensive understanding of environment influences.

This study makes unique contributions to existing literature on understanding lived experiences of disabled teachers. The BPS model applied in this research combining the two theoretical frameworks, ICF and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory to explore the findings is a novel approach. Findings highlight the complexities of disability experiences being multidimensional in keeping with other researchers (e.g. Carol Thomas). Findings of this study explicitly show that disabled teachers are not only beset by social barriers existing in society and biological barriers caused by impairments but systemic attitudinal, physical, sociological, and psychological barriers. By using a multiple case study approach, I was able to delve deep into each individual

participants' life journey, collective cross synthesis of eight individual cases makes the findings more insightful and robust. The timeline aspect I followed in the main data generation strategy where participants were interviewed four times to generate data from childhood to present times was innovative and extremely productive. The application of critical incident forms is unique to this research which allowed participants to add details forgotten during interviews. The theoretical foundation, the methodology and research design applied within this research makes a unique addition to disability studies. This study contributes to existing literature on experiences of disabled teachers through unique findings namely developmental role of grandparents, the long-term effects of self-doubt on participants lives, the complicated diagnosis journey as adults, the bullying and microaggression experienced from peers and teachers. The findings highlight enablers in the form of supportive nurturing family, inclusive attitudes at workplaces, available DSA funding and barriers encountered in the form of lack of consistency in DSA, failure of disability employment schemes, the breaching of the Equality Act by schools to push disabled teachers out of teaching. The research findings showcase participants' suggestions based on their lived experiences, these suggestions make valuable and unique contribution, providing pathways to bring about positive changes in the future. Findings of this research add rich, nuanced, and in-depth understanding regarding enablers and barriers encountered by participants as well as provide deeper insight into their lived experience makes a valuable addition to existing literature on this topic.

Drawing on their personal lived experiences, participants suggested few recommendations. The participants of this study hope that their suggestions are

listened too and acted upon. It is important to acknowledge that inclusion in schools should not be limited to students. Analysis highlights that disabled teachers bring a lot of positives to workplaces, it is imperative that careers of future disabled teachers be supported and encouraged, and not treated as a disadvantage. Because “If education is to be truly inclusive, then we need to support and encourage not only children with disabilities, but also work to support and encourage the careers of disabled teachers” (Ware et al., 2021, p.1).

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## 12 Appendices

### **Appendix 1 – Literature included in this review, 2000-2022 (N=105)**

| No. | Meth<br>odolo<br>gy           | Year/<br>Auth<br>ors                                  | Locat<br>ion          | Data<br>colle<br>ction                                                       | Participants                                 |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Quali<br>tative<br>(N=3<br>2) | Aldak<br>hil Ali<br>2020                              | Saudi<br>Arabi<br>a   | in-<br>depth<br>intervi<br>ews                                               | 6 teachers                                   |
| 2   |                               | Barge<br>rhuff,<br>Cole<br>and<br>Teete<br>rs<br>2012 | USA                   | Case<br>study<br>intervi<br>ew                                               | 1 student teacher with Brain trauma          |
| 3   |                               | Burns<br>and<br>Bell<br>2010                          | Finlan<br>d and<br>UK | Narra<br>tive<br>intervi<br>ews                                              | 6 dyslexic teachers                          |
| 4   |                               | Burns<br>and<br>Bell<br>2011                          | Finlan<br>d and<br>UK | Narra<br>tive<br>intervi<br>ews                                              | 8 dyslexic teachers                          |
| 5   |                               | Burns<br>,<br>Poikk<br>eus<br>and<br>Aro<br>2013      | Finlan<br>d           | Narra<br>tive<br>intervi<br>ews                                              | 6 dyslexic teachers                          |
| 6   |                               | Clayt<br>on<br>2009                                   | USA                   | case<br>study                                                                | 1 Teacher                                    |
| 7   |                               | Dami<br>ani<br>and<br>Harbo<br>ur<br>2015             | USA                   | Semi<br>struct<br>ured<br>intervi<br>ews<br>Telep<br>honic<br>intervi<br>ews | 12 student teachers<br>Multiple disabilities |

|    |  |                                    |        |                                                                   |                                                                                                |
|----|--|------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8  |  | Duquette 2000                      | Canada | Questionnaire<br>Semi structured interviews<br>Observation        | 4 student teachers<br>Low vision, learning disability and physical disability                  |
| 9  |  | Dvir 2015                          | Israel | case study interview                                              | 3 student teachers<br>Physical, hearing impaired and scoliosis                                 |
| 10 |  | Ferri et al. 2005                  | USA    | interviews                                                        | 3 teachers<br>1 student teacher                                                                |
| 11 |  | Ferri, Keefe and Gregg 2001        | USA    | Semi structured interviews                                        | 3 teachers<br>Learning disabilities                                                            |
| 12 |  | Glazzard and Dale 2013             | UK     | life history interviews                                           | 2 dyslexic student teachers                                                                    |
| 13 |  | Glazzard and Dale 2015             | UK     | life history interviews                                           | 1 dyslexic academic                                                                            |
| 14 |  | Grenier, Horrell and Genovese 2014 | UK     | Semi structured interviews<br>Focus groups<br>Documental analysis | 1 PE student teacher physical disability<br>2 supervisors<br>23 students taught by the teacher |

|    |  |                                            |          |                                                |                                                                                          |
|----|--|--------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 15 |  | Griffiths<br>2012                          | UK       | case<br>study<br>interview                     | 6 dyslexic Student teachers                                                              |
| 16 |  | Hankobo<br>2018                            | Ethiopia | interviews                                     | 7 hearing impaired teachers<br>2 school principals                                       |
| 17 |  | Hickman<br>and<br>Brens<br>2014            | UK       | unstructured<br>interviews                     | 6 dyslexic teachers                                                                      |
| 18 |  | Kattari,<br>Olzman<br>and<br>Hanna<br>2018 | USA      | interviews                                     | 14 teachers                                                                              |
| 19 |  | Lee,<br>Abdullah &<br>Mey<br>2011          | Malaysia | interviews                                     | 24 teachers<br>Visual impairment                                                         |
| 20 |  | Lewis<br>et al.<br>2003                    | USA      | Focus<br>groups<br>Ethnography<br>observations | 7 visually impaired teachers                                                             |
| 21 |  | Lima<br>and<br>Ivy<br>2017                 | USA      | Interviews<br>observations                     | 1 Teacher<br>1 teaching assistant<br>Visual impairment                                   |
| 22 |  | Oren<br>and<br>McLeod<br>2011              | USA      | case<br>study<br>interview                     | 1 supervisor of student teacher with visual<br>impairment                                |
| 23 |  | Parke<br>r and<br>Drave                    | USA      | Interviews<br>Weekly                           | 2 visually impaired music student<br>teachers<br>2 supervisors<br>2 cooperating teachers |

|    |  |                                                              |                                        |                                                                  |                                                          |
|----|--|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
|    |  | s<br>2017                                                    |                                        | reflect<br>ive<br>journ<br>als                                   |                                                          |
| 24 |  | Riddi<br>ck<br>2003                                          | UK                                     | Semi<br>struct<br>ured<br>intervi<br>ews                         | 8 dyslexic teachers<br>5 dyslexic student teachers       |
| 25 |  | Singh<br>al and<br>Ware<br>2021                              | South<br>Africa<br>Rwan<br>da<br>Nepal | semi-<br>struct<br>ured<br>intervi<br>ews<br>focus<br>group<br>s | 9 English language teachers                              |
| 26 |  | Smith<br>2000                                                | Can<br>da                              | case<br>study<br>intervi<br>ew                                   | 1 student teacher<br>Visual impairment                   |
| 27 |  | Solis<br>2006                                                | USA                                    | Autob<br>iogra<br>phy<br>narrat<br>ive                           | 1 Teacher                                                |
| 28 |  | Tal-<br>Anon,<br>Shapi<br>ra-<br>Lishc<br>hinsk<br>y<br>2019 | Israel                                 | in-<br>depth<br>intervi<br>ews                                   | 20 teachers s                                            |
| 29 |  | Thorp<br>e and<br>Burns<br>2016                              | Finlan<br>d and<br>UK                  | intervi<br>ews                                                   | 9 dyslexic teachers                                      |
| 30 |  | Valle<br>et al.<br>2004                                      | USA                                    | Narra<br>tive<br>intervi<br>ews                                  | 3 teachers<br>1 student teacher<br>Learning disabilities |
| 31 |  | Vogel<br>and<br>Sharo<br>ni<br>2011                          | Israel                                 | struct<br>ured<br>intervi<br>ews                                 | 12 teachers with learning disabilities                   |

|    |                    |                                 |        |                |                                   |
|----|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 32 |                    | Ware, Singhal and Groce 2020    | UK     | interviews     | 10 teachers                       |
| 33 | Quantitative (N=9) | Baldwin 2007                    | USA    | Survey         | 60 directors of teacher education |
| 34 |                    | Bryant and Curtnier-Smith 2009a | USA    | Questionnaire  | 109 students                      |
| 35 |                    | Bryant and Curtnier-Smith 2009b | USA    | Questionnaire  | 201 students                      |
| 36 |                    | Griffith and Cooper 2002        | Usa    | Survey         | 125 education administrators      |
| 37 |                    | Hayashi and May 2011            | USA    | Survey         | 51 undergraduate students         |
| 38 |                    | Macleod & Cebulak 2009          | Uk     | Survey         | 9 Student teachers                |
| 39 |                    | Martin 2020                     | UK     | questionnaires | 12 Autistic academics             |
| 40 |                    | Sokal, Woloshyn and Wilso       | Canada | Questionnaire  | 10 directors of teacher education |



|    |                                       |                                                          |                             |                                                 |                                                                    |
|----|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                                       | n<br>2017                                                |                             |                                                 |                                                                    |
| 41 |                                       | Wood<br>and<br>Happ<br>e<br>2021                         | UK                          | Surve<br>y                                      | 149 autistic teachers and autistic school<br>staff                 |
| 42 | Mixe<br>d<br>meth<br>ods<br>(N=5)     | Brow<br>n<br>Willia<br>m<br>and<br>Jeffre<br>ss<br>2018  | USA<br>Cana<br>da<br>Israel | Surve<br>y                                      | 193 college students<br>14 universities                            |
| 43 |                                       | Kean<br>e,<br>Heinz<br>and<br>Eaton<br>2018              | Irelan<br>d                 | Surve<br>y                                      | 1042 undergraduate primary teacher<br>education applicants         |
| 44 |                                       | Lamic<br>hhan<br>e<br>2016                               | Nepal                       | Quest<br>ionnai<br>res<br>and<br>intervi<br>ews | 3032 students<br>5 teachers with visual impairment<br>2 principals |
| 45 |                                       | Newt<br>on,<br>Jeffre<br>ss<br>and<br>Thom<br>as<br>2018 | Intern<br>ationa<br>l       | Surve<br>y                                      | 119 disabled teachers                                              |
| 46 |                                       | Sheri<br>dan<br>and<br>Kotev<br>ski<br>2014              | Austr<br>alia               | Surve<br>ys                                     | 53 students                                                        |
| 47 | Self-<br>Narra<br>tive/<br>Essay<br>s | Ander<br>son<br>2006                                     | USA                         | essay                                           | teacher who acquired a disability after a<br>brain aneurysm        |

|        |        |                                             |               |                  |                                                                |
|--------|--------|---------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|        | (N=59) |                                             |               |                  |                                                                |
| 48     |        | Antilla Garza 2015                          | USA           | essay            | How can we provide better support to disabled student teachers |
| 49-67  |        | Brown 2021                                  | UK            | self narratives  | 18 narratives                                                  |
| 68-81  |        | Brown and Leigh 2020                        | UK            | self-narratives  | 13 narratives                                                  |
| 83     |        | Brueggemann, Garland-Thomson and Kleeg 2005 | USA           | conversation     | 3 academics<br>Visual hearing and physical impairment          |
| 84     |        | Campbell 2009                               | Australia     | self-narrative   | 1 academic with physical disabilities                          |
| 85     |        | Clayton Jennifer 2009                       | USA           | self-narrative   | One teacher LD                                                 |
| 86     |        | Erin 2011                                   | USA           | auto ethnography | 1 teacher visual impairment                                    |
| 87     |        | Green 2010                                  | UK            | auto ethnography | 1 visual impaired teacher                                      |
| 88-101 |        | Jeffreys 2018                               | international | self-narratives  | 17 narratives                                                  |
| 102    |        | Lourens                                     | South Africa  | auto ethnography | 1 visually impaired academic                                   |

|     |  |                   |           |                  |                             |
|-----|--|-------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 103 |  | O'Connell<br>2017 | Ireland   | autobiographical | 2 hearing impaired teachers |
| 104 |  | Pritchard<br>2010 | Australia | self-narrative   | 1 disabled academic         |
| 105 |  | Stewart<br>2010   | UK        | autoethnography  | 1 visual impaired academic  |

## **Appendix 2 – Development of interview questions**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| <p><b>Personal Information</b></p> <p>Questions regarding participants name, qualifications, present occupation, what level are they teaching, years of experience</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>This will provide general information about the participants and their current employment status.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <p><b>Early Childhood Experiences – family</b></p> <p>This section participants will be questioned about their early childhood and home experience questions to identify aspects of their early childhood influences like family influence, relationship with siblings, their memories of family holidays, what kind of support did they receive from family, relationship with extended family etc</p> <p><b>Possible questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe your childhood, how would you describe yourself as a child?</li> <li>• What is the earliest memory you have growing up? Friends or fav toy?</li> <li>• Can you describe your family? how many siblings?</li> <li>• What were holidays like growing up, what leisure activities did your family pursue?</li> <li>• How would you describe your relationship with extended family members? Did they visit often?</li> </ul> | <p>The Duquette (2000) exploratory study carried out on four student teachers with disabilities pursuing a post-graduate degree in teacher education in Canada examined the influence of life experiences on their teaching practice. The finding of the study state that the student teachers all had negative experiences during their school days, and they all relied on their families for support with their educational activities.</p> <p>In the Ferri (2001) study some participant teachers shared that they felt supported and encouraged by family members who believed in them and had high expectations of them despite their disabilities.</p> <p>In the Book Disabled Children's Childhood studies edited by Kuran and Runswick-Cole 2013, there are many personal accounts of disabled children sharing their stories about family support and deriving strength from family bonds.</p> |
| <p><b>School years (Primary and secondary)</b></p> <p>In this section participants will be asked questions regarding their primary and secondary school experiences for example, their memories of primary school, support from teachers, their friends, if they</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>The Riddick 2003 study on teachers with Dyslexia carried out in UK reported that of the thirteen participants in the study, nine stated that they have negative experiences during</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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| <p>could recall any favourite teacher, what support services did they avail of in school, special education needs , how did they feel about availing these support services, favourite subjects, peer experiences, which aspects of schooling did they struggle with the most etc. prompts and probes will be used by the researcher to find out the whether their school experience has had impact on their choice of profession.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>school years, three participants talked about having mixed experiences, only one participant shared that they had a very positive schooling experience growing up.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p>Possible questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your earliest memories of school?</li> <li>• What do you recall from your primary schooling days? Any specific memories?</li> <li>• Did your siblings attend same schools as you?</li> <li>• Do you recall any specific incident from primary school that has had a lasting impact on you?</li> <li>• What about secondary school experience, do you recall any incident/s that left a lasting impact?</li> <li>• During your teen years whom did you turn for support if you needed it?</li> <li>• Who were your role models in your teen years? What were your ambitions or dreams for your future as a teenager?</li> <li>• When did you know that you wanted to pursue higher education? What did you want to study?</li> </ul> | <p>In the Ferri 2001 study three of the participant teachers with learning disabilities shared how they felt stigmatised and isolated in school. They recalled how the far way location of the resource classroom made them feel socially isolated yet sometimes served as a hiding place from other students. The participants specifically share they felt “bad” and “stupid” whenever they had to leave their regular classrooms for special needs services.</p> <p>The Vogel &amp; Sharoni 2010 study carried out in Israel interviewed twelve teachers with learning difficulties to understand how they perceived their disability and to explore their experiences during schooling and higher education. All the participants in the study shared painful memories and experiences during their schooling which they felt had led to them having low self- esteem.</p> <p>All four of the student teachers in the Duquette 2000 study mentioned that they consciously tried not to replicate the teaching methodology they had experienced during their schooling years, in fact they stated that they had chosen to become teachers to prove to themselves and others that they</p> |

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|  | <p>were capable of being successful in school.</p> <p>Similarly, in the Ferri 2001 study she states that her participants displayed the desire to provide positive experiences to their</p> |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>students because they had been denied these positive experiences in their own school days and that the teachers felt that because they understood the difficulties their students are facing they can be more effective teachers. They were empathetic towards their students and were especially careful that their students did not suffer from lowered expectations or any kind of stigma because of their disabilities.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p><b>College/University/teacher education experiences</b></p> <p>This section will include questions regarding Participants College / University Teacher education experiences, the disability services they availed of, their general experience with university education, what did they struggle with most, why did they opt for teacher education etc</p> <p>Possible questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you take any gaps before starting university? Could you explain</li> <li>• How would you describe your university experience?</li> <li>• What did you struggle with the most during your University days?</li> </ul> | <p>A Survey conducted in Scotland by Macleod and Cebula in 2009 explores experiences of student teachers with disability during their initial teacher education phase. The findings indicated that though many students with disability shared that they opted not to disclose their disability while seeking employment in fear of being discriminated against. Those who did choose to disclose their disability shared that obtaining a placement had been a struggle. The study reported that though a high number of students with disability did enrol into teacher education courses they still faced issues with access, attending classes, and often the requirement of adjustments took time. Of the sample only half of the participants chose to disclose their disability, especially student teachers with mental health</p> |

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|  | <p>issues were found to be reluctant to disclose their disability.</p> <p>The study also reported some positive findings where some participants shared positive experiences support, they encountered while seeking placements. The study reported that students with learning disabilities were reported to get highest placements. On the other hand few participants reported discrimination and doubts raised by institutions regarding their competence to teach, while some shared their struggle with completing paperwork, others shared their difficulty to complete the entire stipulated time allotted for placements as there is no reasonable adjustments made regarding the duration of the placement it is</p> |
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|                               | <p>the same for all students irrespective of ability.</p> <p>In the article a retired teacher educator who is also a teacher with disability mentions that “successive governments had not encouraged disabled people to apply to teach, which has led to thousands of highly qualified people with disabilities not considering teaching as a option.” (Lepkowska, 2012). The teacher educator shares how she has seen student teacher trainees with disability get frustrated by the lack of accessibility in schools and drop out of teacher education because of the constant struggle to access classrooms. Many other articles also support these aspects Hong, 2015 Ridell, 2014, Valle et al., 2004, Yanok, 1987.</p> |
| <b>Employment Experiences</b> | In an article printed in The Guardian UK on November 12, 2012, Dorothy Lepkowska                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

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| <p>Questions revolving around employment experiences will be included in this section, experience with seeking employment, interviewing experience, work experiences, did they face any challenges etc</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your experiences when you started looking for employment?</li> <li>• What was the interviewing experience like?</li> <li>• Can you describe any problems you encountered during this phase?</li> <li>• Do you have gaps in your employment?</li> <li>• Can you explain why?</li> <li>• Prior to your current employment were you employed elsewhere?</li> <li>• Overall how would you describe your employment experiences?</li> <li>• Can you share any negative experiences?</li> <li>• Did you feel accepted and included in workplace?</li> <li>• Was disability support available at your workplace?</li> <li>• Did you avail of any reasonable adjustments support? Can you explain that process?</li> </ul> | <p>laments about how schools are struggling to recruit and retain teachers with disability because they cannot afford the extra costs entailed in providing the reasonable adjustments they might need. The article also mentions that the Department of education in UK reports that less than 1 % of the teaching workforce has a disability but, Lepkowska refutes this claim and says that statistics are unreliable because “Not everyone admits to being disabled when completing forms and questionnaires” (Lepkowska, 2012), a claim which is repeated in other literature as well ( Jeffress, 2018, Riddell &amp; Weedon, 2014, Hauk, 2010, Macleod &amp; Cebula, 2009, Valle et al., 2004,Yanok, 1987) .</p> <p>Many personal accounts of teachers with disability recorded in two books “International Perspectives on Teaching with Disability” edited by Michael Jeffress (2017) and “Ableism in Academia” edited by Nicole Brown &amp; Jennifer Leigh (2020)</p> |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | further explain the struggles within academia encountered by disabled teachers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p><b>Disability Experience and expectations from the future</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At what age did you experience the first symptoms of Fibromyalgia? Did you get appropriate medical help at the time?</li> <li>• How supportive was your secondary school/ sixth form college with your diagnosis?</li> <li>• Did you avail of any support services at that time?</li> <li>• Whom did you seek support, whom did you rely on for support at these times?</li> <li>• Did you feel that people around you for example teachers/ academic staff/classmates were understanding of your struggles? Can you elaborate</li> <li>• Can you share any negative experience which had a lasting impact on you?</li> <li>• How does having _____ affect your day to day functioning? Can you explain what is a good day versus a bad day?</li> <li>• Do you think it has an impact on you I mean in terms of your self-identity? can you elaborate</li> <li>• What would you want to say to people who are not aware of living with your disability?</li> <li>• Who do you think have been enablers/ positive support for you personally regarding your struggles with _____?</li> <li>• What do you think have been barriers for you personally with</li> </ul> | <p>“The direct and unavoidable impacts that impairments (physical, intellectual, emotional) have on individuals’ embodied functioning in the social world. Impairments and impairment effects are always bio-social and culturally constructed in character and may occur at any stage in the life course” (Thomas, 2014, p. 14) The interaction of the impairment, the disabling social barriers and the ‘self’ needs to be looked at as a totality rather than looking at each aspect separately, which is what I want to achieve through my study.</p> |

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| <p>regards to functioning with<br/>_____?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you could advice or suggest to policy makers/ or people with authority/ employers what would you tell them in terms of future policies/ providing more support for people who have</li> </ul> |  |
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### **Appendix 3 - Pilot study interview schedule**

In this interview I will be asking you about your experiences from early childhood to present day. Please feel free to answer in as much detail as you feel comfortable. As mentioned earlier I will be recording this interview and I will share the transcript with you via email.

Before I begin recording the session do you have any questions?

Let's begin by talking about your childhood memories

#### **Childhood**

- Can you describe your childhood, how would you describe yourself as a child?
- What is the earliest memory you have growing up? Friends or fav toy?
- Can you describe your family? how many siblings?
- What were holidays like growing up, what leisure activities did your family pursue?
- How would you describe your relationship with extended family members? Did they visit often?
- Whom within your family were you closest to or was your constant support if you need it?

#### **School years**

- What are your earliest memories of school?
- What do you recall from your primary schooling days? Any specific memories?
- Did your siblings attend same schools as you?
- Do you recall any specific incident from primary school that has had a lasting impact on you?
- What about secondary school experience, do you recall any incident/s that left a lasting impact?
- During your teen years whom did you turn for support if you needed it?
- Who were your role models in your teen years? What were your ambitions or dreams for your future as a teenager?
- When did you know that you wanted to pursue higher education? What did you want to study?

#### **Higher education**

- Did you take any gaps before starting university? Could you explain
- How would you describe your university experience?
- What did you struggle with the most during your University days?
- You are currently pursuing a PhD could you tell me what has inspired you to select this particular area of study?

#### **Parenting experience**

- What has been the most challenging aspect for you about being a parent?

- What has been your experience as a parent of a child with down syndrome seeking support for your child?
- Could you share any negative experience regarding seeking support for your daughter?
- Could you share any positive experiences regarding support provided to your daughter in her schooling?
- Can you think of any specific government policy/ies that had a direct positive impact on your daughter's life? Can you elaborate

### **Expectations from the future**

- Who do you think have been enablers/ positive support for you as a parent of a child with downs syndrome?
- What do you think have been barriers for you/ your daughter in her schooling experience?
- If you could advice or suggest to policy makers/ or people with authority/ employers what would you tell them in terms of future policies/ providing more support for people who have Downs Syndrome?

## **Appendix 4 - Recruitment advert**



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

### **RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

You are invited to take part in research undertaken by Mrs. Neetha Joy, a full-time PhD research student at the University of Birmingham.

#### **RESEARCH FOCUS**

Although inclusive education policies have made mainstream education accessible to many disabled children, literature suggests that policies have not filtered to teachers, especially disabled teachers who are often invisible in academia. Existing literature suggests that many disabled teachers are underemployed, often face higher rates of precarious employment, and experience either overt or covert forms of ableism and prejudice. This research aims to explore the narratives of disabled teachers to gain an understanding of their personal experiences of living with an impairment and functioning as disabled teachers. The research wants to highlight the role their lived experiences have had in their choice of profession and the biopsychosocial impact their environments have had on their disability identities. The research will analyse the lived experiences of disabled teachers to highlight their struggles in their professional lives and identify barriers they encounter.

#### **SEEKING PARTICIPANTS WHO:**

- ☐ Are above 22 years of age with a visible or non-visible disability
- ☐ Have minimum six months of teaching experience within any educational setting as teaching assistants, schoolteachers, university professors, educators or academics

#### **WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH INVOLVE:**

- ☒ A short online questionnaire (Approximately 10 mins)
- ☐ Four online interviews (Approximately 60 minutes each) or answer the questions in an alternative format which is considered comfortable

#### **CONTACT**

If you are interested in being a participant in this research or require more information, please contact Neetha Joy by direct message on twitter [@neetha\\_joy](https://twitter.com/neetha_joy) or email [npj720@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:npj720@student.bham.ac.uk)



Scan QR Code to read the information leaflet of this research

## **Appendix 5 Recruitment leaflet**

### **“The Advantage of Disadvantage” – A Study about Lived Experiences of Disabled Teachers”**

This information leaflet has been given to you in the hope that you may be able to identify disabled teachers as prospective participants for research undertaken by Mrs. Neetha Joy, a full-time PhD research student at the University of Birmingham. Please read the following information and if you know any disabled teachers who may be willing to take part, please pass the attached information sheet to them.

#### **Description of the research**

The research aims to explore the narratives of disabled teachers in their own voice to gain an understanding of their personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as disabled teachers. The research wants to understand the reasons disabled teachers have chosen the profession of teaching by exploring the connection between their lived experiences and the biopsychosocial impact their environments have had on their choice of profession. The research aims to analyse the lived experiences of disabled teachers to understand their struggles with professional life and identify barriers they encounter. An extensive literature review has been carried out in-order to ground the research in existing knowledge and literature. This research will make an original contribution to disability studies as very little research has been conducted with disabled teachers.

#### **Purpose of the research**

Although inclusive education policies have made mainstream education accessible to many children with disabilities, literature suggests that policies have not filtered to teachers, especially disabled teachers who are often invisible in academia. Existing literature suggests that many disabled teachers are underemployed, often face higher rates of precarious employment, and experience significant barriers in rising through the academic hierarchy. Evidence suggests that disabled teachers face unjust ableism and prejudice, it could be during their education where many disabled students drop out because of the barriers they encounter, during the recruitment process itself, or even after they are employed. The current research aims to explore the complex life journeys of disabled teachers, their personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as teachers. The research will analyse the lived experiences of disabled teachers to highlight the struggles in their professional lives and identify barriers they encounter. The biographical data collected from the participants will be analysed based on World Health Organization's International Classification of

Functioning, Disability and Health Framework and Bronfenbrenner's human ecological systems.

### **Details of the research**

The research requires the participants to complete a short online questionnaire and participate in four online interviews, which will be conducted online via Zoom or answer the questions in an alternative format which is considered comfortable. The interviews will be arranged as per the participants convenience on four separate days. Each interview will be approximately of one hour duration. During the interviews participants will be encouraged to share biographical accounts of their lived experiences. The timeline followed in the interviews will begin with participants educational experiences in schools and universities ending with seeking employment and working in education. The account can include as much or as little detail as the participant is comfortable sharing. During the interviews the participants will be encouraged to recall and share any critical incidents from their lives which they feel have led them towards teaching as a profession as well as shaped their disability experiences. Critical incidents do not necessarily mean extraordinary or sensational events involving a lot of tensions or turmoil, rather these are events that the participant justifies as having a significant influence on their disability experience and choice of profession. After each interview is completed, the transcript will be shared with the participant for their approval. All the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Participant contributions will be confidential, and their identities will be kept anonymous. The participants will also be provided with a critical incident form, in the eventuality that while reading the transcript they recall any incidents that they might not have remembered during the interview. They can describe the event in the critical incident report which can be completed online using Qualtrics which will be shared with the participant. Completing the critical incident report is optional it is provided only if the participant recalls any further experiences and wishes to include them in their narrative.

### **Participant criteria**

Participants of the study should meet the following requirements

- Be above 22 years of age with a visible or non-visible disability
- Have minimum six months of teaching experience as a disabled teacher within any educational settings they could be teaching assistants, schoolteachers, university professors or educators in any format anywhere in the world

If you know any disabled teacher who may be willing to take part, please pass the attached information sheet for prospective participants to them.

**What if I have more questions or want further information?** If you have any questions regarding the research or would like any more details, please contact Neetha Joy by direct message on twitter @neetha\_joy or email [npj720@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:npj720@student.bham.ac.uk).

## **Appendix 6 - Information leaflet**

### **Information leaflet for Prospective Participants**

#### **“The Advantage of Disadvantage” – A Study about Lived Experiences of Disabled Teachers”**

You are invited to take part in research undertaken by Mrs. Neetha Joy, a full-time PhD research student at the University of Birmingham. Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary, this information leaflet explains the purpose of the research and what would participation in the research involve. Please read the information provided in this leaflet and if further information is required, please contact Neetha Joy on the contact details provided at the end of this document.

#### **Description of the research**

The research aims to explore the narratives of disabled teachers in their own voice to gain an understanding of their personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as disabled teachers. The research wants to understand the reasons disabled teachers have chosen the profession of teaching by exploring the connection between their lived experiences and the biopsychosocial impact their environments have had on their choice of profession. The research aims to analyse the lived experiences of disabled teachers to understand their struggles with professional life and identify barriers they encounter. An extensive literature review has been carried out in-order to ground the research in existing knowledge and literature. This research will make an original contribution to disability studies as very little research has been conducted with disabled teachers.

#### **Purpose of the research**

Although inclusive education policies have made mainstream education accessible to many children with disabilities, literature suggests that policies have not filtered to teachers, especially disabled teachers who are often invisible in academia. Existing literature suggests that many disabled teachers are underemployed, often face higher rates of precarious employment, and experience significant barriers in rising through the academic hierarchy. Evidence suggests that disabled teachers face unjust ableism and prejudice, it could be during their education where many disabled students drop out because of the barriers they encounter, during the recruitment process itself, or even after they are employed. The current research aims to explore the complex life journeys of disabled teachers, their personal experience of living with an impairment and functioning as teachers. The biographical data collected from the participants will be analysed based on World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health Framework and Bronfenbrenner’s human ecological systems.



## **Participation criteria**

Participants of the study should meet the following requirements

- Be above 22 years of age with a visible or non-visible disability
- Have minimum six months of teaching experience as a disabled teacher within any educational settings they could be teaching assistants, schoolteachers, university professors or educators in any format anywhere in the world

## **What would being involved entail?**

The research requires you to complete a short online questionnaire and participate in four online interviews conducted online via Zoom or answer the questions in an alternative format which you consider comfortable. The interviews will be arranged as per your convenience. Each interview will be approximately of one hour duration. During the interviews you will be encouraged to share biographical accounts of your life experiences. The timeline followed will begin with your educational experiences in schools and universities ending with seeking employment and working in education. The accounts can include as much or as little detail as you are comfortable sharing. During the interviews you will be encouraged to recall and share any critical incidents from your lives which you feel have led you towards academia as a profession as well as shaped your disability experiences. Critical incidents do not necessarily mean extraordinary or sensational events involving a lot of tensions or turmoil, rather these are events that you feel have had a significant influence on your disability experience and choice of profession. After each interview is completed, the transcript will be shared with you for your approval. All the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Your contribution will be confidential, and your identity will be kept anonymous. You will also be provided with a critical incident form, in the eventuality that while reading the transcript you recall any incidents that you might not have remembered during the interview. You can describe the event in the critical incident report which can be completed online using Qualtrics. Completing the critical incident report is optional it is provided only if you recall any further experiences you wish to include in your narrative.

## **Where and when will the interviews be conducted?**

The interviews will be conducted online via Zoom on four separate days and shall be recorded. The date and time of all the four interviews will be as per your convenience.

## **What will happen to my contribution?**

All the data that you share will be confidential and anonymous. The data will be stored using current GDPR guidelines and university policy. The data will only be seen by my supervisor. Your identity and anonymity will be maintained throughout. All findings and the final analysis will be shared with you.

**What if I change my mind about taking part?**

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary, you are free to change your mind and withdraw from the research within two weeks of completing your final interview. All the data that you have provided shall be promptly destroyed and not be included in the research findings.

**How do I get involved in the research?**

If you are willing to take part in the research, please fill the form below and email it to [npj720@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:npj720@student.bham.ac.uk). Once your information is received you will be contacted to set up an initial online zoom meeting at your convenience. Within this meeting the entire interview process shall be discussed, any queries you may have will be answered so that you are fully confident to be part of the research. In this meeting you will be asked to sign the consent form, giving informed consent to be part of the research. The dates for the four interviews will be agreed upon and you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire at your convenience.

**What if I have more questions or want further information?**

If you have any questions regarding the research or would like to know more before you agree to participate, please contact Neetha Joy by direct message on twitter @neetha\_joy or email [npj720@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:npj720@student.bham.ac.uk).

---

**I have read the Information sheets provided and am willing to take part in the research “The Advantage of Disadvantage” – A study about lived experiences of disabled teachers. I agree to be contacted to arrange an initial meeting with Neetha Joy to discuss the project in more detail and to confirm my consent.**

**My contact details are as follows**

**My name:**

**Phone number:**

**Email:**

**Time to best contact me:**

## **Appendix 7 – Consent form**

(To be filled out after the initial meeting)

### **CONSENT FORM**

- ☐ I have read the participant information sheet for this research project and understand the nature of the research and that this project forms part of the University of Birmingham postgraduate doctoral research towards Neetha Joy's doctorate qualifications.
- ☐ I understand that participation in the study requires me to complete a short online questionnaire and attend four online interviews to share biographical accounts of my life experiences during school years, university education, employment and my disability experience.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will provide a list of the local support resources which I can avail of in case I get distressed during the interview.
- ☐ I understand that all the interviews will be recorded.
- ☐ I understand that my contribution to the study will be kept anonymous and confidential.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw within two weeks of completing the final interview without giving any reason. If I do decide to withdraw from the study, I understand that all my data shall be removed from the study and destroyed.

Based upon all the above, I agree to take part in this research study.

Name of the  
Participant\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 8 - Consent form on Qualtrics**

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**"The Advantage of Disadvantage" – A Study about Lived Experiences of Disabled Teachers**

**CONSENT FORM**

(Please read carefully and give consent to each point)

I have read the participant information sheet for this research and understand the that the research forms part of University of Birmingham postgraduate doctoral research towards Neetha Joy's doctorate qualifications.

☒ Yes

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I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw within two weeks of completing the final interview without giving any reason. If I do decide to withdraw from the research, I understand that all my data shall be removed and destroyed.

☒ Yes

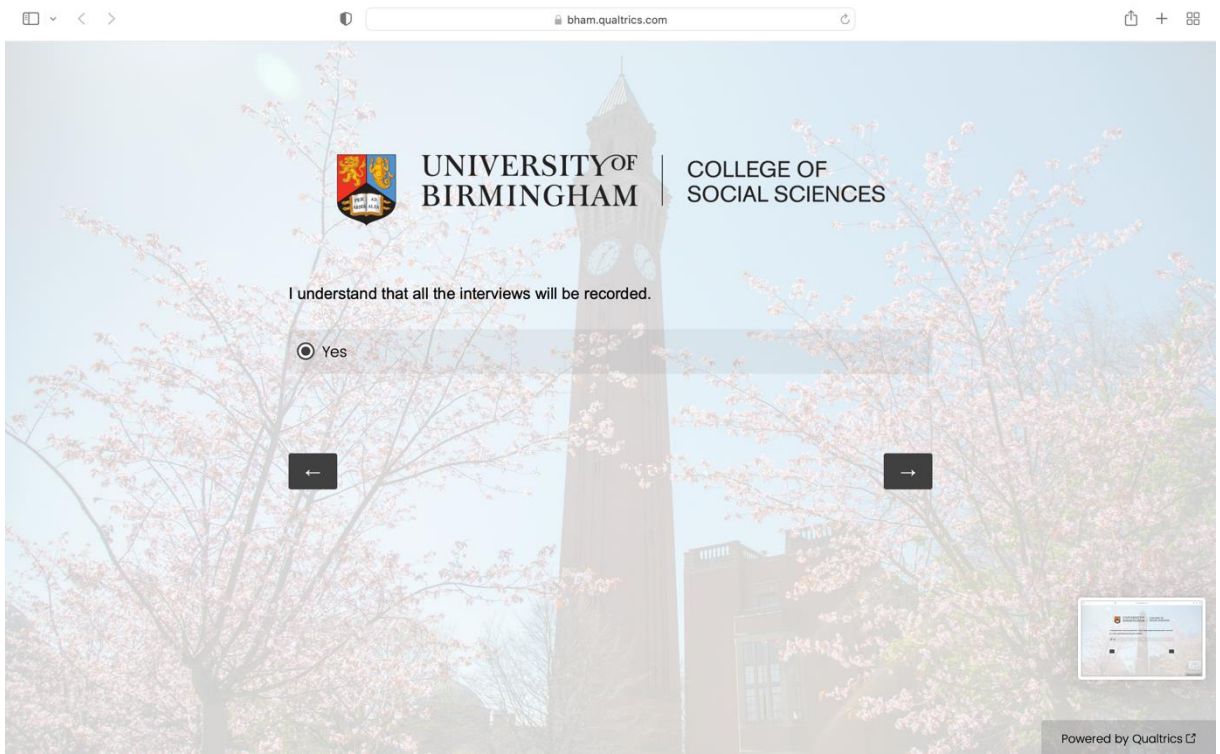
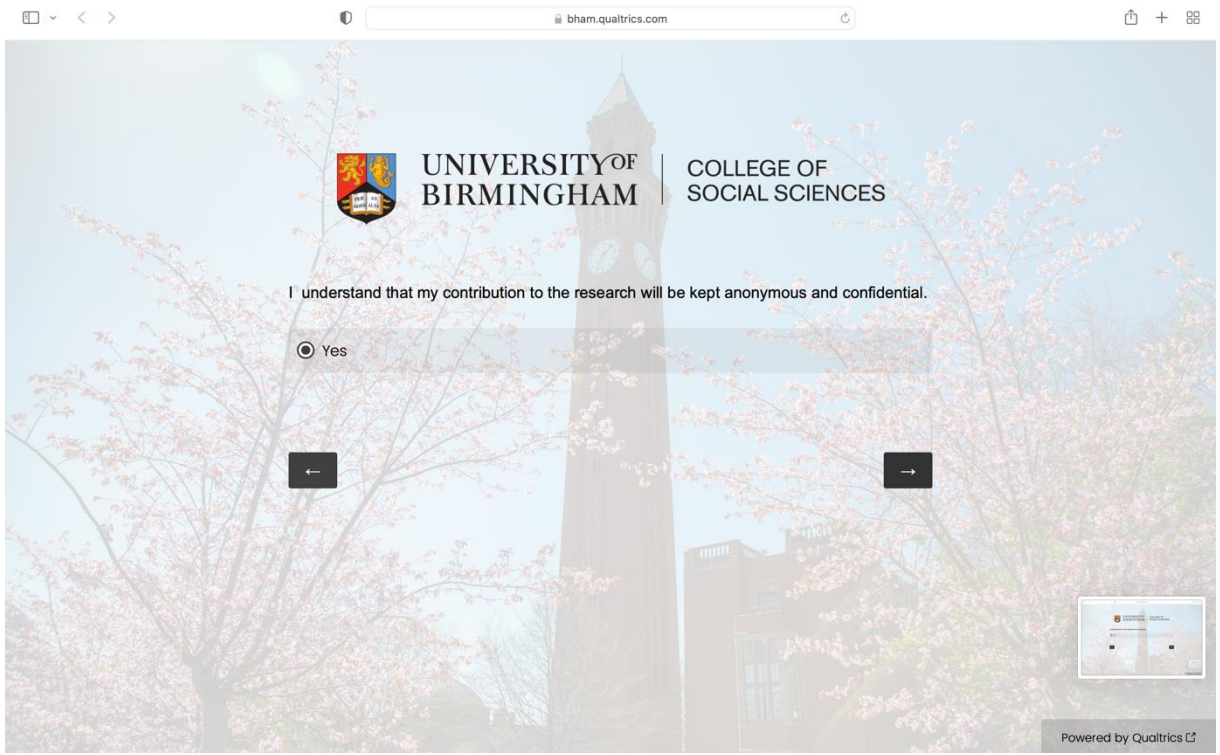
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I understand that I will be provided with a list of local support resources which I can avail of in case I get distressed during the interview.

☒ Yes

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I understand that I will be provided with an optional critical incident report form to describe any experiences I may recall while reading the shared transcripts and wish to add to my narrative.

☒ Yes

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I understand that participation in the research requires me to complete a short online questionnaire and attend four online interviews or answer the interview questions in a format I am comfortable in order to share biographical accounts of my life experiences during school years, university education, employment and my disability experience.

☒ Yes

←

→

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Based upon all the above, I agree to take part in this research.

Name of the participant:

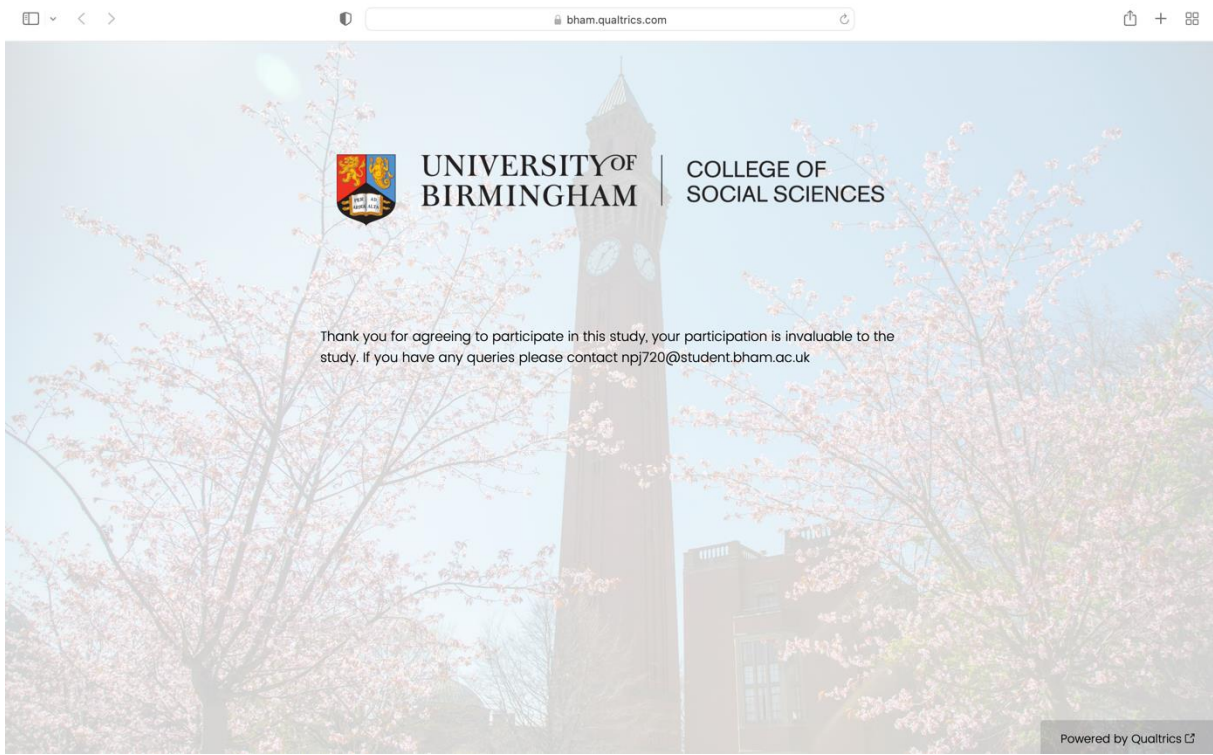
Signature:

×

SIGN HERE

clear







**Appendix 9 - Questionnaire**

**“The Advantage of Disadvantage” – A Study about lived experiences of**

**Disabled Teachers**

Full Name:

Age 22-30 /30-35 /35-40 /40-45/ 45-50 /50+

Current city/town

How would you describe your Disability?

How long have you had the Disability?

Educational Qualifications Undergraduate graduate postgrad doctorate other

Do you have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)? Yes /no

Current designation

Place of employment mainstream school /special school /Sixth form/ University /other

Working hours Parti-time/full-time

Which subject/s do you teach?

Number of years of Teaching experience 0-5 5-10 10-15 15-20 20+

Which year groups do you currently teach?

Primary/secondary/sixthform/undergrad/grad/postgrad/doctoral

What year groups have you previously taught

Were you employed elsewhere prior to your current workplace

If yes, did the role also involve teaching yes/no

Do you have any gaps in employment? Yes/no .If Yes, how many years?

Would you require any special assistance during the interviews?

Whom would you like the researcher to contact if you do require emotional support during the interviews?

**Appendix 10 – Questionnaire on Qualtrics**

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Age

☐ 22-25

☐ 26-30

☐ 31-35

☐ 36-40

☐ 41-45

☐ 46-50

☐ Above 50

☐ Prefer not to say

→

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**"The Advantage of Disadvantage" – A Study about Lived Experiences of Disabled Teachers**

**Questionnaire**

Participants Name

→

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Current Location

Town/City

County/District

Country

→

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How would you describe your disability?

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Educational qualifications

- ☐ Undergraduate
- ☐ Graduate
- ☐ Post Graduate
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other

Next button: →

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Do you have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Next button: →

Thumbnail image of a document or form.

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Current job description

→



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Place of employment

☐ Mainstream School

☐ Special Needs School

☐ Sixth form College

☐ University

☐ Other

→



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Working hours

☐ Full time

☐ Part time

→

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What are the Subjects you teach?

→



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Number of years of teaching experience

☐ 0-5

☐ 6-10

☐ 11-15

☐ 16-20

☐ 20+

Next button: →

Thumbnail image of the survey interface

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Which year groups do you have experience of teaching?

☐ Pre-primary

☐ Primary

☐ Secondary

☐ Sixth form

☐ Undergraduate

☐ Graduate

☐ Post graduate

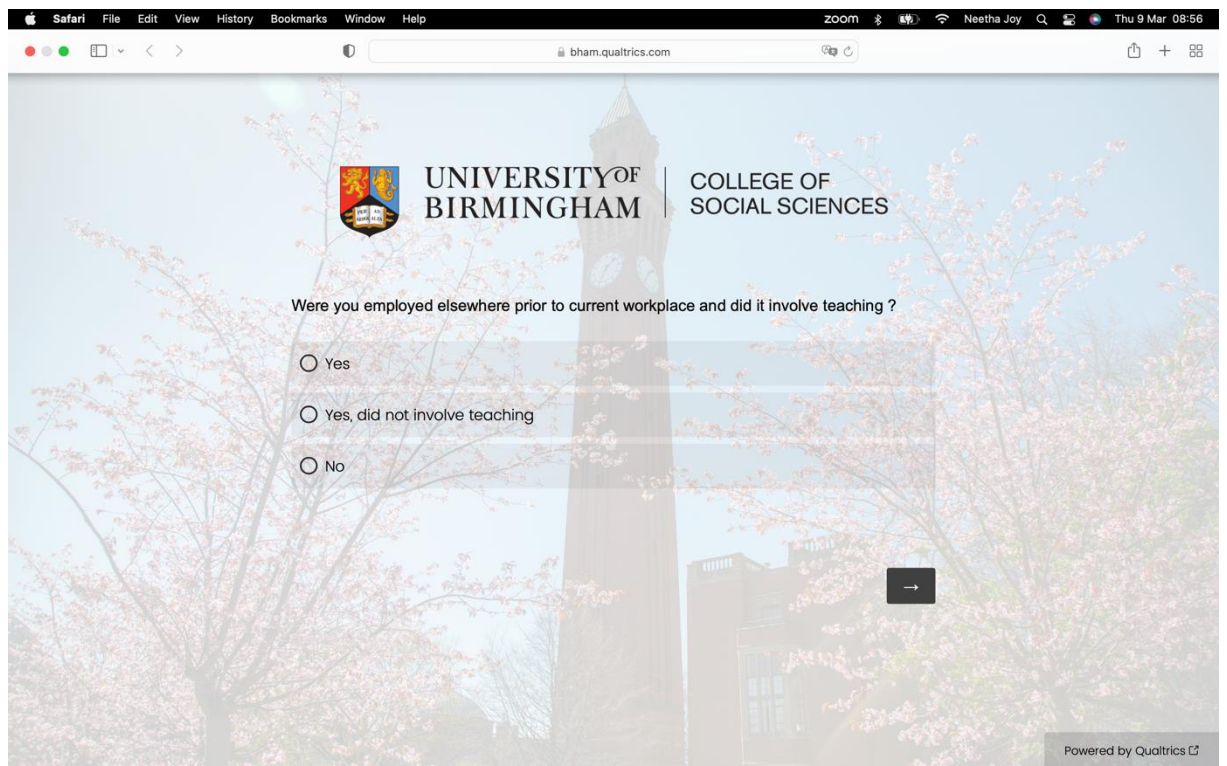
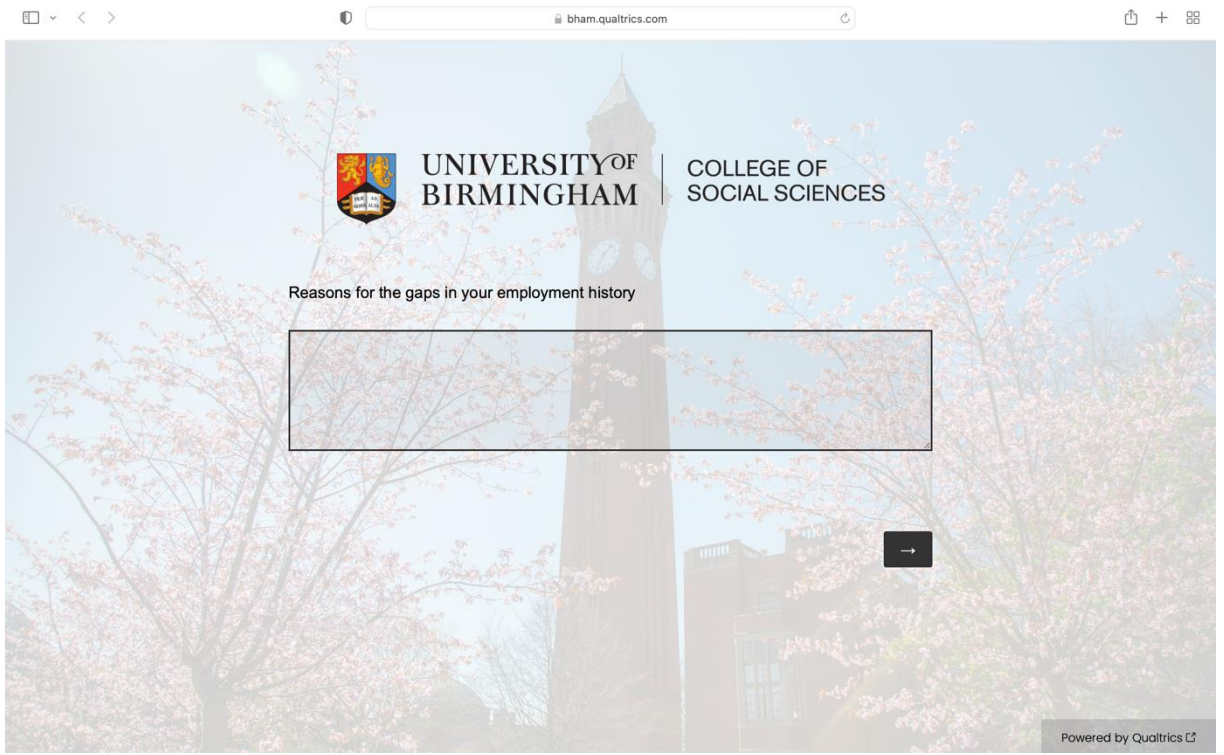
☐ Other

Next button: →

Thumbnail image of the survey interface

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Would you require any assistance during the interview?

☐ Yes

☐ No

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Please specify the assistance you require during the interview

Text input field for specifying assistance.

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Please provide the name and contact details of the person you would like the researcher to contact if you require emotional support during the interviews.

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Thank you for being part of this study and for completing this questionnaire. If you have any queries please contact [npj720@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:npj720@student.bham.ac.uk)

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**Appendix 11 - Critical incident form**

**“The Advantage of Disadvantage” – A Study about lived experiences of  
Disabled Teachers**

Critical Incident Report

When did the event take place :

Where did the event take place:

Describe the incident :

How did the incident affect you?

How old were you at the time:

Whom did you seek support from after the incident :



**Appendix 12 – Critical incident form on Qualtrics**

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When did the event take place?

←

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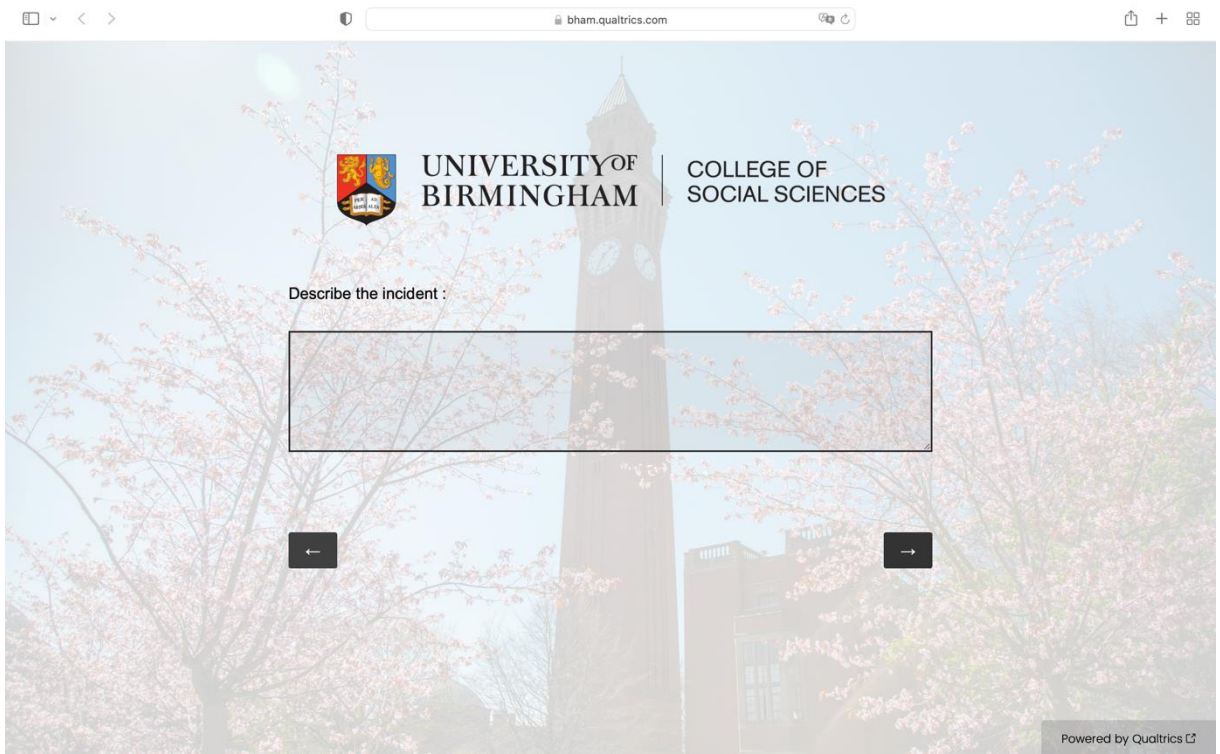
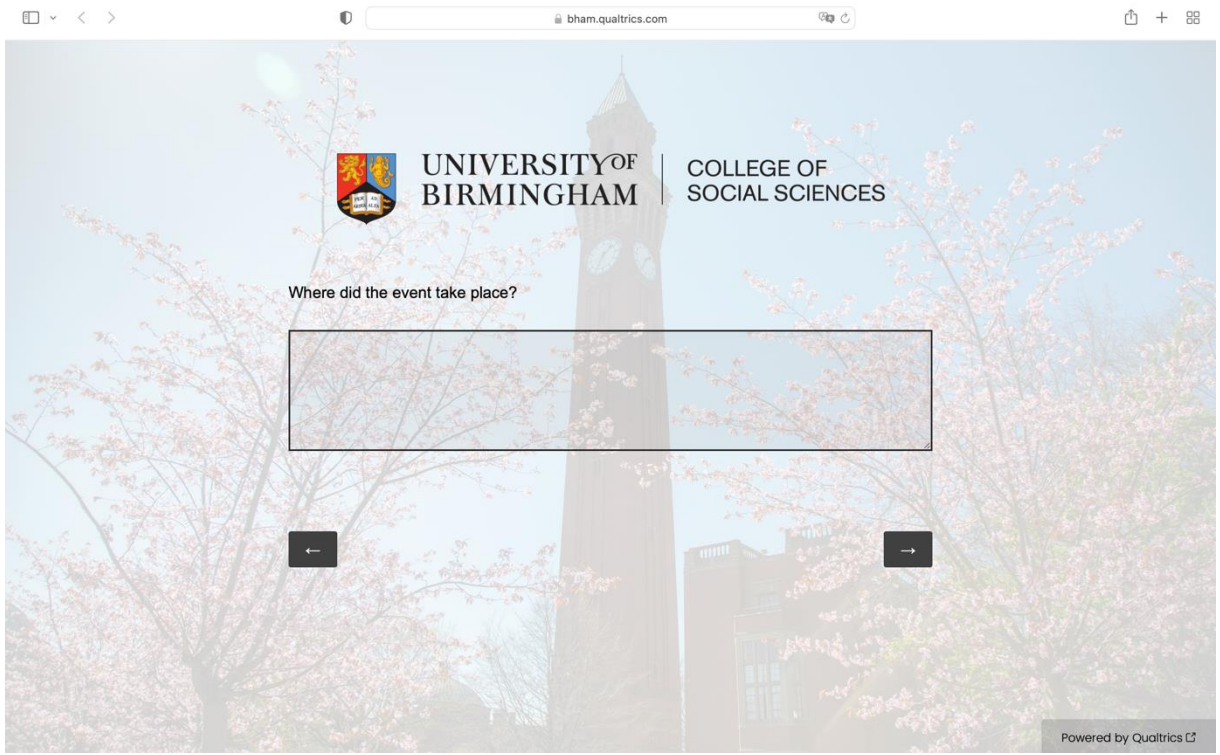
"The Advantage of Disadvantage" – A Study about lived experiences of Disabled Teachers

Critical Incident Report

Participants Name

→

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Navigation icons: back, forward, search, and other controls.

URL: bham.qualtrics.com

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What effect did this incident have on your life?

Text input area for response.

Navigation arrows: left and right.

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Navigation icons: back, forward, search, and other controls.

URL: bham.qualtrics.com

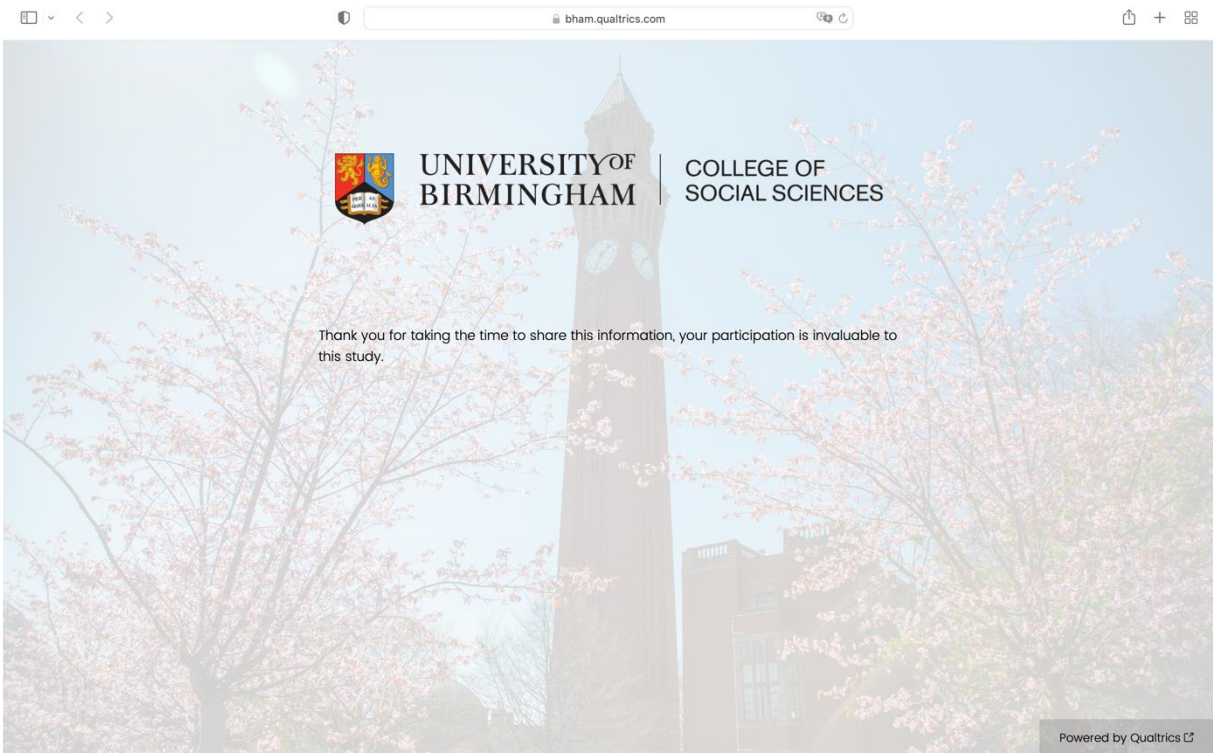
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Whom did you seek support from after the incident?

Text input area for response.

Navigation arrows: left and right.

Powered by Qualtrics



### **Appendix 13 - Draft email for recruitment via gatekeepers**

#### **Draft contact Email to Gatekeepers**

Good Morning,

My name is Neetha Joy, I am a PhD researcher at the University of Birmingham. As part of my PhD, I am carrying out research into the lived experiences of disabled teachers. Because there are very few disabled teachers in various education settings, in order to collect data from them I need to first identify where they are currently teaching. I am therefore writing to ask if you have any disabled teachers/educators/academics in your educational institution who might be interested in participating in my research.

Your institution will be kept anonymous, and all data will be kept confidential in accordance with GDPR rules and University policy. This research has been approved by the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Committee. I would be grateful if you could help me identify any potential participants for my research. Prospective participants need to have a visible or non-visible disability, be above twenty-two years of age, with a minimum six months of teaching experiences within any educational setting.

I have attached the participant information sheet, recruitment advert as well as recruitment information sheet that outlines the research and the involvement in the research should they agree to participate.

Please forward this email along with all the attached documents to other gatekeepers you know, who might be able to help me identify prospective participants. If you need any further information about my research, you are most welcome to contact me or my supervisors.

Neetha Joy. [npi720@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:npi720@student.bham.ac.uk)

Neil Hall. [N.HALL.1@bham.ac.uk](mailto:N.HALL.1@bham.ac.uk)

Graeme Douglas. [G.G.A.Douglas@bham.ac.uk](mailto:G.G.A.Douglas@bham.ac.uk)

Thank you for reading this email. I look forward to hearing from you.



Please copy paste the following draft and email it to any disabled teachers/educators/academics in your educational institution.

**Draft Email for prospective participants**

Dear prospective participant,

My name is Neetha Joy, I am a PhD researcher at the University of Birmingham. As part of my PhD, I am carrying out research into the lived experiences of disabled teachers. I hold a strong belief in inclusion and accessible education for all. Because disabled teachers are a minority and mostly invisible in education, there is not much research specifically focussing on them. I believe my research will make a valuable contribution to the topic and highlight the role disabled teachers play in promoting inclusion. This email has been forwarded to you to ask whether you would like to participate in my research. Through my research I am keen to explore your personal experiences of living with a disability and functioning as a disabled teacher. Your participation will be totally anonymous and confidential.

Please visit [https://bham.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0eVcU17bBu8Zhxl](https://bham.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0eVcU17bBu8Zhxl)

to read the information leaflet. I hope that you will consider contributing to my research. I would be happy to answer any queries you may have. Please contact me by direct message on twitter @neetha\_joy or email me at [npj720@student.bham.ac.uk](mailto:npj720@student.bham.ac.uk).

Thank you for reading this email. I look forward to hearing from you.

Neetha Joy

PhD Researcher

University of Birmingham

## Appendix 14 - Twitter post regarding Call for participants



### **Appendix 15 - 'Magical recruitment experience' - Research diary entry**

May 28<sup>th</sup> 2021-12.30 pm

Tweeted the Call for participants at around 12.30 pm today. The tweet Included the Qualtrics link for the participation leaflet. I am a bit nervous whether this will generate enough interest, whether I will get my eight participants. I have kept the gate-keeper emails ready. Let's see how this goes, fingers crossed. Feeling elated that the Call is out, anxiously waiting to find the response, nervous, excited, elated, apprehensive, butterflies in tummy...so many mixed emotions!

12.57 pm The tweet is getting a lot of attention and retweets, ...my Supervisor Neil Hall as well as loads of UoB colleagues have retweeted.....very excited ....couple of people have viewed the participation leaflet on Qualtrics...which is promising.....humbled, but honestly relieved....cant help it, keep checking the tweet again and again, and everytime more people have seen , retweeted, commented, sent me DMs...this is just wow!

5 pm My friend Sharon has said that she has contacted few of her friends and passed on the call for participants, very grateful , she has been such a support and the best thing that has happened in this first year of PhD I have made a friend for life, we just clicked, and we have been there for each other throughout this journey, thanked her on whatsapp

6.30 pm....still in a daze.....loads of retweets and DM's....overwhelmed by the response on twitter at the same time...feeling somewhat....encouraged by the response...gives me a feeling that my study is important and that what I am doing is of consequence...getting DM's from people in Ireland , Canada ,India and Saudi.....its amazing how fast social media works....

7.57 pm I already have a prospective participant.!!!...they have filled the participation leaflet....yay...feeling exhilarated never expected I would get a prospective participant within few hours of the call going out ...how fantastic!

8.40pm ....THE.....TOM SHAKESPEARE just retweeted my call for participants.....OMG.....I just cannot believe it!!!.....very grateful to Sharon she passed on my Call for participants....to they .....this is beyond imagination .....beyond dreams...I was shaking as I read my twitter feed, .....i literally screamed, my family are looking at me as if I have lost it , haha.....lost for words.....

8.49 pm Another prospective participant has completed the participation leaflet....I am feeling so happy...I have two prospective participants in a couple of hours...this is great!!!!!! What a day...I am feeling so elated and exhausted at the same time with all the emotions.....today has been the best day of this PhD journey so far....even better than when I got accepted for the program and got the visa.....

May 29<sup>th</sup>

10 am Already had three more people complete the participation information leaflet....began contacting prospective participants to arrange initial meeting...emailed one participant as per their request and set up a zoom call for June first at 1 pm. Things are moving fast now.

11 am ..spoke to a prospective participant CH, she wanted to be contacted by phone...spoke at length explained my research and participation expectations, she seemed very excited and keen to participate.....have discussed with her about consent and will be sending her the link on Qualtrics for the Consent soon...so that is one confirmed participant....yay. I was feeling anxious before the call , she seemed very pleasant and spoke in a frank straight forward manner. She stated that she believes the research is one of its kind and that she would love to contribute. The fact that the participant shared that, made me feel very proud of my research study. She used to teach children with special needs for many years and now has moved to academia, looking forward to interviewing her.

May 31 2021

Tweet still getting many retweets and Dm's....couple more people have visited the Qualtrics page....I am rechecking the Qualtrics Consent form and questionnaire to ensure there are no errors...feeling excited.....have first initial meeting with another prospective participant tomorrow...

June 1<sup>st</sup> 2021

Sent the consent form Link to Participant CH whom I spoke to on the phone .....waiting for another participant to arrive for the Zoom initial meeting

Just finished the Zoom meeting with another participant....CN.....before the zoom call I was worried and anxious about how the call would proceed....but as the call began I found I was confident and able to communicate well with the participant, the participant appeared at ease and shared his views openly.....explained the participation requirements....and the participant inquired about when the interviews will take place and I assured they that will arrange them as per his convenience and he has requested to be interviewed when school ends in July....which I assured they that we can arrange for the interviews during summer break.....the participant was on board and has agreed to sign the consent form .which I will send shortly . the participant CN is a secondary school teacher, has a stammer ,diagnosis of ADHD and has been teaching for many years

After the call ended...felt relieved and happy ....also a bit assured that I was able to answer all his questions and accommodate his requests

June 4<sup>rd</sup> 2021

I have sent the consent form to participant CN and participant CH ...Both of them have signed the consent form. I am sending them the Qualtrics link to the questionnaire. Have rechecked the questionnaire many times to ensure there are no errors or spelling mistakes.

I am feeling very happy with the progress and am very optimistic. I have few more people contact me on `twitter with queries and have two more prospective participants who have expressed interest one of them has contacted me via a gate keeper contact and another via twitter. I have set up an initial meeting with one on 8<sup>th</sup> `June at 5.30 pm as per their request and another one on 9<sup>th</sup> `June at 12.30pm.

The response on twitter is very encouraging and the interest people have shown in my research ...I take comfort in the positive and encouraging comments and am feeling somewhat validated that my research topic is important and resonates with many people. Some of the comments have been so genuine and heartfelt makes me feel extremely invigorated to begin my interviews.

June 8<sup>th</sup>

Just finished the initial meeting with participant B, she expressed keen interest to participate, we have a good talk I found her easy to talk to, she was very friendly and even though we had never met before , I found her very approachable and friendly. She has expressed that she would like to begin the interviews soon and has agreed to sign the consent and complete the questionnaire. I have emailed her the consent form today itself, which she has already signed. Participant B was a primary school Art teacher in mainstream schools for many years has now moved to academia and is a student's skills advisor in a university. She has a dyslexia diagnosis. And has set up the first interview date for `June 16<sup>th</sup> at 5.30 pm.....first interview date is set.....Yay!

Another prospective participant S has contacted on twitter, have set up a initial meeting on `jun 14<sup>th</sup> at 10 am as they had requested. Things are moving faster than I expected, my friends had shared doubts about finding participants and shared their experiences. I am feeling lucky so far, things have progressed smoothly and participants who have given consent all seem very genuinely interested in the research and to contribute. Felling very grateful.... afraid that I might jinx it ....

June 9<sup>th</sup>

The meeting today with prospective participant A was delayed because the participant was unable to access zoom because he did not have an account, I offered to reschedule the meeting, or set it up in platform he was comfortable in .... but he insisted on trying so I talked they through accessing the zoom without an account and after a few attempts we finally managed to get it to work for they and the meeting commenced. He is a senior person, found they a bit intimidating at first. he didn't

have any questions just expressed that he wanted to participate and shared that he felt the research was very important and unique and he felt he wants to contribute. He shared he had dyslexia and works at a university and has agreed to sign the consent. I have emailed the consent form to they.

Participant B has also completed the questionnaire so has participant CN.

June 10<sup>th</sup>

So far all the participants who have agreed to initial meetings have come onboard, so far I have two male and two female participants, with a variety of disabilities which is also something that has happened organically without me really trying....i had been thinking what should I do if I get participants with similar disabilities.....but again things have fallen into place.....thankfully

Participant A has also signed the consent form and I have sent they the link for the questionnaire.

June 11

I have an international prospective participant E contact me to express interest via twitter, I have emailed her to ask for an initial meeting, to which she has agreed to meet via zoom on the 13<sup>th</sup> at 3.30 pm. This is very exciting, and I am amazed how far reaching my single tweet for call for papers has been. Another prospective participant J has approached via gatekeeper, the headteacher herself has emailed me and I have replied to both the head teacher thanking her and the prospective participant, who has responded immediately and given me his number to call. I have called they we spoke at length; he is keen to participate, he is a math teacher in a secondary school. He seemed very keen to participate and after explaining the participation process has agreed to sign the consent. Participant J had a hearing impairment, used to be a wheelchair user now has a prosthetic leg. I have emailed link to the consent form to they, and he has already signed the consent and completed the questionnaire we have set up first interview on the 16<sup>th</sup> at 1pm. Wow that was quick I already have another first interview on that day ...so two first interviews on same day .....!!!! the interview process like the recruitment is beginning quickly...with a bang!! .....feeling so excited, happy, relieved, at the same time anxious and a bit nervous as well....

I am surprised by the enthusiasm and appreciation for my research topic. I have received many messages on twitter and all the prospective participants I have spoken to have shared the same. The prospective participants I have spoken with have commented that they are so excited to be part of the research, they haven't come across such research studies. They shared they were glad to participate and contribute because they strongly believe in the topic. I feel humbled at the same time somewhat validated. Have already started preparing for the interviews, studying the questionnaires the participants have completed and preparing the interview questions. I want to ensure that I get all. The details and questions correct, and I feel

it is important that I know every detail the participant has shared in-order to be comfortable and confident during the interviews.

June 13

The prospective participant S has requested to reschedule the initial meeting to Jun 15<sup>th</sup> at 3.30 which I have done and sent the invite. I was really looking forward to the meeting and the cancellation was last minute....now that I have recruited five participants , I want to meet required number of eight !...

June 14<sup>th</sup>

Prospective participant AA zoom meeting at 10 am. Spoke with AA, she shared that she felt very strongly that she must contribute to the study but is concerned about appearing on video for personal reasons. She inquired about the recording medium and how i would ensure anonymity, I explained that her details will not be shared, videos will not be viewed by anyone else. She reiterated that she wants to participate but is nervous about being recorded.

I told her I appreciate her enthusiasm and willingness to contribute to the study and offered alternatively she could answer questions in a format that she will not need to do it on video because it is making her anxious. That I could send her the questions in written format which she find convenient and she can answer them in a written format. This would eliminate the need for her to be recorded on video, which was her main concern. She was highly appreciative of the alternative and quickly agreed to it. Have sent her the consent form.

June 15<sup>th</sup>

Meeting with prospective participant S which was rescheduled for today went well. She is from Saudi, just returned home after successfully defending her PhD in UK, she was very forthcoming and eager to talk. She said she had read the participant leaflet and didn't have any questions. I explained the recording process and how interviews will take place, and she shared she was ok with it. We discussed the timings of the interviews because of the time difference, Saudi is two hours ahead of UK time. She shared that she would like to be flexible about the time and I assured her its fine, whatever is convenient to her. We can discuss the time while setting up the interviews. Ended the interview with her agreeing to come onboard, have sent her the consent, which she has signed immediately. I have sent the questionnaire link; I have recruited six .... technically seven..... participant AA has verbally agreed but not sent in signed consent yet .....!

June 16<sup>th</sup>

I have my first two interviews today, I have prepared and printed out the interview questions. I am ready and raring to go. I am confident.....I have read and reread the participants details, bit nervous, but excited to begin the actual interview process.

Participant J interview began at 1 pm , he speaks in a measured manners, isnt very talkative, initially I could feel he was reserved and was measured in his responses, but soon relaxed and I felt was more at ease, I observed initially he kept distant from the screen and was more formal in his responses, but gradually I observed he appeared more relax, was closer to the screen, the length of responses increased, his responses became more detailed. It was a great interview, I covered all the questions wanted to ask, the participant seemed more at ease with me by the end of the interview. We set the date for the next interview as 30<sup>th</sup> June at 1pm. We chatted for a few minutes at the end of the interview, I shared that he was doing the interviews from school, he had a free hour in his timetable and that his headteacher had allowed them to do the interview from her room so that he would not be disturbed. I felt that was just such a huge gesture on the part of the headteacher, I had been in communication with her when she had emailed me regarding J wanting to participate, and she had commented that she appreciated I was doing this study and asked to share my findings. I felt that was just a genuine and great approach to have as a headteacher. And the thoughtfulness and proactiveness shown by her, I really appreciated it.

I felt this huge adrenaline rush after the first interview, a very euphoric feeling, I felt proud of myself I had managed to conduct the interview in the way I had envisioned, the flow was natural, I felt. It just felt like a huge achievement after the initial doubts I had been feeling.

Participant B interview was at 5.30 pm, she is extremely talkative, very animated while sharing details. She had a great infectious laugh, which she uses at times I observed more when she shares an emotional detail. Is she masking her pain with humour? I wonder?

Very detailed interview, very expressive, long descriptive responses. Participant B is such a joy to interview, her eagerness to share her story, her vivid descriptions, I almost felt like I could envision her experiences. Again, the same rush of emotions and a feeling of adrenaline after the interview. Have set the second interview for 24<sup>th</sup> June.

I am exhausted, interviewing is such a draining process, it is tasking. Because one is so focused, observing every minute detail, alert to catch every minute reaction of the participant, listening to their every word at the same time formulating next question, trying to use the vocabulary term they used in the responses. Jotting down notes, anything you feel might be useful while you are analysing the interview. I am feeling absolutely beat.



June 17<sup>th</sup>

The transcripts had so many errors, had to watch the video multiple times to correct the errors as well as to include the nonverbal gestures. This is so time consuming, but at least by doing so I am familiarizing myself with the data which is an imp step of TA. Some times the transcripts made no sense and had me wondering when did the participant say that ! and when I cross check with the video the participant has said entirely different thing, oh god this is going to be a laborious process.

June 18<sup>th</sup>

Finally managed to get the transcripts corrected and sent them transcripts to B and J  
Participant A has signed consent yay! just emailed the questionnaire to her...

June 19<sup>th</sup>

The Prospective participant from Canada E has replied to the email and we have set up initial meeting on June 22<sup>nd</sup> at 11 am. Hope she comes on board that will complete eight participants.

Started working on the second interview questions for B.

June 22

The initial meeting with e went well, it was very early in the morning for her, but she had mentioned it was the most convenient time for her. She was very friendly, she shared that one of her professors had retweeted my call for participants. She immediately felt that she should participate and had contacted me. She also shared that she has only recently started sharing her experiences and she wanted to part of my research.

She is very talkative and very animated when she talks, had loads of expressions, gestures, and the Canadian accent is very nice to listen to. She is a grade one teacher and said she has always wanted to be one. She didn't have many questions, mentioned the participant leaflet was very detailed and that she was completely willing to be part of the study and that she would like to begin the interview process as soon as we can. The meeting lasted for about thirty minutes, after which I emailed her the link for the consent form, which she immediately signed.

I then sent her the link for the questionnaire which also she completed immediately.

Participant AA has also completed the questionnaire. I have all my eight participants hurrah!!!

June 24

Had the second interview with participant B today. After the first interviews I feel a rapport with B. I am now beginning to gauge her mannerisms and tone. The participant shared her university experiences in detail. She shared many instances. I find myself getting involved in their narratives. It is hard sometimes to remain in the interviewer's role, but I keep a check on my reactions and emotions by watching the video on screen. I try not to interrupt the participant and let them talk as much as they want. After watching the first interview with b multiple times while correcting the transcript I can now tell when she is done answering a question so that I can ask the next one.

The interview went smoothly, took 55 mins, we chatted a bit for a couple of minutes, and the third interview with B is set on July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

June 25<sup>th</sup>

Been working on B's second transcript, I find the transcript correction very tedious , but I also realise that at the end when all the corrections are complete and I have included the nonverbal communication I am very well versed in the narrative she has shared. I find myself at times thinking about the experiences participants share, in my mind. It is difficult to stop myself doing that I think about it often, I have noticed some similarities in the experiences that participants are sharing.

## **Appendix 16 - Interview schedule**

### **First interview questions**

#### **Early Childhood Experiences – Family**

- Can you describe the family you grew up in?
- How would you describe your relationship with your siblings as a child?
- How would you describe yourself as a child?
- What is the earliest memory you have growing up? Of family or Friends or fav toy?
- What were playtime or fun time activities growing up, any memories?
- Did you have friends, did you like as go out and play with children around in the neighbourhood.
- Whom within your family were you closest to or was your constant support if you need it during childhood?
- Any fun memories from childhood about holidays or visits? What were typical fun time activities you did as a family?
- How would you describe your relationship with extended family members? Did they visit often like on holidays?
- How did your family decide on which school you would attend?

#### **School years (Primary and secondary)**

- What are your earliest memories of primary school do you remember your first day of school?
- As a young child did you enjoy going to school? why?
- How did you get along with your classmates? Did you have many friends?
- Did you encounter any challenges within your primary schooling experience ? What did you find most challenging?
- How was the teachers approach to you as a student?
- Were they supportive and encouraging towards your academic achievement,
- Do you recall any specific incident from primary school that has had a lasting impact on you?
- Do you remember any specific teacher from primary school? What made this particular teacher your favourite?
- What were your family's expectations from you when it came to academics? Was there expectation or pressure to do well in school?
- How did your family choose for the secondary school you would attend? What was that decision based on?
- During your teen years whom did you turn for support if you needed it?
- What aspects of academia did you struggle with?
- Whom did you seek support from for your challenges? Did you talk to anyone about the problems?

- How did you manage to keep up with your studies? Did you have any support?
- Did you have many friends in secondary school?
- Who were your role models in your teen years? What were your ambitions or dreams for your future as a teenager?
- What about secondary school experience, do you recall any incident/s that left a lasting impact?
- When did you know that you wanted to pursue higher education?
- What career aspirations did you have in your teens?
- The progression to sixth form, did you continue in same school or did you go to another sixth form?
- Can you share that experience how was it starting at a new sixth form? Did you have friends from middle school who also attended same high school?
- What were fun time activities as a teenager?
- What were your plans after high school? Was there family expectations that you would go on to university?
- Do you recall when was the first time you experienced any symptoms of depression? Can you describe that experience, how did you cope with it?
- How did it affect you personally?
- Whom did you approach for support?
- Is anyone else in your family diagnosed with similar ailments?
- Do you recall any specific incident from high school that you feel has had an impact on you personally?

## **Second Interview Questions**

So today we will be discussing your university and teacher education experiences.

## **Undergraduate**

- Did you go to university immediately after completing sixth form or did you take a gap? Why?
- So can you describe how you selected the university for you would attend for undergraduate studies?
- Was the university local to your home or far away? Did you stay in university accommodation or travel from home?
- How did your family react to that?
- Did you do any university visits before selecting the universities you wanted to apply to?
- Why did you select that particular university?
- Do you remember the first day of university or moving to the university? Can you describe what that was like?
- Which subjects did you opt to do your undergraduate studies in? why
- How would you describe your first year of undergraduate studies?
- What was the most challenging aspect of university life for you?
- During that time whom did you discuss your problems with or seek help from?

- How did you go about seeking support? Whom did you approach?
- What support services did the university offer you?
- How supportive were your professors? What is it exactly that they did that made you feel supported? Friends? Family?
- Describe your overall undergraduate studies experience? Did you have many friends?
- Which university facilities did you most make use of for leisure activities?
- Did you participate in any other university sponsored activities like say events or competitions?
- What was your favourite aspect about undergraduate university experience?
- What did you least enjoy during undergraduate studies?
- Do you recall any particular incident from those years that had a lasting impact on you?
- How did your endometriosis affect you in terms of your university experience? Did you ever seek any support from university for your condition?

### **Post Graduate Studies**

- Did you continue at the same university for graduate studies? Which subjects?
- Why did you opt to do that?
- How would you describe your graduate study experience?
- Did any of your friends from undergraduate years also attend same university?
- Which subject did you opt for graduate studies? why?
- Whom did you seek support from at this time if you needed any?
- How would you describe your professors at this time? Did you find them supportive?
- As compared to your schooling experiences how different or similar were your university experiences?
- So you recall other disabled students in your university availing of disability support services or dropping out of university?
- What was your favourite aspect about graduate university experience?
- What did you least enjoy during graduate studies?
- Do you recall any particular incident from those years that had a lasting impact on you?

## **Teacher Education**

- You also mentioned that you have Qualified Teacher status? Could you explain when you acquired the QTS?
- Why did you decide to get QTS?
- Was it a conscious decision that you wanted to be a teacher ?
- Did you seek any special adjustments during teacher education for your endometriosis?
- Did you encounter any challenges during the QTS process? Can you describe them?
- Would you describe your teacher education experience?
- What was your favourite aspect about teacher education experience? why
- What did you least enjoy during teacher education process? why
- Who were your support at this time if you needed any?
- Looking back at your higher education experiences, do you recall any fav professors? Why this particular professor?
- Do you recall any particular incident from this time that has had an impact on you?

## **Third interview Questions**

So today we will be talking about your employment experiences

- In the questionnaire you have mentioned you have taught at other level , can you explain the time line of your teaching journey?
- After you completed the teacher education did you immediately start looking for teaching jobs?
- Can you describe your experience of the process for seeking employment how did you begin the search?
- Did you decide to disclose your diagnosis during the recruitment? why?
- Did you avail of any reasonable adjustments support? Can you explain that process?
- Do you remember the first time you were called in for an interview? What was that experience like?
- Do you recall any negative interviewing experience?
- What aspect of interviewing process did you find most challenging?
- How long after you began looking for a job did you get a placement?
- Do you remember the first day on the job? Can you describe it?
- What did you enjoy most at your first teaching job?
- How did you get along with colleagues? Did they know about your dyslexia?
- When they did find out what was their reaction?
- where your students aware of your dyslexia? How was their reaction?

- Do you recall any particular incident?
- In the questionnaire you mention Recession, Job loss. No permanent home. can you describe the experience and how it affected you?
- How long after that did you start working again?
- How was that experience?
- Were you teaching at the same level as earlier or different?
- How different was the new place from your earlier one?
- What were the challenges you encountered in the new place ?
- In the questionnaire you also mention gaps in employment due to health Can you describe the incident?
- How did that make you feel?
- Did you take any legal action against your employer?
- Why?
- The transition from a teacher to your current role, which role did you enjoy most? Why
- Who amongst the administrators', colleagues and students did you feel most accepting of your dyslexia? Why?
- What did you find most satisfying about teaching?
- What is your least favourite thing about teaching?
- Have you ever withheld your diagnosis for employment? Why?
- Have you ever experienced discrimination at the workplace because of your diagnosis?
- As compared to other colleagues do you think your own education experiences and disability experience makes you relate and understand students especially those with their own disabilities better? Can you elaborate how?
- Of all the places you have taught which was your fav and least fav ?why?
- Do you have colleagues who have disability? have they had similar struggles with employment?
- What do you think is your main contribution as a disabled teacher in a mainstream workplace? What more do you have to offer to make classrooms more inclusive as compared to say other teachers?

**Fourth Interview Questions – What would you like to change, Expectations from the Future.**

(This is just an outline , you can add any other detail that you feel is relevant. Based on your own experiences what are the things you feel need to change)

- What are the things that have been positive support for you personally with regards to functioning with a disability? (for eg, within your family, available funding, support services, friends, any social policy that was beneficial etc)
- What do you think have been barriers for you personally with regards to functioning with a disability? (eg, unsupportive attitudes, lack of support from ....., no funding, lack of empathy, lack of support from teachers etc)
- Your suggestions that you would like to give to the following in terms of providing more support for the disabled (type response for each sub heading)
  1. Government/Policy makers -
  2. People with authority (employers/Head teachers/administrators)-
  3. Society in general -
  4. Colleagues/ Friends -( Add any other relevant to you)
- What is that you think people do not understand about what it is like to live with a disability?
- Your wishlist, things you would like to change based on your own personal experiences

In Education

In workplace

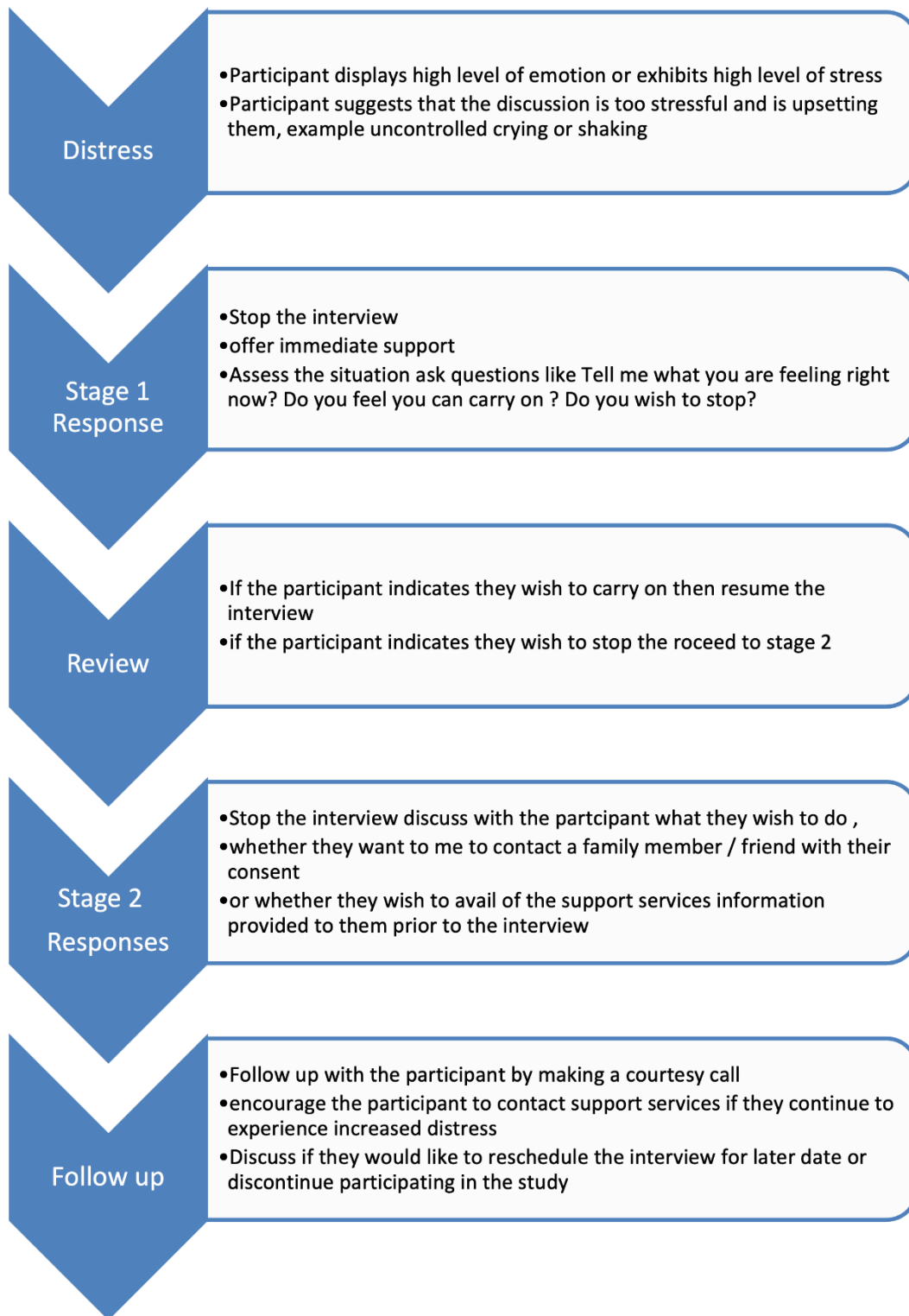
In Society

Any Other -

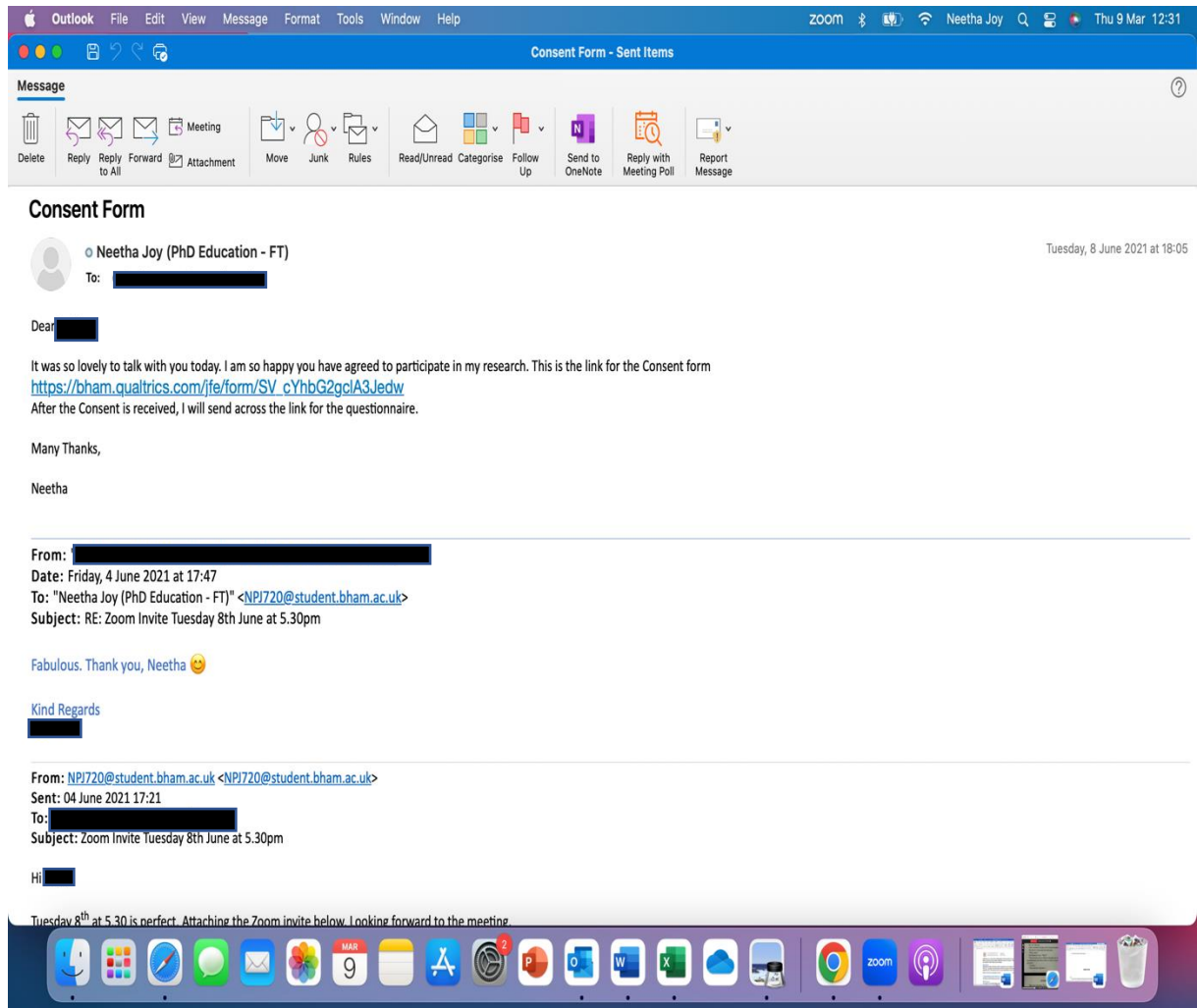
- Looking back at your disability experiences, what is that you wish you would have done differently or wish you had received more support in
- Anything else you would like to suggest.....



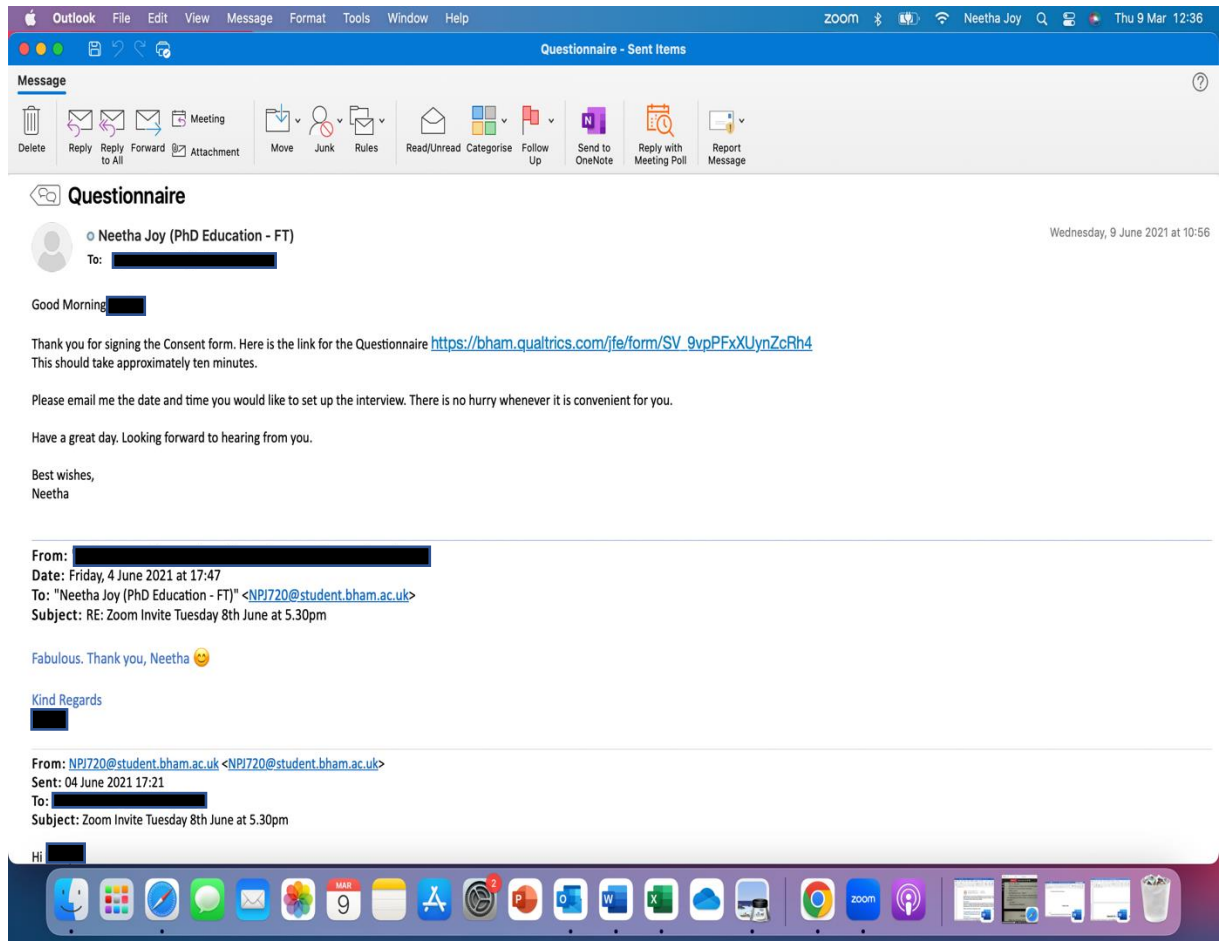
### **Appendix 17 - Haigh & Witham (2015) Distress Protocol followed in interviews**



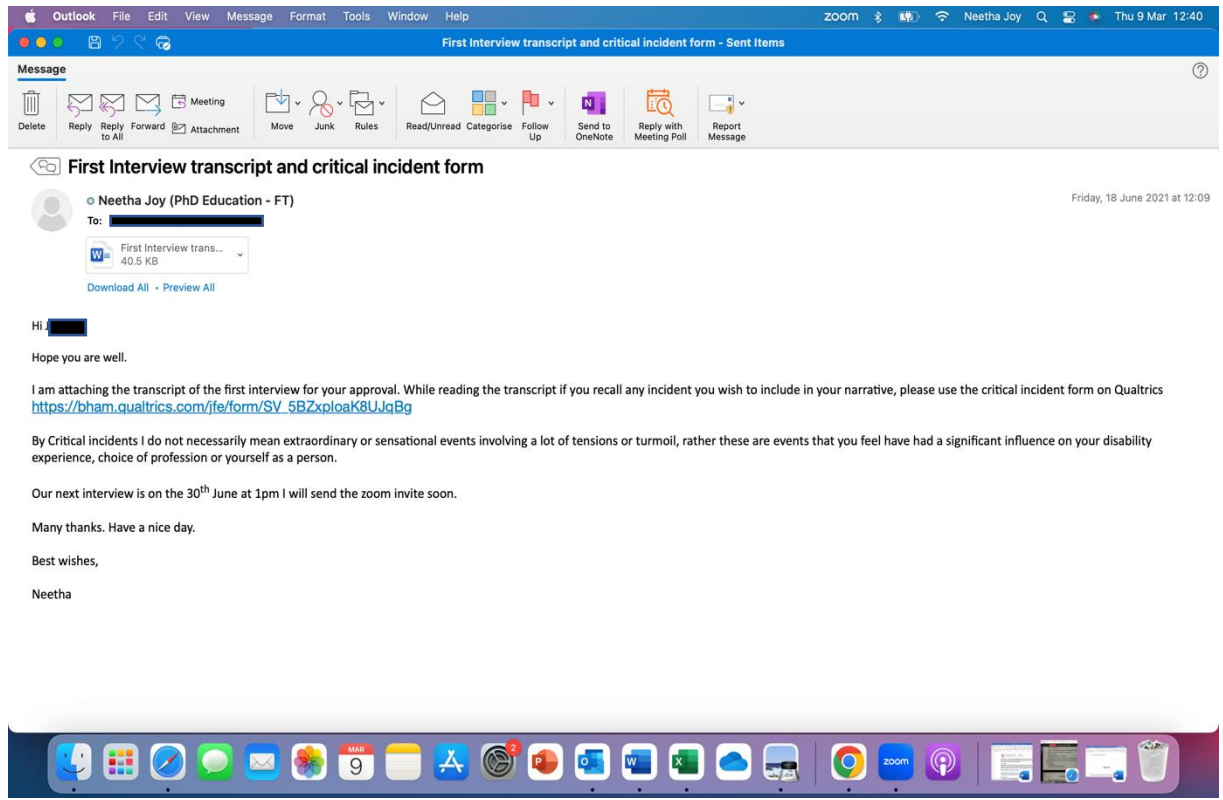
## **Appendix 18 - Email sent to participants Re-Consent form**



## **Appendix 19 - Email sent to participants- Questionnaire**



## **Appendix 20 – Email sent to participants Re-Critical incident form**



**Appendix 21 – Dates Interviews took place**

| Name | First Interview        | Duration | Second Interview       | Duration | Third interview   | Duration | Fourth interview   | Duration |
|------|------------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|
| B    | 16th June 2021 at 1pm  | 41.14    | 30th June 2021 1 pm    | 41.02    | 7th July 1 Pm     | 21.43    | typed responses    |          |
| A    | 16th June 2021 5.30 pm | 48.16    | 24th June 2021 5.30 pm | 57.36    | 2nd July 10.30 am | 61.02    | 16th July 4.30pm   | 35.04    |
| D    | 28th June 2021 5.30 pm | 46.43    | 29th July 11am         | 54.32    | 2nd August 11am   | 45.26    | 2nd August 12pm    | 29.23    |
| E    | 29th June 2021 1 pm    | 35.51    | 20th July 12.30 pm     | 37.56    | 28th July 12.30pm | 44.14    | 3rd August 12.30pm | 44.06    |
| F    | 26th July 3pm          | 42.26    | 29th July 3pm          | 55.07    | 4th August 11am   | 56.27    | 9th August 11am    | 47.32    |
| H    | typed responses        |          | typed responses        |          | typed responses   |          | typed responses    |          |
| G    | 30th July 12 pm        | 58.16    | 9th August 4.30pm      | 98.45    | 16th August 8 pm  | 36.3     | 16th August 8pm    | 28.14    |
| C    | 6th July 6pm           | 37.35    | 8th July 6.30pm        | 48.09    | 15th July 4pm     | 48.25    | 22nd July 4pm      | 38.21    |

**Appendix 22 - Sample of Coding (Excel sheet)**

|                                    |                                             |    |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----|
| Broader Theme                      | <b>Codes identified in first interviews</b> |    |
|                                    | childhood memories                          | 12 |
| Family Influence                   | family dynamics                             | 41 |
| Community influence                | role of community                           | 9  |
|                                    | Family educational expectations             | 17 |
|                                    | history of disability in family             | 9  |
|                                    | family support                              | 9  |
| Schooling Experiences              | <b>Schooling experiences</b>                |    |
|                                    | early memories of school                    | 8  |
| Enablers in Academic participation | challenges in primary school                | 24 |
| Barriers to Academic participation | challenges in secondary school              | 32 |
| Peer influence                     | favourite teachers                          | 11 |
|                                    | choice of school                            | 16 |
|                                    | academic performance                        | 22 |
|                                    | academic support                            | 16 |
|                                    | support from peers                          | 4  |
|                                    | <b>Personal attributes</b>                  |    |
| Personal Attributes                | personal traits                             | 66 |
|                                    | goals and aspirations                       | 5  |
|                                    | Coping strategies                           | 8  |
|                                    | <b>Disability support</b>                   |    |
| Disability Support                 | medical professional support                | 23 |
|                                    | funding for disability support              |    |
|                                    |                                             | 33 |
|                                    |                                             | 2  |

|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participant A                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                             |
| Family and early childhood                                                                          | Primary School                                                                                                                         | Secondary School                                                                                                                                                | Sixth form/ high school                                                                                                     |
| Happy childhood memories                                                                            | fun early memories, fun and play.                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                             |
| mum dad younger brother grandparents                                                                | self-doubt about academic ability early on                                                                                             | secondary school followed brother                                                                                                                               | snapped suddenly when they saw someone bullying younger student and told them off                                           |
| Community, friendly neighbourhood, friends in neighbourhood                                         | attended neighbourhood primary                                                                                                         | difficulty adjusting to secondary school , less structured than primary                                                                                         | surprised that the bullies actually listened to her                                                                         |
| supportive parents and grandparents, close knit family                                              | went happily on first day primary school, end of the day when mum said they have to go to school for many more years, burst into tears | difficulty and struggled to navigate large building, struggled with secondary school work,                                                                      | discussion with mum, mum commented didn't realise how bad bullying had been                                                 |
| close relationship with brother growing up                                                          | two fav teachers in primary                                                                                                            | lead to anxiety, was uncomfortable                                                                                                                              | Dyslexia only became aware in university, uncle had severe dyslexia , grandmother was source of information after diagnosis |
| family had history of Dyslexia, but parents never suspected their child has dyslexia                | liked the teachers because they were nice,                                                                                             | not many friends just one best friend from her neighbourhood                                                                                                    | in adulthood, met old teacher, teacher expressed disbelief in her dyslexia diagnosis                                        |
| late diagnosis for participant and her brother                                                      | primary school less structured more fun activities                                                                                     | self doubt, feeling of not being good at academics, struggled with academics                                                                                    | mom shared that in infant schools participant had to attend special room for speech and language                            |
| family supportive and loving                                                                        | struggled with spelling tests, despite working very hard,                                                                              | art was fav subject wanted to study art in the future                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                             |
| middle class family , not many memories of vacations, remembers free visits and picnics with family | supportive mum, helped study for spelling tests celebrated small achievements                                                          | Bullying continued in secondary school, shoving in the corridor etc                                                                                             |                                                                                                                             |
| no academic pressure from family, they were happy with kids trying to do their best                 | bullied in primary school                                                                                                              | did not seek support for bullying, perception that they were 'too sensitive', mom advised everyone                                                              |                                                                                                                             |
| clumsy would fall a lot, active                                                                     | kids made fun of Tourette's (nodding, blinking), mimicked, stole from them, chanted their name                                         | goes through it, tendency to blame yourself rather than anyone else                                                                                             |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     | teachers ignored bullying, mum said this is part of life live with it, gave up telling anyone about the bullying                       | fav teacher in secondary because she was a lovely person                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | best friend dumping is traumatic left with no friends                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | role models were aunt and a friend who introduced them to teaching                                                                                              |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | careers advisor in school said art is not a profession,                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | will end up with no money and working for McDonald's                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | so followed friend and started liking teaching job                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | no family pressure academically                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | coped by day dreaming                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | accepted everything as part of life and ignoring                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | sports and art only subjects enjoyed in secondary                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                        | later years of secondary school used to walk out of lessons quite often. I felt unwell. I often felt exhausted, nauseous, and dizzy. symptoms of visual stress. |                                                                                                                             |

|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participant B                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                  |
| Family and early childhood                                                                                                                                        | Primary School                                                                                                                                                      | Secondary School                                                                                                           | Sixth form/ high school                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                     | local secondary school                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                  |
| vivid early childhood memory                                                                                                                                      | challenging in school because of hearing problems, chose to be friends with loud people so they could hear                                                          | hearing problems more difficult to cope with in secondary because it was very noisy                                        | due to family situation learnt to be independent early on                                                        |
| mum dad and elder brother                                                                                                                                         | family wanting to send them to private school, but money issues created tensions at home                                                                            | behavioural acting out                                                                                                     | strong belief that if that was not the case they wouldn't be where they are today                                |
| almost entire childhood in one home , one neighbourhood                                                                                                           | uncomfortable in private school                                                                                                                                     | academically not challenging, chose not to do work                                                                         | as a teacher today they are more empathetic to their students, understanding their students is important to them |
| sense of community and friends in the neighbourhood                                                                                                               | asked to be sat in front of the class, often teachers complied                                                                                                      | teachers didn't expect much                                                                                                | tries to get to know their students                                                                              |
| fun memories of family vacation to Florida                                                                                                                        | fun memories of playing in primary school                                                                                                                           | family complications, brothers behavioural issues worsening and getting physically aggressive with family                  | they felt nobody knew them in school, so they make extra effort to know their students                           |
| closest to dad                                                                                                                                                    | sudden withdrawal from primary school no explanation given by parents, possibly due to abuse incident                                                               | was used as an excuse, teachers felt they had the capacity but because of home issues not doing their best                 |                                                                                                                  |
| maternal grandmother very supportive , closer to paternal grandmother in adulthood                                                                                | upset and distressed by midway changing of school, shares 'tears streaming down face driving away from school , remembers crying and driving alongside a brickwall' | very supportive best mate till date still best friends                                                                     |                                                                                                                  |
| completely deaf in right ear but not diagnosed till 16, parents chose to ignore, self approached doctors at 16                                                    | acted up and bad behaviours in school coping with the change, did not like the new school because a kid bit they on the first day                                   | hearing diagnosis too late , no adjustments                                                                                |                                                                                                                  |
| participants hearing impairment problems pushed aside due to challenges faced by family because of elder brothers severe dyslexia and behavioural challenges      | shares difficulty fitting in new school                                                                                                                             | love for music , played multiple musical instruments was in a band                                                         |                                                                                                                  |
| always felt compelled to keep own issues aside because of brothers severe issues                                                                                  | teachers were accommodating with hearing issues, allowed to sit in front                                                                                            | music became outlet for complicated home situation                                                                         |                                                                                                                  |
| mom attempted to keep them busy in extra classes to keep them away from home                                                                                      | shares that because they were good academically hearing impairment was overlooked by school                                                                         | despite hearing problem, because musical ability was very high learned to cope with playing in bands                       |                                                                                                                  |
| mom always shared they were a good child, they always did well , coped well so their issues were not taken seriously, it was very challenging for the participant |                                                                                                                                                                     | wanted to be a teacher, paramedic, or military dentist                                                                     |                                                                                                                  |
| no academic expectations, they is first in family to go to university                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                     | very good at math ended up teaching other students, enjoyed it                                                             |                                                                                                                  |
| no family support                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                     | spinal injury in teen years, chronic pain had to use wheelchair at times, accessibility problems at school                 |                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                     | school unsupportive, no adjustments made, no change of room for science when requested, participant was expected to adjust |                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                     | studied entire gcse science alone in a room                                                                                |                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                     | severe bullying , tipping of wheelchair by students teachers walking by ignoring, no action by school                      |                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                     | school dismissed severity of condition , parents too occupied with elder brother, no support left on their own             |                                                                                                                  |



|  |  |                                                            |  |
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|  |  | fav teacher because of unique personality and fun          |  |
|  |  | teaching choice not because of any teacher as a role model |  |

#### Participant C

| Family and early childhood                                                             | Primary School                                                                                               | Secondary School                                                                                                                              | Sixth form/ high school                                                                                                                               |
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| mum dad two sisters, participant is eldest                                             | grade one teacher got annoyed when they repeatedly shared that they had an important role at aunts wedding   | difficulty making and keeping friends                                                                                                         | unable to go off meds depression episodes start if meds stopped                                                                                       |
| close knit family                                                                      | attended neighbourhood school                                                                                | attended private middle school, no neighbourhood children in private school so very few friends                                               | participant shared that instead of directly putting them on medications therapy or other avenues should have been tried                               |
| community, neighbourhood friends                                                       | family gave lot of importance to education                                                                   | bullying after a particular incident left them ostracised which led to depression                                                             | because currently they are on the highest dose of antidepressants and has been on them since they were 13                                             |
| dad was a teacher, importance to educational value of toys                             | socially awkward at school, considered 'a big child', led to bullying, few neighbourhood friends             | put on depression medication from age of 13                                                                                                   | always wanted to be a teacher, they felt they never got or their sister deserved, their sisters struggle in school motivated them to become a teacher |
| hardworking family, saved for children's education                                     | tried not to tell parents because they were busy with younger sister                                         | depression ran in the family found out much later in family                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                       |
| holidays were money saving trips,                                                      | bullying was normalised at school, teacher blamed them rather than the bully                                 | conversations was never discussed                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                       |
| large close knit extended family mothers' side, happy memories of holidays             | family expectations that children try their best in school                                                   | struggled in private school due to class difference in students, avoided rich classmates, stayed with classmates with similar backgrounds     |                                                                                                                                                       |
| closest to mom, became protector of younger sister who had adhd and attention problems | because of family expectations worked very hard at school, solid 'b' student, but led to anxiety             | struggled with English when they returned to normal high school, because private school was french                                            |                                                                                                                                                       |
| parents wanted children to be bilingual French and English                             | fav teacher because they treated them as little people and he apologised                                     | schoolwork was hard, participant put pressure on themselves and didn't want to let their parents down and disappoint them                     |                                                                                                                                                       |
| 'investing in their children's education' more important for parents                   | an incident at school because of which they tried not to make assumptions of their students as a teacher now | couldn't stick to one hobby or read a book entirely                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                       |
| mother hen, taking care of younger siblings and cousins esp younger sister             | protector of younger sister at school                                                                        | their aunt was a role model, because unlike rest of the extended family she didn't judge them, was interested in their life                   |                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                        |                                                                                                              | extended family was very judgmental, made fun of them being big and their educations, not interested in their academic pursuit unlike parents |                                                                                                                                                       |

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| Participant D                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Family and early childhood                                                                                                                                            | Primary School                                                                                                                                                            | Secondary School                                                                                                                                          | Sixth form/ high school                                                                                                                                                        |
| participant shares they have difficulty to recall memories                                                                                                            | packed lunch was different from other children, always healthy stuff no junk food                                                                                         | secondary school was boarding school                                                                                                                      | moved to local comprehensive                                                                                                                                                   |
| They remember keeping to themselves and always being told that they got into trouble or got things wrong                                                              | participant wants to just fit in                                                                                                                                          | miserable at boarding school , remembers crying a lot                                                                                                     | struggled with welsh accent because family had moved to Wales by that time                                                                                                     |
| participant shares they always tried to please people and try to fit in                                                                                               | parents want best for children, even school uniform but participant shares they just wanted to be like other children and fit in and have clothes like everyone else      | behavioural problems, teachers struggled with them, they made fun of teachers, sometimes got blamed for things they didn't do because of their reputation | struggled fitting in to sixth form                                                                                                                                             |
| the family moved a lot due to dad's employment                                                                                                                        | earliest primary school memory is not having appropriate swimming attire and not knowing how to swim and being terrified, having to go into the pool in and feeling awful | they had attention seeking behaviour, to provoke a reaction from teachers                                                                                 | no guidance on subjects choice neither from home or school ended up with odd combination of subjects                                                                           |
| they loved animals                                                                                                                                                    | loved school , loved learning, created little books and wrote stories for themselves, very creative                                                                       | often punished for behavioural issues                                                                                                                     | ashamed to tell parents of struggles in school                                                                                                                                 |
| mum dad younger sister has an elder brother but left home early so never knew they much                                                                               | moving a lot difficult to maintain friendships in primary and later in boarding secondary school                                                                          | reacted aggressively when blamed for something they didn't do                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                |
| no extended family, mum didn't get along so people didn't visit                                                                                                       | they did well academically, no behavioural issues, teachers liked them                                                                                                    | participant shares they had problems with relationships with adults                                                                                       | They were bright but didn't do well with exams, teachers often commented why what happened                                                                                     |
| early childhood in Germany                                                                                                                                            | very active as a kid                                                                                                                                                      | they loved to learn                                                                                                                                       | diagnosed in university when a lecturer noticed and recommended, they visit student support                                                                                    |
| participant is emotional while talking about their mum shares "my mum doesn't really like me!"                                                                        | people made fun of them because they ran in a funny manner because of their dyspraxia (not diagnosed at that time)                                                        | bullied at secondary school                                                                                                                               | no consistent group of friends, calls themselves a flitter, book wormy and nerdy                                                                                               |
| participant shares their dad might have had Asperger's or autism, family life complicated , parents don't seem to get along, dad often alone in shed or away for work |                                                                                                                                                                           | toxic atmosphere at boarding school, they say they became a bully themselves to be in the popular group, desperate to fit in ,still friends with some     | shares they had difficulty to make attachments and long term friends says "wasn't confident in myself"                                                                         |
| participant close to dad , shares they spent time with dad in his shed talking about steam engines and that their mum and sister didn't ever do that                  |                                                                                                                                                                           | shares they had trouble fitting in with rich classmates , environment in boarding school was very competitive                                             | wanted to become a vet, then got interested in psychology and work experience was in a psychiatric hospital                                                                    |
| moving constantly made it difficult to make and keep friendships                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                           | participant claims were 'mean' at some point to fit in                                                                                                    | they flitted from one group to another , because they feared , they were going to leave anyway?                                                                                |
| strict upbringing, restrictions on diet , television, sleeping times etc                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                           | no control on sleeping times or diet in boarding school , stayed up late                                                                                  | had difficulty understanding what people wanted , they were the kind they knew everyone but friends with no one                                                                |
| they wanted to have beach holidays but dad didn't like beaches so holidays to farms, Devon camping, museums                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                           | they feel behavioural issues were their way of coping and showing off to friends                                                                          | shared they had no hobbies, they didn't watch television or movies, enjoyed music but casually                                                                                 |
| family expectation that they do well and go to university                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                           | shares "SEN kids were made fun of and labelled and looked down upon so they never asked for any help"                                                     | relationship with sister deteriorated in teen years, sister dropped out of boarding school and was home,                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                           | even when they struggled with organizing stuff, managing homework, timetables etc                                                                         | participant shares they considered their sister a loser , what kind of kid doesn't go to school?                                                                               |
|                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                           | attributes their temperament to struggles and not able to cope with them                                                                                  | mother left home when they were a teen, they shared an incident where their mother didn't acknowledge them in front of their friends when they walked past each other in town, |

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|  |  | naughty teenager                                                                                                                                                       | because sister was very close to mum , that affected participants relationship with sister                                 |
|  |  | moved back from boarding school to sixth form before they could be expelled for behavioural issues                                                                     | participant shares that in their mothers eyes their sister can do no wrong, and anything they did was considered a problem |
|  |  | no memory of good teachers, just remembers the horrible ones                                                                                                           | as an adult tried to understand mums behaviour and things mum might have had post natal depression                         |
|  |  | no pastoral support, attitude of just get on with it                                                                                                                   | currently in contact with mum but rare and close to her sister now                                                         |
|  |  | cannot share struggles at boarding school, or keep a diary, coz you got made fun of                                                                                    | refers to mum and sister as 'they'...says niece is having difficulties and that 'they think the niece is not normal'       |
|  |  | attachment difficulties, dad never spoke on phone, they felt lonely has had attachment issues their entire life                                                        | sisters' closeness to the mum hurts the participant even today                                                             |
|  |  | claims would never put thier own child through boarding school maybe private school if they were rich and could provide their child with everything rich kids can have | shares fibromyalgia diagnosis was difficult to understand, they always though that it was a make believe thing             |
|  |  | didn't develop life skills, didn't know how to study, or any real life skill                                                                                           | psychosis like and symptoms overlapped with their RA sytoms                                                                |
|  |  | fun memories with friends                                                                                                                                              | initially though pain was because of RA                                                                                    |
|  |  | They feel being mean was a defence mechanism to deflect the bullying to others rather than them                                                                        | jokes about their multiple diagnosis                                                                                       |
|  |  | by being a bully sort off avoided being bullied yourself                                                                                                               | medications for RA leave them fatigued                                                                                     |

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| Participant E                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                       |
| Family and early childhood                                                                            | Primary School                                                                                                                                            | Secondary School                                                                                                                                                                | Sixth form/ high school                                                               |
| Religious family, mum dad six children, close to maternal grandma, no memory of paternal grandparents | primary school very close to home , in neighbourhood, faith school                                                                                        | secondary school 8. miles , special bus for neighbourhood kids                                                                                                                  | returned to education when 32 years old, not conventional education journey           |
| elder brother had asthma so participant was the protector at school                                   | bullied In primary school they had to wear patch over eye under glasses for health issue, didn't enjoy primary school                                     | They were considered cool and had learnt to be tough and would retaliate and fight the bullies                                                                                  | family business was sold when 18 and divided amongst children                         |
| larger family lots of children                                                                        | Difficulty with reading early on                                                                                                                          | had to toughen up to survive, so he learnt to fight back                                                                                                                        | started own business at 18 and sold it when 32 and returned to studies                |
| caravanning holidays, holidays spent working in parents factory                                       | had to attend special classes, removed from normal classroom from time to time, nothing really was taught in these special classes                        | severe bullying, parents were called one incident someone jumped they from behind and thumped they got a black eye, if they hadn't fought back would have been severely injured | foundation course followed by undergraduate and post graduate                         |
| one vacation parent took all staff and children to Malta first overseas trip for participant          | good at math struggled with English                                                                                                                       | struggled with subjects like science especially writing side of it, argued in religious education class because they held different religious views                             | diagnosed with dyslexia while doing their postgraduate                                |
| house filled with children noisy and chaotic                                                          | didn't like the way history was taught, teacher expected them to copy for the board, participant couldn't do it, sneak away to library to 'look' at books | struggled with English was asked to attend extra classes, but was embarrassed couldn't understand certain words, so chose not to attend further                                 | didn't stay in touch with school friends no mobiles no way to communicate             |
|                                                                                                       | nobody else in family diagnosed with special needs, younger son was tested was told not dyslexic enough                                                   | played in a band was popular, but too much time, dropped it                                                                                                                     | competitive nature, interest in cryptocurrencies, precious metal, football and travel |
|                                                                                                       | no fav teachers                                                                                                                                           | self doubt, I am not clever as other people, I didn't know many things because I am not clever                                                                                  | elder brother went into academics late in life that inspired they to do the same      |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | good at math , struggled with other subjects, school never noticed                                                                                                              | technology and business subjects studied                                              |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | avoided doing homework, parents called in , participant shared had to attend church four times a week no time to do homework                                                    |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | parents lenient not really concerned with education , just asked they to do homework, he still didn't do homework                                                               |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | education not considered valuable by parents, expectation children will work in family business                                                                                 |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | father became ill in final year of sec school , they were asked to leave school and join family business                                                                        |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | They used to manage family shop every weekend on their own 40 miles away                                                                                                        |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | only completed O levels in Math CSC no other subject                                                                                                                            |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                           | no support available ,school aware of their struggles, but didn't know how to help                                                                                              |                                                                                       |

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| Participant F                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                     |
| Family and early childhood                                                                                                                            | Primary School                                                                                                                              | Secondary School                                                                                                                                                                                   | Sixth form/ high school                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                       | remember first day of school picture taken by mum                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                     |
| middle class nuclear family, parents' younger brother                                                                                                 | primary school closest to home,                                                                                                             | secondary school was diverse in term financial backgrounds, felt it was right choice of the two                                                                                                    | unsure about what to do so not heard the word university till year 11                                                               |
| dad also has a stammer, supported the participant, strong desire to help his child                                                                    | traumatic bullying by year one teacher she was mean and would let them complete saying their name at register                               | transition to secondary was taught, took time to find their feet                                                                                                                                   | developed interest in politics 15/16, went to political conferences in London often                                                 |
| supportive parents, importance in family to ethics and being fair to everyone                                                                         | other students complained to their parents about how the teacher treated the participant                                                    | in primary more friends with opposite gender, in secondary because of gender expectations expected not to be friends with opposite gender, took six months to settle into secondary school routine | desired to go into politics but ruled out studying politics as a degree found it not impressive                                     |
| brothers quite different from each other, get along                                                                                                   | parents complained but no action against teacher taken by the school participant calls it disgraceful and a hellish year for a six year old | academically good in traditional subjects struggled with art, dt, drama, music and sports                                                                                                          | attended open days at universities with brother, checked engineering geography and law courses                                      |
| awkward as a child, bit stilted, stubborn. Specific needs, desires, fussy eater                                                                       | irreparable psychological damage done, they would make excuses to be sent home                                                              | gather acquaintances not friends, gravitated toward groups of weird a bit awkward boys, felt lonely, surrounded by a small group, no social butterfly, didn't connect with people                  | A level chemistry teacher suggested they become a teacher they laughed it away                                                      |
| earliest memory 18 months old handed over fence to neighbour                                                                                          | They were clever got along with classmates helped them with their work                                                                      | some bullying in secondary, horseplay, pushing around nothing malicious                                                                                                                            | They could hardly speak how would they teach and control a class                                                                    |
| played independently, computers reading, some outside play climbing trees riding bikes with neighbour kids did not enjoy being outdoors               | not much interested in playtime playground, was often referee at football matches because he knew all the rules                             | good teachers in secondary, especially chemistry and science                                                                                                                                       | decided to do law degree                                                                                                            |
| close to mum, maternal grandparents took care of them when parent worked, granddad had aspergers                                                      | enjoyed primary school, loved learning                                                                                                      | difficult to have deep relationship with secondary teachers because you didn't see them everyday, and they often taught single subjects, few strict but not horrible                               | lot of political figures, followed their work impressed by their thoughts                                                           |
| holidays camping UK wide and France                                                                                                                   | early signs of adhd and autism, obsession with certain things, no one noticed because they were doing well academically                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | idea of improving things, making a difference, doing something useful                                                               |
| not very close with paternal grandparents some rift and fall out                                                                                      | participant feels because their behaviour didn't fit the stereotypical idea of adhd it was overlooked                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | dad dabbled in politics, this sparked interest                                                                                      |
| speech therapy from 3 years onwards, when they was 9 parents advocated for funds when therapy recommended in London                                   | bullied in year 5 and 6, later friends would protect them so they didn't notice the bullying                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | a disabled neighbour in politics also had influence                                                                                 |
| intensive therapy in London did help but when teens hit stammer became worse,                                                                         | year two and four teachers were caring and nurturing and good                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | the sense that they are different and that people shouldn't treat them badly, sense of unfairness                                   |
| people would walk away before they would reach mid sentence, because they took so long to form words                                                  | made excuses in grade one of to get sent home because teacher was a bully                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                    | impact of gulf war, injustice on tv, living next door to person who struggled everyday because of physical disability had an impact |
| returned to London for therapy in teens, it was a cycle received therapy, was a bit better, then some psychological trauma and relapse and back again |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                     |
| participant shares by the time you deal with one stuff something else comes up that your back where you started                                       |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                     |
| parents expectation that children work hard and do their best no pressure to get top grades                                                           |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                     |

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| very close to granddad in teens would drop in from school, chat about grandads fav cars, he listened to the participant talk about stuff nobody was interested in |  |  |  |
| mum nurse, trained in 2000 to be school nurse, autism training discussed signs, a friends was diagnosed with Asperger's, similarities were discussed,             |  |  |  |
| getting funds for uni were discussed, just casual discussion not taken seriously                                                                                  |  |  |  |
| perception that autistic people were weird kept in institutions, as shown in media, no understanding or real awareness                                            |  |  |  |

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| Participant G                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                           |
| Family and early childhood                                                                                                                  | Primary School                                                                                                                                                    | Secondary School                                                                                                                                                                              | Sixth form/ high school                                                                                                                   |
| mum dad seven siblings,                                                                                                                     | closest primary school, followed elder sister to same school                                                                                                      | huge delay in transfer of school records because of bureaucratic system , was put under a lot of stress fortunately they arrived and their grades were so high the headteacher was very happy | after the traumatic incident became subdued , not strong and fierce as before just a survivor                                             |
| close with siblings, support each other, younger siblings think differently                                                                 | not scared , familiar with school because elder sister went there, excited to meet people                                                                         | initially struggled with big city , multiple cultures and non arabic influences, slowly settled in                                                                                            | going to college gave them freedom , though they commuted daily from home                                                                 |
| was a naughty kid, interested in elders conversations, happy childhood                                                                      | would be taken to school aunt who was a head teacher                                                                                                              | pressure from father being religious family to adhere to rules especially because family considered them to be impulsive                                                                      | only much later when they came to UK for further studies did they get diagnosed, till then they felt inadequate and had lot of self doubt |
| eldest memories of grandfathers home open courtyard and shouting across the courtyard                                                       | slow in writing easy to memorise if someone read to her                                                                                                           | support for subjects they struggled in Math English were very good at new school, won a competition , topped their class                                                                      | fibromyalgia symptoms started in college, feeling tired, wanting to lie down , take breaks                                                |
| village was near the mountains, picnics in the mountain with cousins, hiking                                                                | liked to make friends with elder students                                                                                                                         | discipline, rules at new school were strict which they found difficult                                                                                                                        | couldn't cope with studies, friends felt if they worked harder, that they kept moaning and complaining                                    |
| close extended family, maternal aunts grandparents neighbours                                                                               | in year one teacher changed midway new teacher was strict and shouted at them because they were slow in writing                                                   | biology became new struggles, couldn't cope with the terminology                                                                                                                              | family though G was being lazy wanted to get married                                                                                      |
| early signs of ADHD, labelled 'active' doing, liked to do everything independently, did not like to take help                               | cried and refused to go to school, grandmother hit them to make her go to school                                                                                  | teachers pressurised them to be quick , they started doubting themselves that they were stupid not clever                                                                                     | student support services were no help, just paperwork filled forms no counselling no advice                                               |
| family was surprised when they struggled to cope with studies in secondary school because they were always so independent                   | they did well academically , did well in exams, was always top of their class.                                                                                    | performance in subjects fluctuated, they did well some weeks other weeks not, struggled with academics family surprised when G asked for help                                                 | cultural perception that if complain about studies that meant they don't want to continue drop out and get married                        |
| mum restarted education , annoyed with participant because G needed extra effort                                                            | family often requested the school to provide them a quiet room for exams, or extra time because they were slow in writing sometimes school complied sometimes not | incident at school where participant voiced opinion and teachers bullied them for it, they were shouted at and cried of six hours no one was allowed to comfort them                          | family was supportive provided car and arranged a driver for them                                                                         |
| mum left them with grandmother for some time because mom couldn't cope with husband being away for work in another country studies and kids | school did it as a favour not as an adjustment, made to feel they were being kind to them                                                                         | the incident severely traumatised them. parents did question the school but were rebuked                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                           |
| family was surprised when they struggled to cope with studies in secondary school because they were always so independent                   | happy at village school, won awards , was considered very good students teachers talked about them to other students                                              | the school took back their award they felt humiliated psychologically challenging time                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                           |
| family thought G was impulsive , active and participated in everything                                                                      | this led to bullying and students wanting to cause them harm, it got worse and they were actually happy that they were moving away to big city delay i            | wanted to change school, father refused, poor results that year , from active participating student they became passive and didn't care didn't do school work                                 |                                                                                                                                           |
| mum concerned about their behaviour often warned them to be more careful what they shared or talked about no inhibitions academically       |                                                                                                                                                                   | again religious intervention sought by family, but school was changed to private school                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                           |
| family believed academic struggles were because of 'evil eye' and took them for religious healing                                           |                                                                                                                                                                   | they did well and took medical pathway for further studies                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                           |
| grew up in a small village                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                           |
| importance to education no restrictions for education                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                           |
| nobody else has any special needs diagnosis                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                           |

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| Participant H |  |  |  |
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| Family and early childhood                                                                                                                                     | Primary School                                                                                                                                                | Secondary School                                                                                         | Sixth form/ high school                                                                                                |
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| big family , extended conservative and strict, patriarchal and matriarchal too                                                                                 | same primary as siblings followed them, also expected to attend ethnic community school in evening to learn history, dance and language, no choice they liked | parents discussed which secondary school, mum didn't want them to go to all girls school                 | same college as siblings, another friend from school was in same college though they didn't hang in same group         |
| 9 women one man , some years 5 women one man                                                                                                                   | loved primary school, loved learning but wasn't allowed to do some things like playing football or climb fences                                               | was close to sister in teen years                                                                        | played netball and volleyball in college                                                                               |
| family worked in low paid industries for long hours                                                                                                            | had lots of friends, remembers large birthday parties for at home friends were invited to, felt safe at school                                                | they supported others academically                                                                       | no expectation from family that they go to university they wanted to move out of home                                  |
| focused on getting children educated and married                                                                                                               | teachers were kind but distant /guarded/boundaried                                                                                                            | They studied hard, was a fast learner, school suited them                                                | first signs of severe health condition early 20's awful pain approached GP                                             |
| close knit , close to elder siblings                                                                                                                           | H was considered a good student , but talkative                                                                                                               | bit of drifter, friends changed over years not steady                                                    | proper diagnosis took seven years , the final diagnosis was shocking, hard to cope with ended a long term relationship |
| active , playful , friendly , talkative and bright in school                                                                                                   | they did have a speech problem for few years but they learnt to speak clearly                                                                                 | bullying by other peers they thought that was mean                                                       | siblings and cousins have similar diagnosis                                                                            |
| happy memories of playing board games with cousins and going to sporting activities with them                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                               | they knew they wanted to pursue higher education by age 11 wanted to be a flight attendant or accountant |                                                                                                                        |
| community strong, neighbourhood cousins and friends lived nearby, not allowed to go to friends' houses as a kid, strict                                        |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                        |
| close to sister just elder , to mum and nan                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                        |
| holiday memories with a friend of their mum neighbour, took them a week lots of outdoor space, and a farm nearby                                               |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                        |
| extended family visited often, stayed at relatives places for holidays, close to cousins                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                        |
| family expectation to learn and keep studying, don't get distracted, don't get attracted to boys/girls/ study and you will go far, don't be lazy, do your best |                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                        |

## Interview 2



| CODES IDENTIFIED                                     |                                    |                     |                                      |                              |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Undergrad university experience                      | Post graduate experience           | Doctrate experience | personal traits                      | Teacher education experience |
| reasons for gap year                                 |                                    |                     | Funding available                    | interest in teaching         |
| reasons for selecting a particular course/university | Unsupportive behaviour by teachers |                     | social and cultural influence        |                              |
| accomodation while at university/commute             | seeking disability support         |                     | disability experience                |                              |
| transition to university life                        | University support                 |                     | Domestic life/personal relationships |                              |
| Academic performance                                 |                                    |                     | Self doubt                           |                              |
| work experience while at university                  |                                    |                     | family support                       |                              |
| Peer influence                                       |                                    |                     | infrastructure problems              |                              |
| teaching support                                     |                                    |                     | personal struggle                    |                              |
| Favourite teachers                                   |                                    |                     | diagnosis journey                    |                              |

PARTICIPANT A

| Gap year after GCSE/choice of uni                                                                                             | Undergraduate                                                                                                                            | Post graduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Teacher education                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Doctorate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| Gap year at end of GCSE , didn't have requisite grades. Extra year before sixth form.                                         | Initially stayed in student accommodation which was catered then in second year shared a flat which was self catering, she loved cooking | Went back to do her masters after a fifteen year gap, immediately after undergrads started working as a teacher                                                                                                                                                                                                            | When as part of her teacher training she started learning about dyslexia did she realise that she had been experiencing these signs her entire life spoke with mum and grandmother....because uncle had severe dyslexia | While working as a dyslexia study skills tutor at a university she decided to pursue masters in research, and was encouraged by colleagues to do doctorate as well                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Because she went back a year her bullies went ahead and the new year group were nice to her                                   | Vivid memories of moving into university accommodation , funny story about biscuit tin and being independent                             | Her masters experience was completely different from her undergrads because she understood dyslexia , she understood study skills and had very supportive colleagues who were also dyslexia tutors, it was a completely opposite experience                                                                                | Learning about family histories in diagnosis in the fourth year she approached someone                                                                                                                                  | Her doctorate was with dyslexic students in higher education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Visited many universities ...just barely scraped through with required grades                                                 | Memories of trying to make the student accommodation feel like home, bringing things from home                                           | Many colleagues were also doing similar studies which encouraged her                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Because she was already in the fourth year nothing was done, no adjustments                                                                                                                                             | Participatory research on six workshops ideas around dyslexia how to make the university experience better for dyslexic students, which also involved interviewing the students                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                          | But she again struggled because she wasn't aware of research terminology and had doubts about pursuing it further. But she found it interesting and persevered                                                                                                                                                             | Asked her brother to get screened                                                                                                                                                                                       | The urge to bring about change in the system stems from her own experiences .....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Visited universities with parent and when they were working with grandparents                                                 | Nice personal room ensuite with shared kitchen                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Because brother was diagnosed before going to university he got all adjustments and support                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                          | She feels her strengths of thinking differently , questioning stuff, always persevering, wanting to understand things, were because of her dyslexia, while in undergrads she was focusing on memorizing stuff, in post grad she started realizing the strengths in what she earlier thought as her weakness...her dyslexia |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Supervisors were very supportive , they were aware of her dyslexia and supported her throughout especially during viva ensuring that the examiners were aware                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Opted for combined bachelors degree in arts and education which included teacher education to become a primary school teacher | Cordial room mates, few friends outside not from residence                                                                               | This was resonated in her first high grade ever in an essay                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Enjoyed the actual teaching part but in the second year remembers feeling disoriented everytime she had to go into a new school. Having to learn the new learning systems, new rules and expectations was difficult     | She shares that the doctoral process made her realize that she learnt more from her students than challenged her worldview at times, she shares an instance when she is trying to justify why essays are actually not helpful but her students countered her argument ...so at first she thought they are not getting her point but later while driving home she realized it was her that was not getting the students points of view |

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| She chose the course because it included a degree in art which she loved                                                                         | First year at university similar to secondary school experience, feeling disoriented no idea where rooms were, unsettled, baffled at workload.                                                                                                                           | But even then she self doubted her grade initially attributing that the professor was being nice ...but when she kept on getting high grades she started wondering                                                                                                                                                                               | She says she would step back , hiding because she felt she couldn't cope                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |
| The friend who had got her interested in teaching attended a nearby university which was one of the reasons she chose that particular university | Struggling with university coursework, not knowing what to do. Feeling everyone knows what to do you don't. working extremely hard yet not getting desired results. Really low grades despite working three times harder than others...she says 'typical dyslexic story' | She even got mad and irritated as why am I getting higher grades, because it challenged her own perception of herself as being average, not bright, not very academic....she struggled with this                                                                                                                                                 | Of the four weeks of working in groups the last two were to completely manage a class on their own, the teacher she was working shared that she wasn't sure that B could manage , but she did really well. It gave her confidence and she found it easy to teach the class without having to follow someone else's instructions, because she was herself planning the lessons, she was in charge, she realised there is a huge difference in having to follow other people's instructions and she herself planning and managing the class on her own |  |
| Mum wasn't able to go to university, though there was a university nearby they wanted their daughter to be independent and encouraged her        | Feeling of being academically poor, self doubt, embarrassed to discuss with anyone. Just kept going, working continuously not understanding why she couldn't get top grades                                                                                              | An incident when the professor hands out a journal to read in 15 minutes and discuss.....she felt anxious and nervous and despite after the class telling the professor that she had dyslexia in future if the professor could share any reading material in advance, the professor never did and repeated the reading exercise often in class   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
|                                                                                                                                                  | Frustrated with not getting results despite working everyday, having a meltdown and throwing stuff. Often remembers not going out with friends for fun because she had so much work left to do                                                                           | Unsupportive behaviour of the professor despite participant sharing her requirements with her shows lack of awareness and empathy                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
|                                                                                                                                                  | Skipped lectures, seminars to but unlike when she walked out in secondary school in university skipping lectures was considered normal                                                                                                                                   | In another activity when they had to make a poster, her poster was unique because her way of thinking a presenting was different, while others made neat posters, hers looked like a patchwork quilt, which she was embarrassed at first but the professor was kind enough to put her at ease by quietly sharing with her that she had done well |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
|                                                                                                                                                  | Self doubt severe, even contemplating why am I at university should I have not done this n got a job instead like a friend she knew from school who was earning,.... what have I done? Feeling did I make a mistake by coming to university?                             | Kind gesture by professor shows awareness and empathy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
|                                                                                                                                                  | Spent weekends and free time working and catching up and often missed out on all fun activities with friends                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |

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|  | Not aware of any other friends availing of disability support                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |  |  |
|  | Intense course full timetable compared to regular undergraduate course                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |  |  |
|  | The teachers she remembers as her fav wer ethe ones who were really nice and kind                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |  |  |
|  | Art teacher was her fav n his classes were fun and he was the quintessential art teacher                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |  |  |
|  | Writing essays was extremely challenging and she says it was like shooting fish in a barrel, throwing stuff at the page and hoping it worked. Despite working extremely hard she knew she would get marked low and feeling excited even when she scored 50%                                                                                                         |  |  |  |
|  | Making presentations was also very challenging because she ended up reading from. A prepared script and it came out very unnatural, until finally she kept the script away and became a teacher...and got a very high grade                                                                                                                                         |  |  |  |
|  | She attributes her not knowing how to do things to her dyslexia ..things secondary school is supposed to develop the skills , she feels she never developed these skills because of her dyslexia which I s why she feels she struggled in her undergrads. Also because she never had large friendship groups, or peers to show her , because she wasn't comfortable |  |  |  |
|  | She enjoyed the art the most in undergrads                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |  |  |
|  | Different kind of skills and learning them like feltmaking, papermaking, screen printing doing these with kids . she felt art in schools is not taught effectively, she enjoyed teaching art , and the excitement children showed while doing art activities was her favourite part                                                                                 |  |  |  |
|  | Feedback she received on assignments she says was depressing , and she felt the comment you must try harder unfair because she did work very hard, and unlike the comment that it felt like a rudhed job while infact she had worked a very long tim eon the assignment, so she says she doesn't remember the professors in particular but                          |  |  |  |

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|  | more the negative comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |  |  |
|  | Similar to the incident in sixth form, she snapped in another incident with flatmates when they were rude and bullying another flatmate.                                                                                                                                     |  |  |  |
|  | Repercussion of her standing up for her flatmate was that as a retaliation the bullies didn't get her tickets for the leavers ball which she ended up missing and feeling bad about it because her grandmother had made a special dress for her to wear for the leavers ball |  |  |  |

| <b>PARTICIPANT B</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| gap year after GCSE/choice of uni                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Undergraduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Post graduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Teacher education                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Gap year after gcse because, of family tensions, and surgery                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | The university was small so private accommodation with friends                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | He describes London very grimy and dirty for a wheelchair user, his hand would get very grimy ...also he says people only see at their eyelevel and because he was on a wheelchair and not at their eyelevel he would often bump into people | Says he always wanted to be a teacher but his mobility issues stopped him, because he had never seen a teacher on a wheelchair. Also ambition to earn a lot of money, did not make a teaching job so attractive. |
| He is the first in his family to go to university....visited Cambridge didn't like the cobbled streets because he was a wheelchair user, wanted to live in London so visited a small university there ....didn't understand student loans opted for a university which has lower fees | Six different flats in three years ....to find a place to settle-daily commute to university                                                                                                                                                                                          | On hindsight he loved learning and decided to pursue a masters degree in Maths                                                                                                                                                               | Because of sponsorship and motivational speaking he started to realise that money isn't everything                                                                                                               |
| received funding for university                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | When he visited the university in London on the open day he liked it because the station was very close and the building had good wheelchair access. But because he took a gap year and deferred admission for a year, when he joined the university had shifted to another building. | His undergraduate troubles with accessibility he decided to do his masters from open university because he did not want to commute again                                                                                                     | Wanting to buy a house needed to show steady income so was looking for a career that has a salary, and because he always wanted to be a teacher he decided to go for teacher education                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | The new location was difficult to access it was on a hill narrow pathway and really steep on a cobbled street. The building access was impractical and had only one lift.                                                                                                             | He says his post graduate learning experience was no different from his undergraduate even though he opted for open university for masters, because he self taught himself during his undergrads and continued to do the same in his masters | He had no idea about teacher education and what to expect and joined very last minute. Was approved after his first interview                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | The participant didn't ask for any adjustments then because he was unaware of his rights. The university made minor disheartened efforts                                                                                                                                              | Lack of social connections and friends in open university experience                                                                                                                                                                         | Because he had no idea about teacher education course demands and he had joined last minute. There was minimal information provided and he struggled for a couple                                                |

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|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                           | of weeks to understand what was going on it was very stressful                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|  | Even everyday access in terms of getting in and out of the building was problematic. Days when the lift was not working though the participant was informed no solution was provided. Made the whole undergraduate experience not enjoyable for him                               | Opted for open university also because of health complications and major surgery so he needed flexibility which distance learning offered | Haven't used gcse math he found himself a bit rusty with math concepts. For the first time when he attended the freshers fair did he really get a university experience of meeting lots of people and attending events...he found a sense of community                                                                                                   |
|  | The situation was unbearable and he did contemplate changing credits , but decided against it because he would have to redo certain years. He did enjoy the content so he decided to continue and complete...shows resilience and perseverance                                    | He was working as a credit analyst which he did not enjoy                                                                                 | He had to advocate for proper disability toilets facilities like dressing bins etcwiththe facilities manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|  | Had a hearing impaired lecturer he found impressive                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | After post grad he was no longer using a wheelchair and was able to walk using prosthetics.                                               | The university did make the changes he requested but a year later                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|  | Enjoyed the financial and math modules the most                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | He was also competing in many international sports events . he began motivational speaking as a professional disabled athlete.            | Mad elots of friends during the teacher education course who are still in touch                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|  | No friend in the university , shared a flat with his friend and had a few friends in London to socialize                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                           | He remembers doing lesson observations and being very judgmental about the,                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | His classmates formed a clique...didn't socialise with others, and they weren't serious about university work...which wasn't his style. He was very particular with submissions and completing work on time, unlike his class mates                                               |                                                                                                                                           | Because by the time he started teacher education he was not visibly disabled , didn't use a wheelchair or limp , people didn't realise he had a disability. First four weeks nobosy knew, only the HR and his mentor                                                                                                                                     |
|  | The lecturers had a more teacher student relationship and hence they seemed okay with the classmates behaviours                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                           | He decided to have a school assembly to talk about his disability because speaking about it in am ath class didn't seem apt. the reactions were amazing, and good.                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|  | Fav part of undergrads for him was to live in London moving away from tiny town he grew up in                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                           | Studentst were fascinated, and he got a lot of their respect. He says it was a nice experience                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|  | Living in London was challenging, finding accessible accommodation, travel route that were wheelchair friendly was a challenge, often got into arguments with bus conductors because he used a wheelchair, and had to use escalators which was unsafe but he didn't have a choice |                                                                                                                                           | He feels that he wantst to be a role model and let students know that anybody can be anything which is very important to him this message                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|  | He was fast with his wheelchair and it gave him tah feeling of freedom, overtaking people in central London....heedecribe the feeling of being able to get on a bus and go wherever he wanted to go as something he enjoyed                                                       |                                                                                                                                           | He found going into differtn school during teacher education challenging, the first school he found some teachers were unprofessional and lacked team spirit, second placement was a fantastic team friends towards each other but did not include him or care about including him because he was temporary. He used to feel lonely and have lunch alone |
|  | He describes London very grimy and dirty for a wheelchair user, his hand would get very grimy ...also he says people only see at their eyelevel and because he was on a wheelchair and                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                           | Another school used him as a free teacher snad didn't have any respect for him, he didn't really like that                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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|  | not at their eyelevel he would often bump into people                                                                            |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|  | Did a variety of jobs during undergrads, personal training, equality. And diversity training, accountancy ...being self employed |  | in terms of accessibility, the staff room and math room were not accessible, no disabled parking slot for teachers as as no ramp                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  |                                                                                                                                  |  | The schools are designed with access to students in mind but not for teachers, teacher areas are not designed with accessibility in mind                                                                                                                                                                      |
|  |                                                                                                                                  |  | He feels teacher education helped hi become a better teacher, understanding how to teach math, understanding the difficulties students face. He also realised being a teacher is demanding , physically and mentally, with long work days, parents evening etc. which as a student no one really thinks about |

| PARTICIPANT C                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| gap year after GCSE/choice of uni                                                                                                                                   | Undergraduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Teacher education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| No gap year, was sure about what she wanted to do                                                                                                                   | Commuted to the university from home it was only twenty minutes drive                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | she had a very unpleasant expereince in her second year of university suring her student practicum in school with a teacher who was very rude and dismissive of students, she ended up requesting a change of class, but felt guilty for abandoning the students,                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Chose to so a. five year integrated bachelor of arts and bachelor of education , so she was in the classroom from the first year itself                             | her first day of university was on 'September 11' and the memory of that day is very vivid for her                                                                                                                                                                                                       | she did not report the concerned teacher because of the atmosphere she felt she wouldn't be heard and dint know ,                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| She didn't consider many universities , she chose the one closest to home because she was familiar with it as she used to volunteer there during high school        | she remembers the silence on campus, and stunned faces, and her history professor commenting that they were witnessing history first hand and that the world would never be the same                                                                                                                     | she remembers loving to be in the classroom, and enjoyed being a teacher. She loved spending time reading with the kids, and just helping them to learn                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| She did contemplate about going to a far away place like some of her friends went to Thailand or south korea to teach English, she felt she was too much a homebody | she remembers the anxiety of the day                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | she faced challenging situations because she was in a school which was in a very deprived area of the city, she had students who cam ein after experiencing violent situations and she says the expereince she got working in that school taough her somany things that teacher education couldn't                                                                                                                                               |
| Commuted to the university from home it was only twenty minutes drive                                                                                               | she was veru anxious about beginning at the university                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | she had mixed reactions from her etacher education mentors , she just kept on going . she struggled with the organisation and assessment part because of her adhd...and never revealed her diagnosis because of the stigma ssoassociated with it at the time                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| parents paid for tuition                                                                                                                                            | the following days were filled with discussing the ongoing September 11 situation                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | she always felt she never belonged of fit in anywhere but she felt she belonged in the classroom                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                     | settling into university was a hige change from the catholic school atmosphere she was used to to the liuberal arts atmosphere at university. She says a quote has stuck with her " there is a difference between fitting in an dbelonging". She feels she always tried to fit in bit she never belonged | she feels because as the teacher she gets to create the classroom climate, and build the relationships within it , everybody belongs, an dshe often gets called the 'mama bear' . because she is very careful ath everone feels accepted and that they 'belong' , she encourages empathy and acceptance of difference, discourages bullying and that's her fav part because she gets to create that safe space for her students in her classroom |
|                                                                                                                                                                     | she had friends people she. Talked to but not sleep over ot girl trip kind of friends                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | she feels t hat students are more accommodating because they do not know hate, and prejudice. So she stresses more on respect to differences in her classroom, we treat everyone with respect nomatter what they look like                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

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|  | she felt that at university unlike in high school where she was bullied for her size in university being liberal it didn't matter much. Plus she feels if people did talk about her she was unaware of it at university                                                                   |  |
|  | the most difficult part of undergrads was the transitioning into adult hood, maintain a job to earning money and attend classes, juggling all that so that she could help her parents financially and get a student loan of her own . so even though she lived at home she was on her own |  |
|  | she hesitated to participate or go to the hang out office in her department, self doubt , and not wanting to be different. Also she put too much pressure on herself being conscientious that her parents were paying tuition fees and she felt guilty that she should do well            |  |
|  | she had two professors whom she found were impressive because eof the work they did as well as their teaching practices                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
|  | she felt the professors left an impression because they treated students with respect , and as equals. They cared and were empathetic                                                                                                                                                     |  |
|  | in Canada it is considered personal health information and legally there is no requirement to disclose their diagnosis                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
|  | even though her university did provide disability services, because of the stigma around depression she never availed of the,, only her immediate family knew. She would make excuses if her condition prevented her from attending university                                            |  |
|  | she remembers her graduation day , as being overwhelming, she was proud of herself but sad at the same time . grandmother had Alzheimer's and she know her grandmother who wanted her graduate though she was there would not remember this moment.                                       |  |
|  | Also she had not secured a job by that tie so she was anxious                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |



| <b>PARTICIPANT D</b>                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| gap year after GCSE/choice of uni                                                                             | Undergraduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Post graduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Teacher education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Took 3 years gap after GcSe, went abroad                                                                      | She loved university and says for the first time she felt she belonged, she did well in her course and thrived unlike when she struggled at school at university she felt she loved the subject                                                                                                                                                                                                             | She had applied to masters while she was teaching and managed to get accepted                                                                                                                                                                   | She wanted to do her masters right away, but she needed to find a job, she struggled to find part time work she ended up being a special needs support worker ia TA in schools                                                                                                                                      |
| Returned home when her father became terminally ill                                                           | She enjoyed university life because she got to meet people with similar interests, she felt enriched as a person and wanted to be an educational psychologists to help people like her who struggled through school                                                                                                                                                                                         | In her opinion the disability services at universities need to provide more time to understand the students needs and how they can support the student better. Students often don't know how to ask or what support they may require            | Two year into doing support work she decided to do her teaching PGCE so that eventually she can pursue Educational psychology                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>She worked small jobs</b>                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| She worked small jobs and started doing open university, an introductory course because of financial problems | When a lecturer discussed about dyslexia and adhd, she was sent to student support and recommended some assessments that was when she got diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and adhd. She was put on medication which had a bad effect on her, she had insomnia and got paranoid. She took a break from studies in her second year to sort out the medications and then went back to studies | Often there is a delay in providing support from the time the student is enrolled and the course begins, this time can be utilised to identify the support required, rather than when the course starts and the student has no support in place | She felt doing a PGCE will benefit her to become an educational psychologist and help her get on a doctorate degree.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Became a single mother to her son, obtained funding so went back to university to study psychology            | She commuted to university with her sister, 45 min drive                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | She also feels that using online meetings can be a way out to save time for disability services to be offered rather than a face to face                                                                                                        | She learned a lot being a teacher but she also found teaching very emotionally draining, and a feeling that one ends up being trapped, there is no time for anything else, ultimately realising that she wasn't happy and got out of teaching to complete part time masters and then go on to enrol for a doctorate |
| Her employer asked her to choose between university and work, she opted to go to university                   | University had a nursery where she would drop her son                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Because if students have lectures there are time constraints to go physically to disability services everytime                                                                                                                                  | She feels she was good at teaching, she worked with children with ADHD, she felt she understood the children better, and had a way of helping them understand and do school work                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                               | Once when her son was ill her lecturer allowed her to bring in to class                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | The bureaucratic way disability services are offered are often a hassle                                                                                                                                                                         | Though she never wanted to be a teacher she always wanted to work with special needs and that was her intention in the first place to study psychology                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                                                                                               | She had a very mixed group of friends initially she felt embraced being a mature student but she fit right in                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | University campuses are also very difficult to navigate if you have mobility issues                                                                                                                                                             | She feels many people confuse special needs teaching as just teaching with a TA for a child, she stresses it is about changing the way on teaches, and change the environment to fit the needs of the special needs children, it needs a lot more creativity                                                        |
|                                                                                                               | To avail of special adjustments, it took a while for her to seek the right support. But she finally did and was provided with a scribe for lecture notes. She found the process helpful when lecturers have her notes before hand. She was provided with a laptop.                                                                                                                                          | Her supervisor advised her that she never apologise for having emotions                                                                                                                                                                         | While the university suggested she look for more mainstream placements she was adamant that she didn't want to become a mainstream teacher. Even though the university felt she is limiting her options, she was the first student to do two of her placements in a SEN school                                      |
|                                                                                                               | She received an allowance for library books, about 200 pounds to buy supplementary books, this funding has been stopped now                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | She absolutely loved the experience, she says she got the kids and was able to help, she was good at building relationships and helping the                                                                                                                                                                         |

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|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | children . she felt that the structures within education need to be reworked                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|  | She was also provided with a budget for printing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|  | She developed mobility issues with aggravated swollen foot she had to use crutches and could not walk                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | She says she doesn't belong in teaching, but she belonged with the children. She had problems fitting in with the adults. She felt teachers have cliques , and because she did things differently and sees things differently she didn't fit in this wasn't just in one school                                                                                      |
|  | University provided her with a temporary disabled pass, so she could park her car closeby.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | The management didn't like her acting differently and this started reflecting in her teaching observations, which were always outstanding. and she was discriminated against once someone found out about her RA. And she felt she was targeting after that                                                                                                         |
|  | After a lot of tests she was diagnosed with Rheumatoid arthritis, it was very hard time and extremely painful. She had accessibility issues at home as well, every day tasks were challenging                                                                                                                                    | Initially she was doing very well but as time progressed she felt that the environment was toxic and staff were unhappy, and there was jealousy. Internal staff dynamics and politics affected the environment making it a very toxic place to work. She got bullied by other staff members. She absolutely enjoyed being with the kids and that was her safe space |
|  | She felt the core structure of the modules in year one and two of her undergrads were difficult for her to cope because of her ADHD, she like the year three because unlike year 2 where she had to do half modules so like ten to 12 modules in total in year three there were only three or four modules                       | She had a very cordial relationship with cleaning staff she often helped out at events and weekends, but the other teacher bullied and mistreated her                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|  | She has always struggled with time management and time keeping, she feels she needs more support in study skills, she feels overload, because she doesn't seem to know when to stop researching, so given a topic she will research everything she can find, but to organise it in a essay for her is challenging                | She got involved in a whistleblowing incident and was treated as a social pariah and that affected her health. Despite being clinically vulnerable she wasn't allowed to shield, she got referred to occupational health                                                                                                                                            |
|  | She had a support worker , helper in planning assignments, but it was difficult to find support workers with the right qualifications, also committed, there were times where the support worker was supposed to meet her every week, but she never heard from them in months and when they did meet the sessions weren't useful | She felt she was being punished for having health needs. She had very children with very challenging mental health disabilities in her classroom, and she was getting burnout because she was not getting enough breaks, she became a ball of anxiety, emotion, couldn't sleep, the school would even allocate her a lunch break so she could have her medications  |
|  | She approached the university for help and they did help her by contacting an agency that provided support workers which helped                                                                                                                                                                                                  | The school were very rigid and wouldn't accommodate her requests for submitting informations in a way that was easy for her to process                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | She feels distance learning is hard to discuss and collaborate with friends.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | The situation was so bad she got referred to occupational health again, even they were taken aback at the language used in the official form by the school                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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|  | She feels that COVID has helped in terms of working collaboratively from home, unlike during her undergrad times |  | She was advised to take legal action against the school she decided against that because her health had worsened and she felt she didn't have the energy to pursue the case for three or four years |
|  | She feels that she benefits more when someone shows her once how to do something so that she can understand      |  | In one incident she was electrocuted because the building was unsafe                                                                                                                                |
|  |                                                                                                                  |  | Even her union suggested she was not well enough to fight this case so she just left                                                                                                                |
|  |                                                                                                                  |  | She says schools are the least inclusive place she has ever worked in                                                                                                                               |
|  |                                                                                                                  |  | She feels schools need to be more compassionate and instead of being competitive and grading teachers, it has to be a more collaborative environment                                                |

| <b>PARTICIPANT E</b>                                                                |                                                                                          |                                                                 |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>gap year after GCSE/choice of uni</b>                                            | <b>Undergraduate</b>                                                                     | <b>Post graduate</b>                                            | <b>Teacher education</b> |
| Went back to education after 32 years because they were building their own business | For their undergrads he chose business information technology which included a placement | He got diagnosed at the end of their post-graduation during the |                          |

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|                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | time he was about to submit their dissertation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Opted to do a foundation course close to where he lived                                                                                                                                           | Because he had done the foundation course unlike the student who had come in the first year of undergrads directly he was at an advantage because he was already familiar with university way of working, referencing styles etc                                                                                                                                                                            | His spouse was doing a course on learning difficulties, and she recognised the signs and discussed with him. He approached university support services and got assessed                                                                                                                                     | Because he was working on hourly paid contract he couldn't run a module on his own teaching only 8 to 12 hours a week he could go for the QTS process                                                       |
| Foundation course of a year included core higher education skills, research and social science                                                                                                    | He found himself totally immersed in studies and academia and enjoyed the maths orientated B.Sc                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | He was officially diagnosed with dyslexia during the time he was completing his postgraduation                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Only when he was given modules to teach and he began creating study materials for them did he start the process of QTS                                                                                      |
| Because he had returned to academia after a gap he found the teaching style very different, he was nervous making presentations. The course gave him a good foundation in writing and referencing | His spouse was very supportive, but his wider family his parents were of the viewpoint that education isn't required                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | After his post graduation he inquired at the university about hourly paid lecturing and he started doing that                                                                                                                                                                                               | Before beginning the QTS process, he did reveal his Dyslexia diagnosis. It took him ten years to complete the QTS process, being a hourly paid lecturer who weren't considered same as indefinite lecturers |
| daily commute to university                                                                                                                                                                       | Even though his brother had similarly returned to academia after a gap they didn't discuss because they didn't have a close relationship                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | He feels that when he was running a business he had to learn new things and then teach his employees, so he was always teaching in one way                                                                                                                                                                  | There were other pathways available for QTS                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | He feels that after one returns to academia after a long gap having gained practical knowledge by conducting business, there is yearning and thirst for knowledge, to read, to know more and that process is what he enjoyed most. As well as passing on that knowledge to others so that they don't make the same mistakes he did, that transformation is what he enjoyed the most about being in academia | He often self taught himself and then everybody around him.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | His QTS process involved peer observations                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | He felt that rather than the content the pedagogy used was the problem in school while teaching history. At university, he didn't like English literature, he felt some of the books were not interesting to him                                                                                                                                                                                            | He completed a training program conducted by the football association, and began coaching 13-14 year olds which he quite enjoyed.                                                                                                                                                                           | He received positive feedback on his teaching, he was assigned a mentor to discuss about what he was doing, he found the teaching toolkit very generic                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | A particular lecturer raised concerns about his writing and asked him to write a couple of sentences, which he wasn't able to do, he felt under pressure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | He never had the intention to become a lecturer, he says the path opened and he took it                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | He had good relations with his mentor who would share reading materials                                                                                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | He says disability services were not prominent at that time                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | He says two professors in particular made an impression on him because he was so strict with late arrivals, which made him think that it wasn't supposed to be a punishment system and he didn't know what the reasons people were late. So he decided against doing that when he himself became a lecturer | Barriers like he was kept on hourly basis work for 8 years while it should have been only four. He didn't challenge that being dyslexic averse to confrontation                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | He felt that being dyslexic he had the tendency to look at things differently. Having business experience he often had trouble articulating the limitation of a theory, because he knew the business context he knew things at a broader level than other students                                                                                                                                          | Another left an impression because he suggested decentralising the power to students                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                   | He says that he often thinks back and realises he could have articulated what he had said better, he attributes that aspect to being dyslexic and that is the nature of who he is, and that people around him his spouse especially has been very patient and fills in the gaps when he makes such language errors                                                                                          | It is the job of the lecturer to make the content engaging and interesting, so it is not the lecturer but the student who has the autonomy to control the learning by revisiting the content whenever they want. He also advocates to question                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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|  |  | everything, which left an impression on the participant |  |
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| PARTICIPANT F                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| gap year after GCSE/choice of uni                                                                                                                                                                      | Undergraduate                                                                                                                              | Post graduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Teacher education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| No gap year went straight after sixth form to do a law degree                                                                                                                                          | Along with undergrads did a accountancy course because he was a treasurer at a organization he volunteered at                              | Currently doing a part time masters in human rights                                                                                                                                                                                     | Immediately followed the second undergrads with teacher education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Visited many universities along with his brother to decide where he wanted to do his undergrads                                                                                                        | Did a second undergrad degree in science form open university because he wanted to teach                                                   | Only when he was doing his post graduation did they offer an autism screening, and he was offered support because of the diagnosis                                                                                                      | Getting accepted to a teacher education program was a struggle for him. There were many interviews, after completing the set tasks the selector often gave him some pretext which often was untrue as to why they didn't give him a place. He would often get the feeling that they were not comfortable with him, felt awkward communicating with him.                                                        |
| He narrowly missed out studying at a chemistry or math at Cambridge, and wonders if his disabilities had been identified earlier he might have secured a place                                         | He had difficulty making connections with people and he only knew someone from the halls a bit of a friendship                             | Even currently he is progressing the diagnosis pathway and struggles with the dysphraxia diagnosed                                                                                                                                      | He describes the incident that he did lots of activities throughout the day doing pretty well at them and at the end there is an interview and he says its like you could see the lights extinguish at the back of the selectors eyes. As they decide 'no this person is not right for the position'. It made him often question himself, is it because I am not good enough? He often felt it was gaslighting |
| He ended up having a awful first year because he felt he wasn't working on the right things                                                                                                            | He says people often talk about friendship they make at university, it was not his experience                                              | The professors that left an impression the ones who were straight forward, down to earth, knowledgeable, kind, discuss with him what went well and didn't                                                                               | He had obtained scholarship from Royal society of Chemistry                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| He failed to undergrads why he was struggling because his disabilities besides stammering weren't identified by then                                                                                   | He would often travel to London for attend political events he was interested in                                                           | He decided to do his postgraduate because funding became available                                                                                                                                                                      | Once he was in a teacher education partnership it wasn't easy to say no to him and he managed to get three placements. Even within these placements he felt discriminated against                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| He ended up going to his insurance choice university, but had not visited the university before                                                                                                        | There was a subsidy available for international events he attended a few in Brussels and Amsterdam                                         | He is currently feeling stable at his teaching job and feels he is able to fit in the post graduate studies                                                                                                                             | He had similar experiences of bad interviews while looking for teaching jobs. It took him twice as long to get a place despite getting top grades in his cohort                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| He ended up selecting a catered accommodation in the outskirts because that is what he could afford. He instinctively knew he would need that level of support, but he says it was a lonely experience | He says that university itself was more of a temporary dormitory and never really a home to him                                            | Though sometime he acknowledges that teaching can be exhausting                                                                                                                                                                         | One school actually had to apologise to him because they had asked a stammer related question which actually broke many laws just by doing so and was blatantly illegal to have done so                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| His parents helped him move to university accommodation                                                                                                                                                | His academic progress was okay according to him not stellar                                                                                | His post grad experience is very different from both of his undergrad experiences                                                                                                                                                       | During teacher education, he enjoyed the academic aspect and he especially enjoyed being in the classroom with the students. He enjoyed the feeling of having success helping make a difference.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| His parents helped him shop basic stuff he might need at university                                                                                                                                    | He struggled with time management and initially didn't meet his own high standards ended up failing in one module and resat that in summer | He feels the quality. Of lectures are not up to the mark and essentially he has been handed a reading list and that's it even though it is a taught masters. In his current course he is also lacking peer conversations and connection | The things he disliked about teacher education as the paperwork which was a lot                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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|  | In the second year he says he kinda hit the wall, he feel that while he was at school because he was considered capable , and because the way disability is defined as 'noy obtaining sufficient grades, not able to do certain things etc' they didn't identify him as someone who had disabilities | He has availed of extensions on the baasis of his diagnosis so that has been helpful                                                                                        | Also he felt that things oneis judged on are often not based on evidence. For eg. He was getting good results, but he was picked up on specific behavioural points which were neurotypical points according to him.                                                                                          |
|  | And at university there is less willingness to intervene with learners, he feels people slip through the gaps                                                                                                                                                                                        | To encourage more peer collaboration they have started a whatsapp group and had zoom seminars themselves                                                                    | He felt teacher education looks at the a very neurotypical version of education , but he asks the question what about the minority od students who do think differently. He feels frustrated about the little boxes one has to fit in . he says that is why he is very careful about the schools he chooses. |
|  | Even when he did approach support services, he was told he didn't qualify for any support and he wasn't even tested for anything. They just said you have not got ....so there is nothing we can do                                                                                                  | He has basically been managing on his own and knows that some students have dropped out of the course because of lack of support                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | He had a better expereince at open university, because when he approached them they screened him and he was told 'maybe he has some issues' but we cannot do anything about it                                                                                                                       | One more barrier has been that to avail of disability student allowance, one cannot apply online but in paper form which has to be posted and physically signed             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | His sfav aspect of undergrads was the dissertation because he felt that he was able to do indepth study on the topic                                                                                                                                                                                 | He manages stuff electronically because eof his dyphraxia , tings on paper disaapear and difficult to manage. So the DSA is not a disability friendly method of application |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | The library was awesome , coz they had certain resources on his topic which was very niche                                                                                                                                                                                                           | He feels thisis just to cause hurdles so tah there are less number of applications a deliberate act by the government in his opinion.                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | He enjoyed the process of being able to discover the topic in detail and learn and develop                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | Hi sleast fav part was the social side of university life. It wasn't easy for him to find like minded people with similar interests at university. He had friends outside the uni but not within                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | He says there wasn't anyone he could rely on for support besides himself, he did have some support from girlfriends at the time but mostly himself                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | After completely his undergrads he forund himself unemployed and couldn't find work anywhere                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | He did some political work for some years but again was unemployed and eventually found admin work in a school                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | While working atth eschool he realised he wasnted to do teaching and decided to do the second undergrad in chemistry                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | Though he had a degree in law to complete the legal practice course he needed more funds which he didn't have so was trying to find alternative routes                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | Initially he though he would so the science course for a short                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

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|  | time but ended up finishing the degree to get into teaching                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |  |
|  | He never though he could teach while he was at school because his stammer was severe and communicating was a problem                                                                                                                                                  |  |  |
|  | But when he worked at an amusement park for several years, interacting with people helped him gain confidence                                                                                                                                                         |  |  |
|  | He says when you essentially force yourself to do something you are not good at . so he forced himself to communicate                                                                                                                                                 |  |  |
|  | He shares experiences where people have said to his face that his CV is impressive but because he has a stammer they couldn't employ him                                                                                                                              |  |  |
|  | Even for the school admin job he ended up with the temporary position rather than the permanent one which was given to someone else                                                                                                                                   |  |  |
|  | The discrimination pushed him to do things people assumed as a stammerer he couldn't do                                                                                                                                                                               |  |  |
|  | He would participate in political debates to force himself to overcome his confidence issues and build up more self confidence                                                                                                                                        |  |  |
|  | He feels he has had to constantly prove that he can do basic things because time and again people had told him he can't do that                                                                                                                                       |  |  |
|  | He managed to do two courses along with work , he says his time management had improved since undergrads and he was able to leave work at a decent time to fit in the studies. Also open university being flexible it was helpful                                     |  |  |
|  | He feels his ADHD and autism also helped him, because he would hyper focus on something . so he might go a week without doing anything on a module but then be focussed on it completely for the next two weeks. The flexibility of the course allowed him to do that |  |  |
|  | So he feels flexibility of working helps, as well as having content available to access whenever you might need it along with peer learning and sharing like Facebook groups or bulletin boards                                                                       |  |  |

| PARTICIPANT G                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| gap year after GCSE/choice of uni                                                                         | Undergraduate                                                                                                                              | Post graduate                                                                                                                    | Doctorate                                                                                                                                                            |
| She opted to study at medical college a course where she could either major in physiotherapy or dietitian | After a year the university decided to close the pathway she had opted for and switched the major for all the students to laboratory major | She was eligible to work as a lecturer at the university after completing her studies, but her family didn't want her to         | When her dad and her came to the UK her dad wanted to approach the embassy to get her husband arrested, but she refused, which caused a rift between her and her dad |
| parents hired a driver to drive her to university everyday                                                | She struggles with academic work because it was taught in English and she had self-doubt                                                   | She got offered a scholarship to go and study in Canada but the rules of her country required a guardian to travel with a woman, | She did try to reconcile with her husband and returned to him for four months , but things didn't work out                                                           |



|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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|                             | and thought she wasn't good enough                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | her father refused and said she should get married if she wanted to continue studying and then travel                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| daily commute to university | She didn't have difficulty studying English as a language in school but at university she found it difficult to understand the medical terminology in English                                                                                                                | Even when she was doing her studies in Arabic, her problem with not able to complete reading materials and the self doubt that she wasn't good enough continued                                                                                                              | She didn't have the energy to continue fighting and her GP offered counselling, she was diagnosed with depression and suggested medications, which she refused because she was breastfeeding her child. Her health worsened                                      |
|                             | She found it difficult to finish reading large text would often resort to just reading the summary. She also struggled to catch up with her friends. She would feel tired easily and often felt like her clock was different than others and that she was running with time. | She got married to someone who was studying in UK and travelled with him to the UK                                                                                                                                                                                           | She comments that her PhD journey turned into a healing journey because her GP offered her counselling sessions, which had a positive effect. Her GP was very supportive and referred her to specialists and she was diagnosed with depression, Anxiety and PTSD |
|                             | Her friends tried to motivate her by asking her to work hard because she was clever, if she tried she would be good                                                                                                                                                          | While she was someone who would clamp up if pressured and liked to do things at her own pace, her husband would like to hurry and do things fast. She found out he wasn't supportive and wanted to keep her for himself and didn't like if she interacted with other people. | She struggled with her PhD itself, with disagreements with the supervisory team and lots of changes in her original research design. She often blamed herself and felt guilty.                                                                                   |
|                             | Somehow her friends motivated her to pressure for her, and even though she worked hard she fell short of meeting expectations.                                                                                                                                               | Her husband threatened her that she wasn't a strong woman and that he would divorce her. She continued to be with him because she was scared, feeling who would support her child and returned to UK                                                                         | The supervisory meeting began to have an effect with her feeling sad after every meeting and tired as well, her supervisors recommended she suspend her studies                                                                                                  |
|                             | She discussed with her family, but they didn't believe her, because she always did well at school. They assumed that because she was 18 maybe she was not interested in studies and wanted to get married                                                                    | When she finished her English course she got an offer to do masters, where she attended class everyday despite having a small child to care for                                                                                                                              | During this time she was also diagnosed with fibromyalgia                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                             | She felt she couldn't discuss her problems at home with family because they felt the need to approach religious people and not medical professionals for                                                                                                                     | The structure of the masters course suited her, but she felt she needed more support with assignments, she wasn't aware and didn't have the courage to ask the university for help, so she hired a private tutor                                                             | Her therapists recommended she attend a fatigue association meetings for her fibro fog and do a pain management course                                                                                                                                           |
|                             | She tried seeking medical help and was shocked to be told that she lacked skills, she was angered by this suggestion and felt the professional didn't really know her and tried seeking help from other medical professionals.                                               | Even though her performance at masters wasn't stellar she managed to pass and had hope that she would go on to do a doctorate and got an offer and funding                                                                                                                   | She realised that what she had been experiencing is actually normal in her situation and along with a therapist she began dealing with her depression and anxiety issues                                                                                         |
|                             | She was disappointed by the medical advice she was given, she found it was rather general advice mixed with religious and personal views, not really medical diagnosis.                                                                                                      | She took a gap year before beginning her doctorate and returned home                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Her doctor recommended that with the right support and reasonable adjustments she can continue with her PhD studies.                                                                                                                                             |
|                             | She couldn't find a professional who could fully understand her struggles                                                                                                                                                                                                    | During this gap her husband began divorce proceedings and she asked her family to mitigate, but the situation worsened. She says she felt like she asked the men in her family for help but instead of helping they started fighting and she felt she had no voice           | She was unaware that these support services were available for free, when she was offered mentoring support, study skills support it was a big transformation in her life as well as ascribe                                                                     |
|                             | She had self doubt and didn't know whom to believe her friends, family or herself                                                                                                                                                                                            | She pleaded with her husband that she has an offer to do a PhD in the UK. to return back and try                                                                                                                                                                             | She failed in an exam and the relationship with her supervisor had collapsed, making her feel                                                                                                                                                                    |



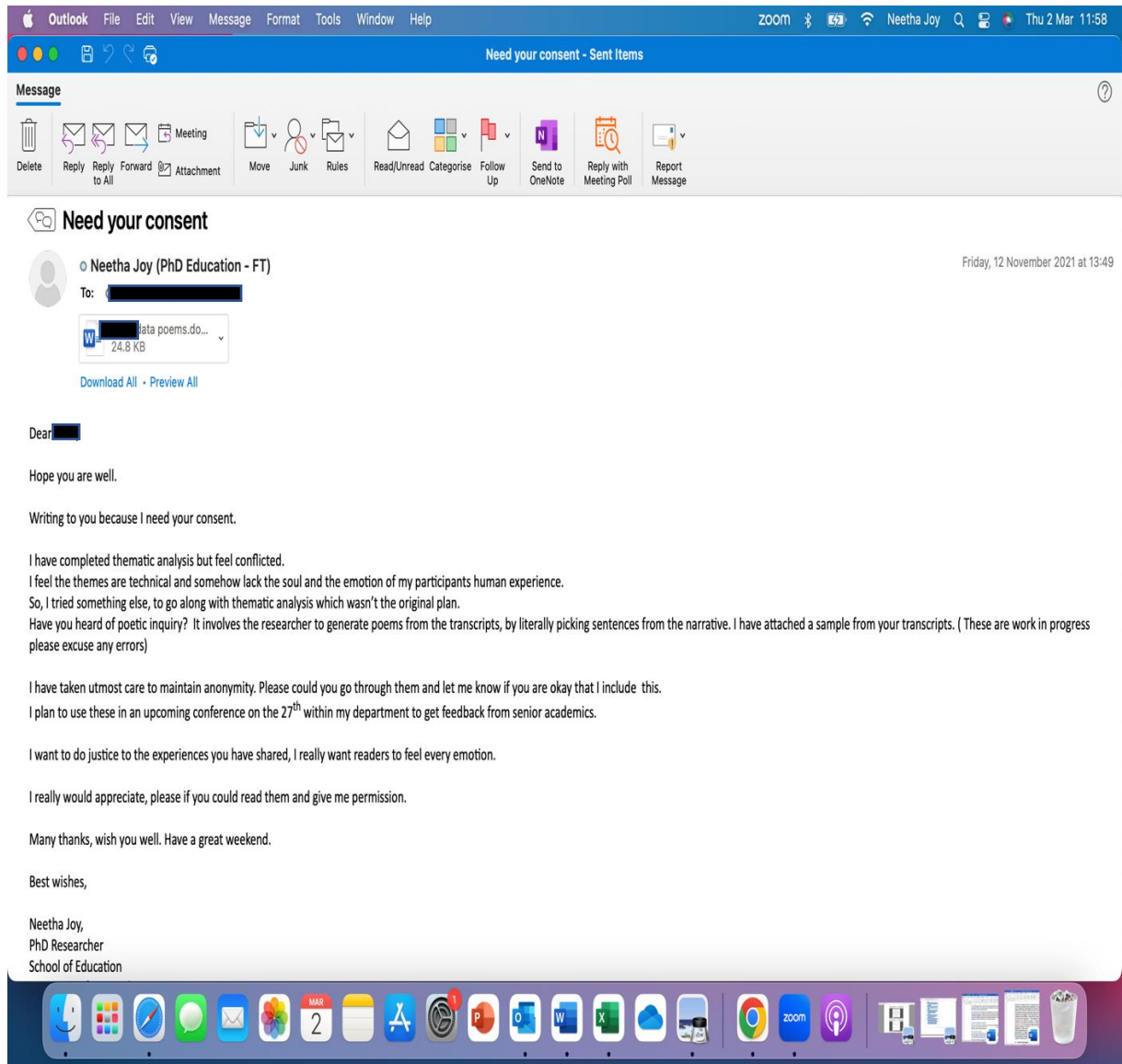
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|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | to make things work. But he refused                                                                                                                                                        | she cannot continue with her phd anymore                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | After two years at university she went from attending classes from eight in the morning till four she began feeling tired at mid day and needed to find a quiet corner to rest sometimes at the back of the class or an empty office. She says it felt like old age rather than being a young person                         | Because in the government documents her husband was her guardian she wasn't allowed to travel because he refused to support her and had to take legal recourse to get permission to travel | The university offered to downgrade her phd to an mphil but she had to argue that it wasn't her fault, but the system. she had to advocate for her rights                                                                                                                                           |
|  | She felt pressure in her shoulders, back aches as he felt the need to lie down. Even her friends began becoming unsympathetic towards her and felt fed up with her                                                                                                                                                           | Her father mitigated with government officials and had to travel with her, but she was advised not to return before completing her studies otherwise she wouldn't be allowed to return     | The university suggested that if she did continue with the phd she might not succeed. She decided to suspend her studies for sometime because she began doubting her cognitive abilities, thinking maybe she is crazy, maybe what people are telling her is true that she cannot be a phd candidate |
|  | She remembers the end of year exams she couldn't write anything and handed in empty answer sheets. She felt like her body, mind and soul were on strike.                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                            | Her friends threw her a farewell party which she was upset about because she felt that this wasn't a celebration and neither the end of her phd                                                                                                                                                     |
|  | She tried her best to pretend in front of her family and friends but internally she had given up.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                            | She took a three month break went back home and decided to return to the UK alone leaving her child with her family                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|  | One of her friends commented that she was literally putting herself in the grave by continuing, and that this field didn't suit her she was a creative person should change her major.                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                            | She came back met with the Dean of the university and advocated for her rights                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|  | She tried taking a break for a term, she explained her situation to her coordinator, who requested for some blood tests                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                            | She was approved a new supervisory team.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | she didn't like the way he spoke with her casually and dismissed her issues by commenting try to be more feminine, stop being too serious. When she complained to her mother and friends about the way he had spoken to her, they brushed her concerns aside saying he was just joking, maybe he just wanted to cheer you up |                                                                                                                                                                                            | She was advised to get an ADHD and Dyslexia screening                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|  | When she wanted to return after taking a break, her father went to meet the coordinator and was told that your daughter doesn't have any health problem, she just wants to get married. Her father was very upset with her after the meeting and she comments that it ruined the relationship between her father and her.    |                                                                                                                                                                                            | The expert handed her an 18 page report for her university on the reasonable adjustments she needs.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|  | She decided to withdraw from the course, she later found out that her GPA was actually alright and wished she knew about that before she withdrew.                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                            | Because she was on ADHD medicines, the university provided her with quiet room, desk space and sofa, relevant tech support                                                                                                                                                                          |
|  | The university offered her the option of transferring to other majors like computer science or bio chemistry, but she decided to switch to religious studies, because she felt tired of life, had no motivation to continue with material life.                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                            | Her new supervisory team was supportive and encouraging and it changed her life                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|  | Her switch to religious studies was easy, the studies were in Arabic, she was comfortable she felt respected.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                            | When covid hit, it affected her mentally because she was required to shield as a vulnerable person                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | But she would often get a shocked response when people found out that she had switched from medical studies to religious studies, and often got comments like she has chosen 'gods way' . she says that snot true the fact was that she felt depressed and had lost faith in herself |  | She was offered a learning assistant, initially for two hours a week which progressed to ten hours. The support helped her make good progress on her research                   |
|  | She became depressed and had lost faith in herself                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  | The supervisors had adjustments in place for her viva and also conducted mock viva with her                                                                                     |
|  | Her tiredness to attend classes especially early morning classes continued                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  | Some of her friends considered her phd journey as a failure and she was even invited by the embassy to talk on how to handle mistakes made during phd which she felt was unfair |
|  | She felt trapped in her student life, but she felt she had failed earlier in the medical major and didn't want to fail again                                                                                                                                                         |  | She was awarded minor corrections and given 12 months to complete the corrections                                                                                               |
|  | During that time she got engaged but the person wanted her to withdraw from her studies and wanted her to stay at home. So she refused and continued with her studies upsetting her father                                                                                           |  | She has since returned home to complete her corrections, she feels she needs time to spend with family especially her son. Her body needs rest                                  |

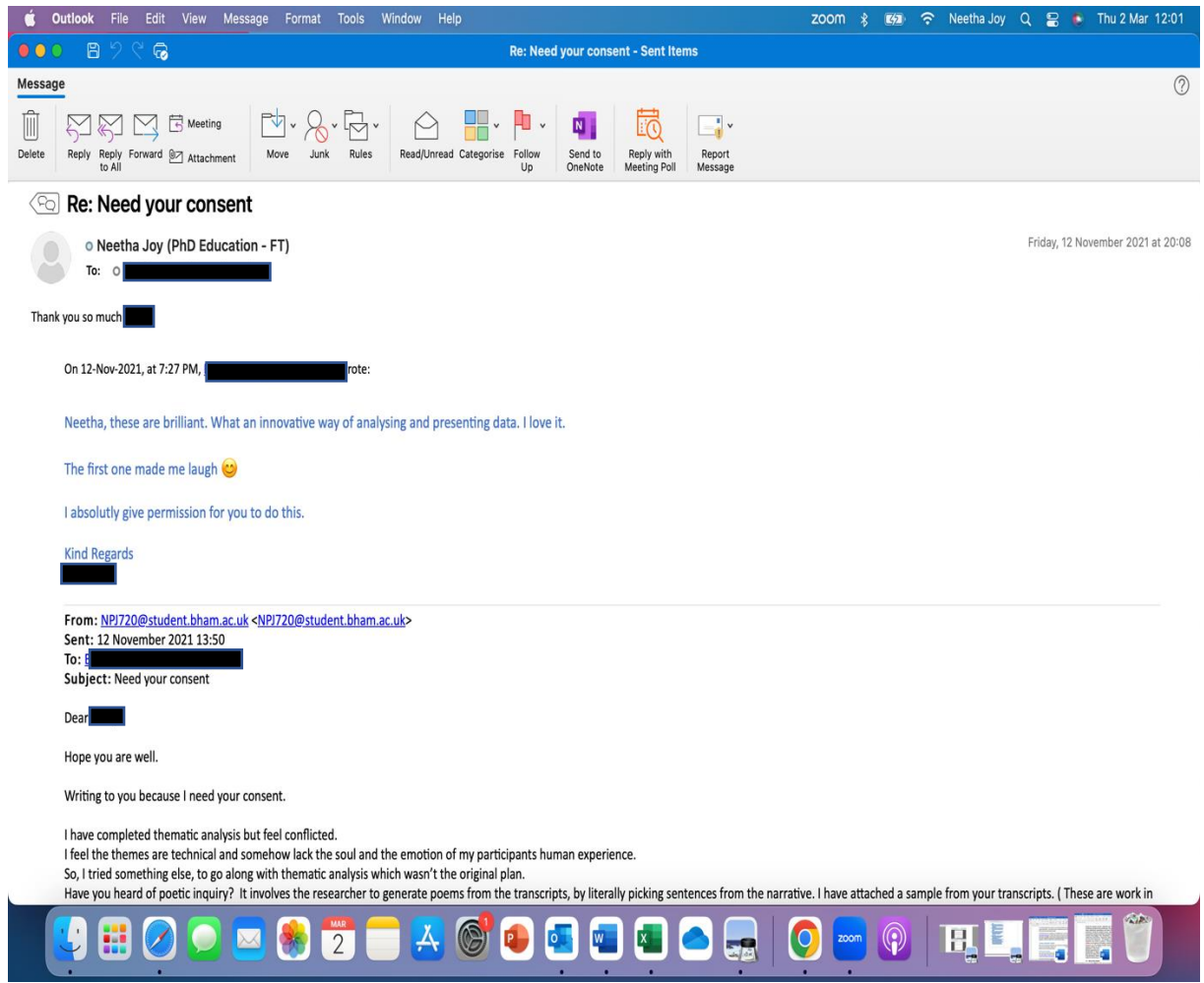
| PARTICIPANT H                        |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| gap year after GCSE/choice of uni    | Undergraduate                                                                                                                                                                            | Teacher education                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| I went immediately finishing college | Philosophy and literature. I had to do history which I didn't really want to do but it was the only way I could get in then I dropped it in the second year.                             | <i>I went to Uni part time when working in 2010</i>                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                      | • Intense a lot to learn and a lot to read                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                      | The amount of reading for literature was huge and philosophy was very hard to understand for a young woman.                                                                              | It was a requirement for my senior lecturer role                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                      | • My third year was quite difficult I think I struggled with some difficult flatmates. I had a good support system through a spiritual organisation that I belonged to at the university | Yes - I liked change and conversation and learning and you got to do all three of those.                                                                                                                                               |
|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                          | No special adjustments sought                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                          | Every engaging, I had a great small study group within the class group. There was some new learning and a very interesting research project. Not challenging in terms of teaching skills development                                   |
|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>An activity that upset me that got us highly competing with our peers in a team game – I like collaboration more and I felt set up.</i>                                                                                             |
|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                          | There were three – one had drive and passion, the other was skilled but not very enthusiastic and the third one it seemed to me just didn't have any energy or passion for the work or maybe even for life. She seemed quite worn out. |

| Themes from first interviews         | Themes from second interview            | Themes from second interview (contd) |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Family Influence                     | reasons for gap years                   | Work experiences while at University |
| Community influence                  | selections criteria for university      | personal traits                      |
| Schooling Experiences                | Accommodation experiences at university | unsupportive behaviour by professors |
| Selection criteria for School        | Transition to University life           | influence of personal relationships  |
| Enablers in Academic participation   | barriers in seeking disability support  | Self Doubt                           |
| Barriers to Academic participation   |                                         | infrastructural barriers             |
| Peer influence                       | Favourite Teachers                      | Personal struggle                    |
| Personal Attributes                  | Support from Professors                 |                                      |
| Disability Support                   | Support provided by University          | getting diagnosed experiences        |
| unsupportive behaviour from teachers | Social and Cultural influences          |                                      |
|                                      |                                         | Post Graduate experiences            |
|                                      |                                         | Doctoral experiences                 |
|                                      |                                         | Teacher education experiences        |

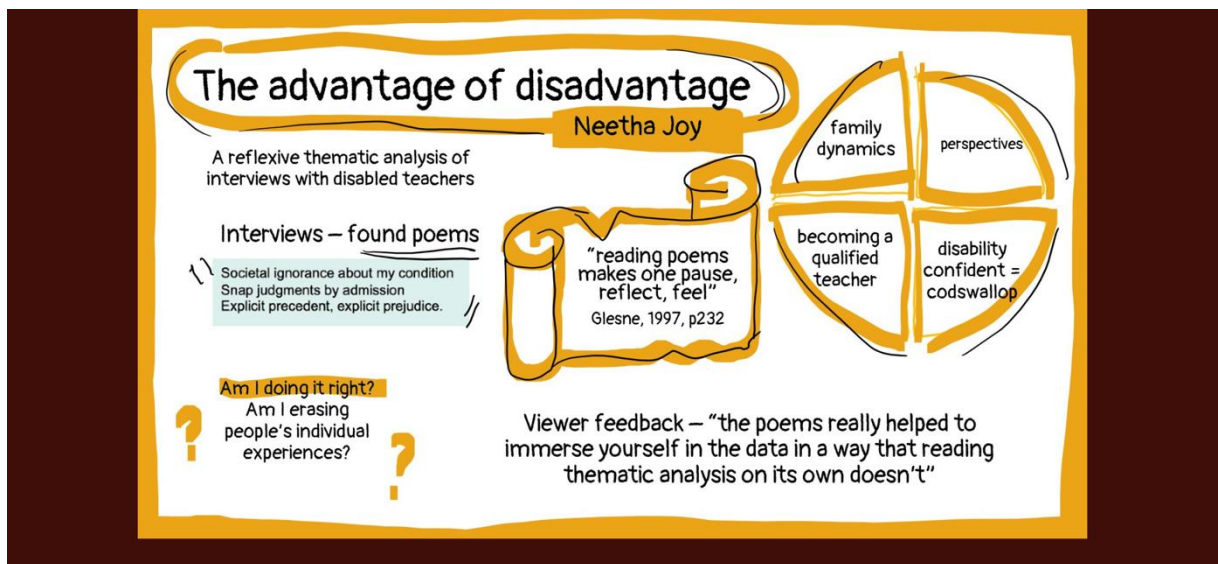
## **Appendix 23 - Email sent to participants regarding poetic inquiry**



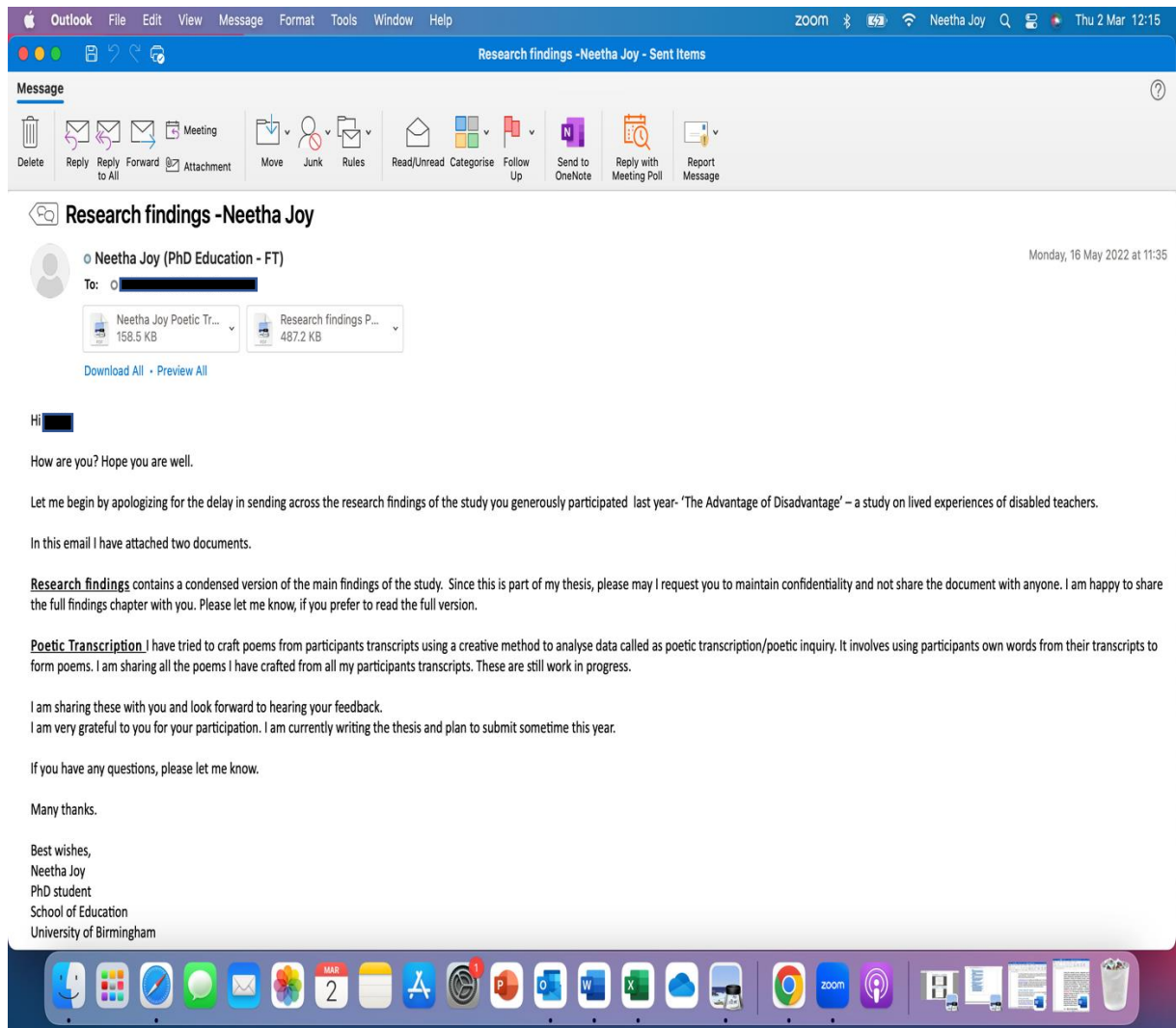
## **Appendix 24 - Reply from participant regarding poetic inquiry**



## Appendix 25 - Doodle feedback by audience member at second pilot study

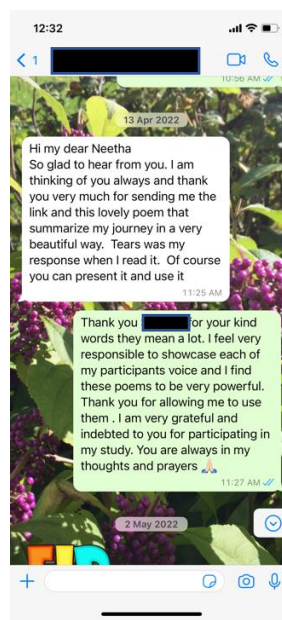
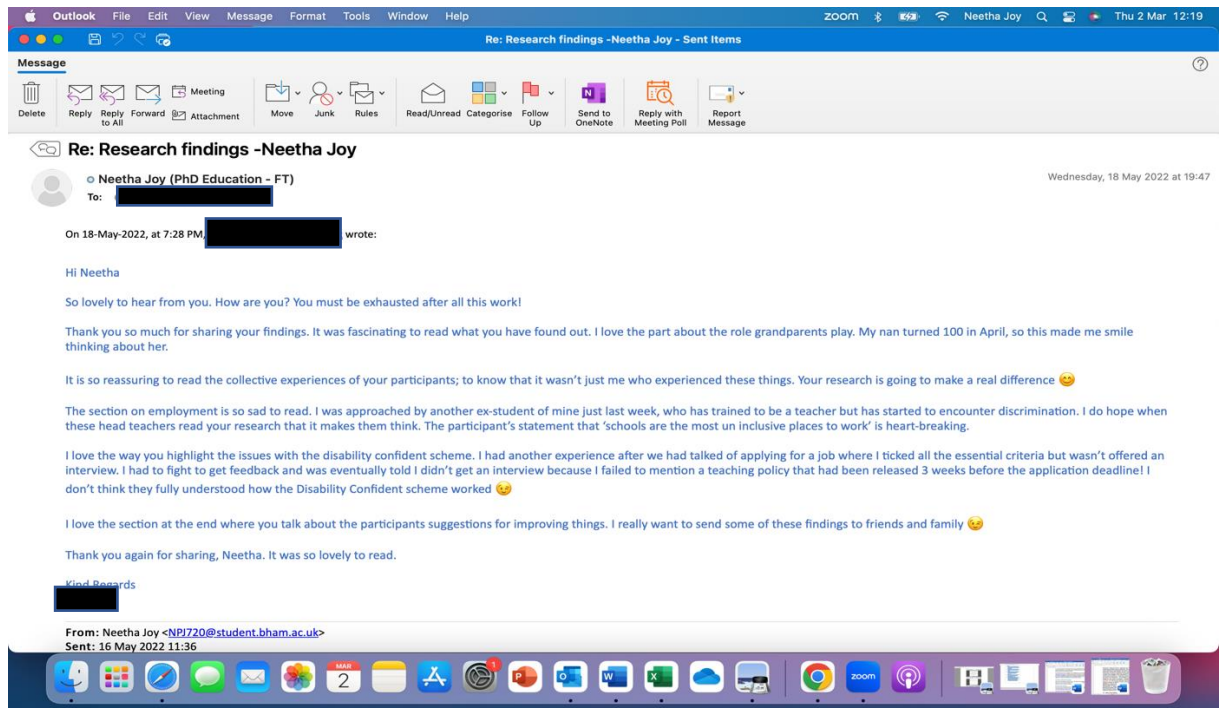


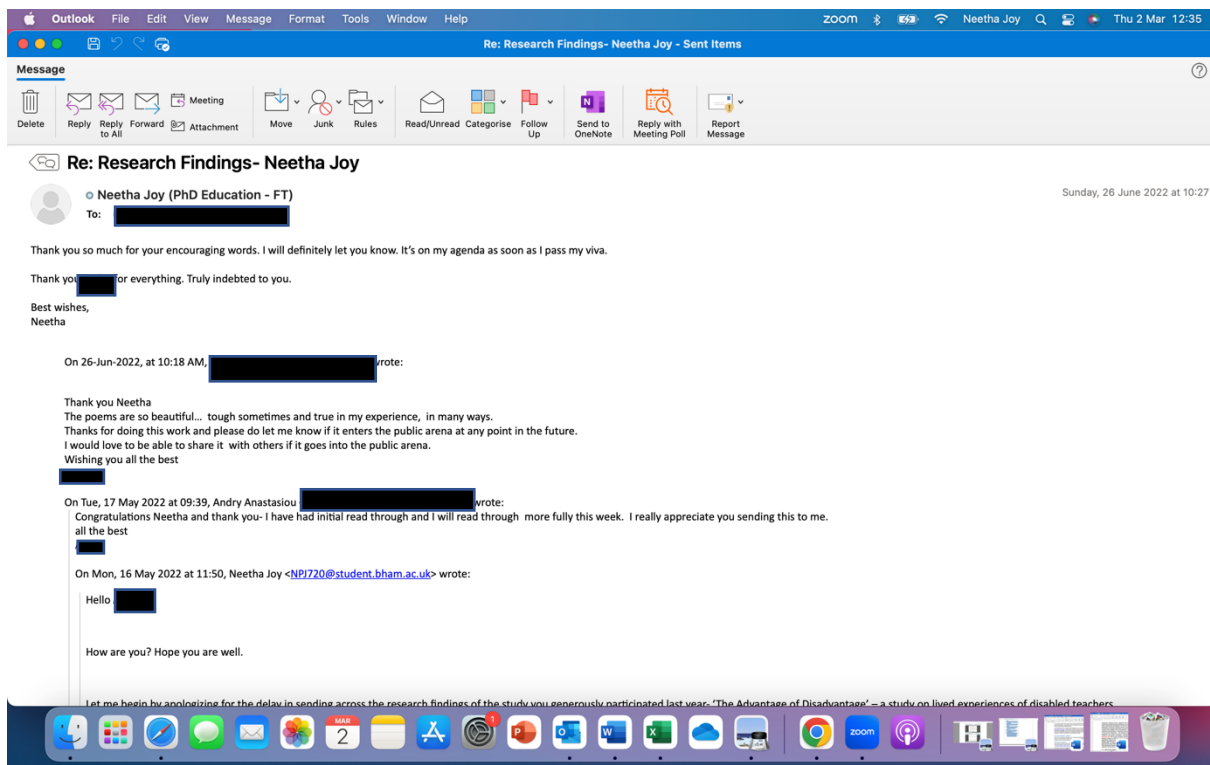
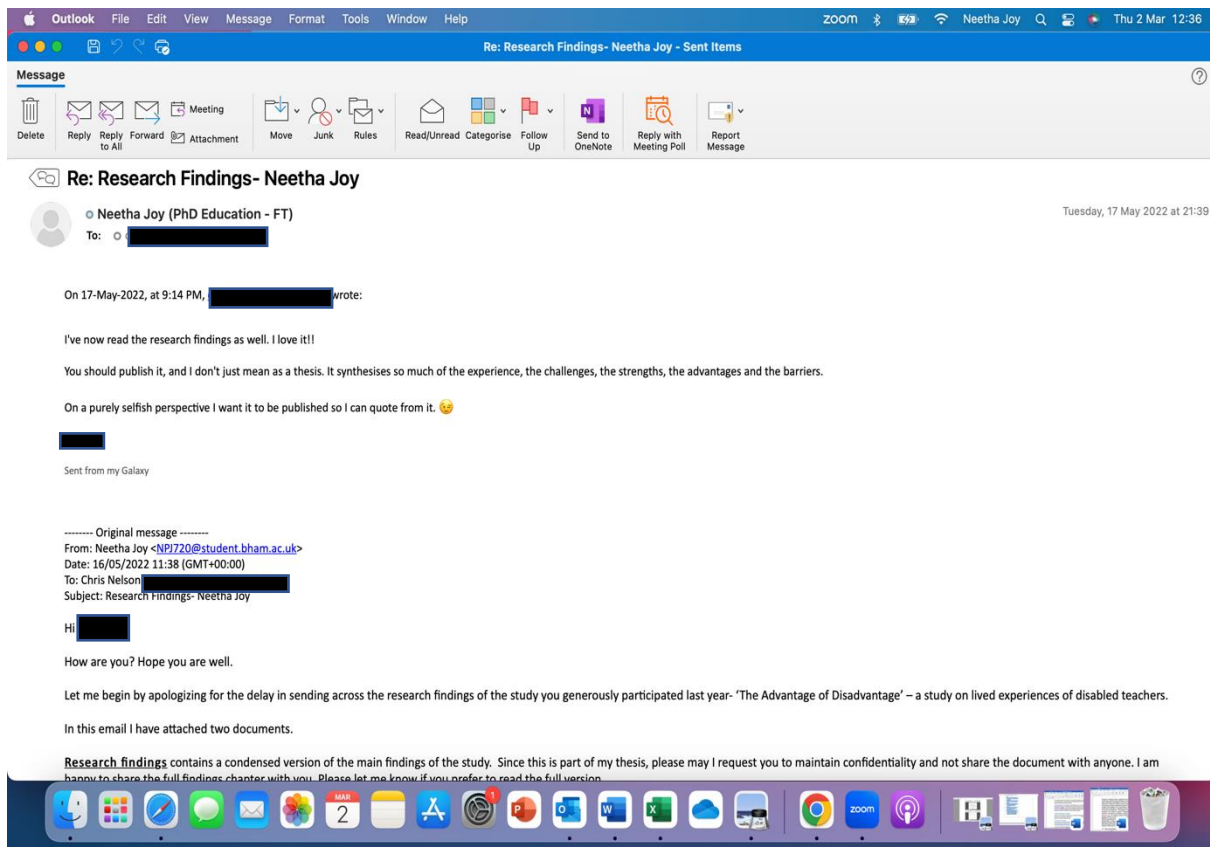
## **Appendix 26 - Email to participants regarding data analysis**





## **Appendix 27 - Reply from participants regarding data analysis/found poems**





**Appendix 28 - Research in progress seminar advert**

✕ ...

 **UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM** | DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITY INCLUSION AND SPECIAL NEEDS

## Research in Progress Seminar (RIPS)

Thursday 24th March 2022, 1-2pm  
Via ZOOM

**“The Advantage of Disadvantage” – A study on lived experiences of disabled teachers**

**Neetha Joy**  
University of Birmingham

ZOOM Link and QR Code to the seminar  
<https://bham-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/83039324036?pwd=Y0wzQU1BRStPRlNld1NDZj3VWxjdz09>  
(Meeting ID: 830 3932 4036/ Passcode: 836023)



SCAN ME



ALL STAFF AND STUDENTS WELCOME

💬 ↺ ❤️ 1 ↗

Tweet your reply

**Appendix 29 - Presentations at conferences**

| <b>Conference Name</b>                                                                  | <b>Date</b>     | <b>Audience</b>                                                               | <b>Presentation Link</b>     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| University of Birmingham School of Education Research and Scholarship Conference        | 2nd July 2020   | School of Education Academics, PGRS and invitees                              | <a href="#">Presentation</a> |
| University of Warwick, 8th Annual PGR Conference “Frontiers of education and Activism”  | 23rd April 2021 | University of Warwick Staff members, PGRS, PGRS from other DTPS, and Invitees | <a href="#">Presentation</a> |
| ESRC MGS DTP Annual Conference 2021                                                     | 23rd June 2021  | Wide academic audience, PGRS                                                  | <a href="#">Presentation</a> |
| University of Birmingham School of Education Annual Research and Scholarship Conference | 9th July 2021   | School of education Academics,                                                | <a href="#">Presentation</a> |

|                                                                                           |                                |                                                  |                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                                                                           |                                | PGRS and invitees                                |                              |
| PESN 3-minute Conference                                                                  | 14th October 2021              | PESN members                                     | <a href="#">Presentation</a> |
| The 20 <sup>th</sup> University of Birmingham School of Education Postgraduate Conference | 27th November 2021             | School of Education Academics, PGRS and invitees | <a href="#">Presentation</a> |
| PESN Conference – online blog submission                                                  | 21 <sup>st</sup> Jan 2022.     | PESN members                                     | <a href="#">Blog</a>         |
| Research in Progress Seminar                                                              | 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2022    | School of Education Academics, PGRs and invitees | <a href="#">Presentation</a> |
| 9 <sup>th</sup> Education Studies PGR Conference 2022                                     | 22-23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2022 | School of Education Academics,                   | <a href="#">Poster</a>       |

|                                                                                                                       |                       |                                                  |                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| University of Warwick                                                                                                 |                       | PGRs and invitees                                |                                                                |
| School of Education Research & Scholarship Conference<br><i>'Serving the Public Good, Doing the Research We Love'</i> | Thursday 7 July 2022, | School of Education Academics, PGRs and invitees | <a href="#">Collaborative presentation using a Padlet</a>      |
| The School of Education's 21st Annual PGR Conference                                                                  | 26 November 2022      | School of Education Academics, PGRs and invitees | <a href="#">Sway - Collaborative presentation</a>              |
| BERA Annual conference 2023                                                                                           | 12-14 September 2023  | Education researchers, academics                 | Forging paths in inclusive research-collaborative presentation |