

**“Sometimes the obvious isn’t obvious”: School Support Staff
Experiences of Interpreting in SEND Family Meetings as
Non-Professional Interpreters: An IPA Study**

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Abstract

Interpreting services can be required to facilitate communication in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) meetings. Schools may meet the linguistic needs of families via bilingual support staff interpreting informally. There is sparse literature on interpreting in UK educational settings, particularly from the perspectives of those who carry out the role. This research highlights the experiences of bilingual support staff who informally interpret in SEND meetings, addressing a significant research and practice knowledge gap.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to explore the experiences of five bilingual support staff interpreting between English and Bengali/Sylheti in primary schools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed idiographically before cross-case analysis led to the construction of six Group Experiential Themes: Finding role and boundaries; Commitment to meaning making; Feeling and managing the load of interpreting; Personal values guide professional role and meaning; Awareness and responsiveness to the emotional experience of parents; Connecting through unique knowledge, strengthening and empowering families.

The findings reveal that bilingual support staff perform a skilled, layered role whose complexity is largely invisible to others. Their deep community knowledge, relational investment and personal values make a significant contribution to SEND meetings. The implications of these findings extend across multiple levels: individual Educational Psychologists reflecting on collaborative practice with interpreting staff; schools developing clearer policies and recognition of the role; and Educational

Psychology Services considering how language access and the support of bilingual staff can be embedded within service-level thinking.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to the Study

This research explores the experiences of bilingual school support staff who have taken on an informal, non-professional interpreting role in school-based meetings with families of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Though the practice of non-professional interpreting services provided by bilingual staff in schools is not uncommon, the experiences of those staff who undertake this role are largely under-researched. Schools, Educational Psychology Services (EPSs), and the professionals within them have both legal and professional duties to ensure language access for families who require it, as well as a professional responsibility to recognise and engage with the experiences of colleagues who undertake the role.

This chapter sets the scene for the research. It outlines the national context of linguistic diversity in the UK, the legislative obligations to provide interpretation services, before discussing the use of interpreters in relation to Educational Psychologist (EP) practice. Key terms relating to interpreter types and modes of interpretation are then defined. The chapter outlines the professional competencies and guidance relevant to EPs working with interpreters, including the context of support staff in schools. Finally, it establishes the rationale and origins of this research, the local context and the researcher's positionality.

National Context

Linguistic Diversity in the United Kingdom (UK)

The UK is characterised by significant linguistic diversity; however, systemic practices across public institutions reflect a persistent bias towards English as the expected language of engagement.

Nationally, the UK can appear racially and linguistically homogeneous, with approximately 82% of the population identifying as White and 91% speaking English or Welsh as a main language (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2021a & 2021b), with a small proportion identifying as not speaking English 'well' (1.5%) or 'at all' (0.3%) (ONS, 2021b). However, this small percentage represents over one million people, many of whom are likely to have difficulties that would require services to support spoken communication. These broad national statistics mask significant regional and community variations, particularly evident in educational settings.

When examining English state schools more closely, a different picture emerges where 30% of children are identified as being from 'ethnic minority groups' and approximately 21% speak a language other than English as their first language (Department for Education [DfE], 2025a). These figures highlight that while the UK may appear predominantly White¹ and English-speaking at a macro level, many educational communities serve highly diverse populations with rich cultural and linguistic characteristics.

¹ Capitalisation of racial and ethnic groups is contested, the thesis uses capitalised words as stated in APA7 guidelines.

Although there is linguistic diversity within schools, English remains the assumed language of government institutions. Though there is no explicit legislation mandating English-language use, it is implicit in policy. For example, British citizenship requires proof of English language proficiency through recognised qualifications (Home Office, 2025), and English is the only required language in the National Curriculum, which explicitly states: 'English has a pre-eminent place in education and in society' and 'pupils who do not learn to speak, read and write [English] fluently and confidently are effectively disenfranchised' (DfE, 2014, "English Programmes of Study" section). Since curriculum delivery and assessment in England occur exclusively in English, the education system assumes progression toward English proficiency.

However, of the children who speak English as an additional language (EAL), only 40% are competent or fluent after one to four years in the UK education system (DfE, 2020). Despite this, access arrangements for examinations for EAL students are withdrawn after three years in the UK (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2025), reflecting systemic expectations of rapid language acquisition that often do not align with language acquisition rates.

This creates tension: while the education system expects movement toward English proficiency, linguistic diversity persists, creating a risk of a gap between individuals' needs for language services and their availability. The obligation to bridge the gap varies considerably across public institutions. For example, English courts must provide an interpreter in criminal cases, but in civil cases it is dependent on set criteria and determined by the judiciary (House of Lords Public Services

Committee, 2025). The National Health Service (NHS) operates within a framework of legal and professional duties that support the provision of interpreting services, including Equality Act (2010) obligations, duties relating to health inequalities, and requirements for informed participation in healthcare decisions (Doctors of the World, 2024). Schools, by contrast, have no equivalent explicit statutory duty to provide interpreters, which risks inconsistent support for families and pupils.

Access to services which are not statutorily required is further compounded by funding changes. Section 11 of the Local Government Act (1966) and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (1999) provided formula-based funding tied to local community need, enabling schools and local authorities (LAs) to employ specialist teachers, bilingual support staff and centralised consultants to support EAL learners. From 2011, this funding was absorbed into the general schools grant, losing its ring-fenced status and any associated accountability measures (Hutchinson, 2018). With it went the infrastructure that sustained specialist language support in some settings, and interpretation provision, leaving schools with no direct statutory obligation and no dedicated resource to support language access for pupils, with implications for language access beyond the classroom, including interpreting for families.

Legislation Protecting Linguistically Diverse Populations

While there is variation in institutional obligation for interpreting services, there is no legislation which directly requires schools to provide interpretation services; however, schools, LAs and EPSs operate within wider legal frameworks that promote

equitable access and participation. The absence of such a provision sits in tension with several legislative frameworks.

Where families lack access to interpretation, there is a risk of indirect discrimination against non-English-proficient families. Though the Equality Act (2010) does not reference language specifically as a protected characteristic, race (defined as colour, nationality, or ethnic/national origins) correlates with language use. The Public Sector Equality Duty of the Equality Act (2010) further requires schools to proactively consider such equality impacts, though it stops short of mandating the provision of interpretation.

In addition, language is intrinsically linked to culture and identity. International legislation recognises this connection, establishing that all children have a right to education that respects parents' views (European Convention on Human Rights [ECHR], 1952, Article 2, Protocol 1) and the child's cultural identity (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC], 1989, Article 29(1)(c)) and parents should be able to provide appropriate guidance based on their child's capacity (UNCRC, 1989, Article 5). Given that many families are not proficient in English, adequate interpretation services are essential to understand parents' views and enable them to guide their children's education.

For children with SEND, this obligation is most explicit. Legislation and guidance require parents and children to participate meaningfully in decisions about their support (Children and Families Act, 2014; Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice [SEND CoP], 2015), and meaningful participation is difficult to achieve without effective communication across languages.

Therefore, whilst schools have no direct statutory duty to provide interpretation, schools, LAs and EPSs remain subject to wider equality, participation and SEND duties. Consequently, the absence of appropriate language support risks undermining the principles of discrimination law, international human rights frameworks, and SEND legislation.

Interpreters and EP Practice

Interpreters can be required across all aspects of EP practice: assessment, consultation, training, intervention and research. The context of EP work influences which mode of interpretation is most appropriate. The BPS guidance for psychologists working with interpreters (2017a) identifies four distinct modes of interpreting:

- **Linguistic mode:** as close as possible to word-for-word interpretation
- **Psychotherapeutic or constructionist mode:** where the meaning and feeling of the words are prioritised
- **Advocate or community interpreter mode:** where the interests of the individual or wider group are advocated for
- **Cultural broker/bicultural worker mode:** where both spoken word and culturally relevant information are shared.

For example, when assessing a child's communication skills, the linguistic mode (word-for-word interpretation) provides more valid insights into receptive and expressive language abilities. Conversely, during family consultations, cultural broker modes may better facilitate cross-cultural understanding between home and school,

aligning with and facilitating the EP profession's strengths-based approach to consultation (DfE, 2023).

Given statutory requirements to ensure children's and families' views remain central to EP work, combined with the UK's linguistic diversity, interpreters are commonly required in practice. However, with no mandated requirement for professional interpreters, given financial constraints across most schools (DfE, 2024a), and capacity constraints in accessing professional interpreters (e.g. Edwards, 2005; Lopez, 2000; Rossetti et al., 2020), EPs, like other educational professionals in schools, frequently work with non-professional interpreters such as bilingual staff and family members, including children (e.g. Cline et al., 2014a). While bilingual staff may be deemed suitable and potentially preferred to children, this practice raises questions about communication accuracy and professional boundaries (BPS, 2017a).

Key Terms

Key terms will be defined to operationalise the terms used in relation to the study. It is important to note that whilst the terms professional and non-professional interpreter are frequently used in the literature, they are not clearly defined. For example, the BPS's (2017a) guidance for psychologists working with interpreters frequently references both terms but does not provide clear definitions of either. Martinez-Gómez (2015) offered a definition of non-professional interpreters that is relevant to this study: "individuals with a certain degree of bilingual competence, who perform interpreting tasks on an ad hoc basis without economic compensation or

prior specific training” (Martinez-Gómez, 2015, p. 417). Rudvin (2007) provided some support for defining professional interpreters as those with professional status, as measured by remuneration, training, and superior competence validated by a community of peers. However, the distinction is not agreed upon, and professional status could be a measure of the capacity to manage the autonomy to coordinate interactions (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2016).

The following definitions are adopted to provide a clear, workable criterion for determining participant eligibility, given that the absence of formal interpreting qualifications is the defining characteristic of the population of interest.

- **Interpreter** - An individual who facilitates communication between speakers of different languages.
- **Professional interpreter** - An interpreter with recognised interpreting qualifications and training.
- **Non-Professional interpreter** - An individual without formal interpreting qualifications who facilitates communication between languages, typically on an ad hoc basis alongside other professional duties.

Despite the professional-non-professional distinction being linked to training, even within professional interpreting, qualifications sought differ across services, with implications for educational settings. For specialised public services such as healthcare and police, professional interpreters typically hold Level 6 qualifications with sector-specific training (Ministry of Justice, 2025). Comparatively, community interpreting qualifications at Level 3 provide the entry-level framework for public service settings, including education, covering skills such as note-taking, cultural

competence, and ethical practice, with optional education-based units available.

Thus, interpreting skills rather than contextual knowledge are the focus.

Non-professional interpreters lack formal interpreting qualifications. In school settings, they may include bilingual staff, bilingual EPs, family members, and child language brokers (CLB) (BPS, 2017a; Cline et al., 2014b; Krause, 2018). As part of the education system, these individuals are likely to possess important knowledge to support interpreting in educational settings. However, whilst the BPS guidelines for working with interpreters acknowledge that non-professional interpreters can help establish trust, they caution against their use, stating that 'interpreting is a highly skilled role and not something that any person or even any professional can just slip into' (BPS, 2017a, p.9). As in the literature on CLB (e.g., Cline et al., 2014b), the use of non-professional interpreters should be carefully considered, with processes in place to support both the interpreter and the service user.

This creates a tension: professional interpreters have formal interpreting skills and training but may lack the specialised educational knowledge that interpreters in other public services receive, while non-professional interpreters in educational settings may understand the context but lack formal interpreting training.

The Professional Guidance, Competencies and Responsibilities for EPs

Working with Interpreters

The following section considers how professional guidance and competencies of EPs is linked to professional responsibilities for working with interpreters.

Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) and BPS Professional Standards

EPs have individual responsibility for 'ensuring they are skilled at working with interpreters' (BPS, 2017b, p.14) and are 'personally responsible for, and must be able to justify, their decisions and actions' (HCPC, 2023, standard 4.1). Even in training, doctoral programmes require Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) to 'demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills across a range of settings and activities (including use of interpreters, taking into account their strengths and limitations)' (BPS, 2023, competency 10f). However, there is no requirement for training institutions to deliver specific interpreter training. The onus for developing these skills appears to rest with individual (T)EPs, and confidence in this aspect of practice is lacking in many T/EPs (Anderson, 2018; Smith, 2025).

Professional standards require EPs to ensure access to language support for those with whom they work, which removes barriers to participation (HCPC Standards 5.1, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.9; BPS, 2017a), communicates clearly to enable informed decisions (HCPC, 2023, standards 7.5 and 7.8), and obtain valid consent, all of which interpreting services would support (HCPC, 2023, standards 7.5 and 7.8). However, EPs must balance these requirements with interpreter availability and family preferences.

This creates professional dilemmas around interpreter choice. While interpretation quality is crucial, it may not necessarily require professional interpreters. However, using non-professional interpreters risks compromising confidentiality (HCPC, 2023, standard 6.4) and accuracy (BPS, 2017a), potentially

limiting service users' meaningful engagement. Additionally, the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021a) emphasises professional responsibility regarding accountability, welfare, and competing demands, including consideration of additional pressures placed on staff who take on interpreting roles.

BPS Guidance and the Theory-Practice Gap

The BPS guidance for working with interpreters (BPS, 2017a) offers practical guidance, including pre-session meetings, confidentiality protocols, fluency checks, training requirements, and interpreter debriefings. The guidance also acknowledges the potential lack of supervision for interpreters and recommends that psychologists offer welfare support. While the guidance cautions against the informal or unassessed use of non-professional interpreters, it acknowledges potential benefits and provides suggestions to mitigate associated ethical challenges.

However, professional interpreters, recommended for their accuracy, training in dynamics and interpreting modes, and adherence to confidentiality standards, are not readily available and entail financial implications (Lopez, 2000). In financially strained school settings where bilingual staff are available, non-professional interpreters may provide a pragmatic solution to ensure family engagement. Yet the experience of such staff in EP meetings, and how professional guidelines support them, remains unknown.

The Context of Support Staff in Education in Relation to Interpreting

This study focuses on support staff experiences when taking on non-professional interpreting roles. Support staff comprise 50% of school

workforces, with 60% being teaching assistants (TAs) and 40% in other support roles, such as administrative staff, business professionals, and 'auxiliary staff'. Over 90% are female (DfE, 2025b).

Support staff face increasing workloads and 'role blur' due to reduced government funding and the informal addition of small tasks without discussion, leading to stress and burnout (National Education Union, 2025). While not specifically referencing interpreting, this could become another informal addition to support staff duties, as in many schools, financial constraints are leading to staff cuts (DfE, 2024a). While government guidance addresses teacher workload via mechanisms such as the Workload Reduction Taskforce (DfE, 2024b), equivalent protections for support staff have been relatively absent. However, the School Support Staff Negotiating Body, currently being established under the Employment Rights Act 2025, will negotiate pay, conditions, and training for support staff, moving to greater equity of consideration (DfE, 2025). The disparity in workload considerations is important for EPs to consider when utilising interpreting support.

Given these systemic pressures on support staff in educational settings, EPs must consider the impact of allowing such interpreting support on already stretched workloads. Therefore, this study examines support staff experiences of non-professional interpreting to understand these dynamics and their implications for ethical EP practice.

Rationale for the Research and Local Context

Rationale and Research Origins

This research originated from my experience as a TEP during a meeting with a parent, which required an interpreter. A member of support staff interpreted throughout the session, and their contribution was invaluable in facilitating communication between the family and educational professionals. However, the logistics of attending the meeting, combined with the cognitive and emotional demands of interpreting a group session, appeared to place strain on someone who was not trained nor had protected time for this specialist role, as indicated by having to rush off to fulfil other duties. This research arose from what Dewey (1910) terms a 'felt difficulty', a suspension of judgement that initiates reflective inquiry, as I sought to understand the nature of the implications of what I had observed.

This experience highlighted the stark contrast between professional competencies, BPS guidance, and the practical realities of school settings. Literature linked to EP practice and culturally responsive practice highlight the importance of EP reflection on the use of interpreters (Sakata, 2024a) and to use professional interpreters where possible (Carrerio, 2024). It raised important questions about the welfare of support staff who take on interpreting as well as their other responsibilities, and the ethical implications for EPs who rely on their assistance.

Local Context

This research is conducted in a large inner-city area in the South of England, where there is significant linguistic diversity and Bengali and Sylheti are among the

most commonly spoken languages after English, with bilingual support staff interpreting in schools as common practice. Further details on the local context, including the linguistic profile of the borough, is provided in the methodology chapter, which informs the justification for the research setting and recruitment approach.

Researcher Positionality

As a White, British, monolingual female and TEP, I bring specific perspectives to this research that require acknowledgement. My monolingual background means I cannot understand the lived experience of interpreting from personal experience. However, this outsider position may facilitate more natural checking in with participants, as my non-expert status in interpreting could encourage fuller explanations of their experiences.

The power dynamics inherent in my role as a TEP researching meetings involving EPs, combined with differences in ethnicity and language background, may influence what participants feel comfortable sharing and my understanding of the shared experiences. Therefore, careful attention to positioning participants as experts of their own experience is essential. A core aim is to amplify their experiences.

Primary Research Aim

The primary aim is to explore the lived experiences of school support staff who informally interpret in meetings involving families of children with SEND and educational professionals, as non-professional interpreters.

Overview of the Thesis Chapters

This introduction has outlined the national context of linguistic diversity in the UK and its implications for educational settings. It has discussed the use of interpreters in EP practice, introduced key terms relating to professional and non-professional interpreting, discussed the professional guidance and competencies relevant to EPs working with interpreters, and established the rationale and origins of this research alongside the researcher's positionality.

Chapter Two consists of a scoping literature review to map the existing research on interpreting in educational settings. The themes identified across the literature inform the research questions and provide the contextual framework for the findings.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology and details the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study. It includes the rationale for selecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the methodology, the recruitment process, ethical considerations, and the analytical approach.

Chapter Four presents the findings, organised around Group Experiential Themes (GETs) generated through IPA analysis. It draws on participant accounts to highlight the lived experience of interpreting in SEND meetings.

Chapter Five is an account of the discussion of the findings in relation to the existing literature. It considers the implications for EP practice and educational settings. It includes a reflection of the researcher's learning, evaluates the strengths and limitations of the study, and suggests directions for future research. It concludes with a summary of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Literature Review: Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a scoping review to determine the current research landscape on the experiences of non-professional interpreters in school-based meetings. It follows the methodology outlined by Arksey & O'Malley (2005), refined by Levac et al. (2010), identifying sixteen papers for review. The findings are synthesised using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and four themes are discussed in relation to the literature research question. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature and establishes the rationale for the study.

Scoping Review

The literature review employs a scoping study methodology rather than a systematic review. These studies can be used to rapidly map the research field across disciplines, identify gaps in the literature, and support a broad, exploratory search of the field, producing a descriptive or thematic overview (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Despite being distinct from systematic reviews, scoping reviews remain systematic to reduce the likelihood of bias in study selection (Booth et al., 2006). Transparency in the methodology is given to allow for replication and assessment of reliability, which remains important for the methodological robustness (Mayers et al., 2001, cited in Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and ensures auditability (Booth et al., 2016).

The scoping search is an iterative and reflexive process in which the researcher refines and adjusts search terms as they better understand the research parameters. Since this research spans multiple areas of study, an iterative process

was deemed particularly appropriate. Before the systematic search, a preliminary literature review was conducted during the research protocol stage to establish an initial understanding of the field. Five studies from this search phase are included in the literature review, having independently met the inclusion criteria and providing some insight into the research question.

Stages of the Scoping Review

The five key stages of a scoping review, as outlined by Arksey & O'Malley (2005), were used in this scoping process: identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, study selection, charting the data and collating, summarising and reporting the results via a framework or thematic construction to provide a narrative of the literature.

Stage 1 - Identifying the Research Question

The initial research question was to determine what is known about the experience (outcome) of those without professional interpreting training (population) who interpret in meetings (intervention) with families and staff in educational settings. The aim was to gain insight into the current understanding of informal interpretation experiences in educational settings. However, due to the limited research on non-professional interpreters specifically, the scope was further widened to include professional interpreters and expanded from school-only settings to broader educational contexts.

Stage 2 - Identifying Relevant Studies

The primary systematic search outlined took place between July and August 2025. A final search was conducted in April 2026 to identify any literature published after the primary search period. EBSCOhost, a multi-database platform which

includes databases of research in Psychology, Education and more general studies, was used for the main search. As a comprehensive platform for Psychology and Educational research, it was assessed as a fundamental tool for identifying key literature, including grey literature, articles, and books for interpretation in educational settings and/or of relevance to psychologists. A supplementary search via Google Scholar, which indexes research across a broad range of online sources beyond psychology and educational research, was conducted due to the limited number of identified papers via these specialist platforms, and a further search in the Educational Psychology in Practice (EPiP) Journal.

Key terms and Boolean operators were iteratively developed and refined across eight EBSCOhost searches, based on hits generated and key terms identified in the papers (see Appendix A). 3048^{2 3} papers were identified to be screened from EBSCOhost, Google Scholar and EPiP. A two-stage screening process was applied. In the first stage, titles and if necessary, abstracts were read to identify papers potentially relevant to interpreting in educational settings; if a title clearly indicated irrelevance, the paper was excluded, whereas papers with any plausible connection were retained for further review (138 papers).

Stage 3 - Study Selection

In the second stage of the screening process, the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1) were applied, requiring reading of abstracts and, frequently, full papers.

² This number represents deduplicated results as a sum of the eight searches (details in Appendix A), this number will include papers which appeared across searches which were not cross referenced, but managed during title screening.

³ The large number of hits were due to the search term 'interpret' being a common term in research as a part of the analysis process and for studies that used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a methodology

Table 1

Literature Review Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Interpreting of spoken language	Translating non-spoken language (e.g. document translation)	Focus on real-time spoken interpretation relevant to meetings
Interpreting in educational settings	Interpreting in non-educational settings (e.g. medical, legal or social work settings)	Language, dynamics and institutional context are more similar to those of the research question
Interpreting beyond classroom settings, for example in meetings	Interpreting in classrooms to support the learning of children only	Context focuses on interpreting between adults in meetings, not for pedagogical support
Research on adults interpreting	Research on child language brokers in meetings	Significant relational differences in child-adult interactions vs. adult-adult interactions
Language brokers and cultural brokers with an interpreting role	Cultural brokers who do not interpret language	The 'cultural broker' was found to be a descriptive term and profession for someone who interprets in schools
Professional and non-professional interpreters	Roles of non-comparable bilingual staff (e.g. therapists who interpret occasionally)	The distinction between professional and non-professional interpreters could be unclear in the literature. Papers were not excluded on the basis of professional status alone.
Peer-reviewed studies, journal articles and grey literature (e.g. government reports and doctoral theses)	Opinion pieces, chapters from books without empirical data, master's or undergraduate theses	Allows a balance between scope and reliability of sources
Papers from 2000	Papers pre-2000	Literature directly relevant to this

Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
onwards		topic is extremely sparse prior to 2000. Where earlier work exists (e.g. Pratten & Cassell, 1987), it tends to take the form of practice-based reflections without empirical data or does not address the research question. The 2000 cut-off is anchored to the earliest substantive empirical work identified (Lopez,2000) ⁴
English language	Non-English language	The researcher is monolingual in English; allows for accessible and accurate interpretation of research

This was particularly time-intensive given the number of papers and complexity of the field; for example, cultural brokers do not always hold an interpreting role, necessitating careful analysis of each paper's specific context and focus to find papers which give some insight into the review question.

At this stage, reference harvesting identified 12 additional potential papers for inclusion checks.

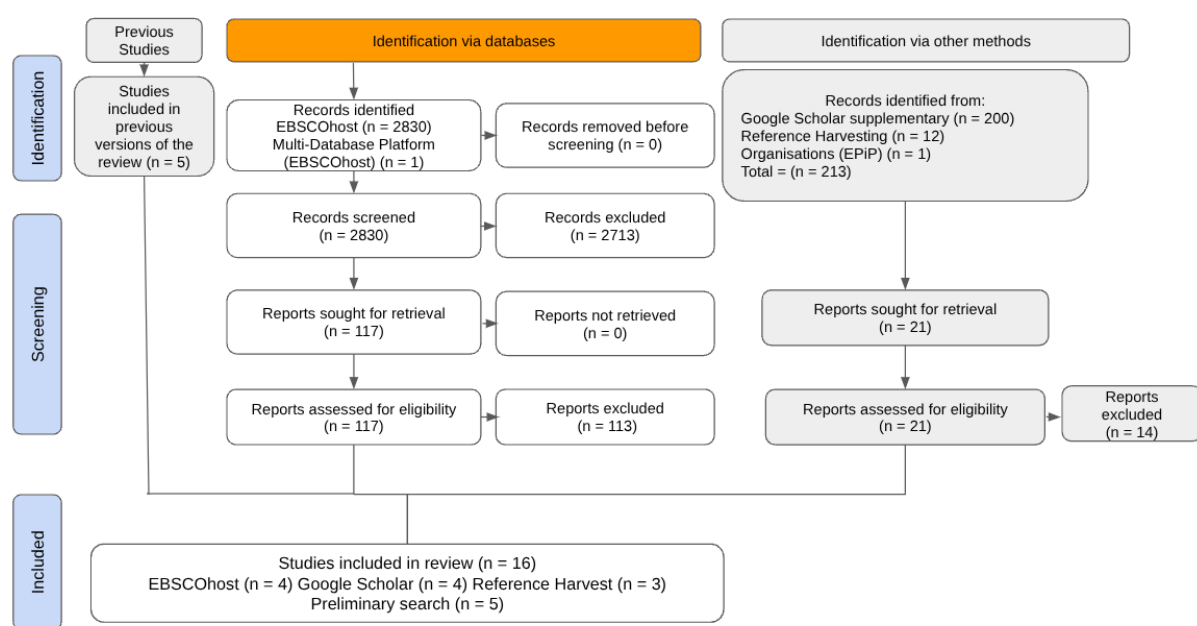
There is some subjectivity in determining which papers meet the inclusion criteria. Levac et al. (2010) recommended that at least two independent researchers review abstracts and make such decisions, which was not feasible. Consequently, a record of the developing inclusion and exclusion criteria and rationale for decisions made was constructed to increase the reliability and transparency of this step (see Appendix B).

⁴ Substantive empirical work is defined by that which collected original data, which contributes to understanding of the research question. It excludes demographic surveys, commentary, or professional reflection pieces.

While the research question is situated in the UK context, no papers were excluded solely on the basis of country, given the limited availability of UK-specific literature. Figure 1 depicts the stages of paper identification, screening, and selection.

Figure 1:

PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Identification Process (Page et al., 2021)



16 papers were identified for the literature review; 5 in the preliminary scoping, 4 from the database search, 4 from Google Scholar and 3 from reference harvesting.

Stage 4 - Charting the Data

Data from the literature were charted to extract key information. The data charted included author, year, country, setting, participants, interpreter type, methodology, data analysis method and key findings (see Appendix C). Although it is recommended that this stage be carried out by two independent researchers (Levac et al., 2010), as a single researcher, having this systematic and consistent approach across papers helped clarify the scope of the literature. A summary of the charting process and key features of each study is shown below (Table 2).

Table 2

Charting Table of Included Studies of the Literature Review

Author, Year, (Country) Title	Design (Method)	Participants (n=X)	Setting/ Context	Interpreter Type (Professional/ Non- Professional)	Key Findings
Lopez, 2000 (USA) Conducting Instructional Consultation Through Interpreters	Qualitative (Case study - participant observation and unstructured interviews)	Parents, consultants, consultees and interpreters (n=16)	High school (multilingual setting)	Non- Professional	Relational dynamics between interpreter and parent are crucial for engagement Non-professional interpreters needed additional preparation time and training

Author, Year, (Country) Title	Design (Method)	Participants (n=X)	Setting/ Context	Interpreter Type (Professional/ Non- Professional)	Key Findings
Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003 (USA) A Vietnamese Head Start Interpreter: A Case Study	Qualitative (Case study - Interviews and observations)	Interpreter for Head Start, teachers, children and families (n=unclear)	Head Start program	Non- Professional	Stakeholder expectations of interpreter role shifted; conflicts between paid role and interpreting duties Community membership added complexity through cultural expectations and blurred role boundaries
Cable, 2004 (UK) 'I'm going to bring my sense of identity to this': The Role and Contribution of Bilingual Teaching Assistants	Qualitative (Semi-structur ed interviews)	Bilingual teaching assistants (n=3)	Primary schools	Non- Professional	Different stakeholders (parents, students and teachers) had varying perceptions of TA interpreter roles TAs role extended beyond interpretation to curriculum advice and cultural explanation to children and adults
Edwards et al., 2005 (UK) Users' Experiences of Interpreters: The Critical Role of Trust	Qualitative (Semi-structur ed interviews)	Adults who have used interpreters (n=50)	Multiple settings (education, legal, medical)	Mixed	Trust and specialist knowledge both crucial; non-professionals may provide trust but lack expertise Service users valued proactive support over direct translation

Author, Year, (Country) Title	Design (Method)	Participants (n=X)	Setting/ Context	Interpreter Type (Professional/ Non- Professional)	Key Findings
Lo, 2008 (USA) Chinese Families' Level of Participation and Experiences in IEP Meetings	Qualitative (Semi-structured interviews)	Parents of children with disabilities (n=5)	Schools - IEP meetings	Mixed	Direct translation is insufficient due to specialist terms/information volume, limiting home-school collaboration Effective interpreter use requires preparation time, time for meetings and professional training in interpreter-mediated interactions
Rah et al., 2009 (USA) Building Bridges Between Refugee Parents and Schools	Qualitative (Semi-structured interviews, school documents and local news archives)	School administrators, teachers and bilingual teaching assistants (n=9)	Public schools (3 districts)	Non-Professional	Cultural differences in school role expectations between parents and schools; interpreters can bridge understanding Called for authentic parent-school participation beyond language translation
Guo, 2010 (Canada) "Why Didn't They Show Up?" Rethinking ESL Parent Involvement in K-12 Education	Qualitative (Naturalistic observation, focus groups and parent feedback)	Teachers of English as a second language and bilingual teaching assistants (n=15)	Secondary school - parents' night	Non-Professional	Different parent/teacher expectations of meetings affected communication direction beyond language barriers Parents viewed bilingual assistants as allies, feeling comfortable expressing dissatisfaction to them
Davitti, 2013 (UK & Italy)	Qualitative (Micro-analysis of videos and	Teachers, parents and interpreter	School parent-teacher	Professional	Interpreters upgraded/downgraded participant messages, potentially promoting school perspectives

Author, Year, (Country) Title	Design (Method)	Participants (n=X)	Setting/ Context	Interpreter Type (Professional/ Non- Professional)	Key Findings
Dialogue Interpreting as Intercultural Mediation: Interpreters' Use of Upgrading Moves in Parent-Teacher Meetings	transcripts of parent-teacher meetings)	(n=unclear)	meetings		Three-way interactions disrupted direct parent-teacher rapport building
Georgis et al., 2014 (Canada) Creating Inclusive Parent Engagement Practices Lessons Learned from a School Community Collaborative Supporting Newcomer Refugee Families	Qualitative (semi-structure d interviews, focus group and observations)	Students, parents, teachers, program/sch ool leadership, cultural brokers, and other community partners (n=46)	Schools	Non- Professional	Cultural brokers mediated different cultural expectations of teacher/parent roles and communication styles Daily presence allowed responsive support; engagement required respecting cultural capital and family aspirations
Davitti, 2015 (UK & Italy) Interpreter-Mediat	Qualitative (Micro-analysis of videos and	Teachers, parents and interpreter	School parent-teac her	Not clear	Interpreters expanded unstated information, revealing parents' 'lifeworld' and implicit teacher messages

Author, Year, (Country) Title	Design (Method)	Participants (n=X)	Setting/ Context	Interpreter Type (Professional/ Non- Professional)	Key Findings
ed Parent-Teacher Talk: One "Talk" – Many Roles	transcripts of parent-teacher meetings)	(n=unclear)	meetings		Expansions could promote institutional agenda and agreement rather than co-construction of communication
Vargas-Urpi, 2015, (Spain) Dialogue Interpreting in Multi-Party Encounters: Two Examples from Educational Settings	Qualitative (Participant observation, field notes, audio recording of one meeting, semi-structured interviews with interpreters)	Parents, teacher, community worker, children, interpreters and researchers (n=12)	Pre-School and 'Educational Welcome Space'	One Professional and One Non-Professional	There are differences in how the interpreters take up their role, they can shift between 'service provider's assistant' to 'user's advocate'. One interpreter answers questions directly based on knowledge of the family rather than interprets. Monolingual exchanges can leave participants excluded. The presence of children in the meetings may have an impact on the interpreter's interactions
Krause, 2018 (UK) What Do Educational Psychologists Recognise is their Unique within their Profession when Working with Ethnic Minority Clients using Language/s other	Qualitative (Semi-structured interviews)	Plurilingual EPs (n=6)	EP services (West Midlands)	Non-Professional	Professional role conflicts created tensions between Educational Psychologist and interpreter duties Need for formal recognition and support for plurilingual practice

Author, Year, (Country) Title	Design (Method)	Participants (n=X)	Setting/ Context	Interpreter Type (Professional/ Non- Professional)	Key Findings
than English: A Socio-Cultural Activity Theory Analysis					
Rossetti et al., 2020 (USA) Access, Accountability, and Advocacy: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families' Participation in IEP Meetings	Qualitative (Semi-structur ed focus groups)	Parents (mothers) most with children taught outside mainstream classes (n=38)	Schools - IEP meetings	Mixed	Parents desire meaningful collaboration with schools; there can be knowledge and linguistic barriers Over half of the parents did not have an interpreter or had an insufficiently skilled interpreter
Mortier et al., 2021 (USA) Cultural Brokers in Special Education	Qualitative (Semi-structur ed interviews and focus groups)	Parents and cultural brokers (n=20)	Schools - parent partnerships	Non- Professional	Cultural brokers provide parents with emotional support and encourage them to ensure their voices are heard Relational qualities, trust building and knowledge of culture and community are highly important
Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024 (Italy)	Quantitative (Discourse analysis of	Parents, teachers and language-cul	Primary school parent-teac	Not stated	Interpreters actively co-construct meaning rather than merely interpret what is being said

Author, Year, (Country) Title	Design (Method)	Participants (n=X)	Setting/ Context	Interpreter Type (Professional/ Non- Professional)	Key Findings
Language Mediation in Schools: The Case of Parent–Teacher Meetings	video-recorded parent and teacher meetings)	tural mediators who interpret (n=74)	her meetings		Dynamics between parent-teacher-interpreter are constantly negotiated
Ho, 2024 (USA) Investigating Coping Self-Efficacy and Burnout among Cultural Brokers Serving Refugees: Mediating Roles of Secondary Traumatic Stress and Compassion Satisfaction	Quantitative (Online surveys)	Cultural brokers working with refugee families (n=260)	Educational settings (schools, nonprofits, after-school)	Not clear	Burnout in cultural brokers is mediated by emotional demands of the role and positive role-related rewards (compassion satisfaction) Training and support for cultural brokers which address the emotional demands of the work is required

Stage 5 - Collating, Summarising and Reporting the Results

Scoping reviews can identify themes across the literature to build a picture when the literature base may be relatively sparse and/or span multiple disciplines. A framework to facilitate processing information across studies is helpful (Levac et al., 2010). Consequently, details of the findings from each study were analysed via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was selected as it is not bound to a theoretical framework and is flexible in its use (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic Analysis of the Literature

The thematic analysis of the findings aimed to provide a response to the research question: 'What is known about the experience of those without professional interpreting training, interpreting in meetings with families and staff in educational settings?' However, during the process of developing inclusion and exclusion criteria and screening papers, the lack of research directly addressing these questions necessitated a broader focus. The guiding question evolved to 'What do we understand about interpreting in meetings between educational professionals and families in educational settings?' This broader question guided the identification of themes, making some aspects of the findings more salient than others.

Whilst Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was developed for qualitative data, the semantic thematic approach was used here to analyse the literature, consistent with thematic synthesis approaches used in scoping reviews. Papers were therefore analysed in terms of explicit content, focusing on the main findings, and, given the interest in professional practice, on the implications of the authors' findings. The stages were undertaken as outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Stages of Thematic Analysis of Selected Literature

Columns 1 and 2 Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 87

Phase	Description of Stage as Stated by Braun & Clarke, 2006 (p87)	Application to Literature Review
Familiarisation of the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas.	Reading and re-reading papers, stating key findings and recorded implications for practice
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the data set, collating data relevant to each code.	Coding key, relevant findings or implications e.g. "Teachers never sanction the interpreter, they tend to look at the interpreter rather than mother so may miss on important contextual cues of the mother. (Davitti, E., 2013)" - code 'professional steps back' (see Appendix D spreadsheet section)
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering data relevant to each theme.	Key finding and associated codes cut out to allow for physical movement and various arrangements to generate themes (see Appendix D photo)
Reviewing the themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.	Spreadsheet recording the themes alongside coded extracts allowed for sorting within and between papers, checking the themes work in relation to the extracts and the papers they came from
Defining and naming the themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names of each theme.	Theme names and boundaries were refined iteratively throughout the analysis. Given the descriptive and mapping purpose of the scoping review, the emphasis was on capturing patterns across studies rather than producing theoretically defined themes (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005)

Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis back to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	The outcome of the literature review themes includes the key findings across a diverse data set.
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The following section examines the methodological approaches across studies, the key research foci of the field, and identifies gaps in the literature before presenting the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

Study Characteristics

The sixteen literature pieces range in date from 2000 to 2024. One additional piece from 1987 (Prattern & Cassell, 1987) documented a UK LA School Psychology Service hiring bilingual teachers as interpreters. Another (Lopez & Rooney, 1997) was a survey of US school interpreters in New York, which sought to explore the backgrounds of those in the role. While these research pieces are relevant, the former was excluded due to its non-empirical, subjective nature from the author's perspective, and the latter focuses on the details of who interprets in New York schools rather than providing insight into the experience. These earlier works indicate that interpreter use in schools and EPSs has been professionally relevant for almost four decades.

Types of Interpreter

It was important to determine whether the interpreters in each study were professionally trained, as training could influence their role. Training status was not always explicitly stated. Terms like 'bilingual' or 'plurilingual' were assumed to indicate no professional interpreting training. The majority of papers (Cable, 2004; Edwards et al., 2005, Georgis et al., 2014, Guo, 2010; Hwa Froelich & Westby,

2003, Krause, 2018, Lo, 2008; Lopez, 2000; Mortier et al., 2021, Rah, 2009; Rossetti et al., 2020; Vargas-Urpi, 2005) included non-professional interpreters, suggesting their common use in educational settings.

Whether interpreters served as cultural brokers or cultural mediators was also noted, as this dual role likely influences interpreting practices through both language and cultural sharing. Four studies included interpreters in cultural mediator roles (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024; Georgis et al., 2014; Ho, 2024; Mortier et al., 2021), but were retained as they provided sufficient insight into the interpreter experience specifically.

The roles of those interpreting varied widely and included professional interpreters (Davitti, 2013; Edwards et al., 2005; Lo, 2008; Vargas-Urpi, 2015; Rossetti et al., 2020), bilingual teachers or teaching assistants (Cable, 2004; Guo, 2010; Rah et al., 2009), cultural brokers or mediators (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024; Georgis et al., 2024; Ho, 2024; Mortier et al., 2021), a community worker (Vargas-Urpi, 2015) and one included plurilingual Educational Psychologists (Krause, 2018).

Participants

Data were collected from various stakeholders, including interpreters (Cable, 2004; Georgis et al., 2014; Guo, 2010; Ho, 2024; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Krause, 2018; Lopez, 2000; Mortier et al., 2021; Rah et al., 2009), parents (Edwards et al., 2005⁵; Georgis et al., 2014; Guo, 2010, Lo, 2008; Lopez, 2000; Mortier et al., 2021; Rossetti et al., 2020) teachers and administrators (Georgis et al., 2014; Guo, 2010; Rah et al., 2009), and students (Georgis et al., 2014). Some studies included objective analyses through video or audio recordings of school-based meetings,

⁵ The participants included a range of 'service users', some of which from schools. The assumption that service users of interpreters in schools would be parents.

including interpreters by the researchers (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024; Davitti, 2013; 2015; Vargas-Urpi, 2015) or researchers as non/participant observers (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Lopez, 2000; Rah et al., 2009; Vargas-Urpi, 2015).

Many studies triangulated data across multiple stakeholder groups (Georgis et al., 2014; Guo, 2010; Lopez, 2000; Mortier et al., 2021; Rah et al., 2009), providing diverse perspectives on interpreter roles but diluting the focus on interpreters' own views. Only three studies focused exclusively on those who interpret (Cable, 2004; Krause, 2018; Ho, 2024).

Target populations for which interpreting was sought varied significantly, including refugee communities (Ho., 2024; Rah et al., 2009), Latinx families (Mortier et al., 2021), Somali cultural communities (Georgis et al., 2014), migrant families (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024; Vargas-Urpi, 2015), and linguistically diverse communities more broadly (Edwards et al., 2005; Krause, 2018), factors which may influence the interpreter role. Several studies specifically focused on families with children receiving special educational support or involvement from school psychology services (Lopez, 2000; Lo, 2008; Krause, 2018; Rossetti et al., 2020), which may have additional implications for the interpreting practice.

Settings

The studies covered a range of geographical locations the majority were from the US (n=8), followed by the UK (n=5), Canada (n=2), Italy (n=3⁶), and Spain (n=1). Educational contexts also varied, though most focused on primary and secondary schools.

Many studies concentrated on formal meetings between parents and school staff, including parent-teacher meetings (Guo, 2010; Davitti, 2013; Davitti, 2015;

⁶ Davitti 2013 and 2015 included both UK and Italy meetings, thus total number of locations exceeds number of included studies

Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024) and Individualised Education Plan meetings (Lo, 2008; Rossetti et al., 2020). The latter are statutory meetings. The degree of formality and whether it has a statutory basis may shape the interpreter's role.

Focus of the Included Studies

The included studies vary in their primary focus. Several centred on parent engagement and the interpreter's role in facilitating communication between home and school (Lopez, 2000; Guo, 2010; Rossetti et al., 2020). Others examined how language is used and how interactional dynamics shape meetings between families and professionals (Davitti, 2013; 2015; Lo, 2008; Vargas-Urpi, 2015). One study was notable for centring the interpreter's experience (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003), offering a rare insight into the challenges of holding an interpreting role within an educational setting, though it was US-based and conducted outside a school context.

Methodologies

All but one study was qualitative (Ho, 2024), and semi-structured interviews were a common method used for data collection (Cable, 2004; Edwards et al., 2005; Georgis et al., 2014; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Krause, 2018; Lo, 2009; Mortier et al., 2021; Rah, 2009; Vargas-Urpi, 2015) followed by focus groups (Georgis et al., 2014; Guo, 2010; Mortier et al., 2021; Rossetti et al., 2020). Data were typically analysed inductively (Edwards et al., 2005; Guo, 2010; Mortier et al., 2021) with specific methods including constant comparative analysis (Lopez, 2000; Rah et al., 2009), thematic analysis (Krause, 2018; Rossetti et al., 2020), latent content analysis (Georgis et al., 2014) and content analysis (Vargas-Urpi, 2015), though some studies did not clearly outline their analytical approach (Cable, 2004; Lo, 2008). A smaller subset of studies included a more micro-analytical approach (Baraldi & Gaviloli,

2024; Davitti, 2013, 2015; Vargas-Urpi, 2015), examining video or audio recordings of parent-staff meetings. These analyses focused on the interpreter's language use, particularly moments where they went beyond word-for-word translation and influenced turn-taking between participants.

Only one larger-scale quantitative study was identified (Ho, 2024). This study used an online survey of 260 cultural brokers working with refugees in educational settings. While providing valuable insight into the personal impact of interpreting, the study focused specifically on those working with refugees. This subgroup may differ in important ways from interpreters working with other populations, with increased risk of secondary traumatic stress and burnout.

Taken together, these methodological choices indicate an interest in understanding cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication between families and educational settings from multiple stakeholder perspectives. They also reflect a focus, often from an outsider's analytic lens, on less conscious influences and the co-construction of meaning by interpreters. However, the predominance of small-scale qualitative studies and the lack of large-scale investigations reveal a significant gap, particularly given that interpreter involvement is likely implied by the substantial proportion of EAL pupils in UK schools (DfE, 2025a), and the routine recommendation of interpreter use in professional guidance (e.g. The Bell Foundation, 2024).

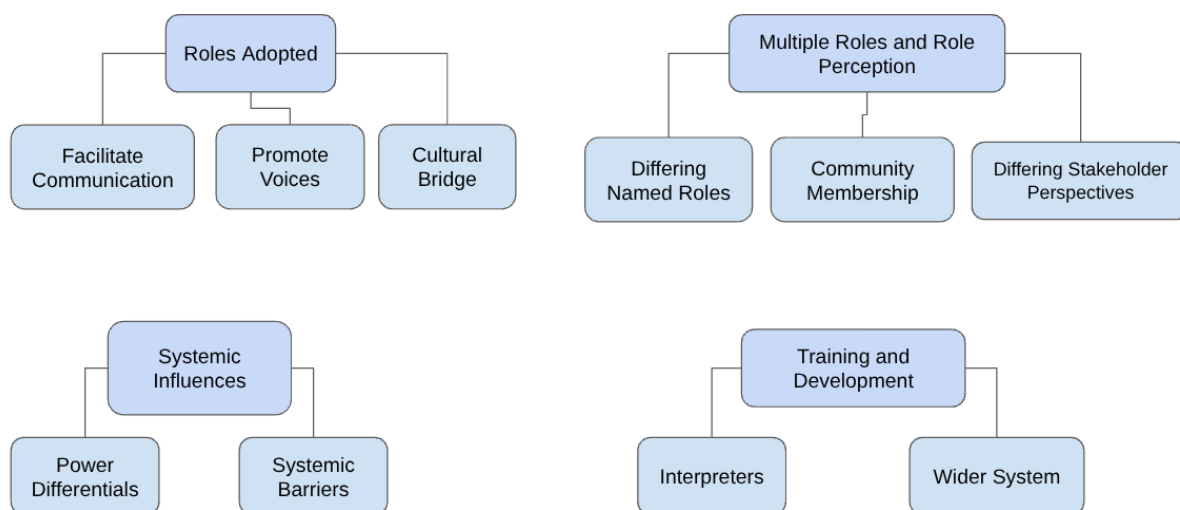
Themes Identified

The key findings across the studies were coded and analysed thematically to explore what is currently understood about the role of those who interpret in educational settings. Four main themes were identified: (1) the roles adopted by the interpreters, (2) multiple roles and role perception, (3) systemic influences, and (4)

training and development. Each of these themes comprises several subthemes and important interconnections between them.

Figure 2

Thematic Map of the Literature within the Literature Review



Theme 1: Roles Adopted by Interpreters in Schools

There are diverse roles adopted by interpreters in educational settings to facilitate communication between parties who do not share a common language. These roles exist along a spectrum ranging from serving as a conduit for direct translation, acting as a cultural mediator, or taking more active roles such as advocacy. Importantly, interpreters often shift fluidly between these roles, sometimes within the course of a single interaction, depending on the needs of the participants and the context.

Three subthemes were identified (1) facilitating communication, (2) promoting voices, and (3) acting as a cultural bridge.

Subtheme 1.1 Facilitate Communication.

Facilitating communication in educational settings goes beyond word-for-word translation (Davitti, 2013, 2015; Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024). For communication between parties to be effective, interpreters often engage in relationship building, clarify the meaning of technical terms and ease interactions where there is potential tension (Guo, 2010; Lopez, 2000; Mortier et al., 2021). In these respects, interpreters act as intermediaries and may adopt an active role (Cable, 2004; Davitti, 2013; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003).

To do so, interpreters require proficiency in both languages, including relevant dialects (Edwards et al., 2005). Functioning as a conduit is often insufficient; interpreters may need to explain educational jargon to parents, clarify the purpose of meetings to encourage parental engagement (Guo, 2010). Consequently, interpreters with both conversational and specialist language skills are well-positioned to foster clearer communication between parents and school staff.

Beyond language proficiency, interpersonal qualities are also crucial. Service users emphasise the importance of trust, confidentiality, and sensitivity to family circumstances in defining “good interpreter” (Edwards et al., 2005). This need for trust explains why some prefer relatives or friends as interpreters, even though those individuals may not have the necessary educational background to advise (Edwards et al., 2005). Similarly, Lopez (2000) found that greater contact with an interpreter increased parental comfort, highlighting the importance of relational dynamics. Conversely, when an interpreter made a judgmental remark, a parent disengaged from the professional interpreter altogether. These findings echo research showing that interpreters who demonstrate empathy, active listening, and trustworthiness increase parents’ feelings of comfort (Mortier et al., 2021).

However, mediated communication also poses challenges for rapport building between schools and families. Interpreters may summarise rather than translate verbatim (Lopez, 2000), leading to frustration and feelings of exclusion among professionals. Such difficulties may stem from interactional dynamics in which teachers focus primarily on the interpreter rather than the parent, thereby missing contextual cues from the parent (Davitti, 2013). In these cases, interpreters sometimes respond by taking a more independent role, stepping in when the 'baton' appears to be passed to them by staff (Davitti, 2015), and exercising informal agency to expand their role (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2024). Importantly, research shows that when interpreters facilitate interactions effectively, parental participation increases, strengthening connections between home and school (Lopez, 2000).

Subtheme 1.2 Promote Voices.

Interpreters in school settings not only influence the transmission of information but also *how* it is conveyed. This can affect the flow of information between parties. This can promote the messages from school or the family and amplify either the school's or the family's perspectives, with implications for meetings and power dynamics between the parties.

Micro-analysis of parent-teacher meetings showed how interpreters manage evaluative acts (expressions of judgment or affect). Interpreters may upgrade or downgrade these evaluations when delivering (Davitti, 2013). This may serve to smooth the interaction, perhaps by offering a positive angle on what a teacher has said to reassure the mother or upgrading the mother's agreement with the school. This can inadvertently lead to promoting the school's voice and discourage active intervention of parents. There is also a risk that this may restrict the exploration of other positions and promote unidirectional communication. Interpreters may also

expand on contributions, which can serve to make explicit what may otherwise be unsaid. This can include making implicit teacher meanings explicit or voicing aspects of a parent's 'life world' that might otherwise remain unspoken (Davitti, 2015). The decision-making processes of when to expand, upgrade or downgrade remain underexplored.

The extent to which interpreters promote particular voices appears to be linked to their perceived role. Interpreters who see themselves as advocates are more likely to promote family perspectives (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003). This is consistent with findings of interpreting cultural brokers, who interpret and also encourage parents to assert their knowledge about their children in school contexts (Mortier et al., 2021). Similarly, interpreters with advocacy experience are more effective in supporting families in statutory school meetings (Rosetti et al., 2020).

In short, interpreters may promote voices consciously, through advocacy, or less consciously through subtle shifts in language. This can empower families by giving their perspectives greater weight. It can also reinforce institutional power if the school's voice is privileged. The literature highlights a tension between smoothing communication and empowering families: a dynamic that interpreters and educators need to recognise to foster more equitable interactions.

Subtheme 1.3 Cultural Bridge.

Cultural differences between school and family systems can shape how families engage with education, particularly when parents have themselves been educated in structures that differ from those of their children (Ratheram & Kelly, 2021). Studies show interpreters can act as cultural bridges, sharing knowledge across these systems and mediating understanding (Cable, 2004; Georgis et al., 2014; Guo, 2010).

Interpreters may serve as intermediaries, explaining aspects of school culture to families with limited familiarity with the education system (Cable, 2004; Guo, 2010). Such mediation is important where expectations diverge. For instance, parents may defer authority to the schools, reducing their involvement (Rah et al., 2009). Similarly, in some cultural contexts, parents may not approach teachers about concerns, instead expecting teachers to initiate contact (Guo, 2010). When teachers expect the same of parents, neither party may take action. These dynamics reflect broader cultural differences in educational practices across countries (Georgis et al., 2014).

The cultural bridging role has important implications for understanding aspects of the child's development. It can provide important background information such as native language development (Lopez, 2000), child-rearing practices (Cable, 2004), family's cultural capital (Georgis et al., 2014) and barriers to parental participation (Rah et al., 2009). This knowledge not only enhances professionals' understanding of children's needs but also challenges deficit discourses about families and communities (Rah et al., 2009). Furthermore, cultural bridging has been shown to facilitate parental engagement (Georgis et al., 2014) and support collaborative work between families and professionals in special education (Mortier et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, not all interpreters may take up this role. This points to a tension in the role: while cultural bridging can enrich understanding and collaboration, its feasibility and consistency remain uncertain.

Theme 2: Multiple Roles and Role Perception

Non-professional interpreters in schools are likely to have additional roles shaped by differing expectations from staff, parents, and the wider community

(Cable, 2004; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003). The literature highlights the complexities of navigating multiple roles within educational settings, particularly when the interpreter's personal identities intersect with shared community membership among the families they support (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Rah et al., 2009). These complexities are further compounded by differences in how various stakeholders, such as parents or teachers, perceive the interpreter's role (Guo, 2010; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003).

This theme is organised into three subthemes: (1) differing named roles, (2) community membership and (3) differing stakeholder perspectives.

Subtheme 2.1 Differing Named Roles.

As outlined above, interpreters in educational settings can potentially hold a variety of roles, ranging from Teaching Assistants working directly with children in classrooms to cultural broker positions aimed at fostering engagement between families and schools. Each of these roles carries distinct boundaries and expectations, within which interpreting may only be one component. The literature demonstrates that navigating these overlapping responsibilities can create challenges, particularly when role boundaries extend beyond those of other colleagues who do not interpret (Cable, 2004; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003).

Much of the research focuses on non-professional interpreters, whose additional responsibilities shape how they take up and define the interpreting role. For instance, 'liaison' roles often involve supporting families beyond language interpretation (Rah et al., 2009), while 'language mediator' roles include negotiating meaning, explaining context, and smoothing social dynamics in relation to language interpretation (Baraldi and Gavioli, 2024). Having the ability to communicate between differing groups may also lead to expansion of job role such advising on the

curriculum (Cable, 2004), or conducting developmental assessments in a child's home language (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003). These examples illustrate boundary blurring that extends beyond formal job descriptions and professional training.

Krause (2018) highlights the tensions plurilingual Educational Psychologists experience when interpreting as part of their role, noting risks that the interpreting role can overshadow their professional responsibilities as psychologists. There is also the potential for difficulties where the interpreting role conflicts with other roles. For example, in Hwa-Froelich & Westby's (2003) case study, an individual acted as an advocate while interpreting for families but also remained objective in a separate role within the same institution. The authors caution against placing individuals in such conflicting occupational positions, as it can compromise professional boundaries.

Subtheme 2.2 Community Membership.

Sharing aspects of identity with members of the community for whom they are interpreting can both facilitate cultural bridging between home and school and also complicate the way professional roles are enacted. Cultural identity can impact how one's professional role is taken up, and tensions can emerge when cultural and professional norms are misaligned.

Community membership provides interpreters with unique cultural and linguistic knowledge that can enrich professional practice (Krause, 2018). Whilst this has been noted among EPs who draw on additional languages in their role, it is reasonable to infer that the knowledge brought by community members applies similarly to other school-based professionals, though the dynamics of enacting that knowledge may differ according to role and positional power within the school system. Parents may also perceive interpreters as community representatives and

seek advice from them rather than other professionals (Guo, 2010). This can blur role boundaries and create challenges in separating professional obligations from community ties (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003).

These challenges may be compounded when community cultural norms expect members to take on supportive roles. In such contexts, conflicts can arise between community expectations and the professional role norms of the country of residence (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Rah et al., 2009). In this way, taking on the role of interpreter as a community member can heighten the salience of personal identity markers, such as ethnicity, sometimes leading to internal tensions when navigating between families and schools.

Subtheme 2.3 Differing Stakeholder Perspectives.

The literature illustrates how different stakeholders, such as parents, staff and children, perceive interpreters in school. These perceptions are shaped by both the act of interpreting and by the interpreter's wider professional or community roles.

As discussed earlier, the interpreting role spans a continuum from a conduit to a cultural broker, and community membership may further shape role expectations. However, stakeholders often hold differing and conflicting perceptions of what the role entails. For example, Cable (2004) found that parents saw bilingual teaching assistants as approachable members of school staff; schools saw them as important channels for communication between home and school; and children perceived them as important staff who supported learning and served as liaisons between them and teachers. Similar findings highlight variation across parents, teachers, children, and interpreters themselves (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003). These groups may not recognise that they have different and sometimes conflicting expectations of

interpreting staff, creating ambiguity around the role and its boundaries (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003).

When role expectations are persistently misaligned, this may have implications not only for role enactment but also for interpreter well-being. Role conflict or misaligned expectations may undermine a sense of fulfilment, whereas alignment can provide protective benefits. In Ho's (2024) large-scale survey on 260 cultural brokers working with refugees in educational settings, compassion satisfaction (positive feelings or fulfilment in helping others) was found to be negatively correlated with burnout. This suggests that interpreters may experience greater resilience when their role is perceived as valued consistently by themselves and others. Conversely, mismatched perceptions risk eroding role satisfaction and may increase stress.

Theme 3: Systemic Influences

Systemic influences were identified as a significant pattern across the literature. The education and family systems intersect within educational settings, and the interpreter plays a role in facilitating communication between them. There may be power differentials between these two systems, and the interpreter may play a role in navigating them.

There were two subthemes identified: (1) power differentials and (2) systemic barriers.

Subtheme 3.1 Power Differentials.

Though both the family and education system are key in supporting children and young people in their educational journey, their relationship is often shaped by power differentials. The literature highlights the top-down nature of many school-based meetings, in which parents are primarily recipients of information

rather than equal partners. In these contexts, the interpreter can enable more active parent engagement or inadvertently reinforce parental marginalisation, depending on how they take up their role.

The literature indicates that although school meetings can be top-down, parents may have other hopes (Guo, 2010). Parents using interpreters can experience that the information they share about their children in school meetings is dismissed (Rossetti et al., 2020) or not fully acknowledged (Lo, 2008). Guo (2010) states that this barrier of communication goes beyond cultural and/or linguistic differences, but is a consequence of the top-down nature of school-family interaction. This power differential has implications for interpreters, as their language interpretation can go some way in increasing parental engagement (Lopez, 2000). Rossetti et al., (2020) found that all parents in Individualised Education Plan (IEP) meetings wanted to have more meaningful collaboration with professionals, but this requires more from interpreters than being conduits of information. This is echoed by Rah et al., (2009), who call for authentic interaction between home and school beyond word translation.

The extent to which interpreters can facilitate authentic home-school interaction depends in part on how empowerment is understood within the school system. Davitti (2013) proposes that the integration of differing communities can take the form of assimilation, in which minority communities conform to dominant institutional norms, or empowerment, in which both parties are supported to participate actively. Where empowerment is the goal, interpreters have a role of creating space for bidirectional communication (Davitti, 2013; 2015). However, the institutional authority of schools and asymmetries in knowledge constrain interpreters' abilities to foster empowerment (Davitti, 2013). This is further

complicated by the agency interpreters' exercise in the moment, for example, shifting between acting as a 'service provider's assistant' or a 'user's advocate' (Vargas-Urpi, 2015), or engaging in monolingual exchanges that can inadvertently exclude other participants. The power of the school system cannot be overlooked: interpreters may contribute to building trust and facilitating partnerships (Mortier et al., 2021), but their impact is shaped and limited by systemic hierarchies.

Subtheme 3.2 Systemic Barriers.

A consistent finding across the literature is the limited availability of professional interpreters in schools, which often leads bilingual staff to assume this role. While pragmatic, this arrangement poses challenges, including variability in staff members' language proficiency, insufficient time to fulfil interpreting responsibilities, and the broader influence of monolingual school cultures that prioritise the dominant language of instruction while marginalising others (Rah et al., 2009).

Practical barriers further exacerbate the problem. Booking and sourcing interpreters delays meetings (Lopez, 2000; Edwards et al., 2005). The cost of professional interpreters is an additional challenge for schools (Rah et al., 2009), which partly explains the reliance on bilingual staff. Yet effective interpreting not only requires linguistic skill but also systemic knowledge that enables interpreters to support advocacy and ensure family voices are heard (Rossetti et al., 2020). Without such expertise, communication risks becoming procedural rather than genuinely collaborative.

The informal reliance on bilingual staff raises important questions of recognition and support. Mortier et al. (2021) argued that cultural brokering roles, often taken up unofficially, should be formally acknowledged to ensure staff receive

adequate training and resources. Cable (2004) extended this point, highlighting that such roles are usually not remunerated, which raises ethical concerns. Moreover, preparing non-professional interpreters for specialist contexts such as consultations requires additional time (Lopez, 2000), adding to workload pressures. Krause (2018), emphasised that without formal recognition, plurilingual practices struggle to develop, and staff are left under-supported. Ho's (2024) findings further point to the potential emotional costs of the work, including secondary stress and burnout, underscoring the need for systemic support.

The systemic barriers, ranging from interpreter shortages to the undervaluing of bilingual staff contributions, place individuals in positions of considerable responsibility without explicit recognition, remuneration, or support necessary to sustain them. These dynamics reveal not only practical shortcomings but also deeper structural inequalities in how schools approach linguistic diversity.

Theme 4: Training and Development

Across the literature, the need for training and development was a recurring recommendation. This was directed not only at the interpreters themselves, but also at the wider system within which they operate.

This theme is divided into two subthemes: (1) Interpreters and (2) Wider Systems.

Subtheme 4.1 Interpreters.

Given the continuum of roles interpreters take up, ranging from conduit to cultural broker, and extending beyond interpreting itself, the literature highlights the need for training in both technical skills (e.g. language use) and relational competencies. However, much of the emphasis falls onto the interpreters

themselves, placing the responsibility on them to navigate complex systems, rather than addressing systemic shortcomings.

Training and development recommendations span several domains: linguistic competence, systemic knowledge, relational skills, cultural awareness and wellbeing support. At the foundational level, interpreters require proficiency in both languages and familiarity with specialist vocabulary to minimise miscommunication in educational settings (Lo, 2008; Lopez, 2000). Beyond this, systemic knowledge of the education system and processes is critical, particularly for those not embedded in the system (Edwards et al., 2005; Lopez, 2000).

Equally important are relational skills and cultural competencies. The literature references building trust with families (Edwards et al., 2005; Lopez, 2000), developing cultural self-awareness, and recognising how one's own communication style may be interpreted by others (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003). Interpreters also need to be aware of the subtle but powerful impact of their linguistic choices, such as upgrading, downgrading and expansions of participant expression, which can facilitate and constrain interaction (Davitti, 2013, Davitti, 2015), as well as direct interventions such as answering questions on behalf of parents based on prior knowledge of the family which can shape whose voice is heard in the meeting (Vargas-Urpi, 2015). Finally, given the emotional demands of the role, particularly with trauma-impacted populations, additional training on trauma-informed practices has also been recommended to provide some protection against potential burnout (Ho, 2024).

While these recommendations aim to improve interpreting practice in schools, they may be unrealistic. Vargas-Urpi (2015) found that even where a participant held a formal qualification in translation and interpreting, they did not draw on or connect

this to their practice, suggesting a gap between formal training and the complex reality of interpreter-mediated meetings. Many interpreters are taking up the role informally, often without formal recognition, training or institutional support. This raises questions about whether responsibility for effective communication should rest solely on interpreters or whether systemic reforms are required to ensure sustainable practices.

Subtheme 4.2 Wider Systems.

Less prominent was the reference to training those who work with interpreters and with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Equipping school staff with appropriate skills and awareness may be key to facilitating effective interpreter-mediated interaction and reducing the burden on interpreters.

On a practical level, training can focus on communication strategies. For example, staff can be encouraged to speak in clear and concise sentences, reducing the likelihood that only the gist of the message is conveyed (Lopez, 2000). They may also benefit from understanding the continuum of interpreting roles (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003), which can help clarify expectations during meetings. Training can raise awareness of how staff behaviours shape interactional dynamics; for instance, teachers may inadvertently 'pass the baton' of interaction to interpreters if they focus on them and not the parents, which can disrupt rapport (Davitti, 2015). Developing cultural humility is therefore crucial, enabling staff to be more responsive to parental cues and recognise the potential for intercultural conflict (Mortier et al., 2021; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003). These skills can shift the responsibility for managing intercultural complexity away from the interpreters, distributing it more equitably among participants.

Beyond individual skills training, systemic developments are equally important. Recognising the complexity of interpreting in schools would allow for guidance to protect staff with dual roles from role conflict (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Krause, 2018) and to provide supportive spaces for reflection (Krause, 2018). Developing culturally responsive services and embedding culturally informed practices across the education system can foster family-school engagement (Georgis et al., 2014). This would ensure interpreters are supported by systemic processes rather than left to manage challenges in isolation.

While interpreters require training in technical, relational, and cultural competencies, the literature also points to a pressing need for schools and wider systems to take on responsibility. Without systemic investment in staff development and culturally responsive practices, the weight of navigating intercultural communication will continue to fall disproportionately on interpreters.

Evaluation of Included Literature

Given the limited literature addressing the review question, inclusion decisions were based on the stated inclusion criteria, and no papers were excluded on quality grounds. Scoping reviews focus less on quality assessment, which may be too restrictive in areas where research straddles disciplines (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Lavac, et al., 2010). Studies were retained where they offered a relevant understanding of interpreting in educational settings. However, post-thematic analysis, a reflective evaluation of the research base was conducted to determine the quality of the included literature.

Given the subjectivist epistemological position underpinning this study, Walsh and Downe's (2006) framework was selected as the primary appraisal tool for the fifteen qualitative studies included. Rooted in an interpretivist paradigm, it addresses

not only methodological rigour but also the quality of researcher decision-making, including justification of method, reflexivity, and transferability of findings. For the single quantitative study, Long et al.'s (2002) Evaluation Tool for Quantitative Research was used. Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework was used alongside both tools to assess not only methodological quality but also the relevance and applicability of each study to the review question. This is particularly important in areas of limited research, where a study with some methodological limitations may nonetheless make a meaningful contribution to the synthesis, and conversely, a methodologically strong study may carry limited relevance to the specific review context. Consistent with Walsh and Downe's (2006) position, these tools were applied reflectively rather than as a prescriptive checklist, in keeping with the interpretive stance of the wider study (see Appendix E).

This process showed that the majority of included studies addressed most of the key criteria outlined in Walsh and Downe's (2006) framework. However, two areas were notably underreported across the literature: reflexivity and ethics. Only six of the fifteen qualitative studies made reference to reflexivity (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Krause, 2018; Lopez, 2000; Mortier et al., 2021; Rah et al., 2009; Rossetti et al., 2020), and five addressed ethics specifically (Guo, 2010; Georgis et al. 2014; Krause, 2018; Mortier et al., 2021; Rossetti et al., 2020). The little engagement with reflexivity is notable given its centrality to qualitative research, and its absence makes it difficult for the reader to assess the validity of the researcher's interpretations. It is possible, however, that omissions in these areas reflect the constraints of journal word limits rather than an absence of rigour in the research process itself. This is supported by the comparatively greater detail evident in the

two doctoral theses included in the review (Ho, 2024; Krause, 2018), where this constraint is reduced.

Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework was useful for both evaluating studies on their own terms and for assessing their relevance to the review question. Five studies were rated as high across the overall weight of evidence (Davitti, 2015; Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Lopez, 2000; Mortier et al., 2021; Rossetti et al., 2020). These studies shared similarities to this research in context, sample characteristics, and the depth of their data, rendering them particularly valuable to the synthesis. Two studies were rated as having low overall weight of evidence (Edwards et al., 2005; Ho, 2024). For Edwards et al. (2005), participants were speaking about interpreting across a range of contexts, including schools, but not limited to them, making the school-specific relevance unclear. For Ho (2024), participants were required to meet only four of seven criteria to qualify as a cultural broker, one of which was providing language translation. While the findings may have relevance to cultural brokers who interpret, the extent to which they are specific to interpreting practice is uncertain, and the sample was predominantly White and agency-based in the US context, which differs substantially from the population of interest in this study.

For the quantitative study, Long et al.'s (2002) tool provided a structured and comprehensive means of evaluating methodological quality and design appropriateness in a way Gough's (2007) framework alone could not fully capture; together the two tools offered a more complete picture of both the rigour and the relevance of Ho (2024) to the review. Whilst formal quality appraisal is not required for scoping reviews, this process proved to be a valuable reflective exercise. It is acknowledged that, as this evaluation was conducted post-thematic analysis, it did

not influence which studies contributed to the synthesis or the weight given to individual findings, thereby offering a transparent account of the strengths and limitations of the evidence base.

The experience of undertaking the scoping review in a research area with sparse literature directly relevant to the literature review question was one of challenge. The parameters of the review question were necessarily widened across the search process to locate literature that could inform understanding of the field. The wide range of terms used to describe those who interpret in schools, extending far beyond the term 'interpreter' itself, combined with the low number of papers where interpreting itself is the primary focus, created a sense of pulling together strands of literature. The themes identified give a tentative, emerging picture of the research field.

Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Current Study

The role of interpreting in school meetings between the family and the school system is more complex than simple word translation. The literature highlights systemic power differentials, relational complexities when the interpreters are members of the same community as families, and potential role conflict when they hold additional responsibilities in schools.

This understanding comes from diverse studies involving professional interpreters, bilingual staff, and cultural brokers who take an interpreting role, most conducted outside the UK and very little is known about interpreting in meetings involving special education. Few studies focus solely on the interpreters' experiences, leaving their voices underrepresented. In the UK specifically, bilingual support staff take up interpreting roles informally, yet no identified studies address

how they experience this role specifically, representing a significant gap in both the literature and how this may relate to ethical practice.

The current study addresses this gap by focusing on support staff who interpret in meetings that include parents and educational staff (e.g., teachers, EPs, or SENCos). The study focuses on interpretation between Bengali/Sylheti and English in a single LA, enabling exploration of the lived experience of a small, relatively homogeneous group.

The following research questions, whilst informed by the themes identified in the literature, are intentionally open to allow the experiences of participants to shape the findings:

- How do support staff experience their role as interpreter, and how do they experience others' perception of their role in such meetings?
- How do they experience relationships between themselves and other stakeholders, including role dynamics?
- What is the cognitive and emotional experience of the role?
- What is the experience of interpreting on personal and professional development?
- What is the experience of support regarding such meetings?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Methodology: Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this research, including the ontological orientation and the decision to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the research methodology. It includes key details of the research process, including participant recruitment, ethics, data collection, data analysis, and data quality evaluation. My evaluative reflections are included throughout, highlighting a research process that was fluid and developed as it went.

Research Aim and Questions:

As established in the literature review, experiences of bilingual support staff who interpret in school settings remain largely unexplored, particularly in UK contexts and in meetings with EPs, and they are not centred on the voices of those who carry out this role.

The primary aim of this research is to shed light on the experiences of school support staff who informally interpret in meetings involving families of children with SEND and other educational professionals, with a focus on a single LA where Sylheti, Bengali and English are the languages of interpretation. The following research questions were formulated:

- How do support staff experience their role as interpreter, and how do they experience others' perception of their role in such meetings?
- How do they experience relationships between themselves and other stakeholders, including role dynamics?
- What is the cognitive and emotional experience of the role?

- What is the experience of interpreting on personal and professional development?
- What is the experience of support regarding such meetings?

Research Purpose:

The research journey began with tension in my role as a TEP during a parent and staff meeting, when the parent could not speak English, and interpretation was provided by a support staff member. I felt a gap between theory and practice, between what the BPS recommends for psychologists working with interpreters (BPS, 2017a) and my experience in school. My concern was *for* the support staff, with a view that they may be absorbing the costs of a lack of school resources for interpreting services, that there may be systemic power differentials at play, and I may be complicit in this.

Research Orientation

The worldview that underpins the research is important to make explicit, as it shapes the basic assumptions and the approach taken (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). These can be described in many ways; in this case, it will be referenced through ontology and epistemology.

Ontology

Ontology is the study of the nature of reality, which contrasts between realism and relativism. Realism takes the position that there is an objective world 'out there', which can be measured in a value-free way. Relativism holds that reality can be understood only from the perspective of the individual; it is relative to time and experience (Moon & Blackman, 2014). This research is positioned around understanding individual experiences of interpreting in schools. The research question does not seek an objective account of interpreting, so the realist position is rejected.

A relativist ontological position allows for the exploration of individual experiences, for participants to share what is important to them, and for the nuances and contrasts between experiences to be examined. Consistent with a relativist ontology, the researcher's position cannot be separated from the data, so researcher reflexivity is essential (Fox et al., 2007). Since I have no personal experience speaking a second language, I am an outsider to this phenomenon; my experiences and assumptions are part of the research field and will influence and be part of the research outcome. Reflexivity is addressed later in the chapter.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and how it can be known (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Positions range from positivism, which holds that knowledge can be sought objectively and value-free, to interpretivism, which holds that there are multiple realities in which knowledge is constructed through human experience and social interaction, rather than discovered objectively. Interpretivism invites self-knowledge and introspection as valid ways of knowing (Bernard, 2013; Fox et al., 2007).

I rejected a positivist position, as it would seek universal mechanisms of interpreting and does not centre on individual experience, which is the focus of this research. Critical realism occupies a position between positivism and interpretivism, acknowledging the existence of an objective reality whilst recognising that knowledge is always mediated through interpretation. It could highlight structural influences, for example, institutional power relations, funding implications and role boundaries linked to understanding of interpreting. However, this research focuses on the individual experience

rather than structural mechanisms; this perspective is not central to this research and is therefore rejected.

I adopted an interpretivist position, in which interpreting in schools can be known only through the individual experiences of those within it, with meaning understood as a co-construction between the participant and the researcher (Fox et al., 2007). This aligns with the relativist ontology established above, centring on individual meaning-making.

Methodological Approach

A qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate, one which seeks to explore how people make sense of their experiences and the social world around them (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). IPA was selected as the qualitative methodology most aligned with the ontological and epistemological position outlined above, given its idiographic focus on individual experience and its explicit acknowledgement of the researcher's interpretation of meaning-making.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative methodology that takes an idiographic approach to data, specifically the first-person account of experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017 in Stainton Rogers & Willig, 2017). It is concerned with the quality of experience, how the individual makes sense of their world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and attending to experiences that matter to them (Eatough & Smith, 2017). It adopts an interpretivist epistemological position, which posits that participants make sense of their experiences through language. As the participant makes sense of their world and experiences, the researcher tries to understand their experience through interpretation (Smith & Osborn,

2008). There is a double hermeneutic cycle where the researcher makes sense of the participant's meaning-making, an interpretation of an interpretation. IPA encourages researchers to acknowledge and reflexively manage their preconceptions, referred to as 'bracketing', allowing the phenomenon to be approached as openly as possible (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Central to IPA is a detailed analysis of each case, before producing any general statements across participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

IPA aligns with the relativist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology established above. It allows each participant's unique experience to be understood in its own right, and the richness of the phenomenon is understood by the researcher contrasting interpretations of individuals' accounts and identifying areas of convergence and divergence between them (Smith et al., 2022). It maintains individual voices through an idiographic approach and explicitly acknowledges both participants' and researchers' meaning-making through double hermeneutics, and its constructivist-interpretivist foundations align with the adopted paradigm.

IPA: Theoretical Underpinnings and Critical Considerations

Theoretical Underpinnings

IPA, as an approach, draws on three key concepts and debates from philosophy: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2022). The aim is to give a thick description of the lived experience (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of experience, what it is like to experience particular phenomena (Smith et al., 2022). IPA draws on the

ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, each of whom informs this research in distinct ways.

Husserl invites gaining awareness of experience by setting aside taken-for-granted assumptions, a process he termed 'bracketing' to get to the essence of the experience itself (Smith et al., 2022). This has implications for how interview questions are designed to support participants in reflecting deeply on what interpreting is like for them, moving beyond description toward meaning.

Heidegger would acknowledge interpreting as a personal experience, but one that exists within a world of language, culture, objects and other people, which cannot be separated from it (Smith et al., 2022). We experience the world *in relation to* others, shifting affectively, temporally and socially (Smith et al., 2022). This invites attention to how school and community culture, educational language and relationships with staff and parents are not a backdrop but a key part of the interpreter's experience. Sartre extended this relational perspective by considering that we are constantly in the process of becoming through our interactions with the world (Smith et al., 2022). For this research, this means considering how interpreters are 'becoming' through their role and how their identity may shift within it.

Merleau-Ponty adds an *embodied* dimension, proposing that the body is our means of communicating with the world rather than merely an object within it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, cited in Smith et al., 2022). This invites close attention to how participants convey embodied experiences of interpreting, such as tiredness, mental fullness, or energy levels.

Together, these perspectives establish that lived experience is layered, relational and embodied, accessed in this research through language and interpretation, considerations central to the hermeneutic discussion which follows.

Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutic Circle

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. Central to IPA is the 'double hermeneutic': participants are interpreting their experience, while the researcher interprets the participants' interpretations (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Three hermeneutic theorists: Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer provide theoretical positions that inform interpretation in IPA (Smith et al., 2022).

Schleiermacher postulated that interpretation involves both grammatical and psychological interpretations. Grammatical interpretations concern the text's objective meaning, and psychological interpretations concern the meaning of the words from the author's perspective (Smith et al., 2022). This requires the researcher to interpret not only the words but also the double meanings of those words in relation to the writer (or, in our case, the participant). Interpreting the meaning conveyed explicitly and implicitly is vital to understanding the phenomenon from the individual's perspective. Importantly, Schleiermacher stated that interpretation requires an interplay between the interpreter and the interpreted. What can be interpreted is in relation to the interpreter (Smith et al., 2022). This position highlights the implications of my lack of experience in interpreting another language. How I interpret the experiences of the participants will be in relation to my own comparisons between them and me, along both the language dimension and

potentially other salient aspects of identity and experience, e.g. class, age, ethnicity and role. Consequently, reflection and reflexivity in relation to the interpretive process are important (see the Reflexivity section).

Similarly, Heidegger saw meaning as both explicit (manifest) and implicit (latent), which is brought to light through detailed analysis and synthesis. Heidegger acknowledged that the interpretation is shaped by 'fore-conception', what is already known. Rather than bracketing this, IPA requires a dynamic to-and-fro of fore-ception and interpretation, making explicit reflexivity about my own preconceptions as a TEP as essential.

Gadamer built on Heidegger's view of fore-conceptions, proposing that interpretation is a dialogue between the text and the interpreter. The interpreter engages with the text whilst bringing 'fore-meanings', projected understandings, which shape what is noticed and how meaning is made, even when attempting to approach the text openly (Smith et al., 2022). For this research, attending to where interpretation feels easy or immediate will be as analytically important as attending to what is surprising. Where the text feels readily interpretable, fore-meanings may be operating unchallenged. My own frameworks may fill gaps, risking the oversight of latent content that does not align with my prior experience and understanding. This invites careful, slow analysis and an ongoing question: whose meaning is being made here?

The hermeneutic circle describes the process of interpretation as an analysis of the parts and the whole. The hermeneutic circle requires analysis to be dynamic, in which the text can be broken down into its parts, e.g., from the level of word use to the meaning of the word in the context of the whole.

Simultaneously, the whole is interpreted as an analysis of the parts. The methodological implications of this are a back-and-forth in analysis rather than a step-by-step approach. It may require re-analysing parts as the greater whole is analysed. For example, a single word like 'exhausting' might initially seem to describe physical tiredness, but analysing the whole narrative might reveal that it relates to emotional or cognitive work, prompting a reinterpretation of the initial coding.

IPA embraces this circularity through iterative analysis, moving between detailed line-by-line coding and holistic interpretation of whole narratives, always anchored in the individual case, a commitment addressed in the following section on idiography.

Idiography

IPA is idiographic rather than nomothetic; it does not seek to establish universal laws or make claims at the population level. Instead, it requires a detailed analysis of each individual case, attending to the participant's unique psychological, contextual, and embodied reality, and understanding the phenomenon as interpreted by the participant themselves (Smith et al., 2022). Following Husserl's emphasis on intersubjectivity and being-in-the-world, idiographic analysis also attends to how interactions with others (e.g. parents, colleagues and school communities) form part of the participant's experience and meaning-making (Smith et al., 2022). Idiography allows each participant, situated in their own school community and life experiences, to express their unique experience of interpreting. Each participant's account is analysed in depth, ensuring individual meaning is not

lost in premature pattern seeking, whilst allowing convergence and divergence to be identified.

Critical Considerations of IPA

IPA as a methodology carries critical considerations which require careful attention, particularly within a professional doctorate context where findings are intended to inform practice. These concern the ethical implications of idiographic inquiry, the interpretative distance between researcher and participant, and the potential consequences of research that enters professional and institutional contexts.

IPA requires, as closely as possible, understanding the lived experience of the phenomena and standing in the shoes of the subject (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), through the exploration of the psychological, contextual, and embodied experience (Smith et al., 2022). In this research, meaning-making around a professional role may draw on experiences that are unexpectedly personal. Participants may find themselves sharing material they had not anticipated engaging with, which carries ethical risks; the professional and personal boundaries may become blurred in ways that extend beyond the research encounter (Birch & Miller, 2000). Though qualitative interviews can be both therapeutic and reflective for participants (Birch & Miller, 2000), they require careful ethical management (see the Ethics section).

The double hermeneutic means that the output of IPA is the researcher's interpretation of participants' meaning-making. The weight of interpretative claims is determined by the researcher; a seemingly incidental comment may be interpreted as analytically significant in ways that the

participant may not recognise or endorse. Member checking of interpretations, as found in other qualitative methodologies, is not congruent with IPA's philosophical framework, as the analysis represents a researcher's interpretative account (Taffour, 2017), rather than a verifiable factual record. Participants may feel misunderstood or misinterpreted, the opposite of my intent. This requires transparency with participants about the interpretative process and care in applying psychological theories, particularly where theoretical frameworks may not map directly onto the specific context in which participants work (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Given my dual role as TEP and researcher, and the weight of interpretative claims in IPA, the findings of this research may have implications for professionals and institutions working with interpreters in educational settings, as well as for interpreting staff themselves. The relativist and interpretivist position requires some caution when making claims to or being used for the development of professional practice.

Participant Recruitment

The next section outlines the recruitment process, moving from planned sampling to the reality of recruiting participants from school settings, and then to the participants who agreed to take part in this research.

Sampling

As a consequence of the phenomenological and idiographic underpinnings of IPA, a small, homogeneous sample was sought. This research aims to understand the lived experience of non-professional interpreting, specifically school support staff who informally interpret in meetings involving families and educational professionals. Purposive

sampling was therefore adopted, selecting participants based on how closely they aligned with the study's purpose (Gauci, 2019).

IPA requires a sample that is homogeneous enough to allow meaningful analysis, in which convergence and divergence across accounts can be interpreted in relation to a shared phenomenon (Smith et al., 2022). There is no fixed sample size for IPA; the appropriate sample size is determined by the depth of analysis required, the richness of individual cases, and pragmatic constraints (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2022). For professional doctorates specifically, Smith et al. (2022) suggest between six and ten interviews are typically appropriate. Given the commitment to in-depth engagement with each case, a sample of six participants was intended.

Inclusion Criteria

To get a relatively homogeneous sample, specific inclusion criteria were determined. There were two changes to the inclusion criteria during the recruitment process.

Final Inclusion Criteria.

Table 4 shows the inclusion criteria for participants and the rationale for each. Those with an asterisk (*) denote criteria that were refined during recruitment in response to the data.

Table 4

Inclusion Criteria for Participant Recruitment

Inclusion Criteria	Description	Rationale
Role in School	Non-teaching staff, those whose role is described as 'support staff', e.g. teaching assistants, admin staff, canteen supervisors.	Teaching and non-teaching staff are identified in schools as differing groups with different roles and influences. To increase sample homogeneity, only non-teaching staff were recruited.
Workplace	Currently employed in an LA-maintained primary school	Primary schools were selected as smaller settings where support staff are more likely to have sustained contact with families, shaping the nature and frequency of informal interpreting. In secondary schools, there is likely to be less direct family contact for support staff, potentially leading to differences in experience if further removed. There may have been increased challenges with recruitment, given lower numbers of secondary schools than primary schools. State-maintained schools were selected because the Bengali/Sylheti-speaking community in this LA is predominantly served by the state sector, thereby grounding the decision in context.
Duration of Employment	Employed in a setting for at least one academic year	One academic year provides sufficient time for the participant to become established in the role and to develop experience in the

interpreting context.

Interpreting Experience *	Interpreted in at least one meeting involving an educational professional who works with SEN children, e.g. SENCo, EP, SaLT and also parent/carer/family	The experience of interpreting between specialist SEND professionals and families is of interest. One meeting would provide sufficient experience.
Language *	Interpreting Bengali/Sylheti and English	There is a relatively high proportion of Bengali/Sylheti speakers in the LA. The aim was to maximise the homogeneity between a member of school staff and a member of the wider community.
English Language Proficiency	Sufficient proficiency in spoken English to participate in a verbal interview conducted in English	To be able to share the experience with a monolingual researcher, without the need for a further interpreter, which would introduce an additional layer of interpretation to the data.
Recency of Interpreting Experience	Interpreted within the last two academic years (since September 2023)	To support the ability to recall the experience to facilitate rich data collection

Changes to the Inclusion Criteria

There were two changes made to the inclusion criteria during the research process, both reflecting IPA's commitment to privileging participant experience over researcher-imposed categorisation.

The original research question focused specifically on the experiences of support staff who interpret in meetings, including EPs, reflecting my professional interest as a TEP. However, during the research process, it became apparent that whilst most participants had experienced interpreting with EPs, this accounted for only a relatively small part of a much broader interpreting experience. One participant was unable to recall a specific meeting including an EP, but had substantial experience in interpreting with other specialist SEND professionals. This prompted a reconsideration of the research question. Maintaining the original focus would have meant imposing a researcher-determined boundary on experiences that the participants did not organise in that way. Consistent with IPA's inductive and phenomenological commitments, and the principle of emergent design in qualitative inquiry, where the design remains responsive to what is encountered in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith et al., 2022), the research question was broadened to encompass the experience of informal interpreting with SEND professionals more widely. The inclusion criteria were amended accordingly.

The second change concerned language. The original criterion specified Sylheti and English only, based on an assumption that specifying Sylheti would increase sample homogeneity. However, some participants described Sylheti as a dialect of Bengali rather than a distinct language,

reflecting a broader debate in the literature about their relationship (e.g. Simard et al., 2020). This highlighted the complexity of language identity. Imposing a linguistic categorisation that participants themselves did not consistently recognise risked misrepresenting their identity. With this in mind, participants' own identification with language was prioritised over linguistic categorisation. This maintains linguistic and cultural community homogeneity, whilst respecting individual linguistic identity.

Both changes reflect IPA's phenomenological commitments to privileging participants' meanings over researcher-imposed categorisation and to the honest examination of my own preconceptions about the EP role and the Bengali/Sylheti distinction.

Research Setting

This research was undertaken in a large inner-city LA in the South of England, where 27% of the population does not speak English as a first language, with Bengali being the second most common first language at 11% (ONS, 2021b). This Bengali category includes speakers of the related language Sylheti, an Eastern Indo-Aryan language spoken by approximately 11 million people worldwide (Simard et al., 2020). Whilst there is an ongoing debate about whether Sylheti constitutes a distinct language or dialect of Bengali, significant linguistic differences mean the two are not mutually intelligible (Chalmers, 1996, cited in Simard et al., 2020). Many Sylheti speakers understand Bengali due to its dominance in education in Bangladesh, but primarily use Sylheti in daily life. Over 19% of the LA population do not speak English well, and 3.8% do not speak English at all (ONS, 2021b). Whilst the LA finds professional interpreting for statutory work,

schools must arrange their own interpreting for non-statutory purposes, making the use of bilingual support staff as informal interpreters common. This linguistic profile and the structural gap in formal interpreting provision made this LA a well-justified and contextually appropriate setting for recruiting participants and exploring the research question.

Descriptions and Outcomes of the Recruitment Methods

Three recruitment methods were employed between June and December 2025, reflecting an iterative approach as initial methods proved unsuccessful. The process highlighted that access to support staff required navigation of institutional gatekeepers, and that direct personal professional relationships were the most effective route to recruitment. The methods, outcomes and reflections are summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Methods of Participant Recruitment

Method	Who was contacted	Outcome	Reflection
Email to all state-funded primary schools in the LA (June and September 2025)	Initially, headteachers of all 66 state-funded primary schools, then named SENCoS on the second attempt	Three SENCoS responded, stating they would share within the school. No participants recruited	Emails to headteachers (Appendix F) were likely filtered by admin staff. The 60-90 minute time requirement may have posed a barrier to sharing and participation. The named SENCo contact meant emails were likely received. Recruitment materials (Appendix G) may have posed a barrier: the term 'interpreting' and specification of 'Sylheti' rather than 'Bengali/Sylheti' may have deterred potential participants who do not identify with these formal categorisations.
Email to all EPs in the EPS	All T/EPs in the EPS were	Eleven EPs confirmed they had shared the	Direct EP contact in schools proved effective in reaching potential participants. However, SENCo functions as a

(June 2025)	requested to share with details of the study to individuals in the schools they work with who may meet the inclusion criteria	research information. Four EPs generated five leads. Three participants were recruited. One lead led to no response, another lead resulted in direct contact with a potential participant, but no interview was completed following a lack of response after the consent form was sent	go-between, organising participant information, consent forms and interview logistics. No participants contacted the researcher directly despite the email address being provided. All interviews were conducted during working hours, suggesting that SENCo's facilitation of time and space was important.
Personal school contact (October-November 2025)	SENCos of the my link primary schools were requested to share with any staff meeting the inclusion criteria	Two participants were recruited from one school, both of whom had previously interpreted in a meeting where the researcher was present	Initially avoided due to concern about power dynamics associated with the TEP role and the possibility that prospective participants may have interpreted in meetings with me and to reduce feelings of obligation. Contact through the SENCo initially, then direct communication with participants when they indicate they were interested in participating.

Learning from the Recruitment Process

Three participants expressed some uncertainty about whether their untrained interpreting 'counted,' or would be helpful enough, suggesting social barriers around perceived legitimacy. Recruitment was also hindered by temporal factors: academic-year transitions, summer break, and schools' 'busy-ness'. If repeating this research, I would use participant-friendly language (describing the activity rather than 'interpreting'), include Bengali/Sylheti from the outset, and prioritise relationship-based recruitment from the start.

Across all three methods, five participants were successfully recruited: three via EP colleague contacts and two via my own direct school contacts.

Sample Recruited

All participants were employed by a state-funded primary school in the LA. Participants were informed that the interview would take approximately one hour. The recorded interview times in Table 6 do not include introductions, rapport building, consent confirmation, or reminders of the right to withdraw or to debrief. Participant characteristics are presented in aggregate rather than individually to protect anonymity. Given the small sample size, the combination of role, language, gender, and interview setting could render individuals identifiable within their school context.

Table 6

Participant Information and Interview Detail

Participant and Interview Information	
School roles ⁷	Medical lead, learning mentor, parent support worker (x2), senior teaching assistant, teaching assistant, safeguarding lead
Languages interpreted	Bengali only (x2), Sylheti only (x1), both Bengali and Sylheti (x2)
Sex of participants ⁸	Female (x4), male (x1)
Interview locations	Face to face in school (x4), online, with participant in school (x1)
Interview duration	Between 31mins to 1 hour 2 minutes. Mean time: 46 minutes.

Semi-Structured Interview

To collect rich data that allow participants to 'tell their stories, speak freely and reflectively, and express their concerns at length' (Smith et al., 2022, p. 53), semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews can provide real-time interaction and flexibility for exploring participants' experiences (Etough & Smith, 2017).

Interview Design Process

The interview schedule was designed to move from generic to experiential questions (Smith et al., 2022, p. 54), reflecting Husserl's notion of supporting participants in moving beyond the natural attitude, from a taken-for-granted description toward deeper reflection on the meaning of their experience. Questions began with the participant's role in school and

⁷ Two participants had more than one role in school. Terms used are those stated by participants and the role may be the same in name but differ across contexts

⁸ Participant gender identity was not confirmed by participants

how they came to interpret, supporting scene-setting and enabling rapport before moving to more specific experiential questions (Smith et al., 2022), for example, 'What is it like for you mentally or emotionally to interpret in these meetings?'

The schedule was designed to explore affective, cognitive, social and contextual dimensions of interpreting experience (see Appendix H). It was informed by the literature review and feedback from the EPS team, which had led to the addition of one question about supportive influences in the interpreting experience. The schedule reflects the layered understanding of the phenomena established in the phenomenological framework: attending to individual meaning-making (Husserl), the relational and cultural context of experience (Heidegger), the process of becoming through the role (Sartre), and the embodied dimensions of interpretation (Merleau-Ponty). Whilst the embodied dimension was less explicitly addressed as a distinct area of questioning, the open and experiential nature of the questions and prompts left space for participants to bring what was salient to them.

The schedule served as a loose scaffold rather than a checklist, with prompts used to deepen responses, for example; 'Can you tell me more?' 'What does that mean for you?', 'How did that make you feel?'. These prompts reflect the hermeneutic commitment to attending to both explicit and implicit meaning in participants' accounts.

Pilot Interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted prior to data collection, consistent with Smith et al.'s (2022) recommendation to use piloting as an opportunity for practice and refinement. Analysis of the pilot transcripts, focusing on what was said after each question, and reflecting on what could have been my response, revealed two key insights: that multiple productive questions could follow any response, reducing pressure to identify the 'right' question; and there was a tendency to move on from responses too quickly rather than probing deeper. This reinforced the importance of prompts such as 'Can you tell me more about that?'. Listening back also highlighted the fast pace and convoluted questioning, emphasising the need to slow down and allow time for thought. These reflections directly informed the final interview approach.

Interview Reflections

All participants chose to interview in school during working hours, typically within one-hour time slots. Three interviews started late due to role demands of the participants, and three were interrupted by people entering the room. Whilst the impact on data richness is unclear, these experiences offered insight into support staff's working conditions, limited time, unexpected demands, and lack of private space. Interruptions in interviews with bilingual support staff in school settings have been similarly noted in the literature (Cable, 2004).

The interview schedule was not followed rigidly; participants typically responded to generic prompts and summaries of what they had shared, with

the schedule referenced toward the end to check the coverage of key areas.

It was particularly useful in framing the interview as a 'one-sided conversation' (Smith et al., 2022) and highlighting that, as a monolingual researcher, some questions may seem self-evident, but are asked with the aim of understanding their experience.

Reflections on my feelings before, during, and after each interview were recorded, alongside observations of interactions between myself and the participants, to develop critical reflexivity and self-awareness (Lincoln, 1995). Given that I have no personal experience of interpreting between languages and am an outsider to the specific experience at the heart of this research, Sakata et al.'s (2024b) Culturally Responsive Consultation Tool was drawn upon, which, whilst not designed for research interviews, provided a useful framework for reflecting on the interpersonal dimensions of the interviews from my perspective.

For example, reflections from one interview noted:

'It is tricky when interacting, your language use and pace is influenced by the other. I need to try to keep the chances for silences, to allow us both to think, digest and wonder. Where we do not know each other well, I wonder if this makes it more difficult for me to sit in the silence - I feel the need to fill [the silence] as the interviewer'

The reflections heightened awareness of the relational dynamics in the interview process and their potential influence on data collection and

analysis, thereby supporting a reflexive approach discussed later in the chapter.

Ethical Considerations

The BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021b), the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2024), and the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists (2023) provided the foundations and guiding principles for the planning, enactment, and reflection on the research process. However, the aim was to remain ethically attuned (Willig, 2013) throughout, attending to the relational, contextual and emergent ethical dimensions that are particularly important in inductive and exploratory qualitative research. This required ongoing thought and reflection at each stage of the research process.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was sought from the Tavistock and Portman Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and the LA's Research Governance Committee (RGC). Minor amendments were requested by the TREC, prompting useful reflection on aspects of my personal and professional identity and their bearing on the research process, which are addressed in the sections on power dynamics and reflexivity. Confirmation of ethical approval is provided in Appendices I and J.

Informed Consent

To reduce the potential feelings of obligation for prospective participants, I did not share research information directly, i.e. face-to-face with participants. Instead, participant information flyers (Appendix G) were distributed via SENCos or EPs with existing professional relationships with potential participants, including those I knew directly. Once prospective participants expressed interest, detailed participant information sheets (Appendix K) and consent forms (Appendix L) were sent. Three participants received these directly via email; two received them via the school SENCo. Whilst this maintained distance during the initial consent process, it introduced a different ethical tension for two participants. Reliance on SENCos as intermediaries meant I had no direct contact with these participants prior to the interview and could not know how the research was being framed in those conversations. This uncertainty heightened the importance of carefully checking and reaffirming consent at the start of each interview, ensuring participants had accurate information and felt free to participate or withdraw.

Information sheets included standard elements such as the study's purpose, voluntary participation, data management, and researcher contact details. All participants were invited to discuss the research before deciding, though only one did so.

The consent form included an additional statement for the two participants who knew me in my TEP role, confirming their awareness of the

dual role and that participation carried no professional obligation. All participants were informed that interviews would occur at least two weeks after providing consent, to provide a cooling-off period that reduces pressure and allows reflection.

Consent was treated as ongoing rather than a one-time event. During interviews, participants were reminded of their right to skip questions or stop at any time. Following the first interview, the debrief was extended to include an explanation of the interpretative process, that data would be analysed and themes generated, so that participants were informed about how their accounts would be used. This aimed to widen the umbrella of informed consent beyond data collection to data use, reflecting the interpretative nature of IPA and the transparency this requires. The right to withdraw was extended to four weeks post-interview, balancing participants' ability to reconsider with the practical constraints of anonymisation and analysis.

Confidentiality and Anonymisation

To protect participant identity, interviews were audio-recorded only (via Zoom and a password-protected dictaphone), avoiding visual identification. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, with identifying details removed, including names of people and schools. Original audio files were deleted after transcription.

Anonymised transcripts were stored on a password-protected, secure OneDrive account accessible only to me, with the research supervisor

granted access for quality assurance purposes if required. Consent forms were stored separately from interview data to prevent linkage.

I had intended to assign participants pseudonyms. While personalised pseudonyms can create reader connection (Edwards, 2020), researcher-assigned names perpetuate power imbalances (Itzik & Walsh, 2023). Consequently, participants were invited to select their own pseudonyms after the interview. None chose to do so. A decision was made to number participants 1-5. Though this risks a write-up that can undermine bringing the participant's world to life (Smith et al., 2022), the richness of direct quotes embedded throughout the findings will sufficiently bring each participant's voice and world to life for the reader.

Recruitment via EPs and SENCos meant that, in most cases, others were aware of staff who had participated, limiting anonymity within professional networks, though not in research outputs. Whilst participants were informed of this limitation, it represents an unavoidable constraint of the recruitment method adopted, which required navigating existing professional networks to access participants. Additionally, while interviews were intended to occur in private spaces, practical constraints meant three were interrupted by colleagues entering, and one occurred in an office with extensive windows, creating visual exposure. Interviews were paused during interruptions. These limitations were beyond my or the participants' control, highlighting the importance of rigorous anonymisation in research outputs. Some contextual detail in participant quotes has been maintained in the

findings where it is analytically necessary, which poses an unavoidable limitation on anonymity.

Participants were informed of the legal limits to confidentiality, including mandatory safeguarding reporting, in information sheets, consent forms, and at the start of the interview. Whilst no participants withdrew data during the four-week post-interview period, it is acknowledged that non-withdrawal cannot be taken as confirmation that confidentiality measures were experienced as fully satisfactory.

Power Dynamics, Dual Roles and Participant Protection from Harm

Multiple layers of power dynamics operated throughout this research, requiring careful consideration and mitigation.

As a TEP employed by the LA, I occupied a complex position. The LA held institutional power over me as a trainee, while my research findings could identify strengths and limitations in interpreter use across LA schools, potentially influencing school and LA practices. This positioned me with some power to influence practice through disseminating findings, creating tension with the reality that data came from individuals with limited power within educational systems. However, the research also provided participants, whose voices are rarely heard in research or practice, with a platform to share experiences on their own terms. To prioritise participants as key stakeholders, findings will be shared with them before wider dissemination.

Power differentials between the researcher and participants were compounded by my TEP role. Two participants knew me as the TEP linked to the school in which they work, and their accounts may have included experiences of meetings I had attended, creating unavoidable dual relationships. One participant referred to "you" and "EPs" interchangeably during the interview, suggesting a dual role remained present in their experience of the research encounter despite explicit acknowledgement in consent materials. This highlighted the limitations of procedural mitigation and reinforced the importance of reflexive awareness throughout.

Additional power dynamics existed between gatekeepers (EPs and SENCos) and participants, potentially influencing recruitment and engagement. The four-week post-interview withdrawal period was available to participants without gatekeepers' knowledge, supporting autonomous decision-making.

Several strategies were employed to mitigate researcher-participant power differentials. I positioned myself as a learner by explicitly stating my monolingual status and lack of interpreting experience, framing participants as experts of their own experience. Participants were informed that the interview would be participant-centred, 'a one-sided conversation' (Smith et al., 2022) focusing on their priorities, consistent with IPA methodology. To maximise comfort, participants chose interview locations (LA offices, school, community space, or online); interestingly, all chose school settings (one online), perhaps indicating comfort in familiar environments. Finally,

post-interview reflexive diary entries (see Appendix M) facilitated critical reflection on relational dynamics that might influence interpretation.

Beyond power dynamics, protecting participants from potential harm required equal attention and active consideration throughout, particularly given the potential for research on professional experience to draw on personal thoughts, feelings and experiences in ways that may not be fully anticipated. Though the risk of distress was deemed low, the possibility existed that discussing their interpreting experiences might elicit uncomfortable emotions or highlight conflicts. Several mitigation strategies were employed. Information sheets and pre-interview discussions explicitly outlined potential emotional impacts, ensuring informed consent. Participants were reminded they could share only what felt comfortable and skip questions, maintaining control over their disclosures. Verbal and written debriefs were provided post-interview (see Appendices N and O), including signposting to support services if needed. Throughout the research process, the right to pause or withdraw was reinforced, treating consent as ongoing rather than a one-time event.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity, understanding how I, as the researcher, influence the research process consciously and unconsciously, and am in turn influenced by it (Fox et al., 2007), is central to IPA's interpretive methodology. Feedback from the TREC highlighted two aspects of the study requiring explicit attention: first, a clear statement of my identity and its potential implications

for relational dynamics and analysis; second, how reflexivity would be systematically incorporated into the research process.

As a White British, monolingual English-speaking TEP, structural differences in language, professional role and institutional position existed between participants and me. However, reducing these to a simple privilege differential would risk obscuring the complexity of the relational dynamics that actually emerged. Similarities in age, family status, values and, in some cases, socioeconomic background created points of connection and alignment across interviews, whilst differences in linguistic experience and community membership required explicit acknowledgement. The relationship between researcher and participant was therefore neither straightforwardly hierarchical nor straightforwardly equal, but contextually shifting and requiring ongoing reflexive attention.

Reflexive diary entries captured this complexity in the moment. Following one interview, for example:

‘Aspects of my identity, e.g. [parent], age, ‘professional’, undertaking qualifications felt relevant in this interview in how we related. These things are close to me at this point in my life, and I believe important to [them] too. Perhaps [there was] some alignment going on? My difference in qualification (thesis) and specific role, supporting [them] in being able to share experiences to raise the profile of this role’.

This reflection illustrates how difference and alignment operate simultaneously. My doctoral researcher role and the associated institutional positioning were both a point of difference and, potentially, a shared investment in making the interpreting role more visible and acknowledged. Rather than straightforwardly positioning me as privileged and the participant as having little power, the dynamic was more nuanced: my outsider position and institutional access were resources used in service of a goal the participant held. My position as an outsider to the interpreting experience may have been a methodological asset, enabling me to approach the phenomenon with genuine curiosity and to notice aspects of practice that those embedded within it might take for granted.

At the start of each interview, I explicitly stated my monolingual status and shared my TEP role and motivation for the research: my initial experiences, highlighting gaps in understanding interpreter experiences, and the absence of research centring interpreters' voices. This aimed to position participants as holders of knowledge I lacked, to disrupt researcher-participant hierarchies.

Throughout the research process, I maintained reflexive notes on my thoughts and relational dynamics. To avoid relying solely on my own potentially biased frameworks, I used Sakata et al.'s (2024b) Culturally Responsive Consultation Tool, which supported consideration of interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions, particularly when reflecting after interviews. It highlighted both similarities and differences in identity and

background that might influence what I probed, what I interpreted, and what went unchallenged.

Several insights emerged from using the tool. Rapport-building revealed how much information participants and I exchanged informally before and after the interview, similarities in age, family status, and values, which may have facilitated connection but also risked creating assumptions of shared understanding. These similarities could enable relational connection, but might also lead to insufficient probing where I assumed common ground. Conversely, differences in language, culture, and professional role required explicit checking of understanding and resisting premature interpretation. The reflexive diary excerpt 2 in Appendix M illustrates how this played out across interviews, including a moment in which assumed alignment with one participant prompted reflection on whether the interpretations were mine rather than theirs.

Whilst IPA encourages a participant-led, one-sided conversation, I remained aware that my choices as an interviewer inevitably shaped the direction. At any moment, multiple questions or prompts were possible, as identified in the pilot interview analysis, each potentially leading the conversation in a different direction. Acknowledging this influence, what I chose to explore further, what I left unexplored, was essential for transparency about my role in co-constructing accounts in the moment.

In IPA, analysis produces the researcher's interpretation of participants' interpretations (Smith et al., 2022). Being aware of how both

levels of interpretation are influenced by identity, interaction, and positionality is essential for transparency, allowing readers to evaluate the strengths and limitations of my interpretive lens.

Data Protection and Storage

All data were managed in accordance with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, with procedures approved by TREC and the LA Research Governance Framework Panel.

The section on confidentiality and anonymity above outlines data storage for digital information. Paper copies of anonymised transcripts used during analysis were stored securely, and annotated paper copies were scanned and stored electronically on OneDrive. Paper copies were securely destroyed following completion.

Anonymised transcripts and scanned analytical annotations will be retained for 6-10 years post-completion in accordance with the university's research data policy.

Data Analysis

IPA analysis involves detailed, iterative engagement with individual accounts before identifying patterns across cases. As Smith et al. (2022) note:

‘Although the primary concern of IPA is the lived experience of the participant and the meaning the participant makes of that

lived experience, the end result is always the result of how the analyst makes sense of how the participant makes sense, this is the double hermeneutic' (Smith et al., 2022, p.77)

Following this principle, analysis proceeded idiographically, completing five stages of IPA for the first participant before moving to the next, adapting the process as confidence developed. This section outlines the six-stage analytical process for generating Personal Experiential Themes (PETs), followed by the process of developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs) (Smith et al., 2022).

PETS: Steps 1 and 2: Reading, Re-reading and Exploratory Noting.

To become familiar with the data, I listened to each audio recording once while noting initial impressions and responses in a notebook. These notes captured immediate reactions and helped manage the volume of ideas and connections listening can elicit (Smith et al., 2022).

Example impression notes, capturing thoughts whilst listening to a part of an interview:

'[Participant's] pace is nice...not too fast, sensing plenty of knowledge of experience of process'. 'My tone a bit flatter? This day I was clumsy and tired' [Participant] speaks of tiredness and quickly changes to "[I] really enjoy it"

After initial note-taking from the audio, I transcribed the interview sentence by sentence, which slowed processing and allowed careful attention to each utterance, with additional notes made during transcription.

Following transcription, I engaged in simultaneous reading and exploratory noting, reading each transcript at least five times whilst annotating either digital or paper copies. I referred back to my notebook entries from listening and transcription to ensure first impressions were incorporated. Each reading revealed new layers of meaning as individual sentences were considered within the wider context of the interview, exemplifying the hermeneutic circle. Early notes influenced later readings, whilst later insights prompted revision of earlier interpretations.

Exploratory noting involved three interrelated types of annotation, which together move from description to interpretation (Smith et al., 2022). Rather than systematically seeking each type, they were allowed to emerge organically as engagement with the data deepened:

- *Descriptive notes* captured content, what the participant said about their experience, attending closely to the details of their account.
- *Linguistic notes* attended to language use, including specific word choices, metaphors, amplitude, and moments of laughter or emotion. These notes linked to how meaning was conveyed beyond content alone.
- *Conceptual notes* moved toward interpretation, probing deeper into meaning-making while remaining anchored to the data. These were

more interrogative, asking questions of the text that could be checked back against the transcript.

Some notes related to broader life experiences rather than specific interpretation; these were retained because they might inform how participants made meaning of interpreting experiences. To facilitate fresh engagement with language, I experimented with reading transcripts backwards, decontextualising sentences from their temporal sequence and focusing on specific word use (Smith et al., 2022). Examples of listening notes, transcription notes, and fully annotated transcripts showing descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual exploratory notes are provided in Appendix P.

PETS Step 3: Constructing Experiential Statements

This stage involved reducing the volume of detail from exploratory notes and detail in transcripts to experiential statements, which are short statements which capture my understanding of the participant's experience. These were influenced by other parts of the interview as the whole shaped the interpretation of the parts within the hermeneutic cycle. Constructing 'pithy' experiential statements proved challenging; my vocabulary felt limited for capturing rich, nuanced meaning concisely. The challenge was finding a single word or phrase that could carry the weight of a more complex observation. Here, I felt internal tension between interpretation and fidelity to participants' meaning-making. Initially, this tension manifested in overly descriptive experiential statements that stayed close to participants' words.

As I became more comfortable with IPA's epistemological position, that my interpretation of participants' interpretations is the legitimate outcome, this tension eased somewhat, though never disappeared entirely. I came to appreciate that I could only make sense of their experience through my own understanding of the world, and that this was the nature of interpretive research rather than a limitation to overcome.

A parallel emerged between my struggle to convey participants' experiential meanings and what one participant described about their own interpreting work: needing to *go around* what was being said, staying close to the original meaning while recognising direct 'translation' was impossible. This resonance highlighted how interpretation, whether linguistic or analytical, involves reconstruction rather than simple transmission. Examples of experiential statements and their relationship to exploratory notes are found in Appendix Q.

PETS Step 4: Searching for Connections Between Experiential Statements.

Each experiential statement was noted with its page number, maintaining a connection to the data from which it emerged. Statements were physically cut up and arranged and rearranged, allowing connections across different parts of the transcript to be identified without being constrained by chronological sequence. Where connections were made, experiential statements were clustered. The research question provided a

helpful framework for connection-seeking, though I remained open to unexpected patterns.

This process generated anxiety about my interpretive authority: was I imposing connections the participant might not recognise? Was I giving equal weight to statements that participants themselves may have experienced as more or less significant? These anxieties were eased by remembering that the hermeneutic cycle permits revision and that my clustering represented one valid interpretation rather than an absolute truth. Clear linking back to the quotes kept me feeling anchored to the participants' shared experiences.

This process also revealed a tendency toward realist ontological assumptions, an expectation that some interpretations were more accurate or legitimate than others, and a discomfort with the idea that multiple value interpretations could coexist. Recognising this pull, likely rooted in previous professional training where research methods are designed to minimise interpretative subjectivity, helped me sit with the interpretative uncertainty that IPA requires more comfortably.

PETS Step 5: Naming the Personal Experiential Themes

Each cluster of connected experiential statements became a Personal Experiential Theme (PET) for the participant. Personal, as they emerged from an individual's experience; experiential, as they related directly to lived experience; and themes, as they were 'analytic entities' constructed through the interpretative process (Smith et al., 2022). Some themes contained

sub-themes. Themes and sub-themes were recorded in a PET table, including page numbers and direct quotes from participants that led to their construction, providing an evidence trail of the interaction between participants' utterances and the researcher's interpretation (Appendix R).

Each participant's analysis yielded between 4 and 6 PETs, with 0 to 4 sub-themes. Theme names aimed to capture experiential essence while remaining conceptually meaningful. Determining theme boundaries required balancing specificity and coherence; themes needed to be analytically distinct whilst connected to the overall research question.

PETS Step 6: Continuing Individual Analysis of Other Cases

Smith et al. (2022) cautioned that prior analyses risk influencing later transcripts, potentially imposing patterns from earlier cases onto later ones, compromising the idiographic commitment to each participant's unique account. While I aimed to treat each participant as an individual by applying the same steps, complete bracketing of earlier analyses was neither possible nor, from a hermeneutic perspective, expected. I noticed growing confidence in interpretation and occasionally saw echoes of earlier themes in participants' later transcripts. To mitigate this, I deliberately began each analysis by immersing myself in the new participant's unique language and phrasing. Anything that seemed familiar from earlier analyses was noted but deliberately set aside for consideration at the GETs stage, rather than allowing it to shape PET construction prematurely. The PET stage remained

strictly idiographic; only after completing PETs for all five participants (Appendix S) did I begin looking for group-level themes.

Construction of GETs

Moving from PETs to GETs required identifying both shared and unique features across individual experiences of interpreting (Smith et al. 2022). Each participant's PETs, with linked subthemes, were printed and laid out on a large surface, separated from each other. Following Smith et al.'s (2022) guidance, I asked questions across the PETs, e.g. 'What lies at the heart of the experience?', 'How are they making sense of it?' which generated broad conceptual groupings, for example, 'bringing unique knowledge of family, school and community' and 'complexity of language, e.g. dialect, professional, lay, assumed understanding, capacity of parents'.

To support this process, I kept a printed narrative summary of each participant's PETs alongside their full PET table containing experiential statements and quotes. This allowed the lens of analysis to move backwards and forwards (Smith et al., 2022) between clusters of related PETs and the individual experiential statements underpinning them. The narrative summaries were particularly important as PET names, though they attempt to capture the nuance of the experience, risk flattening the richness of individual accounts. The summaries helped reorient me to the underlying meanings each participant had made.

PETs were physically moved and clustered around identified connections. In some cases, individual subthemes within the PET did not fit well with the cluster to which the broader PET belonged. Whilst Smith et al. (2022) describe moving subthemes as a viable analytic option, particularly where subthemes across participants might constitute a GET in their own right, I was conscious that the combination of subthemes within each PET was what gave it its idiographic character. Separating subthemes risked removing key aspects of a participant's unique experience. This was therefore avoided unless subthemes clearly came together across participants to form a distinct GET in their own right. Subthemes that did not fit well within a cluster were retained as potential points of divergence.

At this stage of analysis, growing confidence in the epistemological position that there are multiple valid routes to GETs and that each analyst would draw different conclusions, supported a more assured interpretative stance. This was my interpretation, grounded in a detailed idiographic analysis of each case. Six GETs were formed, each with up to two subthemes. All five participants' PETs contributed to two GETs, four participants contributed to three GETs, and three participants contributed to one GET, indicating that most GETs captured experiences shared across the majority of the sample.

GET names were constructed to capture what each cluster represented across participants. A spreadsheet was developed that brought together each contributing PET, its experiential statements, and linked

quotes, allowing points of convergence and divergence to be identified more clearly. This convergence and divergence is demonstrated in the findings chapter through a range of participant voices presented within each GET.

Quality Considerations for IPA Research and the Study

Qualitative research does not seek generalisability from sample to broader populations, nor are reliability and replicability prioritised in quantitative research. Instead, quality is evaluated through concepts such as trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Cresswell & Miller, 2000, cited in Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). However, the diversity of qualitative approaches makes universal validity criteria challenging (Yardley, 2000), compounded in interpretive research where understandings of reality are co-constructed between researcher and participant.

This research draws on Yardley's (2000) four principles for assessing qualitative research quality and on Nizza et al.'s (2021) IPA-specific criteria. Table 7 demonstrates how the criteria were addressed throughout the research process, including the analysis and the forthcoming sections of findings and discussion.

Table 7

Quality Principles and Application to the Study

Quality Principle	How it was addressed
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Yardley (2000) - Qualitative Research

Sensitivity to Context Literature review positioned study within existing research; year-long work in LA provided contextual understanding of school settings; participant-led interviews allowed socio-cultural aspects to emerge; reflexivity using Sakata et al.'s (2024b) framework examined interactions and positionality; close attention to language use.

Commitment to Rigour Five full days of analysis per transcript; minimum five readings with exploratory noting at descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual levels; systematic six-stage IPA process applied to each participant; case-by-case analysis with minimum two-day gaps (often weeks) between participants; PETs completed individually before cross-case analysis; monthly research supervision; openness to data contradicting preconceptions; flexibility in research question when participant priorities emerged; audit trail documented and evidenced in appendices.

Transparency and Coherence Detailed methodology chapter including challenges and limitations; clear ontological/epistemological positioning; explicit rationale for IPA as a methodological framework; coherent theoretical framework; appendices providing audit trail from data to themes; reflexive commentary; findings grounded in participants' words with clear interpretive narrative.

Impact and Importance Addresses the gap centring interpreter voices; contributes to understanding of multilingual support in schools; implications for practice with multilingual families; amplifies marginalised voices; findings to be shared with participants and LA to inform practice; potential to influence training and collaborative working

Nizza et al. (2021) - IPA Specific

Constructing a Compelling, Unfolding Narrative Individual participant narratives maintained through PETs before integration into GETs; findings structured to show experiential journey through themes; extended contextualised quotes present participants' meaning-making; careful sequencing of quotes and analytic commentary to create a

	coherent narrative arc; balance between individual voices and shared patterns; progression from descriptive to interpretive insights
Developing a Rigorous Experiential and/or Existential Account	Multi-level analysis (descriptive, linguistic, conceptual) moved beyond surface description; attention to identity, agency, embodied experience, meaning-making; prioritised depth over breadth through focused thematic analysis; engagement with implicit meanings.
Close Analytic Reading of Participants' Words	Line-by-line analysis with descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual exploratory notes; attention to word choices, pauses, repetition, metaphors, tone; reading backwards; analysis of implicit meanings; PET tables linking themes to quotes; quotes embedded in interpretive commentary; cultural/linguistic differences considered
Attending to Convergence and Divergence.	Case-by-case analysis with gaps between participants; individual PETs before cross-case GETs; findings identify both shared patterns and unique experiences; multiple voices per theme show convergence/divergence; individual narratives maintained within group themes; nuanced reporting of variations

Potential Limitations to Quality

Several limitations to the research quality should be acknowledged. Recruitment challenges meant the intended sample of six was not achieved, and was likely confounded by gatekeepers. All interviews took place in school settings during working hours, which may have constrained what participants felt comfortable sharing and introduced practical interruptions as noted earlier. Those who did participate may represent a subgroup of bilingual support staff who are in settings and have experiences which facilitate participation in this research area.

My positionality as a monolingual TEP/researcher inevitably shaped both the relational dynamics of the interviews and my interpretations of participants' accounts. My monolingual status meant I made meaning of the participant's interpreting experience as a genuine outsider. However, I have experience of such meetings in the TEP role, which provides some understanding from an alternative position which may feed into interpretations. The experiences and perspectives I bring, both professionally and personally, are an inherent part of the double hermeneutic cycle of IPA. Rather than a limitation to be mitigated, it is acknowledged as being present and active within the analysis, consistent with IPA's epistemological position that the researcher's meaning-making is inseparable from the interpretative process.

Chapter Four: Findings

Findings: Chapter Overview

The chapter begins by introducing the six GETs constructed in the analysis and by presenting how each participant's PETs contributed to each GET. Each GET is then taken in turn, with participant contributions to each theme and subtheme explored, using rich participant quotes to present aspects of convergence and divergence among participants. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the findings.

From PETs to GETs

Analysis of each participant's transcripts led to the construction of their PETs (Appendix S). The contents of the PETs were analysed to determine how they could be understood across the group, identifying areas of convergence and divergence within each constructed GETs (Smith et al, 2022). The aim of the process is to answer the overarching research question:

What is the experience of school support staff who interpret in meetings with parents of children with SEND and other educational staff?

There are six GETs: Finding role and boundaries; Commitment to meaning making; Feeling and managing the load of interpreting; Personal values guide professional role and meaning; Awareness and responsiveness to the emotional experience of parents; Connecting people through unique knowledge, strengthening

and empowering families. The contribution of each participant's PETs to each GET is outlined in Table 8 below.

Table 8

GETs and Contributing PETs

GET	Related PETs
FINDING ROLE AND BOUNDARIES	P2 PET 5: Interpreting is an active position P2 PET 2: Interpreting requires saying the unspoken P1 PET 1: There is a need for bilingual staff to interpret in schools P3 PET 4: Living the unfolding journey of interpreting – a thread woven through time P4 PET 6: Navigating role boundaries and responsibilities, seeking support from other professionals P5 PET 1: Fitting the gap - Finding and being found in role
COMMITMENT TO MEANING MAKING	P5 PET 3: Making meaning for families where it doesn't make sense P3 PET 3: Carrying the demands of meetings while creating clarity and navigating P2 PET 6: Family understanding is the priority and is determined by interpreter understanding beyond just words P3 PET 2: Supporting early intervention by connecting family and school P4 PET 2: Responsibility and capability to mediate within the professional and family gap P2 PET 1: The need and purpose in filling the gaps between school and family P1 PET 2: Accuracy, sensitivity and gaps in language, not always hitting the mark, but as close as possible

FEELING AND MANAGING THE LOAD OF INTERPRETING	P5 PET 6: Acknowledging and learning to manage the demands of the role not always seen P3 PET 5: Carrying deep meaning while baring hidden costs P4 PET 1: Feelings of uncertainty of competence P1 PET 3: What is known and unknown influences the felt experience in the moment
PERSONAL VALUES GUIDE PROFESSIONAL ROLE AND MEANING	P2 PET 3: Deep connection to families both motivates and enriches personal and professional experience P5 PET 5: Interpreting as a professional role led by personal values P4 PET 5: Living personal values through professional role P3 PET 5.1 Holding deep meaning of making a difference
AWARENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS TO THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE OF PARENTS	P4 PET 4: Seeing and responding to the emotional needs of parents P2 PET 4: Being an emotional container P4 PET 2.3 Words matter, connecting with compassion P1 PET 2.2 Navigating language use to avoid parental upset
CONNECTING PEOPLE THROUGH UNIQUE KNOWLEDGE, STRENGTHENING AND EMPOWERING FAMILIES	P4 PET 3: Seeing the bigger picture, connecting home and school P5 PET 2: Knowing community challenges and empowering potential P1 PET 4: Interpreting extends professional boundaries beyond the meeting P2 PET 1: The need and purpose in filling the gaps between school and family P5 PET 4: Holding the uniqueness of families, facilitating tailored support through joint working

When quoting from participants, the following typographic representations will be used:

- Verbatim quotes from participants are in quotations and page number of transcript stated post quote
- Ellipses with square brackets “[...]” show where a quotation has been cut and lone ellipses “...” show pauses in speech
- Proper nouns which may pose risk to anonymity are replaced by square brackets and indicator of removed information e.g. “[LA name]”, along with words not stated but implicated in earlier sections to help reading flow.

GET 1 – Finding Role and Boundaries

Roles emerged informally and were bounded variably in practice. Contributing PETs and the subthemes within the GET are shown in Tables 8 and 9, respectively.

Table 9

GET 1 – Finding Role and Boundaries and Participant Contribution

GET	Subthemes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
1. FINDING ROLE AND BOUNDARIES	Practical factors; it makes sense			•	•	•
	Being sought and seeking the role	•		•		•
	Determining role boundaries in the meeting		•	•	•	

Practical factors; it makes sense

Across participants, the ability to interpret language was the practical factor that positioned them for the role. However, the experience of *having* that skill, and what it meant to be the one who interprets, differs significantly, reflecting what might be understood as varying degrees of autonomy in how the role was taken up.

For participant two, early interpreting was experienced as passive, something done *to* them by others rather than chosen: “I’d be called out of the class to translate [...] you’re just a medium to communicate for and help support” (participant 2, page 3). The phrase “just a medium” conveys a sense of being used, of having little agency in how and whether the skill is deployed.

Participant three's experience of having the language skill was markedly different. Having developed the ability to speak both Bengali and Sylheti through their life experiences, they describe this as fortunate: "I was quite blessed [...] I had a lot of friends who spoke [...] the other dialogue, so I ended up...learning the other dialogue as well, so that's [...] where the advantage was, I think" (participant 3, page 2).

Where participant two's skill positioned them as a resource for others, participant three experiences their linguistic range as a personal asset, something they have developed and which gives them an edge.

For participant five, language skill is inseparable from community membership. "And occasionally I do the [...] translation for families and parents and stuff like that, because I come from the same community as them as well" (participant 5, page 1). Their motivation to interpret is not simply that they can, but that they belong. The skill and the community identity are experienced together, giving their taking up of the role a different character, chosen rather than assigned.

Within this subtheme, there is also convergence around availability as a practical factor; all participants found themselves drawn out of their other work to interpret. Here too however, the experience diverges. For participant five, the frequency of interpreting grew gradually and was not wholly within their control, shaped by other roles and the demands of those around them.

"That part of my [role] is [...] arranging lots of family meetings and family support work [...], so we automatically sort of got me into the role of translating for families, [...] so I did it, and eventually, as time went, it continued and continued, so now more and more often" (participant 5, page 1).

The repeated “continued and continued” and “more and more” convey an accumulation that gathered its own momentum. Importantly, they are clear that this is not because they are simply more available, but that being out of class more often creates a perception of availability, which they explicitly challenge: “And not that I’m available more [emphasised], but I think I’m more out of class, [...] and therefore I’m more available to support those families” (participant 5, page 1).

This perceived availability, a misreading of their flexibility by others, echoes in participant four’s experience, though in the opposite direction. Rather than being pulled into increasing frequency, they found themselves called into a meeting where an external professional was present and able to interpret, and they had to actively assert themselves to question it:

“I said [NAME] can I find out what his role is, because if his role is to translate, there’s no more point, me coming out of my work and coming and translating, because he’s going to do it.[...] I was a bit like, sorry, I feel like, what am I doing here, what are you doing there?” (participant 4, page 23).

Their account highlights the risk of time being taken for granted, an assumption that they are available and deployable regardless of whether their presence is necessary. Together, participant five and particularly participant four illustrate a shared dynamic of others making assumptions about availability, but the experience from opposite ends: one being drawn in with increasing frequency, the other having to create a stop. What connects them is the same underlying issue, a misperception of flexibility by others, and a need to assert their own agency in response.

Being Sought and Seeking the Role

Across participants, there is a convergence in a shared recognition, by colleagues, parents and themselves, that there is a role requiring filling and that they are the ones who can fill it. The divergence lies in *how* they come to occupy it: through institutional need, parental identification, or their own noticing of a gap.

Participant one's account illustrates how the degree of choice available varies with context. When safeguarding requires urgent interpreting, there is no real option: "for safeguarding you don't get much notice so you just have to drop, [...] drop everything as you're aware it is [...] very important. I have to [...] translate when needed." (participant 1, pages 2-3). The language here, "have to", "drop everything", "very important", signals an emergency, the highest priority work that supersedes all else. In this context, agency is not in question. However, for planned SEND and EP meetings with longer lead times, the experience shifts: "I'm also asked [...] 'are you okay to translate?' They won't say, [...] 'I want you to translate for me'. [...] If I say no, then that's fine. They'll find someone else." (participant 1, page 23).

The explicit option to decline exists, and the phrasing is careful, an invitation rather than a directive. Yet they are consistently high on the list to be called, despite others potentially being able to take the role, suggesting that the option, whilst real, carries its own weight. The same participant experiences a continuum from no choice to nominal choice, shaped by the urgency of the situation.

For two other participants⁹ it is the parents rather than colleagues who identify them for the role. One account has a particular simplicity to it: “Parents [...] they don't understand, so then they've just come up to me, and then I've just, [...] explained things to them. So that's how it sort of started.” (participant y, pages 1-2).

The repetition of “just”, “just come up”, “just explained”, conveys an ease and naturalness to the interaction. Parents identified them as someone who could help, and they responded. No negotiation, no formal process; a need met simply and directly. Another participant shares their experience of parents approaching them, though with a noticeable difference: “It’s interesting actually, because being a male, I was quite surprised that families actually do come to me.” (participant z, page 16).

Where one participant suggests parents approach them without hesitation, the other is surprised that they approached them at all, given the community's gender norms. That families do so regardless speaks to the strength of need; the requirement for interpreting support outweighs the social expectations that might otherwise have directed them elsewhere. Both accounts converge in parents actively seeking someone out; they diverge in what that seeking involves.

Beyond being sought, participant five describes noticing the need themselves and responding to it: “I noticed that a lot of the families didn’t understand English [...] and therefore, I kind of volunteered myself to translate for them in meetings and things like that” (participant 5, page 1). The word “volunteered” is significant, and perhaps more so, “volunteered myself”. This is not the language of someone acting as a conduit or filling a functional gap. It is the language of offering something personal, a

⁹ Participant numbers are not stated here to protect the anonymity of the only male participant in the sample.

whole-self commitment to a need they have seen and chosen to address. Where participant one's role is shaped by institutional urgency, and participant three's began through being found by parents, participant five actively moved towards the role. The convergence of all three is the recognition of an unmet need; the divergence is who does the identifying, institution, parent, or self, and what this means for the agency with which the role is taken up.

Determining Role Boundaries in the Meetings

Across participants, there is convergence in the shared recognition that interpreting in these meetings is not simply a word-for-word task. The divergence lies in where each participant located the weight of responsibility, how they take it up or deflect it, and the degree of autonomy with which they enact their role.

Participant three's account opens this tension. Directed by the SENCo or Headteacher, they describe their role in terms that suggest a conduit: "the SENCo, or the Head asking me, and then I just interpret [...] I just interpret for them" (participant 3, pages 8-9). The repetition of "just interpret" gives a sense of being a channel for others' words, with little agency. Yet alongside this sits a quiet, self-directed awareness of how this positioning might be perceived by parents:

"you don't want [...] the parent to think, oh, [...] I'm just speaking away because I'm on... I wouldn't say sides, but, [...] I'm just listening to what they say, [...] you feel like you're in the middle [...] trying to liaise between all parties [...] I'm conscious of both parties" (participant 3, page 23).

The discomfort here is subtle but significant. Being seen to simply relay the professional's words risks appearing to take their side, a perception participant three is alert to and actively works against. Their desire to connect both parties is not an official part of the role; it is a silent, self-imposed responsibility, navigated through their own awareness rather than any direction from others. They take this on themselves, in their own way.

Participant four shared this experience of a quiet expectation to interpret, but diverges in where they feel the responsibility should sit. Rather than quietly absorbing it, they redirect it.

“it's also important that you [EP/other educational professional] break it down, because the families don't have a clue, the person who is interpreting who has no training whatsoever, hasn't got a clue [...] it's really important to be mindful of that” (participant 4, page 9)

The address here, “you break it down” is directed to the professionals in the room, including the researcher. The references to “no training whatsoever” and “not having a clue” are clear signals that what is being assumed of them in the interpreting role feels as though it exceeds their skills or remit. Where participant three quietly manages the responsibility, participant four names it and pushes it back toward those with the professional knowledge to carry it.

This lack of understanding on the part of both the interpreter and the parents runs directly into participant two's account. They also identify that professionals may be unaware of how little is being understood in the room, but diverge from the other two in how they respond: “they [parents] don't know what you are talking about. I

actually don't know what you are talking about [laughs]. I don't. [...]. I'm feeling they don't know, then it's my duty then to make you aware" (participant 2, pages 25-26).

Rather than deflecting the responsibility or quietly managing it, participant two uses the interpreting role itself to surface the gap, speaking on behalf of both themselves and the family to bring the lack of understanding into the room. They feel a duty to do so and act on it directly. All three participants converge in experiencing responsibility to bridge understanding as theirs to carry, yet they enact it in markedly different ways: one monitors and navigates silently, one redirects the responsibility to professionals, and one voices it openly through the role.

The question of where authority lies in the role becomes most explicit in participant two's account of how their confidence has developed over time. What began as a conduit role, dependent on the direction of others, has become something self-determined: "Not just parroting or mimicking whatever somebody's told you to say [...] I don't need to ask you to tell me that, I can give them all that information" (participant 2, pages 5-6); "I can challenge them [parents] [...] I can have my own [...] sort of work...working out what's happening, and not just being the middle person to explain" (participant 2, page 10); "Being a [ROLE] and interpreting I can say that, whereas I suppose, as a professional, they're like, they might not be able to say" (participant 2, page 17).

The role has expanded beyond interpretation into something they enact on their own terms, stepping in to support parents, challenging them when needed, and saying what other professionals in the room feel unable to. The boundaries of the

role are not externally defined; they are self-determined, and have widened with confidence and experience.

For participant three, the boundaries are worked out differently. The interpreting role is foregrounded in the meeting, “your role is about helping people to be able to communicate with each other” (participant 3, page 23), but is held within the frame of being a school employee who must conduct themselves professionally “but I think as an interpreter, you still have to act very professionally” (participant 3, page 23). The two roles are experienced as mutually exclusive in the moment, requiring a deliberate setting aside of one to take up another. Where participant two’s boundaries expand through autonomous action, participant three’s are navigated within a professional framework that both enables and constrains.

Both are working out, in their own way, where the boundaries of the role lie, and enacting it where those boundaries work for them. The convergence across the GET is that the boundaries are unclear and individually determined; the divergence is what that means for each participant’s experience of authority, responsibility and autonomy in role.

GET 2 – Commitment to Meaning Making

Participants described going beyond literal translation to enable understanding (see Tables 8 and 10 for PETs and participant contribution)

Table 10

GET 2 - Commitment to Meaning Making and Participant Contribution

GET	Subthemes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
2. COMMITMENT TO MEANING MAKING	Interpreting in the language gaps	•	•	•	•	•
	Meaning-making through family and community knowledge		•	•	•	•

Interpreting in the Language Gaps

The language gap between English-speaking professionals and Bengali or Sylheti-speaking parents is a visible challenge in these meetings. However, participants' accounts reveal that bridging it requires far more than translation between two languages. Three interconnected demands emerge: making professional SEND language accessible, finding an equivalence across languages where none readily exists, and conveying messages with a sensitivity and accuracy that professionals in the room may be unaware is even needed.

The specialist language of SEND is experienced by participants as a barrier, not only by parents but also by the interpreting staff themselves. The terms used are variously described as “technical vocabulary” (participant 1, page 3), “fancy jargon” (participant 2, page 20), “book talk” (participant 4, page 7), and “your words” (participant 2, page 35), convergent in their inaccessibility, but experienced and addressed differently by participants.

Participant five describes stepping in confidently to deconstruct professional language for families: “lots of big words are used in meetings [...] A lot of the terminology that the parents don't understand. [...] I kind of step in and sort of break

it down for them.” (participant 5, pages 2-3). There is no sense of struggle here; stepping in and breaking down is experienced as a natural part of the role.

For participant one, the process is more effortful, requiring time and an active strategy: “there is a lot of technical vocabulary, which I do struggle with sometimes, so it’s about noting it down, [...] just thinking how to explain it” (participant 1, page 3). The need to write things down, to pause and think, reflects the cognitive work involved in interpreting language that is not readily accessible even to them.

Participant two’s experience adds a further dimension, the professional language is experienced as a third language, distinct even from English: “There’s no point speaking about all these fancy jargons [...] even me, although I can speak English, because I don’t know your language [...] obviously I’ll pick it up [...] But they will never pick it up! [laughs]” (participant 2, page 21). Their confidence that they will pick it up contrasts sharply with their certainty that parents will not. This points to something beyond the English-Bengali/Sylheti boundary, the specialist language of SEND may itself exclude parental access regardless of English proficiency, a potential power dynamic in which the professional’s language choices inadvertently position them apart from everyone else in the room. This is made explicit by participant four, who diverges from the others by not adapting the language themselves, but by making a direct request: “Just break it down [...] you’re probably using your book talk? [...] but it’s just breaking it down to real people” (participant 4, page 8). The phrase “real people” stands out as an appeal for professionals to speak at the level of those in the room, an implicit challenge to the inaccessibility of the language being used.

A second convergent challenge is the search for word equivalence across languages, where direct translation is not always possible. Here again, the approaches diverge. Participant five looks for the closest alternative word or uses examples when none exists, “there has to be something that’s alternative word, closest to what that word is.” (participant 5, page 5). Holding a conviction that an equivalent can always be found. Participant one reflects on whether their phrasing will be understood before committing to it, describing a need to “go around” what might otherwise become a barrier (participant 1, page 17), a more tentative, iterative process. Participant four draws on a common linguistic practice, embedding English words directly into Bengali/Sylheti sentences where no equivalent exists (participant 4, pages 9-10), using natural code-switching of the community as an interpretative tool.

The third dimension of this subtheme is the depth of commitment to meaning-making that participants bring, which may be entirely invisible to the professionals in the room. Participant three names the assumption directly: “they’re giving it to me, and I’m just giving it to them, and they think it’s just a simple thing, but it’s not. Even the visuals have to be explained to them” (participant 3, page 17). The assumption that even visual information directly translates to parents, without cultural or contextual explanation, illustrates how the work of interpreting is taken for granted.

Participant two describes the shift in their own practice from superficial to deep interpretation: “I need to know, that information needs to be soaked in, then for me to pass that information correctly and accurately as possible to the parent” (participant 2, page 29). The metaphor of “soaking in” implies time, absorption, and

full understanding before anything can be passed on. This is not word-for-word relay but a process of internalising meaning before conveying it.

Participant four converges in the same commitment to understanding, willing to ask when they do not: “I’m not afraid to ask [...] if I don’t understand what you are asking me, I can’t explain to the family, so I won’t be doing what I’m supposed to be doing.” (participant 4, pages 11-12). Their transparency about the limits of their own understanding, at the risk of appearing not to know, reflects the same underlying priority: accuracy for the family above self-presentation. The use of the word ‘explain’ rather than ‘interpret’ is notable.

Finally, participants carefully attend to *how* messages are conveyed, in ways professionals may not consider. Participant two is aware that professionals, through frequent exposure, have presumptions and a deep understanding that can bypass parents in the message, so direct, clear and explicit communication is important: “But parents don’t have that knowledge. They don’t know. Sometimes you have to actually explain it to them, so plainly” (participant 2, page 15).

For participant one, care is taken in the specific words chosen in Bengali/Sylheti, conscious that some words may cause offence, while others would not: “Sometimes when it is a sensitive topic, [...] you’ve got to be thinking about using the correct words [...] you don’t want to offend the family, you don’t want to say the wrong words in Bengali” (participant 1, page 13).

The convergence across all participants is in the commitment to ensuring parents leave the meeting with a genuine understanding; the divergence is in which

aspects of that commitment are most salient: confidence, effort, directness, depth of absorption, or sensitivity to impact.

Meaning Making through Family and Community Knowledge

Across participants, there is convergence on the recognition that families face a gap that extends beyond language; the implicit knowledge, expectations, and frameworks embedded in the UK education system are not visible or accessible to parents who were not educated within it. The divergence lies in the specific knowledge each participant draws on to bridge that gap, and how they use it.

Participant two names the gap with both clarity and feeling:

“I felt so sorry for them [...] they were not educated in the UK, they don’t know the system [...] there is a lot of grey areas [...] and also the expectation of the West in how they would like certain parents to be [...] there is a level of expectation from both ends” (participant 2, page 4).

The term “grey areas” suggests these are not explicit rules parents have been told and not followed, but implicit expectations they do not know exist. The sympathy participant two feels at this mismatch draws them to the role. They also note that the expectations run in both directions; the education system has expectations of the families, but the families have their own frameworks too, and the two do not always align.

Participant five shares this awareness of the gap, but approaches it from the inside, as a community member who understands both systems: “in our culture [...] things like ADHD, or things like, you know, mental health, these things didn’t really

exist, or it existed, they just didn't have a label to it." (participant 5, page 8). The medicalised language and diagnostic frameworks that are routine in education settings are not how behaviour or difficulty is always understood within the community. Rather than treating this as a deficit, participant five uses community knowledge to facilitate understanding, translating not just words, but frameworks, finding examples and references that have resonance for families: "if there's an Educational Psychologist that's explaining a scenario [...] I might relate that to, do you see this that happens in the community [...] This is exactly what they are saying." (participant 5, page 5).

Their own identity as a community member is a resource to support understanding. They see the disparity because they have lived on both sides of it, they can find ways to connect professional explanation to family understanding. The same applies to processes such as those linked to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), which participant five makes explicit and personally relevant, not just stating the label and assuming understanding, but explaining why it matters for this child at this moment.

Participant four converges in using contextual knowledge to support understanding of professional involvement, through the emphasis on the source of that knowledge, which is different, drawn more specifically from their knowledge of the specific family and the background they have accessed through their school role: "We can just read up on [...] the background of the whole [...] the meeting of the family, or what's going on. So that's a good way of actually then relating or giving examples to the parents" (participant 4, pages 4-5). Where participant five draws on

community-level knowledge, participant four draws on individual family knowledge; both use what they know to help families connect the dots where the professional account alone would not make them clear.

The convergence across all three is in the use of knowledge that sits outside the formal interpreting role, knowledge of community frameworks, family histories, and system processes, to make meaning accessible in ways that pure language interpretation cannot reach. Participant two makes this explicit from their own experience:

“Don’t call someone off the street to interpret [...] the families are not going to go away with anything. [...] But you don’t know the next steps, like, oh, I can do this to help my child, or I can do this so I’m okay with how I am with my child” (participant 2, page 16)

Their strong view that language alone is insufficient is not directly echoed by the other participants, but the accounts of participants four and participant five show in practice what participant two articulates in principle, that it is the depth of contextual knowledge, not language skills alone, that enables families to leave meetings with genuine understanding and capacity to act.

GET 3 – Feeling and Managing the Load of Interpreting

Accounts highlighted the cognitive and emotional load of interpreting and self-management strategies (see Table 8 for the PETs and Table 11 for participant contributions).

Table 11

GET 3 – Feeling and Managing the Load of Interpreting and Participant Contribution

GET	Subthemes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
3. FEELING AND MANAGING THE LOAD OF INTERPRETING	Feeling the load of interpreting	•		•	•	•
	Managing the load	•		•		•

All participants referred to how they feel or have felt about the mental and emotional load of interpreting, but for participant two, though present, it was not an identified PET.

Feeling the Load of Interpreting

Across participants, there is convergence in the experience of a demanding role, which is largely invisible to others in the room. What diverges is what factors can affect the load and how it is carried.

The experience can be physical, as highlighted by participant five: “It’s tiring, it’s tiring, honestly, it’s tiring” (participant 5, page 14). The triple repetition emphasises this is not just tired, but tired in a way that needs emphasis to convey. Participant three shares this, describing meetings as “really overwhelming” and leaving them “mentally a little bit drained” (participant 3, pages 15-16), a cost that “maybe the school don’t know” (participant 3, page 15). For both, the experience is one of depletion that follows interpretive work.

The volume and pace of information flowing through the meeting are a significant source of load for participants, experienced in different ways. Participant four describes the difficulty of holding long questions in mind:

“Sometimes the question might be really long, and I’ll be like, sorry, what was that? [...] saying a little bit and giving me that chance, because I forget otherwise [...] nobody’s going to know that I’ve forgot to say that, which is not fair” (participant 4, page 7)

The concern is not just about keeping up, but about the invisible consequence of forgetting, information lost to the family, with no one else in the room to notice. They also feel the pull of parental tangents: “if the mum’s there, and she’s going off track, then you’re going to go off track with them, so sometimes I’ll be like, oh, what was the question?” (participant 4, page 24). The responsibility to hold the direction of the meeting, keeping the original question in mind whilst being drawn into a parental response that may not directly answer it, leaves them having to actively re-orientate themselves “because I forget, I’m like, let me stay on track” (participant 4, page 24). The effort to refocus is theirs alone, as they are the only person in the room aware of what has been asked and what has actually been said.

For participant five, the load due to the pace of information poses a challenge: “Often things are said really quickly.[...] And therefore it’s hard [laughs] hard for me to process [...]” (participant 5, page 10). The pace leaves a feeling of not being able to “process” what is being said. The speed in real time is greater than the capacity. For both, the demands of the meeting in the moment outstrip what can be comfortably held and processed. They both address this, but in different ways. For participant

four, they respond in the moment by asking for a repeat “I’ll be like, sorry, what was that?” (participant 4, page 7), participant five in comparison is more proactive and pre-empts this by setting the expectations before the meeting begins “I have to mention it before that, that we’re taking, [...] smaller chunks, [...], so that we can break it down a little more” (participant 5, page 10), requesting smaller chunks to slow the process and increasing their processing time.

The number of people in the room increases the load for both participant three and participant four, though in different ways. For participant three, larger meetings multiply the complexity of tracking who is speaking to whom:

“number A could be asking me a question, then C's asking me a question, then [...] B's asking the same, then A's asking the question back [...] on what, say, B's saying. [...] when you're doing that kind of interpreting, then it's hard.”
(participant 3, page 21)

The confusion in the description mirrors the experience itself, a web of interaction crossing through the interpreting staff, each requiring a recall and relay. Similarly, larger groups affect participant four, but do so by increasing their self-consciousness about the time interpretation takes: “it does feel like, oh my god, am I taking too long? [...] cover all the bits?” (participant 4, page 21). The concern about slowing down the meeting through interpreting is amplified as the number of people in the room increases. Their awareness of what other professionals may be thinking of them adds a relational pressure on top of the cognitive one:

“I think if you were sitting there, you’d be like, [...] mum says so much stuff, but she [interpreter] only said this.[...] Sometimes I might just say, “Oh, Mum’s

just saying it again”, which means [...] it’s okay [...] you know that bit.”

(participant 4, page 7)

They are aware of how the length of their interpretation may compare to what was said, and the professionals in the room may question it internally. They manage this by pre-empting the concern, explaining to professionals when the parent is repeating themselves. Both participants carry the weight of monitoring the room, but differ on which aspects of monitoring weigh most.

The presence and nature of others in the room can also ease or intensify the load. Participant one describes how supportive professionals reduce it: “they’re really friendly [...] they give me time [...] they give me that space [...] they don’t judge [...] they’re respectful [...] I feel comfortable” (participant 1, page 13). The term “space” to carry out the interpretation could be the temporal space of not being rushed, the relational space of no judgement and possibly the physical space to speak to parents. These professional interactions are meaningful and foster a sense of comfort in carrying out the role. In contrast is the experience of participant four, where Bengali/Sylheti-speaking professionals may be present, but not interpreting; their presence can fill the relational space:

“Sometimes it gets a bit more [very emphasised], you get a bit more nervous [...] Am I doing it correct? Did I say it right? It makes you feel [...] quite a lot of pressure[...] So you get that pressure as well, that, oh, did I say it right.

Someone else might say, I didn’t actually say that.” (participant 4, page 21).

The sense of ‘pressure’ and concern about correctly interpreting is emphasised. The relational space, feeling pressured, the possibility of being

corrected or questioned, makes the invisible work suddenly very visible and scrutinised, the opposite of what participant one describes. Professional presence, which might be expected to reduce load, instead increases self-consciousness and pressure.

Feeling nervous in meetings can add to the load, but the degree of nervousness is not static and can depend on experience and contextual factors. Whilst participant four's nervousness is heightened by who is in the room, for participant one, experience itself has been a moderating factor:

"I've become confident over time,[...] at the beginning, [...] I'd panic, I'd be nervous, "oh, how am I going say, how am I going to translate this, or that?" [...] as I'm translating more and more I'm becoming more confident because the same vocabulary come up sometimes and I know, what to say."

(participant 1, page 5)

The load of trying to interpret with a lack of experience in vocabulary can lead to them questioning their own competence, and feelings of 'panic' in the moment, experienced as an inner monologue of questions. However, as these words have been understood and interpreted over time, confidence increases, and with it, nervousness decreases.

Much of the load, as a consequence of others in the room, focuses more explicitly on professionals. However, participant one has some divergence in the load of families, more specifically, which can extend the load beyond the meeting itself. They describe the anticipatory stress of interpreting for families they know may be experienced as difficult: "I'm thinking, how is this meeting going to go? What are they

going to say after the meeting? [...] Is it going to go smoothly? All those concerns” (participant 1, page 13). The weight of the role begins before the meeting starts and can linger after it ends, shaped by relationships and histories that an external interpreter would not carry. At the same time, participant one also names something that holds the load in balance: “It feels rewarding and it feels a huge responsibility [...] because you want to get it right, so you want to make sure there is no miscommunication or misunderstanding” (participant 1, page 10). The idea of *no* miscommunication or misunderstanding suggests high expectations, but also the responsibility is experienced as a burden and a source of meaning. A convergence thread that runs through the GET and connects to personal values explored in GET 4.

Managing the Load

Some responses to the load have already emerged in the accounts above. Participant four asks for questions to be repeated when the volume of information exceeds what can be held in mind, reactive in the moment. Participant five requests that information can be chunked before the meeting starts, a more proactive approach. Participants three and five both create transitional spaces outside of the meeting to protect themselves within a fast-paced working environment. This subtheme includes more deliberate, experience-informed strategies participants describe for managing the load before and during meetings.

There is convergence between participants one and five, who both use pre-meeting time to reduce the demands of the meeting itself, though they do it in different ways. Participant one seeks access to reports in advance, where possible:

“If I have time and have a glance through the report. If I don’t have time, I just have to take my notebook and pen and just jot down, [...] any words that, [...] words that I have to, [...] remind myself about [...] what words to use to translate.” (participant 1, page 19)

The pre-reading appears to serve the same function as the growing familiarity with vocabulary described in the previous subtheme, giving time outside the meeting to consider how to interpret, so that the decision does not have to be made in the moment, under pressure. Where that is not possible, the notebook becomes a tool to externalise what cannot be held in mind. Both strategies create processing time that the meeting does not allow.

Participant five’s pre-meeting is more relational, focused on establishing the boundaries and purpose of the meeting with the lead professional:

“I have a quick discussion with them about [...] why the EP is involved with the family, [...] and what is our [...] main objective and outcome[...] from the meeting [...] Because I know a lot of things will get thrown and said, and it goes back and forth, [...] but I try to get the clear objective before I go into the meetings.” (participant 5, page 18)

The word “thrown” carries significance; without this pre-meeting clarity, information can feel chaotic and unpredictable. By establishing focus in advance, participant five reduces the risk of chaos. They then make that structure transparent to everyone in the meeting, explicitly setting out the order and time boundaries. This resonates with what participant four described about trying to hold the direction of

the meeting quietly, whilst trying to manage parental tangents. Participant five makes this risk visible and shared, so it is less likely to fall on them alone.

Participant three also creates space within the meeting itself, but with conscious awareness of what it is for: “You have to be confident in yourself, and say, you know, can you please just hang on a minute, let me explain that. So that gives you a breather to understand” (participant 5, page 22). Asking for a minute to explain acts as a chance to take stock of what has been said, before there is the chance of getting lost. The request to pause is similar to participant four’s asking for questions to be repeated, but what is different here is the explicit awareness that this is a breather, a self-protective act, requiring confidence to assert. For participant four, the request is about managing the volume; for participant three, the pause is making a claim for cognitive space, which is a deliberate and conscious strategy, rather than a reactive response.

Across these strategies, there is a common thread: participants are managing the load largely on their own, through self-developed approaches grounded in their experience. This points to the final dimension of the subtheme, that the load may be more manageable if professionals were aware of it. Participant three speaks to this directly: “Yeah. Just, a bit of emp...no, I wouldn't say empathy, yeah, maybe a little bit of empathy for the interpreter, whoever does it” (participant 3, page 27-28); “It'd be great if [...] we're actually recognised for doing it [...] they don't pay me any extra for interpreting, but it'd be nice if I could get, [...] some sort of qualification,[...] to show, [...] on my CV that, although I do it, but it's nice to get that qualification for it” (participant 3, page 28). The hesitation around the word “empathy”, starting it, pulling

back, then settling on it, suggests an awareness that it might be too much to ask, but it is what is needed. Participant one similarly gestures toward the value of formal training, particularly for the more technical meeting (participant 1, page 25). The absence of recognition, no additional remuneration, no qualification, and no formal acknowledgement of a skilled role means the strategies participants have developed remain largely self-generated. Greater professional awareness of the load and the skills required to manage it, might not only validate the role but also equip participants to carry it more effectively.

GET 4 – Personal Values Guide Professional Role and Meaning

Lived histories and values shape role identity and purpose (see Table 8 for PETs and Table 12 for participant contribution).

Table 12

GET 4 – Personal Values Guide Professional Role and Meaning and Participant Contribution

GET	Subthemes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
4. PERSONAL VALUES GUIDE PROFESSIONAL ROLE AND MEANING			•	•	•	•

For all four participant whose PETs contribute to this GET, their personal experiences underpin the emotional and moral foundations of how they take up the role; this is where their experiences converge, it is not a professional obligation but

something more personal and deeply held. Where they diverge is what drives each of them and how it influences how they take up the role. Given the personal nature of these experiences and the nuance of each participant's shared experience, each participant's PET will be taken in turn.

Participant two makes sense of their interpreting through their knowledge of the families, allowing them to connect more deeply and deepen their understanding in a way that an external, professionally trained interpreter cannot. They spoke of an early professional experience where they had stepped in to interpret, after a professional interpreter left a family at risk, due to a lack of explanation as they took a conduit role in a meeting:

“It’s not good enough. It’s not good enough. Because there is no empathy, there’s no understanding [...] get somebody from the school who does know the family, they might not interpret as well as the interpreter, so you might think, but actually knows the family to actually explain and talk about the child in question. You know that is much better” (participant 2, page 9)

The repetition of “it’s not good enough” emphasises the strength of feeling. Having an interpreter who simply interprets without empathy or knowledge of the family falls short of what families deserve. Such an interpreter does not aim to understand from the family's perspective, nor is able to add value in explanation, instead “parroting” (participant 2, page 5). They hold a strong moral position that families deserve better than a simple interpretation of language from somebody who does not know them and is not invested. The “they may not interpret as well as the

interpreter, so you might think” is a challenge to the presumption that a professional interpreter is better.

Their genuine care for the families in the school gives a sense of responsibility to them, as seen across the transcript: “I like to check in on my families to see that they’re okay, do they need anything else” (participant 2, page 36); “If you care, you do become like this with families [...] I think any professional that cares would do that extra” (participant 2, page 14). The use of the term “my families” exemplifies the connection they have and the responsibility they feel beyond the limits of the meetings. Their reference to “if you care” highlighting it is this which is the driver to do all that is possible. The “my families” seem juxtaposed with “any professional”; the closeness and wanting to look out for them are not seen as a special quality of theirs, but this is how they understand caring professionals carry out their work.

Their care for the families, the trust the families put in them consequently, are key to the satisfaction they get in their role: “They trust what I say. They find you are sincere, and you care and that’s why you say what you do. They’ve thanked me so many times [...] you get satisfaction from that” (participant 2, pages 19-20). The time, effort, and empathy they put into the role have earned the trust of families through their display of sincerity. This gives them the ability to speak more candidly, which they feel is appreciated. This trust and sincerity are there both in the meetings and beyond them. They are driven by empathy and relational investment.

Like participant two, participant five’s sense of being trusted by families is of key importance, but the trust they have achieved is through role and community belonging: “and trust and I suppose it’s not because I translate but all the other roles

I do [...] And I grew up in this community” (participant 5, page 17). Interpreting is not the reason for their trust, but it is part of it, a legitimacy of trust through their professional roles. But an important addition is that they are known as a long-standing member of the wider community. The trust is part of who they are personally and professionally. This trust that families have in them is an important aspect which influences the relationships in the meetings:

“Although they need you to do translation,[...] it’s also, like a trust element as well, that they’ve been fed the right information [...] they’ve got support from somebody who’s also from native, sort of line of the country, supporting us to kind of understand what is [...] happening.” (participant 5, page 6),

They are driven by a sense of community belonging and identity, being on both sides and navigating neutrality. Families do need interpretation, but they need to trust the messenger, who can understand from their position, and they hold that position. This trust from families can cause some difficulty where they are an educational professional who is a member of the wider community, but also the education system.

“It’s difficult sometimes. It’s difficult sometimes, [...] because you kind of understand where the parents are coming from. You also understand [...] psychologists as well. [...] I’ve worked with a lot of EPs. I trust their viewpoint of what’s happening, but it’s also difficult for [...] parents to [...] understand that as well, and being on both sides, and kind of neutral,[...] I get into a neutral position.” (participant 5, page 9)

They see themselves as being on “both sides”, as a member of the community and an educational professional. Sides, indicating a sense that there may be differences in views or perspectives between professionals and families, and a potential lack of cohesiveness. Their identity and experiences allow them to see both perspectives and the difficulties in getting a shared understanding. However, they are pulled to trust the views of EPs but find themselves having to step back from either position and “get into a neutral position” to support them in this difficult position.

They work to help the families take alternative perspectives, whilst carefully navigating maintenance of trust and respect for their perspectives. It is the impact of their work that gives meaning.

“Honestly, I do really enjoy it, I do really enjoy it. I feel satisfied, I feel from every single meeting that I go into.[...] there’s gonna be some good outcomes hopefully, for that family, for those families as well. [...]. And this is why I came into education” (participant 5, page 14).

For participant five, their repetition of the enjoyment of the role, emphasises its meaning, but the enjoyment is through a satisfaction that they are having a positive impact on the families they interpret for. Positive impact on families is the motivation for working in the education system and interpreting supports them in achieving this aim.

Moving from participant five’s community connection, participant four is driven by personal identification with parents, which influences how they carry out their role

and the use of their interpreting skills. The interpreting experience does not reside in the meetings alone:

“I might have the meeting [...] I’ll have that parent one-to-one and then just ask [...] I’ve had parents come up to me and say, how do you remember that? And I say, because I love my parents [...] if someone did that to me you know [...] Someone to ask [...] are you okay? [...] has that been sorted?” (participant 4, page 5).

Interpreting is not for the moment; they recall and keep in mind what was shared and, through their non-interpreting role, can ask how parents are or whether there has been action. The parents’ surprise and appreciation of them doing this has meaning for them. There is a sense of treating people as you would like to be treated. The use of the term “I love my parents”, expressed to them as emphasising this is not an expectation through role, but through genuine emotional meaning, which they want them to know about, and the enactment of their care is the post-meeting check-in.

The interpreting role has personal meaning, recalling their experiences as a child of a parent who did not speak English:

“my mum went through a lot of [...] difficulties, and because of that I feel like I want to help the community now. Who are facing those issues [...] so I think that’s quite close to my heart because of that, [...] I’m very blessed that I am able to [...] I’m bilingual and I am able to do the job I’m doing” (participant 4, pages 13-14).

Their experience of witnessing their parent navigate meetings without adequate interpretation is the emotional root of this commitment. It is the motivator to be someone that can be relied on by parents and the wider community in a way that was missing for their parent. Consequently, the way in which they take up the role is to maintain connection, to check in post meetings, and it is something with an emotional pull, being described as “close to my heart”. They see their role as supporting not just individual parents but also the community. Their ability to interpret is a blessing, not an obligation, but a privilege. Both valuable to support others and give them meaning.

Connections to their own experiences and those of the families they interpret for extend past childhood experiences, and continue now as they too are a parent, like those they interpret for: “I totally understand how other parents go through, because I went through the same thing” (participant 4, page 16). Their ability to empathise with parents through their lived experiences, influencing their interactions with them and how they understand their experience. There is a sense of something that is part of the parental experience of having a child with SEND, that is universal, and they can empathise with, which is brought into the interpreting role.

Participant three’s childhood experience of having parents who did not speak English, who were committed to their education and therefore relied on support from others, drove participant three into the role. The importance of interpreting to support parents in being able to enact their desire to help their child is a key component of the value they hold in the role:

“I feel like the language barrier shouldn't be a reason for a child [...] not to be educated [...]. That's why [...] I would...do anything to help the school, and if it's [...] just a simple thing, and then parents are fine after they've realised that, then I feel so honoured to be a part of that” (participant 3, page 18).

For them, the impact of parents not being able to speak English is a real barrier to education, and there is a moral drive to remove this barrier. Their commitment to removing this barrier is exemplified by “I think I would...do anything to help the school”, a lack of bounds to the support. For them, the act of interpreting to support is a “simple thing” that can have a significant impact and they feel “honoured” to have helped in the process, resonating with participant four’s “blessing”.

There is a moral accountability and collective responsibility as part of the school community: “We all work in a school [...] I feel like we're all accountable, so if it's just a language barrier [...] you're just trying to help...trying to help everyone in school” (participant 3, page 4). Their work supports parents and children, but extending to all colleagues who are jointly accountable within their roles, the language barrier is for them a small part of the challenges that need to be overcome in the school environment, where they see they have a requirement to fill.

The impact of the work, like all other participants, is of importance to participant three, knowing that their actions have supported long-term benefits and have been meaningful to the parents of the children: “I would go above and beyond just to help a child [...] when a parent [...] comes to me [...] a few years later, and says, oh, you know, thank you, you know, we remember you helping us.” (participant

3, page 20). Acknowledging working beyond the realms of their job description and “above and beyond”, it does not go unnoticed by parents, who hold gratitude for their support, which is long remembered. The long-term impact on families of what participant three sees as a relatively small act of removing the language barrier is their motivator as part of the wider school community.

For all participants in this GET, interpreting is personal and deeply meaningful. Their work is shaped by a strong sense of empathy for families who cannot speak English and by personal connections to the parents and children they support. Where they diverge is what drives that empathy, community belonging, personal identification with parents, moral accountability, or relational investment, and how it shapes the particular way each takes up the role. The role is not simply a task but an expression of identity, responsibility, and the desire to make a difference.

GET 5 – Awareness and Responsiveness to the Emotional Experiences of Parents

Interpreting staff act as emotional buffers and attuned communicators (see Table 8 for PETs and Table 13 for participant contributions).

Table 13

GET 5 – Awareness and Responsiveness to the Emotional Experiences of Parents and Participant Contribution

GET	Subthemes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
5. AWARENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS TO THE EMOTIONAL		•	•		•	

EXPERIENCE OF PARENTS						
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There is some overlap between this GET and the sensitivity of language use that is explored in GET 2. The focus here is on how participants are attuned to the parents' emotional experience and how that attunement shapes the way they carry out their role. All three participants converge in their awareness that how the message is communicated matters as much as what is communicated, and that parents' emotional state in the meeting shapes what they can receive. The divergence lies in what each participant is most attuned to and how that attunement influences role.

Participant four begins with an understanding of the internal experience parents may be carrying in the room:

“you have to understand, those parents, where they are in their mind at the... at that present moment, are they in denial? [...] There's a lot of stigma [...] so there's a lot of cultural background that she's [mum] probably thinking about, not listening to you anyway. So you have to really pick your words. You really have to think the way you are saying it, that....because you don't want to kind of offend anyone or hurt anyone” (participant 4, page 25).

The phrase “not listening to you anyway” highlights that a parent may be physically present but mentally elsewhere, processing stigma, fear, and community judgment before the content of the meeting has reached them. Participant four sees this, holds it in mind, and adjusts accordingly. The repeated use of “really”, “really

pick”, “really think”, conveys the weight of conscious effort involved in finding words that will land without causing harm.

This resonates with participant one, who similarly attends to the risk of causing offence in sensitive meetings: “When it is a sensitive topic [...] you’ve got to be thinking about using the correct words, because you don’t want to offend the family, you don’t want to say the wrong words in Bengali” (participant 1, page 13). Both participants converge in the careful, deliberate selection of words as a protective act, shielding parents from unnecessary hurt whilst ensuring the message gets to them.

Participant two converges in awareness of how the message may land, but their attunement has a temporal quality; they hear what is coming before the parents do: “Some meetings are quite difficult, with some of the things the parents are going to hear about their child [...] you have to have empathy for them [...] to be like, look don’t worry, you can do this” (participant 2, page 11). The phrase “going to hear” is preparatory; participant two receives the message first and anticipates its impact. Their role becomes not only to interpret but to buffer and reframe, trying to ensure that parents leave feeling they have some capacity to act rather than be overwhelmed. This extends beyond the meeting: “I feel like I want them to leave okay [...] they won’t get that at home [...] people don’t...realise what they say and how that can hurt someone” (participant 2, page 12).

They are aware that parents may return home to less sensitive responses. They then see their role as giving them enough emotional reserve to face what

comes after. For participant two, empathy is not optional; those who take this role “have to have” it.

Participant four develops this awareness further, attending not only to the emotional state parents bring into the room, but the cumulative weight of their circumstances:

“they’ve got other things going on in the family [...] plus, they have, say, a child who’s got special needs [...] and if they haven’t got the family support, they haven’t got the understanding. And then you make it worse by not explaining it to them properly. They’re not going to understand what they should be doing, or how they can support their child.” (participant 4, pages 15-16).

Where participant two focuses on emotional support, participant four focuses on empowerment through clarity. Their description of the layers of challenge in the families before the meeting has already begun demonstrates their deep understanding of the many challenges the parents they work with face. The professional “making it worse” emphasises the importance they place on clarity; parents are left without understanding, which disempowers them. Their response is to strip back the message to its simplest form: “the obvious isn’t obvious” (participant 4, page 5) when parents are under stress, and it is their role to make it so.

Participant two also describes an experience that is unique to this GET, the moment when a parents’ distress is directed to them: “I have felt crap [...] You’re only an interpreter and all that [...] I’m able to bring them back to, okay, what do you mean by that? Why are you so upset?” (participant 2, page 10). Being reduced to “only an interpreter” is hurtful, but rather than holding onto that feeling, participant

two uses it as emotional data, a signal of what the parent is experiencing, and turns it into an opening for dialogue. Perhaps this demonstrates a role that extends well beyond word interpretation into emotional interpretation. This connects to participant four's view that parents need to feel safe enough to be open in meetings:

"I think it's really important to have that relationship, that they feel that they can be open [...] it's important that they're able to express [...] their thoughts [...] any issues [...] and be comfortable enough [...] otherwise, [...] they're gonna hold back, they're gonna hold back, and if they're holding back, ultimately, it's not good for them or the child" (participant 4, page 7).

The three repeats of "holding back" emphasise the risk, without the relational safety and the attunement that the participants provide, parents may not bring what matters most to the table. The convergence across all three is in the understanding that emotional attunement is not part of the interpreting role, but central to it; the divergence is in what each is alert to, stigma and denial, the weight of what is coming, the challenges they come to the meeting with, and how they respond.

GET 6 – Connecting People Through Unique Knowledge, Strengthening and Empowering Families

Unique school and community knowledge enables connection, advocacy and agency (see Table 8 for PETs and Table 14 for participant contribution).

Table 14

GET 6 – Connecting People Through Unique Knowledge, Strengthening and Empowering Families and Participant Contribution

GET	Subthemes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
6. CONNECTING PEOPLE THROUGH UNIQUE KNOWLEDGE, STRENGTHENING AND EMPOWERING FAMILIES	Connecting people through unique knowledge		•		•	•
	Strengthening and empowering families	•	•			•

Connecting People Through Unique Knowledge

Across all three participants, there is convergence in the recognition that families need more than interpretation; they need connection to others, to knowledge, to support that is responsive to their unique circumstances. All three actively facilitate these connections through roles that extend beyond the meeting itself. The divergence lies in where each sees the connections needing to be made and how they go about making them.

For participant four, the connections are between the families themselves. Their role in school creates opportunities to build community and inclusivity, where parents become the experts and resource for one another: “everyone’s sharing and exchanging ideas, and what the most simplest thing someone else mentioned, you’ve not actually stopped and thought” (participant 4, page 14). The reciprocity in “sharing and exchanging ideas” gives a sense of equal support; the ideas do not need to come from professionals. This extends to ensuring that language is not a barrier to participation: “It doesn’t always have to be English [...] if they can’t, that doesn’t mean we’re gonna say you’re not allowed to come. It’s just come in” (participant 4, page 5). The informality of “just come in” conveys an unconditional welcome. Their role in connecting families to one another is largely done outside

meetings, through their school-based relationships, building networks where parents can share experiences and find support in one another.

Like participant four, participant two focuses on connecting parents to support beyond the meeting, but through a different kind of knowledge, awareness of services available to families who may not know they exist:

“They don’t know where to go, they don’t know sometimes even what to think, do I ...can I get support? [...] So where we have the knowledge, it’s my duty, personal duty as well, not just my responsibility at work. But you know as a person, you feel like, okay, I know this, they don’t. I’ll just tell them”
(participant 2, page 14).

The distinction between professional responsibility and personal duty highlights that this is not something they do because they are required to, but because they feel it is right. Their empathy is evident in their use of the first person to imagine the parents’ experience, not knowing what help exists or even how to formulate what might help. The knowledge they hold becomes a moral act to share.

Participant five converges in the motivation to support families as fully as possible, but their connecting role sits more explicitly within professional structures. Their language and multi-agency relationships position them as a bridge between families and professionals, and they use this deliberately:

“You have more information about that family [...] we’ve got a wider context of that family. And this is why I go into a lot of those meetings [...] I can speak the language, [...] where I work with so many multi-agencies and so many

families, it just helps to support those families in the right way” (participant 5, page 16).

The use of the word “we” when speaking about working with other professionals indicates their experience of being part of a team around the family, with a distinct and valued contribution to make. Where participant four’s connecting work is informal and community-facing, participant five’s is more formalised; they use pre-meetings with professionals to share contextual knowledge before the meeting begins: “I always give them a pre-context of what to sort of expect from the meeting [...] so that we can kind of angle in the right way for the families and the parents.” (participant 5, page 12). The word “angle” shows that the meeting can be shaped in advance, oriented towards what will work for the particular family, rather than proceeding without that knowledge. Participant four also shared experiences of giving contextual information before meetings, though they did this in a more informal way. But they both have the same underlying purpose: to tailor the meeting to the individual family.

The convergence across all three is the commitment to meeting families where they are, using knowledge that extends well beyond the interpreting role to ensure support is relevant, accessible and responsive. The divergence is where that knowledge flows, towards families and between them, towards families from services, or toward professionals from the interpreter, each participant doing this where their particular knowledge and relationships are most useful.

Strengthening and Empowering Families

Across participants, there is convergence in their position, which gives them a unique capacity to facilitate family strength and empowerment. The divergence lies in how each enacts this, and in what form the empowerment takes.

Participant five articulates the stakes most directly through a metaphor: “a lot of families feel the same way. They feel like they’ve stalled they don’t know where to go, how to move up forward.” (participant 5, page 14). Families are not disengaged or unwilling; they are stuck, unable to move forward without knowledge of what is available or possible. The directionality of “up” and “forward” suggests aspiration frustrated by circumstance. From their own experience, participant five has learned that knowledge is what allows families to get moving again: “I think one of the things I learned was that having somebody with knowledge and to share that knowledge is a very important thing.” (participant 5, page 14).

The risks of remaining stuck are significant. Participant five sees isolation from knowledge as a vulnerability that can add to and increase the risk of family breakdown and poverty (participant 5, page 15). Their role is to be “out there for them”, actively bringing knowledge to families who may not know what they are missing or that help exists.

For participant one, families are also seeking support, but the difference is that they know what they need and come looking for it:

“Sometimes they just come and say, oh, can you help me with this straight away? And I said, no, I can’t do that. So yeah, they book an appointment, and

they come and see me. And I help them, translate...I translate the letters for them and help them with anything.” (participant 1, page 21)

Their interpreting role has made them a known and trusted resource, and families seek them out beyond educational matters. The empowerment here comes through access; participant one helps families navigate written communication that would otherwise exclude them. The urgency of requests requires boundaries through appointment bookings, protecting their own time whilst still meeting the need. Their willingness to help with “anything” reflects the same commitment seen across the GET, enacted here through practical, responsive support. Participant two in comparison, is a go-between for the knowledge shared in the meetings to encourage family action beyond the meetings.

Participant two’s empowerment of families operates across a range. At one end, they are a bridge between what was shared in the meeting and family action beyond it: “if they ask me something, I’m able to say, oh, remember this is what you’re supposed to do [...] just give them a little nudge” (participant 2, page 34). The “little nudge” is gentle but all that is needed to support. They also translate professional advice to actionable steps for families who have not fully grasped or remembered what was shared and act as a way to gain this information if lost: “Sometimes they ask [...] how was I supposed to do this? And I’m like if I can’t answer, you know what, I can’t remember, but let me find out for you” (participant 2, page 35).

At the other end of the range, participant two can also speak candidly in ways that other professionals in the room cannot:

“Sometimes you know the family well, you can say, don’t do this, don’t do that. Because you are not helping the situation [...] I’m in that role where I can [...] Don’t say I didn’t tell you. You know, know about it, and then make your choice. You’re an adult” (participant 2, pages 18-19).

This directness is reserved for families they know well and is possible because of the unique relational position they occupy; they are not constrained by professional protocol, nor are they without professional knowledge. The closing “you’re an adult” is an act of respect, treating parents as capable of making informed decisions once they have the information.

Participant five adds the final dimension, empowerment through knowledge of rights. By explaining processes such as annual reviews and parents' rights within the EHCP framework (participant 5, page 3), they give families the understanding that they can challenge, agree, or disagree with professionals. This is a significant shift from families receiving decisions to families participating in them. Like participant two’s candid speaking, it can create tension with professional perspectives, but that is part of what empowerment means; families can advocate for themselves from an informed position.

The convergence across all four participants in this GET is in the commitment to ensuring families are not left passive or powerless. The divergence is what that looks like: unsticking those who are stalled, responding to those who need help, nudging those who need reminding, speaking frankly to those who need honesty, and informing those who do not know their rights. Together, these show how the participants work to empower families in practice, which is enacted through

relationships and knowledge that no professional interpreter, arriving without context, could replicate.

Concluding Remarks

Together, the six GETs offer a response to the overarching research question by illuminating the breadth and complexity of what it means to interpret informally in school meetings. Across participants, there is convergence in the experience of a role that is demanding, deeply personal, and largely invisible to those around them. The divergence across and within the GETs reflects IPA's idiographic commitment; each participant brings their own unique history, set of values and relational context, which shapes how the role is taken up, experienced and made meaningful. The following chapter considers these findings in relation to the existing literature, exploring their implications for practice and for the professionals who work alongside bilingual support staff in schools.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Discussion: Chapter Overview

The chapter integrates the six GETs to inform four key themes, which will be explored as findings in their own right and in relation to the literature, considering the extent to which they align with, contradict, or expand the literature review's findings. Additional literature is included to provide explanations or extensions of the findings beyond the literature review. The discussion will then move on to the implications of the findings for individual professionals, schools, and wider institutions, and to how the findings can be disseminated to facilitate discussion of this important area. Reflection on my own learning as a practitioner-researcher and TEP is discussed. In addition, a critical evaluation of the study is provided. The chapter concludes with suggested directions for future research.

Key Findings and their Context in the Current Literature

The six GETs: Finding role and boundaries; Commitment to meaning making; Feeling and managing the load of interpreting; Personal values guide professional role and meaning; Awareness and responsiveness to the emotional experience of parents; Connecting people through unique knowledge, strengthening and empowering families, can be understood across four key themes.

- Beyond words - the invisible complexity of the role (GETs 1, 2 and 5)
- The cognitive and emotional load - often carried alone (GETs 1,2,3 and 5)
- Work beyond the meeting- a relational and expansive role (GETs 1,2,3,4,5 and 6)

- Identity as a resource - personal and professional self as the foundation of the work (GETs 1,2,4,5 and 6)

Each theme will be taken in turn, with the key findings and an evaluation of its relevance to the current literature and what it adds.

Beyond Words - The Invisible Complexity of the Role

The 'interpreting' role is, for the participants, more than just word-for-word interpretation. A core part, for them, is supporting families in understanding the *meaning* of what is being communicated, whilst being attentive to parental feelings in the moment. Navigating the dynamic boundaries of a role adds a further layer of complexity. Much of this is experienced internally by the interpreting staff and is not necessarily observable by others in the room.

The first aspect of this invisible complexity is the challenge of meaning-making itself. The 'big words' and jargon used by educational professionals in meetings present a common experience for interpreting staff to navigate, and can be difficult even for those working in the education system, which can lead to a felt lack of confidence. The challenge is not only decoding jargon, but finding word equivalences that may or may not exist in the families' home language, in order to get as close as possible to the intended meaning. Participants described varied ways of managing this, allowing the message to be 'soaked in', using English words, and finding ways around the term entirely. Their knowledge of the families, language, school system and community is being drawn on to support meaning-making. Significantly, the participants felt a sense of responsibility for the process, a

responsibility that professionals in the room unintentionally reinforced by not communicating in a fully accessible way.

Alongside meaning-making, participants described a sensitivity to parents' emotional experience, reading the room, and being attuned, carefully selecting words to avoid unnecessary hurt or offence. Also, being aware of what parents might be able to manage in the moment, and holding in mind how the meeting may leave them. This emotional attentiveness runs alongside and adds to the cognitive work of interpreting, yet remains largely invisible to others present.

A third dimension of this invisible complexity is the absence of clear role boundaries. The interpreting role is a continuum of a way to take up the role; a conduit, speaking on behalf of others, maintaining perceived neutrality, and taking an active, independent stance, for instance saying things to parents that other professionals cannot due to their own role boundaries. There was an awareness among participants that the interpreter role carries no explicit boundaries, whilst also feeling the pull of their paid role and sense of responsibility to represent the school. Each participant had their own experiences of how they see the role and how they navigate it, but what was consistent was that their role was not experienced as one of direct word-for-word interpretation.

Taken together, these three dimensions- meaning-making, emotional attentiveness, and boundary navigation- constitute what might be understood as the invisible complexity of the role. The existing literature captures some of this. It acknowledges the importance of interpreting staff in mediating between home and school (Cable, 2004), the importance of dialect knowledge (Edwards et al, 2005), their value in supporting parental engagement and understanding of jargon and

concepts (Guo, 2010; Lopez, 2000) and the risks of ineffective interpreting on parental engagement in meetings (Lo, 2008). However, the literature's framing of 'ineffective' interpretation, which can include summaries, substitutions and skipping unknown words (Hart et al., 2012; Lo, 2008), sits in tension with what the participants describe here. The changes they make to language are not necessarily failures of interpretation, but can be deliberate acts in the service of parental understanding.

This resonates with microanalysis of dialogue interpreters, who actively articulate what may be unsaid by teachers to parents, and expand on parental contributions where there is evidence of resistance, intending to smooth communication (Davitti, 2013, 2015). However, Davitti's work also introduces an important caution: such active mediation carries the risk of restricting parents' co-construction of meaning. Interpreters can work on a continuum between assimilation, where the power of the institution is maintained and families are expected to adapt, and empowerment, where parents are supported to actively participate (Davitti, 2015). This framework is useful for what might be operating at a less conscious level for the participants, whose meaning-making sits somewhere between facilitating smooth top-down communication and genuinely co-constructing understanding with families. Rossetti et al. (2020) add further context, noting that culturally and linguistically diverse parents often want to engage with their child's education and meetings about it, but face significant barriers, including quality interpreting services which support collaboration, information sharing and advocacy.

Davitti (2015) highlighted the difficult balancing act interpreters face, constantly determining the extent to which they should identify with or distance themselves from one party or another, and what their task is. This resonates with

Vargas-Urpi (2015), who found role shifting of an interpreter, between ‘service provider’s assistant’ and ‘user’s advocate’. These shifting positions were found in professional interpreters; what the participants speak about is the act of doing this in a non-professional role.

The literature does attend to role tensions; it tends to frame these as role-conflict (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003) or professional role tensions (Krause, 2018), particularly where various stakeholders hold different expectations of the interpreter, for instance, professionals seeing them as a conduit and parents experiencing them as an advocate. Notably, role conflict was not a significant theme of the participants in this study, suggesting the interpreting function is not incongruent with their broader roles in school. What this study adds, then, is not experiences of role conflict, but of complexity, a complexity which is navigated with skill, and largely unseen.

The Cognitive and Emotional Load - Often Carried Alone

The participants' experiences of interpreting carry both a cognitive and an emotional load. What makes this particularly significant is that, given the invisible nature of the work described in the previous theme, this load is largely unrecognised by others in the room and therefore carried alone.

The cognitive dimension of this load arises in part from the sheer demands of interpreting in the moment. As discussed in the previous theme, the process is far from word-for-word interpretation; it requires, as one participant put it, “really thinking” (participant 1, page 14). Where there may be difficulties in understanding the professional, the interpreting staff may protect family vulnerability by making themselves vulnerable, making their uncertainty known, risking appearing “stupid”

(participant 4, page 10) or taking the voice of the parent to seek clarification from the professional. Professionals in the room may be entirely unaware of these internal experiences, leaving the lack of confidence some interpreting staff feel with them, reducing opportunities for additional support. The way in which participants manage the cognitive demands also varies depending on how they understand the function of their role, something explored further in the later theme of identity.

Alongside the cognitive load can sit an emotional one. Some participants describe being acutely sensitive to the experience of parents who are receiving significant information about their child: “some meetings are quite difficult with some of the things the parents are going to hear about their child” (participant 2, page 11). This awareness of the emotional tone of the room shapes the choices interpreting staff make about language and pacing, adding a further layer to an already demanding task. The overall experience can be one of “overwhelm”, managing the volume of information passing between parties through them, monitoring relational dynamics, attending to their own confidence, and remaining aware of how they may be perceived. Crucially, this overwhelm is internal, largely invisible to those around them, as is the impact on the interpretation.

Through experience, participants have developed strategies to manage these demands, for example requesting information to be chunked, taking a moment during or after the meeting, and reviewing reports in advance. One participant described colleagues who were helpful by showing patience. However, these supports largely depended on the interpreters themselves identifying and requesting what they needed. There was a request for professionals to have more “empathy” for the work they are doing, an empathy that may not yet be possible, given that the

work may remain unseen. Consequently, the responsibility for managing the load can default to the interpreting staff themselves.

The literature offers some recognition of these experiences, though largely from the outside looking in. Cable's (2004) research with bilingual TAs, found taking on board differing views and actively presenting them as an intermediary or advocate can be difficult. Barialdi and Gavilio (2024) outlined the work of mediators in schools who, in meetings, make teachers' views understandable to parents, using techniques like expanding to help the parents' acceptance. They also represent what parents say, which teachers may dismiss when it does not align with the teacher's position. This points to a skilled and cognitively demanding task. However, what the literature does not capture is what the work feels like from the inside, the "tiredness" or, at times, "overwhelm".

Lopez (2000) highlighted the importance of interpreters having time to build rapport with families, and Mortier et al. (2021) acknowledged the role of cultural brokers in emotionally supporting parents. Yet neither addresses what this study highlights: that the very rapport and emotional attunement which makes these staff so effective may also increase the emotional load they carry.

Some participants identified practical supports that helped, such as pre-meetings, speaking in short sentences, and debriefings, which align with recommendations in the literature (Lo, 2008; Lopez, 2000), affirming that these structures have value. However, practical strategies alone may not be sufficient. Ho (2024) found that the risk of burnout of cultural brokers, who work with and may interpret for refugees in educational settings, is not mitigated by subjective confidence or coping ability, but by positive role-related rewards, which Ho describes

as ‘compassion satisfaction’ (“positive or pleasurable experiences derived from someone being able to effectively help others and contribute to a larger purpose” Stamm, 2005 cited in Ho, 2024 p8). This suggests that the tools participants use to manage their load may feel helpful, but cannot guarantee protection against its emotional demands. Rapport building may therefore play a dual role: increasing emotional demand whilst also being a protective factor by increasing the likelihood of compassion satisfaction.

The less visible dimension of the load is what may be understood as emotional labour, “the effort, planning and control to express an organisationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions” (Kariou et al., 2021, p.2). The participants’ experiences may reflect this, ranging from deep emotional investment in families to the suppression of feelings of being dismissed or undervalued. The ability to carry emotional labour can both enhance and impair job satisfaction in roles like teaching (Kariou et al., 2021; Kinman et al., 2011). Though these papers are linked to teaching, the findings may be transferable given the participants' links with families and children in school. Kariou et al.’s (2021) distinction between deep and surface acting offers a useful framework here. Emotional labour can be a function of deep acting and surface acting. Deep acting involves genuinely working to feel the appropriate emotion in the moment, whilst surface acting involves hiding or regulating the felt emotion. Deep acting requires significantly less effort and produces less dissonance. Given that the non-professional interpreting role carries no official guidelines about emotional expression, participants may have more flexibility than formally employed interpreters to engage in deep rather than surface acting with references to speaking frankly and of ‘their’ parents and families, the

accounts provide some evidence that this is what they may be able to do, which could be a protective factor.

Kinman et al. (2011) identified social support as a protective factor for teachers' emotional labour in schools. Given that others in the room may be unaware of the cognitive and emotional load, social support may be lacking.

What participants' experiences add to the literature, then, is an account of the load from the inside. The complexity and dynamic nature of this work are invisible to most, leaving these colleagues to find their own ways to manage. Their experiences raise important questions for the wider system: what systemic factors increase or decrease access to support? How can support be flexible to meet individual needs, such as confidence as experience develops? And how can formal support be put in place when the role itself remains unacknowledged? The experiences of these participants make a strong case for the system to recognise what they are doing, understand its demands, and share the responsibility for the load, rather than leaving it with the individuals who carry it.

Work Beyond the Meeting - a Relational and Expansive Role

A key feature of the participants' experiences is that the interpreting role does not begin or end at the meeting room door. The bilingual staff may have relationships with families that predate the meeting, continue beyond it, and shape the experience of it. This relational dimension fundamentally distinguishes their experience from that of an interpreter brought in for a fixed time period.

Before the meeting, existing knowledge of families can bring its own precontemplation. For some, prior experiences of a family created feelings of uncertainty about how parents might present in the meeting, or what dynamics might

need navigating. Pre-meetings with colleagues offered one way of managing this, a space to share relevant context and prepare. In this sense, the relational threads that extend beyond the meetings are not simply a backdrop; they actively shape how participants approach and experience the meeting itself.

During the meetings, this prior knowledge becomes a resource. Participants describe using what they know about the families, the processes involved, and the wider community to support parents in understanding what is happening, to ensure, as one participant put it, that they did not ‘walk away with nothing’. This goes beyond interpreting word-for-word; it is the active application of relational and contextual knowledge in the service of parental understanding.

Beyond the meeting, the role expands further still. Participants described taking what they had learned in meetings outward, linking families to other services and other families, signposting, and holding information over time so they could ‘nudge’ and remind parents of what was shared. The checking in on families that followed meetings was experienced as meaningful, both appreciated by families and satisfying to the staff themselves, given the opportunities it created for positive impact. Yet this expansive role was not always recognised. One participant described being seen at times as ‘only [...] the interpreter’ (participant 2, page 10), a framing that sits in sharp contrast to the richness of what their experiences reveal.

The literature offers some relevant context for understanding this relational and expansive role, though it does not fully capture it. References to formal cultural brokering roles (Georgis et al., 2014) describe staff who can address problems quickly due to their daily presence in schools and their capacity to build trust and a sense of community. However, these are formal, defined roles. What the participants

describe is something that has evolved more organically, through the combination of their interpreting function and the relational threads they carry pre and post-meeting, perhaps moving them, in practice, into the territory of cultural brokering or cultural liaison without the formal recognition that comes with it.

The value of trust is well established. Edwards et al. (2005) cited trust as a key reason family members are used to interpret over professional interpreters, and suggest that training in relationship building might bridge this gap for professional interpreters. What the participants' experiences suggest, however, is that trust is not built through training but through the daily interactions that are a natural feature of their presence in school and, for some, the community. This resonates with the research of Lopez (2000), who found that parents feel more comfortable with interpreters they already know. What this study adds is the interpreter's side of that relationship, the sense of being sought out, the appreciation felt, and the way in which this trust generates both connection and demand.

As these relationships deepen, participants describe being sought out by parents and colleagues alike, which in turn increases the scope and frequency of their interpreting. For some, this may be extending their role to what Rah (2009) terms as a 'bilingual liaison role', where language ability, combined with knowledge of the wider needs of the family, supports the bridging of home and school. Rah's research found that although such roles created a 'zone of comfort' for families to meaningfully engage with the school, there were questions about whether they ultimately supported parents in making their own decisions, or leaned more toward aligning families with the school system. Some participants in this study were alert to this tension, with references to the importance of helping parents understand so they

could make their own decisions. The role of interpreting becomes satisfying to the interpreting staff, not as a function of the task itself, but due to the interactions around the meetings, the deeper connections with families and the ability to have an impact through their other roles (formal and informal). This may provide an important buffer against burnout (Ho, 2024).

There were also less straightforwardly positive experiences. Some participants described complexity when prior knowledge of a family may influence the meeting, navigating relational dynamics in ways that a conduit interpreter, without those prior connections, would not need to. Professional conference interpreting has been found to place emotional demands due to the requirement to remain neutral (Ayan, 2020), and medical interpreters have been observed to shift over time from a conduit role to a more active advocacy role, despite their training, which may promote the former (Hshei, 2008). Though not school-based, these findings suggest that the emotional and relational demands of interpreting may be qualities of the phenomenon itself, rather than features specific to any one setting or level of professional training (Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva, 2012). The relational and expansive nature of the role experienced by the participants, in other words, may not be incidental to their particular context; it may be an inherent feature of what interpreting, when connected with others, actually involves.

Identity as a Resource - Personal and Professional Self as the Foundation of the Work

The previous themes have explored what the interpreting staff do and how they experience it. This theme turns to the question of who they are, and how their personal and professional identities are not incidental to the role, but foundational to

it. Identity emerges from the participants' accounts not as a fixed characteristic, but as a dynamic resource that shapes how they are approached, how they engage, and what the work means to them.

The participants are sought out to interpret not simply because they speak the language, but because of who they are within the school and wider community.

Their professional roles give them legitimacy and perceived flexibility; their personal history and community connections give them knowledge and trust that no professional interpreter could replicate. These combined qualities set them apart from other colleagues and draw others, families and other professionals alike, toward them. Yet the role is not static. It is one that they experience as evolving, shaped by accumulating personal and professional experience, and it is this evolving quality that gives identity its character as a resource rather than a fixed attribute.

The biographical roots of identity stand out. Three of the five participants spoke of being children of parents who did not speak English, and for one other, a formative experience of witnessing a parent placed at significant risk due to inadequate interpreting. These histories generate a depth of empathy and drive for the families they work with, an empathy so strong for some that the families are experienced as 'their families' or 'their parents'. This is not simply warmth; it is a form of knowing. There is a deep understanding of community dynamics, stigma, isolation, and the particular ways in which SEND may be understood from within the community, in ways that no outside professional could access. It is this knowledge that allows some to feel they can talk with candour to families, and to hold awareness of the emotional experiences that would otherwise remain unknown to others in the room. Their paid roles within the education system add a further layer:

specialist knowledge of processes and systems that professional interpreters, however skilled in language, are unlikely to possess.

The intersection of personal history, community knowledge, and professional experience not only shapes what the participants do but also why they do it; it has meaning. The interpreting role is taken up as an enactment of personal values - “it’s my duty, personal duty as well, not just my responsibility at work” (participant 2, page 13) and “It feels rewarding, and it feels a huge responsibility as well” (participant 1, page 10). The role is experienced as meaningful precisely because it allows participants to act on a deeply held commitment to connect people, strengthening families, and reducing the disadvantage that language and systemic barriers create. It is this values-driven foundation, rather than any contractual obligation, that sustains the work.

At the same time, participants navigate the tensions that arise from holding multiple identities in the room. As educational professionals, they are also aware of their relationships with colleagues and the need to maintain neutrality and professional trust. There can also be a sense of uncertainty when other bilingual staff are in the room, which can make them feel more exposed. How participants managed this varied considerably, for example, feeling confident speaking frankly to parents; developing a more conduit-like stance, seeking pre- and post-meeting conversations with colleagues, or quietly hoping the other professionals take the lead. What is notable is that these are individual, self-generated strategies, rather than responses to any formal guidance or support, indicating awareness of need.

The literature resonates with several aspects of what the participants describe, whilst also leaving important dimensions unaddressed. Rossetti et al.

(2020) identified that culturally and linguistically diverse families seek out cultural brokers and experienced parents to support them in SEND meetings, drawn by a combination of their language ability and system knowledge. Guo (2010) found that bilingual assistants in school are more likely to be approached with questions than other staff, because they are seen as both experts and as being on the parents' side. What the literature does not explore, however, is how this comes about, that it may be the intersection of professional role, personal identity, and individual values that draws families toward these particular colleagues and shapes the quality of what they have to offer.

Edwards et al. (2005) found that service users prefer interpreters who are proactive, sympathetic, and give advice beyond direct translation. The participants in this study embody precisely these qualities and bring the additional dimension of deep system knowledge of the school and community. Individual aspects of identity also surface in less expected ways. A male participant described surprise at how frequently he was approached by parents, given his own awareness of community gender norms around male and female communication. This contrasts with Hwa-Froelich and Westby's (2003) case study, in which community gender norms created direct tension in the interpreter's role, shaping how they communicated with parents of the opposite sex in ways that conflicted with professional expectations. In this study, the experience was not one of conflict but of surprise, suggesting that the pull towards seeking support and meaningful communication in these meetings may, for some parents, take precedence over community gender norms, a finding that resonates with Rossetti et al.'s (2020) observation that parents from culturally and linguistically diverse communities actively seek support when engaging with schools.

The participants' understanding of cultural stigma around SEND, and the ways in which educational needs may be understood differently from medicalised models, generates empathy to provide emotional support in meetings and to extend their support beyond the meeting. They also articulated awareness of systemic inequality, the lack of language access in schools, and the barriers families face in navigating services, and positioned their work as a response to these. It is here, in the reduction of these barriers, that the meaning of the role is located. And it is this sense of meaningful impact that, as Ho (2024) suggested, may be the most important protective factor against burnout, though, as this study adds, the term 'compassion satisfaction' may not fully capture what sustains these colleagues. What they describe is closer to the enactment of values and the experience of the influence and impact that follows from that.

The experiences of the participants resonate strongly with Mortier et al.'s (2021) study of cultural brokers in the Latinx community, whose qualities, community knowledge, strengths-based orientation toward disability, empathy, active listening, and commitment to family empowerment closely aligns with what the participants here describe. However, there is an important distinction: Mortier et al.'s cultural brokers held a formal, defined role. The participants in this study occupy other paid roles and step into interpreting as an extension of their identity. What this study adds is that their positioning across both the school system and the community makes them uniquely placed not only to support families, but also to support professional learning, as participant 5 illustrated in describing their experience of pre- and post-meeting conversations with EPs to share what had been communicated and why.

Cullen et al. (2013) offer a further useful lens, finding that parent support workers in school drew on three of Bolton's (2009) four types of emotional labour: prescriptive (responding to the requirements of line managers), philanthropic (the 'gift' of emotional labour to parents with whom they had built relationships) and presentational (according to societal rules). The participants in this study appear to lean more strongly to the philanthropic, emotional labour offered as a gift, rooted in relationship and values rather than contractual obligation. As a gift, however, it carries a risk: it can be taken for granted, precisely because it falls outside formal role boundaries. This connects to a broader point about professional practice. Carr (2006) argues that good practice in roles like teaching is more than technical competence: it requires a certain kind of person. These colleagues operate in contractual frameworks, but the invisible work they do, the emotional labour, the relational judgement, the values-driven advocacy, is a virtue of their character. Their community connectedness, as Fretwell et al. (2018) found among effective community link workers, may not be merely a characteristic of their effectiveness but its very mechanism, something that cannot be replicated by those outside the community.

McDowell et al. (2011) found that interpreters in health settings described experiences closely mirroring those of the participants here; the invisible complexity of the role, making decisions in the moment, emotional toll without debrief or support and unrecognised and remunerated labour. This supports the view that a part of what these participants experience is a phenomenon of interpreting itself, which goes beyond settings. What this study adds is not only accounts of what is experienced, but of why these staff continue despite its demands. Where McDowell

et al.'s participants named exhaustion, the participants here reveal what drives them through it: their values, their relational commitments, their community identity, and their emotional attunement to the families they serve. Identity, in this sense, is not simply a feature of who they are; it is what makes their work possible and what makes it matter.

Answering the Research Question - 'How do support staff experience interpreting in meetings?'

The experience of interpreting in school meetings extends far beyond cross-language communication. It is cognitively and emotionally demanding, relationally expansive, and deeply rooted in who these staff are personally and professionally. Crucially, much of this complexity is invisible to others in the room, and therefore carried largely alone.

There is a cognitive and emotional experience in meetings. The role is cognitively demanding in the moment, requiring interpreting language to make it understandable and meaningful, drawing on knowledge of language, culture, and individuals. This can lead to feelings of overwhelm in the meeting and to requests for, and methods to manage, the flow of information to support them. The cognitive demands differ based on experience and learned strategies used to manage them. There is also emotional labour, which can include awareness of parents' potential feelings, feeling nervous, and a desire to do a good job. The cognitive and emotional labour is internal to the interpreting staff and may not be observable to others in the room. It is an invisible part of their experience whilst interpreting.

Interpreting in these meetings has a relational dimension; parents and other colleagues are unlikely to be strangers, and these relationships extend beyond the

meeting. This may support parents in feeling more able to open up, and it can facilitate information to be brought to the meeting that the interpreting staff bring. The relationships with others within and beyond the meeting also affect how the meeting may be experienced by them. What happens in the meeting does not stop there for them; they continue with the relationships post-meeting, which may extend to their paid role in school. Their identity as members of the school and wider communities also affects how others see them; e.g., parents and staff may approach them to support in meetings and beyond. It is the relationships they have and aspects of their identity that bring them to the role.

The interpreting role requires skill, knowledge and is led by personal and professional values. They do it not just because they can, but because they see the need and are acutely aware of the disadvantages children and parents will face if they do not step in. There may be others who can interpret, but for these interpreting colleagues, a conduit is often 'not good enough'. The gap between families and other educational professionals in the system is more than linguistic; here is where they have a unique and important role. Since the role is not official, there are no clear boundaries of the role; this has allowed these staff to make it their own and bring their skills and personal values to create a role that bridges linguistic and cultural gaps. However, the lack of boundaries and the invisibility of the complexity of the role mean that these staff are holding much of the responsibility themselves.

Though the work brings demands to these staff, yet they are not remunerated or formally acknowledged for their interpreting role, it holds meaning for them. It leans to their personal values, and there is legitimacy in carrying out, since they have

the professional and personal knowledge, skills and experience. They see the impact of the work, and it is this which maintains them.

Implications of the Findings for EP Practice and the Wider Profession

EPs in such meetings are working with colleagues who can have extensive knowledge, skill and experience supporting interpreting in meetings with families of children with SEND. The work is complex, lacks visibility and formal frameworks, and the responsibility of the role is largely managed alone. This has implications for the interpreting staff, the families, schools and other staff (including EPs) who rely on their support. Implications for practice will be considered with the view that pragmatism needs to be kept in mind and that EPs can not solve the systemic challenges, but have a professional and ethical responsibility to support where they can.

Implications for Educational Psychology Services

The legal and ethical context for EPS-level action is clear. Where families cannot access adequate interpretation, this risks indirect discrimination under the Equality Act (2010), given the close association between language and protected characteristics of race and national origin. For children with SEND, the requirement for meaningful parental participation (Children and Families Act, 2014; SEND CoP, 2015) makes interpretation access not just good practice but a statutory concern.

The BPS guidance (2017a) recommends seeking qualified interpreters and cautions against the use of bilingual staff without formal assessment of their competency, citing risks around accuracy and impartiality. However, the findings of the study invite a more nuanced reading of the guidance. The professional and non-professional distinction may be less meaningful in practice, as a phenomenon,

than it appears (Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva, 2012), and the qualities the bilingual staff bring (community knowledge, systemic understanding, relational trust, and values-driven commitment) are not deficits but enactments of the advocate and cultural broker mode the BPS itself recognises (BPS 2017a). The concern about non-professional interpreters changing the meaning or having their own agendas does not ask the why of the behaviour, nor what it may add alongside those risks. What may matter most, as the BPS itself highlights in relation to professional interpreters, is how EPs collaborate with those in the interpreting role, treating them as partners rather than conduits. This principle applies with equal, arguably greater, urgency to bilingual staff, who operate without role clarity and professional frameworks that formal interpreter training provides, and whose motivations, community positioning and relational knowledge make the collaborative model both more complex and more necessary to consider.

Given this, there are several areas where EPS action could make a meaningful difference, summarised below.

Table 15

Implications for Practice: EPS

Area	Recommendation	Rationale
Needs assessment	Conduct a service-level audit of language interpretation needs across LA schools, for example, via a short survey to senior leaders or SENCOs	Establishes the evidence base for commissioning decisions and initiates reflection in schools
CPD for bilingual staff	Offer accessible input on SEND processes, professional language and terminology, and space to check meaning with EPs	Reduced cognitive load and builds specialist knowledge that professional interpreters typically lack

Reflective and supervisory spaces	Facilitate individual or group reflection spaces for bilingual staff, addressing identity in role, boundaries, bias, impact of interpreting mode, and ethical practice	Supports staff wellbeing and professional development; creates dialogue about parent co-production and statutory requirements
Cross-service collaboration	Share good practice with other LA services, for example, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, which operates under NHS interpreting guidelines	Identifies existing frameworks and avoids duplicating effort; may be achievable without additional commissioning
EPS interpreting policy	Develop a clear EPS-level interpreting policy that reflects local need, available resources, and family preference	Policies for working with culturally and linguistically diverse families are not commonly found in EPSs (Smith, 2025); without one, the work of bilingual staff remains out of focus and opportunities for systemic improvement may be missed.

Each of these recommendations requires resourcing, and a needs assessment would provide the evidence base to justify that investment. For some services, having a role within the EPS for interpreters trained to work with EPs may be viable, and a model with some positive evaluation (Pratten & Cassel, 1987). In this research conducted in the UK, bilingual teacher interpreters were hired in the EPS. The community knowledge, understanding of child development and ability to support communication across the range of EP work were a positive addition to the team. However, this, along with the proposals above, may put EPS at risk of becoming the backstop for systemic underfunding of interpreting provision in schools, and this should be kept in mind when scoping the service-level response.

School/ Educational Settings

Schools share the legal responsibility to ensure language access for families of children with SEND (Equality Act, 2010; SEND CoP, 2015), and the use of bilingual staff to meet this is common, given the cost and availability barriers associated with professional interpreters. Whilst concerns about confidentiality and accuracy are frequently cited (e.g., Hart et al., 2012; Lo, 2008), they require closer examination. As school employees, bilingual staff are already bound by contractual confidentiality obligations, data protection policies, and UK GDPR requirements covering sensitive personal data discussed in SEND meetings, not substantially different from those of other professionals present. The more significant gap is not confidentiality but the absence of an interpreting-specific professional framework to support staff in navigating the complexity they are already carrying. The existence of school-specific guidance for child language brokers (Cline et al., 2014) highlights the absence of equivalent provision for bilingual staff. The findings of this study, alongside the BPS guidance (2017a), could form a useful foundation for developing such a resource.

The table below outlines key areas for school-level action

Table 16

Implications for Practice: Schools

Area	Recommendations
Interpreting policy	A clear school policy covering how interpreters are accessed, in what contexts, and the implications of different approaches, with named leads for oversight, e.g. SENCo for SEND-related interpretation, senior leaders for HR and wellbeing
Staff safeguards	Formal acknowledgement of the interpreting role in job descriptions, workload allocation and remuneration; access to

	training; clear routes to raise concerns; protection against role blur
Meeting processes	Clear guidance for meetings involving interpreters, drawing on professional guidance such as BPS guidance (2017a); agreeing the mode of interpretation in advance; pre-meeting to establish context and terminology, post-meeting debrief
Feedback and evaluation	Mechanisms for gathering feedback from families, professionals and interpreting staff on the quality and accessibility of interpreted meetings
Formal recognition	Acknowledgement of the interpreting role as skilled work in employment terms; to not do so risks indirect discrimination where the role is linked to staff identity and carried out without contractual recognition or remuneration

EPs can support schools in reflecting on these areas. Schools are systems with their own expertise and constraints and EPs positioning themselves as the holder of correct practice risks undermining collaborative relationships, and so meaningful change. This may be approached through facilitating reflection and collaborative inquiry rather than direction, for example raising questions about language diversity and interpreting provision at the beginning of year planning meetings with schools, giving careful thought to who else beyond the SENCo may be important to include in the conversations.

Across all the above, there is a risk that procedural institutional response, however well-intentioned, could undermine what the findings reveal as central to why the work is carried out and why it is effective. For these colleagues, interpreting is not a task to be managed but a meaningful act, rooted in personal values, community identity and genuine commitment to the families they serve. Formalising the role could shift what may be experienced as a philanthropic gift into a contractual obligation, reducing motivation and the quality of contributions to the role. Any

institutional changes would begin not with policy but with conversations, actively listening to bilingual staff's views on what support would be meaningful and which structures might help or hinder. They have important expertise gained through their experience of this work.

Educational Psychologists

Research consistently points to a lack of confidence amongst EPs when working with interpreters, with training providers not routinely offering specific teaching in this area (Anderson, 2018; Smith, 2025). This sits uncomfortably alongside the BPS competency of effective interpersonal communication, which includes the use of interpreters and taking account of their strengths and limitations (BPS, 2022). If EPs are not trained or confident, meeting this competency requires more than good intentions. The BPS guidance on working with interpreters (BPS, 2017a) offers a practical framework, agreeing on the method of interpretation, holding a pre-meeting to clarify terminology and context, and a post-meeting debrief that includes checking on the interpreter's wellbeing. From the participants' experiences in this study, these structures matter; they can reduce cognitive and emotional load, create space to discuss how they will work together, and signal that the EP sees the interpreting staff as a collaborator rather than a tool. However, procedural compliance alone is not sufficient. What the findings point to is the importance of a genuinely relational approach, one that takes into account the interpreting staff member's style, confidence, paid role, and the tensions they may be navigating around neutrality and trust. Given the training gap, a realistic way forward for individual EPs may be through self-reflection and evaluation, actively seeking

feedback from parents, interpreting staff, and other stakeholders about the quality and accessibility of meetings. This positions the EP as a reflective practitioner in this area rather than assuming competence that training has not yet built.

For the Bilingual Staff

When planning for the implications outlined above, the bilingual staff themselves should be kept central. The findings show colleagues carrying out skilled, values-driven work that is largely unacknowledged and unremunerated. EPs are well placed to make this visible through the conversations they have in schools, the feedback they seek, and potential advocacy they can offer at a service level. The research itself is a starting point. These colleagues have not previously been the focus of research in this context, and making the findings visible to services, schools, and the bilingual staff themselves is an act of recognition for work that has until now remained largely unseen.

Planning for Dissemination

Harmsworth et al. (2000) identified three purposes of dissemination: awareness, understanding, and action. The dissemination plan for this research reflects all three, with outputs tailored to different audiences based on what is most useful and achievable. The content to be disseminated includes the key experiential themes, the gap between how guidance suggests non-English-speaking families should be supported and the reality in which bilingual colleagues fill that gap, and the implications for EPs, schools, and EP services. An honest framing will be important throughout, disseminating this research formally acknowledges an unpaid and underrecognised role, which may be uncomfortable for some schools and services.

Table 17

Dissemination of Findings

Audience	Content	Format	Purpose
Participants	Key themes and implications in accessible language	Short informal report with offer of discussion	Ethical obligation and recognition. Not member checking, but an opportunity to engage with how their experiences have been interpreted. Feedback could be a first step to considering implications from their perspectives
EPS team, including the Principal EP	Findings and service level implications	Reflective team space	Understanding and action, building buy-in for service level response
LA senior leaders and Head of Children's Services	Summary of bilingual staff contribution and LA implications	Brief written summary	Awareness and advocacy for this group
LA schools Headteachers, Senior Leaders, SENCos	Findings and implications for practice	Written summary shared via email at the start of the academic year, and possible follow-up as appropriate via the link EPs	Awareness and action, to support planning meeting conversations
Wider EP and school profession	Findings and implications	Webinar via AEP/EdPsy, accessible blog	Awareness and understanding beyond the LA
Academic and professional community	Full research findings	Peer-reviewed journal publication, University of Essex repository, social media signposting	Awareness and understanding. Contributing to the evidence base in an under-researched area

Across these activities, dissemination spans awareness, understanding, and action, with the more immediate, action-focused work located locally within the LA, and wider outputs contributing to professional and academic conversations over time. The thesis will be deposited in the University of Essex repository, with links shared via social media as a further route to raising awareness. Journal publication remains a longer-term aim, contributing to a field where research on the experiences of bilingual staff in this context remains limited.

Self-Reflection of Learning in the Context of my Position in Relation to the Study

The BPS guidance for psychologists working with interpreters (BPS, 2017a) cautions against using bilingual staff as interpreters. This was the starting point of the research. Being a TEP, reading the guidance in preparation for a meeting with parents and staff, I found that a bilingual member of staff was taking up the role of interpreter. It raised concerns that there may be power dynamics in the school system that make it difficult for support staff to say no to such a task, and that this additional work was placed on them without extra time or money. Further was a concern for their experience in the role in the moment. This research, along with the participants' experiences, has shifted this perspective. Those who interpret are valuable assets to the schools and families. The work they do, as shared by these participants, is meaningful to them. So, I would not fully agree with the BPS guidelines, which recommend seeking professional interpreters as a default. There are clearly valid and important reasons for this, e.g. confidentiality, ethical guidelines and measures of language proficiency. However, professional interpreters cannot

know the families, school staff and school system, which are highly important factors in building rapport, trust, and the ability to share information in a meaningful way.

That is not to say caution should not be taken; we have a duty to both the family and the staff in the room, which the recommendations for practice in the earlier section offer a possible way forward. I have come to view the professional guidance (BPS, 2017a) as a tool to facilitate reflection rather than a directive or requirement.

The experiences shared led me to reflect on the way I communicate with families. There is a risk of assuming joint understanding. The interpreting staff consistently spoke of having to break down and make professional jargon more relatable. It has made me consider what constitutes jargon for those not in education or psychology? Both these institutions, in the context of UK practice, are primarily based on Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic (WIERD) cultural positions. Even for English-speaking parents, to what extent does the language translate into meaningful understanding, and how can I take the learning from the interpreting staff to communicate more accessibly? The bilingual staff find ways through using their experiences and knowledge as members of the school and wider community. This has made me reflect on my own aspects of identity, for example, socioeconomic background, language access, and racial and ethnic identity, which shape the pre-conceptions of meaning I bring to the interactions, which may align or misalign with those of families and staff I communicate with. This research has brought to light where these aspects of identity can both facilitate and hinder meaning-making between myself and others, which is important, and this awareness develops and deepens over time rather than being arrived at as a fixed endpoint. It is

akin to cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), being curious and reflexive, and maintaining a learning position.

Critically Evaluating the Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The study has met the key research aims, and a critique of its strengths and limitations will be supported by Yardley's (2000) four principles for evaluating qualitative research and Nizza et al.'s (2021) IPA-specific quality criteria.

In relation to sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2000), this study was undertaken in a specific inner-city borough in the South of England, where it challenges common-sense assumptions, as distinct from professional guidance (BPS, 2017a), about non-professionally trained interpreters, in a contextually relevant setting. Sensitivity to context required understanding the setting as an insider to working in the borough, though an outsider to the Bangladeshi community, and willingness to question my own assumptions, which led to my interest in this area of EP practice. The themes of the literature review informed the semi-structured interview questions, with the aim of supporting participants in sharing the breadth and depth of their experiences, which could have brought to light aspects that may not have otherwise been foregrounded by participants. My own experience working in the education system is likely to have influenced both the direction of the interviews and the interpretations. The theme of identity as a resource resonated with my own motivations and background, which may have amplified the salience in the analytic process. That is not to say the theme is invalid; it is embedded in the participant's own words and there may be genuine similarities between participant values and my own within the same system. It may also highlight that individual meaning-making does not happen in a vacuum. Each participant has their own personal meaning for

the interpreting role they take up. However, this role is 'available' as a function of the systemic gaps for families with linguistic diversity. The participants see these gaps and have the skill to be able to respond via the non-professional interpreting role, which gives the role its individual meaning. Thus, systemic inequality and the motivation to address that inequality are what give the role meaning. The findings do raise questions about the relationship between the researcher's interpretation and the data. The relational dynamics between me and the participants were complex, having worked with two in my TEP role, which may have influenced what participants felt comfortable sharing. Sakata et al.'s (2024b) cultural responsiveness framework was used to support reflection on how my identity and experience may have influenced the interview process and subsequent interpretation, strengthening reflexive engagement without aiming to eliminate researcher influence.

In terms of commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence (Yardley, 2000), alongside Nizza et al.'s (2021) criteria of close analytic reading and a compelling unfolding narrative, the homogenous sample of five participants aligns with IPA's requirements and Smith et al.'s (2022) recommendations. While methodologically appropriate, transferability to other educational settings cannot be assumed. The sample may consist of participants who were more confident to speak to this experience and in contexts where colleagues facilitated participation, introducing a degree of self-selection. That said, the alignment of findings with interpreting in other settings, including medical contexts (McDowell et al., 2011) and professional conference interpreting (Ayan, 2020), suggests some findings may reflect phenomenological aspects of interpreting more generally, inviting further research to

determine the extent to which they are contextually determined or reflect the phenomenon itself.

The systematic movement between individual and group-level analysis, from PETs to cross-case GETS, honours the hermeneutic cycle, with a clear audit trail as evidenced in the appendices. The themes which move through linguistic function, cognitive and affective experience, to identity and values reflect a phenomenological narrative consistent with Nizza et al.'s (2021) criterion of a compelling unfolding narrative, with quotes embedded in interpretative commentary rather than left to speak for themselves. Participants' own surprise at the complexity of what they expressed, both during and after interview, suggests the interviews generated genuine experiential depth, supporting the criterion of a rigorous experiential account. As a sole researcher, interpretations were my own, supported through supervision. This is not necessarily a drawback given IPA's epistemological position, but it means that other valid interpretations may have been missed, or those resonating with my own experience may have been given greater prominence.

Nizza et al. (2021) identified convergence and divergence as central to quality IPA work. Case-by-case analysis with gaps between participants, and individual PETs before cross-case GETs, supported attention to both shared patterns and unique experiences. Convergence and divergence are handled more explicitly in the findings than in the discussion, where thematic connections to literature foreground shared patterns. This is a structural limitation of the discussion rather than the analytic process, with individual variation maintained in the findings.

I believe the strength of this research is in relation to Yardley's (2000) criterion of impact and importance. The research opens a new way to understanding a largely

unexplored area of practice, offering an understanding of experiences which can inform how professional decisions are made based on professional guidance, and offering practical relevance from individual bilingual staff and EPs and wider systems, including school interpreting policies and the role of the EPs. Findings will be shared with the participants and the LA to encourage direct application beyond the academic context. However, the absence of other stakeholder perspectives is a significant limitation. The research captured experiences of interpreting when it occurs, not when it does not. Lopez (2000) found that some parents have difficulty sharing personal information with community interpreters, and this perspective is missing here. The findings offer a partial picture, and corroboration from others, such as family members, SENCos, and EPs, would deepen understanding of the quality and impact of interpreted meetings.

Suggesting Directions for Future Research

Given the study's specificity, this context opens several directions for future research. Exploring experiential aspects of non-professional interpreting in other educational settings, such as secondary schools or early years, or with different languages and communities, would deepen understanding of the phenomenon and inform ethical practice. Understanding how community context, including shared history, displacement, or cultural distance, shapes the interpreting experience for the interpreting staff would enrich the evidence base. Participatory research approaches, which position community members as active contributors to the research process rather than its subjects, may offer both an ethically responsive and accessible methodology in this context. Multilingual research teams would be valuable here,

both in terms of facilitating meaningful participation and in bringing cultural and linguistic knowledge to the interpretations of findings.

Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva (2012) questioned the distinction between professional and non-professional interpreting as separate phenomena and studies which explore the experiences of professional interpreters in educational settings can support in understanding the extent of overlap or divergence which is particularly important when professional guidelines recommend their use over non-trained staff (BPS, 2017a), given professional interpreters are more likely to be used for statutory work and may not have extensive knowledge of the education system. Their experiences of the role, where co-production between home and school is required, would offer important insights to support practice.

At a more systemic level, research which maps interpreting provision across LAs would provide a clearer picture of the current landscape, the extent to which bilingual staff are being used in an interpreting capacity, what community interpreting services exist and how they are accessed, and what school staff understand about their own legal obligations. Such research would complement the needs assessment approach recommended in the implications of this study. Comparative work across LAs, or between LAs and NHS services such as CAMHS, which have more established community interpreting frameworks, could also illuminate what good practice looks like and how it might be adapted for educational settings.

The experiences of parents and carers are not the focus of this study, but their views and experiences are deeply important and significantly under-researched. The BPS (2017a) acknowledges the importance of clients' views on who they would like to interpret for them, yet research on parental perspectives in UK schools is largely

absent. Though this is likely to pose methodological challenges, given the linguistic barriers of researching culturally and linguistically diverse populations, their experiences of interpreter-mediated interactions are vital to understand.

Participants described a change in how they take up their roles over time, interpreting it as dynamic rather than static, evolving with experience, confidence, and growing systemic understanding. Longitudinal research exploring this evolution could inform professional development tailored to different career stages and provide insight into the kinds of support that would be most valuable at each stage.

The lack of confidence and training of EPs working with interpreters is evidenced in the literature, e.g., Anderson (2018) and Smith (2025). Research into what training or support would improve confidence, and importantly, the impact of any training and support would also be a valuable contribution to the field.

It is hoped that research like this will encourage schools, LAs and EPs to act. Where there is a desire to act, participatory action research within settings provides the most direct route to practice change (Fox et al., 2007), with the findings informing and being informed by the contexts in which they are applied.

Concluding Summary

As far as the researcher is aware, this research is the first UK-based study to explore the experiences of bilingual support staff who take up an informal interpreting role in meetings with families of children with SEND.

Five bilingual support staff participated, sharing their experiences via semi-structured interviews. IPA methodology led to the construction of six GETs across participants: Finding role and boundaries; Commitment to meaning making; Feeling and managing the load of interpreting; Personal values guide professional

role and meaning; Awareness and responsiveness to the emotional experience of parents; Connecting through unique knowledge, strengthening and empowering families. Their accounts brought to light the experiential complexity of the role. Interpreting for these participants is not about word-for-word interpretation. It requires supporting families' meaning-making, decoding language, and being aware of what families bring into the room. There can be a felt cognitive and emotional load as a consequence of meaning-making, and sensitive navigation of messages, which, with connections to those in the room, may increase emotional labour, which can both add to the load and potentially offer meaning. Others may not see the depths of the work, leaving their experiences largely unseen and unknown. Their accounts also highlight that the meeting is a small part of the experience and the work. Connections with families and staff start before and continue after the meetings. This can lead to precontemplation of what the meeting may be like; the knowledge they bring adds to the meeting, and their supporting role for families may continue beyond it. Their professional and personal identities are a rich resource; their empathy, understanding of community stigma and barriers, and the power of knowledge sharing explain why they take up this complex role. It is an act of inclusion, a 'duty' and 'responsibility' to act against the barriers of language access for families, which otherwise perpetuates inequality.

The experiences shared and interpretations highlight the need for explicit acknowledgement of the role, support for these staff in this role, and consideration of the implications of non-professional interpreters supporting parental access to SEND meetings. For the EPS, auditing language needs and services in the LA is an important starting point. This can identify contextual needs, enable the provision of

spaces for training, supervision, and reflection for non-professional interpreting staff, and facilitate liaison with other services that may utilise non-professional interpreters to identify good practice that can inform policy. For schools, the EPS and EPs can support reflection on interpreting services in SEND-related situations and translate those reflections into actions for improvement. What will be vital is keeping the interpreting staff central to the conversation and working to support, not dictate.

Further research is required to explore the extent to which these experiences are context-bound and the implications of interpreting in other settings, e.g., secondary schools or other communities. The experiences of other stakeholders, particularly parents and carers, are of great importance. How do they experience interpreting services, whether professional or from bilingual staff in the school system? Do they experience empowerment, opportunities for coproduction, understanding and being understood? Like the experiences of these participants, the picture is likely to be complex and nuanced, but vital in understanding how we can do our very best to work ethically, inclusively and collaboratively with families and interpreting staff.

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Appendix A: Literature Review Search Terms and Boolean Operators

The table shows the search terms used in the main scoping review, which was undertaken between 28th July-15th August 2025. Where hit numbers were not recorded at the time of the search, deduplicated hits only are stated. The terms within the columns were separated by the Boolean operator 'OR'. The Boolean operator 'AND' was used between columns. Eight separate searches were carried out, the terms were developed iteratively as a function of identifying different terms in the literature.

Databases selected: APA PsycInfo;APA PsycArticles;APA PsycExtra;Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection;PEP Archive;Education Source;ERIC;SocINDEX with Full Text;eBook Collection (EBSCOhost);eBook Open Access (OA) Collection (EBSCOhost).

Roles/Personnel	Activities/Contexts	Settings
Search 1		
Teaching assistant OR learning support assistant OR bilingual support	Interpret* for parents OR parent meeting OR language support	School OR education

Notes: EBSCOhost database search; focused on UK based studies
23 papers returned (0 duplicates removed)

Search 2

“Teaching assistant” OR “learning support” OR “bilingual support” OR “bilingual*” OR “paraprofessional” OR “support worker”

“Interpret* for parents” OR “parent meeting” OR “language support” OR “advocate” OR “cultural broker” OR “language broker” OR “conduit”

School OR education OR college OR early years OR nursery

Notes: EBSCOhost database search; increased the terms for possible personal, filter for UK studies removed
386 papers returned (290 with duplicates removed)

Search 3

“Cultural broker” OR “language broker” OR “cultural mediator” OR “linguistic mediator”

“school*” OR “education” OR “parent meeting” OR “family meeting”

Notes: EBSCOhost database search; professional names of support staff replaced by language based roles more specifically in education settings, the interpreting activity removed to widen the search. Studies in the UK and beyond
1116 papers returned (605 with duplicates removed)

Search 4

“Informal interpret” OR “ad hoc interpret” OR “natural interpret” OR “untrained

“parent” OR “family”

“School*” OR “education”

interpret" OR "non-professional
interpret*"

Notes: EBSCOhost database search; informal interpreting as a specific focus rather than part of a role (such as cultural broker), UK and beyond
393 papers returned (202 with duplicated removed)

Search 5

"ethnic minority liaison" OR "family
liaison" OR "community liaison" OR
"home school liaison"

"interpret*" OR "translat*" OR "language
support" OR "bilingual"

Notes: EBSCOhost database search; UK named roles that focus on family liaison roles, which can be found in UK schools, UK and beyond
90 papers returned (50 with duplicates removed)

Search 6

"child* language broker" OR "child*
interpret" OR "student interpret" OR
"pupil interpret"

"School" OR "education" OR "parent
meeting" OR "teacher"

Notes: EBSCOhost database search; at this point child language brokers was included as a known area of research focus of non-professional interpreting in schools, and exploration of literature in the area may open avenues for relevant research papers, UK and beyond

Original number of returns not recorded (692 with duplicates removed)

Search 7

"cultural broker*" OR "language broker*" OR "cultural mediator*" OR "linguistic mediator*" OR "informal interpret*" OR "ad hoc interpret*" OR "natural interpret*" OR "untrained interpret*" OR "non-professional interpret*" OR "Bilingual"	"interpret*" OR "translat*" OR "language support"	"school*" OR "education*" OR "parent meeting*" OR "family meeting"
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Notes¹⁰: EBSCOhost database search; range of named roles from previous searches, specific focus on UK, Ireland, USA and Europe as more likely to have similar education systems and roles within schools.
Original number of returns not recorded (340 with duplicates removed)

Search 8

Teacher* OR "School psychologist" OR "Educational psychologist" OR parent OR carer OR guardian	Interpret* Or "Language Broker" OR "cultural mediator" OR "cultural broker" OR translat*	"School" OR "education" OR "parent meeting" OR "School meeting" OR "parent consultation"
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Notes: Google Scholar and EBSCOhost search, UK only as a final refined search.
EBSCOhost: Original number of returns not recorded (628 with duplicates removed)

¹⁰ On reflection search 7 was a amalgamation of searched 3 and 4 which had a wider geographical boundary, thus search 7 was not likely to return anything new. This was confirmed with no additional papers added at this stage.

The search terms in search 8 were used in Google Scholar as a supplementary search. Titles were ordered by relevance and searching discontinued when no more relevant papers were being identified. 200 titles screened in this phase. 12 were retrieved for full text review.

Search 8 terms were repeated on EBSCOhost in April 2026 as a final check of papers which may have been published post 2024, with no geographical limit. No relevant papers were identified.

Appendix B: Sample of Spreadsheet for Decisions About Inclusion and Exclusion

A total of 143 papers were identified as potentially relevant to the literature review question after reading titles and abstracts. The rationale for including or excluding each paper was recorded for each paper read. A section of the spreadsheet which was used to record the decisions, is shown below.

Authors	#	Year	Title	UK?	Include?Yes, Maybe, No (Y/M/N)	Reason for inclusion/exclusion
C.Cabel		2004	'I'm going to bring my sense of identity to this': the role and contribution of bilingual teaching assistants	Y	Y	Bilingual support staff, interpreting in school settings between home and school in the UK
Ayo A. Mansaray		2006	Liminality and in/exclusion: exploring the work of teaching assistants	Y	N	Focus on the role of TAs not those that interpret specifically
Silva, K.		2016	Bilingual assistants and cultural awareness. Reflections of a Brazilian bilingual assistant in a mainstream school context	Y	N	Though the experience of a bilingual TA - the focus is mostly on teaching and learning, it is more of an opinion piece.
Rokita-Jaśkow, J., Wolanin, A., Król-Gierat, W. & Nosidlak, K.		2023	Bridging the 'dual lives': school socialization of young bi/multilinguals in the eyes of EFL teachers	N	N	Focus on teachers working with bilingual children rather than experiences of interpreters - too far removed from focus
Klaus, S.M		2018	Using Cultural Brokering Strategies to Improve the Early Childhood Education of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller Children: Case Studies from the UK and Serbia	Y	N	Was borderline. Compares UK and Serbia process of cultural brokering. It includes data from interviews with cultural brokers and other stakeholders. Focus on process rather than understanding interpreting specifically so decision to exclude.
Young, S		2022	'They have a go at me, that I'm a good English guy. Well, I'm Polish as well': how bilingual Polish adolescents in the UK negotiate the position of 'linguistic expert'	Y	N	Participants are adolescents rather than adults - though useful in considering the aspects of expert in language and conflict with this which may be found in support staff experience the population is not the focus of the review
Crafter, S. & Iqbal, H		2020	Child interpreters: Source of pride or cultural burden?	Y	N	Article from the psychologist - lacks the robust data, not empirical study
Cline, T., Crafter S., & Prokopiou, E.		2014	Child language brokering in schools: A discussion of selected findings from a survey of teachers and ex-students	Y	N	Context is correct, includes meetings, but focus on children. CLB excluded.
Prokopiou, E., Cline, T. & Crafter, S		2012	Child language brokering in schools: Why does it matter?	Y	N	Overview of the aims of the research that later happened and was published rather than the research itself. CLB focus

Appendix C: Charting the Literature

Author/s (Year) Location	Lopez, E.C. (2000) US	Findings
Setting	Multilingual High School 5 Instructional Consultation Cases	Interpreters impacted the pace - delays in finding them Lack of consultation training meant time was needed to explain the process and role as an interpreter. Clarity of communication between consultation participants - useful in learning about cultural backgrounds and important background information Increase in parent participation after communication through interpreters. There were communication challenges - interpreters stated they did not interpret word-for-word, but went for the gist. Consultees found this frustrating, as they felt left out and struggled to build rapport with the client. Establishment of Rapport and Trust - rapport was compromised by having to communicate through an interpreter Parent relief at having access to an interpreter; when the client had previous contact with the interpreter, they expressed greater comfort. Where one interpreter made a judgmental statement, the parent no longer wanted to engage with them.
Sample	4 parents of children with limited English who are making limited progress. 5 consultees. 6 interpreters.	
Methodology	Case study methodology: Researchers as participant observers.	
Data Analysis	Each case data was analysed to identify categories relevant to interpreters. Category names notes. Then, cross-case analysis was conducted to compare and contrast emerging categories.	

Author/s (Year) Location	Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E. (2003) US	Findings
Setting	Head Start - A free learning and development service for low-income families with children under the age of 5	There were differences between what the administrator and teachers believed the interpreter's role was and what the role is as a Head Start worker. This is also different between the staff, the family, and the interpreter. She had dual roles and multiple expectations in each, but the participants were unaware of the different expectations they had. Role changed based on who with. For the teachers and administrators, she took a conduit role, interpreting in a neutral way, also mediating interactions between families and staff (interpreter manager), and embedded an interpreter or cultural broker to learn about cultural differences. From the family perspective, she was an embedded member of the Vietnamese community. Children viewed her as a teacher. Collectivist community, so the needs of the group over the individual are most important. From her perspective, she was an interpreter manager to help understanding between families and staff and an advocate for the families. Her role extended to developmental assessments in Vietnamese. There were cultural conflicts between her cultural upbringing and her role. Conflicting social rules e.g., the power of men and elders, made her role a challenge when interacting with teachers, particularly if older.
Sample	A Health Service worker for Head Start and an interpreter for Head Start teachers, Vietnamese children and their families. 9 South-East Asian families	
Methodology	Case Study	
Data Analysis	Triangulation of the data collected to get a view of the key aspects of the interpreter's experience and that of those she worked with	

		Conflicting employment rules - the staff saw her more as an interpreter and allowed her role to extend to do this as a priority. Conflict with colleagues due to differences in cultural values and challenges fitting in. Interdependence and independence (differences in Vietnamese culture vs American), Power - Distance relations - different cultures have different ways to treat people with more or less power Time concepts - monochronic to polychronic (one at a time vs many), implications for schedules
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Author/s (Year) Location	Cable (2004) UK	Findings
Setting	Primary schools	They carry out the following roles: Utilising their cultural knowledge and understanding of children and their backgrounds, including child-rearing practices, to help the monocultural/lingual staff to better understand the parents' and children's needs. Mediating communication between home and school to help parents understand the UK education system and involve them in school life (described by the author as advocates), this sometimes involved troubleshooting and promoting communication. They served as intermediaries between home and school. They contributed to the assessment of children's needs by getting information about the background, with the aim of helping decipher between learning needs and SEND. They supported learning in the classroom, linking the child's cultural knowledge to new learning, advocating for the child and being an intermediary between the child and the teacher. They also advised on the curriculum in some places.
Sample	Three bilingual teaching assistants (TAs), all from different LAs	
Methodology	Semi-structured interviews of the bilingual TAs	
Data Analysis	Recording, transcription and analysis, 'according to the key aspects of the role identified by the respondents' p.210	

Author/s (Year) Location	Edwards, R., Temple, B., & Alexander, C. (2005) UK	Findings
Setting	Experience in interpreting services, which includes experience in educational settings	Good interpreter: Language proficiency, both in the mother tongue and English. It is important that the dialect is taken into account Interpreter character and attitude e.g. sympathetic. Ability to be 'proactive' to know about the system and be able to support and give advice beyond simple translation. In accessing professional interpreters, there can be challenges e.g., not being available, not knowing how to book one. But they were able to interpret medical terms which family members may not have, codes of confidentiality and non-biased, particularly appreciated when the same person was used on more than one occasion. Mostly, the views of professional interpreters were negative. Use of family and friends to interpret - available and no cost. But lack of knowledge of specialist terms and service procedures. But there is trust in family and friends, as they understand them, as well as being available.
Sample	50 participants, from minority ethnic groups living in Manchester and London	
Methodology	Semi-structured interviews, encouraging a narrative approach of the qualities people look for in 'good' interpreters, and their experience of using professional interpreters, family and friends	
Data Analysis	An inductive process of reading and rereading the transcripts to identify themes	

Author/s (Year) Location	Lo, L. (2008) US	Findings
Setting	Schools of the US, the Individual Education Plan meetings	There were 3-10 professionals per meeting (no children). In all meetings, at least one professional left early. Minimal interaction. The purpose of the meeting was not made clear to parents. Lack of preparation to support the parent. 12/15 of the meetings, parents were dissatisfied as requests were denied by professionals. Lack of acknowledgement of parents' knowledge of the child in relation to the school's knowledge. 4/5 needed an interpreter. The one who did not had difficulty in understanding the information, due to volume and specialist language. One parent had no interpreter in one meeting. Professionals gave a large amount of information before allowing interpretation so interpreters gave summaries; they did not know some terms so skipped them. Parent felt 60% was translated and recommended interpreters who have knowledge of special education
Sample	5 Chinese parents	
Methodology	Semi-structured interviews of the 5 parents after 15 IEP meetings, observations of the meetings (non-participant observer)	
Data Analysis	Coding system to analyse the observational and interview data. Categories on the basis of each observation. Searched for common themes and developed categories using the constant comparative method Lincoln and Guba (1985) described. Two graduate students to review the coding sheets independently and determine the accuracy of coding. 93% interrater reliability.	

Author/s (Year) Location	Rah, Y., Shangmin, C., & Nguyen, T.S.T. (2009) US	Findings
Setting	Public schools across three school districts	Language barrier challenges and the cost to the school and district. Many parents are illiterate so they need to be called. Many parents have a lack of formal schooling. Lack of time to participate as families were often of Low SES, and parents may hold 2 jobs each. They have many children, and many are single parents, thus a challenge to interact. Deference to authority to the schools - cultural views that the parents' position is to listen and defer to the educators' professional judgement, which though trusting, reduces the likelihood of active parent involvement. Bilingual liaison role to act as a mediator between the culture of the school and that of the family and child. For one liaison, it is more than communicating (often by phone) but also finding out about needs e.g. food and clothing and organising workshops for parents in aspects they are interested in. One had a key role in translating between children and staff and as a parent liaison. To be a bridge between home and school and to support where there may be cultural conflicts. They provide a 'zone of comfort' to facilitate meaningful involvement. They also work with community service organisations - provide evening literacy classes for parents and create links to existing
Sample	4 school administrators, 2 Hmong American teachers and 3 bilingual TAs	
Methodology	Semi-structured interviews Other data included school documents and local news archives to provide background to guide interviews. Participant observation field notes of meetings and activities organised by the school district	
Data Analysis	Inductive analysis - influenced by Grounded theory and techniques of constant comparative analysis.	

		community organisations to support Hmong refugees. They also facilitate education programmes for parents - they were interested in practical issues rather than language learning e.g. what to ask during teacher-parent conferences.
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Author/s (Year) Location	Guo, Y (2010) Canada	Findings
Setting	Parents' nights in a secondary school in Canada	There were conflicting goals between teachers and parents regarding the expectations of parents' night. The parents wanted to speak to teachers about their child's progress and ask about the ESL programme and voice concerns. The teachers wants to share about the programme and saw it as a mass educational information event. The bilingual assistants noted that the parents would ask them many questions by telephone about the night, but most did not ask anything during parents' night. The bilingual assistants facilitated parent participation, when in a small group with the Chinese parents, they were asked many questions about the programme and wanted their view as experts of the education system. They took the role of helper to invite parents on phone after written invite increasing participation significantly by explaining the night. They acted as language interpreter, translating for parents, who may not have otherwise attended. They also explained some of the jargon used by teachers. As cultural interpreters, they went beyond translations to explain Canadian school culture. As intermediaries, they acted as a go between for parents and
Sample	9 English as a Second Language teachers, 6 bilingual assistants	
Methodology	Naturalistic observation of three parents' nights and planning meetings, interviews with teachers and bilingual assistants (interpreters) and focus groups of 8 teachers and 4 bilingual assistants. Parent feedback of the night (phone conversation)	
Data Analysis	Inductive analysis strategy. Identify emerging themes. Searching for patterns, then a 'systematic analysis' of data and interview transcripts	

		teachers, by explaining cultural differences e.g. teachers would expect parents to approach them if there is a problem, whereas in China the opposite is the case. They also notified teachers that the parents could not question the programme publicly, as this may be seen as critical. The parents perceived the bilingual assistant as being on their side and felt more comfortable expressing dissatisfaction to the bilingual assistant than to teachers.
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Author/s (Year) Location	Davitti, E (2013) UK & Italy	Findings
Setting	School - Parent teacher meetings	There were many favourable Evaluative Assessments (ESAs) (154), of which the interpreter produced 20 independently of what was being said. This has the role of making explicit the unsaid of the teacher. When producing EAs and gaze patterns, this is to indicate active engagement and may be compensating for the teacher's lack of gaze towards the mother. EAs are sensitive to the context that the interpreters may be using to manage social relations and interaction. Offer the mother a new (usually positive) angle to consider, and reassure and ensure interaction unfolds smoothly. The gaze of the interpreter and actors to the interpreter establishes rapport, the upgrades anticipate unspoken concerns or implicit worries of the mothers and reinforce the teacher. There was a promotion of mothers' agreement and seemed to 'preserve a unidirectional flow of information from teachers to mothers, who are given no effective opportunity to actively take part on the co-construction of the communicative event. Teachers never sanction the interpreter; they tend to look at the interpreter rather than the mother, so they may miss
Sample	In each parent and teacher meeting there were 2 teachers, 1 professional interpreter	
Methodology	Observation via video recordings of 3 hours of interaction between teachers and parents	
Data Analysis	Micro analysis of video recordings and transcripts of 3 hours of interaction between teachers and parents	

		important contextual cues of the mother. EA assistance may discourage mothers from actively intervening, thereby limiting empowerment and preventing alternative positions. Mothers usually indicate they understand what is being said, not agreement with it.
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Author/s (Year) Location	Georgis, R., Gokiart, R. J. Ford, D.M., & Ali, M. (2014) Canada	Findings
Setting	School	Language barriers were a key barrier to school involvement - so the role of the cultural broker in supporting language expression was important (both verbal and written). Differences in cultural experiences of school and the roles of parents and teachers were a barrier, where e.g. the role of the teacher in learning and discipline in Somali culture, cultural brokers could mediate and explain these differences. Cultural brokers understand communication style preferences. Cultural brokers understood practical barriers and could support school staff in recognising them and adapting the programme to meet the community's needs. The daily presence of the cultural brokers enabled support as needed and quick problem resolution. Parent engagement is reciprocal and relational; the cultural brokers supported this, fostering trust as relationships developed and a sense of community emerged. Parent engagement is culturally and linguistically responsive, respects parents' culture and language, and is frequently supported both informally and formally. Engaging with the family's cultural capital and aspirations can support engagement.
Sample	2 Somali cultural brokers, students, teachers, program/school leadership, and other community partners working with the families	
Methodology	Semi-structured interviews, focus group, observation notes and review of relevant documents	
Data Analysis	Latent content analysis- identifying patterns in the data and then amending the interview schedules to allow for more in-depth examination of identified themes.	

Author/s (Year) Location	Davitti. E (2015) UK & Italy	Findings
Setting	School - Parent teacher meetings	Interpreters carry out expansions - go beyond interpreting exactly what is said. This has a relational function, not one to clarify information when ambiguous terms are used. Expansions can both help reveal information about the 'mother's lifeworld' which may not have been expressed otherwise. It can inhibit the mother's expression. Focus on the institutional agenda in a reassuring way to mothers. Can promote the mother's voice and support mutual perspective-taking Instances where the teachers self-exclude and do not monitor the interaction
Sample	In each parent and teacher meeting, there were 2 teachers, 1 professional interpreter	
Methodology	Observation via video recordings of 4 hours of interaction between teachers and parents	
Data Analysis	Detailed analysis (micro-analytic observations) of the interaction between the interpreter, teacher and parent. Focus on non-verbal gazes, verbal cues, e.g. laughter, and sequences of interaction	

Author/s (Year) Location	Vargas-Urpi, M. (2015) Spain	Findings
Setting	Preschool and Educational Welcome Space	There are differences in how the interpreters carry out their role. One makes interventions they feel would be important for the teacher to know, based on what they know about the community, as an 'service provider's assistant'. They also switch to a 'user's advocate' role, intervening to reduce the likelihood that the parent will lose face. Monolingual exchanges can leave participants excluded. The other interpreter answers the community workers' questions directly based on what they have learned about the family. They also engage in monolingual exchanges, which can leave participants out (particularly the mother). Having children in the meeting, who had some understanding of both languages, impacted the interpreter's ability to control the turn-taking. Presence of children may shape the interpreter's behaviour (they both were described as adopting an 'affectionate tone').
Sample	Two meetings; the first a mother and child, teacher and interpreter. The second a community worker, mother, two children and an interpreter.	
Methodology	Meeting 1: Participant observation, with field notes and an interpreter semi-structured interview which was transcribed. Meeting 2: As meeting 1, but the meeting was also audio recorded and transcribed	
Data Analysis	Discourse analysis of field notes, for meeting two, there was also a conversational analysis of the transcript of the recording. The interview transcriptions were analysed via content analysis.	

Author/s (Year) Location	Kraus, K. (2018) UK	Findings
Setting	EPs working with linguistically diverse communities in the West Midlands	Plurilingual EPs add unique value: They bring personal, cultural, and linguistic knowledge into their professional practice. They offer richer insights when working with ethnically minoritised communities (EMCs) However, there can be professional identity tensions: EPs see themselves as psychologists, not interpreters They are aware of professional boundaries and ethics around using non-English languages in their role There is systemic ambiguity and a lack of guidance: No formal policies or training on using other languages in EP work. EPs are often left to negotiate boundaries on a case-by-case basis Workforce diversity is potentially underutilised: EPSs may not be capitalising on the benefits of multilingual staff. Time, workload, and lack of formal recognition limit the development of plurilingual practice
Sample	6 plurilingual EPs	
Methodology	Exploratory study - semi-structured interviews	
Data Analysis	Transcriptions of audio recordings - thematic analysis of the transcripts using Braun and Clarke's (2006) stages	

Author/s (Year) Location	Rossetti, Z., Redash, A., Sauer, J.S., Bui, O., Wen, Y & Regensburger, D. (2020) US	Findings
Setting	Schools of the US, the IEP meetings	All parents expressed a clear desire to collaborate meaningfully with school professionals in developing their children's IEPs, countering assumptions that CLD families are less motivated to participate in their children's education. Parents initially lacked understanding of the IEP process but learned through social networks, particularly from cultural brokers and experienced parents in support groups. This social capital helped them gain crucial knowledge about their rights and the importance of IEPs Two-thirds of parents actively participated by preparing for meetings, requesting interpreters, and bringing advocates. Over half engaged in advocacy efforts, with meetings that included experienced advocates being notably more successful. Limited Access to Information Over half attended meetings without skilled interpreters or with inadequate interpretation Two-thirds did not receive translated IEP materials in their preferred language School personnel often failed to accommodate linguistic difficulties
Sample	38 Chinese, Vietnamese and Haitian parents, most have limited English proficiency and most children are taught outside mainstream classes	
Methodology	Semi-Structured focus groups with an interpreter present. Transcription and analysis of audio	
Data Analysis	Inductive, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) with 4 independent coders who met and agreed on codes and themes	

Author/s (Year) Location	Mortier, K., Brown, I.C., & Aramburo, C.M. (2021) US	Findings
Setting	Schools	Commitment of the cultural brokers: Motivated to help in the system, to help families who can help other families, committed to the Latinx community, and rewarding to be an advocate. Strategies used by the brokers: informing, encouraging, assisting and providing emotional support (encourage parents to trust their own knowledge and not be afraid and raise their voice, importance of translating documents, organising events to support the families) Qualities of the brokers: nuanced view of the culture and strengths-based view of disability, interaction style of empathy and active listening, strong focus on establishing bonds, being trust worthy, respecting differences and making parents comfortable. They had a desire to educate themselves and share with others. They were out in the community, and they helped understand that there is a joint effort between families and professionals in special education. Brokers and parents recommended to schools that teachers and administrators are culturally humble, get to know families and their cultures. Be honest and acknowledge their power and help parents feel comfortable. Use strengths-based language
Sample	10 Latinx parents (mothers) and 10 cultural brokers (but these had to have been engaged as an 'advocate' for Latinx families'	
Methodology	Mothers participated in a semi-structured interview. 7 cultural brokers undertook focus groups. 3 had to keep a log of their brokering activities for 5 months, and then were interviewed	
Data Analysis	Inductive data analysis (data, transcripts, codes, categories and themes). Line-by-line analysis of transcripts between 3 authors and a graduate student.	

Author/s (Year) Location	Ho, J. (2024) US	Findings
Setting	A range of educational settings e.g. schools, universities	Burnout is linked to both compassion satisfaction and secondary traumatic stress Higher compassion satisfaction is associated with lower burnout. Higher secondary traumatic stress is associated with higher burnout. Coping self-efficacy was not a significant direct predictor of burnout Confidence in coping did not show a direct or indirect effect on reducing burnout in this sample. Suggests that coping ability alone is insufficient if emotional burdens (like trauma exposure) are high. Implications: Burnout among cultural brokers is influenced more by emotional demands (trauma exposure) and positive role-related rewards (compassion satisfaction) than by their perceived coping strength. Training and support for brokers should: Foster job satisfaction and meaningful role identification. Address secondary traumatic stress through trauma-informed approaches. Recognise the emotional cost of bridging cultural and linguistic gaps.
Sample	260 cultural brokers who work with refugees in an educational setting.	
Methodology	Online survey	
Data Analysis	Software for descriptive statistics, normality, and correlations between items and reliability of scales.	

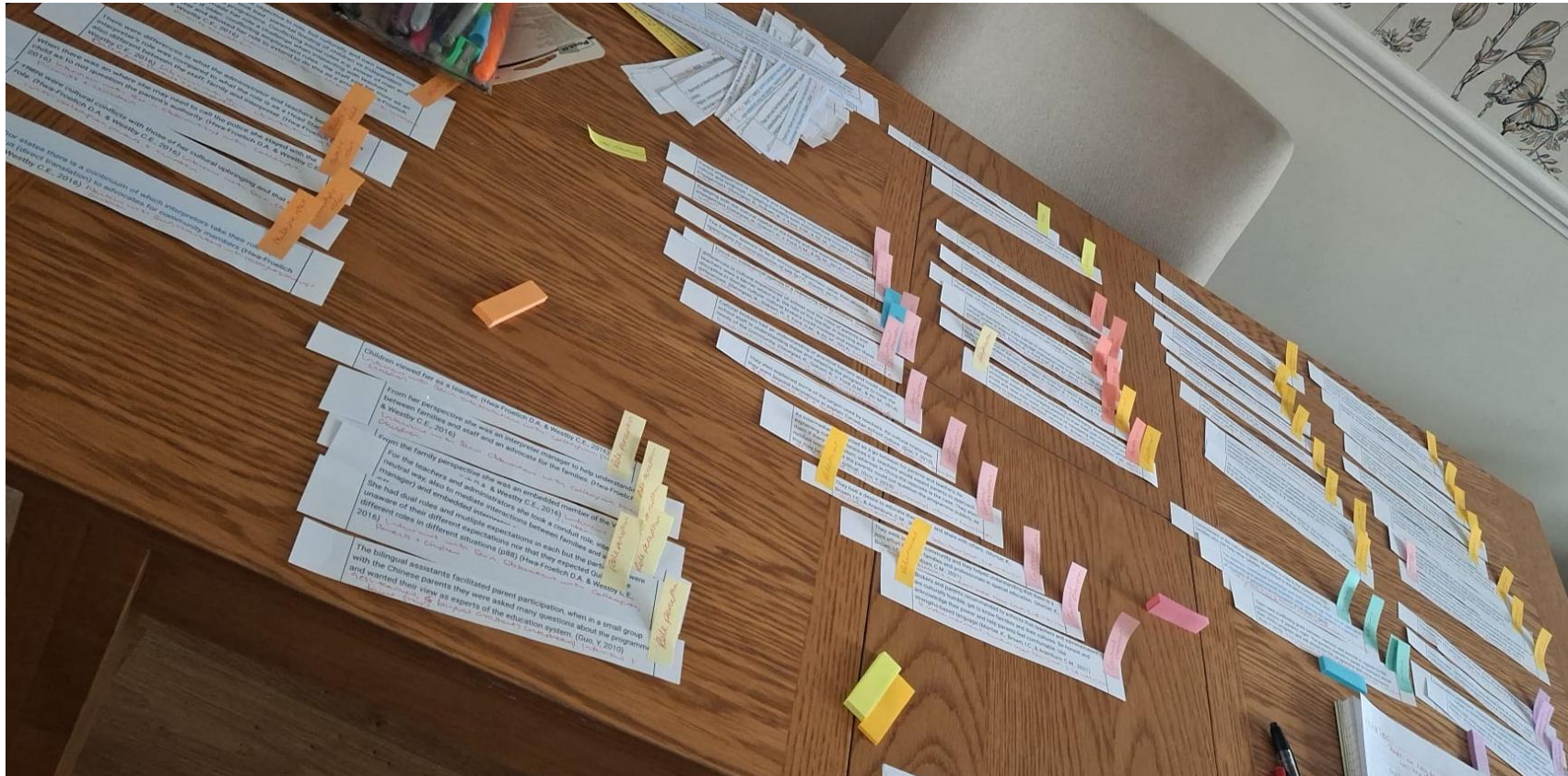
Author/s (Year) Location	Baraldi, C. & Gaviolo, L. (2024) Italy	Findings
Setting	Primary schools	Language mediators adopt flexible, shifting roles – not just translating, but negotiating meaning, explaining context, and smoothing social dynamics. Mediators actively co-construct the meeting rather than merely convey information. There are moments where mediators take initiative (e.g., softening messages, adding clarifications) – indicating informal agency and role expansion. Power dynamics among the teacher, parent, and mediator are constantly negotiated. Linguistic and social positioning affect how information is delivered and received
Sample	10 language-cultural mediators providing interpreting service, 39 teachers and 25 parents	
Methodology	Analysis of video-recorded parent and teacher meetings - 25 encounters included	
Data Analysis	Discourse-analytic approach of video-recorded meetings. Transcripts were created and analysed using Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990). Focused on turn-taking, speaker roles, code-switching, and frame shifts during mediation	

Appendix D: Searching for Themes in the Literature Review

Key points from each of the 16 studies which met the inclusion criteria were recorded on a spreadsheet and coded. A section of this is shown below.

Data	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Systems	Relational	Promoting Voices	Cultural Promotion	Role Perception	Multiple Roles	Community Membership	Emotional/personal Impact	Training and Development	Future Research
She had dual roles and multiple expectations in each but the participants were unaware of their different expectations nor that they expected Quin to take different roles in different situations (p88) (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Different role expectations	Unaware of differences						Y					
For the teachers and administrators she took a conduit role, interpreting in a neutral way, also to mediate interactions between families and staff (interpreter manager) and embedded interpreter or cultural broker to learn about cultural differences. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Teachers - neutral conduit or mediate as cultural broker	Multiple roles within stakeholders						Y	Y				
From the family perspective she was an embedded member of the Vietnamese community. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Family - role as a community member	Family see as community member						Y		Y			
Children viewed her as a teacher. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Children - Role of teacher							Y					
The community are collectivist so needs of the group over the individual most important - so she gave her number out. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Cultural values and professional behaviour									Y			
From her perspective she was an interpreter manager to help understanding between families and staff and an advocate for the families. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Advocate	Facilitate cultural understanding	Interpreter - between staff and family and advocate			Y	Y	Y					
Her role extended to developmental assessments in Vietnamese. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Paid role extended								Y				
There were cultural conflicts with those of her cultural upbringing and that of her role. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Challenges of cultural bridge	Conflicting roles	Cultural values and professional behaviour				Y		Y	Y			
She was expected to be objective in role, but culturally and own values meant not allow people to look bad - parental feeding of children vs independent feeding in the HS programme. Conflicting social rules e.g. power of men and elders which made her role a challenge when interacting with teachers particularly if older. Conflicting employment rules - the staff saw her more as an interpreter and allowed her role to extend to do this as a priority. (Hwa-Froelich D.A. & Westby C.E., 2003)	Own cultural membership intersecting with perceived role and action	Conflicting roles	Cultural values and professional behaviour					Y	Y	Y			

The key points were printed and physically moved around to identify patterns within and between themes. The coloured tabs in the image representing developing themes.



Appendix E: Quality Assessment of Included Literature

Quality assessment of the qualitative studies was undertaken using Walsh and Downe's (2006) criteria to assess the quality of qualitative research. Each study was assessed against each criterion and assigned a value of 0-2. 0= no reference identified, 1=partially referenced and 2 = fully referenced. These ratings are subjective and a method to give some measure of quality, rather than an objective and robust measure.

From Walsh and Down (2006) - Qualitative Quality Appraisal															
Stages	Lopez, E.C. (2000)	Hwa-Froelich and Westby (2003)	Cable (2004)	Edwards, Temple and Alexander (2005)	Lo (2008)	Rah et al (2009)	Guo, Y (2010)	Davitti (2013)	Georgis, Gokiert, Ford and Ali (2014)	Davitti (2015)	Vargas-Urpi, M (2015)	Kraus (2018)	Rossetti, Redash, Sauer, Bui, Wen & Regensberger (2020)	Mortier, K., Brown, I.C., & Aramburo, C.M. (2021)	Baraldi & Gavioli (2024)
Scope and Purpose	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1
Design	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
Sampling Strategy	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	2	0	2	2	2	1
Analysis	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Interpretation	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1
Reflexivity	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Ethical Dimensions	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	0
Relevance and Transferability	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1

In addition to assessment of 'quality', relevance to the literature review was assessed using Gough's (2007) weight of evidence criteria. Each papers was assessed against three initial criteria; weight of evidence quality, weight of evidence appropriateness of design, weight of evidence relevance of focus. The latter being particularly helpful in considering relevance in comparison to the focus of the review. The final measure of weight of evidence overall is an assessment based on the three former ratings. These measures are also subjective.

Weight of Evidence Criterion	Lopez, E.C. (2000)	Cable (2004)	Edwards, Temple and Alexander (2005)	Lo (2008)	Rah et al (2009)	Guo, Y (2010)	Davitti (2013)	Georgis, Gokiert, Ford and Ali (2014)	Davitti (2015)	Vargas-Urpi, M (2015)	Hwa-Froelich and Westby (2016)	Kraus (2018)	Rossetti, Redash, Sauer, Bui, Wen & Regensberger (2020)	Morier, K., Brown, I.C., & Aramburo, C.M. (2021)	Baraldi & Gavioli (2024)
Weight of evidence Quality	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	High	High	High	High	High	High	Medium
Weight of evidence appropriateness of design	High	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	High	High
Weight of evidence of focus	High	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
WoE overall	High	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	High	High	Medium

The quantitative paper was quality assessed against Long et al.'s (2002) evaluation tool for quantitative research studies.

The 0-2 rating as described above was used. Gough's (2007) weight of evidence was also used.

Long et al. (2002) – Evaluation Tool for Quantitative Research Studies			
	Ho (2024)	Gough (2007) Weight of Evidence Summary	
(1) Study Overview	2	Weight of Evidence: Quality	High
(2) Study, Setting, Sample	2	Weight of Evidence: Appropriateness of Design	Medium
(3) Ethics	1	Weight of Evidence: Relevance	Low
(4) Group Comparability & Outcome Measurement	1	WoE overall	Low
(5) Policy & Practice Implications	2		

Appendix F: Recruitment Email

Initial email sent to all state primary schools in the LA. With no participants recruited via this method, emails were sent directly to named SENCos.

Dear Head of School,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Rebecca Hooper, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist completing my doctoral training in Child, Community and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust.

I am writing to request your support in recruiting participants for my research study, which has been approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and Tower Hamlets Research Governance Framework (RGF).

Research Aim: My study explores the experiences of school support staff who have acted as informal interpreters between Sylheti and English during meetings involving Educational Psychologists, other school staff, and parents. The research aims to better understand the challenges and benefits of this role to inform future support for staff who undertake interpreting responsibilities.

Request: I would be grateful if you could share the attached recruitment poster and information sheet with any staff members who may meet the participation criteria. I am specifically seeking support staff (such as teaching assistants, admin staff, or receptionists) who have provided interpretation between Sylheti and English in meetings with Educational Psychologists within the last two academic years and do not have formal interpreting qualifications.

Participation involves a voluntary 60-90 minute interview at a time and location convenient for the participant. All data will be handled confidentially and anonymised in any reporting.

If you have any questions about this research or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Rebecca Hooper
Trainee Child, Community and Educational Psychologist

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

Appendix G: Recruitment Flyer

The flyer has a background of colorful, radiating lines in shades of orange, yellow, and green. The text is arranged in a central column with boxes, and side boxes for 'Why participate?' and 'What is involved?' are connected by lines to the central flow.

Share Your Experience as a School Interpreter!

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

Have you provided interpretation between Sylheti and English in school meetings with Educational Psychologists?

Who can take part?

This study is for school support staff (e.g., teaching assistants, receptionists, admin staff) who have provided informal interpretation between Sylheti and English during meetings involving Educational Psychologists. This research focuses on the experiences of staff without formal interpreting qualifications who have taken on this role in schools.

Why participate?

Your insights are vital! By sharing your experiences, you'll help improve understanding and support for untrained interpreters who take on this important role in schools.

What is involved?

- A 1:1 interview (60–90 minutes)
- A chance to share your experience and shape future practices
- Conducted at a time and place convenient for you

Interested?

For more information, see the attached information sheet or contact
Rebecca Hooper (Trainee Educational Psychologist):
rhooper@tavi-port.nhs.uk

This study has been approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and Tower Hamlets Research Governance Framework (RGF). It is being conducted as part of the researcher's doctoral training in Child, Community and Educational Psychology.

Participation is entirely voluntary.

Appendix H: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Introduction

Purpose of the Study:

- Experiences of support staff interpreting in meetings with EPs, who work in schools to support the educational outcomes of children and young people.
- Lack of research from the viewpoint of those who carry out the role.
- Hopes that understanding will help reflect on and improve practice.
- Acknowledge position: English, Trainee EP, speaks one language, not a member of the Sylheti-speaking community.
- Highlight the value of their experience and the hopes I'm here to understand and learn from.

Do you have any questions at this point?

Voluntary Participation:

- Interview like a guided conversation where I'm here to listen to your experiences.
- I may ask questions that seem self-evident, but my aim is to check my understanding.
- Please only share what feels comfortable for you. Let me know if you would like to pause, skip questions, or stop at any time; you don't need to give any reason.
- If, after the interview, you decide you'd like to withdraw your consent, that will be possible within one calendar month from today. Just send me an email.

Confidentiality:

- All that is shared will be anonymous - when the audio is converted into a written transcript, any names or places will be removed.
- Pseudonym will be determined. I can assign you a pseudonym, or if you'd like to choose your own, you're invited to.
- What we speak about here and is used in the research is for those purposes only. This is the case unless there are any safeguarding concerns arising from the interview, e.g. concerns about a child or significant concerns about you. If this is the case, I will let you know.

Recording and Consent:

- Today's interview will be audio-recorded securely on Zoom and a password-protected dictaphone.
- Once transcribed with pseudonyms, the audio will be deleted. #

- Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data, which will be password-protected throughout.

Distress Acknowledgement:

- It is not anticipated that there will be significant distress experienced due to the interview content, but you may speak about things that may lead to uncomfortable feelings.
- Remember, you can skip any questions, and only share what you feel comfortable doing so. If at any point you feel uncomfortable or need a break, please let me know - even a simple gesture is fine if you'd prefer not to interrupt.

Double-check still consent

Opportunity for Questions: Before we start the interview do you have any questions?

Press Record

Rapport Building and Role Overview

The first questions are to get some context about the role before focusing more on the meetings.

Can you tell me about your role, what you do and how long you've been doing it?

How did you come to take up work interpreting between Sylheti and English in school settings, and in what contexts do you interpret?

Prompts: (What kind of meetings or events do you usually interpret for? How has this role evolved over time?)

Can you tell me about your experiences as an interpreter in meetings with EPs, (other staff and family members)? Perhaps you could start with a specific meeting that comes to mind?

Can you tell me about how you and others might see your role during meetings with EPs, school staff and parents?

Prompts: Do you see yourself as a facilitator, translator, advocate, or something else? Is there anything else besides interpreting language that you think others expect from your role?

Relationships and Role Dynamics

How do you experience your relationships with EPs, parents, and staff in these meetings?

Prompts: (How do these relationships feel during the meeting? Do you notice differences in how each group interacts with you? Are there any tensions or misunderstandings that arise?)

**Have you encountered any challenges or difficult moments in this role? Can you tell me about one?*

Prompts: (Has there been a situation where your expectations felt unclear or differences in expectations from different parties? How do you address conflicts that arise in meetings? What strategies have you used to navigate challenging dynamics? Do you ever feel pulled between different people in the meeting?)

Cognitive and Emotional Demands

What is it like for you, mentally and emotionally, to interpret in these meetings?

Prompts: (Are there specific aspects of these meetings that stand out to you, either positively or negatively? Can you describe how you approach situations in which meetings become intense or emotional? Do you notice differences in how you feel after different types of meetings? What might make some meetings feel more demanding than others? Are there aspects of these meetings that you find especially meaningful or rewarding?)

**Can you describe an experience or situation that illustrates some of the challenges or demands you face when interpreting?*

Prompts: (Was there a specific moment or type of meeting that felt particularly challenging? How did you handle it at the time? Did the experience influence how you prepare or approach similar meetings in the future?)

Do you prepare for or need to manage any demands before or after these meetings? If so, how do you do this?

Prompts: (Do you use any specific strategies to prepare before meetings? How do you unwind or process the meetings afterwards? Are there any particular resources or techniques that help you manage these demands?)

Personal and Professional Impact

Has the role of interpreting affected you, either professionally or personally? If so, how?

Prompts: (Do you feel this role has shaped your sense of self? What skills or perspectives have you gained? Has this role changed how you view your work?)

Support and Development

How do you feel you are supported in your role as an interpreter?

Prompts: (How does your school support you as an interpreter? Do you receive any supervision or formal guidance related to interpreting? How helpful is it? Do you have access to specific training or professional development opportunities for this role? What kind of support do you get from peers or colleagues? How about from external sources? Are there particular forms of support you wish were available to you?)

Final Reflections

Is there anything else about your experience as an interpreter in meetings with EPs, (staff and parents) that feels important to share?

Prompts: (Is there something you wish others understood about your role? What do you think future interpreters should know about this work?)

General Prompts for Probing Deeper

These prompts will be used when participants provide brief answers or there is a need to deepen their response:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- What does that mean for you?
- How did that make you feel?
- What happened next?
- Why do you think that was the case?
- How did you make sense of that experience?
- Can you give me an example of that?"
- What was that like for you?"
- Help me understand what you mean by..

Close:

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today.

- How are you feeling after our conversation?

- Do you have any questions for me?
- [Provide debrief sheet/information about support if needed]
- Remember, you can withdraw within one month by emailing me
- Check in about whether they would like a summary of the results of the study (expected July 2026- check contact details)

Appendix I: Ethical Approval (Tavistock and Portman)

Approval from Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee.

The Tavistock and Portman 

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/>

Rebecca Hooper

By Email

24 March 2025

Dear Rebecca,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'How do school support staff describe their experience working as an interpreter of Sylheti and English in meetings with Educational Psychologists, other school staff and parents?'*

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 modifications to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC for review.

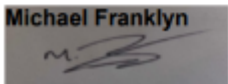
Failure to obtain prior approval for such changes may result in academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification, please 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

Appendix J: Ethical Approval from the LA

LA approval from the Research Governance Framework Panel. 10th June 2025.

RGF Application Approval

Dear Rebecca

Research Title: How do school support staff describe their experience working as an interpreter of Sylheti and English in meetings with Educational Psychologists, other school staff and parents?

This is to confirm that your research proposal has been approved by the Research Governance Framework Panel.

Upon completion can you please submit a copy of your report or an extract from your conclusion to the above postal or email address. We may then publish details of your research on the National Social Care Research Register or equivalent.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need any further assistance.

I wish you well in your research study.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix K: Participant Information Sheet

Participant information sheets were sent to all prospective participants, along with the consent form. A minimum two-week window was set between consent given and interview date.

Participant Information Sheet Project Title: How do school support staff describe their experience working as an interpreter of Sylheti and English in meetings with Educational Psychologists, other school staff, and parents? Researcher: Rebecca Hooper Contact Details: [REDACTED] Introduction You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of school support staff who have acted as interpreters. This document explains the purpose of the study, what participation involves, and your rights. Please take time to read this information carefully. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the researcher. Ethics Approval: This study has received ethical approval from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and Tower Hamlets Research Governance Framework (RGF). The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust are the sponsors of this research. What is the purpose of the study? This study explores the experiences of school support staff who act as interpreters during meetings involving Educational Psychologists (EPs), school staff, and parents. We are seeking the experiences of those who do not have formal qualifications for interpreting. It aims to understand your unique perspectives, including any challenges and benefits of this role, with the hope it will allow consideration of how to support staff in these roles. The findings will form part of a doctoral thesis for the Doctorate of Child, Community and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. The main findings will be shared with Tower Hamlets Educational Psychology Service. Who Can Participate? We are seeking school support staff who meet the following criteria: Roles: Individuals working as teaching assistants, admin staff, receptionists, canteen supervisors, or in similar roles within a school setting. Experience: 1. Workplace: Must have worked in a [REDACTED] school for at least one academic year. 2. Interpreting Experience: Must have interpreted simultaneously in Sylheti and English during at least one meeting involving: a. An Educational Psychologist b. Other school staff (such as teachers or SENCOs)
--

c. Parents

3. **Training:** Must not have received formal interpreter training.
4. **Language Proficiency:** You must have good proficiency in English to share your experiences.

Timeline: The interpreting experience (meetings with Educational Psychologists, teachers, and parents) must have occurred **within the last two academic years** (i.e., since September 2023).

School Setting: Preference is given to those working in **state primary schools**, though individuals from **secondary schools** may also participate if there is insufficient uptake.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you agree to participate:

- You will take part in a one-to-one interview lasting approximately 60–90 minutes.
- During the interview, you will be asked to share your experiences as an interpreter in meetings with Educational Psychologists, school staff, and parents.
- The interview audio will be recorded using a microphone on a secure personal laptop and through a secure Zoom or Microsoft Teams account. These recordings will be stored securely and used only for research purposes. The recordings will be securely destroyed after the audio is transcribed into text. The transcript will then be anonymised by removing any identifying information, and the original non-anonymised transcript will also be securely destroyed.

Location Options¹:

You can choose the location for the interview, such as:

- A small meeting room in the [REDACTED] Town Hall.
- A room in your school (with permission from the headteacher).
- A booked community space.

Data Protection and Anonymity:

- Minimal personal data will be collected to facilitate communication with you. This information will be stored separately and securely from interview transcripts to ensure your anonymity.
- Your name and any identifying details will not appear in the final report. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity, and there will be no references to place names.

What are the benefits of taking part?

By sharing your experiences, you will contribute to a better understanding of the interpreter's role in schools. This research could lead to improved support and training for support staff who act as

¹ If you'd prefer an online interview, this can be arranged upon request.

interpreters. The research will be shared with [REDACTED] Educational Psychology Services, increasing understanding of the experience of the role of interpreters in schools with Educational Psychologists. Participants will also receive a summary of the research findings if they wish.

Are there any risks involved?

While there are no significant risks, discussing your experiences might bring up some uncomfortable feelings. If this happens, you are free to pause or stop the interview. A debrief session will be provided at the end of the interview, during which you can share your feelings or concerns.

If you feel any discomfort or distress following the interview, you are encouraged to contact the following support services for additional assistance:

- Education Support: 08000 562 561 | www.educationsupport.org.uk
- Mind: 0300 123 3393 | www.mind.org.uk
- NHS Mental Health Services: Visit [NHS Find Mental Health Support](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health) to locate local services.

Signposting to these resources will also be included in the post-interview information sheet.

Will my participation be confidential?

Yes, your participation in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Any personal information you provide will be anonymised, meaning that your name and any details that could identify you will be removed wherever possible.

However, there are certain situations where confidentiality might need to be broken, such as:

- If required by a court order or legal request.
- If I am concerned about a safeguarding issue (for example, if someone is at risk of harm).

Only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to your data, which will be securely stored on the University of Essex's data storage systems (e.g., OneDrive). Contact details, like your name and email address, will be stored separately from the interview recordings and transcripts to help keep your information anonymous.

Because the study has a small number of participants, it might not be possible to guarantee complete anonymity, but I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. For example, your name and place names will not appear in the final report. If quotes from the interviews are used, they will be anonymised so they cannot be traced back to you.

What happens if I want to withdraw?

You can withdraw from the study at any time, up to 4 weeks after your interview. To withdraw, simply email the researcher and request the removal of your data. You do not have to provide any reason for your withdrawal.

The 4-week deadline is in place because, after this time, the data from your interview will be undergoing processing, including steps to anonymise the information you have provided. Once this process begins, it may no longer be possible to identify and remove your data from the study.

If you decide to withdraw within the 4-week period, both your personal data and interview data will be securely deleted and will not be included in the research.

What will happen to the results?

The results of this research will be written as part of a doctoral thesis for the Doctorate of Child, Community, and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. The findings may also be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. A summary of the main findings will be shared with the [REDACTED] Educational Psychology Service to help inform their practice.

You will not be identifiable in any publication, as all personal and identifying details will be removed. If you wish, you can request a summary of the research findings, which will be available by July 2026, to be sent to you via email once the study is complete.

What should I do if I have concerns about the research?

If you have concerns, you can contact the Head of Academic Registry at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

What data will be stored?

Two types of data will be stored for this study:

1. **Personal Data:** This includes your name, contact details, and emergency contact information. This information is necessary to communicate with you during the study. It will be stored securely and separately from the research data.
2. **Research Data:** This includes anonymised transcripts of your interview, which will use pseudonyms to protect your identity. These transcripts will also include non-identifiable information such as the number of years you have been interpreting in school settings and your role within the school.

How long will the data be stored?

Data will be stored securely for a period of 10 years, in accordance with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Data Protection and Handling Policies. You can access these policies at <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/>.

Both personal and research data will be stored securely and will only be accessible to the research team for the purposes of this study.

Legal Basis for the Research

The legal basis for processing your personal data in this study is Article 6(1)(e) of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – public task. This means that the research is being carried out in the public interest.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you would like more information or would like to participate, please contact the researcher.

- **Researcher:** Rebecca Hooper Email: [REDACTED]

If you need to contact somebody other than the researcher concerning this study you may contact

- **Research Supervisor:** Dr Maria Wedlock Email: [REDACTED]
- **TREC Contact (Tavistock and Portman ethics board):** Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Thank you for considering taking part in this study. Please keep this sheet for your records.

Appendix L: Consent Form

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Consent Form

Project Title: How do school support staff describe their experience working as an interpreter of Sylheti and English in meetings with Educational Psychologists, other school staff, and parents?

Researcher: Rebecca Hooper

Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust

Please read the following statements and tick to confirm:

- ☐ I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, up to 4 weeks after my interview, without giving a reason.
- ☐ I understand that participation in this study or withdrawal from it will not impact my professional relationships or employment status, except where confidentiality cannot be maintained due to safeguarding concerns or legal obligations (e.g., court orders or mandated reporting requirements).
- ☐ I understand minimal personal data will be collected to facilitate communication between the researcher and participants. I understand this data will be stored separately from interview transcripts to maintain anonymity. This data will be confidential, but there are limits to confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur, or safeguarding concerns raised.
- ☐ I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that anonymised quotes may be used in publications.
- ☐ I understand that the findings from this research may be published in academic journals, presented at conferences, or disseminated in professional contexts (including being shared with Tower Hamlets Educational Psychology Services), in addition to inclusion in the doctoral thesis.
- ☐ Due to the small sample size, I understand that there may be implications for anonymity, despite efforts to anonymise data.
- ☐ I understand that the findings of this study will be used as part of a doctoral thesis for the Doctorate of Child, Community and Educational Psychology at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust.
- ☐ I understand that my responses will be anonymised and that any data collected will be stored securely in line with GDPR regulations. I have received a link to the Tavistock privacy policy (found on the participant information sheet).
- ☐ I understand that only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data.
- ☐ If I have worked with the researcher in their role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I confirm that I am comfortable participating in this research and understand that mitigations are in place to ensure impartiality and confidentiality.
- ☐ I understand that if I share any information during the research process that raises safeguarding concerns, it will be reported according to Tower Hamlets Local Authority and school procedures. I will be informed if a safeguarding report needs to be made.
- ☐ I agree to participate in the above study.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Email Address: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the research findings via email by the end of July 2026, please check the box below.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the research findings.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the researcher or their supervisor using the details provided in the Participant Information Sheet.

Appendix M: Excerpts from Reflexive Diary

The following excerpts are drawn from the post-interview reflexive diary, informed by Sakata et al.'s (2024b) Culturally Responsive Consultation Reflective Tool. They illustrate reflexive engagement with the interpersonal dimensions of the research encounter and the researcher's awareness of how identity, assumption and alignment may have influenced the interview and subsequent interpretation. Gendered pronouns have been replaced with gender-neutral alternatives throughout to protect participant anonymity, consistent with the anonymisation measures applied across the research.

'When [they] spoke of being a small community or the idea that people know each other's business, this felt like an 'I have heard about this about some community groups', being aware of the difference in my lived experience where community knowledge in this way is not well known, particularly since I am now an adult. [They] worried that what [they] shared was off tangent; this was not my experience. I used this as a 'chance' to check my understanding [of what they had said], that it may be difficult to separate [their] role outside meetings to what is happening in meetings. Perhaps [an] early interpretation, also a method to reassure, but a little bit of checking in'

'I felt a connection to [their] experiences and motivations being in education, my own working class background and the sense of not knowing the ropes of the education system. [Their] experience differed with a non-English speaking [parent], a double disadvantage perhaps? There was certainly a feeling of aligning due to this, again a need to be caution as [their] experiences are

[their] own and will differ on dimensions of family immigration and living in [location] vs [my home location]. I wonder if this potential alignment at times may have prevented checking in on words used, my assumed understanding, this is something I will need to listen for when hearing back the audio. When analysing checking carefully when it comes to experiential statements, are they more mine than [theirs]?’

Appendix N: Participant Debrief Document

Debriefing Information

Purpose of the Study:

This research aims to understand the experiences of school support staff acting as interpreters in meetings with Educational Psychologists, school staff, and parents. Your contribution will help improve understanding and support for individuals in this role.

Confidentiality Reminder:

Your personal data will remain confidential and will not be shared beyond the researcher and supervisor. Identifiable information, such as contact details, will be stored securely and separately from anonymised interview data. Any safeguarding concerns raised during the interview will be reported in accordance with Local Authority procedures, and you will be informed of this process.

Withdrawal Period:

You have the right to withdraw your data up to 4 weeks after this interview. If you wish to do so, please contact [REDACTED]. You do not need to provide any reason for wishing to withdraw. After 4 weeks, the data from your interview will be undergoing processing, including steps to anonymise the information you have provided. Once this process begins, it may no longer be possible to identify and remove your data from the study.

If you decide to withdraw within the 4-week period, both your personal data and interview data will be securely deleted and will not be included in the research.

Further Queries and Feedback:

If you have any questions or feedback about your experience, you may contact the researcher, supervisor, or ethics committee. The contact details for these individuals are included in the post-interview information sheet.

Support Services:

If you feel any discomfort or distress following this session, we encourage you to reach out to the following resources:

- **Education Support:** 08000 562 561 | www.educationsupport.org.uk
- **Mind:** 0300 123 3393 | www.mind.org.uk
- **NHS Mental Health Services:** Visit [NHS Find Mental Health Support](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health) to locate local services.

Your school may also provide access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), which can offer confidential counselling and advice.

If you have ongoing concerns, we recommend sharing them with your GP or primary care provider for further support.

Next Steps:

Your input will contribute to a doctoral thesis and may also inform future educational practices as findings will be shared with the Educational Psychology Service of the Local Authority. A summary of the findings will be emailed to you if you have expressed interest via

the consent form. If you have not expressed interest and would like a summary of the findings do not hesitate to contact the researcher.

Opportunity for Final Questions:

How are you feeling after participating in this interview? Do you have any questions or further thoughts you would like to share? If you reflect on this interview later and think of additional points, feel free to contact the researcher at the provided email address.

Thank You:

Thank you for your participation in this research. Your time and insights are greatly appreciated.

Appendix O: Post-Interview Information for Participants

The following information sheet was emailed to participants post-interview.

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Support and Information for Participants

Thank you for your valuable contribution to this research. Your insights are greatly appreciated and will help enhance understanding and support for those who interpret in educational contexts.

Support Resources

If you feel you need emotional support or advice, the following services are available:

- **Education Support:** Tailored support for education professionals. Call: 08000 562 561 | Visit: www.educationsupport.org.uk
- **Mind:** For mental health support. Call: 0300 123 3393 | Visit: www.mind.org.uk
- **NHS Mental Health Services:** Find local support. Visit: www.nhs.uk/mental-health
- **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP):** Your employer may offer free, confidential counselling services through an EAP.
- **GP Support:** If needed, your GP can provide further advice and ongoing support.

Contact the Researcher

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact:

- **Researcher:** Rebecca Hooper, Email: [REDACTED]
- **Research Supervisor:** Dr Maria Wedlock, Email: [REDACTED]
- **Ethics Committee:** Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer, Email: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Feedback and Withdrawal

If you have feedback about the study or wish to withdraw your data, please contact Rebecca Hooper within 4 weeks of your interview.

Thank You

Thank you again for your participation. Your time and insights are greatly valued.

Appendix P: Example Exploratory Notes

Exploratory notes are demonstrated in the transcript below. The exploratory notes include information collated from the impression notes made whilst listening to the audio of the interview, notes made in the transcription stage, and exploratory notes made in the reading and re-reading of the transcript. They include **descriptive (blue)**, **linguistic (green)** and **conceptual (yellow)** notes.

Excerpt of interview transcript of participant 2 (pages 4-7)

pulled out to translate, I felt, ooh, I actually have a purpose, I like this. And yeah, I did, and that's where my first interest came from actually, to help support parents, and since then, my whole career have been around supporting families. Not the child, because I don't really want to work with the child, because I feel...if I was a qualified teacher, then yes, but I'm not, and I don't want to work in a supportive role, I want to lead. Yeah, I know, so I was lucky enough to get into get into employment that allowed me to do that. You know, so, yeah. So that what, that's where my interest came from, to supporting families. I thought, oh my god, I felt so sorry for them, like, oh my god. They don't know what they are talking about. It's not their fault, you know, because they don't have the language, they don't have the educational background, you know, they were not educated in the UK, they don't know the system, so there is a lot of grey areas and a lot of things for them to learn. You know, and also the expectation of the West in how they would like certain parents to be, in terms of the understanding, of their behaviours, you know other things. So I felt it would be good to educate the parents, or give, or not educate actually, make them aware so they know you know, so they understand what is expected of them as well. Because there is a level of expectation from both ends. But in the beginning of my career, I didn't, I didn't realise parents didn't understand that, but now parents, obviously, they're all educated through the British education system, they know a lot more, so you don't really need to work on that side of things.

I: So you feel there has been a shift, a change, in like, parents and their understanding?

P: Yeah, now they are really challenging [laughs]

I: In what way are they challenging?

Commented [HR16]: Exploratory note: The experience of the classroom, the lack of evident learning of the children left a sense of not 'doing anything'. The interpretation with the adults gave a sense of influence and purpose

Commented [HR17]: Exploratory note: The interpreting with families changed their career focus to family work over individual child work

Commented [HR18]: Exploratory note: There is a desire to lead not support. A value trait? But the contradiction in 'support the parents' and families. Supporting through leading? To what extent is the leading used in interpreting to support?

Commented [HR19]: Exploratory note: Feeling sorry for the difficulties of the families, the challenge in not having the language and not having the knowledge of the education system. Double disadvantage?

Commented [HR20]: Exploratory note: There are cultural expectations of the 'West' in regards to 'how they want certain parents to be' and these are not black and white, not clear, there are 'grey areas'. The sense of seeing the challenge for parents in relation to these expectations when they are not aware of them

Commented [HR21]: Exploratory note: There is value in making sure parents are aware of these cultural expectations so they are understand what is expected of them

Commented [HR22]: Exploratory note: Both families and schools have expectations of each other

Commented [HR23]: Exploratory note: They learnt of the differences in expectations, that the parents were unaware of the cultural expectations, but times have changed and parents have been educated through the ...

Commented [HR24]: Exploratory note: Parents are now challenging as a consequence of their knowledge...challenging for them? The school? Both?

P: Well, I think where they think, they know a lot more, which is good, but I think the mannerism in how to address certain concerns could be different. You know, they don't need to come **gun blazing at a member of staff**, you know they don't need to do that. Yes, **you're upset, tell me, what is it? Let me see how I can help.** You know, instead of **having a go and then saying, I'm really sorry.** Okay, fine, you said that but, you know, not having that approach.

Whereas the older generation would not do that, they're like, they don't know anything. Or why was this? How did this happen? It's not like **how dare you do this to my child?** That's the child, the shift. You know, so, **I don't know what's better really** [laughs]

I: It sounds like they both have their challenges.

P: Challenges, yeah. But it was easier to deal with the older generation with their mindset. They would, **if a teacher said, this is what happened, they would just accept it.** Which made, you know, school's life easier to be honest. But you know, they were more polite, I found in my career anyway. But now, you know, those that are not, they're really challenging, they're really not polite, you know, they don't have to deal with things like that, that's all.

I: And do you...has that kind of...has that affected your...the role that you take so when you are interpreting, does that affect the role that you take in those meetings, like...

P: So earlier on when I didn't have much experience, and I was **just interpreting whatever the professional told me**, it was, I just interpreted that and that was it. But, obviously as your experience builds, you understand things, like what your role is, what the school's is, like everything whatever job you are in, you understand it more and you have more depth about it, knowledge about it. **You do take interpreting differently. You speak with more substance, more gravity,** you know it's like you know what you are talking about. You not just, **parroting or mimicking** whatever somebody's

Commented [HR25]: Exploratory note: **Parents come in 'gun blazing' ready for a fight?**

Commented [HR26]: Exploratory note: **Their response appears to be acknowledging the emotion and directing to helping them. An in between? Protecting the staff? Regulating the adult? Engaging in problem solving?**

Commented [HR27]: Exploratory note: **Allowing parents to save face, so they do not get into a position of having to apologise for 'having a go'**

Commented [HR28]: Exploratory note: **Parents are protective of their children in regards to school? Fighting against rather than working with? A significant change to the past from parents who had less knowledge of the British education system**

Commented [HR29]: Exploratory note: **Ambivalent to what is better? Parents knowing and increased home and school conflict or them not knowing but not being able to support in the way expected**

Commented [HR30]: Exploratory note: **Parent interaction with school has changed, from acceptance of what school says to now (gun blazing, how dare you...) an experience of them not being 'polite' and this is not how it has to be. Is them naming the emotion and problem** ...

Commented [HR31]: Exploratory note: **'just' interpreting what was 'told': Professional appears to be in control and the person interpreting repeated as it was**

Commented [HR32]: Exploratory note: **Know what talking about not just the words, but the depth of what is being said. Allows speaking beyond the superficial** ...

Commented [HR33]: Exploratory note: **The depth of knowledge of personal role (does this include interpreting) and the role of the school changes the way** ...

Commented [HR34]: Exploratory note: **To parrot or mimic. Parrots speak with no understanding. Mimicking to try to be like someone else? The experience moves t** ...

told you to say. So if parents do get upset about certain things, you are able to explain, like, this is our policy, this is why we do this, or this is the process, this is why we do this. That's why this person has said this to you or, this is the next steps, I do not need to ask you to tell me that, I can give them all that information, while I'm interpreting and that's what experience brings. You know and I think it is really important to interpret when you are really knowledgeable about what you're interpreting about. And like when you are not sure, like when I first did the EP interpreting, I'm like, oh, sorry, what does that mean? I need to understand from you, like, what it means, so then I can explain it best to the parents, so they know what I'm saying, or they are [not?] getting accurate information from you to them, because I'm in the middle. If I don't understand it, how are they gonna...so it's really important that happens, and I think that grows with confidence. If you're just being pulled out and you haven't got any knowledge, it's really not good for the parent. They're not actually getting anything quality out of it. It's very, I'd say it's not very good.

I: Yeah, so you are saying you kind of moved from a situation where before...you were being accurate, like, you were word-for-word interpreting, you're saying the same thing, but that's very different to, making sure you really understand

P: Yeah, they understood. If they asked me a question, oh, so why did that happen? Like in the earlier stages, you'd think...you'd just interpret the same thing back. Because you don't have knowledge but as you grow knowledge, and you understand, and you know the child as well, it's easier to interpret to the family, to say, this is what they are talking about, these are the examples. Then it makes more sense to them as well, and it makes it real, so I think that's really important.

Commented [HR35]: Exploratory note: This depth of knowledge from experience moves their role to an independent one. There is no need for the 'professional' to explain the reasons why for things, they know. This allows them to explain to the parents when they can see they are upset, to step in, to do so in an autonomous way.

Commented [HR36]: Exploratory note: The background knowledge of what is being interpreted about is 'very important' for the parents

Commented [HR37]: Exploratory note: If they do not fully understand what is being said and why then there is little hope of the parents being able to understand. It is the interpreter in the middle that needs to interpret the words and meaning, so there is parental understanding. This comes with knowledge and experience

Commented [HR38]: Exploratory note: Those interpreting without the depth of knowledge in the area are not able to provide parents anything of 'quality'. The implications are on the family?

Commented [HR39]: Exploratory note: The knowledge base extends to system, school, role, and here about the child which can contextualise what is being said to help 'make it real' for the family.

Commented [HR40]: Exploratory note: 'Makes it real' - is this making abstract ideas more concrete, related to their experience? Makes it serious? Takes it to reality i.e. day to day life?

I: And you say your knowledge has increased. What kinds of knowledge has really helped with that confidence?

P: I think confidence definitely. Because I think if you speak to the professional and you try to understand what this meeting is about, because when people just come in and just interpret it, I don't think, you should allow a couple of minutes before just to give a little...look this is the reason for the meeting, **this is what we are trying to find out.**

Because it's important that the person coming into the meeting does need to know, because otherwise, you are just **throwing them at the deep end.** They can say anything, you have no knowledge, and the...they'll just say whatever.

You know, there are some meetings that I have...I've waffled. And I felt, I could have done that better, you know, but

now, obviously, I'm like, but then I wouldn't ask the professional, because I wasn't, **I was too shy to ask,** cause it felt

like, oh I just told you, why are you asking again? **Or something in your head, all these things playing in your head.** But

now, I'd be like, no, sorry, what does that mean? Why did that happen? So, then I can tell the parent because I have to

forget that, **I'm here to help that parent understand,** not think, oh my god, I didn't understand, cause there is another

level in your head that's going on, isn't it? Like, I didn't understand that. Oh let me just say that anyway. And I think

that is wrong, and that comes with experience and obviously background. Information before actually sitting in the

Commented [HR41]: Exploratory note: **Being given a short period of time before the start of the meeting know what the professional is 'trying to find out' and what it is about, to avoid being 'thrown in the deep end'**

Commented [HR42]: Exploratory note: **'Throwing in the deep end' - no context for the meeting. You have to work it out? Sink or swim?**

Commented [HR43]: Exploratory note: **'I've waffled' not being able to be clear, saying things in a convoluted way? Linked to not knowing what the context of the meeting is and the direction? A sense of personal critique as a consequence 'I could have done better'**

Commented [HR44R43]: Exploratory note: **If they had known the function of the meeting, they could have done better?**

Commented [HR45]: Exploratory note: **Shy to ask with less confidence in role, thoughts of the professional** ...

Commented [HR46]: Exploratory note: **Not knowing and not feeling confident to ask the 'professional' about** ...

Commented [HR47]: Exploratory note: **The clarity in role function 'help the parent' gives confidence to ask** ...

Appendix Q: Example of Experiential Statements

The following experiential statements are linked to the excerpt and exploratory notes of participant 2, shared in Appendix P.

Page	Experiential statement	Quote
3-4	Early interpreting was felt to be a passive, conduit role without real agency, but felt empowering to families and gave a purpose	"I'd be called out of the class to translate [...] you're just a medium to communicate for and help support"
4	They see cultural blind spots between schools and families which others cannot and must bridge the gap	"I felt so sorry for them [...] they were not educated in the UK, they don't know the system [...] there is a <i>lot</i> of grey areas and a <i>lot</i> of things for them to learn [...] and also the expectation of the West in how they would like certain parents to be, in terms of understanding, of their behaviours [...] make them aware so they know, so they understand what is expected of them [...] there is a level of expectation from both ends"
5	Changes in parent-school power dynamics seems to position them as an emotional buffer where they feel compelled to quell parental frustration whilst simultaneously protecting both sides	"They don't need to come in gun blazing at a member of staff [...] yes, you are upset, tell me, what is it? Let me know how I can help?"
5	There are felt shifts over time, from parental compliance to confrontation, and wishes parents would seek the middle ground	"It's now link <i>how dare you</i> do this to my child? [...] the older generation with their mindset. They would, if a teacher said, this is what happened, they would just accept it"

5	Uncertainty about whose needs are best to serve, school or parents, feeling there is an either/or but desiring and/also	"I don't know what's better really [laughs]"
5	Knowledge and deep understanding of school systems boosts their confidence and enabling greater influence through the interpreting role	"You speak with more substance, with more gravity, you know it's like you know what you are talking about"
5-6	There is a felt shift from being a necessarily controlled as a mouthpiece to navigating interpreting independently, bringing what is needed in the moment	"Not just parroting or mimicking whatever somebody's told you to say. So if parents do get upset about certain things, you are able to explain [...] I don't need to ask you to tell me that, I can give them all that information"
6	They feel the responsibility of ensuring parental understanding, leaving them constantly self-monitoring and checking	"When I first did the EP interpreting, I'm like, oh, sorry, what does that mean [...] If I don't understand it, how are they gonna?"
6	With knowledge of families, it feels easier to help them understand what is happening for them and their child	"As you grow in knowledge, and you understand, and you know the child as well, it's easier to interpret to the family [...] this is what they are talking about, these are the examples [...] it makes it real"
7	Without meeting context they can feel out of their depth and inadequate in role, which drives them to seek clarification	"Look this is the reason for the meeting, this is what we are trying to find out [...] because otherwise you are just throwing them in the deep end. They can say anything, you have no knowledge [...] there have been some meeting that I have...I've waffled"

7	Having their own internal questions in mind feels distracting, pulling their focus away from parental understanding	“Or something in your head, all these things playing in your head [...] I have to forget that I’m here to help that parent understand, not thing, oh my god, I didn’t understand”
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Appendix R: Example Personal Experiential Themes and Connecting Experiential Statements and Linked Quotes

Experiential statements were printed and spread on a large surface to identify clusters which could become personal experiential themes. Where possible, themes with a small number of experiential statements were compared to other developing themes to determine whether they could be subordinate themes. Themes were named to try to capture the experiential aspect of the experiential statements within it.

The table below shows an extract from the PET table of participant 2. (PET 1)

Personal Experiential Themes (PET) – Participant 2	
PET 1: THE NEED AND PURPOSE IN FILLING THE GAPS BETWEEN SCHOOL AND FAMILY	
1.1 The need to translate professionals' words into family action	
Experiencing frustration at the mismatch in communication between parents and professionals and working to grasp the unspoken meaning between them to facilitate clearer understanding (p15)	“Where you are professionals [...] if your child does this, every day, for the X number of years [...] they will get it. But parents don't have that knowledge. They don't know. Sometimes you have to actually explain it to them, so plainly”
Feeling a strong rejection for word-for-word interpreting, their purpose to transform professional knowledge to usable steps parents can take home (p26)	“With your work, what you're asking them to do, you do need knowledge. You can't just tell them, you know, everything you say in your meetings, they need to know. Really understand it. Otherwise, it's a waste of your time. You don't need to meet with them [...] If the family don't understand what you have done, they don't even need to be part of that meeting”
Their position in the school system enables them to help parents understand what they can practically do to support their child (p16)	“Don't call someone off the street to interpret [...] the families are not going to go away with anything. They might understand what you are trying to say. But that's it [...] But you don't know that next steps, like, oh, I can do this to help my child, or I can do this so I'm okay with how I am with my child”

They hold knowledge that they move between the meeting to and from the families' real lives, gently nudging parents towards action (p34)	"When you're involved with the family, with interpreting, even when you're not here, you can just...if they ask me something, I'm able to say, oh, remember this is what you're supposed to do [...] just give them a little nudge"
Felt freedom of professional protocols to enable guiding and advising parents to help them make informed decisions (p18-19)	"Sometimes you know the family well, you can say, don't do this, don't do that. Because you are not helping the situation [...] when you're a say, a professional is telling a parent or family, they have to be so politically correct with what they are saying. They really want to say, no, don't, don't, or do, do, but they can't. I'm in that role where I can [...] Don't say I didn't tell you. You know, know about it, and then make your choice. You're an adult"
As part of a wider, interdependent professional network, feeling responsibility to get parents to understand so they can act on recommendations (p22)	"You don't know that, you don't have that much time, you see. So that's why it does help when you have somebody in school to talk to families, because then that takes away that pressure off you [...] that's where the individual schools come into...that's a partnership [...] Because you're giving them actions aren't you? [...] They don't understand that, they're not going to do it with the child"
1.2 Seeing the gaps that both family and educational professionals cannot; filling the gap and making connections	
They experience being a dynamic connector, linking families to school (p1)	"Working with families to bridge that gap between home and school" "looking at what level they are at [...] so they can help their child at school"

See sees cultural blind spots between schools and families, which they cannot, and needs to bridge the gap (p4)	"I felt so sorry for them [...] they were not educated in the UK, they don't know the system [...] there is a <i>lot</i> of grey areas and a <i>lot</i> of things for them to learn [...] and also the expectation of the West in how they would like certain parents to be, in terms of understanding, of their behaviours [...] make them aware so they know, so they understand what is expected of them [...] there is a level of expectation from both ends"
The dearth of parental support in school makes them feel compelled to enact the needed support (p1)	"Parents need more support, because the children have so much support [...] parents don't have anyone, helping them with anything"
Interpreting in meetings leaves a lingering sense of needing to do more to help (p8)	"So then we worked with the family, and I was involved with the family, then I felt happy [...] with this job, you go dome and you think, oh my god, I could have done that better. Why didn't I say this?"
The knowledge they hold about the education system enables them to support their understanding of what is happening as they interpret (p9)	"They don't have time to explain to you [...] where there the EP comes in, why they come in, what they're doing, how does that help your child, what happens next. You know you need to have all of that before you come in and just translate. [...] they go away thinking, okay I heard you, but I don't under...they still go away thinking, they don't understand what you said"

There is the gap of time for families which they can fill to support after meetings, taking up their role in a value aligned way (p27)	“It is how you are as a person, with any job, but yes, it does help with the role I’m in, because if I was in class, I probably wouldn’t have much time to think like that [...] I’m very lucky, I have a really, a wide range of services I work with and support, so I have all that knowledge [...] But if I was in class, no way, I wouldn’t know that. So then it is hard for that person to actually emotionally support a family”
1.3 Holding unique knowledge of schools and families gives the ability to empower and support families	
Knowing families well they can break down professional’s messages to aid understanding, at times experiencing futility when it still feels out of reach (p16-17)	“ If you know the family well, you know there’s certain things they will not understand at all. So you have to be really basic, so they understand the basic knowledge [...] so they can build on it [...] because some of them go out of their head. There’s no point translating. It’s frustrating sometimes, trust me, with some families [...] They don’t get it, whatever you say”
Making connections between people (not interpreting) can leave them feeling an energised ‘brain overload’ fuelling their sense of purpose (p32)	“Always. Yeah, brain overload [...] I love it though [...] I really do. I really do”
The movement of knowledge within them and between them and others enables a kind of knowledge sharing between systems that would not otherwise occur (p35)	“It gives you a fuller picture of the family and not just one-sided [...] whichever side I’m working on, because I’m working on different things [...] sometimes they ask, htey said, oh, how was I supposed to do this? And I’m like if I can’t answer, you know what, I can’t remember, but let me find out for you”

They feel a deep sense of 'completeness' from doing all they can in and beyond meetings, feeling a valuable part of the support system around them (P28-29)	"I would go away feeling incomplete [...] as time went on, I didn't feel like that, because I am giving them as much as I can. They know I'm here if they need anything. I can't do more than that [...] we're all doing our bit"
They experience themselves as mentally energised after meetings, reflecting on interactions, holding the family in mind, anticipating their needs and using their knowledge to empower them (p13-14)	"I don't see it as [...] like it's draining me out. No, I feel like the opposite, actually. I'm so happy that...oh, God, I'm glad I said that. Sometimes I go home and I'm like, I could have said that actually [...] everyone has their lightbulb moments [laughs]. I have very odd times. So, I feel like once I've said it, if she says no, then that's fine, or if he says no, that's okay. But as long as I know I've said it and they can make that choice"
They feel a personal and professional responsibility to support and share knowledge with families (p14)	"They don't know where to go, they don't know sometimes even what to think, do I ...can I get support? [...] So where we have the knowledge, it's my duty, personal duty as well, not just my responsibility at work. But you know as a person, you feel like, okay, I know this, they don't. I'll just tell them"

Appendix S: Participant PETs

Participant 1 PETs

PET 1: THERE IS A NEED FOR BILINGUAL STAFF TO STEP IN AND INTERPRET IN SCHOOL	PET 2: ACCURACY, SENSITIVITY AND GAPS IN LANGUAGE, NOT ALWAYS HITTING THE MARK, BUT AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE	PET 3: WHAT IS KNOWN AND UNKNOWN, INFLUENCES THE FELT EXPERIENCE IN THE MOMENT	PET 4: INTERPRETING EXTENDS PROFESSIONAL ROLE BOUNDARIES BEYOND THE MEETING
1.1 Reduced resources and increased need, need to fill the gap 1.2 Not forced but asked, the option to say no	2.1 Felt need to be accurate for the sake of the parents 2.2 Navigating language use to avoid parental upset 2.3 Word for word interpretation is not always possible or appropriate, working a way around words 2.4 Despite best efforts there is a lack of understanding	3.1 Building confidence with experience 3.2 Relationships with those in the meeting and prior experiences matter 3.3 Parent language needs and feelings of responsibility	4.1 Current roles influence boundaries in others 4.2 Increasing parental confidence and access to help seeking

Participant 2 PETs

PET 1: THE NEED AND PURPOSE IN FILLING THE GAPS BETWEEN SCHOOL AND FAMILY	PET 2: INTERPRETI NG REQUIRES SAYING THE UNSPOKEN	PET 3: DEEP CONNECTION TO FAMILIES BOTH MOTIVATES AND ENRICHES PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	PET 4: BEING AN EMOTIONAL CONTAINER	PET 5: INTERPRETI NG IS AN ACTIVE POSITION	PET 6: FAMILY UNDERSTANDING IS THE PRIORITY IT'S DETERMINED BY INTERPRETER UNDERSTANDING BEYOND JUST WORDS
1.1 The need to translate professionals' words into family action 1.2 Seeing the gaps that both family and educational professionals cannot; filling the gap and making connections 1.3 Holding unique knowledge of schools and families gives the ability to empower and support families	2.1 Speaking to the biases that parents may hold about their child 2.2 Making explicit professionals' oversights in assumed knowledge and understanding of families	3.1 Connecting with knowledge that enriches understanding of the child and family 3.2 Feeling responsible through the experience of genuine care and interest in families' lives 3.3 Feeling a valued part of families' experiences	4.1 Adapting to difficult emotional shifts and responding to make right 4.2 Responding to parent's emotional experience of having a child with SEND	5.1 Interpreting requires leadership in meetings 5.2 Moving from conduit to active participant with increased knowledge and confidence	6.1 Their own understanding is vital for them to be able to interpret well enough for family understanding 6.2 Deep knowledge of families and schools are invaluable in their understanding and ability to interpret fully 6.3 Lack of explicit shared information from professionals hinders their ability to interpret

Participant 3 PETs

PET 1: RELATING THROUGH INTERPRETING, MAINTAINING SELF WHILST CONNECTING THROUGH OTHERS	PET 2: SUPPORTING EARLY INTERVENTION BY CONNECTING FAMILY AND SCHOOL	PET 3: CARRYING THE DEMANDS OF MEETINGS WHILE CREATING CLARITY AND NAVIGATING DIRECTION	PET 4: LIVING AN UNFOLDING JOURNEY OF INTERPRETING – A THREAD WOVEN THROUGH TIME	PET 5: CARRYING DEEP MEANING WHILST BEARING HIDDEN COSTS
1.1 Tuning into parental experience and being responsive to them 1.2 Navigating as the voice between home and school	2.1 Empowering parents by bridging the cultural and linguistic gaps 2.2 Acting early to smooth the path for children	3.1 Lightening parents' cognitive load and making space for meaning 3.2 Leaning on structure to stay steady in complex dynamics	4.1 Watching interpreting organically grow through life's journey 4.2 Being proactive and responsive to parents' needs and staff requests for interpreting	5.1 Holding deep meaning of making a difference 5.2 Quietly hoping for recognition while carrying hidden work 5.3 Absorbing the pace and pressure of interpreting

Participant 4 PETs

PET 1: FEELINGS OF UNCERTAINTY IN COMPETENCE	PET 2: RESPONSIBILITY AND CAPABILITY TO MEDIATE WITHIN THE PROFESSIONAL AND FAMILY GAP	PET 3: SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE; CONNECTING HOME AND SCHOOL	PET 4: SEEING AND RESPONDING TO THE EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF PARENTS	PET 5: LIVING PERSONAL VALUES THROUGH PROFESSIONAL ROLE	PET 6: NAVIGATING ROLE BOUNDARIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – SEEKING SUPPORT FROM OTHER PROFESSIONALS
1.1 Self-awareness of the mental load and sensing a gap in ability 1.2 Professionals in the room heighten self-awareness	2.1 Mediating in the language gap 2.2 Making it personal, connecting the message to individual families 2.3 Words matter, connecting compassion	3.1 Making a community of support, through family connections 3.2 A hub of knowledge to share and connect	4.1 Building parental capacity for understanding 4.2 Seeing the barriers of parental fear and offering safety through relationships		

Participant 5 PETs

PET 1: FITTING THE GAP- FINDING AND BEING FOUND IN ROLE	PET 2: KNOWING COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND EMPOWERING POTENTIAL	PET 3: MAKING MEANING FOR FAMILIES WHERE IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE	PET 4: HOLDING THE UNIQUENESS OF FAMILIES, FACILITATING TAILORED SUPPORT THROUGH JOINT WORKING	PET 5: INTERPRETING AS A PROFESSIONAL ROLE LEAD BY PERSONAL VALUES	PET 6: ACKNOWLEDGIN G AND LEARNING TO MANAGE THE ROLE NOT ALWAYS SEEN
1.1 Seeing a gap in parental understanding and need for support 1.2 Practicalities and ability to help the role evolved	2.1 Community stuck-ness and the lubricant of knowledge 2.2 Empowering families through connection and independence	3.1 Barriers of words, interpreting where words don't exist 3.2 Driven to make it meaningful for parents through community understanding		5.1 Need to trust, be trusted and maintain trust 5.2 Personal meaning of interpreting, supporting families and the community	6.1 Managing the crowded inner experience and maintaining a calm exterior requires explicit advocacy of needs 6.2 Putting in boundaries to manage in the moment

Appendix T: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Declaration

Artificial intelligence tools were used during the preparation of this thesis. Claude Sonnet 4.6, Anthropic, <https://claude.ai> was used in a supportive capacity for language clarity, chapter structure suggestions and discussion of concepts to support the author's thinking. Grammarly, Grammarly Inc., <https://www.grammarly.com>, was used for grammar checking and sentence refinement. AI was used as an assistive aid. All ideas, conceptualisations, analysis, interpretation and scholarly arguments presented in this thesis represent the author's own thinking and judgement.