"I'm just trying to prove them wrong" Roma Children's Experiences in a Secondary School with Targeted Cultural Support

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Abstract

Roma children continue to experience the lowest educational outcomes and the highest rates of suspensions and exclusions, contributing to significant social inequalities. This research aims to develop an understanding of Roma children's experiences of secondary school education and how their cultural identity influences these experiences.

The study adopts a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with Roma secondary school students. Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to interpret the data.

The findings show that targeted cultural support, with a strong focus on building relationships, fosters social inclusion and creates a more positive school experience for Roma students. Key aspects of Roma students' experiences include facing racism and discrimination, the importance of cultural and ethnic identity, the value of relationships and community, experiences of social and academic pressure, challenges around managing well-being, and the dreams, aspirations, and interests they hold for their future.

Educational Psychologists play an important role in supporting schools with anti-racist and inclusive practice. Fostering inclusion for Roma children and young people involves recognising Roma heritage and culture, increasing the visibility and representation of Roma people in school, employing designated Roma support workers, and building positive relationships between Roma children, their peers and school staff. The study highlights the need for a whole-school approach where all staff are knowledgeable and sensitive to Roma students' needs and backgrounds.

The research highlights the need to expand support for Roma children in secondary schools, suggesting that Educational Psychologists are well-positioned to guide this work. By working

closely with schools, Educational Psychologists can help address inequalities and promote a more inclusive, culturally aware school environment.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to my family. Mum and Dad, I hope I have made you proud.

Omar, I can't even put into words how much your support has meant to me over these past three years. Thank you for believing in me, taking care of me and cheering me on every step of the way.

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1   Introduction

1.1   Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are seen as people of nomadic lifestyles or heritages. The communities are often grouped under one umbrella term, 'GRT'. GRT represents Romani/English Gypsies, Roma, Irish travellers, Scottish and Welsh Gypsies, New Age Travellers, and Showmen. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are ethnically diverse groups with different cultures, histories, and experiences. The term 'GRT' is problematic as it assumes a group homogeneity (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b). The communities deserve to be acknowledged as separate, diverse groups. The term 'GRT' will be used to describe legislation, articles, documentaries, and literature where the term appears; however, the author will refer to these as 'communities' where possible to acknowledge the differences and diversities. Furthermore, the term 'Gypsy' is seen as derogatory by some communities in Eastern Europe, whereas other communities in the UK have accepted the term. The term will only be used to accurately reflect UK government data, literature and the media where the Gypsy/Roma term exists.

1.2   Historical Context

Historically, Roma have been subject to persecution, slavery, sterilisation and genocide (Murray, 2012). English Romanichal Gypsies first arrived in the UK as part of the gradual migration of Roma from across Europe from Northern India in the 16th century. They were labelled 'Egyptians' as people believed they came from Egypt, which later developed into the term 'Gypsies'. Around 1530, an Anti-Gypsy Act was passed, where anyone of a Gypsy heritage entering England would have their possessions confiscated and was ordered to leave

within two weeks. The act resulted in slavery, deportations and executions of Gypsies and those who were seen interacting with them (Foster & Norton, 2012).

During this time, Roma groups also settled in other European countries, where they were subject to persecution. During the Second World War, it is estimated that between 200,000 and 500,000 Roma people were murdered as part of the Holocaust. Many more were imprisoned, used for labour, sterilised and medically experimented on during the Roma genocide (Schulze, 2015). In the early 2000s, more Roma people arrived in the UK from Eastern Europe, many claiming asylum. Further migration occurred in 2004 when the UK joined the European Union. The historical marginalisation of the Roma community has had lasting consequences, which remain evident in their current experiences within the UK's education system and wider society.

1.2.1   National and Local Context

It was only in 2021 that 'Roma' was included as a distinct option in the UK Census ethnicity question, allowing Roma individuals to self-identify separately from the broader 'White Gypsy and Irish Traveller' categories (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Roma people are recognised as an ethnic group and are protected under the Equality Act (2010) from racism and discrimination. However, despite this legislation, Roma children continue to face significant educational disadvantages. They experience the highest rate of school suspensions and exclusions, and the second-highest rate of persistent absence (Department for Education, 2023a, 2023b). Roma children have the lowest attainment at GCSE level (Department for Education, 2023c). They are also the least likely to remain in education after the age of 16 or to achieve three A-levels (Racial Disparity Audit, 2017). These educational disparities are further reflected in the over-representation of Gypsy/Roma children in pupil referral units

(PRUs) and alternative provisions. Research shows they are 3.5 times more likely to attend PRUs and 8.5 times more likely to be placed in alternative provisions compared to their peers in mainstream, state-funded education (Malcolm, 2015).

The 2021 Census revealed that 100,00 people identified as Roma (Office for National Statistics 2018); however, this may be an underrepresentation, as some community members may be reluctant to reveal their identity because of fear of discrimination. The Evidence for Equality National Survey, by the Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (2023), found high levels of racial discrimination experienced by the Roma community, with 47% experiencing a racist attack, while 35% experienced a physical attack. The survey also highlighted high levels of poor health and socio-economic deprivation within the community. In addition, Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities' school issues are often missed from government policies and strategies (House of Commons, Women and Equalities Committee, 2019), despite The Cabinet Office racial audit (2017) reporting that Gypsy Roma and Traveller children have the worst educational outcomes of all ethnic groups across all school ages, highlighting the deeply entrenched challenges faced by Roma children in the UK education system.

1.3   Racism & Discrimination

Given the well-documented challenges around educational outcomes, poor health, low socio-economic status, and the lack of targeted initiatives for the Roma community, there are concerns that Roma people may be experiencing institutional racism. The Macpherson Report (1999) defines institutional racism as:

"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes,

attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people" (Macpherson, 1999, p. 49)

1.3.1 Public Attitudes

Negative societal attitudes towards the Gypsy and Traveller communities remain prevalent in Britain with racism continuing to drive marginalisation and exclusion. A survey carried out by the University of Birmingham in 2021 titled 'The Dinner Table Prejudice: Islamophobia in Contemporary Britain' included people's views of the Gypsy and Traveller communities on a sample of 1667 people, weighted by age, gender, social grade, and education level. The findings showed that 44.6% of people from higher social grades viewed Gypsy and Travellers negatively and the researchers suggest an anti-gypsy attitude among the middle classes (Jones & Unsworth, 2022).

Research surveys have also confirmed that Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities experience discrimination in the UK. The MORI (2001) survey of 1,183 people, reported Gypsies and Travellers as one of the most frequent groups to experience hate and prejudice with threats of physical violence. Sir Trevor Phillips, then Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality at the time, described the discrimination against GRT communities as "the last respectable form of racism" (Sir Trevor Phillips, 2004, cited in Foster & Norton, 2012, p. 87). The survey highlighted how negative attitudes towards GRT communities remain socially acceptable.

Furthermore, Foster & Norton (2012) reported on the mistreatment of GRT communities in the London borough of Waltham Forest, e.g. the phrase "Gypsy slaves go home" was spray-painted on a building. Additionally, discriminatory practices were reported within the local authority,

such as the use of Polish-speaking interpreters for Roma families, demonstrating professionals' lack of understanding about the ongoing tensions between the two communities. These examples highlight how discrimination can manifest through overt prejudice and institutional practices, and the urgent need for education and training to ensure that Roma and GRT communities are treated with dignity and respect.

1.3.2 Media

The media has played a substantial role in perpetuating negative stereotypes about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. In 2005 The Sun newspaper launched a campaign called "Stamp on the Camps," which declared a "war on Gypsies" and warned readers of a "Gypsy invasion". The campaign perpetuated racist views and left GRT families fearful of racially motivated attacks on their homes.

In 2009, BBC2 released a documentary titled 'This World- Gypsy Child Thieves' about the Roma community in Europe. Miranda Wilson from the Institute of Race Relations stated that the documentary reinforced negative stereotypes about Roma culture, using biased sources like police officers to support the idea that Roma people exploit their children. It also linked child abuse and theft to the Roma community, further spreading these harmful stereotypes. In 2011, a Panorama report called 'The Secret Lives of Britain's Child's Beggers' was broadcast on BBC1. Such media representations reinforced harmful stereotypes and helped normalise discrimination against GRT communities.

Furthermore, a documentary called 'The Truth about Traveller Crime' aired on Channel 4 in 2020. Once again, the documentary portrayed Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities in a negative light, focusing on crime rates and drawing direct, inextricable links between these issues and the communities themselves. During this time, Ofcom received 900 complaints from

the public and 7,391 complaints from the charity Friends, Families and Travellers for the offensive nature of the programme. Ofcom was accused of institutional racism and dehumanising the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities because it cleared the programme following these complaints (Weaver, 2021).

1.3.3   Police

The relationship between UK police and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities has historically been strained. This began with the 1530 Anti-Gypsy Act that permitted law enforcement to confiscate property and deport and execute Gypsy individuals migrating to the UK who refused to vacate the land within two weeks.

There is ongoing tension between the police and the GRT communities, highlighting discriminatory practices. Coxhead (2007) interviewed police officers in the UK. One officer commented that people still viewed Gypsies and Travellers as "subhuman" and mistreating them is seen as an "achievement that should be bragged about". This demonstrates the level of oppression and discrimination against individuals from the GRT communities.

The mistreatment and over-policing of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities are reflected in UK prison ethnicity statistics. The HM Inspectorate of Prisons Report (2020) showed that GRT individuals make up 5% of the prison population, despite representing only 0.1% of the UK population. The overrepresentation may suggest systemic biases within policing and the criminal justice system, contributing to the marginalisation of GRT communities.

Furthermore, there is a lack of trust in the police force and a fear of discrimination within the Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities. Between 2017 and 2018, the charity Traveller

Movement carried out research into the relationship between the police, including 45 territorial forces and the GRT communities. The results revealed a systemic negative bias and discriminatory behaviour used by members of the police force towards individuals. The report revealed that the police associated criminality with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (Traveller movement, 2018). This demonstrates the level of discrimination the communities face.

1.4 Overview of literature

The literature overview is presented in two parts, addressing two literature review questions. (Further explained in Sections 2 & 2.5).

1.4.1 Part 1: School Experience of Roma Children

Research highlights the educational marginalisation of Roma children and the limited understanding among school staff regarding their linguistic and cultural practices (Crozier, Davies, and Szymanski, 2009; Matras, Howley, and Jones, 2020; Payne and Prieler, 2015; Robson, 2015). Studies also reveal the need for improved cultural awareness and the adoption of alternative pedagogical methods when working with Roma children (Crozier et al., 2009; Dobson, Stephenson, & De Arede, 2021; Levison & Hooley, 2014; Matras et al., 2020; Smith, Robertson, & Wysocki, 2020; Swanwick, Elmore & Slater, 2021; Themelis & Foster, 2013). Research further discusses the importance of multi-agency collaboration when supporting Roma families (Swanwick et al., 2021; Lever, 2012; Scullion & Brown, 2013).

In addition, the literature stresses the importance of avoiding the homogenisation of GRT communities, emphasising the distinctiveness of the Roma experience (Penfold, 2016). Finally, broader literature exploring Roma across Europe similarly highlights patterns of educational

exclusion (Aguiar, Silva, Rodrigues, Ribeiro, Pastori, & the ISOTIS Research Team, 2020; Humphris, 2013; Klaus, 2019; Klaus & Marsh, 2014; Klaus & Siraj, 2020; Miskovic, 2009; Óhidy, Riddell, & Boutiuc-Kaiser, 2022; Ryder, 2015; Scullion & Brown, 2013; Themelis, 2009; Themelis & Foster, 2013)

Research on Roma children's education in the UK highlights marginalisation, systemic barriers, and the absence of their direct voices. Gaps include limited cultural training, weak school-parent relationships, little evidence on the long-term impact of alternative pedagogies, and a lack of research on language barriers, past experiences, trauma, mental health, and poverty. Greater cultural responsiveness, training, and policy reform are needed, with future research focusing on Roma children's lived experiences.

1.4.2   Part 2: School Experience of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children

The literature on the school experiences of GRT children identifies experiences of social injustice, racism, exclusion, and a lack of cultural understanding in schools (Riddell, 2020; Danvers, Derbyshire, Hinton-Smith, & Lewis, 2019). Research also highlights the importance of Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) in supporting GRT children in schools (Wilkin, Kinder, Martin, Robinson, Haines & Derrington, 2008; Boot, 2013).

In addition, schools with strong leadership and inclusive practices, including culturally sensitive training designed with GRT community input, have proven effective in promoting GRT inclusion (Wilkin, Kinder et al., 2008; Gould, 2017; Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; Boot, 2013). Building trusting and strong relationships with GRT families has also been shown to improve outcomes, demonstrating the importance of parental involvement (Wilkin, Kinder et al., 2008; Bhopal & Myers, 2009a).

Flexible policies, such as adapting curricula, transport, and uniform requirements, have been linked to better attendance and engagement among GRT pupils (Wilkin, Derrington, White, Martin, Foster, Kinder & Rutt, 2009a; Gould, 2017; Danvers et al., 2019). However, despite some improvements in inclusive practices, many schools continue to struggle with issues of marginalisation (McCarthy, 2016). Research has also highlights the importance of flexible quality education models such as elective home education when working with GRT children (Clavell-Bate, 2012)

Burchardt, Obolenskaya, Vizard and Battaglini, (2018) note that poor housing and economic instability negatively affect educational achievement. Research also suggests that Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support GRT pupils through closer collaboration with schools and TESS (Li, 2021; Gould, 2017; Pollock, 2019; Pollock & Barrow, 2021).

There is limited research on GRT children's well-being, mental health, and how this links to poverty. There is also minimal focus on GRT children's direct experiences and aspirations, with many studies relying on stakeholder opinions and policy reviews. Additionally, the literature homogenises the experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, treating them as if they are one group with one experience. Although some researchers acknowledge this, their methods rarely reflect it. Many studies fail to specify participants' ethnic backgrounds.

1.5   Orientation

1.5.1   Ontology

The study adopts a relativist ontology, which suggests there is no single truth, but there are multiple truths and views of reality held by individuals (Crotty, 1988, p. 10). Facts are dependent on the observer's perspective and interpretation. Therefore, the position is based on

the premise that there are multiple experiences of secondary school for Roma children, and all are valid. The relativist ontology suggests that secondary schools will be seen and experienced differently by the pupils. The relativist position would indicate that Roma children have multiple experiences of group membership in the Roma community, and these perspectives are true. The relativist stance suggests multiple experiences of what it means to be a Roma pupil.

1.5.2   Epistemology

The study adopts a constructivist epistemology. The stance posits that truth is subjectively formed through different meanings individuals construct (Crotty, 1988, p. 8). Meaning making is filtered through past experiences and historical and cultural contexts (Coolican, 2007). The constructivist epistemology in this research will be based on the premise that the Roma pupils will make sense of their school experiences and community identity through the lens of their past histories, experiences, and cultural contexts.

1.6   Research Rationale

The rationale for focusing this research on Roma children is grounded in the recent statistics and findings on exclusion rates, low attainment, and attendance data, all of which highlight Roma children as a vulnerable group facing significant educational inequities. Roma children are recognised as a protected characteristic group under legislation, and it is important to understand their experiences. However, there is a gap in the research, which does not capture the voices and lived experiences of secondary school Roma children well. Roma children are best positioned to bring depth and meaning to the national data on ethnicity and education.

1.7   Researcher Personal Position

I position myself as an insider researcher based on my Roma heritage and membership within the community being studied. I view my personal experiences as a strength, while also recognising the influence and active role they may have throughout the research process. I acknowledge that elements of the analysis may reflect my own views and experiences. I will utilise personal reflexivity to ensure that the participants' voices are the foundation of each theme and ensure these themes are grounded in their perspectives. This approach will enable me to maintain openness and provide a transparent account of how my positionality may shape the research. I will select methodology and analysis strategies that align with my positionality, applying Yardley's (2008) criteria for assessing the quality of my qualitative research and using research supervision reflexively to sense-check interpretations.

1.8   Relevance to the Educational Psychology Profession

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are in a strong position to advocate for Roma children within schools. Commissioned to work with children and young people aged 0–25 (Children and Families Act, 2014), EPs hold an influential role in the education system. Roma children are recognised as a minority ethnic group in the 2021 Census and are protected under the Equality Act (2010), which includes protection against discrimination based on race, ethnicity and nationality. In addition, legislation such as the Children Act (2004) and Every Child Matters policy (2003) highlight all children's rights to safety, achievement, and economic well-being, rights to which Roma children are equally entitled.

EPs are well-placed to promote inclusive and anti-racist practices because of the nature of their role across schools and local authorities. They can offer advice, consultations, deliver training,

and conduct research to help improve the educational experiences and outcomes of Roma pupils.

Educational psychology services in the UK often follow the traded service delivery model, which has affected time allocation and budgeting (Lee & Woods, 2017). EPs play a crucial role in this context, as the traded model can be a barrier to working with Roma children. The school's position of power within the traded delivery model can steer the direction of the work. School priorities may not always align with the needs of Roma pupils, reflecting wider patterns of institutional racism, leading to further gaps in support. The HCPC (2023) Standard of Proficiency 2.13 urges EPs to reflect on boundaries and power dynamics in their work with schools. EPs must develop their ethically sensitive practice when negotiating work with schools to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils (Lee & Woods, 2017). This includes asking schools about the provisions and support for Roma children (Li, 2021).

EPs are particularly suited to advocate for Roma children within their LAs. The updated HCPC Standards of Proficiency (2023) have emphasised equality, diversity and inclusion. HCPC 5. states that EPs "must recognise the impact of culture, equality, diversity on practice and practice in a non-discriminatory and inclusive manner" and HCPC 5.6. conditions that EPs must "recognise the characteristics and consequences of barriers to inclusion, including for socially isolated groups and actively challenge these barriers". This research will support EPs with their understanding and practice when working with Roma children.

1.9   Research Aims and Research Questions

The research aims are closely tied to the current context of poor educational outcomes for Roma children. It seeks to develop an understanding of Roma children's shared experiences of secondary school education and to explore how their cultural and community identity shapes

these experiences. The study also aims to amplify the voices of Roma children, providing insight into their perspectives that can inform anti-racist practices and targeted school interventions.

Professionals such as educational psychologists, teachers, and GRT liaison officers can use these insights to better understand Roma pupils and identify ways to provide more effective support. By highlighting the link between cultural identity and school experience, this research hopes to raise awareness and deepen understanding of Roma children's educational journeys within the UK system.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1 How do Roma children represent their experience of school?

2 How do Roma children represent being part of the
Roma community, and how does this influence their school experience?

2   Literature Review

This chapter aims to answer two literature review questions and uncover what is absent in the literature. The search strategy and terms will be outlined, followed by a scoping literature review. Key findings are thematically presented and synthesised.

2.1   Literature Review Questions & Search Strategy

The literature search strategy aimed to answer two questions in two parts:

Part 1: 'What does the literature tell us about the school experiences of Roma communities in the UK?'

Part 2: 'What does the literature tell us about the school experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK?'

A different approach was taken to parts 1 and 2 of the review. While Part 1 focused on the most directly relevant literature on the experiences of Roma children in education, maintaining such strict search criteria risked overlooking valuable studies from the literature that combine the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in education. Broadening the search allowed the review to capture a fuller picture of the educational experiences of Roma children, particularly where shared issues across GRT communities are present.

The databases were searched with words and phrases related to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, schools and experiences in the UK.

2.2 Database and Search Terms

The literature search was conducted on the following databases via EBSCOhost:

- PsycINFO
- Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection
- PsycArticles
- Education Source
- ERIC

The search terms used in connection with a keyword or phrase within a category were connected using the Boolean Operator 'OR' e.g. Roma OR Romani OR Gypsy. A second search was carried out using Google Scholar using the key phrase e.g. Roma or GRT (See Figure 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram below for search strategy, inclusion & exclusion criteria).

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection
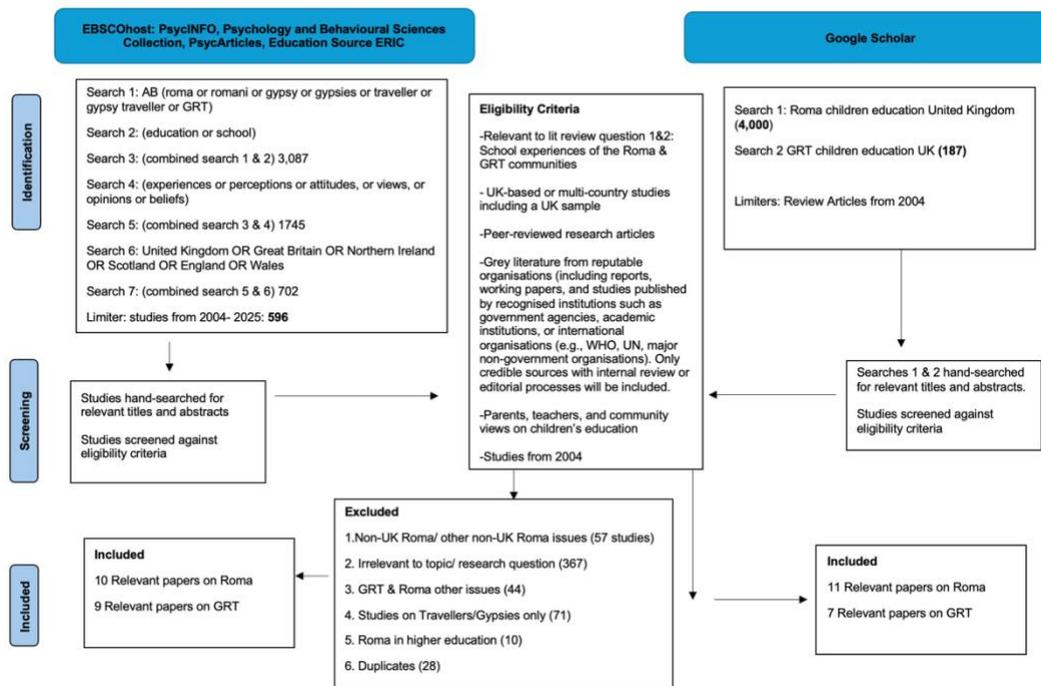
Note. A full-size version of this diagram, including studies, is presented in Appendix A, 7.1.1. Adapted from PRISMA 2020 & PRISMA-ScR guidelines 2021 (Page et al., 2020 & Page et al., 2021).

2.3   Literature Review

2.4   Part-1 Roma

The following studies have been selected to form part 1 of the literature review as they answer the first literature question, 'What does the literature tell us about the school experiences of Roma communities in the UK?'. The studies vary in sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, impact and importance. However, all studies meet the inclusion criteria and have demonstrated good reliability and validity. A critique of the studies using Yardley's (2008) criteria can be found in Appendix B (7.2.1).

Overview of Themes

The key themes identified in the literature on Roma education include negative teacher attitudes, the value of alternative pedagogies when working with Roma children and the importance of culturally relevant approaches in schools (Crozier, Davies, & Szymanski, 2009; Dobson, Stephenson, & De Arede, 2021; Levison & Hooley, 2014; Matras, Howley, & Jones, 2020; Payne & Prieler, 2015; Robson, 2015; Smith, Robertson, & Wygotski, 2020; Themelis & Foster, 2013).

Cultural and language barriers and the importance of multiagency collaboration are highlighted by Swanwick, Elmore, and Slater (2021), Lever, (2012) and Scullion and Brown (2013). Penfold (2016) provides insights into Roma versus GRT identities. Meanwhile, Aguiar, Silva, Rodrigues, Ribeiro, Pastori, and the ISOTIS Research Team (2020), Humphris (2013), Klaus (2019), Klaus and Marsh (2014), Klaus and Siraj (2020), Miskovic (2009), Óhidy, Riddell, and Boutiuc-Kaiser (2022), Ryder (2015), Scullion and Brown (2013), Themelis (2009), and Themelis and Foster (2013) highlight the systemic barriers faced by Roma in education across Europe.

2.4.1 Negative Teacher Attitudes

Crozier et al. (2009) and Matras et al. (2020) investigated teacher attitudes towards Roma students. Matras et al. (2020) focused on differences between teachers' narratives and those of Roma pupils. Whereas Crozier et al. (2009) explored teachers' perspectives on an INSET CPD programme focusing on Roma children. The studies utilised purposive sampling, interviews and thematic analysis. In addition, Matras et al. (2020) also drew on various Roma projects between 2008-2016. The projects involved a range of activities, including supporting the use of the Romani language in schools, conducting community surveys, carrying out interviews

with teachers and students, collecting life history narratives, and developing policy analysis through participatory research methods.

Crozier et al. (2009) and Matras et al. (2020) shed light on teachers' stereotypical views of Roma children. The findings reveal a significant gap between teachers' and pupils' perceptions of Roma identity and language. Teachers viewed Roma students as marginalised; however they also attributed stereotypes, such as early marriage among girls or a lack of value for education within the Roma community. Similar views were also held about the children's limited prior education.

In contrast, Roma pupils expressed a positive outlook on education, viewing their identity as tied to shared experiences of exclusion and the Romani language. Despite their experience of teaching Roma students, teachers struggled to distinguish between Romani and Romanian languages, revealing a need for greater awareness and understanding of the culture. Crozier et al. (2009) found that teachers who held stereotypical views would homogenise the Roma children as "Eastern Europeans", reflecting a limited understanding of Roma culture and backgrounds.

Furthermore, Crozier et al. (2009) emphasise the need for effective and well-evaluated Roma training for teachers, such as the INSETRom course, which showed some progress in teacher practice, such as using new materials and addressing stereotypes. The author also highlights that meaningful, school-wide change would require strong leadership from head teachers, sufficient funding, and additional resources such as EAL teachers and interpreters, to improve outcomes for Roma children.

Robson's (2015) research further highlights the persistence of stereotypical views held by some teachers toward Roma students. The case study followed specialist Roma practitioners working in schools. The findings reveal a widespread lack of understanding about Roma identity, which contributed to ongoing inequalities, as many educational practitioners reinforced negative narratives. The study concludes that specialist practitioners and schools could benefit from a theoretical framework which includes human rights policies to critically reflect on practice whilst working with Roma children.

In response to the literature highlighting teachers' and professionals' perceptions of Roma pupils, Payne and Prieler (2015) developed a language tool known as RoLet. The tool was designed as an analytical framework to support professionals working with newly arrived Slovak Roma in the UK. The tool aims to improve cultural understanding and acknowledges the need to support Roma children with limited English language abilities. The researchers emphasise that existing language support pathways for children with EAL may not be effective as Roma children's first language is Romani, a non-standardised language. The study highlights the need for building relationships with the families and the importance of acknowledging the family's past experiences with segregation in their countries, which has contributed to their outsider status.

Overall, the studies identify low teacher aspirations for Roma children in educational institutions and the need for effective training in culture and language, a whole school approach, and more resources. The results highlight the importance of the Roma language as a central aspect of Roma children's identity. The researchers suggest that accepting the culture may lead to a more supportive and inclusive school environment for Roma children.

2.4.2 Alternative Pedagogies, Educational Practices & Importance of Culturally Relevant Approaches

Smith et al. (2020) explored translanguaging with Roma children. The study lasted three years and was carried out across four European countries, including the UK. The project encouraged children to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire through a translanguaging pedagogy. The method aims to enhance engagement and comprehension, foster language development and value bilingual ways of knowing (Smith et al., 2020). A second aim of the study was to support cultural identity and socioemotional growth to promote social justice (Smith et al., 2020). The UK project involved a discourse analysis of interviews and classroom interactions at a primary school. It included teachers developing lessons with a translanguaging pedagogy, engaging families, and working with a Roma liaison officer who had a pre-existing strong relationship with the families.

The study demonstrates positive outcomes on attendance, achievements and improved home-school relationships. Overall, the technique improved the educational experiences of Roma families and changed teachers' perceptions of the Roma community, particularly regarding their knowledge, contributions, and the value of education. The author concludes that teachers should incorporate translanguaging methods into the curriculum as an intervention against cultural marginalisation in schools.

Dobson et al. (2021) also confirm the importance of involving the Roma culture in the curriculum to foster inclusion. The authors ran a creative writing project involving Roma primary school children. The study aimed to explore children's participation in novel writing challenges using creative writing workshops with Czech and Slovak Roma children. The study focused on aetonormativity, defined as adult-child power dynamics in children's literature (Nikolajeva, 2009). The researchers also used aspects of participatory research and utilised

methods such as observations, staff interviews, reflective journals, children's drawings, and video recordings to document the process.

The findings demonstrate the lack of cultural representation in literature for Roma children. This led to the children's hesitation in using Roma characters in a positive light, and their heroes and protagonists mainly relied on Western ideas. The adults in the study took an active role in shaping the stories, which resulted in the development of stereotypical Roma characters. The findings highlight the need for careful cultural considerations when incorporating Roma culture into the curriculum, as this can improve feelings of inclusion but can also further embed negative views. The researchers conclude that teachers require professional development in theoretical frameworks, such as Critical Race Theory, to better analyse texts with their students and challenge stereotypical representations.

In addition, Themelis and Foster (2013) found the positive impact of alternative practices on Roma children. The study reviewed data on interventions in three countries, including the UK. The findings highlight effective strategies and interventions used with Roma pupils, for example, the importance of community involvement and training on Roma history. The authors suggested that schools can create a more inclusive culture by acknowledging the Roma Genocide in the Holocaust, using classroom resources that reflect Roma culture, celebrate diversity and employ a zero-tolerance policy on racism.

Furthermore, Levison and Hooley (2014) also highlight the importance of alternative pedagogies which acknowledge and promote Roma culture in school settings to improve outcomes for Roma children. The study compared the educational experiences and challenges faced by UK Roma/Gypsies and Indigenous Australians. The method employed secondary data

and reports from studies on both demographic groups. The authors drew on critical pedagogy, including the view of education as a tool for liberation rather than oppression (Levison & Hooley, 2014). They explored the findings through a Post-colonial Theory lens, which discusses the legacy of colonialism and systemic racism in the education systems that impact Indigenous Australians and Roma Gypsies.

The findings highlight similarities between the experience of UK Roma and Gypsies, and Indigenous Australians in the education systems. The communities experience barriers and marginalisations because of their cultural traditions and practices, which often clash with Westernised attendance and literacy-focused curricula. Educational practice does not consider the cultural values of UK Roma and Gypsies, resulting in disengagement, absenteeism, and lower educational outcomes. The study highlights the lack of understanding of Roma culture, which reinforces a deficit model and urges the development of adequate teacher training. The authors conclude that there must be a greater emphasis on cultural relevance in schools and advocate for more community-based interventions, including the values of the children's communities.

Overall, the studies exploring the effectiveness of alternative pedagogies show the benefit of creative, culturally sensitive practices when working with Roma children and families. The findings address a gap in children's literature/curriculum involving characters from underrepresented groups, such as Roma characters. The research confirms the importance of professionals' understanding of Roma culture and reflection on their biases. The literature demonstrates how incorporating the culture in schools can foster belonging, improve engagement and positively impact the children's outcomes.

2.4.3 Cultural & Language Barriers

Swanwick et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of understanding Roma culture and the language barriers faced by Roma children and young people (CYP) with disabilities. The study explores the educational inclusion of Roma children who are deaf, with an emphasis on multi-professional team support. The authors drew on intersectionality theory and acknowledges the complexities of deaf Roma children's identities (Crenshaw, 1989). The study used a demographic survey of deaf educational services, five case studies of local authority services, and four individual case studies of Roma children who are deaf, aged 11 months to 12 years. Methods included questionnaires and interviews with adults and children. An intersectional approach was used to analyse the data, focusing on the interrelatedness of being deaf and Roma. The findings include themes such as language and communication, lack of family resources and challenges of navigating complex systems.

The study emphasises that professionals lacked knowledge about the Romani language, which impacted their ability to understand the children's full linguistic profiles. The Roma parents expressed concerns about professionals' negative views of the Romani language. The family's engagement with interventions was influenced by some of their previous experiences with professionals and the complexity of navigating a new system. The study highlights that Roma children who are deaf face additional disadvantages linked to their cultural, linguistic and disability related barriers. The authors conclude that cultural training for professionals is essential for institutions working with Roma children to develop a greater understanding of their intersecting identities and the barriers that come along with them.

The study demonstrates how limited professional understanding of Roma children's linguistic abilities negatively affects Roma families' experiences with professionals. Many Roma

families are often unaware of the systemic processes in the UK, as these are unfamiliar and in a foreign language. These challenges have also created a barrier to working with Roma children. The literature suggests that interventions and support are needed for Roma families to overcome these barriers, alongside training for professionals to better understand Roma language and culture.

2.4.4   Multiagency Work

Lever (2012) highlights the need for multi-agency work with Roma families to improve Roma children's education outcomes. The author included four case studies including schools and services in England. The study highlights the barriers services working with the Roma communities face. This includes low funding, limited cultural understanding, the need to build better community relationships, and the need for government-funded initiatives to support Roma children.

Scullion and Brown (2013) carried out a study in three countries, including the UK, and found the following barriers to Roma children's educational outcomes: low levels of attendance at secondary school level, experiences of poverty, challenges with engagement in education and lack of understanding of the systems in the UK. The authors highlight the importance of engaging with Roma families over an extended period, as high professional turnover can hurt the established relationships. The study also points out that although multiagency work is strongly recommended in research, it requires additional consideration as it may not be suitable for all families, especially those who have a challenging history, are reluctant to engage with multiple professionals and prefer one point of contact. The findings emphasise the importance of building meaningful, trusting relationships with Roma families.

The research highlights the value of multi-agency work with Roma families. However, this requires careful consideration given the Roma community's past experiences with government services. Research recommends that services should focus on developing their cultural understanding and improving their relationships and trust in the community. The findings also highlight that services working with Roma families require more resources and government support.

2.4.5   GRT vs Roma Identity

Penfold (2016) explores whether a distinct approach is required for supporting Roma children and young people (CYP), as opposed to the broader strategies typically used for British Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) populations. A key focus of the study is the concept of "ascription", which is how schools identify and record students' ethnic backgrounds. The project used a case study and literature review approach to explore the educational needs of migrant Roma children. The study considers whether the "R" needs to be separated from "GRT" and argues that accurate ascription is believed to correlate with better attendance and achievement. The study advocates for targeted support for migrant Roma children.

The study highlights the issue of homogenising the experiences of marginalised groups within literature. Grouping communities can overlook individual experiences, which are crucial for shaping interventions that genuinely address specific needs, such as recognising the Roma community's unique history or supporting them with language barriers.

2.4.6   Roma in Europe

Studies explore Roma education and the implementation of Roma children's rights in European education, including the UK (Aguiar et al., 2020; Humphris, 2013; Klaus, 2019; Klaus &

Marsh, 2014; Klaus & Siraj, 2020; Miskovic, 2009; Óhidy et al., 2022; Ryder, 2015; Scullion & Brown, 2013; Themelis, 2009; Themelis & Foster, 2013). The findings highlight several issues, such as the marginalisation of Roma communities in education, particularly in early childhood settings, for example, the overrepresentation in segregated schools and special education (Miskovic, 2009). The research demonstrates the need for new polices and early childhood initiatives, including Roma children e.g., supporting continuous teacher training, securing funding for evaluating intervention effectiveness, and distinguishing Roma children from English Romany and Irish travellers.

The research demonstrates significant gaps in Roma children's outcomes in Europe. All papers agree that greater efforts are needed to address the systemic barriers hindering Roma children's inclusion in the education system. Although the studies are not specific to the UK, they highlight that more attention is required to improve Roma CYP outcomes in multiple countries, highlighting this as a cross-country issue in Europe.

2.4.7   **Synthesis**

The literature review has provided insight into the systemic discrimination experienced by the Roma community in education. Themes that have been interpreted from the evidence base include negative teacher attitudes, experiences of stereotyping, limited ethnic and cultural understanding amongst professionals, lack of culturally inclusive curriculum, underfunded services and the general marginalised experience of Roma across Europe. There was a strong emphasis on the need for effective cultural training for professionals to accurately understand the Roma community's challenges and their needs.

Teachers can hold stereotypical views of Roma pupils, and this leads to low expectations of the children (Crozier et al., 2009; Dobson et al., 2022; Matras et al., 2020; Payne & Prieler,

2015; Robson, 2015). Studies suggest that effective cultural training, such as INSET CPD programs, or tools e.g. RoLet, can improve teacher practice; however, it requires leadership buy-in and resources to be meaningful and impactful (Crozier et al., 2009; Matras et al., 2020). Long-term commitment and a whole school effort are required for successful implementation.

Research shows the effectiveness of culturally sensitive teaching methods and approaches, such as translanguaging and creative writing projects, in fostering engagement and improving educational outcomes for Roma children. The children's linguistic practices, such as the use of the Romani language, are frequently misunderstood or overlooked in school settings. Findings demonstrate how teachers fail to understand the differences between the Romani and Romanian languages, and this can lead to misunderstandings and stereotypes (Dobson et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2020). The studies demonstrate a positive impact of including families in the children's education. The teaching methods and culturally relevant approaches confirm the importance of including Roma culture in the curriculum to foster belonging in children and support teachers in reflecting on their biases.

Language remains a significant barrier for Roma families, and many professionals lack knowledge of Romani linguistic practices, leading to misunderstanding and reinforcing deficit views of Roma children. Roma children who are deaf are not fully understood by professionals: they face exclusion in education, and their parents struggle to navigate complex health and school systems (Swanwick et al., 2021). The studies highlight the barriers Roma families face as immigrants in a foreign country with a foreign language. While multi-agency approaches are necessary to support Roma families with language barriers, they must carefully manage this relationship, given the community's historic mistrust of services. Studies also emphasise

the need for building relationships, trust and additional resources to support Roma families (Lever, 2012; Scullion & Brown, 2013).

Studies across Europe reveal systemic discrimination and segregation in education. The literature also emphasises the importance of advocacy and policy changes to address the educational marginalisation experienced by the Roma community. The studies recommend including better teacher training on Roma culture and language, community-based educational initiatives, and policies that acknowledge the unique cultural needs of marginalised groups. Efforts to improve inclusion through policy reforms and multicultural education initiatives have had limited success so far, demonstrating the persistence of structural barriers and possibly a lack of embedding practice into institutions (Ohidy et al., 2022; Miskovic, 2009). These findings reveal that Roma's educational marginalisation is a cross-European issue.

A distinctive contribution comes from Swanwick et al. (2021), who examine the intersection of culture and disability, shedding light on the added difficulties experienced by deaf Roma children. The study highlights the gap in the research base about Roma children with other disabilities and other aspects of their identity, e.g. gender and sexuality. The intersection between different aspects of identity and Roma culture requires further exploration in educational research. Swanwick et al. (2021) also make an important point to acknowledge the Roma family's migrant status and the need to support them in navigating systems in the UK and overcoming their language barriers to foster the education of their children. In addition Penfold (2016) also provided a distinct contribution to the literature review by highlighting the risks of homogenizing Roma children with other Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) groups. Homogenisation fails to acknowledge the unique needs of Roma students, especially regarding language and identity (Penfold, 2016).

Although studies (e.g., Crozier et al., 2009; Dobson et al., 2021; Klaus, 2019; Klaus & Siraj, 2020; Lever, 2012; Matras et al., 2020; Payne & Prieler, 2015; Robson, 2015; Scullion & Brown, 2013; Smith et al., 2020; Swanwick et al., 2021) include input from Roma children amongst other methods, other studies rely heavily on secondary data and/or institutional perspectives (Aguiar et al., 2020; Humphris, 2013; Klaus & Marsh, 2014; Lever, 2012; Levinson & Hooley, 2013; Miskovic, 2009; Óhidy et al., 2022; Ryder, 2015; Themelis & Foster, 2013). Studies also incorporate analysis of existing qualitative research, policy reports, and case studies (Penfold, 2016; Themelis, 2009). While the research base predominantly relies on qualitative methods, some studies incorporate statistical data to support their findings. Most studies integrate stakeholder views, policies, and reports alongside the voices of Roma children. On the one hand, this approach helps build a broader picture of the Roma educational experience. On the other hand, combining these perspectives may dilute the children's voices and reduce the impact of their insights, particularly regarding what they feel would be helpful in school.

Furthermore, there remains a lack of practical guidance on how to provide effective training on Roma culture, as well as limited exploration of strategies for building stronger partnerships between schools and Roma families. In addition, there is limited research on the long-term effectiveness of alternative pedagogies, and a lack of clarity around how best to support migrant families in overcoming language barriers and navigating the education system. There is also a limited understanding of how the past experiences of Roma families in their home countries influence their children's education in the UK.

Moreover, there is limited exploration of Roma children's intersecting identities and how these impact their educational experiences. The relationship between trauma, mental health, and

education for Roma children and young people (CYP) also remains largely unexplored. Furthermore, the link between poverty and education for Roma children has not been adequately studied. The voices of Roma children are not strongly represented in the research, making it harder to fully understand their lived experiences of secondary school education.

Overall, the research on the educational experiences of Roma children and their community in the UK highlights marginalisation, systemic issues and structural barriers. Some studies suggest creative approaches/pedagogies for fostering inclusion and attempting to address educational inequalities; however, the effectiveness of these interventions in the long term are unknown. There is an urgent need for training for professionals, culturally responsive teaching, and effective policy reform. Further research is required on the children's intersectional identities, family experiences, parental understanding of systems and language barriers, the impact of poverty, and children's mental health. Future research should prioritise children's voices and amplify their first-hand experiences in education.

2.5   Part 2- GRT

The second part of the literature review focuses on studies involving Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities. These studies will be discussed and evaluated in less detail than the studies on Roma in Part 1. This is because GRT studies cover multiple communities, and while there are some similarities between them, the information is not specific to Roma. Therefore, any conclusions drawn from GRT studies must be approached with caution to ensure they do not oversimplify or generalise the unique experiences of Roma children.

Despite these limitations, the selected studies on GRT communities show some relevance. The term "GRT" is often used interchangeably, and Roma are often grouped within the broader GRT category across research, policy, and legislation, meaning their experiences are frequently

discussed in relation to other Traveller and Gypsy groups. The studies have been selected to form part 2 of the literature review as they meet the inclusion criteria and answer the second literature question, 'What does the literature tell us about the school experiences of GRT communities in the UK?'.

2.5.1   GRT School Experience

Marginalisation

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children experience racism, prejudice, and social exclusion (Gould, 2017; Pollock, 2019; Wilkin, Derrington, White, Martin, Foster, Kinder, & Rutt, 2009a; Wilkin, Derrington, Foster, White, & Martin, 2009b). Gypsy/Traveller children have the lowest attendance and attainment, and the highest rate of exclusion compared to other children. Gypsy and Traveller children are also overrepresented in special educational needs categories, such as social, emotional, and mental health needs and disrupted learning (Riddle, 2020). GRT children experience limited educational opportunities and struggle to visualise themselves in higher education because of feelings of uncertainty and fear due to marginalisation (Danvers et al., 2019). The current learning environment does not fully support GRT children's integration or meet their emotional needs. (Pollock & Barrow, 2021).

Barriers to Education

Some barriers to education that were identified in the literature included cultural stigma, lack of school information, and feelings of not belonging in academic environments (Danvers et al., 2019). Gould (2017) suggested that to tackle social exclusion experienced by GRT children, schools should employ GRT support staff. Teachers should attend cultural awareness training to understand the GRT culture. The study also suggests that schools require an inclusive school ethos where GRT culture is celebrated, and issues related to racism are promptly addressed.

The study recommends a multi-professional approach, including the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS), to tackle GRT children's educational inequities. Danvers and Hinton-Smith (2024) discussed 'cruel optimism' when professionals paint higher education as a positive experience that will enable social mobility when, in reality, GRT children do not experience institutions as inclusive.

Mixed Feelings

Some studies show that GRT children experience mixed feelings about school. Some felt a sense of belonging, positive peer relationships, and recognition, while others felt connected only to their GRT peers and disconnected from the wider school (Danvers et., 2019; Pollock & Barrow, 2021). Children also expressed mixed feelings about raising awareness about GRT culture in schools, as it sometimes made them a target for peer discrimination. Pollock & Barrow (2021) suggest that schools must first establish a strong whole-school anti-racist approach before spotlighting the children's cultural backgrounds.

In addition, Danvers et al. (2024) found that GRT secondary school children experienced mixed feelings about attending higher education, some students had high aspirations, whereas others preferred vocational routes. However, despite the difference in children's perspectives about their academic future, professionals often made traditional assumptions about their aspirations.

Support systems

Research demonstrates the importance of support systems in fostering GRT children's feelings of belonging and motivation to engage with school. Children's aspirations and motivations to pursue higher education were shaped by the views of their families and communities (Danvers et al., 2019). In addition, teachers' stance on the GRT communities highly influenced their

status and acceptance amongst their classmates; when teachers held positive views, this was reflected in how GRT children were treated by their peers (Pollock & Barrow, 2021). Children's sense of belonging was also reinforced in schools that appointed GRT staff, children voiced more positive experiences and felt more represented and understood (Gould, 2017).

2.5.2   Effective Practice with GRT

Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) & Multi-agency

Studies highlight the crucial role of TESS in bridging the gap between schools and GRT families, providing essential support to help them engage with the education system. TESS supports schools in developing their culturally aware practice and creating respectful, trusting and collaborative relationships with Traveller families (Bhopal & Myers, 2009a; Boot, 2013; Gould, 2017; Wilkin, Kinder, Martin, Robinson, Haines, & Derrington, 2008; Wilkin et al., 2009a; Wilkin et al., 2009b). However, the research also identifies the barriers to support from services, such as lack of funding, resources, capacity and dependency on the service to run cultural training in schools (Boot, 2013; Wilkin et al., 2008).

The literature also points to the importance of strategic direction, such as decision-making and long-term planning, trust-building, community involvement, and multi-agency collaboration, which are essential in services working with GRT families (Wilkin et al., 2008). The effectiveness of multi-agency work with GRT communities was also confirmed by Gould (2017), Wilkin et al. (2009a) and Wilkin et al. (2009b). Findings suggest that better connections between children's services and broader policies, such as health and housing, are necessary to close gaps in service provision. Additionally, Wilkin et al. (2009b) emphasise the need for greater national recognition of GRT communities' challenges.

Involving Community & Culture

Research shows that increased parental involvement in education could help overcome cultural barriers and reinforce the importance of education. Building trust and involving the community appear to be essential for effectively engaging GRT families. The literature often highlights family-centred approaches and partnerships as key to understanding GRT culture, fostering mutual trust, and valuing their perspectives on education. This approach fosters feelings of safety with professionals within the community (Bhopal & Myers 2009a, 2009b; Wilkin et al., 2008; Wilkin et al., 2009a). The researchers also highlight the importance of community involvement in designing and delivering GRT training programs.

Studies further confirm the value of culture and community in GRT families' engagement with education (Bhopal & Meyers, 2009; Gould, 2017; McCaffery, 2016). Bhopal and Myers (2009) found that safety, racism and bullying were something GRT parents were worried about, and this influenced school attendance. However, community support, e.g. peers and teachers from their own community, helped alleviate concerns. The research also confirms that cultural sensitivity was a significant factor in relationship-building with families. The study indicates that schools adopting an inclusive ethos, supported by the TESS, observe better outcomes in terms of attendance and engagement.

Gould (2017) emphasises that schools require an inclusive school ethos where GRT culture is celebrated, and issues related to racism are promptly addressed. McCaffery (2016) found a cultural mismatch in education, barriers to access, and discriminatory practices in Western education. The author identifies a need for reform and changes in the education system that recognise and integrate culture from the communities into the curriculum.

Cultural Training

The literature points to the need for culturally sensitive teacher training that incorporates the views of children and the GRT communities. Studies emphasise the value in training that is developed with the input of members from the communities, to ensure accurate cultural understanding and to build relationships between schools and GRT families (Gould, 2017; Wilkin et al., 2008; Wilkin et al., 2009a)

Leadership & Whole School Approach

Research illustrates the importance of leadership and whole school approaches to ensure meaningful inclusion of GRT children. An example of inclusive practice was the cultural celebrations of GRT communities in school, which have been found to improve outcomes for GRT children. (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; Wilkin et al., 2009a & Wilkin et al., 2009b). Social inclusion can be further strengthened by the school's positive ethos and strong connections with the GRT community, which has shown a positive impact on children's education (Boot, 2013).

The literature highlights the importance of dedicated GRT staff support, monitoring GRT children's academic achievements and following up with appropriate interventions in schools, to foster inclusion and improve attainment (Boot, 2013; Wilkin et al., 2009b). Findings show that teachers should hold and voice high expectations for GRT children and encourage them through positive cultural role models (Wilkin et al., 2009b).

Flexible Curriculum & Policies

Danvers et al. (2019) demonstrate the need for flexibility in schools to improve access to education for GRT families. The study recommends that schools use flexible policies and

include GRT culture in the curriculum. The celebration and acceptance of GRT culture should be felt across the school. Staff should support children with socio-economic barriers, including travel and uniforms, and provide classwork during distance learning while travelling. The study also recommends a more adaptable curriculum, including vocational options, to raise the aspirations of GRT children. Some GRT students are interested in subjects involving equine studies, floristry, and blacksmithing, and schools should offer outreach activities that are shaped by their interests.

Research also highlights that when schools communicate clear behaviour policies with GRT families, this can improve home and school relationships. Schools that invest in understanding the unique needs of GRT communities and adopt flexible policies tend to have better attendance and academic achievement outcomes (Gould, 2017; Wilkin et al., 2009a; Wilkin et al., 2009b). In addition, research points out the lack of government initiatives addressing GRT challenges. GRT issues require government attention and national-level policies (Wilkin et al., 2008; Wilkin et al., 2009b).

Connecting GRT Practice

The literature also highlights the need for stronger connections between services, schools and GRT families to address the gaps in provision. GRT educational issues require broader national policies addressing health and housing. Additionally, GRT communities' members should be actively involved in policy development (Wilkin et al., 2009b). Schools that integrate culturally sensitive practices, such as incorporating GRT culture alongside clear leadership, flexible policies and additional access to support, observe improved social inclusion and academic outcomes for GRT children (Boot, 2013).

Overall, the studies show that good practice with GRT children and families includes strong school leadership buy-in, a whole school approach to inclusion, cultural sensitivity in staff, and effective teacher training with GRT member input. A few effective approaches highlighted in the literature include high aspirations for GRT children, valuing community voices, collaboration with parents, employing GRT staff, flexible curricula and school policies, multi-agency work and national policies to address systemic issues. The strategies require consistency to ensure a lasting impact on GRT inclusion in education (Boot, 2013; Gould, 2017; Wilkin et al., 2009b).

2.5.3   Role of the EP

The literature highlights the important role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in understanding the school experiences of GRT children and providing tailored support. Li (2021) points to the limited involvement that EPs had with GRT children despite their poor educational outcomes. The author emphasises several frameworks that EPs can apply when working with GRT children, including Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), the Bio-ecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), and Burnham's Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS framework (2012).

Pollock and Barrow (2021) challenge EPs to reconsider how they support minority groups. EPs should consider activities promoting GRT identity, as they may risk reinforcing differences if GRT issues aren't addressed. The study suggests that schools must support GRT children in achieving their aspirations while respecting their cultural practices. The author states that this requires strong collaboration between schools, EPs and TESS. The findings demonstrate the importance of the EP role with GRT children.

In addition, Pollock (2019) explores GRT children's lived school experience. The findings reveal five main constructs: relationships with adults, social integration, prejudice, purposeless education and cultural appreciation. In the study, *"purposeless education"* reflects the idea that some GRT children see little or no value in education as it is currently offered, because it does not align with their perceived needs, cultural identity, or future opportunities. It's about perceived irrelevance, not education being inherently purposeless. The study concludes that EPs can apply these five constructs to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to school involvement and the factors that promote social inclusion for GRT children in schools. Studies highlight that a multi-professional approach, including EPs, is required to tackle GRT children's educational inequities (Gould, 2017; Pollock, 2019; Pollock & Barrow, 2021).

2.5.4   **Alternative Education**

GRT children are over-represented in alternative provisions (Clavell-Bate, 2012; Riddle, 2020). Clavell-Bate (2012) examine the role of elective home education (EHE) in providing access to education for GRT children. Results reveal that learning mentors/tutors used during EHE had a positive impact on engagement with education, but cultural attitudes toward education, especially for secondary-age girls, remained a barrier for children accessing education. The study found that financial constraints in the system and the cultural view of formal education were significant challenges in engaging children. The findings highlight the need for more flexible education models, increased support for GRT parents, and enhanced cross-agency collaboration to improve educational outcomes for home-educated GRT children

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2.5.5 GRT children & poverty

Burchardt, Obolenskaya, Vizard & Battaglini (2018) illuminate GRT children's severe economic disadvantages. The children are often underrepresented in large-scale data used to shape policies on poverty and deprivation. Data from the 2011 Census of England and Wales explored four key areas of disadvantage: housing, household economic activity, education, and health. Demonstrating that nearly 25% of GRT children suffer deprivation in three or more areas, a significantly higher proportion compared to children from other backgrounds. The study emphasises that GRT children face particularly intense challenges, especially in education, where 62% lack basic qualifications. The author calls for better use of census data and holistic strategies that consider family, education, and culturally sensitive health needs. It concludes that the census data is essential for closing the data gap and improving policies for GRT children.

2.5.6 Synthesis

The literature on the educational experience of GRT children and communities reveals substantial structural barriers to education, including racism, exclusion, and a lack of cultural understanding in schools (Danvers et al., 2019; Riddell, 2020;) The children are often overrepresented in alternative provisions or special educational needs categories due to disengagement or absenteeism (Riddle, 2020). Cultural barriers, such as a mismatch between GRT values and Western education, hinder GRT children's access to education. Some schools have managed to improve their inclusive practice, but others continue to struggle with issues of marginalisation (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; McCarthy, 2016).

The literature highlights culturally sensitive training as an effective strategy. Training designed with GRT input is more effective in promoting cultural understanding in schools (Gould, 2017;

Wilkin et al., 2008). The literature also emphasises whole-school approaches and leadership buy-in when working with GRT communities. Strong leadership, an inclusive ethos, and high expectations for GRT pupils improve their sense of belonging and academic outcomes (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; Boot, 2013).

Findings also demonstrate that schools which build inclusive, trusting relationships with GRT families achieve greater success (Bhopal & Myers, 2009a; Wilkin et al., 2008). There is advocacy for flexibility in curriculum delivery and school policies that address the needs of GRT children and adjust for their nomadic lifestyles. Schools that are flexible in their approach to transport, uniforms, and distance learning see better attendance and engagement from GRT pupils (Gould, 2017; Wilkin et al., 2009a).

The literature highlights the critical role of TESS in supporting GRT children and shaping their educational outcomes. However, persistent challenges, such as limited funding, inadequate resources, and an over-reliance on TESS to deliver cultural training, pose barriers to GRT children's outcomes (Boot, 2013; Wilkin et al., 2008) Research has also shown that effective collaboration between education, health, housing, and other services is essential for addressing the multi-layered and complex needs of GRT communities (Gould, 2017; Wilkin, et al., 2009b). However, service provision gaps remain due to poor connections between children's services and broader policies.

Burchardt et al. (2018) was the only study to include the impact of poverty on GRT children's school experience. The study acknowledges that GRT children often live in households affected by poor housing, low economic status, and health problems. These factors negatively impact educational achievement and are overlooked in GRT policy planning. The literature

also encourages EPs to take a more active role in supporting GRT children. Studies suggest that close collaboration between EPs, schools, and TESS can help foster a more inclusive learning environment (Pollock & Barrow, 2021).

Furthermore, research on the school experiences of GRT children and communities predominantly relies on qualitative methods, and studies typically use purposive sampling to select participants. Research employed case studies involving primary and secondary children, parents, staff, or a combination of these groups (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; Boot, 2013; Clavell-Bate, 2012; Wilkin et al., 2009a; Wilkin et al., 2009b) Others utilised interviews or focus groups with secondary school children, parents, school staff, and professionals (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; Danvers et al., 2019; Gould, 2017; Li, 2021; Pollock, 2019; Pollock & Barrow, 2021; Wilkin et al., 2008). Some studies combined qualitative and quantitative methods to assess trends and intervention impact (Burchardt et al., 2018; Wilkin et al., 2008, 2009a, 2009b), while others also drew on official reports, statistics, policy analysis, and literature reviews (McCaffery, 2016; Pollock, 2019; Riddell, 2022; Wilkin et al., 2008, 2009a, 2009b)

A strength of the literature is the practical recommendations made about effective GRT practice, inclusion, trust building and cultural sensitivity. For example, Bhopal and Myers (2009) outline practical steps that schools can take, such as celebrating GRT culture and fostering strong leadership to support inclusion. However, a key shortfall in the literature on GRT is the assumption of homogeneity among diverse communities grouped under a single umbrella term. The challenges and barriers one 'GRT' community faces are often generalised to the entire 'GRT' population. However, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are unique groups with different histories and challenges. For example, Eastern European Roma

communities may encounter distinct barriers related to their history, language, and migration status, which differ from those faced by British or Irish Traveller groups.

Moreover, several gaps have been identified in the literature review. The evidence base on GRT children's well-being and mental health remains limited, especially in relation to poverty. There is also a lack of research exploring the psychological and emotional impacts of racism and marginalisation, as well as the strategies schools can use to address these issues. Many studies focus on stakeholder perspectives, policy reviews, and existing data, while fewer examine the lived experiences of GRT children. Studies where these voices are included remain limited. More research is needed to amplify their direct perspectives and aspirations to inform child-centred approaches. There is also a need to explore how vocational training, flexible curricula, and distance learning can be effectively adapted for GRT pupils in both primary and secondary education. The review further highlights a lack of consistency and scalability in teacher training programmes that include GRT perspectives. Finally, national-level policy research is needed to assess the potential for developing coordinated strategies to support GRT inclusion and improve educational outcomes.

Overall, the research into the educational experience of the GRT communities highlights systemic barriers in the education system. The literature emphasises the integration of GRT cultures in schools. Trust-building and collaboration with GRT families are essential for creating supportive educational environments and improving outcomes.

The studies provide practical recommendations, including multi-agency collaboration, targeted training, whole-school approaches, leadership, curriculum and policy flexibility. However, a key limitation of the research base is the tendency to generalise the diverse experiences of GRT communities. Future research should focus on specific communities to better amplify children's

voices and inform inclusive educational practices that are responsive to their distinct needs and experiences.

2.6   Comparison of Part 1 & 2

2.6.1   Similarities

Educational Barriers

A recurring theme throughout both sections of the literature review is the persistent structural barriers faced by Roma and GRT communities within educational settings. These barriers include systemic racism, discrimination, school exclusion rates, low attendance, social exclusion and poverty (Burchardt et al., 2018; Danvers & Hinton-Smith, 2024; Riddell, 2022; Scullion & Brown, 2013). The reviews stress the need for cultural sensitivity and the integration of Roma and GRT cultures within educational environments (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; McCarthy, 2016; Pollock & Barrow, 2021).

Research advocates for policy changes and teacher training to address the educational marginalisation of these communities (Crozier et al., 2009; Matras et al., 2020; McCaffery, 2016; Payne & Prieler, 2015; Robson, 2015; Wilkin et al., 2009b). Studies recommend community-based initiatives and family-centred practices to support Roma and GRT students (Bhopal & Myers, 2009a; Dobson et al., 2021; Gould, 2017; Óhidy et al., 2022; Robertson & Wysocki, 2020). In addition, although Parts 1 and 2 of the review acknowledge poverty as a barrier to education within Roma and GRT communities, studies such as Burchardt et al. (2018) and Scullion and Brown (2013) offer a limited exploration of these issues.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Both sections of the review draw on insights from a range of stakeholders. In Part 1, the research includes voices from teachers, Roma children, and families, alongside policy analysis.

Part 2 focuses on teachers, GRT children, parents, and professionals, often incorporating insights from Traveller Education Support Services (TESS). The literature would benefit from a greater emphasis on children's lived experiences across the reviews, which would help amplify their voices and inform the development of more child-centred strategies.

Qualitative Methods

Parts 1 & 2 of the review are predominantly grounded in qualitative research methodologies. The studies primarily employ purposive sampling, interviews, case studies, focus groups, participatory research, literature reviews, data and policy reviews, and they draw out themes from the data to provide insights into the educational experiences of Roma and GRT communities.

2.6.2   Differences

Specific Educational Practice

A key distinction between the two reviews is that Part 1 focuses specifically on the barriers faced by the Roma community, highlighting the unique challenges faced by Roma children. For example, the emphasis is on linguistic practices, cultural identity, and the role of the Romani language in educational settings. The studies discuss specific pedagogical practices like translanguaging (Robertson & Wysocki, 2020) and creative writing projects (Dobson et al., 2021) to improve outcomes for Roma children. Whereas part two provides a broader but shallower discussion of good practices, such as flexible curriculum design and school policies, without the same level of analysis into specific pedagogical approaches (Clavell-Bate, 2021; Wilkin et al., 2009a & Wilkin et al., 2009b).

GRT vs Roma

Part 2 of the literature review groups diverse communities under the umbrella term 'GRT', often without specifying the cultural backgrounds of the participants involved. Part 2 of the review also focuses on broader cultural and systemic issues and provides general recommendations such as trust-building, community involvement, and strong leadership. In contrast, Part 1 focuses specifically on the Roma community and explores more complex aspects of Roma identity, such as the intersection of disability and culture (Swanwick et al., 2021) while also offering targeted interventions.

Educational Psychologist involvement

An additional difference highlighted from the reviews was the role of the Educational Psychologist. The literature in Part 2 advocates for the involvement of the EP with GRT children working in collaboration with TESS. However, this was not identified in Part 1. Highlighting the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) is valuable, as they have a professional responsibility to support socially excluded groups such as GRT children, by promoting inclusive educational practices and addressing barriers to learning and well-being. This aligns with the HCPC (2023) Standards of Proficiency, which EPs are required to adhere to, emphasising the need to improve educational outcomes and mental health for all children, particularly those from marginalised communities.

In conclusion, the reviews show some similarities in the experiences of marginalisation and exclusion faced by both Roma and GRT communities within the education system. There are also some differences in terms of the distinct challenges that Roma children face, particularly related to their unique cultural backgrounds and language differences. Comparing the two reviews has shown that generalising findings from GRT studies to all Gypsy, Roma, and

Traveller groups can be problematic as specific needs of a community can be missed and therefore requires deep consideration. While many marginalised groups share experiences, this does not mean their histories and lived experiences are identical. It is essential to avoid grouping people based solely on a few similarities or misconceptions. Research should avoid the broad term 'GRT' and use more specific language when referring to different cultural communities.

3 Methodology & Data Collection

3.1 Overview of Chapter

This section begins by outlining my ontological and epistemological position and the key assumptions underpinning the study. I will then explain the rationale for adopting an inductive approach and how this choice aligns with my research aims. Following this, I describe the overall research design, considering alternative methodologies and providing a justification for the approach I selected.

I will present my research question, providing clarity on the focus of the study, followed by an explanation of the sample size and an outline of participant criteria used to guide the recruitment process. I will discuss the recruitment strategy, outlining the steps to engage potential participants and the challenges I faced. I will provide an overview of the participant information, including demographic and contextual factors, as well as specific information about the school's context, which is essential to understanding the background of the study.

I will then explain the steps I took to analyse the data, detailing the process of identifying patterns and themes in the participants' responses. To ensure the quality and rigour of the

research, I will use Yardley's (2008) criteria, demonstrating how I maintained transparency, reflexivity, coherence and sensitivity to context throughout the research process.

Finally, I will reflect on the role of personal reflexivity in shaping the research process, considering how my background, perspectives, and interactions may have influenced the data collection and interpretation. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of ethical considerations, outlining the steps taken to protect participants' rights, ensure confidentiality, and maintain ethical standards throughout the study.

3.2   Ontology

Ontology refers to the study of existence or "being" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10), focusing on the nature of reality and what constitutes it. A researcher's assumptions about the nature of reality inform how they understand and investigate the phenomena they are studying (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). There are many ontological positions, however the two most referred to in research are realist and relativist.

A realist ontology believes that an objective reality can be measured and observed independently of human perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this research, a realist ontology would imply that the secondary school experience of Roma children is an objective reality that exists independently of individual perspectives or interpretations. Therefore, the challenges Roma children face in school are real and measurable regardless of how the students, teachers or families may subjectively perceive this experience. There is a single, universal reality of their educational experience that is made up of facts and can be objectively studied.

From a realist ontological standpoint, the study may focus on uncovering the objective social structures and mechanisms, such as poverty, educational policies, and societal discrimination, that shape the secondary school experiences of Roma children. This approach prioritises the identification of underlying causes over the exploration of how individuals subjectively interpret or make meaning of these experiences.

In contrast, a relativist ontology may believe that reality is subjective, varying from person to person, and constructed by social and cultural factors: there are multiple realities and truths (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this research, a relativist ontology would imply that Roma children have different experiences in secondary school, and each of these is equally true. A relativist position would also hold that Roma children's secondary school experiences are shaped by social and cultural factors (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Given the diverse backgrounds, histories, and identities within the Roma community, I believe it would be reductionist to treat Roma children's secondary school experiences as a single, uniform narrative. A relativist ontology is therefore more appropriate, as it recognises that there is no single objective truth, but rather multiple, coexisting truths shaped by individuals' subjective experiences (Crotty, 1998). How individuals see and understand the world is influenced by the social, cultural, and historical settings they are part of (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For many Roma pupils, their experiences of secondary education are shaped by factors like family traditions, community life, and experiences of discrimination, which can influence how they make sense of school.

From this perspective, Roma children's views about education and their understanding of what it means to be both a student and a member of the Roma community are varied and all true.

Each child's perspective provides a unique lens through which the broader experience of Roma pupils in the UK can be viewed. This diversity of realities reinforces the idea that there is no singular "Roma school experience" but rather a range of multiple valid experiences shaped by individual, social, and historical circumstances such as migration and exclusion (Schutz, 1967). Adopting a relativist ontology allows for a deeper and more context-sensitive exploration of Roma children's experiences in education.

3.3   Epistemology

Epistemology explores "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) and how we verify facts. A positivist epistemology believes that objective truth can be discovered through scientific investigation, a perspective that is common in quantitative research. Researchers adopting a positivist approach aim to identify cause-and-effect relationships (Sarantakos, 2012). They often utilise methods such as controlling for variables to ensure that research accurately reflects reality, as positivism is grounded in the belief that objective truth can be discovered through empirical observation and measurement. For example, observable and measurable outcomes such as attendance rates or academic performance could be used to assess the impact of factors like discrimination or limited resources on Roma students' educational experiences. The goal of positivist research is to produce universal findings that are applicable across various settings (Bryman, 2016).

On the other hand, a constructivist epistemology suggests that individuals actively construct knowledge and meaning through their experiences, rather than passively receiving objective truths that exist independently of them (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, unlike the positivist paradigm, truth is not absolute but is created through interaction, interpretations and meaning. This view suggests that knowledge is subjective and reflects the perspectives of those involved

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers who adopt a constructivist lens will likely utilise qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to capture individual experiences and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study adopts a constructivist epistemology, which suggests that Roma students interpret their secondary school experiences through their personal histories, cultural identities, and individual experiences (Bruner, 1996). Roma children's experiences are subjective, shaped by their interactions with teachers, peers, and broader society. As a result, there is no singular "Roma school experience" but rather multiple valid interpretations based on history and individual perspectives (Crotty, 1998). This study aims to explore these diverse realities through semi-structured interviews, uncovering how Roma children make sense of their educational experiences.

3.4   Inductive or Deductive

A deductive approach to qualitative research would involve identifying interview themes based on existing research or prior theories. However, I will adopt an inductive approach in this study, allowing themes and insights to be generated through my analysis of the dataset itself, rather than utilising predefined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

An inductive approach is particularly well-suited for this research, as it centres on the participants' perspectives, which are essential for exploring the shared lived experiences of Roma children in secondary schools. There is potential for Roma children's stories, experiences, and perspectives to be genuinely reflected by allowing the themes to be constructed directly from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive research allows for flexibility in responding to emerging data, whether it supports or challenges existing research,

aligning with the ontological and epistemological view that multiple realities and experiences exist for Roma children in secondary school (Bryman, 2016). This approach also aligns with the study's aims, as it seeks to uncover and understand their shared experiences directly from their narratives without preconceived assumptions guiding the analysis.

3.5   Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research design has been chosen for this study because it is well-suited to capturing the rich lived experiences of marginalised groups. A quantitative approach may have also produced helpful insights however, it would have missed the richness of the participants' stories and would not amplify their voices in the way the study aimed to.

The research is both exploratory and emancipatory. It seeks to give a voice to a marginalised group and aims to uncover their unique experiences in secondary school, which is an under-researched area. The study aimed to explore the collective lived experiences of these individuals and contribute to empowering them by highlighting their challenges and perspectives.

3.6   Consideration of Methodologies

The first methodology considered was grounded theory, which generates theory directly from participants' data (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2015). This approach shifts the focus from fully understanding each participant's individual and shared experiences to constructing a broader theoretical understanding of a phenomenon (Corbin et al., 2015). While valuable in some contexts, this approach does not align with the exploratory nature of this research, which seeks to explore and understand the unique and collective experiences of Roma pupils in secondary school.

The second approach considered was the narrative approach, which involves participants sharing their stories about an experience with the researcher; the data is then analysed based on how these stories are told and the surrounding contextual factors (Clandinin, 2006). While this methodology focuses on participants' lived experiences, it may not be the best fit as it places significant emphasis on the storytelling process rather than delving into the meaning that participants derive from their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

A case study approach was also considered, which would allow for an in-depth, detailed exploration of a specific, bounded system, such as an individual, group, or organisation, within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). The approach provides an in-depth exploration of a single case or a few cases. Case studies are useful when the research aims to explore complex, context-dependent factors that influence behaviours or experiences. There could be some benefits to using a case study approach in the present study; however, it may not be the best suited, as it would not provide insight into the collective experience of Roma children in secondary school, which the study aims to do.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was also considered. IPA explores how individuals make sense of their personal experiences, involving in-depth data collection where participants share their thoughts and feelings about a particular phenomenon. The researcher then analyses the data in a detailed process, identifying key themes from the participants' stories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is idiographic, meaning it focuses on understanding individual experiences before looking for patterns across a group. The approach also emphasises the researcher's interpretive role, where they make sense of how participants interpret their own experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is often used in studies aiming to deeply understand personal, subjective experiences (Smith, 2011).

Although IPA could offer valuable insights for the present study, it may not be the most appropriate, as it focuses intensively on individual participants in the initial stages. This emphasis on in-depth individual analysis may limit the study's ability to explore broader patterns across the group, which is important for capturing the diversity of experiences among Roma children in secondary schools. In addition, given the sensitivity of the topic, this level of personal analysis could also feel overly exposing for participants. IPA may not be the best fit as it places a strong emphasis on the researcher's interpretation of participants' accounts, it tends to concentrate on individual meaning-making, with less focus on the wider social and cultural context from which this study would benefit (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

After careful consideration of these methodologies, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was chosen as the most appropriate for this study. RTA is a flexible method focused on identifying and analysing patterns or themes in data. It is particularly well-suited to exploring both individual experiences alongside shared experiences and the broader social and cultural contexts in which those experiences occur (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). It involves several stages: familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for and refining themes, defining and naming those themes, and writing up the findings. RTA views identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning as inherently subjective, influenced by the researcher's theoretical assumptions, analytical skills, and reflexive engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The reflexive engagement occurs at the intersection of three key criteria: (1) the dataset itself, (2) the theoretical framework guiding the analysis, and (3) the researcher's analytical capabilities and resources (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Throughout this process, RTA emphasises

the importance of reflexivity, encouraging the researcher to critically consider how their own assumptions, values, and experiences influence the analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, reflexivity is not just a step in the process but a continuous practice that shapes the development of themes and meaning.

3.7   Reflexive Thematic Analysis

RTA prioritises the understanding of complex, subjective and collective experiences of individuals and groups, making it a good fit for capturing the unique perspectives of Roma children in secondary school settings. The flexibility allows the researcher to identify patterns across participants while still attending to individual narratives, making it an appropriate method for examining both individual and shared school experiences of Roma children (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019). RTA allows for a broader examination of how patterns and experiences may align or differ across the group (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Importantly, RTA also facilitates an understanding of how social, cultural, and institutional contexts shape these experiences, providing a more holistic view of Roma pupils' educational lives that considers the history of their communities.

RTA adopts a non-linear, flexible process that makes it suitable for studying complex phenomena such as race, identity, and culture that are imperative when exploring the experiences of marginalised groups. The method allows the patterns of meaning to be constructed from the participants' narratives, which would lead to a richer understanding of their schooling experience as Roma students. Its subjective and interpretive nature allows the researcher to engage deeply with the data whilst considering broader social and cultural contexts. This flexibility also allows the researcher to reflect throughout the analysis process and evaluate how their experiences and views have shaped the interpretations and whether

themes remain grounded in the participants' experiences and perspectives. Additionally, RTA's bottom-up approach places the children's voices at the centre of the analysis, aligning with the study's aim of exploring the secondary school experiences of Roma children (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

In conclusion, RTA is best suited for this study as it aligns with the aims of exploring individual and shared experiences of Roma children. It embraces the researcher's subjectivity and encourages the researcher to engage reflexively with the data. Reflection on the researcher's cultural background and assumptions contributes to an ethical and transparent research process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a Roma researcher, my insights, experiences, and cultural background can provide valuable interpretative resources in the analysis. Reflexivity will also allow for critical reflection on the personal influences shaping the research process, ensuring that the voices of Roma children are authentically represented while maintaining awareness of the researcher's perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.7.1 Theoretical Underpinning of RTA

Braun and Clarke (2006) originally introduced thematic analysis (TA) as a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning within qualitative data. TA was later developed into RTA, emphasising the flexible and interpretive nature of the method
 (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise that RTA is subjective, with the researcher's perspective playing a central role in the interpretation of the data and theme development. The method does not aim for objectivity, instead, researchers are encouraged to acknowledge and reflect on their influence throughout the analytic process. In this approach, the researcher is an active participant in meaning-making and co-constructing themes.

There are no specific procedural rules for RTA; it is not a rigid step-by-step process but requires the researcher's active engagement by going back and forth with the data and creating and refining the codes and themes. This analysis is subjective through the researcher's lens and context-dependent (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke encourage researchers to tailor the method and their views to suit the specific needs of their research. The authors argue that themes are uncovered through interpretation and do not just sit within the data. They believe that experiences are shaped by social, cultural, and historical interactions and contexts rather than reflecting an objective reality (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, RTA is well-suited to research exploring how people make meaning within specific contexts.

3.7.2   Limitations of RTA

While RTA offers a flexible framework, some researchers find its lack of guidelines difficult. Unlike other thematic analysis approaches, such as Boyatzi's (1998) version, which provides clear, structured steps for coding and theme development, RTA is more fluid and organic (Terry, Clarke & Braun, 2017). This can lead to uncertainty, especially for novice researchers who may struggle to navigate the open-ended theme development process (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

A potential limitation of RTA is its emphasis on researcher subjectivity, which can lead to differing interpretations of the data when multiple coders are involved, potentially reducing consensus across the analysis. The method places less emphasis on reliability and replicability, as it is grounded in interpretation and reflexivity rather than standardisation. This can make it more difficult to produce findings that are generalisable or easily comparable across studies (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2019), however, argue that the purpose of RTA is not to achieve consensus, but to engage reflexively with the data and recognise multiple

interpretations. Nevertheless, others have pointed out that when researchers bring different theoretical or interpretive perspectives to the analysis, it can be challenging to integrate these into a coherent account when engaging in RTA (Terry et al., 2017).

Another potential limitation of RTA is the lack of guidance for data saturation. The method is interpretive and subjective, meaning researchers must rely on their judgment to decide when themes have been sufficiently developed. This can create uncertainty about the themes and cause disagreements between researchers about when they have been developed enough (Terry et al., 2017). Some may argue that there is also a risk of overinterpretation, where the researcher might unconsciously impose their perspectives too heavily on the data, emphasising patterns that align with their preconceptions and possibly distorting participants' intended meanings (Terry et al., 2017).

RTA can also present practical challenges, particularly in terms of time demands, which may be difficult to manage for researchers working with large data sets or under tight deadlines. RTA demands that the researchers engage deeply with the data and generate codes and themes while maintaining a reflective role in shaping the analysis. Researchers have argued that while this process can generate rich data, it can also be overwhelming and requires significant effort (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.8   Research Design

The research aimed to uncover two research questions. The first was 'How do Roma children represent their school experience?' and the second was 'How do Roma children represent being part of the Roma community and how does this influence their school experience?' The questions were developed in response to the limited research in this area, which has not

effectively focused on the secondary school experiences of Roma children in the UK or adequately amplified their voices. This study aimed to help professionals build a culturally informed understanding of Roma children's secondary school experiences. The intention was to recruit around five participants through purposive sampling.

The approximation of five participants was chosen based on Braun and Clarke's emphasis that RTA does not adhere to fixed sampling rules, prioritising the data's richness and quality over its quantity. Approximately five participants are seen as sufficient to capture a meaningful range of experiences without diluting the depth of analysis. The concept of thematic saturation is rejected, and subjectivity in the researcher's view of the data reaching its research goals is encouraged. The sample size is context-dependent and guided by the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2013; Braun & Clark, 2019 & Braun & Clark, 2021).

Purposive sampling is well-suited to this study. A smaller, purposively selected sample helps ensure that each participant's voice is heard clearly, thereby amplifying the insights into the participants' personal experiences of both school life and community belonging. Roma children of secondary school age are uniquely positioned to illuminate the research questions. This sampling method aligns with the research aims, which prioritise depth, context, and cultural lived experience. Moreover, it is consistent with the principles of RTA, which values deep understanding over broad generalizability (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Participants were selected using the following criteria:

Participant Selection Criteria

- Roma Background

- Male & female

- Age 12-16 (school years 8-11)

- Necessary English communication skills

- Must have attended a UK secondary school for at least one full year

3.8.1 Recruitment Strategy

In August 2023, I contacted a Roma support charity to explore whether they would support my project. They initially consented and provided a supporting letter for the ethics application. Once my ethics approval was granted in February 2024, I made contact again; however, their responses became less frequent. After a few weeks, the charity informed me that they were going through a transitional period due to leadership changes, and they also shared the sad news of a colleague's passing. In light of these circumstances, I chose to step back and pause any further follow-up, recognising that it was a difficult and emotional time for the organisation.

In May 2024, I contacted a second Roma charity, and I reached out to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller liaison officers in London boroughs and surrounding areas. Unfortunately, the second charity declined to support the project due to capacity issues. GRT services were experiencing the same problem, and many did not respond. The original charity also stopped responding to my emails and calls (July/August 2024).

In September 2024, I reached out to Educational Psychology Services across London and nearby boroughs, asking if Educational Psychologists could contact their linked schools; however this was unsuccessful. After reflecting on these challenges in supervision, I decided to request an amendment from the ethics committee to broaden the recruitment strategy. The amendment allowed for direct contact with UK secondary schools, rather than relying on charities or local authorities. The Tavistock and Portman Ethics Committee approved the amendment in October 2024.

Following on from this, I used the data from the 2022 Census to identify areas in London and the surrounding regions with larger Roma populations. I selected seventeen local authorities and contacted all secondary schools within those areas. Three schools initially showed interest, but only one agreed to meet with me. This school had a context-specific setting, with over one hundred Roma students and a dedicated program aimed at supporting their educational outcomes. After meeting with the school team to discuss the project and their work with the Roma community, four student participants were identified. Interviews were scheduled for December 2024; however, one student was suspended on the first day and could no longer take part, leaving a final sample of three participants.

The school was contacted again in January 2025, and they successfully identified four more participants after I agreed to speak at their Roma Day event. Interviews were carried out in February. The ongoing recruitment challenges highlighted that services working with Roma children were at full capacity, and there was little interest or response from local authorities and schools. Upon reflection, I wonder if the historical discrimination and marginalisation faced by the Roma community were being perpetuated in this cycle. Schools and local authorities may not prioritise the issue, and some may have felt the project was too exposing for both students and their practices. Alternatively, schools may have been operating at full capacity, with limited time for extra projects.

In addition, despite having parental, child and SLT consents, logistical challenges with organising the interviews caused further delays. Interviews were arranged through the Roma team, who contacted members of staff to request that students be released from their lessons. However, heads of year and class teachers would not allow students to miss any core lessons, like English and Maths. In the end, I managed to interview all consenting participants however, these barriers delayed the interviews by weeks. While the school was very busy, I reflected on

whether the study's potential to uncover sensitive issues triggered unconscious defence mechanisms, which could have resulted in limiting access to the Roma children's voices.

I have reflected on the reasons why the original charity stopped responding. I wonder if the emotional task of working with a marginalised group, compounded by the loss of a colleague, created an environment that was too challenging to manage the additional emotional strain that comes with research. This may have been the reason for the observed defence mechanism against task anxiety, manifested through resistance to change (Bion, 1962). On the other hand it was also observed that services dedicated to supporting Roma families are underfunded, overstretched, and experience high staff turnover, leaving little capacity for additional projects.

3.8.2 Participant information

In total, seven participants were recruited from one school in one local authority.

Table 1.

Participant details

Pseudo name	Age	Ethnicity	School Year
Bob	15	Slovakian Roma	10
Joanne	16	Slovakian Roma	11
Theo	16	Czech Slovak Roma	11
Logan	13	Romanian Roma	8
Faith	13	Slovakian Roma	8
Billy	13	Slovakian Roma	8
Fabian	15	Slovakian Roma	10

3.8.3   **Context-Specific School**

It is important to note the context-specific environment of the participants, as this was a school with additional Roma support initiatives, which may have influenced the students' experiences. The school is a non-selective academy in one of England's deprived local authorities. It has approximately 1,500 students, of whom around 120 have disclosed their Roma background. The students range in age from 11 to 18, covering years 7 through 11 and the sixth form. The school is highly diverse, with about 50 languages spoken by students and staff. To support Roma students, the school has a dedicated department focused on improving their educational outcomes.

In 2022, the school joined the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showman, and Boater Pledge, demonstrating their commitment to the cause. Key aspects of the pledge involve recognising the unique identities and histories of Roma children, working towards an inclusive environment, supporting access and engagement with higher education, and providing representation and positive role models. The pledge also includes working collaboratively with the Roma community, providing targeted pastoral and educational support and data monitoring of the pupils. The school demonstrates its commitment to the pledge by running a course specifically for its Roma pupils. The course runs twice a year and is supported by a local Roma charity. The course is made up of three sessions designed to support students in exploring their goals and ambitions related to higher education. It includes a mix of presentations, interactive workshops, and visits to colleges and universities.

The Roma department in the school also provides mentorship, interventions, additional opportunities, and they organise cultural events, e.g. International Roma Day. On this day, the school invites Roma speakers such as lawyers and former police officers to inspire students

and highlight Roma representation in academic and public sector careers. University tours are also organised to promote high academic aspirations and help students become familiar with the idea of pursuing higher education. The students are also offered opportunities to mentor younger Roma children in local primary schools.

Additionally, the school employs a Roma-speaking support officer who acts as a bridge to support communication between the school and the Roma families. The Roma support officer also provides pastoral care, mentoring, and targeted academic support. Their efforts are highly valued by both the students and the wider community. These initiatives reflect the school's ongoing commitment to supporting and empowering its Roma students.

3.8.4 Data collection

Data was collected via semi-structured interviews, which lasted around one hour in a quiet room at the school. This method was chosen because it aligns with the qualitative nature, aims, and questions of the study. Braun and Clarke (2019) highlight the strong compatibility between RTA and semi-structured interviews in qualitative research. This approach was particularly suitable for exploring the secondary school experiences of Roma children, as it provided space for them to share and explain their experiences in depth.

Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to be responsive, ask follow-up questions, and explore new avenues based on participant responses (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This structured and flexible approach is particularly suitable when working with children (Punch, 2002). It allows specific topics to be covered while also giving children the space to explore areas they feel are important. This format also supports ethical practice by respecting the child's voice and autonomy (Greene & Hogan, 2005).

Probing questions and prompts were incorporated into the interview schedule (see Appendix C, section 7.3.3) to help draw out more detailed responses, as recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). A semi-structured format was more appropriate than an unstructured one in this context, as it allowed the researcher to gently guide the conversation towards the research questions, while still giving the children the freedom to speak about what mattered to them. This balance was especially important, helping participants stay focused while allowing them to share their experiences in their own way.

3.8.5   **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the interviews on Roma children's secondary school experiences followed the six stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021). The approach provided a flexible way to engage with the data, allowing for generating themes representing the participants' shared experiences and meaning-making. The stages were not strictly linear and often involved moving back and forth between them as new insights were interpreted or themes were refined, in line with Braun and Clarke (2021). Below is an overview of each stage of the analysis.

1. Familiarising Myself with the Data

The first step in my analysis journey involved getting familiar with the data. I transcribed each interview, listening carefully to what the children said and reading through the transcript multiple times. This helped me understand the surface level of their responses and notice deeper meanings, emotions, and cultural context. During this stage, I took notes about anything that stood out or seemed important to me. This allowed me to see the bigger picture of what the

children shared about their school experiences. I also made notes about anything they said that related to their specific school context.

2. Generating Initial Codes

Once I was familiar with the data, I started coding. Analysis was conducted using NVivo software to identify and code key themes in the data. I went through each transcript and labelled key sections of the text with short phrases or words that captured important points or patterns. The codes were created directly from the data, focusing on what the children said rather than applying any pre-set categories. For example, I coded " feeling supported by Roma team" when participants spoke about the help they received from the team and "importance of Roma culture" when participants shared how much they valued their culture. I was picking out the key ideas.

3. Identifying Themes

After coding the data, I began to roughly group similar codes together using online post it notes and arrows to visually organise the codes and show the complexity of how they linked to one another (see Appendix D, section 7.4.4 for code map 1). I then began to refine my themes. This step involved looking for patterns or connections between the different codes and grouping them under one theme (see Appendix D, section 7.4.5 for code map 2). For example, I grouped several codes about being treated stereotypically and unfairly by teachers together under the provisional theme of "unfair treatment by others". I later refined his theme in stage 4 to "racism and discrimination". I also noticed a few codes showing the importance of positive relationships with staff, peers and community. I created a provisional theme called the "importance of relationships", which was later refined to "relationships & community" in stage

4. I spent time reflecting and making sure the themes were grounded in the children's experiences and linked back to my research questions.

4. Reviewing Themes

Once the themes were identified, I revisited the coded extracts to check whether the themes accurately captured what participants said. I considered the emotional tone and language used by participants and how this fit with the research question. For example, I reviewed the theme of "pressure ". (See Appendix D, section 7.4.6)

During the review, I reflected on potential overlaps with themes, such as relationships and well-being, social and academic pressure, and I worked to ensure that each remained a distinct and meaningful theme. I did this by reviewing the core organising concept of each theme. 'Social and academic pressure' centred on external expectations placed on Roma children around academic success and school engagement. Whereas 'relationships and community' focused on the importance of interpersonal connections and belonging, and 'well-being' captured emotional experiences such as feelings of exclusion and low self-esteem. While some areas of overlap naturally existed, I gave particular attention to maintaining the integrity of each theme's focus. This step helped to strengthen and clarify the themes before finalising them.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

In this step, I focused on clearly defining each theme. I took time to think about what each theme really meant and how it contributed to the bigger story of the children's secondary school experiences. I also made sure each theme had a clear, simple name that captured its main idea, for example, "Ethnic & Cultural Identity" or " Dreams, Aspirations & Interests". This process

helped me to understand the core message of each theme, how it linked back to the children's experiences and my research questions.

6. Writing the Report

The final step of RTA was writing up the findings. I explained each theme using quotes from the children's accounts to demonstrate how their experiences fit within each theme. I connected the themes to the research question and existing literature in the discussion, showing how they shed light on the experiences of Roma children in secondary school. I stayed true to the children's voices by being transparent about how I interpreted their stories and linking everything back to the data itself.

Reflexivity: Throughout the analysis process, I reflected on my choices. I remained aware of my assumptions, staying open to how the data shaped the theme. I maintained a personal research journal, documenting my reflections, decisions, and questions that arose throughout the process. Regular discussions during research supervision also provided a valuable space to explore my interpretations and ensure that I remained grounded in the participants' voices. (See Appendix D, section 7.4.3 for a reflexive journal entry example)

3.8.6 Quality of research

I ensured the credibility and validity of the data by applying Yardley's (2008) criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research. These criteria include sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance.

Sensitivity to the context is very important when researching marginalised groups, such as Roma children. I demonstrated awareness of the socio-cultural, historical, and educational

contexts that shape their experiences in secondary schools by developing a deep understanding of the historical marginalisation of the Roma community. In the introduction, I outlined the socio-cultural and historical context of the Roma community to provide a foundational understanding for the research. I also ensured the literature review focused on studies that offered relevant insight into these contexts, recognising the barriers Roma children face within educational settings. I approached the participants with care, ensuring their voices were respected and they felt safe sharing their personal experiences.

In addition, the sensitivity was reflected in the awareness of power dynamics during the interviews. I aimed to foster an environment where the participants felt comfortable and empowered to speak openly about their experiences. I did this by telling the participants that there was no right or wrong answer and that they could withdraw from the interview at any point. I mentioned that I also had a Roma background and was a student. I did this with the hope that the children would perceive me as a less authoritative figure. I attempted to reduce the power dynamic by dressing casually, sitting on a chair similar to the participants', and providing refreshments to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Commitment and rigour were demonstrated through a thoughtful and systematic approach to participant selection, data collection, and analysis. During the recruitment phase, I followed up persistently with local authorities and Roma charities through multiple emails and calls. When responses remained limited, I expanded my search criteria to include secondary schools and continued to follow up consistently with them as well.

I applied the principles of RTA as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), ensuring that the data was analysed methodologically, in line with their recommendations. Participants were

purposively selected to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria and could provide rich, meaningful insights into the secondary school experiences of Roma children. I fully engaged with participants during interviews, using follow-up questions and prompts to elicit deeper reflections on their experiences. Rigour was also demonstrated by maintaining regular supervision throughout the research process, ensuring that all stages were conducted in line with ethical and methodological standards, e.g. examples of codes, themes and interpretations were brought to supervision for sense checking and reflection.

Transparency was demonstrated by clearly outlining the participant selection process, data collection, and analysis. An account of how participants were approached and recruited was provided, ensuring the process was ethical and transparent. During the analysis, I explained clearly how themes were identified from the data, providing examples to show how the analysis was based on the participants' accounts (see Appendix D, section 7.4.2 for an example of coded extract).

In terms of coherence, Yardley (2008) highlights that interrater reliability is not essential in qualitative research, as the aim is not to uncover a single objective truth. Instead, coherence is about producing a narrative consistent with the researcher's theoretical and interpretive approach. The current study followed a relativist ontology, which assumes that experiences exist independently but can only be understood through the subjective perspectives of both the researcher and participants. In line with RTA's emphasis on reflexivity, I acknowledge and reflect on my positionality, making it transparent how this may have influenced the interpretation of the data. This reflective approach supports coherence in the research process and ensures that the analysis remains consistent with my ontological and epistemological

stance. Coherence was also demonstrated through reflections on the internal consistency of themes and how they fit with the data and research questions.

The impact and importance of this research stemmed from its efforts to address a clear gap in the literature around Roma children's experiences in secondary education. There was a lack of robust research that centred on their voices and explored their school life in depth. This study aimed to shed light on those experiences, offering insights that could inform future educational practice, particularly in how Roma children are supported within secondary school settings.

This research has the potential to inform practitioners and educators about the lived experiences of Roma children in secondary schools. By gaining a deeper understanding of these experiences, schools can create more inclusive and supportive environments for Roma students. Furthermore, the research is important as it aimed to amplify the voices of Roma children, allowing them to share their stories and perspectives, contributing to broader discussions on equity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness in education.

3.8.7 Personal Reflexivity

RTA embraces and encourages the researcher's subjectivity and sees their role as integral to the meaning-making throughout the analysis process. There is no expectation that the same data will be coded, and themes will be generated similarly by different researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

As a Roma researcher exploring the secondary school experiences of Roma children, it was important for me to remain aware of how my own identity and experiences might influence the research. Sharing a cultural background with my participants offers valuable insight and fosters

trust, helping to create a more comfortable environment for them to share their experiences. My background influenced the assumptions I made based on my experiences and those of other Roma individuals I know.

I have attempted to remain reflexive throughout the research process, constantly questioning how my background might shape the way I collected and interpreted the data. I applied Yardley's (2008) criteria by remaining transparent throughout the process and I have tried to be clear and honest about how the research was conducted and interpreted. I reflected on and documented my positionality throughout the study, using a reflexive journal to record moments where my Roma identity might have influenced my interpretation of the participants' responses (see Appendix D, section 7.4.3). I took time to examine whether any aspects of the analysis reflected my own experiences in supervision, ensuring that the root of each theme originated from their voices and perspectives. This approach allowed me to remain open and provide a transparent account of how my views might have shaped the research.

I have also attempted to remain coherent and consistent, ensuring that my interpretation of the data aligned with the principles of RTA. As a Roma researcher, I felt a strong sense of responsibility to represent the children's voices authentically through my own lens. I aimed to provide an honest understanding of Roma children's experiences in secondary schools.

3.8.8 Ethical Considerations

The Tavistock and Portman Ethics Committee (TREC) granted approval for the research, and it was conducted accordingly (see Appendix C, section 7.3.1). Written consent was obtained from the school's senior leadership team (SLT), participants, and their parents. An information sheet outlining the research was sent to the school (see Appendix C, section 7.3.3), followed

by a phone call and an in-person meeting with the school's Roma team. The school introduced a selection bias by contacting parents of students who were already well-known to their department and receptive to the support offered by the Roma team.

Information sheets and consent forms were provided to those who verbally agreed. Although the information sheets stated that parental consent was not required for children aged sixteen or older, the school insisted on obtaining consent from all parents. The Roma-speaking support officer verbally translated the information sheets and consent forms for the parents. This approach ensured that parents provided fully informed consent while also addressing any language or literacy barriers. Parents were contacted first so that they could decide whether they wanted their children to take part. Once parents provided consent, the study was explained to the children by the Roma support worker, and the children then gave their consent. Consent forms and information sheets were provided for them to take home.

As the children were discussing potentially challenging or distressing experiences at school as Roma students, I took steps to ensure their emotional well-being was prioritised throughout the interview process. At the beginning of the interview, I spent five minutes introducing myself, reviewing the information sheet, confirming that consent was still valid, and allowing participants to ask any questions. I reminded participants about the right to withdraw from the study up to the time that the interviews were to be transcribed. I took a few minutes to share information about myself, my cultural background, and my reasons for researching this area. This approach allowed me to build rapport and make participants feel at ease.

After each interview, I allocated time for debriefing, giving the children an opportunity to reflect on their experience and discuss any emotional responses they may have had. I assessed

whether any follow-up support was necessary by asking the children how they felt. Participants received a well-being support services list in their information sheet, and I signposted the students to these resources at the end of the interviews (see Appendix C, section 7.3.4). However, the participants indicated that no further action was necessary. To provide further support, I asked a trusted staff member from the school's Roma team to check in with the children after the interviews; I also encouraged the children to speak with their parents. If a child expressed more serious distress, I planned to signpost them to appropriate services, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or Childline, whose contact information was provided to students, parents and staff in the information sheet.

I had planned to report any safeguarding concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), whose contact details were provided by the school reception. Additionally, if a child became visibly upset during the interview, I would pause the session, take the time to explore their feelings, and assess whether they wished to continue or end the interview. This approach ensured that I prioritised the safety and well-being of the participants and any concerns were reported appropriately, in line with the school's safeguarding policy.

Furthermore, I ensured that confidentiality and anonymity were also carefully considered in my planning. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a private, confidential space within the school to ensure participants were in a familiar and safe environment. Interviews were transcribed, with all identifiable information, including names and locations, removed to ensure the children's anonymity. At the start of the interview, I explained the limits of confidentiality, clarifying that if any safeguarding issues were disclosed, I would follow the school's safeguarding procedures and inform the DSL where necessary.

The information sheets provided to parents and children outlined that all data and audio recordings would be securely stored following legal guidelines and the University's Data Protection Policy. Microsoft Teams was used to transcribe the audio recordings. The service uses a secure, encrypted file transfer system, which adheres to legal standards for data handling.

These approaches ensured that the research was carried out ethically with the children's well-being in mind. By providing a safe, predictable and supportive environment, I wanted to ensure the participants' voices were amplified while minimising any potential risks or harm associated with discussing sensitive topics.

4   Findings

4.1   Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to present the findings of the study, following the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) process, and to answer the research questions:

How do Roma children represent their experience of school?

How do Roma children represent being part of the Roma community, and how does this influence their school experience?

The chapter begins with an overview of the themes identified in the analysis, followed by an exploration of each theme, illustrated with data extracts from the interviews. Pseudonyms will be used throughout to protect the participants' identities. While some contextual information will be provided to enhance understanding, a more in-depth analysis of the findings will be presented in the discussion chapter that follows.

4.2   Overview of Themes

The thematic map in Figure 2 shows the seven themes identified during the analysis process.

Figure 2.

Thematic Map
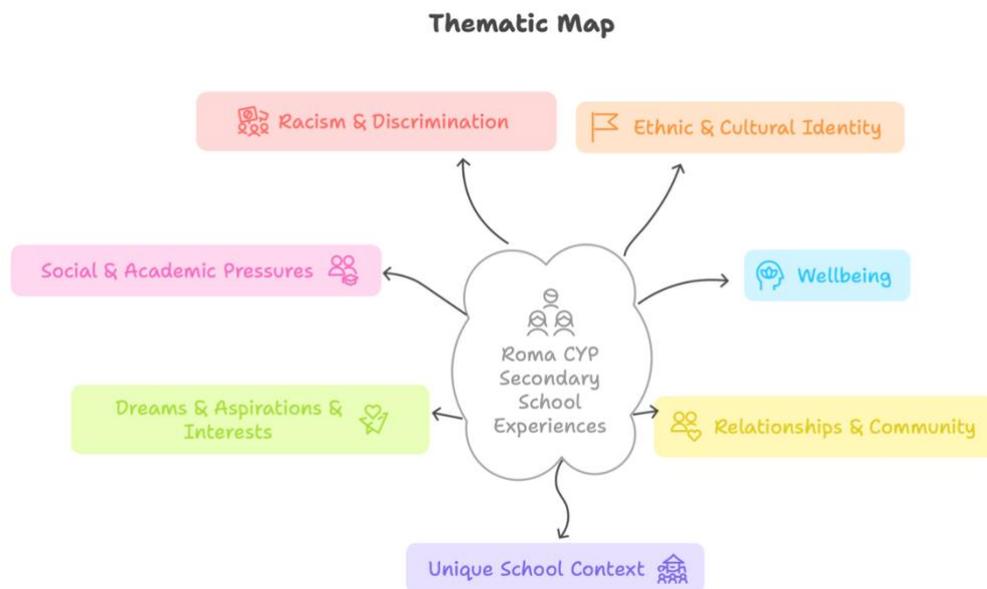
The map captures the key areas shaping the secondary school experiences of Roma children and young people (CYP). These interconnected themes reflect the complex and varied factors influencing Roma CYP's secondary educational journeys.

4.3   Summary of Themes

Table 2 below provides a summary of each theme.

Table 2.

Themes

Theme	Summary
Racism & Discrimination	This theme highlights the prejudice and unequal treatment experienced by Roma children, both within the educational system and in wider society, including the historical discrimination and marginalisation their community has faced.
Ethnic & Cultural Identity	This theme explores how the Roma children understood and expressed their Roma heritage and culture in the context of their school and broader community life.
Relationships & Community	This theme focuses on the importance of relationships and community support inside and outside of school and how these factors influence the Roma children's school experiences.
Unique School Context	This theme looks at the specific conditions of the school environment that felt as unique in shaping the Roma children's experiences.

Social & Academic Pressure	This theme explores the internal and external pressures the Roma children face in school, including academic and behavioural expectations, peer relationships, and the influence of parental, cultural, and societal expectations on their school experience.
Well-being	This theme covers the mental and emotional wellbeing of the Roma children in relation to their school experience.
Dreams & Ambitions & Interests	This theme explores the hopes, future aspirations and interests of these Roma children, in relation to their education and life beyond school.

4.4   [1]Theme 1 - Racism & Discrimination

The students' experience of racism and discrimination in school and broader society was identified in the dataset.

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[1] Following Braun and Clarke (2022), (...) indicated where text was removed for clarity without changing meaning

... Indicates a pause in speech

4.4.1 Historical Racism

Faith discussed historical racism, referencing the Roma Genocide during the Holocaust and sharing how it impacted her feelings in school. The school hosted an assembly about aspirational Roma people and the Roma Genocide. There was a sense of sadness, grief and desire for acknowledgement of Roma history when Faith spoke about the Holocaust.

"We had an assembly about Roma. Yeah. And, like, it was about how they were killed and stuff. In the genocide (…) My partner next to me who wasn't clapping. Like, she was laughing at the pictures of (aspirational Roma) people (…) I was like, but if this was your culture, you'd be clapping, right? (…) You're not going to clap about this? These people died. (…) I got so mad, I just started crying" (Faith)

"They never say, and Roma people were also murdered in the Holocaust. (…) We don't ever get any acknowledgement that we were there too. (…) I just hate it. Like, this is my culture."
(Faith)

4.4.2 Negative Teacher-Student Relationships

Multiple participants focused on their negative experiences with teachers and how they felt unwelcome, stereotyped and mistreated by them because of their ethnic background.

There was a feeling of rejection and alienation, alongside disappointment and inadequacy, that teachers did not view them as 'smart', which they spoke about in their experiences with teachers.

"The teachers maybe they have like an idea of us not being that smart so maybe I'm just trying to prove them wrong (...) They just don't have good like energy around you." (Bob)

"When I moved, (...) the teachers didn't want to give me work" (Faith)

"Because the teachers don't want me there, I can tell" (Billy)

A frequent sense of disrespect was described, along with feelings of being treated differently from non-Roma peers by teachers.

"They don't respect you or (...) value you in a lesson because sometimes just sitting there they're not like engaging with you. Maybe they're engaging with other people but not you. (...) Because we're Roma (...) because we're not English, maybe when we talk in lesson, like in our language." (Bob)

"Some teachers, like English teachers, sometimes they just don't like you. (...) They have always something to say to you. (...) For example, when I was in year 7, I wanted to go to the toilet, the teacher didn't let me, and an English person asked her, she let him."
(Fabian)

There was a sense of feeling persecuted when Fabian shared about his experiences of being 'targeted' by a teacher.

"There were four or five Roma students in there. She didn't used to get along with none of us. But the other students that was in the classroom, everyone, she got along with them. (…) We was all saying in the classroom. Why are you always targeting us?" (Fabian)

I asked Billy if he thought that he would have a different experience if he were White British. There was a sense of sadness in his response, where he felt that he would be included if he were.

"Yeah (…). they'd make me included, like, I'd feel included."

(Billy)

The students felt they were being targeted with punitive measures in the school, feeling *"Isolation and not getting along with teachers"* (Fabian), with feelings of being excluded from the classroom and the threats of exclusion and suspensions as part of the rhetoric.

"He won't even be talking about the work.....He'll be talking about some dumb stuff like you're gonna get permanently excluded soon (…)I only be suspended a lot." (Billy)

The students described how they felt invisible, or a *"sort of problem in the class"* (Billy) and how this led to feelings of being stereotyped and rejected from school (Fabian)

"They act like I'm not there. (…) Like I'm sort of a problem in the class."

(Billy)

"Yeah, but now in school, like, I'm being more accused of things that I didn't do, because they know that, and, I'm, like, a "naughty boy". (...) They just always accuse me of things."

(Fabian)

A feeling of desperation for support and the lack of teachers' response led to feelings of alienation in the school environment, as described by Faith, which later linked to the social and academic pressure experienced by the children.

"Give us more attention. More attention. Stop picking on us and help us. Yeah. Just start helping. We're not aliens." (Faith)

4.4.3   Negative Perceptions of The Roma Community

Participants also discussed how Roma individuals are perceived and mistreated by society. Faith explained that her peers would often mock Roma students who lived in a particular area, as that neighbourhood was known for having a large Roma community. This created a sense of shame and embarrassment about how people spoke about the community living on that road.

*"Everybody lives there. A lot of people are racist towards us because they say, (...) where do you live? ****** Road, right? (...) The most discrimination you can hear here in ****** to Roma people is ***** Road"* (Faith)

There were feelings of frustration and sadness about being racially stereotyped negatively and mistreated by society.

"People would say we're dirty (...) I hate that. (...) So dirty, all they do is steal. All they do is mess their houses. (...) all they do is wear fake clothes"

(Faith)

"It's not feeling good because once I was in a shop and they told me that I was stealing, but I was just looking around. (...) They said they're going to call the police on us." (Bob)

"People are prejudiced when it comes to us they think that we're thieves, we're robbers, we ruin everything. I think that is the thing that frustrates me the most." (Joanne)

"People say like we steal a lot." (Joanne)

"Some have been in the past quite rude about it like calling us like a beast" (Joanne)

A feeling of desensitisation, lack of outrage or surprise at the mistreatment of the Roma community was captured in Logan's and Faith's quote, where they felt that the community was "used to it by now".

"Were really used to it by now, I think. But, like, people just have something, you know…bad to say" (Logan)

"People judge you. (...) It happens everywhere, but, like, obviously, that's how it goes, I guess." (Faith)

Low societal expectations for the community and negative self-identity formation were captured by Logan and Theo. Their ethnic background automatically made them "wrong" and deserving of "hate".

"I've seen on social media, (...) (Roma people trying) to start a community, like, a business, (...) People have, like, something bad to say about that,(...) it's because you're gypsy, it's because you're wrong." (Logan)

"We get like hate racially" (Theo)

4.4.4   Internalised Racism and Its Effects on Self-Perception

Participants illustrated how external racist narratives can influence their self-perception and their view of the community. Faith discussed the underachievement of Roma students in school, which has contributed to her feelings of frustration towards the community.

"And in my head, it's, like, you're all dumb." (Faith)

There was also a sense of frustration from Theo towards the community due to their actions in school, such as 'being rude', 'skiving' and talking in their language. These feelings mirrored the views of the school towards Roma students. Theo felt this behaviour was inappropriate and a within-student problem. He felt the Roma pupils should do better.

"Some of them, they can be quite rude, they can be like bad in school...like they're just not getting along with school." (Theo)

"They skive a lot in school. (…) I don't like skiving, just go to lesson simple. Go to lesson.

Learn, don't mess about" (Theo)

Theo was discussing how the students speak Romanes (Roma Language) rather than English, and he felt they should speak in English in school because they are in England. There was a sense of frustration that they were using Romanes.

"It's a good language for family and friends. It's like you know you are here your in

England…. So come on." (Theo)

There was also a feeling of embarrassment about how the students behaved outside of school. Billy discussed how he believed all young Roma people got up to mischief in their communities.

"And like out of school they do some dumb stuff too. Like getting up to silly things." (Billy)

Faith also showed feelings of rejection and competitiveness from individuals in the Roma community. She describes her experience as a fully Roma individual facing colourism within her community. She felt that those of mixed heritage treated her more harshly or believed they were superior to her because of her full Roma background.

"I've never been in an argument with someone, like, fully Roma. It's always been (…) people

who say, oh, I'm quarter Roma Slovakian, (…) They think they're better" (Faith)

4.4.5 Racial Discrimination in Home Countries

Bob expressed feelings of desperation for a better life and pity for those still living in his home country, where marginalisation persists. Bob highlighted the extreme poverty that their families had experienced in their homeland. There was also a sense of disappointment when Bob and Billy spoke about the racism, they both experienced when they returned to their home countries, which reinforced their outsider status.

"They find you like different, (…) the Slovakian people. (…) Once I went (…) bowling. And they kicked us out because we was Roma. (…) and a police officer just came yeah he was like what are you doing (…) you gotta go" (Bob)

"All the houses are broken (…) You just feel bad for them. Even like don't have money for bread." (Bob)

"My parents want me and my sister to (…) have a good job and not (…) struggle how they did (…) in Slovakia" (Bob)

"I went to Czech, we were on a slide (…) They were like oh get out you brown people (…) this and that. In Czech Republic (…) we were the only brown people there" (Billy)

4.4.6 Experience of Poverty

There was a sense of embarrassment and shame when Faith explained that she was experiencing financial hardship in the UK and required support from the Roma team with free school meals.

"My mum, she's not really doing well with money and stuff, so she helped me with school

dinners." (Faith)

4.5   Theme 2 – Ethnic & Cultural Identity

4.5.1   Importance of Culture

The data has shown the importance of Roma identity and culture centred around family, cultural food, religious and non-religious celebrations, music and the Roma language.

There was pride and joy when the participants shared aspects of their culture that they enjoyed.

"Food, I love everything Roma. Especially the music." (Billy)

"I actually love this community, like, I just love being (Roma)" (Faith)

A feeling of belonging and inclusivity was evident when Joanne spoke about Roma Day, an event the school hosts annually and invites Roma speakers and families to celebrate the students' cultural identity.

"It's a day where we celebrate the Roma culture. We have dancing, we have music, (...) we

have parents coming in, people from the community, it's very inclusive." (Joanne)

There was also a sense of belonging to the community when Fabian, Bob and Theo discussed their religious and cultural celebrations centred around music. They felt very positive and happy to be part of a community that values family and celebrates together.

"Like, in my family, we do, like, really big Christmases and Easters, and it's always, like, parties and get-togethers (...) Famous singers, they make food, they make tables, stuff like that. Mm-hmm, yeah. And, like, they make great music" (Fabian)

"Maybe when you're all together celebrating something like Christmas, that's a big thing for us" (Bob)

"Yeah, loads of musical talent. Yeah, yeah. Like there's loads of Roma going around playing music, having fun with family. Playing music on the guitar. drums. Piano." (Theo)

4.5.2   Importance of the Roma Language

There were, however, also feelings of frustration when the students wanted to speak their language, but this was suppressed by teachers in the school, as noted by Joanne and Bob. Theo showed a sense of pride and satisfaction when he spoke about the Roma language being a 'secret' that was not accessible to non-Roma individuals, and he later described the community as unique for this reason.

"As Roma people we don't like to talk in English we like to talk in our own language and I feel like some of the teachers, (...) can find it disrespectful because some want only English to be spoken in the classroom." (Joanne)

"The teachers always say you should be speaking English" (Bob)

"I like our language, (...) because as the sayings are every Roma keeps his language as a secret. It's like just for us the community." (Theo)

Theo explained how the language made him feel comfortable, as it was simple to understand, whereas English was more complicated.

"It's understandable (...) it's like really simplified. (...) like simplified more than English."

(Theo)

4.5.3 Cultural Difference

Faith spoke to the lack of cultural understanding that she experienced in school from the staff, which made her feel misunderstood and irritated.

"They don't understand where we come from and, like what we do, how it is for us, how our parents are to us, (...) there are some, like, cultural differences that they don't really understand. They don't understand us very well." (Faith)

Cultural differences in communication styles, as well as the frequent misinterpretation of the Roma participants' communication, were highlighted. Participants shared the understanding that Roma people tend to be more passionate, emotionally expressive, and direct in their language. However, their communication style was often misunderstood by teachers and viewed through a negative lens.

"I think they see the Roma community, they probably think that were quite argumentative"

(Joanne)

"Because we're loud and we talk like um straightforward" (Bob)

"When they're talking like very loudly (...) That's just how they are." (Bob)

"When it's a lot of people (...) like we're all in a circle just talking, they might think we're gonna have a fight or we're arguing" (Bob)

"Teachers might react in a different way. They would think that something is going wrong" (Bob)

"People might find it offensive like when they're talking like very loudly. Yeah. That's just how they are." (Bob)

"They think we can have a fight or something" (Billy)

"And some people might see that as (...) they're arguing. (...) But they're not arguing. That's just how they communicate." (Logan)

4.5.4   Views on Gender Roles

Participants held modern and traditional views toward cultural gender roles and how this related to education (Joanne, Faith & Bob). There was a feeling of freedom of choice that was expressed by Joanne and Faith in regards to their future and career choices as Roma women.

"It's modern age (...) there's less expectations now than there used to be. (...) you kind of do your own thing like if you want to go into like big education you can if you don't want to do that and you just want to get a husband you can. I feel like it's very relaxed now" (Joanne)

Joanne also discussed the importance of the Roma community teaching her the way of life as a Roma woman, and there was a sense of honour that her community would support her choices regarding her future as a wife, mother, educated person or as all three.

"Like how to live like a peaceful life. As a woman, how to live your life, like the life with the kids and how to treat your family and all that. As a mother or a wife or an educated person."

(Joanne)

Before the interview began, Faith shared her aspirations in wanting to become a forensic psychologist, which her family had supported. In the quote below, she expresses a sense of fear and self-doubt, as she had never seen a Roma woman working as a psychologist and questioned whether she could achieve that goal.

"It's so hard, like, it makes my goals go down on me, because, like, in my head, it's, like... I don't see no, like, Roma people going high." (Faith)

Bob reflected on the equal educational expectations his parents held for both him and his younger sister. While he felt pressure to meet their academic standards, he also appreciated the fairness in knowing those expectations applied to his sister as well.

"I think they want me to succeed they want me to have a life for my kids" (Bob)

When Bob was asked if he felt that these expectations were the same for him and his sister, he responded that they were.

"Yeah, I think they are the same" (Bob)

"My parents want a better life for me and my sister" (Bob)

There was also a sense of defending aspects of the culture that were more traditional, where women played the role of homemakers and nurturers. This was evident when Faith said this is "our culture" and our "tradition".

"This is our culture (...) our tradition (...) Cleaning the garden, cleaning, housewives, (...)That's, like, really important in our community. Learning how to cook, learning how to clean" (Faith)

4.5.5   Historical Roma Migration

The data also highlighted the cultural origins, migration experiences, and diversity within the Roma community. Participants expressed a sense of uniqueness and difference, but also feelings of exclusion from the societies they had settled.

"We're scattered around Europe. Because we originate from northern India and were just around Europe. (...) We got people from everywhere and like Romania, Czech, Slovakia, Bulgaria." (Theo)

"Sometimes people say I'm from India. Oh. I'm not, miss. Roma people come from there, like, way back. Originate from India" (Fabian)

"Like they migrated and was never included in one country" (Joanne)

4.5.6   Diversity in the Roma Community

Logan conveyed feelings of frustration that all Roma people were often viewed as the same. He felt that the diversity within the Roma community was overlooked and that their identity was more complex than people realised. For instance, being Slovakian Roma differed from being Romanian Roma; though there are similarities, the differences are rarely acknowledged.

"I'm, like, Romanian, gypsy. (…) (other Roma in different countries) they have similar words, but it's different" (Logan)

There was a sense of curiosity when Fabian discussed the cultural similarities between the Roma and aspects of Indian culture.

"I've noticed many similarities. (…) The similarities with the language and sometimes with the culture as well. Things like they believe in and, (…) the flag (the sign in the centre) they have in the middle is quite similar to our one" (Fabian)

4.6   Theme 3 Relationships & Community

4.6.1   Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

The data set highlighted the crucial role of positive relationships with teachers and peers, along with the importance of community support for Roma students.

There was a real sense of valuing positive interactions, support and moments of connection with teachers by Billy, Fabian, Faith, Joanne, Logan and Theo. These positive interactions created feelings of belonging and a desire to remain in the lessons (Billy), where support was offered because their needs were known.

"What I enjoy in school is when my teachers understand me" (Faith)

"She's kind to me. Like sometimes I'll be bad (...) but she'll just be like to me ...I want the old (Billy) back. And then it'll make me like think about it, and I'll be good" (Billy)

"She'll see me struggling and she'll help me. I don't even need to put my hand up she'll come to me straight away. (...) She'll make me feel good about myself (Billy)

"Makes me want to, you know, have a good relationship with the teachers, like work more too" (Billy)

"I used to always make jokes with her. (...). She always talks to me. (...) she treats me good. (...) she says she likes Roma students." (Fabian)

"I put my hand up (...) she's always there like to help. And she understands (...) what I need" (Theo)

The teacher-student relationship was very important to Bob. When he felt supported by teachers, this influenced his motivation and behaviour in the classroom. He described it as 'a big part' when teachers were nice to him.

"It's just how you connect with a teacher that how's they vibe with you too" (Bob)

"Because if a teacher's not nice to you, you're going to react in a way that you don't want to"
(Bob)

Logan and Joanne expressed how they felt about the Roma team, who actively advocated for them. There was a real sense of care when they explained the opportunities they gained due to their support.

"I was very close with her (Roma Leader) she was very supportive she would always be there for every student Roma student" (Joanne)

"They help you out a lot for all the time you're here (…) they give you lots of opportunities"
(Joanne)

"They helped me like with talking with my mum. They helped me with going on the trips (…)
They helped me (…) talk about my future." (Logan)

4.6.2   The Importance of Peer Relationships

The data also demonstrated the importance of Roma and non-Roma peer relationships in school. There was a feeling of comfort, safety and community when Bob, Joanne, Fabian, Billy, and Faith spoke about their Roma peers in school.

"When I joined there was a lot of Roma people and we (…) became friends we talked to each other, there's like a big group of us (…) I could always count on my (Roma) friends" (Bob)

"My other friend she's Roma we were friends since children so we're very close"

(Joanne)

"It's good to have family going to the same school you go to" (Fabian)

"Because the only thing that helps me (…) is to go meet my (Roma) friends." (Billy)

"In class, (…) we can sit together (…) no one will hate. (…) (they) understand me very well.

(Faith)

Faith spoke about the transition to her new secondary school and the significant positive impact it had on her well-being. She expressed a sense of relief at being surrounded by peers who were more like her.

"The biggest difference I've ever had. (…) It's such a change in my life. Like, it just makes (…) my mental health feel way (…) better." (Faith)

There was a feeling of fun, belonging and motivation to attend school and meet friends, which is part of the support for each other noted by Faith, Joanne, Logan and Theo.

"There's some fun times that you can actually enjoy in school because that's, like, where you meet all your friends." (Faith)

"My friend group, (…) I'm very close with them we support each other very well especially with like school work also outside of school, problems" (Joanne)

Logan was asked if friends make school worth coming to, and he responded with.

"They make it worth it" (Logan)

"When I've achieved something they cheer, it makes me happy. And they support me (...)
when I want to achieve something. And it's like, motivates me, yeah." (Theo)

Theo also conveyed a sense of inclusivity, sharing that he has friends from diverse cultural backgrounds and values the importance of learning about others.

"I got many friends, like from many different places I chill with one English guy. (...) He is
really, like, enjoyable to hang out with." (Theo)

4.6.3   Importance of Roma Community

The data also showed the importance of inclusivity and community support inside and outside of school for Roma pupils.

There was a sense of empathy for other people's experiences and eagerness to help people in need when Billy, Joanne and Theo shared the values of the Roma community.

"The Roma community (...) they're good. They will (...) help you." (Billy)

"I think because Roma people haven't been included (...) they migrated and was never
included in one country. (...) So I think that we kind of learnt from that to not do it with other
people, instead to be inclusive because we don't want the same thing happening to others"

(Joanne)

"They want to give forward (...) They put themselves in their shoes and they know what it feels like. So, they want to help." (Theo)

Logan, Billy, and Faith expressed a strong sense of belonging, love, and comfort when reflecting on their experiences within the Roma community.

"We're all Romanian Gypsy (...) So you've got a big community. Yeah! Big community"

(Logan)

"Like we're all family here..(..) They (...) support each other and look after each other (...) I'll just see someone that's Roma. And then I'll become friends with them (...) its easy."

(Billy)

"We're a big community and we all, like, love each other (...) I actually love this community"

(Faith)

"Literally, we're all family. (...) The community, Gypsy, we're all family. (...) Because we all go through the same stuff And (...) families, really important." (Faith)

There was a feeling of satisfaction and pride when Joanne spoke about her family gatherings where older and younger generations listen to each other and treat each other with kindness love and respect.

"When we are celebrating, we are there to listen to one another (...) we get to meet older generations and younger generations (...) we talk with them, (...) they give us advice, we give them advice" (Joanne)

Joanne, Bob, and Theo expressed feelings of loss and sadness when asked how they would feel if their community were to disappear.

"Very sad very confused I think I'd um I'd lose my sense of belonging."
"My community has taught me the way of life" (Joanne)

"Your people are gone. Like you wouldn't know who to talk to" (Bob)

"That's sad. Sad cause I don't get to hang out with them no more. Like I don't get to talk like how I want to say things" (Theo)

4.7 Theme 4 – Unique School Context

4.7.1 Cultural Affirmation and School Belonging

Participants expressed a sense of uniqueness about their school because of the support and sense of belonging they experienced. They also showed appreciation for the Roma team's efforts in organising cultural events, such as Roma Day and Roma Month celebrations, which played an important role in recognising and valuing their cultural identity.

"It makes me feel way better. (...) It makes me feel like this school's for me. (...) This school's good." (Faith)

"(The school) gives you a lot of opportunities with the international team (…)

they help you out a lot (…) they do like uh celebrations for (…) our background. There's also

like Roma month (…) they celebrate" (Bob)

"We celebrate here." (Fabian)

There was a feeling of excitement from Faith when she spoke about dancing on Roma Day.

"They have, like, dances, like, all the girls and, like, we just dance. And that's my favourite

thing ever. I just love it." (Faith)

Fabian and Bob also described a sense of support and mutual respect with the Roma team,

which contributed to their feelings of inclusion within the school.

"They're all, like, nice to me. I speak to them. They're respectful to me." (Fabian)

Fabian was asked what made him feel supported in school, and he responded with:

"The (Roma) international team." (Fabian)

Bob also had a similar response when asked what made him feel included in school.

"The Roma team (…) they do (…) celebrations for like um our background" (Bob)

"The international (Roma) team like I said they help you like if you have any problems, you

just go to them, they'll help you" (Bob)

"They give you a lot of stuff like this like to help you" (Bob)

Joanne and Logan expressed pride in their school, noting that it was "unique" and stood out from others because it recognised and respected their cultural identity and offered them additional opportunities.

"I think it's unique (…) This school is not like the other schools (…) students from other schools, especially Roma ones, they don't feel recognised at all" (Joanne)

"This school has brought us to universities, (…), they bring in (Roma) lawyers, police officers, (…) to talk to us about our opportunities and what we can do." (Joanne)

"I feel, like, it's something that you never get (…) in another school. (…) it makes me happy in this school." (Logan)

4.7.2   Impact of Roma Support Staff

There was a sense of care and protection that the students were experiencing with one member of the Roma Team. This member took up the role of advocate and mentor for the Roma students. She also provided a sense of inspiration to them as someone from their cultural background. Bob, Billy, Faith, and Fabian spoke with fondness about this staff member, whom they viewed not just as a teacher but also as a friend or even as family.

"She gives you good advice. She helps you (…) if you're in a bad spot." (Bob)

Bob was asked if she was like a mentor? He responded:

"She is. I think to all of us" (Bob)

"She was a flight attendant. I would want to be that." (Bob)

"That's my auntie. (…) She'll tell me like behave (…) she'll make me realise what I'm doing wrong." (Billy)

When Fabian was asked if he had a good relationship with this member of staff he responded:

"Yeah, make jokes with her sometimes as well." (Fabian)

Faith spoke at length about how supported she felt by this staff member, describing a strong sense of safety shared by her and her family. This sense of security stemmed from the staff member's understanding of her hardships and their provision of both practical and emotional support.

"I love her so much. (…) she's so, like, understandable. (…) she helps every Roma kid (…) Everywhere I go down the hall, she's helping someone who's (Roma) (…) She's like a mum, (…) like an auntie to us (…) someone who I can trust here (...) She helps." (Faith)

"She was helping me with (…) school dinners and stuff, because (…) my mum, she's not really doing well with money". (Faith)

"My mum (…) she doesn't really understand English properly. And she can't really speak well and (...) My mum feels more comfortable with her" (Faith)

4.7.3 Cultural Diversity in School

The data set also highlighted the importance of the school's culturally diverse context. Participants expressed feeling safe and included in a setting where cultural diversity was present and embraced.

"There's a lot of different nationalities in school. I think there's like 52 languages spoken here (…) I think that is what makes us unique. It's a positive thing." (Joanne)

"Half of my friends are Muslims. My friends are Christian. (…) Some of them are Atheist. (…) One of my best friends is from Morocco and my other one's from England." (Logan)

Bob, Faith, and Theo highlighted the importance of learning about different cultures and ways of life. They expressed a strong sense of inclusion, feeling that the school's diversity fostered respect for various cultural identities.

"There's a mix of different nationalities (…) I think it's better like there's a lot of people from different backgrounds. You might learn from a lot of people." (Bob)

"In my friend group, we're all mixed (…) it's so good. I just want to be able to learn their cultures as well" (Faith)

"The school (…) It's like really diverse. (…) There's like people from basically everywhere. (…) You get to know about other people's cultures (…) because everyone's different" (Theo)

4.8   Theme 5 – Social & Academic Pressure

Participants discussed the social and academic pressures they felt from parents, community, school, peers, as well as the broader society.

4.8.1   **Pressure to Succeed for Family and Community**

Bob expressed fear around meeting parental expectations and falling short of expectations.

"My parents of course they want me to finish my school and have a good job (…) They gave you opportunity (…) that's why we came here" (Bob)

"My parents they want me to do good and it's just it's hard but they just really want a better life for you (…) A lot of pressure on you that you should do good" (Bob)

Joanne expressed a strong desire to make the Roma community proud and show that Roma people could achieve success. She also conveyed a sense of pressure not to waste the opportunities she felt privileged to have, in comparison to others in her community.

"In my Roma community, they do not have the same opportunities as me, so I obviously want to show them (…) It's important to me to show them that it's in you, it's a new age (…) a new time (…) where we all have opportunities we are all equal" (Joanne)

Theo expressed a deep desire to make his parents proud of what he had achieved academically.

"School is the place to get a good education (…) Make your own dad proud (…) I just want to make my mum proud." (Theo)

4.8.2 Challenging Negative Stereotypes About the Roma Community

Bob and Joanne expressed clear disheartenment and frustration when discussing how others perceive their Roma community. There was a sense of pressure to prove people wrong.

"I think some people might have like...the teachers maybe they have like an idea of us not being that smart so maybe I'm just trying to prove them wrong" (Bob)

"So that us as a Roma community we can show them that we're not what people say about us we're more than that" (Joanne)

4.8.3 Anxiety About University and Future Success

Bob and Joanne conveyed a sense of anxiety when they spoke about university as the only option that would earn them respect and value in the world of work.

"People have a better idea of you when you go for like a job (…) I would pick that over somebody that didn't (attend university) (…) a value for you." (Bob)

"Without education, you'd not succeed. Education can help you get to where you actually want" (Joanne)

There was a sense of fear when Faith spoke about her future and the lack of representation of Roma people. Faith aspired to become a psychologist. However, there were feelings of hopelessness and low self-belief as she didn't know how to become a psychologist and whether she could cope with the academic demands.

"I don't see no, like, Roma people going high. (..) And you're now gonna try and be high. Like, it's hard." (…) *I don't know how to get myself there to be that part of that. (…) You've got to go to university. Will it be hard? Like, do I have to do a lot of stuff?"* (Faith)

4.8.4   Mental Exhaustion from Discipline and Expectations

There was a sense of feeling trapped, powerless and mentally exhausted when Faith explained the pressure, she was under at home and school.

"I just feel like that puts something on our mental health, too, and with school, it makes it worse" (Faith)

"As, Roma, (…) we get into it with our mums and dads, (…) with the discipline and (…) it just puts more mental health (…) it's just more pressure. (…) And then, as soon as we get to school, it (…) just makes it worse for us" (Faith)

"School should be the time that they can be free, (…) but here, it's (…) strict as well, and it's just a bit exhausting." (Faith)

"It's, like, caging in on us, that's how I feel." (Faith)

When Fabian described the school as 'rubbish,' there was a sense of exhaustion with the strict rules and discipline. He shared mixed feelings about his teachers, at times showing a sense of belonging with some, but also highlighting that this was not consistent across all staff or his experience of school more generally.

"It's rubbish. Isolation, detentions (…) It's the (…) new rules they made around our behaviour. (…) I don't attend detentions, so that's when I end up in isolation." (Fabian)

4.8.5 Managing Peer Pressure

Billy and Theo expressed a desire to fit in with their Roma peers, noting that they avoided lessons with their friends to maintain that connection.

"My friends like they force me to escape sometimes." (Billy)

"I chill with this one Roma guy, but he's got me into a bit of trouble" (Theo)

There was a sense of regret and longing for parental approval when Theo explained that he was grounded by his parents after getting in trouble with peers in school.

"I'm not allowed outside (…) I'm grounded (…) but you know got to move forward, (…) keep focusing. (…) I'm already focused on what I want to do and my parents are proud" (Theo)

4.8.6 Respect for Elders and Authority

Faith, Joanne, and Logan expressed respect for elders and authority figures when reflecting on the influential people in their lives.

"Because our parents, strict, very strict, (…) (They value) discipline." (Faith)

"I comply, I'm very compliable with everything that they say (…) In the Roma community, you're taught how to respect older and younger generation" (Joanne)

"I don't know how to explain it, but, like, we should respect the teachers". (Logan)

4.9   Theme 6 – Well-being

Participants demonstrated how negative experiences at school, home, and within society had affected their well-being.

4.9.1   Rejection and Loss of Motivation

There was a feeling of numbness when Billy said that his bad experiences made him want to be rebellious or destructive. He expressed a sense of losing motivation or care for the consequences that might have followed his actions.

"I think it's once something bad happens to you just don't like care...you want to be bad."

(Billy)

Billy expressed a sense of defeat, apathy, and rejection when he explained that the teachers did not support him and made him feel excluded from the classroom.

"(School) won't do nothing. I already said that to them, what they can help you with, but they never did it (…) The truth is the teachers don't want me in the class, and they don't like me"

(Billy)

"I've given up. (…) Because I don't want to be in this situation …It's bad for me. (…) I'll get suspended, and they'll just be talking (…) about me to my mom" (Billy)

"I don't even care about my education" (Billy)

When asked if Billy cared about his education in the past and what made him lose this care, he responded:

"Yeah, I did. (...) My teachers (...) They don't make me feel included" (Billy)

4.9.2 Challenges with Mental Exhaustion & Self-esteem

Faith expressed a sense of feeling overwhelmed and stressed when she spoke about managing her home and school environment, which was overly focused on behaviour management and discipline. There was a feeling of mental exhaustion when she said she had negative thoughts that occurred 'a lot'.

"I just feel like that puts something on our mental health, too, and with school, it makes it worse (...) It's just more pressure" (Faith)

"I think a lot about so much different stuff, like, once I get stressed." (Faith)

When Faith was asked if she experienced impulsive and negative thoughts, she responded:

"A lot, yeah." (Faith)

There was also a sense of mental strain, hopelessness, and low self-esteem in Billy when he spoke about failing in school.

"I know I'm going to fail at it (GCSE). (...) even like in year six, the things that I learned now from there, I don't, I don't remember it because (...) my mind is not in a good situation."

(Billy)

Theo expressed feelings of low self-esteem and defeat when asked why Roma children were not achieving academically, while Logan conveyed similar emotions when discussing his dreams.

"Mmmhmm Low self esteem" (Theo)

"Like, when I was a kid, I used to think I was going to be, like, something big in life. But then, as I grew up, I don't think that's, like, that's possible. It's really difficult" (Logan)

4.9.3 Feeling Alienated & Excluded

There was a sense of alienation, exclusion and mistrust when Bob, Faith and Logan spoke about how others treated them.

"Like people hate on you for no reason" (Bob)

"It could be hard because the teacher might not like you that much." (Bob)

"People judge you. (based on ethnicity) it happens everywhere (…) but that's how it goes, I guess" (Faith)

When Faith was asked if she needed to stick up for herself often, she responded:

"Yeah.

(…) It's, like, them, girls (…) White (…) British girls, they were not that friendly, (…) they just wouldn't accept me" (…) I used to have a big accent and I'd just get judged. (…) I remember...a lot of discrimination, then." (Faith)

"Rumours going around" (Logan)

Faith expressed a desire for acceptance and positivity, noting that she would feel happier if people were nicer to her.

"I just feel like I could be, (...) more happier (...) I just want everything to be, like, no negativity. (...) I just want people to, (...) have no (...) hate around me. (Not) thinking bad stuff about me" (Faith)

4.9.4 Feeling Targeted & Unseen in school

Fabian and Billy shared how they felt targeted and overlooked by their teachers in class, which led to a cycle of avoidance. They expressed anxiety about the possibility of confrontations or feelings of isolation in the classroom. Billy, in particular, expressed frustration, feeling that he was not receiving the necessary learning support.

"Sometimes you come to school, they send you to isolation" (Fabian)

When asked why he was sent to isolation, Fabian responded:

"Sometimes it's the teachers" (Fabian)

When Billy was asked what made school confusing for him, he responded:

"Classes. (...)

I'm not good at maths. (...) when I'm in class I don't know what to do (...). I don't want to be there. And is that the reason why you leave sometimes? Yeah." (Billy)

"They don't help me they don't make me feel like welcome. So when I don't feel welcome I'm just (...) not gonna behave (...) and go. (...) The teachers don't want me there I can tell"

(Billy)

"They don't need to make it easier. They just make me like, making me understand it, (...) and help me" (Billy)

"I'm like, all the time hyper (...) I need to fidget with something (...) I can't like sit down for too long. (...) And I even said that to my tutor the other day and they did nothing" (Billy)

"I'm going to be in classes, they're going to shout at me, so like, I'll just get like, angry and I'll start doing this (fidgeting with fingers) I just need to walk around, just to calm down."

(Billy)

4.10 Theme 7- Dreams & Aspirations & Interests

The participants showed a strong ambition for their future, emphasising their desire for success, personal growth, and overcoming obstacles to improve their circumstances. The children aspired to attend university and become musicians and business owners. They also showed interest in subjects within the humanities, arts and culture, social sciences, and business fields.

4.10.1 University & Future Jobs Aspirations

There was a sense of hope, ambition and motivation when Bob, Fabian, Joanne, Logan and Faith expressed a desire to attend university in the future.

"I think I'm gonna go to university. (To study) travel and tourism maybe." (Bob)

"I want to do music in university." (Fabian)

"I do want to go to university and all that" (Joanne)

"I've been to London, Cambridge, two universities. (…) I want to go there too. (…)
If get accepted there (to study) Engineering. To learn a successful business." (Logan)

When Faith was asked if she wanted to become a forensic psychologist. She nodded, indicating a positive response.

Bob desired a job that was enjoyable and where he could travel.

"Like more active job, not just sitting in the office I think I like something more than that and
I like travelling the world" (Bob)

Although Theo did not express a desire to go to university, there was still a sense of understanding the long-term benefit of education in supporting him in achieving his dreams and goals. There was a feeling of frustration and annoyance that other students' behaviour was disrupting his learning.

"School is the place to get a good education. Like GCSEs (…) Then, eventually you (…)
develop in terms of knowledge. Strengthen. Then you could achieve like what you wanna do,
like get a job, get money" (Theo)

"Some of the students behaviour. It's just like really disruptive (…) it stops me from

learning" (Theo)

4.10.2 Parental Support with Education

Participants expressed a sense of support from both their parents and the Roma community in engaging with education.

"All my family, my father is very supportive of my education I think he's always there when I

need help when I need anything (…) I was practising art skills and I needed a lot of new

things for it, so my parents took me to go shopping (…) It was a very good feeling,

heartwarming" (Joanne)

"It's modern age (…) there's less expectations now than there used to be, (…) if you want to

go into like big education you can" (Joanne)

"They're all happy for me. They want me to go to university or college. (…) They support

me." (Logan)

"(Roma community supports) in terms of achievement, (…) progressing. (…) when you're

trying to achieve something, you feel supported" (Theo)

4.10.3 **Balancing Ambitions with Practical Realities**

When Logan discussed his desire to study engineering at Cambridge, he expressed worry about the need to plan for an alternative in case university became an unattainable goal.

When Logan was asked if he wanted to be successful, he responded:

"Yeah (…) I want to, like, but I need to have back up. (…) plan" (Logan)

There was also a sense of school and university being too inaccessible or too ambitious for Fabian and Billy. The participants thought alternative vocational routes were more appropriate, as this was a more familiar route, and it provided a prompt income.

"I don't like school. I don't think it can get me, (…) to places I want to go to. (I want to be a) Musician. They don't teach you nothing, (…) about music in school" (Fabian)

"My dad said just go learn about music because my dad used to be a musician. (…) My whole family, (…) they're all musicians, they have like a famous band (…) (We can play) violin, guitar, piano. (We are) Self-taught, self-taught. It's in the blood, miss." (Fabian)

"I have cousins that can play. We can learn all together." (Fabian)

"I heard about something in college like bricklaying (…) Every brick laid is like one pound. Yeah. I could just do that because I like building stuff." (Billy)

4.10.4 Dreams of Fame

Theo, Billy, and Logan expressed a strong desire to become world-famous musicians or footballers, reflecting their feelings about their dreams and hopes for a successful future.

I believe you like can achieve (...) I want to be something big. Like I want to be famous. I would want to be a musician." (Theo)

"I want to be a business owner or a rapper" (Billy)

"I love football (...) I want to be something big" (Logan)

4.10.5 School Engagement Through Favourite Subjects

Fabian, Billy, Logan, and Theo conveyed a sense of motivation to attend school when they had lessons, they enjoyed and were good at.

When Fabian was asked if there was anything that made him feel included in school, he responded:

"Only my music lesson, that's it." (Fabian)

Fabian expressed a feeling of curiosity and hopefulness when asked which lessons he wanted to learn.

"Business, music, and, like, more like Spanish." (Fabian)

Theo also expressed a strong sense of motivation and happiness to learn Spanish.

"I kind of know the words in Spanish. But I want to speak it fluently. (…) So, I've been trying to learn Spanish in the Spanish lessons. (Theo)

Billy seemed very engaged and interested when he spoke about his history lessons.

"History that's my favourite lesson. (…) Because I like learning about all like something that happened in the past." (Billy)

Logan voiced feelings of disconnection and frustration with his Maths lessons as they did not align with his interests.

"I'm more interested about geography, history, English, but maths is really not for me" (Logan)

4.10.6 **Roma Role Models Shaping Aspirations**

The participants highlighted the importance of inspiring Roma role models in shaping their aspirations. Bob spoke with a sense of encouragement and hope for his own future when he mentioned a staff member, who was Roma and an ex-flight attendant.

"She's from the community. (…) She was a flight attendant. I would want to be that." (Bob)

Joanne, Faith and Logan expressed feelings of pride, inspiration and motivation when they saw successful Roma people.

"I think that because we have a person (staff member) here who is Roma it feels better (…) They bring in lawyers, police officers, Like Roma to talk to us about our opportunities and what we can do." (Joanne)

"My people who were lawyers, policemen, and stuff" (Faith)

"He actually owns (…) a charity (…) He's a Roma police officer (…) Successful Roma people try to help people. I see them, I want to be like them." (Logan)

Faith expressed a sense of being held back from achieving her dreams due to the lack of representation of Roma people in successful job positions. There was a feeling that her aspirations were unattainable, which led her to feel low about her future.

"It's so hard, like, it makes my goals go down to me, because, like, in my head, it's, like... I don't see no, like, Roma people going high." (Faith)

Faith also voiced a strong desire for change and empowerment, wanting more opportunities and recognition for her people.

"I just want everything to be okay. (…) The community has to be higher. (…) (we need) more opportunities in the community." (Faith)

5   Discussion

5.1   Chapter Overview

In the discussion section, I will explore seven key themes that were constructed through my analysis of the data. I will address the implications for educational psychologists and how they can support school practice, highlighting the need for culturally responsive approaches. The strengths and weaknesses of the research will be discussed, along with suggestions for future research. I will also outline a dissemination strategy and reflect on my role as the researcher. Finally, I will conclude how this study contributes to the understanding of Roma children's experiences in education.

5.2   Summary of Findings

The study revealed seven key themes shaping Roma children's school experiences: racism and discrimination, ethnic and cultural identity, relationships and community, unique school context, social and academic pressure, well-being, and dreams, aspirations, and interests. Roma children face marginalisation due to racism, however, they take immense pride in their ethnic identity. Positive relationships with peers and teachers, along with strong ties to the Roma community, are crucial to their emotional well-being. The school environment considerably influences their sense of belonging, while high social and academic expectations place pressure on them. Well-being is a concern, with feelings of exclusion and low self-esteem, but their aspirations challenge stereotypes, showing a strong desire for academic success among female and male participants. The importance of Roma role models in successful positions was constructed as a key point.

5.3 Theme 1 Racism & Discrimination

The experiences shared by the participants in the interviews provide insight into the challenges they face in their school setting, related to both overt and subtle forms of racism and discrimination. The children navigate a school environment that replicates the biases and prejudices that have historically marginalised their community. In this section, I explore the theme of racism and discrimination that Roma children and young people (CYP) are experiencing, focusing on their historical trauma, exclusions, stereotyping in schools, internalised racism, and societal prejudice through the lens of race and trauma theories. The children's voices offer a sobering look at how racism in schools shapes the educational experiences of Roma CYP.

5.3.1 Historical Racism

The data highlighted the impact of historical trauma on participants' sense of identity within the school environment. Faith references the Roma Genocide during the Holocaust (1933-1945) and expresses frustration at the lack of acknowledgement of the communities' suffering by society. While the school did host an assembly on the Roma Genocide, Faith's comments demonstrate how the broader school community fails to engage with Roma history meaningfully. Her emotional reaction to a peer's indifference during the assembly highlights the ongoing trauma Roma children experience when their history is mocked, minimised and ignored. This demonstrates the importance of schools meaningfully and authentically recognising Roma children's historical past. Themelis and Foster (2013) found that including Roma history, such as the Holocaust, within the curriculum had a positive impact on Roma students. However, the current findings show that when the wider school community fails to engage with this positively, it can instead hurt Roma students.

5.3.2 Negative Teacher-Student Relationships

Roma CYP have one of the highest rates of exclusions and suspensions in the UK (Department for Education, 2023), and participants' accounts illustrate how they experienced exclusion. There was a sense of social isolation and rejection when participants such as Billy were threatened with permanent exclusion by teachers, and others voiced that isolation made them feel excluded from the school community. The findings are consistent with those of Riddell (2022) and Danvers & Hinton-Smith (2024), who also reported high exclusion rates and feelings of marginalisation among GRT children. They also align with European research on Roma children, which highlights persistent patterns of educational exclusion (Aguiar et al., 2020; Humphris, 2013; Klaus & Marsh, 2014; Klaus & Siraj, 2020; Miskovic, 2009; Ohidy et al., 2022; Ryder, 2015; Themelis, 2009).

Research emphasises that belonging is a fundamental psychological need, and students who feel connected to school are more likely to engage and succeed (Osterman, 2000). However, the voices of the young people suggest that the Roma children are not fully integrated into their school environment. The looming threat of removal contributes to feelings of alienation and exclusion, which Fabian and Billy speak to in their interviews.

In addition, at the time of recruitment, an eighth student consented to taking part in the research. However, on the day of the interview, the student was temporarily excluded from school and was no longer allowed to participate. This raises ethical concerns about the barriers enforced by gatekeepers that prevent access to Roma children's voices. The limited access is consistent with the one-sided narrative about Roma children's high rates of school exclusion, propagating the idea that Roma children are inherently badly behaved.

The children's accounts demonstrated how the Roma CYP feel they are being stereotyped and discriminated against through perceived low teacher expectations. Participants voiced how teachers assumed that Roma children had limited academic abilities, illustrating how the young people internalised the messages. Perceived low teacher expectations were further evidenced when participants felt ignored or did not receive class work from teachers, indicating that they saw teachers as dismissing their academic potential.

Critical race theory states that educational institutions perpetuate unequal outcomes by maintaining low expectations and providing fewer opportunities for engagement to marginalised students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Crozier et al. (2009) and Matras et al. (2020) found that teachers had stereotypical views about Roma children's past education and held low future aspirations; the present study's findings are consistent with this research.

The accounts demonstrated how Roma CYP feel heavily stereotyped and negatively labelled in the school environment as children who cause problems. Participants' accounts of perceived labelling suggest that some Roma children feel teachers see them as incapable and as troublemakers. The participants expressed a deep sense of desperation for help and described the alienation they feel in school. The experiences of students align with research on racial microaggressions (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007), where minority students are subtly and consistently undervalued through negative assumptions. The data aligns with Robson's work (2015), where it was found that some teachers held stereotypical views and replicated or extended the negative discourses of Roma children in the school environment.

In addition, negative stereotypes of Roma children as disruptive, unmotivated, or academically incapable were described by participants, who shared that these perceptions made them feel inadequate and unwelcome, which sometimes led them to avoid classes. These accounts suggest that Roma children in this study feel pressure to prove their worth in environments that they perceive as undervaluing or ignoring them and they may find this too challenging. The participants also highlighted the sense of invisibility they experience in the classroom.

Roma children's experiences of stereotyping can be viewed through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), which states that systemic racism is often perpetuated through educational institutions that uphold negative stereotypes about minority students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This interpretation aligns with Dobson et al. (2021), who found that teachers require professional development in theoretical frameworks, such as Critical Race Theory, when working with Roma children to challenge the biases they hold.

Furthermore, participants' accounts illustrated how they perceived that teachers treated Roma children unfairly in the classroom compared to their peers. These perceptions highlight how participants felt that teachers distributed their attention unequally, resulting in a sense of marginalisation (Gillborn, 2005). Participants described experiences where teachers appeared to engage more with peers than with them, particularly when they spoke in Romanes. These accounts suggest that some participants felt that language and cultural differences were perceived as justifications for exclusion. Research has illustrated that linguistic racism can reinforce biases positioning students who speak non-English languages as less competent or less deserving of engagement (Creese & Blackledge, 2011), which resonates with participants' interpretations in this study.

The participants illustrated how the absence of relationships and mutual respect between teachers and Roma students shapes their educational experiences. The unequal treatment described by participants reflects how they perceived individual biases and marginalisation in the school environment. Participants described experiencing what they saw as discriminatory practices, such as being ignored by teachers, being denied privileges and being asked not to speak their language, all of which they felt reinforced their outsider status in the classroom. These experiences may all contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where they internalise these negative messages, causing disengagement from the learning environment. These findings align with studies such as Aguiar et al. (2020), Humphris (2013), Klaus and Marsh (2014), Klaus and Siraj (2020), Miskovic (2009), Ohidy et al. (2022), Ryder (2015), and Themelis (2009), which highlight the marginalisation of Roma communities in education across Europe.

5.3.3 Internalised Racism

The participant accounts suggest that Roma children in this study may internalise the racism they perceive in the school environment, where they adopt the negative stereotypes they feel are imposed on them. They use words like "dumb" to describe people like themselves, revealing how external narratives of Roma academic inferiority can shape their self and community view, making them feel incapable and less intelligent. Similarly, there was a conversation about Roma students speaking Romanes (Roma language) in school, which was viewed by some participants as inappropriate or wrong. This may reflect internalised beliefs that Roma cultural identity is incompatible with academic success and should be hidden within the school environment. This shows the pressures Roma children face to assimilate into the dominant culture where they must suppress cultural expressions to fit into the education system.

Furthermore, these accounts suggest that internalised racism may shape how some Roma children perceive other Roma students, whom they described as frequently absent or uninterested in school life. There may have been an unconscious attempt to separate their identities from those perceived as holding negative traits in their community. Participants may have been projecting their own uncomfortable or negative feelings onto others, externalising the community's problems and attributing them to 'them' rather than recognising their own connection to these issues. There was a sense of longing for others to recognise Roma as good people, which could begin to explain the separation from the community. This demonstrates that Roma children can use defence mechanisms that allow them to protect their sense of self by displacing undesirable qualities that are held about themselves onto others (Freud, 1936; Klein, 1946).

5.3.4 Intra-Community Tensions

Participants' accounts suggest that intra-community tensions, such as colourism, may be shaped by internalised racism. Some described being judged by individuals of mixed Roma heritage, which they perceived as contributing to their exclusion within school settings. The accounts suggested that those with mixed heritage may distance themselves from fully Roma individuals in an attempt to avoid the discrimination and prejudice associated with being Roma. Glenn (2009) found that internalised racial bias reinforces social hierarchies and perpetuates inequality within minoritised communities, which may be at play in these participants' experiences. This dynamic creates additional layers of marginalisation for these Roma children, who not only face racism from outside communities but also experience rejection within their own. These findings illustrate the multi-layered and complex experiences of Roma children in schools. This study highlights a previously underexplored aspect of Roma children's educational experiences, suggesting that internalised racism may play an important role. This is a topic not widely addressed in existing literature.

5.3.5   Negative Societal Views

Participants highlighted the racism Roma children face in broader society. They described experiencing discrimination in everyday interactions, including being stereotyped as thieves or unclean, and hearing negative remarks about the neighbourhoods they live in. Participants expressed that these stereotypes are deeply ingrained in the public view of the Roma community and are reinforced through channels such as social media. The children's accounts demonstrate that societal racism towards Roma people remains a significant issue, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and shaping how Roma children are perceived and treated both in and out of school. The findings align with the studies which highlighted that GRT children experience marginalisation, racism, prejudice, and social exclusion inside and outside of school (Danvers et al., 2019; Gould, 2017; Pollock, 2019).

In addition, participants shared that despite efforts to challenge negative stereotypes, they continued to face discrimination. They described how even when Roma individuals pursued positive goals, such as starting a business or contributing to the community, they were often met with dismissive or hostile comments solely because of their ethnic identity. This persistent mistreatment appeared to be normalised among the participants, who expressed it as a regular part of their experience. These experiences highlight the ongoing discrimination the Roma community feels they face, where children expect to be treated unfairly no matter their efforts. The constant negativity reinforces the feeling that their attempts to succeed are pointless, leading to a sense of hopelessness or a 'why bother' attitude. It was observed that some Roma children in this study felt discouraged from trying to improve their situation. The findings illustrate how social stigma can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, as seen with the statement that, "when bad things happen to you, you just want to be bad" (Billy).

5.3.6   **Discrimination & Poverty in Home Countries**

The children and young people highlighted historical and current experiences of racism and poverty in their home countries. The accounts of poverty offer an insight into why many Roma families migrate to the UK in search of a better life and to escape financial hardship and racial discrimination.

These experiences illustrate the intersection of race and class **(**Crenshaw, 1989), where poverty and racism combine to marginalise Roma people. According to data from the UK Parliament (2019), many Roma children at the school receive pupil premiums and free school meals. Burchardt et al. (2018) highlight GRT children's experience in four key areas of disadvantage: housing, household economic activity, education, and health. This backdrop of historical and current marginalisation further reinforces a cycle of poverty and Roma students' ongoing feelings of difference in school. Burnham's (2012) Social GRRRAAACCEEESSS framework explains how factors like gender, race, class, and ethnicity shape identity, highlighting how Roma children's class and ethnicity mark them as 'other' in schools.

In conclusion, the voices of Roma children provide a sobering insight into the multilayered challenges they face in both school and society, such as racism, discrimination and historical trauma. The children's experiences reveal how deeply ingrained biases in schools perpetuate negative stereotypes, resulting in high rates of exclusion, low teacher expectations, and social isolation. Additionally, the intersection of race and class highlights their marginalisation, as many Roma families face financial hardship both in their home countries and in the UK. By recognising and challenging these patterns of discrimination, schools can play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of hopelessness and helping Roma children realise their full potential.

5.4   Theme 2 – Ethnic & Cultural Identity

The participants' accounts highlighted how ethnic and cultural identity is deeply rooted in the school experiences of the Roma children. Their perspectives Reflect their strong connection to family, traditions, language, and cultural practices. The children's comments emphasise how their cultural identity shapes their school experiences, interactions, and sense of belonging in their school environment.

5.4.1   Love of Roma Culture & Language

The participants perspectives show Roma children's love for music, dance, cultural foods, and celebrations and the importance of schools understanding and celebrating the culture with their Roma students. Their comments illustrate a deep sense of pride and belonging. The participants highlight the importance of strong community bonds and how Roma children affirm their identity, helping them stay connected to their heritage. The significance of family and celebration demonstrates the importance of these cultural anchors, helping Roma children navigate a school environment where their cultural identity might be threatened, not understood or valued. Furthermore, these findings align with Levison & Hooley (2014), who highlighted the importance of understanding and acknowledging the Roma culture in promoting inclusion in schools.

The participants demonstrate that language plays an important role in how Roma children maintain the ties and connections to their cultural identity. Speaking in Romanes was seen by participants as a way of preserving cultural pride and integrity in the face of the challenges experienced. However, several participants described how they felt some teachers responded negatively when Roma children used their language in school, perceiving it as inappropriate or disrespectful. Others recalled being directly instructed to speak English, highlighting the

discrimination they felt they experienced and the pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture.

For Roma children, the ability to speak their language among their peers and family is a source of pride, belonging and provides a strong group identity. However, when their cultural expressions are met with hostility or are misunderstood by teachers, this can create a sense of cultural suppression, making them feel that their identity is not welcome in the classroom. These findings align with Mataras et al. (2021) and Swanwick et al. (2021), who highlighted the importance of understanding Roma culture and the value of the Romani language as these are key aspects of Roma families lives. Swanwick et al. (2021) found that the lack of understanding of the Roma language affected professionals' ability to fully understand the children's needs, which can be seen in the present study.

5.4.2   Lack of Cultural Understanding in Schools

The participants highlighted how the lack of understanding of Roma origin and culture among school staff shapes Roma children's school experience. Participants highlighted the cultural misunderstandings that often inform Roma children's interactions in school. Differences in communication styles, such as speaking loudly, directly or congregating in a group, were highlighted by participants. They explained that school staff often misinterpreted their communication style as aggressive or argumentative. Their experience demonstrates how the Roma children felt unfairly labelled or disciplined based on cultural behaviours that differ from mainstream norms. The findings fit with Matras et al. 2020 and Lesovitch 2005, who identified communication barriers as key challenges for Roma children in education.

5.4.3   Changing Gender-Norms in Roma Community

The participant narratives highlighted how traditional gender roles in Roma culture influence children's school experiences and aspirations. There is importance in cultural teachings around family-gendered responsibilities expressed, however, participants also challenged the stereotypes about Roma women, early marriage and low interest in education, which were views often held by teachers (Matras et al., 2020). Participants emphasised a change towards fewer expectations for Roma women to follow traditional paths and be free to pursue education or other careers. This shift needs to be recognised in the school system.

In addition, the participants' views showed that Roma children feel supported and encouraged by their families to pursue education and careers regardless of gender, which also challenges stereotypes held about the Roma community. The perceived conflict between traditional gender roles and modern opportunities seems to be less of a concern and barrier for female Roma students in this study. However, a clear barrier is the experience of racism and a lack of representation of Roma people in successful positions. The limited representation of Roma's success in professional fields seems to shape the Roma students' ambitions in schools. The present study brings to light the influence of ethnicity and gender on education and emphasises a shift in traditional values in the Roma community that has not been previously highlighted in the literature.

5.4.4   Diversity in the Roma Community

The participants also highlight the diversity within the Roma community, as they can reside in multiple European countries, e.g. Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Romania. The children also showed an awareness of the Roma historical roots in Northern India and the awareness of migration and displacement history. The accounts illustrate that the children are proud of their Roma heritage but also want people to acknowledge the historical marginalisation they have

experienced over the decades. The present study emphasises the importance of historical migration for Roma children, an area that has not been strongly highlighted in previous research.

In addition, participants described how important ethnic and cultural identity is for Roma children's school experiences. Their love for music, dance, and traditions shows the value in schools to celebrate Roma culture to foster inclusion. Their language is key to their identity, and discrimination against Romanes can lead to cultural suppression and disengagement. A lack of understanding among school staff can also result in misinterpretations of Roma communication styles and reinforce negative stereotypes. While traditional gender roles remain important in the community, accounts have shown a shift towards modern aspirations, which are supported by families. The limited Roma representation in successful positions and their experiences of racism are key barriers to children's academic development. The Roma children take pride in their diverse heritage and history, emphasising the need for schools to recognise and value Roma culture for a more inclusive environment.

5.5   Theme 3 – Relationships & Community

The children described the importance of teacher-student relationships, peer relationships and community ties in shaping the school experiences. The accounts showed that nurturing, inclusive environments where Roma students feel safe, valued, and connected contribute to their emotional well-being and support motivation for academic success.

5.5.1   Importance of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Participants described the importance of feeling understood by their teachers, which included emotional awareness and sensitivity to their circumstances and experiences. The accounts

demonstrated the positive influence on Roma children's class behaviour and engagement when teachers showed them empathy and genuine care. Some children spoke about how emotionally supportive teacher-student relationships encouraged them to reflect on their actions and motivated them to improve. Others shared experiences of feeling personally connected to certain teachers, who treated them with kindness and respect, and who valued them as Roma students. These positive interactions appeared to create a greater sense of belonging and motivation within the school environment.

Participants also expressed how negative teacher interactions influence them to behave in ways they don't want to but feel strongly compelled. This can contribute to a cycle where Roma children feel they must constantly defend themselves, leading to reactions they struggle to control because they are in heightened emotional and physiological states, e.g. fight/flight/freeze. In this stressed state, Roma children's responses may manifest as frustration, resistance, or disengagement. While previous literature (Crozier et al., 2009; Matras et al., 2020; Robson, 2015; Payne & Prieler, 2015) highlighted the negative views some teachers hold about Roma students, it has not fully explored how crucial the teacher-student relationship is for Roma children's sense of belonging, as demonstrated in the present study.

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), children who form secure attachments with adults feel more confident, safe, and willing to explore and engage with their environments. The experiences of the participants can be viewed through the lens of Attachment theory. For these Roma students, feeling understood by their teachers fosters trust and connection, potentially helping to alleviate some of the external challenges of social exclusion they face. Teachers who take a compassionate, understanding, and attentive approach can create spaces of belonging for Roma students where they feel safe, valued, and understood.

5.5.2 Importance of Designated Roma Staff

The participants illustrated the importance of positive relationships with designated Roma staff/liaison officers. The Roma staff member provided an emotionally and practically supportive experience to the CYP. The participants conveyed a deep sense of care, showing that this support system understood their emotional and cultural experiences. Gould (2017) suggested that to tackle social exclusion experienced by GRT children, schools should employ GRT support staff. Designated Roma school staff play a key role in acting support system and as a bridge between the schools and Roma families, supporting to foster positive relationships.

Bronfenbrenner's microsystem (1979) influences Roma students' development by fostering strong and trusting family-school relationships. The understanding of Roma cultural and familial dynamics also connects to the mesosystem, where positive interactions between home and school shape students' educational experiences and sense of belonging (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The findings align with studies that highlighted the importance of building relationships with Roma and GRT families, acknowledging their past experiences, encouraging them to be involved in their children's education (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; Payne & Prieler, 2015; Swanwick et al., 2021; Wilkin et al., 2008; Wilkin et al., 2009b).

5.5.3 Importance of Peer Relationships

The participants' narratives highlight the significant role of Roma peer relationships in fostering a sense of pride, safety, and community for Roma students in schools. Peer relationships created an emotional support system where participants felt understood and accepted. Participants emphasise how having Roma friends and family in school helps them feel less isolated, reinforcing a sense of protection and belonging. They voiced how Roma peers at school improved their mental health and made school worth attending. Participants felt

encouraged and celebrated by their Roma peers. The accounts highlight that Roma peer relationships offer emotional safety, improve mental well-being and can help reduce the feelings of alienation and threat that can arise from cultural or social differences within the broader school community.

Participants highlighted the importance of diverse and inclusive friendships within the school environment. They described having friends from a range of cultural backgrounds and expressed a genuine interest in learning about others. This openness to building friendships and engaging with different cultures reflected the inclusive attitudes many Roma children hold. Several participants noted that their willingness to support and connect with others stemmed from their own experiences of discrimination, which created empathy and a desire to create a welcoming environment for others.

The perspectives show that friendships across cultures can promote understanding and contribute to a more inclusive school environment for Roma children in schools. The present study strongly highlights the importance of both Roma and non-Roma peer relationships in shaping positive school experiences for Roma children, an area that has been overlooked in previous research.

5.5.4 Importance of the Roma Community

Participants expressed a strong sense of belonging, pride, and emotional connection to the Roma community. They described the community as large and close-knit, highlighting the importance of intergenerational relationships and collective identity. Participants demonstrated deep affection and mutual support within the community, which was often linked to an extended family that looked out for one another. The quotes show how the shared experiences of Roma people strengthen their bonds, making family and community relationships important protective characteristics for Roma children. These findings align with Smith et al. (2020), who

found that when Roma families were included in school projects, this improved children's engagement and academic outcomes, illustrating the value of the Roma community for Roma children.

In addition, the importance of the Roma community was further reinforced by the participants through a strong sense of loss and sadness when participants considered the idea of their community disappearing. The children emphasise loss of identity, belonging, way of life, relationships, and connection. Given the collectivist nature of Roma culture, where identity and well-being are deeply rooted in community bonds and interdependency, the potential loss of their community represents a major individual and collective loss. The accounts can be viewed through Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals develop a sense of self from the social groups they belong to, and that the loss of such groups can significantly impact self-concepts and emotional stability (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In conclusion, positive relationships with school staff, peers, and the Roma community can be seen as crucial to the emotional well-being and school experience of Roma children. Supportive teacher-student relationships foster engagement and positive behaviour, while friendships with both Roma and non-Roma peers provide emotional and academic support. Additionally, the strong sense of community within the Roma culture creates a foundation of belonging and identity, which helps the students feel understood and connected. These relationships create a network of support that is important for the educational success and emotional resilience of Roma students. Roma children require nurturing, inclusive environments in schools to thrive.

5.6   Theme 4- Unique School Context

The children's experiences illustrated the importance of Roma support staff/teams and their role in ensuring Roma children feel included. The importance of Roma peers and groups was also highlighted as a source of support and belonging for these Roma children in their school. The school that participated in the present study had a dedicated Roma support team that provided mentorship and organised Roma cultural celebrations. The school also had a large group of Roma children on roll. These factors shaped the participants' school experience and helped foster a sense of recognition, support and connection to the school.

5.6.1   Celebrating & Validating Roma Culture

The recognition of Roma culture within the school through the Roma support team seemed to play a crucial role in fostering a sense of validation for Roma students. Participants described cultural events such as Roma Day and Roma Month as meaningful experiences that affirmed their cultural identity and made them feel acknowledged within the school environment. The celebration of Roma children's cultural heritage and positive relationships with the team provides a sense of validation and belonging.

When Roma students in the study felt that their identity was acknowledged and celebrated, it enhanced their experience, engagement and investment in the school community. This suggests that schools require an inclusive school ethos/ whole school approach where GRT culture is celebrated to improve GRT children's sense of belonging (Bhopal & Myers, 2009a; Gould, 2017; McCaffery, 2016; Wilkin, et al., 2009a; Wilkin, et al., 2009b)

Furthermore, participants emphasised the uniqueness of their school in making a special effort to recognise their culture. They perceived the school as more supportive and inclusive of Roma

students compared to other schools in the area. Participants emphasised the value of this school's recognition of Roma cultural identity and the tailored opportunities provided to support Roma children. The school affirmed the children's academic abilities through their targeted initiatives, including visits from Roma professionals, university trips, and career-focused projects. The data suggests that when Roma students are given the chance to see themselves represented in successful positions and they are supported and encouraged, this strengthens the connection they feel with school and their future aspirations.

5.6.2   Roma Staff from the Roma Community

Accounts shared by participants emphasise the value of employing support staff from the Roma community, offering cultural understanding, advocacy, and positive role models. Participants described the Roma staff member as a trusted mentor and source of support, with some comparing the relationship to that of a close family member. They shared that her presence made them feel more comfortable and understood, especially when receiving help with sensitive issues such as free school meals. Her ability to communicate in Romanes with parents and her understanding of the community's challenges helped foster a sense of safety and connection. This highlights the value of Roma children receiving emotional and practical support from trusted adults in schools, which is even more meaningful when provided by staff from their own communities. The findings align with Gould (2017) suggestion that employing GRT support staff can help address social exclusion in schools.

While past research strongly emphasises the importance of Traveller Education Services and multi-agency work with Roma and GRT families (Bhopal & Myers, 2009a, 2009b; Boot, 2013; Gould, 2017; Lever, 2012; Scullion & Brown, 2013; Wilkin, et al., 2008; Wilkin, et al., 2009a; Wilkin, et al., 2009b) the present study found that children reported no connection with these agencies. Instead, what made a real difference to their school experience was feeling a sense

of belonging through deep relationships with staff and peers and having a trusted staff member from their own community on site. A Romanes-speaking support officer was especially important in helping them feel safe and supported at school.

5.6.3 Culturally Diverse School

The students' experiences reflect how culturally diverse environments can contribute to Roma children's sense of safety and community in school. The participants reflect on how diversity in schools creates an environment of inclusion and understanding between minoritised students. The shared sense of empathy in multicultural communities enabled these Roma students to feel safer and more comfortable, as they recognised that others understand their struggles and can relate to their experiences.

Additionally, the Roma children show a genuine curiosity and desire to learn about other cultures. Their comments reflect an openness to diversity, where they not only accept but actively seek to understand the cultures of their peers. This was reflected in participants' appreciation for cultural diversity, seen in their interest in learning from peers of different backgrounds and valuing the inclusive environment of their school. Belonging to a diverse school environment enriches the school experiences of the Roma children by offering protection and helping them develop an appreciation and understanding of other cultures.

In summary, this unique school setting highlights effective practices for supporting Roma students. Roma children benefit from Roma teams or designated staff who celebrate their culture, build positive relationships with their families, and provide emotional, academic, and practical support. This support is especially meaningful when offered by someone from their own community. Additionally, attending a culturally diverse school with people from the Roma community, in addition to other cultures, fosters a sense of belonging, safety, and curiosity about other cultures for the Roma students.

5.7   Theme 5- Social & Academic Pressures

The participants' reflections demonstrate the weight of external pressures the Roma children experience from their parents, peers, school and broader society, as well as the burden of challenging negative stereotypes about Roma people.

5.7.1   Challenging Negative Views

Participants expressed frustration and sadness at the way teachers and others often view Roma children through a negative lens. They felt that the Roma community is often stigmatised, misunderstood and undervalued in schools and society, especially when it came to their cognitive abilities. Participants voiced a strong desire to prove people wrong and demonstrate that they are more than the prejudiced views held about them. Their voices highlight the pressure the students face to challenge negative narratives while navigating an educational system in which they already feel excluded.

5.7.2   Fear of Academic Failure

Participants shared feelings of pressure about their futures, influenced by the lack of visible Roma representation in universities and professional careers. They expressed aspirations for ambitious roles, such as becoming a psychologist or footballer, however, there was also a sense of self-doubt about their ability to achieve these goals. These findings suggest a parallel between broader societal stereotypes about Roma people's abilities and the internalised doubt that some Roma students described. The quotes demonstrate the fear and pressure Roma children face when trying to break through societal barriers and achieve their dreams.

5.7.3 Pressure to make use of Opportunities

The reflections also showed how the Roma children feel pressure to take advantage of the chances their families gave them by moving to a new country. Participants highlighted the importance of their parents' aspirations, and making use of opportunities that their community were not privileged to have in the past. These accounts show that Roma children feel pressured to succeed because they know their parents and community have made sacrifices for them. It highlights the weight and responsibility they feel to challenge stereotypes and represent their community in a positive light. This pressure seems to be intensified by inconsistent support in school and wider societal discrimination that participants describe, which can make fulfilling their families' hopes challenging and emotionally demanding.

5.7.4 University as the Key to Success

The accounts highlight how the Roma children can place high expectations on themselves by viewing university education as a path to being valued and successful in society. The participants illustrate feeling pressure to go to university, seeing it as the key to success and self-worth. However, a contradiction can be observed, as many Roma young people do not attend university. As a result, this tension can affect their emotional well-being, sense of purpose, and overall happiness as they are unable to reach their goals. These findings align with Danvers et al. (2024), who describe 'cruel optimism' as the portrayal of higher education as a path to social mobility, when in reality, GRT children often face exclusion and do not attend these institutions.

5.7.5 Discipline in the School & Home Environment

Participants described how the strict discipline in both home and school environments contributed to the mental exhaustion they experienced. Several shared feelings of frustration

with the school setting and felt there was a lack of understanding and an overuse of excessive punishment with Roma students. The use of the term "caged in" (Faith) is particularly powerful as it reflects a sense of feeling trapped, suggesting the school adds to the burden and pressure that Roma children are already experiencing. Research has shown that schools which understand the unique needs of GRT communities and use flexible behaviour policies often see better attendance and academic results (Wilkin, et al., 2009b).

5.7.6 Parental, School & Peer Pressure

The accounts show a tension between peer pressure, parental and school expectations experienced by the participants. There was a voiced desire to fit in with Roma peers, despite knowing that engaging in behaviours such as missing lessons would get them into trouble with their parents. This observed pressure to conform to the peer group norms demonstrates the challenges Roma children face by wanting to be accepted by peers whilst also meeting parent and school expectations. For the Roma children, the social bonds within their peer group offer a sense of belonging and solidarity, which may not be worth compromising in a school environment where they feel excluded. This seems to result in choosing the peer group over conforming to school rules.

Participants also explained that they collectively avoided classes because they felt unwelcome as a group by their teachers. This shows that they avoid school not because they do not care, but because they feel overlooked and left out. Over time, this can reinforce a loss of interest in school and perpetuate a cycle of avoidance. The pressure to attend classes where they feel afraid of being ignored or experiencing a negative interaction may be too challenging for the Roma children to manage. The participants' experiences underscore the complexity of Roma children's class avoidance.

5.7.7   Respecting Authority Figures

The accounts show a cultural emphasis on respecting authority figures and elders within the Roma community. This can be seen through the comments about making the community and parents proud, and the strict behaviour management they experience. Their comments highlight the value placed on discipline and obedience to those in positions of power, both in the home and in school. For the Roma children, this sense of respect can create a foundation for adhering to societal expectations, but it may also lead to a tension between compliance and the challenges they face in navigating an education system which they feel they need to defend themselves against. The findings on social and academic pressures illustrate a previously overlooked aspect of Roma children's educational experiences, highlighting how pressures from family, community, school, and wider society shape their well-being and their journeys, an area not yet fully explored in existing literature and often less forthright in the minds of professionals working with these families.

In summary, Roma children in the study face noteworthy external academic and social pressures from parents, peers, school and society. Though they try to meet their parents' expectations and make their community proud, they often struggle with self-doubt and a lack of support. They experience frustration with being misunderstood and undervalued in school. At the same time, they are managing the tension between fitting in with peers and meeting academic expectations. The emotional burden of achieving academic success, combined with the barriers experienced in the education system, is a challenging reality for these young Roma students. Additionally, cultural values of respect and discipline contribute to a sense of obligation but can create further tensions between themselves, staff and parents in environments targeting the children using harsh behaviour management strategies.

5.8   Theme 6- Wellbeing

Participant narratives highlighted that the challenges Roma children face in school and in broader society negatively affect their self-esteem and overall well-being. While Roma children's well-being is a topic that has been largely overlooked in existing literature, the findings from this study highlight the substantial emotional influence they experience.

5.8.1   Feeling Unwelcome in Class

Participants demonstrated how they can feel emotionally numb, defeated, and rejected at school. The feeling of being unwelcome may contribute to the display of behaviour that is seen as problematic in schools, as noted by the participants. Feelings of exclusion led some participants to disengage from their education, attributing this shift in attitude to the way they were treated by their teachers. The findings highlight the power and responsibility teachers hold in keeping Roma children engaged in education through relational and inclusive practice. This can be understood through the theory of Attachment (Bowlby, 1969), which emphasises the importance of relationships for children's sense of security and development.

5.8.2   Experiences of Mental Exhaustion

Participants highlighted the mental exhaustion Roma children face in secondary school, where strict discipline adds to the stress they already feel at home, where expectations are high. These experiences demonstrate how both environments can influence their well-being, contributing to the experience of negative thoughts. The internal conflict between high expectations and the struggle to cope suggests that harsh school environments can worsen the mental health of Roma students.

Participants shared how academic struggles can negatively shape their self-esteem. Participants highlighted feelings of hopelessness and defeat about their academic achievements and their future dreams. This illustrates the disappointment and low self-belief that can arise as Roma children grow up in environments where they feel academically inadequate. These quotes show the harmful effects of systemic neglect, which fosters feelings of defeat, low self-worth, and disconnection from dreams for the Roma children.

5.8.3   Lack of Acknowledgement of Hardship

The children's accounts also highlighted how a lack of respect and acknowledgement for their experiences can influence their well-being. The emotional reactions reveal how connected the Roma children can feel towards their trauma and the history of the community. The data shows how the Roma children experience a deep sadness when they feel their cultural history and identity are disrespected or dismissed by others. This emphasises the importance of schools taking the time to show their acceptance and appreciation of Roma experiences and history.

5.8.4   Impact of Discrimination

The recurring themes of exclusion, mistrust, and discrimination, highlighted by the participants, demonstrate the detrimental impact of a lack of school belonging on the Roma children's well-being. Participants felt hated because of their ethnicity and struggled to trust others. The sense of rejection weighs heavily on the well-being of the Roma children, causing a desire for an environment where they do not have to continuously stand up for themselves. The perceived ongoing prejudice and need to defend themselves can be viewed as negatively shaping their well-being, leading to emotional exhaustion and a strong need for acceptance and a safe space.

Furthermore, the quotes illustrate the Roma children's heightened anxiety, social isolation, and frustration, considerably impacting their overall well-being. Participants noted being sent to isolation for skipping class, which they associated with negative relationships with teachers. The accounts show how the perceived lack of support and understanding from teachers fosters an environment of avoidance and fear. For Roma children, this can mean that school becomes a source of stress rather than a place to learn.

5.8.5   Lack of Support & Low Self-esteem

In addition, participants expressed feeling behind in class, which made them feel like they did not want to attend lessons. The accounts show how a lack of academic support makes the Roma children feel alienated and academically incompetent. This leads to disengagement and avoidance, isolating them further from peers and the education system, reinforcing low self-worth and making it harder to catch up.

The feelings of incompetence and the class avoidance can be understood through Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The theory emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering motivation and psychological well-being for children in schools. The Roma children experience powerlessness in their educational experience; they do not feel academically competent, and they can experience a low sense of belonging in the classroom. These aspects can contribute to disengagement and emotional distress, leading to avoidance of situations where they feel unsupported and incapable. The findings align with studies confirming that the schools which understand the needs of GRT communities often see better attendance and academic outcomes (Gould, 2017; Wilkin, et al., 2009a; Wilkin, et al., 2009b).

Moreover, participants highlighted the lack of support for their needs, which can be seen as further contributing to their feelings of low self-worth and anxiety in the class environment. They described the need for help with understanding concepts, and some explained they needed additional adjustments, e.g. fidget toys. However, they shared that requests for support go unaddressed, and this resulted in frustration and emotional distress. The lack of classroom support highlights how schools' disregard for the specific needs of Roma children can reinforce feelings of neglect, contributing to a cycle of frustration, invisibility, and diminished well-being.

Participants' accounts revealed a tension between their positive and negative experiences of relationships with school staff and how this shaped their wellbeing. On the one hand, the school offered multiple forms of support and targeted interventions through its Roma provision, which the children found helpful. They especially spoke highly of the relationships with the Roma team. On the other hand, participants' descriptions showed that this support was inconsistent across the wider staff body. While many Roma children shared positive experiences with certain staff members, they also noted that this was not the case with all staff, which sometimes made them feel undervalued or misunderstood, leaving them with what can be interpreted as mixed feelings about school.

In conclusion, the challenges the Roma children face in school, including exclusion, discrimination, and lack of support, considerably impact their well-being. These negative experiences cause feelings of alienation, anxiety, and frustration, leading to disengagement and low self-esteem. The lack of consistent academic and emotional support, along with the failure by some members of staff and peers to meaningfully recognise their cultural identity, may contribute to feelings of disconnection from the education system. This systemic neglect can perpetuate a cycle of avoidance, frustration, and diminished mental health. The children's

accounts highlight the need for schools to implement inclusive and supportive practices that promote the well-being and academic success of Roma children.

5.9 Theme 7 -Dreams, Aspirations & Interests

The accounts highlight that Roma children possess dreams and high ambitions for their future. They have shown the Roma children's drive and desperation for success, and determination to overcome challenges to improve their lives. Most participants expressed aspirations to attend university and pursue careers in music, business and travel. Their interests covered a range of subjects, including the humanities, arts and culture and social sciences.

Participants voiced dreams and aspirations about their futures. Some included attending university, studying travel and tourism, music, psychology, business, and engineering. Others expressed vocational aspirations, however, there was a shared understanding between the participants of the value of education in achieving personal ambitions.

5.9.1 Academic Hopes

The accounts reflect the dreams, aspirations, and interests of the Roma children, demonstrating their ambition and hope for success despite societal challenges and stereotypes about them. Their desire for academic success contradicts one of the most common stereotypes about Roma children being academically incapable or uninterested in their education. The dreams of attending university or using education to reach goals illustrate their desperation, motivation and determination for social mobility. The findings align Matras et al. (2020), who also found that Roma pupils expressed a positive outlook on education, whereas teachers held low expectations.

5.9.2 Parental support

Participants described strong family support, with parents providing encouragement and resources for their education. They also noted a shift in cultural expectations, particularly for Roma girls, with families increasingly supporting ambitions like higher education and career goals. These accounts challenge the stereotype that Roma parents do not value education, showing they support their children's academic goals. Research has found that support systems, including family and community, played a crucial role in shaping GRT children's aspirations and providing motivation to pursue higher education (Danvers et al., 2019), which was also observed in the present study with the Roma children.

5.9.3 Uncertainty about Reaching Dreams

Despite aspirations for higher education, participants expressed uncertainty because few Roma people attend higher education. This led to feelings of anxiety and the need for alternative plans, such as vocational routes or learning skills through family support. Participants' future plans were often shaped by concerns about financial stability, doubts about their ability, and receiving the support needed from school to achieve academic success. These participants highlight the uncertainty Roma children feel about their academic futures because higher education may not feel attainable or practical for those facing poverty. This is echoed by Danvers et al. (2019), who highlight how marginalisation limits GRT children's educational aspirations.

Danvers et al. (2024) also found that GRT secondary school children had mixed feelings about higher education, with some expressing broad aspirations and others leaning toward vocational pathways. The present study aligns with these findings; however, it offers additional insight

into the reasons why the children are following vocational routes, which include feelings of low self-esteem, fear of failure and financial practicalities. The present study also aligns with findings emphasising the need for a flexible curriculum including vocational opportunities to improve education access for GRT families (Danvers et al., 2019).

5.9.4   Dreams of Fame

A few participants expressed the desire to achieve fame and success as musicians, rappers or footballers, highlighting the vast aspirations that Roma children hold for their future. The hope for fame and success might be influenced by their experiences of financial and social hardship. For the Roma children, fame could symbolise success, personal achievement, financial stability, security, and acceptance. It could feel like a way to guarantee personal fulfilment and have a good chance to change their circumstances.

5.9.5   Subject Interests

The children's quotes highlighted some of their school interests. When the Roma children's interests and feelings of competency are nurtured, school engagement improves. The participants illustrated that when subjects align with their passions and feelings of competence, for example, music, Spanish and business, there is a clear motivation and enthusiasm to attend classes. Whereas frustration with subjects like math reflects the disconnection Roma students can feel when school content seems unrelated to their interests and future aspirations. The data highlights the need for schools to work creatively and tap into Roma children's interests, increase feelings of competency and maintain their engagement and motivation.

5.9.6   Importance of Roma Role Models

The participants also highlight the valuable role of Roma role models in shaping the dreams and aspirations. When the Roma young people could see successful individuals from their own community, this created a sense of inspiration and hope for their own futures. Participants expressed admiration for Roma professionals they encountered, such as former flight attendants, lawyers, and police officers. Roma role models offer tangible proof for Roma children that their ambitions are achievable, and this, in turn, helps them challenge the limitations they may feel in school. For these Roma children, representation becomes a powerful motivator that offers encouragement at the possibility of social mobility.

5.9.7   Limited Roma Representation

The lack of visible Roma representation in successful positions creates feelings of discouragement and self-doubt for the Roma children, and this can be observed in their comments. The value of seeing Roma people in successful roles has not been explored in the literature, however, it came through strongly in the children's accounts. Participants reflected on the lack of Roma representation in high-status careers, which made their own goals feel unachievable. This absence was linked to feelings of frustration and limitation. Their reflections revealed a strong desire for change, more visible role models, and greater opportunities that would empower Roma youth to see themselves in a wider range of successful roles.

The Roma children's dreams, aspirations and interests show a strong desire for success and determination to overcome challenges for a better life. They aim for higher education and are supported by their families and community. However, their perceived uncertainty about university leads some to consider vocational routes or family traditions for financial stability. Their dreams, including hopes for fame, may be shaped by social and financial hardship.

Supporting their interests in school is key to their engagement, and Roma role models play an important role in showing them that their goals are possible.

5.10 Implications for Practice

5.10.1 The Role of the Educational Psychologist in Supporting Schools

Educational Psychologists (EPs) work with children and young people (CYP) aged 0–25, using psychological approaches to support a wide range of needs. They collaborate with the systems around CYP, such as parents and school staff (BPS, 2023; HCPC, 2023). Their core functions include consultation, assessment, intervention, training, and research (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires, & O'Connor, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2002). Recent updates to the HCPC standards place a stronger emphasis on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), requiring EPs to actively challenge racism, discrimination, and systemic inequalities in their practice (HCPC, 2023). EPs are required to recognise and understand the impact of barriers to inclusion, especially for socially isolated groups (HCPC, 2023). Given the experiences and challenges faced by Roma children, educational psychologists have a responsibility to ensure they are supported in their schools.

The themes identified in the present study can be used as a guide for EPs to consider different aspects of Roma children's identity and school experiences (racism & discrimination, ethnic & cultural identity, relationships & community, social & academic pressure, (unique) school context, well-being, dreams, aspirations, interests.) A guide designed to support EPs in working with Roma children and young people (CYP), their families, and schools is provided in Appendix E, section 7.5.1. This framework incorporates relevant theories and school recommendations to help EPs better understand the school experiences of Roma children and identify the support they would benefit from.

Research in Part 2 of the literature review on GRT children offered key recommendations for EPs. It suggested using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) alongside Burnham's (2012) Social GRRRAAACCEEESSS framework (Li, 2021). Pollock and Barrow (2021) stressed that EPs and schools need to carefully consider the support offered to minority groups, as promoting GRT identity and culture without addressing deeper inequalities could be harmful to GRT children. They also highlighted the importance of strong collaboration between schools, EPs, and Traveller Education Support Services. Pollock's (2019) research identified five key factors that shape GRT children's school experiences: relationships with adults, social integration, prejudice, purposeless education, and cultural appreciation.

Although the present study did not focus on all GRT children, the findings confirm that some EP recommendations from the literature are relevant and transferable to Roma children. Racism and discrimination, and cultural and ethnic identity, came through strongly within children's accounts. The findings support the recommendations for using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) alongside Burnham's (2012) GGRRAAACCEEESSS (Li, 2021) when working with Roma children and the systems around, supporting the understanding of the community's negative experiences and the importance of their cultural and ethnic identity.

In addition, the theme unique school context demonstrated the importance of acknowledging and building in meaningful celebrations for Roma children. The celebrations had a positive impact on their well-being and general sense of belonging. EPs should encourage/support schools with embedding Roma cultural appreciation through an inclusive school ethos (Bhopal & Myers, 2009; Gould, 2017; McCaffery, 2016; Wilkin, et al. 2009a, 2009b). However, it is important to note Pollock and Barrow's (2021) point about the harm of promoting GRT identity

without embedding a culturally inclusive ethos in the school. The children in the present study attended a school with a vast number of Roma peers, where they had an element of safety to openly display their culture. This highlights a need to consider the views of the CYP themselves, especially if they are in a school with a small Roma population.

Although the findings did not confirm the value of multi-agency or GRT liaison officer involvement in Roma children's school experiences, they highlighted the need to support school staff in understanding Roma children's history, culture, and experiences of racism. There is a need for cultural training to debunk stereotypes, as found in part one of the literature review (Crozier et al., 2009; Matras et al., 2020). Schools require support with embedding their anti-racist practices consistently to improve teacher-student relationships, which are drastically affecting Roma children's school experiences. Damaged relationships were linked to class avoidance, escalating to isolation, suspension, and exclusion.

EPs and GRT liaison teams could support schools through multi-agency consultations, intervention implementation, and anti-racism training. The recommendation for culturally sensitive training for professionals was also recommended by Gould (2017) and Wilkin et al. (2009b). A recommendation for multi-professional collaborations including educational psychologists when working with GRT children was suggested by Gould, 2017; Pollock, 2019; Pollock & Barrow 2021.

Schools would benefit from relationship-building initiatives, such as mentoring through a key adult or teacher, restorative practice sessions, cultural projects celebrating Roma heritage, trauma-informed check-ins, and student voice initiatives. In addition to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) and Burnham's (2012) GGRRAAACCEEESSS

recommended by Li (2021), EP work can draw on Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), Attachment Theory & Teacher-Student Relationships (Riley, 2010), Trauma-Informed Practice (Perry, 2006), Transgenerational trauma (Danieli, 1998), Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to better understand Roma children's school experiences. (See EP guide in Appendix E, section 7.5.1)

EPs should recognise the importance of community, relationships, and school context when supporting Roma children and the systems around them. The findings highlighted that peer relationships and the presence of staff or students from the same or other minoritised communities fostered a sense of safety. These elements would be particularly important in less diverse schools, where feelings of social exclusion may be more intense. The study also emphasises the value of employing designated Roma staff, something EPs can support schools in understanding, in line with recommendations to address social exclusion and parental concerns (Bhopal & Myers, 2009b; Boot, 2013; Gould, 2017; Wilkin et al., 2009b). By applying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model and Social Identity Theory, EPs can increase their understanding of Roma children's experiences and how they are shaped by their environments and their connection to the Roma community.

In addition, the present study highlighted the high levels of pressure Roma children face and how their school experiences can shape their well-being. Given that the EP role involves promoting well-being and addressing distress (HCPC, 2023), EPs should work alongside schools to implement emotional support strategies for Roma children. They should challenge behaviour policies that harm Roma children and contribute to cycles of exclusion, particularly in light of the high suspension and exclusion rates they face in the UK. EPs should promote

restorative and relational approaches to behaviour management instead of punitive behaviourist methods.

The present findings align with Pollock's (2019) recommendations around the importance of relationships with adults, social integration, tackling prejudice, and promoting cultural appreciation for GRT children. However, unlike Pollock's study, Roma children in the present study held strong academic aspirations, they related to certain subjects and did not view education as "purposeless". EPs should help schools recognise Roma children's dreams and maintain high expectations while supporting both their academic and social-emotional needs. EPs should also challenge low expectations and stereotypes about a lack of parental support, as the findings in the present study contradict these views.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers an important lens through which to interpret the findings, highlighting how the Roma children's experiences are shaped by interactions of multiple systems. For example, the importance of positive teacher–student relationships and Roma support staff sits within the microsystem, showing the important role of daily interactions in fostering inclusion. At the mesosystem level, participants' accounts of inconsistent support and cultural understanding illustrate how connections between home, school, and the wider community influence their sense of belonging. The exosystem can be seen in factors such as school policies and Roma-specific provision, which participants described as helpful but not consistently applied. The macrosystem is reflected in the wider societal stereotypes, deficit discourses, and institutional racism that participants described, which contribute to feelings of disconnection and self-doubt.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) further deepens this systemic understanding through illustrating how the Roma participants experience racism and cultural marginalisation which are a reflection on broader systemic inequalities. The tensions some participants described within the Roma community itself, such as colourism or intra-community judgment, can also be understood through this lens, as these dynamics are shaped by wider systems of racialisation and oppression. CRT highlights that strong, trusting relationships with Roma families and communities are essential to resist deficit discourses and ensure that schools do not position parents as disengaged.

Taken together, these frameworks emphasise that targeted cultural support, while incredibly valued and helpful, needs to be complemented by broader, whole-school approaches to ensure lasting change. A whole-school, consistent anti-racist approach is needed to address inequities at all levels of the system, from daily staff interactions and family-school relationships to institutional policies and societal narratives. This reinforces the important role of Educational Psychologists in advocating for systemic change and supporting schools to build genuine partnerships with Roma families.

In summary, this study highlights the important role EPs have in supporting Roma children in schools. EPs should use psychological frameworks like Critical Race theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model, Attachment theory, and Social GRRRAAACCEEESSS to understand the impact of racism, social exclusion, and cultural identity. EPs should engage parents and families with an understanding of the value of the Roma community. They should work closely with schools to promote inclusive and anti-racist whole school practices, strengthen peer and adult relationships, and challenge discrimination. EPs can also support schools by embedding emotional support and restorative approaches to behaviour

management. Roma children have strong dreams and aspirations; therefore, EPs can help schools to maintain high expectations and address stereotypes about the community. A cultural understanding, appreciation, and genuine community involvement are key to improving outcomes for Roma children.

5.11   Strengths of the Research

One of the key strengths of this research is how it has amplified the voices of Roma children and young people (CYP), offering valuable insights into their experiences within the school environment. These perspectives have shed light on the factors contributing to poor academic outcomes, as well as the high rates of suspensions and exclusions. The study highlights the pressures Roma children face in balancing their community's expectations to succeed after migration, while also confronting systemic racism within schools.

In addition, the research highlights how the role of the EP can be crucial in supporting Roma CYP in secondary schools by working collaboratively with school staff. It provides EPs with a guide, incorporating relevant theories, school recommendations to enhance their understanding of Roma children's school experiences and the aspects of their identity that influence their needs and well-being. Another strength was my approach of understanding, empathy, and unconditional positive regard, which encouraged participants to share sensitive and challenging experiences. My shared ethnic background with the participants also fostered a sense of mutual understanding, which helped create a more open and trusting interview process.

5.12   Limitations of the Research

A key limitation of the research was the sample, as participants were recruited from a specific school setting that placed a strong emphasis on supporting Roma students. This school had a particularly large Roma population and was situated in a city with a well-established Roma community, which contributed to the participants' feelings of belonging and safety within the school environment. The school introduced a selection bias by choosing participants who were already well-known to their department, which likely led to the inclusion of students who were either receptive to support or referred by teachers for 'challenging behaviour'. Roma students in secondary schools with fewer Roma peers and less targeted support may have had different, possibly more negative, experiences. As a result, the findings may not reflect the full range of Roma CYP experiences in other educational contexts, although this was not the aim of this qualitative study.

Furthermore, time limitations also meant that only a small group of Roma CYP participated in the research, which some researchers may argue, narrows the breadth of perspectives captured and the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) challenges the importance of sample size, focusing instead on the depth and richness of the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

On reflection, some of the questions used during the interview process could be improved as they required clarification during the interviews. Words like "peers," "community," and "engagement" seemed a bit too complicated, and looking back, it would have been better to use simpler language, like "friends" or "friends and family." Some questions could be reworded, for example, asking "What can school do to support you better?" instead of "How

can school support your engagement?". Using simpler, more young people-friendly language might have made it easier for the CYP to understand and answer.

In addition, some of the questions also felt a bit repetitive, which led to a few frustrated responses, e.g. "I already told you." It became clear that CYP found it hard to tell the difference between similar words, like "included" versus "supported" and "excluded" versus "unsupported." The questions could have been improved by using clearer language.

5.13 Future Research

This study aimed to develop an understanding of Roma children's experiences of secondary school education and to explore how their identity influences these experiences. One of key findings was the lack of positive teacher-student relationships and the feelings of being unwelcome at school, which many Roma CYP identified as reasons for avoiding classes. Future research could explore practical strategies for strengthening teacher-student relationships in schools, aiming to enhance Roma students' engagement, sense of belonging, and potentially reduce exclusion.

Another important aspect highlighted in this study was the intersectionality of race, class, and gender, an area that has often been overlooked in previous research. Future studies could expand on this by investigating how schools can more effectively support young Roma girls, with a focus on fostering a sense of belonging and helping them achieve positive academic outcomes. In addition, the study drew attention to the challenges Roma CYP face in relation to their well-being. Participants spoke about the emotional impact of their school experiences, including feelings of exclusion and discrimination. Future research could further explore the mental health needs of Roma students to better understand the specific barriers they face and

how schools and wider systems can provide more targeted and meaningful mental health support.

Furthermore, future research could consider extending the research area with primary-aged Roma children to amplify their voices and capture their early experiences of school life. Gaining insights at an earlier stage could help build a more holistic understanding of the educational journey of Roma CYP and how experiences in primary school may shape their later experiences in secondary education.

Future research could also benefit from gathering the stories and perspectives of Roma individuals who have successfully overcome social barriers and are now in positions of success. Hearing from those who have navigated these challenges could offer powerful insights into the protective factors, opportunities, and support systems that helped them to thrive, and inform how we work with and support Roma CYP in schools.

5.14 Dissemination Strategy

The findings of the study will be shared with the school that participated in the research via an online Zoom webinar. In addition, the researcher hopes to share the work via webinar with Educational Psychology services in the UK that have high Roma populations living in their boroughs.

This research will also be made accessible online through thesis databases, including the Tavistock and Portman Library and the University of Essex repository. In addition, the researcher intends to share the findings at conferences, such as the DECP Trainee Educational Psychologists' Annual Conference or the Eastern Region EP conference. Looking ahead, there are also plans to submit the research for publication in an educational psychology journal, such as Educational Psychology in Practice (EPIP).

5.15 Researcher Reflections

As a Roma researcher, this study has been both an academic and deeply personal journey. In reflecting on the experiences of Roma children in secondary education, I am aware that I carry my own memories, emotions, and hopes into this work. This chapter offers a space to consider what I have learned from the research, but also how this process has shaped and challenged me.

I found the recruitment process to be the most challenging aspect to manage, as it reinforced my feelings about the outsider status of Roma children and the lack of genuine care from the system regarding the challenges they face. The low response rate from boroughs and schools made me feel, at times, that I undertook a journey that needed more time, more perseverance, and perhaps more experience. However, my personal ties to the community and my deep motivation for people to hear the voices of Roma children pushed me to persist.

Eventually, my perseverance led me to a school that agreed to participate. At the time, it felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. However, I quickly learned that recruitment within the school itself still presented many challenges. Through this process, I have learned that Roma children occupy a role within the education system, one that is deeply entrenched and very difficult to challenge. It became clear that the system was either not ready or resistant to truly listening to what these children had to say. Despite these feelings, I was still eager to challenge the narrative.

Furthermore, supervision played a crucial role in helping me reflect on my interpretations of the data. At times, it was challenging to separate my own views and experiences from the analysis. However, I do not view this as a weakness. In fact, I see it as a strength. My chosen

method of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) aligned well with my perspective as an insider researcher. Being a Roma researcher offered me a unique lens through which to view the data, but it also brought important responsibilities: to honour the voices shared with me and to challenge the stereotypes carefully. In addition, I learned how my identity shaped my relationships with participants, fostering trust and understanding, and highlighting the value of conducting research within communities to which one has strong personal connections.

This connection became particularly apparent during the analysis phase. Although I did my best to ensure there was a balance of quotes, I noticed that Faith's voice appeared more frequently than others. Her quotes were rich and relevant to my research questions; however, I also reflect on my connection with her. She was a participant who stood out to me and reminded me of myself. I found her openness and honesty particularly engaging. Although I connected with several participants throughout the study, this particular interview stayed with me more than others. She spoke with passion for her people and with a strong sense of purpose. I took time to reflect on how my own position and experiences may have shaped the way I engaged with the data. I think this sense of resonance may have made me more attuned to her responses during the analysis.

One aspect that surprised and moved me was the emphasis participants placed on their relationships with teachers, their appreciation for seeing Roma representation in successful roles, the pressure they were under, alongside the hope they expressed about their dreams and aspirations. I felt inspired by their resilience, pride in their heritage, and ability to maintain hope despite the barriers they faced. I noticed myself paying particular attention to moments where participants challenged common stereotypes about the Roma community. This led me to ask deeper questions about areas such as parental support, reasons behind class avoidance,

relationships with teachers, and future aspirations. I found myself actively hoping that the participants' narratives would dismantle some of the damaging assumptions that persist in society.

In reflecting on these experiences, it also became clear to me how important the role of educational psychologists could be in supporting schools working with Roma CYP. EPs are in a unique position to advocate for a more relational, culturally sensitive approach within schools.

This research journey has enriched my understanding of the Roma secondary school experience in ways I could not have anticipated. It has been emotionally complex, at times difficult, but overwhelmingly meaningful. I feel incredibly proud to have carried out this work for my community and for the possibility of a more inclusive and informed narrative moving forward.

5.16 Conclusions

This study set out to develop an understanding of Roma children's experiences of secondary school education. A group whose voices have often been overlooked in educational practice and academic literature. The study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of how Roma children experience school life, how they perceive their Roma identity, and how this identity influences their educational journeys. By amplifying the voices of Roma young people, the research hoped to inform more inclusive, anti-racist practices within schools and provide insights that educational psychologists, teachers, and GRT liaison officers can use to better support Roma students.

The study aimed to answer research questions:

1. How do Roma children represent their experience of school?
2. How do Roma children represent being part of the Roma community, and how does this influence their school experience?

These questions were developed in recognition of the persistent educational inequalities faced by Roma communities, and from a commitment to ensuring that the voices of Roma children inform how we understand and respond to their realities within the UK education system.

The representation of Roma children's school experiences and the impact of their community identity on these experiences are deeply intertwined. The children represented their experiences by sharing their stories and demonstrating the emotional value they hold. The findings highlighted several key themes, including experiences of racism and discrimination, the importance of ethnic and cultural identity, the importance of relationships and community, the social and academic pressure Roma children are facing, challenges with wellbeing and the vast dreams, aspirations and interests of Roma CYP.

The study offers new insights into the school experiences of Roma CYP, emphasising the role of community and relationships in supporting emotional well-being and academic engagement. It reveals that school/class avoidance is linked to a lack of relationships and feelings of being targeted, unseen, and misunderstood. The findings highlight the need for cultural training in schools, addressing the impact of racism and discrimination, and supporting Roma children's well-being in the face of social and academic pressures. Additionally, the research challenges stereotypes by showing Roma male and female CYP' strong academic aspirations, supported by their families.

The study is important as it highlights the challenges Roma children face in education, including systemic racism and cultural exclusion. The findings emphasise the need for more inclusive and relationally supportive environments. The findings have meaningful real-world implications for educational practice. They suggest that schools should prioritise building positive relationships between Roma children and their teachers, they should recognise and celebrate Roma culture and address the negative impact of racism and exclusion. The research also advocates for the role of EPs in helping schools implement culturally sensitive practices, offering trauma-informed support, using restorative practices and providing guidance on building an inclusive school culture.

Future research could focus on improving Roma and teacher relationships, exploring supporting Roma girls, and addressing Roma CYP mental health needs. Additionally, exploring the experiences of primary-aged Roma children and successful Roma individuals could offer valuable insights.

By amplifying the voices of Roma children, the study has found the complex ways in which their cultural identity influences and shapes their school experiences. The findings have revealed the challenges they face, such as racism, discrimination and stereotypes, as well as their love for their culture, community and their strong academic aspirations. The research highlights the importance of building positive relationships, creating inclusive school environments, and addressing the emotional and academic needs of Roma students, offering a valuable foundation for future educational practices.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix A

7.1.1 Literature Review PRISMA Diagram

EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC

Google Scholar

Identification

Search 1: AB (roma or romani or gypsy or gypsies or traveller or gypsy traveller or GRT)

Search 2: (education or school)

Search 3: (combined search 1 & 2) 3,087

Search 4: (experiences or perceptions or attitudes, or views, or opinions or beliefs)

Search 5: (combined search 3 & 4) 1745

Search 6: United Kingdom OR Great Britain OR Northern Ireland OR Scotland OR England OR Wales

Search 7: (combined search 5 & 6) 702

Limiter: studies from 2004- 2025: **596**

Eligibility Criteria

-Relevant to lit review question 1&2: School experiences of the Roma & GRT communities

- UK-based or multi-country studies including a UK sample

-Peer-reviewed research articles

-Grey literature from reputable organisations (including reports, working papers, and studies published by recognised institutions such as government agencies, academic institutions, or international organisations (e.g., WHO, UN, major non-government organisations). Only credible sources with internal review or editorial processes will be included.

-Parents, teachers, and community views on children's education

-Studies from 2004

Search 1: Roma children education United Kingdom **(4,000)**

Search 2 GRT children education UK **(187)**

Limiters: Review Articles from 2004

Screening

Studies hand-searched for relevant titles and abstracts

Studies screened against eligibility criteria

Searches 1 & 2 hand-searched for relevant titles and abstracts.

Studies screened against eligibility criteria

Excluded

1.Non-UK Roma/ other non-UK Roma issues (57 studies)

2. Irrelevant to topic/ research question (367)

3. GRT & Roma other issues (44)

4. Studies on Travellers/Gypsies only (71)

5. Roma in higher education (10)

6. Duplicates (28)

Included

10 Relevant papers on Roma

9 Relevant papers on GRT

Included

11 Relevant papers on Roma

7 Relevant papers on GRT

EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC

ROMA

1. Dobson, T., Stephenson, L., & De Arede, A. (2021). Writing a novel with Roma primary school children: Tensions in disrupting aetonormativity. *Children's Literature in Education, 52*(4), 511–527. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-020-09428-3
2. Klaus, S., & Marsh, A. (2014). A special challenge for Europe: The inclusion of Roma children in early years education and care. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 22*(3), 336–346. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2014.912896
3. Klaus, S., & Siraj, I. (2020). *Improving Roma participation in European early childhood education systems through cultural brokering. London Review of Education, 18*(1), 50–64. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.18.1.04
4. Levinson, M., & Hooley, N. (2014). Supporting the learning of nomadic communities across transnational contexts: Exploring parallels in the education of UK Roma Gypsies and Indigenous Australians. *Research Papers in Education, 29*(4), 373–389. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2013.772223Taylor & Francis Online
5. Matras, Y., Howley, G., & Jones, C. (2020). Attitudes to the language and identity of Romanian Roma migrants in a UK school setting. *Intercultural Education, 31*(3), 359–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2020.1728092Taylor & Francis Online+1Taylor & Francis Online+1
6. Miskovic, M. (2009). Roma education in Europe: In support of the discourse of race. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 17*(2), 201–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681360902934442
7. Óhidy, A., Riddell, S., & Boutiuc-Kaiser, A. (2022). Children's rights in European education: Dilemmas, challenges and implementation regarding Roma children in selected European countries—An introduction. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal, 12*(1), 1–11.
8. Ryder, A. (2015). Raising Roma educational participation and achievement: Collaborative relationships, transformative change, and a social Europe. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 61*, 417–431.
9. Smith, H. J., Robertson, L. H., Auger, N., & Wysocki, L. (2020). Translanguaging as a political act with Roma: Carving a path between pluralism and collectivism for transformation. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 18*(1), 98–135. https://www.jceps.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/18-1-4-heasmi.pdf
10. Swanwick, R., Elmore, J., & Salter, J. (2021). Educational inclusion of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and from migrant Roma families: Implications for multi-professional working. *Deafness & Education International, 23*(1), 25–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/14643154.2019.1685756

Google Scholar

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2. Crozier, G., Davies, J., & Szymanski, K. (2009). Education, identity and Roma families: Teachers' perspectives and engagement with INSETRom training. *Intercultural Education, 20*(6), 537–548. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980903448577
3. Humphris, R. (2013). European Union enlargement and Roma migrants' welfare: The role of changing migration status in UK education policy and practice. *Human Welfare, 2*(1), 26–35.
4. Klaus, S. M. (2019). *Using cultural brokering strategies to improve the early childhood education of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children: Case studies from the UK and Serbia* (Doctoral dissertation, UCL Institute of Education). UCL Discovery. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10066139/UCL Discovery
5. Lever, J. (2012). *A report into the impact of multi-agency work supporting Roma children in education*. European Dialogue.
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EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC

Google Scholar

GRT

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7.2 Appendix B

7.2.1 Yardley's Literature Critique

Yardley's Criteria **EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC**				
Study	Sensitivity to context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact & Importance
1. Dobson et al., (2021)	The study showed strong sensitivity to context working with Roma primary school children who have been historically marginalised and an underrepresented group in education and literature. The research acknowledged cultural and institutional dynamics that impacted children's reluctance to share their cultural knowledge and their tendency to reproduce stereotypical representations of Roma people. The involvement of an adult Roma reader added an additional layer of sensitivity. The authors acknowledged their position in the research as non-Roma and attempted to address their biases in the storytelling process.	The research showed commitment and Rigor in its methods through its longitudinal engagement with the children in this project and the use of multiple sources of data, e.g. reflection journals, children's drawings, videos and interviews. This demonstrated a thorough approach to data collection. The choice of thematic analysis utilising a dual approach (deductive and inductive) was appropriate as it allowed the use of a framework, e.g. aetonormativity, and the construction of new themes based on children's contributions. However, commitment could have been improved if more time was spent exploring alternative explanations for why children struggled to express their cultural knowledge, which resulted in using stereotypical representations of their culture, e.g. follow-up conversations or interviews.	The study is transparent and coherent in its methodology and analysis process. It explains each phase of the project, from the co-construction of the stories, the feedback from the sensitivity reader, and the feedback between drafts. The study is coherent in applying the theoretical concept of aetnormativity throughout and focuses on how children and adult participation influenced the representation of Roma characters. However, the authors could have been more transparent in its selection process for participants, the schools, the children and the sensitivity reader. In addition, more explanation around how feedback from the sensitivity reader was incorporated in the final product would have improved the study's transparency.	The research has significant practical implications for educational professionals involved in children's literature. It addresses a gap in children's literature around involving characters from underrepresented groups. The study has implications for pedagogical practices and the way children's voices are valued and incorporated into educational contexts. The authors could have further developed impact and importance by offering more concrete recommendations for educators and publishing on engaging children from underrepresented groups in storytelling projects. The study could have been improved by linking the findings to the National Curriculum UK and how curriculum designers could incorporate critical literacy and representation issues into the classroom.

Yardley's Criteria				
EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC				
Study	Sensitivity to context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact & Importance
2. Klaus & Marsh (2014)	The study places emphasis on the unique challenges Roma children experiences in early years education across Europe. It highlights the role of social and cultural barriers, including historical marginalisation, and shows the importance of inclusive practices in early childhood.	The commitment of the study is shown through an understanding of the topic and the use of children's relevant research case studies. The study is mainly based on theoretical analysis and secondary research. Incorporating primary data could strengthen the study as it would allow for direct insights from the participants and those working with them.	The study demonstrates transparency through naming the sources it draws on which included numerous EU-level reports, studies, and statistics. It could benefit from more depth on how these challenges are being addressed in practice, beyond policy analysis.	The study's focus on early childhood is important. This is a key stage in addressing the educational inequalities Roma children face. Its findings are important for policymakers and practitioners looking to create more inclusive early years environments.
3. Klaus & Siraj (2020)	This study is sensitive to the cultural context of Roma communities, focusing on the role of cultural inclusion in overcoming barriers to education. The concept of cultural brokering is used to describe the strategies used to improve Roma participation in early childhood education systems in Europe. By acting as cultural brokers, individuals or organizations can help navigate cultural differences, address misconceptions, and create more inclusive educational spaces.	The study draws from multiple case studies in the UK and Serbia. The researchers demonstrate a commitment to understanding the experiences of Roma families in the education systems, using qualitative methods and offer practical solutions through advocacy to improve their outcomes. Rigour is shown through the studies method of triangulating data by combining quantitative survey data across 21 countries with qualitative (case study) from Serbia and the UK.	The methods are clearly outlined. The study provides a coherent narrative about how cultural brokering can improve educational access and outcomes for Roma children. A mixed-methods approach, combining a survey with in-depth case studies to explore the impact of employing Roma individuals in early childhood education was used	The study is relevant for educational practitioners and policymakers. The concept of cultural brokering could be used for improving Roma children's educational experiences and achievement. The study emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity by promoting the role of Roma cultural brokers in early years settings.
4. Levinson & Hooley (2014)	The study shows sensitivity to context in demonstrating the understanding of the historical and cultural marginalisation of UK Roma Gypsies and Indigenous Australians. The paper also engages with educational policies and cultural practices, showing a	The study uses a comparative ethnographic approach, which is valuable in understanding the shared struggles of nomadic groups. However, many of the studies mentioned in the paper are based on 'GRT'	There is a clear comparison between the two ethnic groups. The study would benefit from transparency about the participants used in the studies they incorporated.	The study shows the impact and importance of educational policy for marginalised groups. The comparison of Indigenous Australiana and Gypsy Roma highlights the systemic nature of marginalisation faced by these communities. The authors highlight the

	Yardley's Criteria			
	EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC			
Study	Sensitivity to context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact & Importance
	broader institutional and social context affecting these communities' educational access. The study relies on secondary sources of data and previous studies. The lack of direct engagement with participants such as teachers, students, educational professionals, and community members limits its sensitivity to the lived experiences of these communities.	demonstrating the author's lack of understanding of the differences between, Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, as conclusions are drawn specifically to UK Roma Gypsies. This can have implications for the reliability of the results and conclusions drawn specifically for the Roma community when the data relied on is not specific to Roma participants. .	The study demonstrated coherence in comparing the two groups demonstrating the similarities between their experiences.	importance of culturally sensitive education and advocate for community-based learning initiatives to promote inclusion and improve outcomes. The synthesis of current research involving the two groups is useful; however, the study could have offered a more detailed explanation of how policy recommendations could be implemented in practice for teacher training or curriculum changes.
5.Matras, et al., (2020)	The paper shows strong sensitivity to the social and institutional context surrounding the narratives and experiences of Romanian Roma pupils. It considers the views of the young people and the views of teachers, who shape the educational environment. It shows how stereotypes and misinterpretations of the Roma culture can impact Roma children. The study's sensitivity could have been improved by including the views of others who play a part in educational environments, such as parents and educational leaders.	The research demonstrates commitment and rigour in its use of ethnographic methods; there is a robust quantity of data from observations, semi-structured interviews, and documents related to Roma pupils in schools. The methods are clear and can be easily replicated. The methodology would have been improved by expanding the sample to other Roma pupils, e.g. Polish Roma and Czech Roma, to broaden the generalisation of the findings.	The research is transparent and coherent in using qualitative methods, clearly explaining how, where and when data was obtained. However, the study is vague with the details they provide about participants, e.g. age, gender, and sex. The research demonstrates good validity and reliability in its methods, findings, and conclusions. However, there may be some issues with the applicability of the experience to all Roma groups.	The research shows a strong impact and importance, providing theoretical and practical information for professionals working with Roma pupils. However, the study could have benefited from a deeper exploration of the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) of the pupil's identity around culture, language, class and gender. The research shows how institutional narratives can contribute to the marginalisation of Roma young people, which could go on to affect educational policy and school training programs.

| Yardley's Criteria |||||
| EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC |||||
Study	Sensitivity to context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact & Importance
6. Miskovic (2009)	This study demonstrated its sensitivity to context by examining the role of race in the education of Roma children across Europe. The study highlighted how children's school experiences are shaped by broader dynamins concerning race in Europe.	The study is mainly theoretical, it draws on existing literature and critical race theory to highlight the experiences of educational marginalisation. The study shows commitment to highlight race and racism towards Roma in education.	The paper could benefit from incorporating more empirical research to back up its claims, as it mainly focuses on policy reviews, secondary literature, and historical context. The paper is coherent with its argument, centring race in the discussions about Roma children education.	The study illustrated the importance as it like the educational experiences of Roma children to race theory which many studies fail to do. It is important for furthering conversation about anti-racism in educational environments and for promoting inclusive practices. The author challenges mainstream policy that frame Roma exclusion as a cultural choice and argues instead for a race-conscious approach.
7. Óhidy et al., (2022)	The study focused on the legal and policy context of Roma children's rights and educational challenges within the framework of UNCRC. However, the use of secondary data limits the ability to assess the real-life impact of policies on Roma children's educational experiences. The study would have benefited from a mixed-method approach incorporating interviews with children to amplify their experiences and views on education. There also has to be careful consideration when applying the findings to the UK, as other European countries with different education systems and policies have been included in the sample.	The study shows commitment and rigour in the steps taken in the methods of reviewing European educational policies and thematic data analysis. However, the data used selected from all countries is not of equal the same value; for example, the data from Germany is based on studies and legal documents, and the data from the UK is based on newspapers and testimonials from an organisation called Traveller Movement, where robust interview methods may have not been followed. The paper acknowledges that the UK data has incorporated the views of the Traveller and Gypsy communities in the UK, who are different to Roma but may have some similarities in lifestyle. This has implications for the general claims	The paper is transparent and coherent about its reliance on secondary data and policy analysis; the source of data from each country is outlined. However, there could have been more detail about the exclusion and inclusion criteria of the policies and documents selected for analysis.	The paper demonstrated a high level of impact and importance for the outcomes of marginalised Roma children and demonstrated that more attention is required to improve their outcomes. The paper could have been improved by providing actionable recommendations for governments to make changes around Roma children's rights.

Study	Sensitivity to context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact & Importance
		made about Roma children in Europe and how applicable the findings are to Roma children in the UK.		
8. Ryder (2015)	The study focuses on the improving Roma children's participation and achievement in education. It acknowledges the importance of transformative change and a "social Europe" approach, showing sensitivity to the socio-political factors affecting Roma education in Europe.	The study emphasizes the importance of collaborative relationships between Roma communities. The study demonstrates rigour from its long-term, uses of participatory methods, which actively engaged with the Roma communities and educational institutions to develop an understanding of their experiences and what they might find helpful.	The paper is fairly clear in its approach and methodology, however more details on the specific research methods and data collection could improve its transparency.	The study demonstrated implications for improving Roma educational outcomes, particularly through collaborative approaches focusing on collaborative relationship building with children and families. The researchers practical approach ensures that the research provided practical solutions for practitioners working with Roma children and communities.
9. Smith et al., (2020)	The study demonstrated strong sensitivity to the sociolinguistic context, exploring how translanguaging practices help Roma children navigate between their linguistic environments. The study acknowledges the complex cultural and linguistic identity of Roma children. However, the authors could have been more sensitive to the institutional challenges professionals face when implementing translanguaging into their pedagogy; the paper does not address the broader school context or teacher training.	The study shows commitment and rigour in its methodology. Discourse analysis was appropriately selected to explore how Roma children's language practices are viewed in the classroom. Data was drawn from rich sources such as interviews and class observations, aligning with the researcher's post-modernist (constructivist) view.	The paper is clear in its methodology and theoretical framework. It outlines the process of novel-writing with Roma children and the tensions involved, providing enough detail to follow the research process. There could be more explicit discussion of challenges faced during the study. The study could have demonstrated more transparency in the number of participants involved as it only included the four Romani dialects identified.	The study demonstrated impact and importance; it showed how recognising and supporting Roma children's multilingualism can foster engagement. The research has practical implications for teachers as it challenges perspectives on Roma children and promotes inclusive practice in education. The research promotes social justice by recognising and validating Roma student's linguistic and cultural resources. However, the study offers little practical advice to schools about successfully implementing translanguaging pedagogy.

Table header:

Yardley's Criteria

EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC

	Yardley's Criteria			
	EBSCOhost: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection, PsycArticles, Education Source ERIC			
Study	Sensitivity to context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact & Importance
	Authors could improve their sensitivity by acknowledging the importance of family involvement in the Roma community and how this can support children education. Grandad being involved.			
10.Swanwick et al., (2021)	The paper demonstrated strong sensitivity to context; it highlighted the intersectional challenges faced by Roma children who are deaf. The researchers show an awareness of the complexity of deaf Roma children's identity, including cultural, linguistic and disability-related barriers. This was also demonstrated in the author's choice of intersectional methodological approach.	The research showed a high level of commitment and rigour in its methodology. It draws on a vast array of data from multiple areas of the children's lives e.g. parents, teachers, children themselves and methods are clearly explained and followed.	The authors are transparent and coherent in using case studies, surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and observations. More transparency could have been provided regarding specificity during the data collection process, such as durations and locations of observations, the structure of interviews and how children were selected to participate. The study could have provided more specific information about the children's ethnicity e.g. Polish Roma, Czech Roma. Additionally, the research would be improved if more time had been spent on a deeper exploration of intersectionality theory and how it applied to the findings and the practical implications for professionals.	The paper demonstrates strong impact and importance; the findings have practical implications for multi-professionals, schools and policymakers working with Roma children who are deaf. It highlights the need for better training and awareness of the children's culture, language and experiences. The study could have been improved by applying systemic theories, e.g. Bronfenbrenner, and investigating the socio-cultural context by looking at broader societal attitudes towards disabilities and Roma communities and the impact on inclusion.

Yardley's Criteria Google Scholar				
Study	Sensitivity to Context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact and Importance
1. Aguiar et al., 2020	The study acknowledges the challenges faced by low income, immigrant Roma families. Thereby demonstrating's its sensitivity to context through acknowledging the socio-political climate experienced by the families.	The study demonstrated commitment by reviewing early interventions. It evaluates the effectiveness of interventions through secondary data analysis. There was a commitment to addressing educational inequalities. The inclusion of primary data looking at the impact of interventions on children direct experience could have improved the studies commitment and rigour.	The study is transparent the use of secondary data, but the methodology around how data was synthesised or selected could be more explicitly described. For example, more detail on how each intervention was selected and evaluated The study demonstrates coherence as it shows how these interventions are implemented in different European countries and analyses their effectiveness	The study helps policymakers and practitioners understand what interventions are successful and how they can be adapted across different countries in Europe. The study provides valuable insights into addressing educational marginalisation for Roma children.
2. Crozier et al., (2009)	The research highlights the complexities of Roma identity, and the challenges teachers face in engaging/understanding Roma families in the UK. The study shows cultural misunderstandings and systemic issues in schools.	The studies commitment is illustrated through its investigation of teachers' perspectives on Roma families' engagement with educational training (INSETRom) and focuses on how these teachers understand and address Roma students' needs The study is rigorous, involving in-depth qualitative interviews, offering rich data. the study could be strengthened by incorporating perspectives, of the Roma families.	The methodology is clear, with an explanation of participant selection and how interviews were carried out. The study is coherent, the findings are relevant to understanding the potential for teacher trainings to improve educational outcomes for Roma children.	The study can influence teacher trainings. Especially for those working with Roma children, to improve their cultural understandings of Roma families. It could lead to more inclusive teaching practices and improve teacher-family relationships within Roma communities.

Yardley's Criteria **Google Scholar**				
Study	Sensitivity to Context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact and Importance
3. Humphris (2013)	The paper positions the discussion around the challenges of Roma access to education in the UK within the broader context of the EU. Highlighting this as a cross-country issue in Europe.	The study explores the socio-political issue and applies a policy analysis framework to understand its impacts. The study shows commitment by exploring how changing migration policies affect Roma educational opportunities.	The study shows transparency by detailing the changes in migration status in the EU. However, there could be more transparency in terms of how the data were analysed and whether any specific methodological tools were used. The study is coherent through clearly connecting political shifts to practical outcomes in schools.	The study us relevant as it highlights the connection between policy and day to day life involving access to education for Roma families.
4. Klaus (2019)	The studies sensitivity lies in its effort to explore the cultural and systemic barriers experienced by Roma Gypsy Traveller communities in the UK and Roma communities in Serbia. The study highlights the importance of culturally response approaches when working with the populations. .	Commitment is shown through study of cultural brokering strategies to improve Roma children's education in the UK and Serbia. A case study approach is used and the draws on practical real-life examples. The study shows its commitment by highlighting the lived experiences of Roma children and staff in schools. The rigor is shown using a compressive case study approach, with systematic data collection from schools.	Transparency in the study is shown through a clear explanation of the research design, sampling strategies, and data collection methods. The study clearly explains the concept of cultural brokering and how it can support the educational outcomes of Gypsy Roma children. It explains how strategies were employed and why they were chosen. The study applies the concept to real world example helping the reader imagine how the strategy could be used in	The research is impactful and important, it contributes significantly to understanding how cultural brokers can be used in education settings to promote cultural inclusion and act as a bridge between schools and Roma families. The study has implications for policy and practice in education.

		Yardley's Criteria **Google Scholar**		
Study	Sensitivity to Context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact and Importance
			school, demonstrating coherence However, the study would benefit more from more transparency around the ethnic identity of its participants as children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are not the same group. The study seems to be mainly discussing Roma issues however the distinction is not explicitly made.	
5. Lever (2012)	Sensitivity was demonstrated by the studies exploration of multiagency collaboration in support educational outcomes for Roma children. The study acknowledges the socio-economic challenges experienced by Roma services such as budget and time, influencing capacity of the services.	Commitment and rigor is shown in the studies choice of methodology including case studies, interview and secondary data to paint a convincing picture of the challenges experienced between different agencies commissioned to work with Roma families.	The study shows transparency, by listing the different agencies involved and describing their roles. However, the study could have been more transparent with its explanation about the methods used to analyse the data. The study is coherent as it supports a strong evidence base suggesting that collaboration across agencies improves outcomes for Roma children.	The study is useful for policy makers and those in charge of educational budgets as it supports multi-agency working. The study provides valuable insights into how partnerships between different children's services can support Roma children's outcomes.
6. Payne & Prieler (2015)	The study highlighted the language and cultural difficulties experience by migrant Slovak Roma pupils. The	The study shows its commitment by addressing the real linguistic challenges	The study demonstrates transparency by clearly documenting the process of	This study has shown its importance through demonstrating practical

Yardley's Criteria Google Scholar				
Study	Sensitivity to Context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact and Importance
	study emphasises the importance of educational tools to support the children's access to education. (The Roma Language and Education Tool, RoLET).	faced by Roma Slova children who recently moved to the UK. It is rigorous in testing the effectiveness of a language tool with the population it was intended for	developing, trying and evaluating the tool. The study outlines the steps on how educators can use the tool. The instructions are also clear and easy to replicate. The tool is also well evaluated and directly linked to the educational outcomes for Roma children demonstrating the studies coherence. However, the study could be more coherent with clarifying that the population was made up of new migrant children where not all Roma children. EAL challenges may not be relevant to all Roma children.	The study demonstrated importance and impact through providing a practical tool for schools to utilise when supporting new migrant Roma children. The tool can inform practices for assessing Roma students' language abilities and improve their educational experience through the support tools.
7. Penfold (2016)	The study shows sensitivity to context by highlighting a common issue of ascription that Roma children face in the UK where their ethnicity is not ladled correctly in the school system. The study also raised issues of attendance and engagement for Roma children.	Commitment is illustrated by a comprehensive review of current educational practices and its challenges in the education system. It evaluates data and offers practical recommendations. The studies rigor is shown through its systematic review of literature and an evidence-based approach to support practical recommendations for schools. The rigour of the study could be improved by providing more detail on the practical	Transparency is demonstrated through the study's clear explanations in regard to its methodology. The authors review educational challenges and support strategies used in. schools to support Roma pupils. The study uses practical case study examples from schools and local authorities, showing coherence in demonstrating barriers in two institutions	The report offers useful recommendations for those working in education sectors. The practical recommendations and insights can help in the development of interventions that are specific to Roma students rather that general support for GRT communities.

		Yardley's Criteria **Google Scholar**		
Study	Sensitivity to Context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact and Importance
		case study examples and how these were analysed.	impacting the educational outcomes of Roma children. In addition, the study uses a wide range of existing research, policy reports, and case studies across the UK and Europe, demonstrating this as a cross-country issue.	
8. Robson (2015)	The study demonstrates sensitivity to context by exploring the negative narratives surrounding Roma children in education. It highlights the dynamics of when school staff challenge or reinforce these stereotypes.	The study is committed to challenging stereotypes and offers a qualitative analysis of how practitioners navigate these biases in school settings.	The study is clear in its methodology, using interviews to collect data. However, it could provide more information about how the data were analysed and coded. The study is coherent as it connects the discussion of stereotypes with practical strategies used in classrooms.	The study contributes to efforts to challenge stereotypes about Roma children in education. Its findings are impactful for educational institutions where Roma students face prejudice and discrimination.
9. Scullion & Brown (2013)	The study is a policy review and research report. The sensitivity is shown through the exploration of the impact and effectiveness of policed aimed at Roma inclusion across Europe.	The study is committed to understanding the broader picture of how Roma inclusion is targeted across Europe. The rigour is shown by analysing and evaluating various international policies on Roma educational inclusion.	The use of a policy review is transparent however the study would benefit from providing more explanation about how policies were selected, and the methods used to analyse its effectiveness. The study is coherent with its aims and what it indented to find out, it followed a clear analysis of how education policies affect Roma children.	The study is impactful as it provides valuable information for policymakers and those in charge of education budgets to consider investing funds into policies and interventions that are working well. European countries can compare their policies and interventions to access which ones could also be impactful for their Roma populations.

Yardley's Criteria **Google Scholar**				
Study	Sensitivity to Context	Commitment & Rigour	Transparency and coherence	Impact and Importance
10. Themelis (2009)	The study explores the inclusion of Roma/Traveller children. The study demonstrated sensitivity to context by acknowledging the socio-political climate experienced by Roma families, influencing educational outcomes of Roma children in Europe	The study shows commitment by emphasising the experiences of exclusion in schools that the children face. Rigor could be improved by the use of primary data such as using case studies or interviews to capture the lived experienced of children experiencing poverty. The study could improve its commitment by acknowledging the differences between Roma and Traveller children as they author writes as if they are the same ethnic group.	The methodology is somewhat clearly presented, though more detail on the data analysis would improve transparency. The study is coherent in demonstrated the exclusion of Roma and Traveller children in education systems across Europe	The study is important for improving educational inclusion across Europe and provides a valuable insight into those creating policies and working in schools with marginalised communities.
11. Themelis & Foster (2013)	Sensitivity to context is demonstrated by the study highlighting the educational disparities that Roma children face in educational institutions The study emphasises the need for culturally inclusive curriculums to support the engagement of Roma pupils in Europe.	Commitment is demonstrated by the studies effort to explore the importance and improving the understanding of culturally inclusive curriculums that foster belonging and engagement for Roma pupils across Europe. The study has shown rigour by providing a review of existing interventions used to support the educational outcomes of Roma children.	The study is transparent in explaining its methodologies and the research used to evaluate the interventions. It highlights the need for education reform to address the educational barriers experienced by Roma communities.	The study is important as it proposes changes to educational curricula that could improve the learning outcomes of Roma children. Its recommendations are relevant to schools and those in charge of educational policies and funds.

7.3   Appendix C

7.3.1   Ethical Approval

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Klaudia Matthews

By Email

04 April 2024

Dear Klaudia,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'Roma Children; Experiences of Secondary School Education'*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn

Academic Governance and Quality Officer
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc.   Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

7.3.2   **Ethics Amendment & New Approval**

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Notification of Amendment to Approved Ethics Application

To apply for an amendment to an existing study please complete the form, attach all appendices (track changes where appropriate) and send application including all appendices to academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk – ensuring that your supervisor is copied into the email.

1. Details of Researcher/Principal Investigator and Supervisor

Student name	Klaudia Matthews
Doctoral Programme	M4 – Professional Doctorate in Child, Educational and Community Psychology
Supervisor(s)	Dr Richard Lewis

2. Details of Research Project

Project Title:	Roma Children; Experiences of Secondary School Education
Original Date of Approval:	04/04/24
Date Project Commenced (if applicable):	04/04/24

3. Details of Amendments   (*Please delete as appropriate*)

	Yes		No
Does the amendment involve changes to information supplied in the original ethical application to TREC? (*If yes, please detail the changes in Section 4 below*)	x		
Does the information involve changes to the consent form, information sheet or other supporting materials for the study? (*If yes, please ensure all amended materials are appended to this application*)	Yes		No
	x		

	Yes	No	NA
If your project has the approval/consent of external/commissioning organisations 'external organisations', please confirm that they have been consulted/consent to the changes			x

4. **Summary of Amendments -** Please state clearly and simply the proposed changes to your project (methods of data gathering, changes to design etc)

Please explain the reason for the change(s) and their implications for the study.

If the amendment substantially changes the research design, methodology, data gathering or may otherwise affect the value of the study, please indicate if additional and appropriate critique has been obtained.

Location of proposed research

I am requesting approval with immediacy as the request is time sensitive and a minor change.

In the current TREC application I have stated that I will carrying out interviews at a Roma charity and local authorities. However, in the past week a local authority has identified Roma children through a school. Parents have asked for the interviews to take place at the children's school as this would make them feel more comfortable.

I am therefore requesting approval to carry out my interviews at the participants schools when current and future participants are identified by schools.

Recruitment

I am also asking for approval to approach secondary schools myself and ask if they have Roma children who would be willing to participate in my research.

5. **Additional Information**

7.3.2.1   Applicants may indicate any specific ethical issues relating to the proposed changes, on which the opinion of TREC is sought.

Safeguarding
Schools follow strict safeguarding procedures. The DSL will be present in the building and the researcher and participant will be visible to those working in the building. The schools safeguarding procedures will be followed regarding disclosure of harm to self or others. There will be no lone working, visiting private residences or conducting research outside the working hours. Interviews will be carried out during the school day.

Only participants who are identified by their schools will be interviewed at their school, as this means that their Roma identity is already known to the school. This mitigates the risk of accidently revealing their Roma identity in the event that they were actively trying to conceal it from the school.

Student Information Sheet & Consent
Consent remains the same as in the current TREC form. I have only made a small amendment on the student information sheet about the location of the interview.

All other ethical considerations made in the original TREC still apply.

6. List of enclosed documents

Document *All changes made are highlighted in documents*	Date
TREC form	13/09/24
Risk Assessment	13/09/24
Information Sheet & Consent Form (School Version)	13/09/24

7. Declaration

- I confirm that the information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and I take full responsibility for the details herein.
- It is my belief that it would be practical for the proposed amendment to be implemented.
- I have discussed the changes with my supervisor(s) and I can confirm that they are in agreement with my changes and have approved my changes (please copy your supervisor into the email request)

Signature of Student: _____ K. Matthews
_____

Print name:_____Klaudia Matthews_____

Date of submission:_____13/09/24_____

Please return this form as directed by your supervisor or course lead to academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

You **must** ensure any changes are also approved by the ethical approval body before you start work

Dear Klaudia

I can confirm that the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee has received your updated TREC documentation in light of the challenges you have experienced with recruiting participants and I can confirm that the changes have been recommended. Your updated TREC form is attached.

Please see extract of comments below:

'the only request I have made is for the school to give consent for the interviews to be carried out in the school premises, and that they are happy with the governance around the interviews, safeguarding protocols etc. At this stage, all the student has to state is that consent will be sought on interviews being carried out at school.

…I am happy for the change of venue of the interviews provided the school agrees.'

With this in mind, and for record keeping processes, please forward any written consents from schools to me and I will ensure the records are kept up to date.

Please note that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc., must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

Kind regards,

Paru
Paru Jeram
Senior Academic Governance and Quality Officer
Pronouns: she/her
Spelling mistakes are possible – apologies in advance

Doctoral Student Research and Research Ethics

7.3.3   Interview Schedule Questions

1. How do Roma children represent their experience of school?

2. How do Roma children represent being part of the Roma community and how does this influence their school experience?

Interview Schedule Questions

General Prompts:
-Can you tell me more about that?
-That sounds like…
-Are there any other things?

I'm interested in what school is like for you as a Roma young person. I want to listen to what you have to say about this, so…

1. Can you tell me what it's like?
    Potential Prompts:
        - Can you tell me more about that?
        - Are there any other things

2. Can you describe school in three words?
    Potential Prompts:
        - What three words come to mind?
        - Talk to me through these words.
        - What example can you give me for each word?

3. What do you enjoy about school?
    Potential Prompts:
        - Can you tell me more about that?
        - Are there any other things you enjoy?
        - Why do you enjoy that?
        - Is there anything else you would like to share?

4. What do you not enjoy about school?
    Potential Prompts:
        - Can you tell me more about that?
        - Are there any other things you enjoy?
        - Why do you not enjoy that?
        - Is there anything else you would like to share?

5. Could you tell me about your relationships with your peers?
    Potential Prompts
        - Why do you think that is?
        - Do you have many relationships with your peers?
        - Which peers do you get along with best and why?
        - Can you tell me more?
        - How do you feel about the relationships?

6. Could you tell me about a teacher you get on with?
    Potential Prompts
        - Why do you think that is?
        - What makes the relationship positive?
        - How do you feel about the relationships?

- Is there anything else you would like to share?

7. Tell me about a teacher you don't get along with.
   Potential Prompts
   - Why don't you get along?
   - Did something happen?
   - How do you feel about the relationship now?
   - Do you think the relationship can be fixed?
   - Is there anything else you would like to share?

8. What makes you feel included in your school community?
   Potential Prompts
   - Why do you think that helps with feeling included?
   - Can you give me an example of a time you felt included?
   - Is there anything else you would like to share?

9. What makes you feel excluded in your school community?
   Potential Prompts
   - Why do you think that makes you feel excluded?
   - Can you give me an example of a time you felt excluded?
   - Is there anything else you would like to share?

10. What makes you feel supported in your school community?
    Potential Prompts
    - Why do you think that makes you feel supported?
    - Can you give me an example of a time you felt supported?
    - Which people make you feel supported?
    - Is there anything else you would like to share?

11. What makes you feel unsupported in your school community?
    Potential Prompts
    - Why do you think that makes you feel unsupported?
    - Can you give me an example of a time you felt unsupported?
    - Which people make you feel unsupported?
    - Is there anything else you would like to share?

Now I want to know what is it like to be a part of the Roma community?

1. Can you describe the Roma community in three words?
   Potential Prompts:
   - What three words come to mind?
   - Talk to me through these words.
   - What example can you give me for each word?

2. When have you had the opportunity to meet with other Roma people?
   Potential Prompts
   - Where else do you have the opportunity?
   - Do you like to meet up with other Roma people?

3. Is there something you enjoy about your Roma culture? Could you give an example?
   Potential Prompts
   - Why do you enjoy those aspects?
   - What else do you enjoy

4. How does the Roma community support you?
   Potential Prompts
   - Why do you think that makes you feel supported?
   - Can you give me an example of a time you felt supported?
   - Which people make you feel supported?
   - Is there anything else you would like to share?

5. Are there things that frustrate you about the Roma identity? If yes, what frustrates you?
   Potential Prompts
   -Why does that frustrate you?
   -Is there anything else that frustrates you?
   -Is there anything else you would like to share?

6. If the Roma community disappeared tomorrow, how would that make you feel?
   Potential Prompts
   - Is that something difficult to think about?
   -What would life look like if this happened?
   - Is there anything else you would like to share?

7. How do you feel your Roma identity influences your school experience?
   Potential Prompts
   - Why do you think part of your identity influences your school experience?
   -Does that make engaging with school easier or harder?
   - Is there anything else you would like to share?

8. What do you think is a benefit or value of your education?
   Potential Prompts
   - Do you think you might use your education in the future?
   -Do you think education can help you in any way?

9. How could school be better for you / what could help with your engagement in school?
   Potential Prompts
   - Why do you think that might help?
   - Is there anyone you could lean on to support you with school engagement?

10. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Debrief Questions

How do you feel about the questions I asked?
Was there a question you found difficult to answer?
How are you feeling, is anything bothering you?
Do you feel you need more support once you leave this room?

7.3.4   **Student Information**

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Student Information Sheet

Title: Roma Children; Experiences of Secondary School Education

Who am I?

My name is Klaudia Matthews. I am a trainee educational psychologist and a student at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am carrying out my thesis research. I also identify as Roma and am interested in Roma children's school experiences.

Why have you been asked to take part in this research?

You have been asked to take part in the study because your school has identified you as a Roma young person who may be willing to share their experience of school within the UK.

Why is this research important?

This research is important because Roma children's views are important, I would like to listen to them and develop an understanding of their experiences at school to tell other people and to support and improve outcomes for Roma children.

Do I have to take part?

No, you don't, it is your choice. Your parent/guardians have given permission to ask if you would like to take part. There is no disadvantage to you if you decide you don't want to take part, I just hope you can consider this information sheet and do ask questions of the adults around you if you need help to make your decision.

What do we do, & Where?

We will meet for around an hour to talk about your school experience and cultural identity. The location will be confirmed. This most likely will be at your school. I will have some questions to ask you about these topics. Your responses to the questions will be audio-recorded. I will spend about 10 minutes at the end to check in to see how you are feeling and whether you require additional support.

Who will know what I will say in the interview? (Confidentiality & Anonymity)

Other people will **not** be told who said what in the interview **unless** you say something to me that suggests you or someone else is in danger. If this happens, I will have to follow safeguarding procedures to ensure your safety; however, I will speak with you about what is worrying me before I do so.

The written research will **not** include your identifying personal information, such as your name, address, school, or borough. There will be approximately five students participating in the research; therefore, you may recognise your answers in the final research paper. Your information and the interview audio recording will be kept safe and secure in line with data protection policies.

What will happen after the interview?

After the interview, your answers will be typed, and I will put them into themes along with other's answers. I will use your answers as part of my educational psychology thesis, which I must complete as part of my educational psychology training. The research will be shared with others; however, they will not be told who was interviewed.

The research will be a publicly available thesis or publication when completed.

What if I no longer want to take part? (Withdrawal)

Whether you would like to participate in the study is your choice. If you no longer want to participate after the interview stage, you can withdraw **until** it has been typed up. The interview will be typed up one week after the interview. This is because your responses will be anonymised. Should you withdraw from the programme, you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any need to give a reason.

Contact for Support Services
If you require additional support after the interviews have taken place. Please inform your parents/guardians and the educational champion at the Luton Roma charity. You can also contact the following organisations:

Childline
0800 1111
https://www.childline.org.uk

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
01582 708140
https://www.elft.nhs.uk/services/camhs-south-bedfordshire-and-luton

Your Local GP

Who approved the research? Who do I contact if I have concerns about the research process (Ethical Approval and Ethical Concerns)

The research has received ethical approval from the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC)

If you have any concerns about the researcher's conduct or the research process, you can contact Head of Academic Registry (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

If you have any further questions, you can contact the lead researcher by email to arrange a call.
klaudia.matthews@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

This research has not been funded by a funding body or research council.

Permission (Consent)

Please complete an attached consent form to indicate whether you would like to participate in the research and return to klaudia.matthews@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk, or the adult who told you about the project. This may have been someone in your school.

Klaudia Matthews
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Dr Richard Lewis
Principal Investigator
Educational Psychologist

Rlewis@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
120 Belsize Lane
London NW3 5BA
Tel: 020 7435 7111
Fax: 020 7447 3837
www.tavistockandportman.nhs.uk

7.3.5   Consent Forms

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Consent Form

Title of research project: Roma Children; Experiences of Secondary School Education

Researcher: Klaudia Matthews (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Student & Parent/Guardian Consent

- I have read the information sheet relating to the above programme of research in which I / my child has been asked to participate and given a copy to keep.

- I understand the purposes of the research, and I / my child has had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information.

- I understand what is being proposed, and the procedures in which I / my child will be involved have been explained to me.

- I understand that my/ my child's involvement in this study and particular data from this research will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data.

- I understand if I/ my child says something that suggests I/they or someone else is in danger, safeguarding procedures will be followed to ensure safety.

- What will happen once the research has been completed has been explained to me.

- I give permission for the interview to be audio recorded as long as my/ my child's name is changed in the final research project.

- I understand that the research may be shared with other professionals and will be a publicly available thesis or publication when completed.

- I understand that approximately five students will be participating in the research; therefore, I/ my child may recognise my/their answers in the final research paper.

- I freely and fully consent to participate in the study, which has been fully explained.

- Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the programme at any time without being disadvantaged and without being obliged to give any reason up until the data has been anonymised a week after the interview.

PLEASE TURN OVER PAGE TO SIGN

I have read and understood the information about Klaudia Matthews's research, and I agree with the statements above. Please sign below to indicate that you agree.

Parent's/Guardian's name (Printed):..

Parent's Signature:...

Date:.........................

Student's name (Printed):..

Student's Signature:...

Age & Year Group………………………………………………………………

Date:.........................

(If the young person is age 16 or over, parental/guardian consent is not required)

Klaudia Matthews
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Klaudia.matthews@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Dr Richard Lewis
Principal Investigator
Educational Psychologist
Rlewis@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
120 Belsize Lane
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7.4   Appendix D

7.4.1   Reflective Thematic Analysis

7.4.2   Example of Coded Extracts (Stage 2 RTA)

Code	Example Quotes
Experiences of Racism, Discrimination & Stereotyping	"People hate on you for no reason" "It's not feeling good because once I was in a shop and they told me that I was stealing, but I was just looking around. I was with my friends and they closed the door and they said they're going to call the police on us" "The teachers always say you should be speaking English" "They think we can have a fight or something" "Some teachers, like English teachers, sometimes they just don't like you. Yeah. They have always something to say to you" "I'd have a big accent, and I'd just get judged. Mm. Like, I remember... a lot of discrimination, then" "That's the most discrimination you can hear here in ****** to Roma people. ***** Road" "Some have been in the past quite rude about it like calling us like a beast" "People say like we steal a lot."

Code	Example Quotes
Cultural Differences with Communication Styles	"They think we can have a fight" We're all in a circle just talking they might think we're gonna have a fight or we're arguing or something" "We're loud and we talk like um straightforward" "Some teachers might react in a different way. They would think that something is going wrong" "Because we're Roma maybe and how they like act maybe. People might find it offensive like when they're talking like very loudly. Yeah. That's just how they are." "They see the Roma community they probably think that quite argumentative"

"As Roma people we don't like to talk in English we like to talk in our own language and I feel like some of the teachers, some of them can find it disrespectful because some want only English to be spoken in the classroom."

"So when a lot of Roma kids get together, start talking, some shout in, the teacher can like not know how to break it up or something. They may take it as they're doing something wrong and talking about them"

"They're not arguing, that's just how they communicate."

"(Romanes) it's understandable. Yeah, it's like really simplified. Yeah, like simplified more than English."

Code	Example Quotes
Importance of Relationships with Teachers	"He's very nice to me. I like him" "He knows how to like really teach you. He's good" he's a nice person to be around yeah "It's just how you connect with a teacher that how's the vibe with you' "If a teacher's not nice to you. You're going to react in a way that you don't want to" "Sometimes I'll be bad and bad but she'll just be like to me ...." I want the old ***** back" and then it'll make me like think about it and I'll be good" "She helps me. She'll see me struggling and she'll help me" "I don't even need to put my hand up she'll come to me straight away" "She'll make me feel good about myself" "I used to always make jokes with her" "She treats me good" "She says she likes Roma students" "She's not always, like, rude to you. Like, she talks to you, like, respectfully" "I was very close with her she was very supportive she would always be there for every student Roma student" "Makes me want to, you know, have a good relationship with the teachers, like work more too"

Code	Example Quotes
Feeling Supported by Roma Team	"I think it's good because it gives you a lot of opportunities with the international team" "They help you out a lot for all the time you're here" "They give you a lot of opportunities" "The international team like I said they help you like if you have any problems, you just go to them, they'll help you" "What makes you feel included in your school community? The Roma team they give you like stuff like this every single time yeah, they do like uh celebrations for like um our background" "There's also like Roma month yeah they celebrate that okay they give you a lot of stuff like this like to help you" "They're all, like, nice to me. I speak to them. They're respectful to me" "That's from the international team, yeah. That's right. I love her so much" "Everywhere I go down the hall, she's helping someone who's Slovakian like this. Like, all they do is just come to her. I can see that, like, she's like a mum"

Code	Example Quotes
Importance of Parental & Family views	"Because to my parents of course they want me to finish my school and have a good job of course" "They gave you opportunity right that's why we came here" "Parents yeah they want me to like succeed" "They're always telling me to wake up and go to school" "My parents want me and my sister to like have a good job and not like um maybe struggle how they did maybe back like in Slovakia" "They want us to have a better life" "They have a lot of pressure on you that you should do good like my parents yeah they want me to do good and it's just it's hard" "Some things that they say it's not true. And does that sort of get you into trouble? Yeah. With your parents? It does."

"My dad said just go learn about music, , because my dad used to be a musician. Okay, so he says music you should focus on"

"They (school) obviously, like, don't understand where we come from and, like, what we do, how it is for us, how our parents are to us"

"In my Roma community do not have the same opportunities as me so I obviously want to show them"

"I'm already focused on what I want to do and my parents are proud"

"It's important to me. I just want to make my mom's proud"

Code	Example Quotes
Feeling Unseen	"If they don't they act like I'm not there it's gonna just it's gonna be a problem. And do they act like that often that you're not there? They do. They act like I'm not there" "He like acts like I'm not there too. No? He usually talk to other people. I put my hand up he doesn't want to talk to me" "I put my hand up I'll wait there for like 10 minutes you all don't answer me. When someone else does they answer" "It's like what I said like they don't help me they don't make me feel like welcome. So when I don't feel welcome I'm just gonna be like not behave you know and go. You don't want me there? Because the teachers don't want me there I can tell" "They like don't greet you when you come in the classroom or say bye to you or ask you questions" "When they're giving me bad looks and like they don't like help me they'll put my hand up I'll wait there for like five minutes and they'll choose someone else but not me" "They don't know what I'm going through" "They don't even want to talk to me" "They'll never give me a chance" "It makes me just feel like, okay, then what am I going to do? Yeah, like, who's going to help me"

Code	Example Quotes
Aspirations for University	"I think i'm gonna go to university"
	"What do you think you'd like to study? um travel and tourism maybe"
	"Six form or college and then university"
	"I want to do music in university"
	"Before we started, you said you wanted to become, like, maybe, like, a forensic psychologist. (shakes head, confirming)"
	"I do want to go to university"
	"I've been to London, Cambridge, two universities. Where do you want to go? Cambridge. (To study) Engineering. To learn a successful business"

7.4.3 Reflexive Journal Entry Example

Date	27/02/25
Task	Initial coding of transcripts from participant interviews.
Biggest Observation	Participants spoke a huge amount about negative relationships with teachers and feeling discriminated against.
Personal Reflection	Although this did not surprise me, I noticed feeling frustrated and protective when the participants shared their accounts of being stereotyped or underestimated. Hearing their experiences brought up a strong emotional reaction, and I found myself wanting to amplify their voices even more. I also recognised a tendency within myself to focus more on their negative experiences, which risked overlooking the moments where they spoke about positive relationships with teachers and feelings of support at school. I made a conscious effort during the analysis to stay open to the full range of their experiences, ensuring that the positive interactions were also acknowledged and not lost.
Action Taken:	I made a note to also actively listen to positive experiences the next day. I also made a note to take these feelings to supervision, unpack them and sense check my interpretations of the quotes. This helped me with further codes and themes capturing the importance of relationships later down the line.

7.4.4   Code Map 1

7.4.5 Code Map 2

Themes							
Racism & Discrimination	Ethnic & Cultural Identity	Relationships & Community	Unique School Context	Social & Academic Pressures	Wellbeing	Dreams, Aspirations & Interests	

Codes

Racism & Discrimination		Ethnic & Cultural Identity		Relationships & Community		Unique School Context		Social & Academic Pressures		Wellbeing		Dreams, Aspirations & Interests	
Holocaust	Recent experiences of racism, discrimination & stereotyping	Cultural difference with communication styles	Roma day celebrations	Parental support with school	Belonging as a motivator for school	Opportunities in school	Feeling supported by Roma Team	Changing the negative narrative	Making Roma community proud	Adversity leading to acting out	Lack of trust in others	Hopes & Aspirations for the future	Valuing education
Feeling compelled to react to discrimination	Negative expereinces with teachers	Feeling proud to be Roma	Roma as an inclusive community	Roma community teaching the way of life	Importance of relationships with non-Roma peers	Gratitude for support & opportunities	Other minorities are experienced as understanding	Becoming a trailblazer and fearing the unkown	Importance of parental and family views	Feeling defeated	Feeling unseen	Aspirations for University	Enjoying learning new things
Exclusions & Suspensions	Expereinces of racism, dicrimination & stereotyping in home country	Importance of Roma language	Modern & Traditional Views on gender roles	Importance of the Roma Community	Importance of Roma peers	Grateful for a culturally diverse school	School recognising Roma Culture	Respecting elders & authority	Viewing education as the key to success	Low self-esteem and wellbeing	Class avoidance	Importance of ethnic representation and role models	Becoming a musicans or entrepreneur
Experiences of Poverty	Expereinces of colourism	Roma as an empathetic community	Importance of culture	Importance of relationships with teachers		Importance of school dealing with racism		Importance of making use of opportunities	Seeking positive recognition	Unirecognised needs & lack of support	Expereinces of peer bullying	Intrest in creative & humanistic subjects	Vocational routes as a back up
Lack of acceptance & inclusion	Internalised discrimination projected into the community	Diversity in Roma Community	Importance of Traditional Christian Views					Academic struggles and desire for support	Academic School pressure				Parental & Roma Commuity support with education
Negative past school experiences	Lack of opportunities for Roma	Travel between UK & Home country	Northern Indian Heritage					Strict parenting & high expectations	Adolescent changes & challenges				
	Views of Teachers negative perception and low expectations							Peer pressure	Peer disruption to learning				
								Schools strict behaviour policy	Need for flexible and respinsive teaching				

7.4.6 Example of Theme Review (Stage 4 RTA)

Theme under review	Pressure
Process	I went back over the coded data to make sure it told a clear and meaningful story about the participants' experiences. I asked myself whether the theme truly reflected the participants' voices and stayed close to the data, I challenged my own assumptions.
Example of Quotes reviewed	"Us as a Roma community we can show them that we're not what people say about us – we're more than that." (Bob) "The teachers maybe they have like an idea of us not being that smart so maybe I'm just trying to prove them wrong." (Joanne) "In my Roma community do not have the same opportunities as me so I obviously want to show them." (Joanne) "I just want to make my mom's proud." (Theo) "I think education is very important, I think without education you'd not succeed." (Joanne)
Reflections	The quotes showed both personal and social pressure, participants wanted to succeed in school to challenge stereotypes and make their community proud. I considered splitting this into two themes (social vs. academic pressure), but decided they were too closely linked and made more sense together.
Action Taken	I slightly reworded the theme title to "Social and Academic Pressure" to better reflect the data.

7.5 Appendix E
7.5.1 Educational Psychologist Guide

Racism & Discrimination
- Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) helps EPs explore how biases in school policies and attitudes contribute to Roma children's marginalisation. Impact of internalised racism through the lens of projection (Freud, 1936)
- .Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) reveals how societal attitudes (macrosystem) impact Roma children's school experiences (microsystem), often resulting in discrimination.

Cultural & Ethnic Identity
- Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) emphasises the role of family and community in nurturing Roma children's cultural identity, and how this influences their school experiences.
- Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS (Burnham, 2012) highlights Roma cultural practices that might conflict with mainstream school norms, leading to misunderstandings. Supports the value of acknowledging history and culture.
- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) underscores the value of involving Roma parents and families when working with Roma children.

Relationships & Community
- Attachment Theory & Student-Teacher Relationships (Riley, 2010) highlights positive relationships with teachers and peers are essential for Roma children's emotional well-being and academic success.
- Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) shows how Roma children's ethnic identity fosters pride and belonging within their community.
- Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) underscores the importance of supportive relationships in motivating Roma children to succeed academically

(Unique) School Context
- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) stresses the impact of school environment factors like inclusivity and teacher attitudes on Roma children's sense of belonging. Shows the importance of working with Roma families. EPs should consider how school diversity shapes Roma children's experiences.
- Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) prompts EPs to consider how schools might fail to reflect Roma values, contributing to alienation.
- Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) advocates for the employment of Roma staff to foster culturally sensitive relationships with students.

EPs Working with Roma CYP in Secondary Schools

Social & Academic Pressure
- Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) addresses the academic pressures Roma children face due to cultural stereotypes, impacting their motivation.
- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) highlights the multiple pressures from family, school, and society that influence Roma children's school experiences.

Wellbeing
- Trauma-informed practice (Perry, 2006), including transgenerational trauma (Danieli, 1998), helps EPs support Roma children affected by racism and displacement by creating a safe, supportive space. EPs can support schools with restorative practices.
- Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) emphasises fostering autonomy and belonging in school to enhance Roma children's emotional and academic well-being.

Dreams, Aspirations & Interests
- Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) helps EPs consider the importance of Roma CYP feeling competent and autonomous and how a lack of this can hinder their progress.
- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) emphasises the influence of family, community, and school on developing Roma children's aspirations.
- Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) highlights the importance of community role models in motivating Roma children to pursue their dreams.

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Recommendations for Secondary Schools with Roma CYP

Racism & Discrimination

- Receive/deliver culturally responsive training on Roma children's experiences of racism via EPS, GRT Support team, Roma charities
- Recognise and challenge unconscious bias and systemic racism.
- Embed anti-racist practice, ensuring this includes Roma CYP, e.g. policies, and channels dealing with racist behaviour

Cultural & Ethnic Identity

- Receive/deliver Staff training, including Roma history, e.g. Holocaust, migration, traditions, values, culture, the importance of language and community
- Recognise cultural differences, e.g. communication styles, group identity
- Build relationships with parents & celebrate Roma culture, e.g. organise Roma Day celebrations

Relationships & Community

- Ensure that Roma children experience belonging through strong relationships with peers and staff
- Emphasis should be placed on initiatives to improve teacher-Roma student relationships.
- Apply Attachment Theory-Informed Practice: Build strong, trust-based relationships, understand the impact of intergenerational trauma
- Foster good relationships with parents and involve the Roma community where possible,, e.g. through Roma Day celebrations, culture-sharing projects

(Unique) School Context

- Adopt flexible and responsive policies. Adapt behaviour and attendance policies to consider cultural contexts. Schools could use relational and restorative practices
- Employ designated staff from or closely connected with the Roma community.
- Use strategies that recognise the multiple environmental layers influencing Roma children (family, peers, school, and broader society).

Wellbeing

- Understand that Roma CYP are struggling to manage their self-esteem and wellbeing
- Create drop-in spaces where Roma students can access emotional support.
- Roma CYP could benefit from culturally relevant expressive arts, dance, and story-writing therapeutic interventions.
- Employ well-being mentors trained in trauma-informed care to support Roma CYP struggling with SEMH
- Use responsive and inclusive teaching strategies in the classroom that meet Roma CYP needs

Social & Academic Pressure

- Develop an understanding of the pressure that Roma CYP face to perform academically and challenge stereotypes about them.
- Be mindful that Roma CYP are desperate to make their parents and community proud.
- Recognise that Roma are overwhelmed and negatively impacted by sanction-led behaviour management

Dreams, Aspirations & Interests

- Acknowledge & celebrate Roma CYP's aspirations for higher education or vocation paths, using positive language and fostering engagement through their interests (e.g., music, business, languages).
- Maintain high expectations and provide opportunities such as academic trips (e.g., t universities) and inspirational talks from successful Roma individuals.
- Roma CYP school data should be closely monitored and reviewed to track progress.

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