

School Belonging and Generation 1.25: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology

North London NHS Foundation Trust / University of Essex

Date of submission: 8th May, 2026

Abstract

Generation 1.25 international new arrivals are young people who moved to the UK during adolescence (ages 13–17). This group is distinguished from first or second generation immigrants by the developmental window during which they migrate – a period in which identity is actively being negotiated alongside the onset of puberty and the development of social belonging. Unlike first generation immigrants who arrive as adults with more established identities, Generation 1.25 students have begun forming their sense of self in their home country but are still in the process of negotiating it during migration. This developmental timing may make them particularly sensitive to the social and institutional environments they enter. This study explores how Generation 1.25 students experience and develop a sense of school belonging in UK secondary schools. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was conducted, drawing on ten individual interviews across five participants. The initial interviews used a lifeline grid and semi-structured interviews, followed by a second member checking interview. Six Group Experiential Themes were developed, suggesting that belonging for this group is partial, relational, and sustained through ongoing negotiation rather than achieved through a definitive moment. Participants described belonging as having a ceiling that time and effort alone could not raise, as grounded in specific relationships rather than institutions, and as shaped by the ongoing labour of linguistic navigation, family dynamics, temporal trajectories, and cultural in-betweenness. These findings have implications for Educational Psychology practice by highlighting the importance of relational approaches to supporting the transition and belonging of Generation 1.25 students in schools.

Keywords

Abbreviation	Definition
ACAA	Afghanistan and Central Asian Association; a charity supporting Afghan and Central Asian communities
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EP	Educational Psychologist
Generation 1.25	Individuals who migrated during adolescence (ages 13–17), as classified by Rumbaut's (2004) decimal generation framework
GET	Group Experiential Theme; a cross-case theme developed by identifying patterns across participants' PETs
INA	International New Arrival; a broad term encompassing both forced and voluntary migrants to the UK
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; a qualitative methodology focused on exploring how individuals make sense of lived experience
PET	Personal Experiential Theme; an individual-level theme derived from IPA analysis of a single participant's account
PSSM	Psychological Sense of School Membership; a scale developed by Goodenow (1993) to measure students' perceived belonging in school
School Belonging	A student's subjective sense of being accepted, valued, and included within their school community

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not exist without Cassey, Daisy, Jacob, Vincent and Savannah. Sitting with each of you, I felt a kind of recognition – a sense that I was learning from you as much as, I hope, you gained something from our conversations. Thank you for trusting me with your stories.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Philip Archard, my research supervisor, whose steady guidance carried this thesis from a set of half-formed ideas to a finished piece of work. I am also grateful to Dr. Lisa Bostock and Dr. Hannah Lichwa, who each supervised me during earlier stages of this journey. Though their time with me was briefer, both left a distinct mark on my thinking and on the shape this research eventually took.

To my family – my parents, who raised me with the kind of quiet determination that I only came to fully appreciate through this process. To my brothers, who were, without knowing it, the reason I was ever drawn to developmental psychology in the first place. And to Joey, who held me steady through my many breakdowns and never once made me feel like I was too much.

To my coursemates, with whom I have shared every part of this doctoral journey – I would not have been able to complete it without you, and I am grateful to have had you alongside me.

I would also like to thank the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) for their time and effort in supporting the early stages of recruitment, even though this route did not ultimately prove productive. Their willingness to engage with the research was valued.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the North London NHS Foundation (previously Tavistock and Portman) and the University of Essex for providing the training and institutional support that

made this research possible. This extends to all the course instructors, tutors and supervisors that I had the honour to learn from.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Statement

AI tools (Claude, Microsoft Copilot) were used as copy-editing and proofreading aids during the preparation of this thesis, supporting language accuracy, sentence refinement, and formatting consistency. All conceptualisation, analysis, interpretation, and writing presented in this thesis are my own original work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Introduction

This thesis offers a phenomenological account of how Generation 1.25 young people – those who migrate to the UK between the ages of 13 and 17 – experience and develop school belonging in secondary schools in England. Employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology from the accounts of five participants, it suggests that belonging for this group is fundamentally relational: shaped by pre-migration experience, unfolding unevenly over time, and rooted in relationships where young people felt genuinely seen and accepted. While existing research has documented the school experiences of migrant and refugee young people more broadly, it has rarely attended to this specific generational cohort, rarely used a phenomenological methodology to explore belonging as a lived and developing process rather than a measurable outcome, and rarely centred the perspectives of young people themselves in sustained, idiographic depth. This chapter sets out the context from which the study emerges – the demographic realities of migration in England, the particular challenges facing young people who arrive during adolescence, and why school belonging matters for this group. It identifies the gaps this study addresses, states my positionality as a practitioner-researcher, and provides a roadmap of the thesis.

1.2 Setting the Context: The UK Educational Landscape

The demographic landscape of schools in the United Kingdom (UK) has transformed significantly over the past decade, reflecting both planned migration and forced displacement. While 16% of the UK population was born abroad (approximately 10.7 million people) (The Migration Observatory, 2024), it is important to distinguish between different pathways to arrival. Economic migrants who voluntarily relocate for opportunities represent one segment of this population, while refugees – those forced to flee their home countries due to conflict, persecution, or humanitarian crises – represent another distinct group with unique experiences

and needs. This distinction is particularly significant in the current context, with 75,658 asylum applications (relating to 97,107 people) recorded in the year ending June 2024, representing a 341% increase from 2010 (Refugee Council, 2023).

The circumstances of arrival significantly shape how young people engage with education. While family remains the primary reason for migration (37%) among the general immigrant population (Cuibus, 2024), refugee students often arrive through humanitarian routes, sometimes following periods of educational disruption or separation from family members. Many of these students have experienced what Correa-Velez et al. (2010, p. 1399) describe as “not only violence and uncertainty but also the trauma of loss and feelings of being ‘cast out’ from their home country.” The top five countries of origin for asylum seekers – Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Vietnam and Bangladesh – reflect global patterns of displacement and conflict that can result in limited, interrupted, or non-existent educational opportunities (Due & Riggs, 2009; Gifford et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2005).

For the purpose of this research, both voluntary migrants and refugees are referred to as International New Arrivals (INAs). While their migration pathways differ substantially, this study focuses on how these young people develop school belonging, as both voluntary migrants and refugees face shared challenges including acculturative stress, English as an Additional Language (EAL) need, and the developmental complexities of identity formation within new cultural contexts.

The year 2015 serves as a critical anchor point. The European Migration Crisis, the 2016 Brexit referendum, and the Prevent Duty Act 2015 – requiring schools to identify individuals at risk of radicalisation (HM Government, 2015) – converged to create a socio-political environment that continues to shape how schools receive and support INA students. The

geographic distribution of INA families is highly concentrated, with 47% residing in London and the Southeast, where some school populations reflect the capital's overall foreign-born resident rate of 40%. As of late 2025, approximately 876,000 foreign-born children (aged 0–17) were living in England and Wales, though the majority arrived before the age of five (The Migration Observatory, 2024). Roughly 19.2% of secondary school pupils have a first language other than English (Department for Education, 2024), though Generation 1.25 arrivals represent a smaller and less visible portion of this group. By focusing on their lived experiences, this research aims to understand how this population experiences and develops school belonging, providing insights that can inform Educational Psychology and school support practices.

1.3 Introducing Generation 1.25

Within this diverse population of INA, a particular group requires focused attention: those who migrate during adolescence. Rumbaut (2004) developed a nuanced classification system called the “decimal generation” to capture developmental features of migrants that moves beyond simple first- and second-generation categories. “Generation 2.0” includes individuals born in the host country to foreign-born parents, while “Generation 1.75” refers to those who arrive during early childhood, and “Generation 1.5” includes those arriving during middle childhood. The cohort this current study focuses on is “Generation 1.25”, which encompasses individuals who arrive during adolescence (ages 13–17) whose parents were born outside the host country. This group is closest to first-generation migrants, as most of their development occurs before arrival in the host country.

Rumbaut (2004) found that the 1.25 generation tends to have poorer educational and occupational outcomes compared to other generational cohorts, including those who arrive as adults. This pattern persisted even among typically high-achieving immigrant groups, suggesting

that the challenges stem not from a lack of aspiration but from the complexity of adjusting to a new educational system during adolescence, when academic demands are high and identity formation is at the forefront. UK-specific data supports this: research from the Education Policy Institute indicates that adolescent arrivals trail their non-migrant peers by an average of 17.3 months at GCSE level (Strand et al., 2015), and those arriving at age 15 or 16 often face difficulty securing a school place for Year 11, as schools can be reluctant to admit students just before high-stakes examinations (COMPAS, 2024). English language proficiency remains the strongest predictor of academic success, and while EAL students who arrive in early childhood typically close the attainment gap by age 16, those arriving during secondary school often cannot bridge it before their GCSEs (Department for Education, 2024). This suggests that the challenge for Generation 1.25 students lies not in motivation – high educational aspiration is well-documented across immigrant families (IRMO, 2024) – but in a system struggling to accommodate late arrivals at a critical phase.

The Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) – who supported this research through participant recruitment – is a non-profit organisation based in the UK working to support and empower Afghan and Central Asian refugee and migrant communities. Through their work, ACAA have identified a significant gap in services for secondary school-aged refugees: while extensive support exists for younger children and adults, adolescent refugees navigate a particularly complex intersection of challenges – simultaneously managing puberty, cultural transition, identity formation, and often trauma from forced displacement (Block et al., 2014). Generation 1.25 refugees and migrants may therefore represent a group currently underserved by existing services.

These challenges are further complicated by what Berry (2006) terms "acculturative stress" – the psychological and social difficulties arising when individuals adapt to a new cultural environment while maintaining their heritage culture. For adolescents, this stress is particularly heightened as they manage normal developmental tasks alongside cultural adaptation, often leading to identity confusion, family conflicts, and challenges in peer relationships (Berry, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2010; Phinney et al., 2001).

1.4 The Developmental Complexity of Adolescent Migration

My training in psychodynamic thinking – developed across my Master's and doctoral programme – naturally shapes how I attend to the emotional dimensions of migration. It is offered here as one lens amongst others – a way of beginning to find language for what Generation 1.25 students may experience during this transition, rather than a comprehensive explanatory framework. With that acknowledged, Akhtar (1995) describes the migration experience as a "third individuation" – a process involving profound losses of familiar food, native music, unquestioned social customs, and often language. For Generation 1.25 students, this third individuation does not occur in isolation. It overlaps with the normative developmental task of adolescence itself, which Blos (1967) conceptualised as a "second individuation": the process by which adolescents disengage from internalised parental objects from childhood while maintaining supportive family relationships. Blos's work built on Mahler's (1960) original concept of separation-individuation in infancy – the gradual process by which infants differentiate themselves from their primary caregivers while developing a distinct sense of self (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975). What Akhtar's framework makes visible is that Generation 1.25 students are navigating three simultaneous separation processes: the normal psychological separation from parents characteristic of adolescence, the physical separation from their familiar

cultural environment, and often actual separation from family members due to migration circumstances (O'Shea, 2018). This confluence of challenges occurs at a critical developmental period when these young people are already reworking earlier childhood separation issues and developing autonomous identity, while adapting to new cultural expectations and often learning a new language.

However, as Mirsky and Peretz (2006) argue, while immigration is a distress-provoking life event, it can also present opportunities for psychological growth and maturation. The physical distance from original objects that migration creates may enable individuals to move beyond overwhelming regressive pulls of infantile dependencies while developing new capacities for independence. This developmental potential is particularly relevant in educational settings, where schools can offer crucial opportunities for young people to learn the language and culture of their new country while making vital connections within their new community. This developmental potential makes schools a critical site – not only of challenge, but of possible growth.

1.5 School Belonging and Its Significance

School belonging is a multifaceted construct reflecting the extent to which students feel accepted, respected, included, and supported within their school community. Belonging can be conceived of as a fundamental human need (Maslow, 1943), developing through the interplay of micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystemic factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and shaped by early relational experiences that lay the groundwork for security in new contexts (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale was particularly influential in operationalising this construct, providing the first widely adopted measure of students' perceptions of acceptance, inclusion, and respect within their school

community. The PSSM demonstrated clear associations between belonging and motivation, engagement, and achievement – providing much of the empirical foundation on which subsequent research has built. Related work on pupils' psychological sense of community has found that even at primary school level, children's experience of school as community rests on valued membership and social support (Sayer et al., 2013) – dimensions that take on added complexity when students arrive mid-adolescence into an already established community. A fuller discussion of these frameworks is offered in Chapter 2.

For Generation 1.25 students, school belonging takes on heightened significance as they navigate the intersection of adolescent development, cultural adaptation, and often trauma. School belonging serves as a buffer against acculturative stress and can facilitate both academic success and psychological adjustment (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009; Sánchez Ordaz & Mosqueda, 2021; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Osterman, 2000). When INA students perceive the school climate as inclusive and responsive, they are more likely to develop an internal working model of the school environment as supportive and trustworthy, promoting a stronger sense of belonging (Cartmell & Bond, 2015).

1.6 Systemic and Structural Barriers

The experiences of Generation 1.25 students highlight complex intersections between academic, social, and emotional challenges that shape their adaptation trajectories. Multiple studies have documented language barriers as a primary obstacle, with limited English proficiency affecting both academic performance and social integration (Hamilton, 2013; Moskal, 2014; Reynolds, 2008). However, as Rumbaut (2004) emphasises, these language challenges cannot be viewed in isolation but rather interact with broader adjustment difficulties that extend far beyond the school gates.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework is useful here: the disruption to INA students' microsystem through potential separation from family, combined with the need to navigate a drastically different macrosystem in their host country, can create significant barriers to successful adaptation. Exosystem factors – housing policies, immigration status, community reception – significantly shape students' educational experiences and sense of belonging, yet remain largely outside the direct influence of schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs). It is important to acknowledge that schools, regardless of their commitment and expertise, are operating within constraints that limit their ability to address all the factors affecting Generation 1.25 students' sense of belonging. The question becomes not whether schools can solve all the challenges facing these students, but how they can optimise their practices within their sphere of influence to promote belonging and resilience.

The way schools receive and support Generation 1.25 students also reflects broader questions about UK society's approach to diversity and social cohesion. The school environment serves as a microcosm of wider social attitudes toward immigration and cultural diversity, placing additional pressure on educational institutions to navigate not only pedagogical challenges but broader social and political tensions. These systemic realities highlight gaps in our understanding of how to effectively support this population.

1.7 The Research Gap

In the context of growing professional commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion within education – a responsibility central to the EP role as defined in the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2019) – the experiences of Generation 1.25 students in UK schools remain insufficiently understood. The scoping review presented in Chapter 2 identifies several specific gaps. First, while UK-based research on migrant students' school experiences exists, few studies

distinguish Generation 1.25 as a population with distinct developmental characteristics from broader categories of "migrant" or "refugee" students – despite Rumbaut's (2004) framework providing clear theoretical justification for doing so. Most existing studies were also conducted in other countries with different educational systems, immigration policies, and social attitudes toward diversity. The specificity of the UK context – its educational structures, the legacy of Brexit discourse, and recent policy shifts around immigration – means that findings from elsewhere cannot be directly applied without careful consideration of local factors.

Second, much of the existing research focuses on what is done to or for migrant students rather than amplifying their own voices. Temple and Moran (2006) argue that quantifying refugee students' experiences positions them as passive subjects, potentially contributing to educational inequalities because their voices do not influence research outcomes. The absence of research capturing students' own narratives about developing school belonging is particularly significant given that belonging is inherently a subjective experience. Without understanding how Generation 1.25 students themselves experience belonging and what factors they identify as most significant, interventions and support systems risk being misaligned with students' actual needs.

Third, the two closest comparable studies – O'Shea's (2018) IPA study of Eastern European migrants and Sobitan's (2022) study of refugee students – offer valuable insights but neither captures how belonging develops over longer timeframes. O'Shea (2018) found a broadly progressive trajectory over a two-to-three-year window; Sobitan captured experiences at a single point. Understanding belonging as a process rather than a state is particularly important for Generation 1.25 students, whose adaptation unfolds across years of navigating a new educational system.

1.8 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

The reflexive account offered here focuses on my personal and professional motivations for undertaking this research. A fuller discussion of how my positionality shaped data collection and analysis is provided in Chapter 3, and a retrospective reflection on what I learned through the process is offered in Chapter 6.

I left Hong Kong at eighteen years old, first to the United States and then to the UK. By Rumbaut's (2004) classification, I am first-generation rather than Generation 1.25, having migrated just beyond the adolescent window that defines this study's population. That proximity allows a certain recognition of the terrain – the disorientation of new systems, the labour of navigating in a second language, the quiet grief of cultural loss – but it does not grant me direct access to what it means to undergo that upheaval during adolescence, when identity is still actively forming and the social and academic pressures of secondary school are at their most acute.

My interest in this topic was shaped by personal experience of institutional unreadiness. When I arrived in the UK for my Master's degree, an administrative error – my British passport was mistaken as evidence of residency rather than citizenship – meant I missed pre-arrival procedures entirely, and COVID restrictions made it impossible to resolve once I had arrived. The institution was not unsupportive so much as unprepared – my circumstances did not fit their existing categories, and there was no framework for responding. It was my first experience of an institution not being ready for a student like me and it affected my readiness to learn and overall sense of belonging to that institution, and by extension, to the UK. This was compounded during my doctorate, where as the only person of Asian ethnicity in a cohort of sixteen, I became increasingly aware of the cultural assumptions embedded in the frameworks we were taught –

and began questioning their transferability to non-Western contexts. It oriented me toward research that could centre voices and experiences that existing frameworks may not adequately capture – a commitment informed by broader efforts to decolonise educational psychology research and practice (Henrich et al., 2010). These experiences, while different in nature from those of Generation 1.25 students, sensitised me to what it feels like to navigate educational environments that may not fully recognise or know how to accommodate you.

While working as a teaching assistant in a secondary school, I witnessed a Year 9 refugee student who spoke no English – placed in a mainstream classroom with no structured support – sitting at the back each day looking like he was about to cry, relying on peers to translate when they felt like it. The school had no guidelines, no roadmap, no system to accommodate him. Later, as a therapeutic coordinator in a primary school, a class teacher asked me to speak with a reception-aged boy from China who had been crying daily. The school – caring but without a shared language – could not work out why. Because I speak Cantonese and Mandarin, I could ask him directly: he needed the bathroom but did not know how to ask. Through our shared language over the rest of that year, I came to know a lively, talkative boy entirely different from the quiet, withdrawn child that other staff in the school experienced. That event crystallised my interest: how much of this child's real self was locked in a language no one around him shared – entirely inaccessible, unable to be expressed outwards – and how a single relational connection based on a shared language can unlock it.

I focus on Generation 1.25 specifically because I have always been drawn to adolescence as a developmental period – the identity formation, the testing of boundaries, the renegotiation of self in relation to others. My psychodynamically oriented training in developmental and educational psychology led me to wonder what happens when migration disrupts that

developmental work, and whether Akhtar's (1995) concept of a third individuation could offer language for what these young people experience. At the same time, I wanted to understand participants' own meaning-making rather than impose a theoretical lens from the outset. This is what drew me to IPA as a methodology that could honour the phenomenological texture of their experiences while allowing space for interpretive dialogue with psychodynamic ideas in the discussion. My linguistic background also shaped this research in ways that go beyond general rapport: three of my five participants speak Cantonese, and a close family member is attending the same Hong Kong school where two of the participants studied previously. These connections and their implications for the research process are discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

1.9 Research Aims and Contribution

The significance of school belonging as the framing construct for this study became clear through the scoping review presented in Chapter 2, where themes of acceptance, connection, and exclusion surfaced repeatedly across the empirical literature but were rarely theorised explicitly. As Pinson and Arnot (2007) argue, how we support refugee children in education "tells us how inclusive and supportive the UK education system really is" and fundamentally "how we define education and its role in society" (p. 405). Generation 1.25 students sit at a critical intersection of the EP's professional remit. Their late arrival places them at heightened risk of having special educational needs misidentified or overlooked, as language acquisition difficulties can mask – or be mistaken for – learning disabilities. They are disproportionately exposed to post-migration stressors that affect mental health and readiness to learn, and schools often lack frameworks to distinguish between the effects of trauma, acculturation, and developmental need. EPs are uniquely positioned to support schools in navigating these complexities – through culturally responsive assessment (BPS, 2019; HCPC, 2015), consultation with school staff, and advocacy

for approaches that recognise individual progress rather than measuring these students solely against attainment benchmarks designed for settled peers. Understanding how Generation 1.25 students experience belonging is therefore not only an academic question but a practical one for EP service delivery.

With these considerations in mind, this study aims to address the identified gaps by exploring how Generation 1.25 INAs experience and develop a sense of school belonging in UK secondary schools. Employing IPA and lifeline grid technique, the research seeks to amplify the voices of young people who moved to the UK between ages 13–17. It is guided by one primary question and three secondary questions: How do Generation 1.25 students experience and develop school belonging? How do they navigate the dual challenges of adolescent development and cultural adaptation? What factors do they identify as supporting or hindering their sense of belonging? And how do their pre-migration experiences influence their process of developing school belonging? The findings carry implications for Educational Psychology practice at multiple levels: supporting EPs in consultation with schools about how relational conditions for belonging can be created; offering alternative assessment approaches that move beyond standardised belonging measures; informing how language support is understood and provided; and deepening understanding of the role of family configuration and home-school communication in belonging trajectories.

1.10 Chapter Conclusion and Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has set out the context that informed this study – the demographic realities of migration in England, the particular challenges young people who arrive during adolescence face, and why school belonging matters for this group. The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents a scoping review of the existing literature on school belonging for

INA young people, identifying the evidence base and the gaps that this study addresses. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, including the rationale for IPA and lifeline grid technique, the recruitment and data collection process, and a fuller reflexive account of my positionality as a practitioner-researcher. Chapter 4 presents the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) for each of the five participants, offering individual portraits of their school belonging journeys. Chapter 5 draws these together into Group Experiential Themes (GETs) that capture the shared and divergent patterns across participants. Chapter 6 discusses the findings in dialogue with existing literature and theory – including psychodynamic and transcultural perspectives – before considering implications for Educational Psychology practice, limitations, and directions for future research. Finally, Chapter 7 offers concluding reflections on the research process, including what it meant to occupy an insider-outsider position and the tensions between psychodynamic and phenomenological orientations that ran through the work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on migrant young people's experiences of schooling in the UK. The review has two initial aims: first, to synthesise empirical research on how migrant students experience UK schools, and second, to identify what is known – and what remains underexplored – about this population in the UK context. Themes of acceptance, peer connection, and feeling included surfaced consistently across the reviewed studies but were rarely named or theorised as belonging. I therefore turn to the school belonging literature to provide a framework for understanding these experiences. Towards the end of the chapter, an overview of the theoretical and empirical foundations of school belonging is provided and articulates how the gaps identified across both bodies of literature inform this study's focus on Generation 1.25 INA.

A scoping review methodology was used to identify and synthesise relevant literature. Scoping reviews are suited to emerging fields where the aim is to map available evidence rather than answer a narrowly defined question (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Unlike systematic reviews that focus on evaluating intervention effectiveness using strict criteria, scoping reviews allow for diverse study designs and methodological approaches (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). Given that research on migrant students' school experiences spans varied populations, settings, and methodological traditions, a scoping approach was most appropriate for capturing the breadth of relevant work while maintaining rigour. I followed Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage framework: (1) identifying the review question; (2) identifying relevant studies

through systematic database searching; (3) selecting studies based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria; (4) charting the data; and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting results. The specific procedures at each stage are detailed in Section 2.2.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 2.2 outlines the scoping review methodology, including search strategy, databases consulted, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the screening process. Section 2.3 presents descriptive information about the eleven studies identified before sections 2.4-2.10 offer a thematic synthesis organised around key themes identified across the literature, with section 2.11 summarising the key findings. Section 2.12 examines the theoretical and empirical foundations of school belonging – the construct that best captured the patterns apparent across the review – including how it has been defined and measured, its significance for student outcomes, and its application to migrant and minority populations. Section 2.13 identifies the gap this study addresses. Section 2.14 summarises key points and articulates how the gaps identified inform the research questions and approach to the research.

2.2 Scoping Review Methodology

The scoping review was guided by two review questions (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005):

1. What are the experiences of migrant young people in UK secondary schools
2. What factors shape their sense of school belonging?

Systematic searches were conducted across two electronic databases: PsycINFO, which covers psychological and behavioural research, and ERIC, which covers educational research. Together, these databases span the two disciplines most relevant to this study's focus on migrant young people's school experiences. One limitation of the review is noted:

EThOS was intended as an additional source for doctoral theses but was unavailable during the search period, meaning relevant theses may have been missed. This was partially mitigated by expert consultation via supervisors, through which one relevant thesis (O'Shea, 2018) was identified and is drawn on in the discussion rather than included in the review.

The search strategy was developed iteratively. Initial scoping searches were run using broad terms to establish the volume and general scope of the field, before narrower, more refined searches were conducted. Search terms were piloted across both databases and adjusted where initial results suggested gaps or irrelevant returns – for instance, geographic terms were moved to abstract-only searching after full-text searching produced a large number of results with only incidental UK references. The final search strategy was reviewed in supervision to ensure it was sufficiently comprehensive and aligned with the study's research questions.

The search strategy combined terms relating to migration status (migrant*, immigrant*, refugee*, 'new arrival*'), educational context (school*, education*), developmental stage (adolescen*, 'secondary school', teen*, youth*), and geographic location ('United Kingdom', UK, England, Britain, Scotland). Boolean operators combined search terms, truncation captured variant word endings, and geographic terms were limited to abstracts to improve precision. Searches were restricted to English-language publications from 2015 to 2026. This date range prioritises contemporary research that speaks to the current educational landscape, rather than one that may have shifted substantially in its policies, demographics, and practices. The year 2015 also marks a point at which the UK context for migrant young people changed notably – the Prevent duty became a statutory requirement for schools, the European Migration Crisis brought increased public attention to migration, and the discourse surrounding the 2016 Brexit referendum reshaped conversations about migration in schools and communities.

I included studies if they: (a) reported empirical research on migrant or refugee students' experiences of school; (b) were conducted in the United Kingdom; (c) focused on adolescents in secondary school; (d) were peer-reviewed journal articles or doctoral theses; (e) were published in English; and (f) captured students' own perspectives, whether through direct participation in interviews, focus groups, or other data collection methods, or through ethnographic observation of their experiences. I excluded studies if they focused exclusively on adult populations, examined educational outcomes without attending to students' lived experiences, were conducted outside the UK, focused primarily on health or mental health services rather than school experiences, or presented only staff or parent perspectives (Appendix A).

Formal quality appraisal using a standardised tool was not undertaken, consistent with scoping review methodology which prioritises breadth and mapping over evaluative functions (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The diversity of methodologies across the included studies is acknowledged as a feature of the field rather than a limitation; as Lester and O'Reilly (2021) and Reynolds et al. (2011) note, quality in qualitative research is better understood in relation to the rigour of the research process and the credibility of the findings it produces.

The screening process followed PRISMA guidelines (Appendix B). Initial database searches yielded 141 records (PsycINFO: $n = 80$; ERIC: $n = 61$). After removing duplicates and non-empirical sources, titles and abstracts were screened against the inclusion criteria, then assessed full-text articles for eligibility. After removing duplicates and non-empirical sources, I screened titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria, then assessed full-text articles for eligibility, resulting in eleven studies in the final review. These studies used qualitative data collection approaches – including semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observation, participatory methods, and creative methods such as dance – and were analysed using a range of

approaches including IPA, reflexive thematic analysis, and ethnographic analysis. Collectively, they centred the experiences of migrant young people from diverse backgrounds, including refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants from Eastern Europe and beyond.

Additional studies relevant to the broader argument of this chapter were identified through citation tracking and supervisor recommendation (Cartmell & Bond, 2015; O'Shea, 2018) – a departure from the database search strategy that Arksey and O'Malley (2005) recognise as a legitimate means of identifying studies within scoping reviews. These are not included in the scoping review but are drawn on in later sections where they inform the discussion of school belonging.

2.3 Migrant Young People's Experiences of Secondary School in the UK

Table 1 summarises the eleven studies included in the review. All eleven used qualitative approaches, but they differed in who they studied and how – from single case studies using extended ethnographic observation (Sharples, 2017) to interview-based studies with larger samples of up to 71 students (Tereshchenko, 2019). Five focused on refugee or asylum-seeking young people (Bulsara et al., 2025; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Hughes, 2021; Câmara, 2024, 2025; Sobitan, 2022), three on Eastern European migrant students (Moskal, 2016; Sharples, 2017; Tereshchenko, 2019), and two on mixed migrant populations (Evans & Liu, 2018; Ritchie & Gaultier, 2020). Six studies were conducted in England and one in Scotland. Of these, Sobitan (2022) was the most directly focused on school belonging; her findings are drawn on throughout the synthesis rather than treated in a single section. The synthesis that follows is organised thematically.

Table 1 *Literature Review Studies*

Study	Population	Location	Participants	Data Collection	Analysis
Moskal (2016)	Polish children aged 5–17	Scotland (6 schools)	41 children, 24 parents, 18 teachers	Interviews, ethnographic observation	Ethnographic analysis
Sharples (2017)	Ethiopian student, aged 14	London secondary academy	1 (case study)	Ethnographic observation, interviews	Linguistic ethnographic analysis
Evans & Liu (2018)	Newly-arrived migrant children	East of England	37 pupil interviews across 4 schools	Interviews	Inductive thematic analysis
Tereshchenko (2019)	Eastern European students aged 12–18	East of England & London (4 schools)	71 students, 22 teachers	Semi-structured interviews	Discourse/Thematic analysis (critical race theory)
Fuller & Hayes (2020)	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors aged 18–19 (entered UK aged 13–17)	England	6 unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors	Semi-structured interviews	IPA
Ritchie & Gaulter (2020)	Migrant pupils	South East England	13 female migrant students aged 11–15.	Dance intervention, interviews	Qualitative thematic analysis

Hughes (2021)	Recently-arrived migrant students	London secondary academy	Fluctuating (5–20 students in EAL classroom)	Ethnographic observation, interviews	Ethnographic analysis
Sobitan (2022)	Secondary students with refugee backgrounds	North East England	7 participants aged 11-16	Semi-structured interviews	IPA
Câmara (2024)	Refugee families	South England secondary school	8 young people, 3 mothers	Ethnographic observation, interviews	Ethnographic analysis
Câmara (2025)	Refugee young people	South England	Same cohort as 2024	Ethnographic observation, interviews	Ethnographic/relational ethics analysis
Bulsara et al. (2025)	Refugee adolescents aged 18–24	England	3 adolescents, 6 key informants	Semi-structured interviews	Reflective thematic analysis

2.4 Language as Both Barrier and Bridge

Language was the most prominent factor shaping migrant students' school experiences across the eleven studies. It did not operate in a single direction but was instead multi-facted – English functioned simultaneously as a barrier to immediate participation, a marker of difference that positioned students as outsiders, and a source of hope tied to future opportunity.

The barrier was felt most acutely in the early stages of settlement. Students across multiple studies described the isolation that came with not being able to communicate with peers or follow classroom activity (Evans & Liu, 2018; Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Moskal, 2016). This was not limited to formal academic language. Indeed, Fuller and Hayes (2020) found that their participants – unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors – struggled particularly with the informal speech patterns and slang used by British students, meaning that language barriers extended into the social realm in ways that schools may not always recognise. The experience was compounded when schools responded to linguistic difference primarily through a deficit lens. Moskal (2016) found that assessment of newly-arrived Polish students in Scotland centred almost entirely on English language ability, with teachers often failing to recognise students' other competencies or their multilingual skills. Tereshchenko (2019) took this further, suggesting that the very category of “English as an Additional Language” (EAL) constitutes a form of othering – positioning students on what she termed a “native-speaker-versus-other” binary that reduced complex multilingual identities to a single axis of deficit.

This deficit framing intersected with broader questions of identity and social positioning. Tereshchenko (2019), drawing on critical race theory, found Eastern European students in her study experienced what she called “marginal whiteness” – their white appearance offered some

social privilege, yet their accents and languages marked them as outsiders. Language, in other words, was not just a practical barrier but a site where belonging was negotiated and, in some cases, denied. Evans and Liu (2018) captured a related dynamic in their concept of 'linguistic enclosure' – the way students' language use was compartmentalised into separate domains governed by external authorities. Parents imposed rules about using the home language at home and English at school, schools confined home language use to outside the classroom, and peer groups created their own linguistic boundaries. Students were left maintaining what Evans and Liu (2018) termed “parallel identities”, with little room to integrate their languages across contexts. Where more intercultural perspectives were fostered, however, EAL students could develop “simultaneous membership” of home and school cultures – though such opportunities were not consistently available.

Despite these barriers, English language learning also carried significant aspirational weight. Fuller and Hayes (2020) found that their participants – unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors – viewed English proficiency as essential for achieving their goals, linking it explicitly to university access and future careers. Moskal (2016) documented similar aspirations among Polish families, who saw English as the gateway to educational and economic opportunity in the UK. Yet this instrumental view of English sometimes came at a cost to heritage language maintenance. Tereshchenko (2019) noted that parents' emphasis on English proficiency often occurred at the expense of literacy in the home language, potentially affecting students' cultural connections and sense of identity over time.

2.5 Peer Relationships and Social Connection

Peer relationships served multiple functions for migrant students across the studies – as sources of emotional support, as guides to navigating unfamiliar environments, as language learning partners, and as bridges to the wider school community. Where these relationships formed, they could be transformative; where they did not, the resulting isolation was a significant barrier to wellbeing.

The value of shared background emerged strongly. Students who found peers with similar linguistic, cultural, or religious experiences reported feeling safer and more understood within the school environment (Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Sobitan, 2022). Fuller and Hayes (2020) found that unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors actively sought friendships with other English language learners, who they found easier to communicate with than native speakers – these relationships provided both practical support for language learning and emotional grounding during resettlement. Sobitan (2022) similarly found that having peers with shared backgrounds enabled refugee students to form supportive subgroups within the larger school community, where experiences that differed from those of the majority population could be discussed openly. One participant in Sobitan's study described how peers' respect for her religious beliefs – even when they did not share them – contributed to her sense of safety at school.

Yet shared background did not automatically translate to peer support. Sobitan (2022), building on Candappa and Egharevba (2002), found that some refugee students reported being rejected by peers from similar backgrounds – possibly because association with other refugees risked undermining whatever social position they had managed to establish. This finding complicates a straightforward narrative about shared identity as protective – the social dynamics within and between migrant communities in schools are more layered than they might appear.

Structured activities offered one way around the barriers to peer connection that language and unfamiliarity created. Ritchie and Gaulter's (2020) dance intervention – a six-week hip-hop programme for migrant pupils – demonstrated how shared physical activity could function as a non-verbal means of connection that transcended linguistic barriers. Participants reported that the relationships they formed through dance extended beyond the sessions themselves, continuing during lunch breaks and journeys home. Staff observed students growing in confidence and visibility around the school more generally. The intervention created conditions where students felt comfortable making mistakes in front of others – suggesting a level of acceptance and safety that they may not have experienced in typical classroom settings. This finding points toward the potential of creative, structured approaches to peer connection, particularly in the early stages of settlement when language barriers are at their most acute.

The cost of not forming peer connections was documented across the studies. Moskal (2016) and Evans and Liu (2018) both found that students who lacked English proficiency experienced significant loneliness, particularly in the first months of schooling. This isolation affected not just social wellbeing but students' broader sense of themselves within the school. Without peer relationships, the school remained a place students attended rather than one they felt part of.

2.6 Identity Navigation and Cultural Belonging

The studies highlighted the complex identity work that migrant students engaged in as they moved between their heritage cultures and the expectations of UK schools. This was not

simply a matter of adapting to new norms – it involved active negotiation of who they were, who others perceived them to be, and who they were becoming, with a range of agentic possibilities.

A key finding across the studies was that migrant students' difficulties could not be reduced to language barriers alone. Sharples (2017), drawing on the sociolinguistic concept of “trajectory”, demonstrated this through a case study of an Ethiopian student in a London secondary school. This student’s challenges stemmed more from mismatches between educational culture than from limited capacity for learning. His expectations of how classrooms should function – shaped by his schooling in Ethiopia – conflicted with the behavioural norms of his London classroom. His teachers did not doubt his effort; they described him as enthusiastic and diligent. What they misread was his conduct, interpreting the ways he sought attention and recognition as demanding rather than as the behaviour of a competent student following a different set of rules. This finding illustrates how educational identities formed in one context do not transfer straightforwardly to another, and how schools' inability to recognise this can produce deficit readings of students who are, in fact, drawing on well-developed educational competencies.

Evans and Liu (2018) captured a related process through their concept of “identity simulation” – the way newly-arrived students explored and tried out new cultural identities through language learning. For migrant students, this process carried higher stakes than for their settled peers, because it intersected with the real and ongoing need to adapt their identities as they moved between home and school cultures. The process was not one of straightforward assimilation – students were simultaneously maintaining heritage identities and experimenting with new ones, often with limited agency over how these identities were perceived by others.

Experiences of racism and othering added a further layer of complexity. Tereshchenko's (2019) Eastern European participants, occupied a position of “marginal whiteness” where their appearance offered some privilege but their linguistic and cultural difference marked them as outsiders. These students described encountering class-inflected stereotypes – associations with heavy drinking, aggression, and low-skilled labour – from both white British peers and more settled minority ethnic groups, which affected how they saw themselves and were seen within the school. Sobitan (2022) found a related dynamic – her refugee participants reported that racial bullying and being told to “go back to your country” created feelings of separation that actively undermined belonging. Conversely, when cultural and religious identities were respected and affirmed within the school – even by peers who did not share those identities – participants described feeling safer and more included. What mattered, across both studies, was not whether cultural difference existed but how the school environment responded to it.

2.7 Teacher Relationships and Institutional Support

The quality of teacher relationships emerged across the studies as an important – and highly variable – factor in migrant students' school experiences. Where teachers offered genuine encouragement, showed interest in students as individuals, and maintained orderly classroom environments, this contributed to feelings of safety, motivation, and connection; where relationships were absent, hostile, or shaped by stereotyped assumptions, their effects could be disproportionately damaging.

Positive teacher relationships operated through two main channels. The first was interpersonal warmth – students valued teachers who provided encouragement, showed genuine interest, and made them feel welcome (Fuller & Hayes, 2020; Sobitan, 2022). The second was

effective classroom management. Sobitan (2022) found that refugee students' sense of safety depended not just on how teachers treated them individually but on whether the classroom environment was orderly enough to allow them to learn without distraction. Both dimensions mattered, and the absence of either could undermine belonging. One participant in Sobitan's study described how a single teacher's apparent hostility created anxiety that affected his broader sense of safety at school – illustrating how one difficult relationship can have outsized effects for students already navigating unfamiliarity.

Bulsara et al. (2025) highlighted the particular importance of mentoring relationships for refugee adolescents, especially those without family support in the UK. Educational mentors provided encouragement and guidance that sustained academic motivation when other sources of support were absent. This compensatory function suggests that for some migrant students, individual teacher or mentor relationships may carry a weight that schools do not always recognise – standing in, at least partially, for the support networks that migration has disrupted.

However, teacher relationships could also reinforce the very stereotypes and deficit framings that shaped students' broader experiences of school. Tereshchenko's (2019) participants – Eastern European students aged 12-18 – reported that teachers assumed their parents worked in construction and directed them toward similar career pathways. Tereshchenko (2019) drew on critical race theory and interpreted this as reflecting a wider pattern in which Eastern European migrants are positioned through class-inflected stereotypes that associate them with low-skilled manual labour. A framing that, even when superficially positive (“hard workers”), narrows how teachers perceive students' potential. She argued that teachers need to be better prepared to recognise forms of covert, non-colour-based racism and to challenge the stereotyping that may guide their own practice. Moskal (2016) raised related concerns about gaps in teacher training,

finding that teachers in her study expressed worry about the lack of appropriate in-service training for supporting students who did not speak English as their first language. Some schools had developed specific language support programmes; others relied on teachers' abilities to improvise or on Polish-speaking classroom assistants. This variability meant that students' experiences depended heavily on which school they attended and which teachers they encountered.

What emerged across these studies was that teacher relationships are not simply a matter of individual warmth or hostility – they are shaped by the institutional context in which teachers operate, the training they receive, and the wider cultural assumptions they bring into the classroom. For migrant students, who may already be navigating unfamiliar systems and contending with stereotyped perceptions, the quality of these relationships then carries heightened weight.

2.8 Institutional and Policy Barriers

Migrant students' school experiences were not shaped only by interpersonal relationships – they were also structured by broader policy contexts and institutional arrangements that created tensions between competing agendas.

Hughes (2021), in her ethnographic study of an EAL classroom in a London academy, provided the most detailed account of these tensions. She found that recently-arrived migrant students and their teachers were caught between contradictory policy demands: education and child-centred policies aimed at inclusion existed alongside immigration and anti-terrorism policies that encouraged exclusionary practices. Most notably, the Prevent duty placed teachers

in a contradictory position: legally required to promote “British Values” – a term criticised for being vague and poorly defined (Bryan, 2017; Rights Watch, 2016) – while simultaneously monitoring students for signs of radicalisation. In practice, this created an arbitrary dynamic that depended heavily on individual teacher interpretation, positioning teachers as gatekeepers of national belonging. As Hughes (2021) observed, their classrooms included students from multiple religious, national, and ethnic backgrounds – many of whom fitted the stereotypical profile of young people deemed at risk of radicalisation under Prevent. For students, this meant that the classroom intended to support their transition into the school was also a site where their belonging to the national community was implicitly being assessed. Hughes (2021) also found a mismatch between what policies expected and what students needed – while audits demanded measurable attainment, students were often more concerned with learning English, understanding how to navigate the school, processing recent experiences, and feeling safe.

The extent of institutional support available to migrant students varied considerably depending on where they went to school. Moskal (2016) found significant disparities in provision across schools in Scotland – some had developed specific language support programmes, while others, particularly in rural areas, lacked specialised EAL resources and relied on individual teachers' improvisation. This unevenness meant that students' school experiences were shaped as much by the capacity of the specific institution they attended as by migrant students' own backgrounds or abilities.

Câmara (2024) situated these local variations within a wider policy gap. Unlike countries such as Sweden, where refugee children's education is actively addressed in national policy, England has given limited attention to refugee education at the policy level. This invisibility, she argued, makes it harder for schools to access appropriate resources and contributes to deficit-

based framings of refugee learners – when there is no policy framework recognising what migrant students bring, schools default to focusing on what they lack.

2.9 Stability, Security, and Academic Motivation

For refugee and asylum-seeking young people in particular, stability and security shaped how far they could engage with education – and education, in turn, represented a route to the stability they sought. Education held particular significance for this group – not just as a route to qualifications but as a means of building a secure future in a context where much else remained uncertain. Yet the very instability that made education so important also undermined students' capacity to engage with it.

Across the studies, refugee students described academic motivation driven by concrete aspirations. Participants in both Bulsara et al. (2025) and Fuller and Hayes (2020) identified some form of professional training – e.g., police officer, dentist, computer scientist – and linked these explicitly to education as the pathway to stability and security in the UK. Fuller and Hayes (2020) found that unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors viewed academic attainment as leading to “a better life”, while Bulsara et al. (2025) found that their participants' conviction that studying would help them realise their aspirations was a primary motivating force. One participant in Bulsara et al. (2025)'s study expressed particular appreciation for the freedom to pursue her goals in the UK, contrasting this with gender-based constraints she had experienced in her country of origin.

However, experiences of instability repeatedly disrupted this motivation. The asylum process was a particularly significant source of stress. Fuller and Hayes (2020) found that uncertainty about whether they would be permitted to remain in the UK directly affected

participants' ability to engage with education – one participant described the stress of not knowing whether his application would be accepted, and questioned why he should learn at all if he might be sent back. Sobitan (2022) similarly found that some refugee participants expressed fear about deportation, which affected their general sense of safety and, by extension, their capacity to feel secure at school. The disruption was not always about the asylum process itself – Bulsara et al. (2025) found that unexpected dispersal to new locations and isolation during the COVID pandemic compromised students' engagement. One participant in their study became profoundly demotivated and dropped out of education after a friend relocated to a different city, highlighting how disruption to support networks can have cascading effects.

What was notable across these studies was the variation in how individual students responded to these pressures. Fuller and Hayes (2020) found that while some participants experienced education as a positive distraction from asylum-related stress, others found that their anxiety about the process made it impossible to concentrate. Sobitan (2022) identified a sense of agency among some refugee participants – the belief that they could influence their circumstances through their own efforts – that appeared to support resilience and sustained engagement despite the challenges they faced. These individual differences are worth noting because they resist any single narrative about how instability affects migrant students – the relationship between external circumstances and educational engagement is mediated by personal resources and coping strategies that vary from student to student.

2.10 Alternative Approaches to Fostering Belonging

While most of the studies in this review documented the barriers migrant students face, a smaller number pointed toward approaches that actively fostered connection and belonging.

What these approaches shared was a move away from deficit-based framings – rather than focusing on what migrant students lacked, they worked with what students brought.

Ritchie and Gaulter's (2020) six-week hip-hop dance programme for migrant pupils offered one such approach. The intervention was designed around the principle that shared physical activity could create a common ground that did not depend on English language proficiency. Participation gave students a way to engage meaningfully with school life and with one another through a non-verbal medium – and the connections formed in these sessions carried over into other parts of the school day. Staff observed students growing in confidence beyond the dance sessions, becoming more visible and more engaged around the school generally. What made the intervention effective, Ritchie and Gaulter (2020) argued, was not the dance itself but the conditions it created: a space where mistakes were accepted, effort was valued, and students could participate as equals regardless of their language level. For students in the early stages of settlement, when language barriers are at their most acute and the risk of isolation highest, this kind of structured, non-verbal entry point into the school community may be particularly valuable.

Câmara (2024, 2025) proposed a different but complementary shift – from deficit-based to asset-based approaches when working with refugee families. Drawing on the funds of knowledge framework (Moll et al., 1992), she argued that refugee students and their families possess valuable knowledge, skills, and practices that schools routinely fail to recognise or build upon. Rather than viewing migrant students primarily in terms of what they lack – English proficiency, familiarity with UK school systems – an asset-based approach identifies existing competencies and uses them as a foundation for learning and for strengthening home-school partnerships.

Câmara (2025) took this further through what she termed a relational ethics – arguing that it is not enough to change how we think about refugee young people; we also need to change how we work with them. Drawing on anticolonial perspectives, she argued for an approach to research that goes beyond procedural compliance – beyond ethics committee approval – to attend to the ongoing power dynamics between researcher and participant. In practice, this meant building trust over time, involving participants in decisions about how their stories were represented, and working against the extractive tendencies of research that takes from marginalised communities without meaningful return. While Câmara (2024, 2025) developed this argument in the context of research methodology, the principles she articulated apply equally to educational practice: if schools are to support migrant students' belonging, they need to build genuine relationships with students and families rather than simply delivering standardised interventions. This argument also informed the methodological choices in the present study, including the use of two-phase interviews that included member checking, designed to give participants ongoing input into how their experiences were understood and represented (see Chapter 3).

These approaches are modest in scope – a six-week dance programme, a conceptual reframing of how schools understand and support refugee families – but they point in a shared direction. Both move away from asking what migrant students need to fix about themselves and toward asking what schools can do differently to create conditions where belonging becomes possible.

2.11 Summary

Across the eleven studies reviewed, migrant young people were navigating far more than academic adjustment. Language operated simultaneously as a barrier, a marker of difference, and a source of aspiration, while peer relationships – crucial for connection – were difficult to form across linguistic boundaries. INA students engaged in ongoing identity work complicated by racism, stereotyping, and deficit framing. Teacher relationships varied considerably, shaped not only by individual disposition but by training, institutional capacity, and cultural assumptions. For refugee and asylum-seeking students, external instability – the asylum process, dispersal, housing uncertainty – repeatedly disrupted the educational engagement they saw as their route to security.

Apparent through these findings, though not always named as such, were questions of belonging: whether students felt accepted, whether they had a place within the school community, whether the school felt like somewhere they were part of or somewhere they simply attended. These questions surfaced across the studies but were rarely theorised explicitly. The next section turns to the construct of school belonging to provide a framework for understanding the patterns that emerged from this review.

2.12 School Belonging: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations

The review in the preceding section found that themes of acceptance, peer connection, and feeling excluded repeatedly surfaced across the studies – but were rarely named or theorised as belonging. I turn here to the school belonging literature to provide a framework for understanding those patterns.

The theoretical foundation for school belonging lies in Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis, which proposes that human beings possess a fundamental drive to

form and maintain lasting, positive interpersonal relationships. Their comprehensive review established that satisfying this drive requires two conditions: frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with others, and interactions occurring within a temporally stable framework of mutual concern. When this need is not met, the consequences are significant – Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that the loss or threat of social bonds is a primary source of emotional distress, and that social exclusion and failing to feel accepted can precipitate anxiety and depression. The hypothesis proposes that this need is innately prepared and nearly universal, operating across cultures regardless of individual differences in intensity or expression.

Goodenow (1993) operationalised belonging within educational contexts through the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale. She conceptualised school belonging as arising from the interaction between the individual and their school environment – not as a purely intrapsychic phenomenon, nor entirely a function of the school context. The scale assesses students' perceptions of acceptance, respect, inclusion in activities, and relationships with teachers and peers. Goodenow (1993) found that belonging was particularly at risk for newcomers and for students whose backgrounds differed markedly from their peers – with ethnic majority membership predicting higher belonging, highlighting the contextual nature of the construct. Her studies also demonstrated significant associations between belonging and motivation, effort, attendance, and achievement.

Allen et al.'s (2016) meta-analysis across 51 studies extended this evidence base, identifying ten factors influencing school belonging during adolescence, of which teacher support and positive personal characteristics were the strongest predictors. The meta-analysis demonstrated that school belonging is positively associated with academic motivation, reduced absenteeism, improved school completion rates, and fewer incidents of misconduct. In relation to

psychosocial outcomes, school belonging has been associated with higher levels of happiness, psychological functioning, self-esteem, and self-identity, whilst being inversely related to bullying, disruptive behaviour, emotional distress, and risk-taking behaviours.

Belonging among migrant and minority populations has received some direct empirical attention, though not much in the UK. Biggart, O'Hare, and Connolly (2013) conducted a UK survey investigating school belonging among ethnic minority children (N = 711), finding that European migrant pupils had lower belonging, felt more excluded, and were less likely to participate in extracurricular school life compared to their settled peers. While the study focused on primary-aged children in Northern Ireland, the findings matter here because it establishes quantitative evidence of a belonging gap that the qualitative studies in this chapter help to explain.

Cartmell and Bond (2015) explored what belonging actually means for migrant students in practice. Interviewing five INA pupils attending UK secondary schools, they found that belonging involves complex interactions between child-related factors – positive emotions, personal development, being understood as a person – and environmental factors such as the support and attitudes of others and respect for cultural and religious differences. Their analysis emphasised that promoting belonging requires attending to students' holistic needs, including supporting English language development whilst valuing home languages.

Of the eleven studies reviewed, Sobitan (2022) engaged most directly with school belonging, identifying four superordinate themes – agency, participation, safety, and separation – suggesting that belonging for refugee students is not a fixed state but a dynamic negotiation. Belonging was enhanced when students could contribute to their school community rather than

simply receive support, and undermined when racial bullying positioned them as visible outsiders. Her findings reinforce the argument that belonging is shaped by forces operating at relational, institutional, and structural levels.

2.13 The Gap: Generation 1.25 and School Belonging

This scoping review identified rich insights into the barriers and resources that shape migrant young people's school experiences, and the school belonging literature provides a framework for understanding the patterns of acceptance, connection, and exclusion that surfaced across those studies. However, gaps remain that warrant focused investigation.

First, while the reviewed studies included diverse migrant populations, few specifically examined adolescents who arrive during secondary school with substantial prior educational and cultural formation in their countries of origin. Rumbaut's (2004) decimal generation framework provides theoretical justification for distinguishing this group. Within this classification, “Generation 1.25” encompasses individuals who arrive during adolescence (ages 13–17) whose parents were born outside the host country – a group closest to first-generation migrants, as most of their development occurs before arrival. Rumbaut (2004) found that the 1.25 generation tends to have poorer educational and occupational outcomes compared to other generational cohorts, including those who arrive as adults, a pattern persisting even among typically high-achieving immigrant groups. This suggests that challenges stem not simply from migration itself but from the complexity of adjusting to a new educational system during adolescence, when academic demands are high and identity formation is at its most intense.

Second, while the studies reviewed in this chapter documented the importance of belonging for wellbeing and engagement, only Sobitan (2022) explicitly employed a school

belonging framework, and her focus was on refugee students broadly rather than on the particular experiences of those who arrive during adolescence. Cartmell and Bond (2015) examined belonging among INA pupils but focused on students in their first twelve months of settlement, capturing early arrival experiences rather than belonging development over time. O'Shea (2018), in the closest comparator study to this one, explored school belonging among Eastern European migrant students in UK secondary schools using IPA – finding that participant's sense of belonging generally improved over a two-to-three-year window. However, her sample was limited to one ethnic group (Eastern European), did not use Rumbaut's generational framework to distinguish between students who arrived at different developmental stages, and captured a relatively short timeframe of adaptation. The present study differs in its focus on Generation 1.25 specifically, its inclusion of migrant students from diverse backgrounds, and its attention to how belonging develops over time rather than at a single point.

Third, much existing research focuses on what is done to or for migrant students rather than centring their own voices and meaning-making. Temple and Moran (2006) argue that quantifying refugee students' experiences positions them as passive subjects, potentially contributing to educational inequalities because their voices do not influence research outcomes. The absence of research capturing students' own narratives about developing school belonging is significant given that belonging is inherently a subjective experience – it cannot be fully understood from the outside.

Fourth, while the reviewed studies documented significant challenges for migrant young people in UK secondary schools, they offered limited guidance for practitioners working directly with this population. This was confirmed in initial consultations I completed with the ACAA, where a gap was identified in their services for secondary school-aged refugees. While extensive

support existed for younger children and adults, adolescent refugees – who must simultaneously manage puberty, cultural transition, identity formation, and often trauma from forced displacement (Block et al., 2014) – were underserved by existing provision. This reinforced the need for research that attends specifically to this age group.

The study that follows addresses these gaps, using a methodology designed to centre the voices of Generation 1.25 young people themselves.

2.14 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter began by reviewing eleven UK-based empirical studies on migrant young people's school experiences, finding that themes of acceptance, connection, and exclusion surfaced consistently but were rarely theorised as belonging. Turning to the school belonging literature, I found a construct – grounded in Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis and operationalised by Goodenow (1993) – that captured the patterns identified across the review. The evidence demonstrates that school belonging matters substantially for both academic and psychosocial outcomes (Allen et al., 2016; Goodenow, 1993), and that migrant and minority students face distinct vulnerabilities in developing it (Biggart et al., 2013; Cartmell & Bond, 2015; Sobitan, 2022).

The review also identified a specific gap. While the studies examined diverse migrant populations and documented the significance of language, peer relationships, identity, teacher relationships, institutional structures, and stability for school experiences, none focused specifically on how school belonging develops over time for adolescents who arrive during secondary school – the group Rumbaut (2004) classifies as Generation 1.25. O'Shea (2018)

comes closest but differs in population, framework, and scope. These gaps inform the following research questions:

1. How do Generation 1.25 international new arrivals (ages 13–17) experience and develop a sense of school belonging in UK secondary schools?
2. How do Generation 1.25 students navigate the dual challenges of adolescent development and cultural adaptation in developing school belonging?
3. What factors do Generation 1.25 students identify as supporting or hindering their sense of school belonging?
4. How do Generation 1.25 students' pre-migration experiences influence their process of developing school belonging?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter lays out the research design, including the ontological and epistemological stance underpinning the current study. The chosen methodology – IPA – will be described with its theoretical underpinnings, considering both its strengths and limitations. The process of participant recruitment will also be detailed, followed by the methods of data collection and analysis. Discussions around the validity, transferability, and ethical considerations of the chosen methodology will then conclude the chapter.

Table 2 *Researcher Framework*

Ontological Position	Phenomenological
Epistemological Position	Interpretivist
Theoretical Perspectives	Hermeneutic School Belonging Theory Decimal Generation Framework (Rumbaut, 2004)
Methodology	Qualitative; IPA
Data Collection	Semi-structured Interviews; Member Checking
Participants	5 Generation 1.25 students who moved to England between ages 13-17 years old; have lived in England for 3 years or more

3.2 Research Questions

This study was guided by one primary research question and three secondary research questions, developed in response to the gaps identified in the preceding chapter, where they are stated in full. Briefly, the primary question asks how Generation 1.25 INAs experience and

develop school belonging in secondary schools in the UK, with secondary questions addressing the navigation of adolescent development and cultural adaptation, the factors students identify as supporting or hindering belonging, and the influence of pre-migration experiences.

3.3 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how Generation 1.25 INAs experience and develop a sense of school belonging in UK secondary schools. A qualitative approach was selected as most appropriate for addressing research questions that centre on lived experiences, subjective meanings, and personal narratives (Smith et al., 2009).

The decision to adopt a qualitative approach was further supported by the identified gap in existing literature regarding the voices of Generation 1.25 students themselves. Much of the existing research on migrant students' educational experiences has been conducted from external perspectives, examining outcomes or interventions rather than amplifying students' own understandings of their experiences (Pinson & Arnot, 2007). This study sought to address this gap by positioning participants as experts in their own experiences, privileging their narratives and meaning-making processes.

3.3.1 Retrospective Design.

A retrospective design was employed, with participants in their early adulthood reflecting on their previous secondary school experiences. Temporal distance from the immediate experience of transition allows for deeper reflection and meaning-making – participants who have moved beyond the initial period of adaptation are better positioned to identify patterns and turning points that may not have been apparent at the time. This reflective capacity aligns with

IPA's emphasis on participants' interpretations of their experiences rather than simply descriptions of events (Smith et al., 2009). The retrospective approach also created appropriate emotional distance from what may have been challenging experiences, and ensured sufficient English language proficiency to engage in detailed discussion – a requirement discussed further in section 3.7.2.

3.4 Research Paradigm: Ontology and Epistemology

This study is grounded in a phenomenological ontological position, which holds that experience is real and meaningful, while acknowledging that the meanings people attach to their experiences are constructed through individual interpretation and shaped by social and cultural context (Crotty, 1998). This phenomenological stance privileges individual experience and meaning-making, consistent with IPA's commitment to understanding how participants themselves make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

The epistemological foundation sits within the interpretivist tradition (Schwandt, 2000), drawing on the phenomenological-hermeneutic epistemology that underpins IPA's “double hermeneutic”, discussed in section 3.5.2. Knowledge is understood as co-constructed through this interpretive engagement while remaining grounded in participants' own accounts.

3.5 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a qualitative research approach developed by Jonathan Smith in the mid-1990s, designed to explore how individuals make sense of significant life experiences (Smith et al., 2022). As Smith et al. (2022, p.1) explain, "IPA researchers are especially interested in what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people". This focus on moments of significance - where ordinary experience becomes “an

experience” of importance - makes IPA particularly suited to exploring transitions such as migration during adolescence. IPA draws on three key philosophical traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. These interconnected traditions provide both the theoretical foundation and methodological guidance for the approach, shaping how researchers engage with participants' accounts and construct meaning from them.

3.5.1 Phenomenology.

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of experience and consciousness, concerned with how things appear to individuals in their lived experience. Founded by the philosopher Husserl in the early twentieth century, phenomenology sought to return to "the things themselves" – examining phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness rather than through abstract theorising (Husserl, 1927). Husserl (1927) emphasised the importance of “bracketing” or setting aside prior assumptions to attend fully to the phenomenon under investigation.

Later phenomenologists extended this foundation in directions particularly relevant to IPA. Heidegger (1962) shifted focus from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology to an emphasis on being-in-the-world, highlighting that human existence is always already embedded in context, relationships, and temporal horizons. Merleau-Ponty (1962) further emphasised the embodied nature of experience, arguing that perception and meaning are grounded in our bodily engagement with the world. For this study, phenomenology directs attention to how school belonging was actually lived and experienced by Generation 1.25 students.

3.5.2 Hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics refers to the theory and practice of interpretation, originally developed in relation to biblical and literary texts but subsequently extended to the interpretation of human action and experience. Gadamer's (1960/1990) philosophical hermeneutics emphasised that understanding always involves interpretation, and that interpreters inevitably bring their own perspectives, assumptions, and “horizons of understanding” to the interpretive encounter.

IPA acknowledges this interpretive dimension explicitly. Smith et al. (2022) describe a "double hermeneutic" at work in IPA research: the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of their own experience. This requires the researcher to simultaneously adopt an insider's perspective – seeing what it is like from the participant's view – and a questioning stance that puzzles over what participants are saying.

The hermeneutic tradition also emphasises the "hermeneutic circle" – the iterative movement between parts and whole in interpretation. In IPA, this means moving between individual passages and the overall interview, between single cases and the developing cross-case patterns. For this study, hermeneutics acknowledges that my interpretation is shaped by my own positioning while requiring me to remain grounded in participant's words and meanings.

3.5.3 Idiography.

Idiography refers to a concern with the particular rather than the general, with individual cases rather than population-level patterns. This stands in contrast to nomothetic approaches that seek universal laws or group-level generalisations (Smith et al., 2009). IPA's idiographic commitment manifests in two ways: a focus on detail through thorough, systematic analysis of each case, and a focus on particular people and their particular contexts.

In practice, IPA requires the researcher to engage deeply with each participant's account before moving to identify patterns across cases. This ensures that individual voices are not prematurely subsumed into group-level themes, and that convergences and divergences across participants' experiences are honoured. For this study, idiography meant attending to each participant's unique belonging story before considering what patterns might emerge across the five accounts.

3.6 Rationale for IPA

IPA was selected because its three core commitments – phenomenological attention to lived experience, hermeneutic acknowledgment of interpretation, and idiographic focus on the particular – align closely with this study's aim to understand how individual Generation 1.25 students experienced and made sense of school belonging. Given the diversity within this population and the under-researched nature of the phenomenon in the UK context, IPA's combination of depth, interpretive rigour, and attention to individual voice provides an appropriate framework.

The retrospective design of this study also aligns well with IPA's interest in how people make sense of experiences. Participants were invited not simply to recall events, but to reflect on and interpret their school belonging journey with the benefit of temporal distance. This reflective stance is consistent with IPA's concern for meaning-making and interpretation rather than mere description.

Larkin et al. (2006) describe IPA as occupying a centre-ground between a hermeneutics of empathy – reconstructing experience in its own terms – and a hermeneutics of suspicion, where interpretive work draws on theoretical perspectives from outside (Josselson, 2004). This

balance is particularly relevant to the present study, where Chapters 4 and 5 aim to stay close to participants' own meaning-making, while Chapter 6 draws on psychodynamic frameworks as interpretive lenses. Maintaining this balance requires careful attention to ensure the researcher's interpretive contribution does not overshadow participants' own accounts (Brocki and Wearden, 2006),.

3.6.1 Validity and Quality Criteria.

Assessing quality in qualitative research requires criteria appropriate to its epistemological foundations rather than the application of quantitative standards such as reliability and objectivity (Yardley, 2000). This study adopted Yardley's (2000) four principles for assessing validity in qualitative research, which have been widely endorsed within IPA scholarship (Smith et al., 2009).

Sensitivity to context was demonstrated through attention to the existing literature on school belonging and Generation 1.25 migration, careful consideration of participants' cultural and linguistic contexts, and sensitivity to the power dynamics inherent in the research relationship. The two-interview structure allowed for relationship-building before in-depth exploration, with the second interview functioning as a member checking session in which participants could shape the interpretation of their accounts.

Commitment and rigour were evidenced through thorough engagement with each participant's data, following IPA's systematic analytical procedures. Each transcript was analysed individually and in detail before cross-case analysis proceeded. Regular research supervision provided external scrutiny of developing interpretations, and a reflexive research diary documented my analytical decisions and developing understanding throughout the process.

Transparency and coherence were supported through maintaining a clear audit trail of analytical decisions from initial noting, through theme development, to final group themes. The coherence between the study's philosophical foundations, methodology, and methods has been articulated throughout this chapter. Direct quotations from participants are used extensively in the findings to demonstrate the grounding of interpretations in participants' own words.

Impact and importance will ultimately be judged by readers, though the study's focus on an under-researched population and its aim to inform Educational Psychology practice suggest potential contributions to both knowledge and professional development. Member checking, described in section 3.8, played an additional role in quality assurance by allowing participants to confirm, challenge, or nuance developing interpretations.

3.7 Participants

3.7.1 Selection of participants.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a strategy aligned with IPA's idiographic commitment to recruiting participants who can offer meaningful insight into the phenomenon under investigation (O'Reilly et al., 2025). Snowball sampling was employed as a technique, as described in section 3.7.3. The aim was to recruit a relatively homogeneous group who shared the experience of arriving in UK secondary schools during adolescence and could reflect on their school belonging journeys in depth.

The target sample size was five to eight participants, consistent with recommendations for IPA doctoral research that balances the need for sufficient data to identify patterns across cases while maintaining the depth of analysis required for each individual account (Smith et al., 2009). Five participants were ultimately recruited, falling within this recommended range. This

sample size enabled detailed, systematic engagement with each participant's experience while allowing for meaningful cross-case analysis.

Homogeneity in this study was defined by the shared experience of migrating to the UK during adolescence (ages 13-17) and navigating the UK secondary school system as an INA. Within this shared experience, the sample included diversity in terms of country of origin, gender, age at arrival, and type of school attended, allowing for exploration of both convergence and divergence in participants' experiences of developing school belonging. Although the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 draws on research conducted across the UK, all participants in this study were recruited from and schooled in England.

3.7.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

The inclusion criteria for participation were:

- **Age at interview:** Between 16 and 27 years old
- **Age at arrival:** Arrived in the UK during secondary school years (ages 13-17), aligning with Rumbaut's (2004) definition of Generation 1.25
- **Length of UK residence:** Minimum of three years at the time of interview
- **Language:** Conversational English proficiency sufficient to engage in in-depth interview

The three-year minimum residency requirement served multiple purposes. Research suggests that basic interpersonal communication skills typically develop within one to two years, while cognitive academic language proficiency takes five to seven years to develop fully (Cummins, 2008). The three-year threshold ensured participants had moved beyond initial language acquisition challenges and could articulate their experiences with sufficient fluency,

while also allowing adequate time for meaningful adaptation and reflection on their school belonging journey.

The upper age limit of 27 was established following an ethics amendment (discussed below) to expand the original 16-20 age range. This extension enabled recruitment of participants who could offer more temporally distant retrospective accounts while still meeting the criterion of having arrived post-2015, a period marked by significant shifts in migration patterns following the European Migration Crisis and preceding Brexit.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Arrival in the UK before age 13 or after age 17
- Less than three years' UK residence
- Insufficient English proficiency to participate in an interview without an interpreter

3.7.3 Recruitment Process.

The recruitment process evolved significantly from the original research design in response to practical challenges. The study was initially developed in partnership with the charity ACAA. ACAA had identified a gap in services for secondary school-aged refugees, and the partnership aimed to recruit participants from their networks, potentially capturing experiences of forced migration alongside voluntary migration.

Despite sustained engagement with ACAA over several months, including meetings with staff, distribution of recruitment materials through their networks, and promotion via their social media channels, no participants were recruited through this route. Several factors may have

contributed to this outcome: the specific inclusion criteria may not have matched their service user demographics, and potential participants may have had concerns about discussing their experiences with someone outside the organisation.

In response to these recruitment challenges, two adaptations were made. First, an ethics amendment was submitted and approved to expand the participant age range from 16-20 to 16-27 years. This broadened the potential participant pool while maintaining alignment with the study's focus on Generation 1.25 experiences. Second, recruitment channels were diversified beyond the ACAA partnership to include:

- A recruitment flyer (Appendix C) was circulated through social media and university networks.
- Snowball sampling, where participants were invited to share the study information with others who might meet the criteria.

These adaptations proved successful. Three participants were recruited through social media, after a personal contact shared the study information through his university networks, including group chats and peer contacts. The remaining two participants were recruited through snowball sampling: one participant referred a friend, and another referred his younger brother.

3.7.4 Participant Information.

To add a layer of anonymity, approximate age descriptors are used throughout rather than exact ages – consistent with the measures taken to manage deductive disclosure risk. Ages at arrival are grouped as early teens (13–14), mid-teens (15–17), and late teens (17–19), with ages at interview described as late teens or early 20s. Five participants took part in the study. Table 3

summarises their key demographic characteristics; fuller descriptions of each participant are provided in Chapter 4.

Table 3: *Participants' Overview*

Pseudonym	Gender	Country of Origin	Age at Arrival	Age at Interview	Years in UK	School Type
Daisy	Female	Hong Kong	Late teens	Early 20s	3	Grammar School
Savannah	Female	Bahrain	Mid-teens	Late teens	3	Sixth Form College
Jacob	Male	Hong Kong	Early teens	Late teens	5	Boarding School
Vincent	Male	Hong Kong	Early teens	Early 20s	9	Boarding School
Cassey	Female	India	Mid-teens	Late teens	3	Sixth Form College

The sample comprised three female and two male participants, with countries of origin including Hong Kong (three participants), Bahrain (one), and India (one). Ages at arrival ranged from 13 to 17, representing both younger and older adolescent migration within the Generation 1.25 category. Time in the UK at interview ranged from three to nine years, providing variation in the temporal distance from which participants reflected on their school experiences. All participants had progressed to higher education or employment, suggesting broadly successful educational trajectories, though this also reflects a limitation of the sample.

Notably, three of the five participants shared the researcher's country of origin (Hong Kong). The implications of this shared background for rapport, interpretation, and potential blind spots are addressed in the reflexivity discussion.

3.8 Data Collection

Data were collected through two interviews with each participant, conducted online via Videoconferencing (Microsoft Teams). The first interview incorporated a belonging ladder activity, filling out the lifeline grid, and a semi-structured interview, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The second interview, lasting approximately 45 minutes, was dedicated to member checking, where experiential statements from the initial analysis were shared and discussed with participants. The member checking served a dual function. Firstly, it was confirmatory in that participants were invited to validate, correct, or nuance the themes developed from the first interview, consistent with IPA's commitment to grounding interpretation in participants' own meaning-making (Birt et al., 2016). Secondly, it is also generative, as the process of having their experiences reflected back prompted new reflections and elaborations that meaningfully extended the analysis. The second interview is therefore treated throughout this thesis not merely

as a quality assurance procedure but as a substantive analytical contribution in its own right. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

3.8.1 Lifeline Grid Technique

The lifeline grid (Appendix D) is a visual, participatory technique in which participants map key experiences and turning points along a timeline, producing a graphical record of their subjective journey over time. Adapted from DerSarkissian et al. (2022), it was employed here as both a data collection tool and a means of structuring the interview conversation. The grid consists of two axes: the X-axis represents a timeline from arrival in the UK to the present day, while the Y-axis represents a subjective wellbeing scale ranging from -20 to +20. Participants were invited to plot significant moments, experiences, and turning points in their school belonging journey along this grid, creating a visual representation of their trajectory.

Before completing the lifeline grid, participants engaged with a belonging ladder activity (Appendix E), which served as an initial frame of reference. Participants were asked to rate their sense of school belonging on a scale of 1 to 5 at four time points: in their country of origin before leaving for the UK, upon first arriving in the UK, at the present time, and anticipated five years into the future. This activity oriented participants toward reflecting on how their sense of school belonging had developed and changed over time and provided anchor points for the subsequent interview questions. Where participants gave a belonging ladder rating alongside their lifeline grid, the rating is plotted on the grid's positive scale for comparison: the five ladder rungs are mapped onto the 0 to +20 range, so each rung corresponds to four points.

The lifeline grid was administered digitally to accommodate the online interview format. I first screen-shared the lifeline grid to explain the task, then emailed participants a blank

template. Participants completed the grid digitally and returned it via email. During the interview, the completed grid was screen-shared, remaining visible throughout the conversation, serving as a visual prompt that helped participants narrate their experiences chronologically while highlighting moments of particular significance. This gave participants a degree of control over the interview agenda, as the points they chose to mark guided the subsequent conversation.

3.8.2 Rationale for semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the predominant method of data collection in IPA research, as they facilitate in-depth exploration of lived experience while allowing flexibility to follow unexpected avenues of meaning (Smith et al., 2009). This was deemed particularly appropriate for the current study, where experiences of Generation 1.25 participants were likely to vary considerably depending on individual circumstances, school contexts, and personal meaning-making.

The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, a decision shaped by both practical considerations and participant preference. Online interviewing enabled participation regardless of geographic location, which was important given that participants were recruited nationally. While online formats can present challenges for rapport-building, the two-interviews structure helped mitigate this – the first interview (Appendix F) enabling in-depth exploration through the lifeline grid and interview, and the second allowing for more focused engagement with developing themes (Appendix K). The decision to meet each participant twice was informed by the principle that ethical research with migrant young people requires building trust over time rather than treating data collection as a single extractive encounter. Centring participants' perspectives means involving them in ongoing decisions about how their experiences are

understood and represented (Câmara, 2025). The second interview – member checking – served this function, giving participants the opportunity to confirm, challenge, or develop the themes I had identified from their accounts.

Audio recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Teams' automatic transcription function and then verified by listening back, with errors or omissions rectified to ensure accuracy.

3.8.3 Development of interview schedule

The interview schedule (Appendix F) covered five key areas: initial experiences of arriving at a UK school; relationships with peers and teachers; moments of inclusion or exclusion; navigation of cultural differences; and reflections on what supported or hindered belonging. It was developed through an iterative process informed by supervision discussions and the existing literature reviewed in the research protocol. Questions were designed to be open-ended and exploratory, consistent with IPA's aim of eliciting rich, detailed accounts of lived experience. The schedule served as a flexible guide rather than a rigid script – depending on what participants shared, I asked different follow-up questions, sought clarification, or reflected back my understanding. The schedule was not formally piloted but remained consistent across all five participants. The lifeline grid completed prior to the interview played an important role in shaping each conversation: rather than working through the schedule linearly, interviews often moved between the grid's marked points and the schedule's thematic areas.

3.9 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis in IPA is described by Smith et al. (2009) as iterative and inductive, moving between the parts and the whole of each transcript in a manner consistent with the hermeneutic circle. Rather than prescribing a rigid single method, IPA offers a flexible set of guidelines that researchers can adapt to their particular study. The analysis in this study followed the stages outlined by Smith et al. (2009), which provided a clear and systematic framework while allowing responsiveness to the specific characteristics of the data.

Analysis was conducted using Microsoft Word documents, with transcripts formatted in a three-column table from the outset. The left column contained the interview transcript, the middle column was used for descriptive comments, and the right column for conceptual comments. This format facilitated the systematic annotation process central to IPA while keeping interpretive notes visually connected to the original data.

The lifeline grid data was integrated into the analysis by structuring each transcript chronologically around the time points participants had identified on their grids, preserving the temporal flow of their narratives.

3.9.1 Stage 1: Reading and Re-reading

The first stage involved becoming immersed in each transcript through repeated reading. Initial readings were conducted while listening to the audio recording, which served to verify transcription accuracy and re-embed the participant's voice, including variations in tone, pace, and emphasis that the written transcript alone could not fully convey. A reflexive diary was used to record initial responses and reactions, helping to bracket these so that subsequent analysis could remain focused on the participant's account (Appendix G).

3.9.2 Stage 2: Exploratory Noting

This stage involved detailed annotation of each transcript, working systematically through the text. Smith et al. (2022, p. 75) describe this as "the close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant". Descriptive comments were recorded in the middle column, noting the content of what participants described—key experiences, relationships, events, and the language used to convey them. Conceptual comments were recorded in the right column, representing a more interpretive engagement with the data. These comments began to move beyond description toward understanding what the experiences might mean for the participant, drawing on psychological concepts while remaining grounded in the text (Appendix H).

3.9.3 Stage 3: Constructing Experiential Statements

Experiential statements were constructed from the exploratory notes, aiming to capture the essential quality of what was found in each section of the transcript. This stage involved reducing the volume of detail while preserving the complexity of participants' meaning-making. Experiential statements were expressed as concise phrases that remained close to participants' own language where possible, reflecting IPA's commitment to honouring participants' voices.

To illustrate this process briefly: when one participant described their early experiences by saying "I didn't talk to anyone for like the first few months... I just sat there," the descriptive comment noted the period of silence and social withdrawal, while the conceptual comment explored this as a protective response to an unfamiliar environment. The experiential statement captured this as "silence as safety" (Appendix I).

3.9.4 Stage 4: Searching for Connections Across Experiential Statements

Once experiential statements had been identified across a transcript, connections between them were explored. Related experiential statements were clustered together, a process involving abstraction (grouping similar statements), contextualisation (attending to narrative moments), and consideration of how frequently particular concerns appeared across the transcript (See Appendix I).

3.9.5 Stage 5: Naming the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

Clusters of experiential statements were then examined for higher-order connections, leading to the development of Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) for each participant. These PETs represented the most significant aspects of each participant's experience of school belonging. Where possible, PET titles used participants' own words, preserving their voice at the highest level of abstraction and ensuring themes remained grounded in the data rather than imposed theoretical constructs. Tables showing the experiential statements and their organisation into PETs for each participant are presented in Appendix I.

3.9.6 Stage 6: Continuing the Individual Analysis of Other Cases

Stages 1-5 were repeated for each participant. Consistent with IPA's idiographic commitment, each new transcript was approached with openness, bracketing themes from previous cases as far as possible to allow each participant's unique experience to emerge on its own terms. This was challenging but important, as premature cross-case thinking risked obscuring individual distinctiveness.

3.9.7 Stage 7: Working with PETs to Develop Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

The final stage involved working with the PETs from each participant to develop Group Experiential Themes (GETs) across the five cases (Appendix J). This cross-case analysis sought to identify shared themes while also attending to divergence and individual variation. The aim was not to erase individual voices in favour of group-level generalisations, but to identify resonances and differences that illuminate the phenomenon of school belonging for Generation 1.25 students. As Smith et al. (2022, p. 26) emphasise, "the single cases remain central if we move to broader, cross-case analyses, enabling us to retrieve particular claims for any of the individuals involved".

3.9.8 Quality Assurance in Analysis

To enhance the rigour of the analysis, developing themes and interpretations from the first transcript were shared with my research supervisor to ensure fidelity to IPA principles and to examine whether interpretations were sufficiently grounded in the data. Based on this feedback, the analytical approach was refined before proceeding to subsequent transcripts. A further transcript was shared during a later supervision session to maintain consistency throughout the analytical process (Appendix N). Member checking, as described in section 3.8, provided an additional layer of quality assurance – participants were presented with their individual PETs and supporting quotes, and invited to confirm, challenge, or nuance the developing interpretations.

3.9.9 Found Poems

Following the completion of analysis for each participant, a found poem was constructed from their own words. Found poetry is a form of poetic representation in qualitative research in

which the researcher selects, arranges, and condenses participants' language into poetic form (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Richardson, 1992). The words belong entirely to the participant – the researcher's role is curatorial rather than authorial. The decision to include found poems emerged during the writing of the findings rather than as part of the original research design. As I worked through each participant's narrative summary, I found that the richness of their language – the particular turns of phrase, the rhythms of how they spoke – risked being flattened by prose summary alone. I returned to both interview transcripts for each participant and selected phrases that captured the emotional and experiential core of their account, arranging these into stanzas that traced the arc of their belonging trajectory.

Within Chapter 4, the found poems serve as expressive entry points into each participant's case – placed after the table of superordinate themes and before the lifeline grid and narrative summary. They are not a separate layer of analysis, but a way of foregrounding participant voice at the threshold of each case. Poetic representation can illuminate dimensions of experience that conventional prose may not fully convey, particularly the affective qualities of how people speak about what matters to them (Butler-Kisber, 2002). In this study, the found poems offer an additional means of honouring participants' expressive registers – the pauses, repetitions, and turns of phrase that carry meaning beyond their semantic content.

3.9.10 Digitalised Lifeline Grids

Participants completed their lifeline grids digitally during the interview, using highlighting tools or a digital pen on the blank template. Because the resulting grids varied in legibility, I created digitalised versions to support readability in the findings chapters. These reproduced each participant's self-reported ratings, trajectories, and annotations while standardising the visual format. Where participants had made spontaneous adaptations – Cassey,

for instance, drew two separate lines to distinguish happiness from belonging; Vincent represented each time period as a range rather than a single point – these were retained, as they carried analytical significance.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust Directorate of Education and Training Research Ethics Committee (TREC; See Appendix O). When recruitment challenges necessitated expanding the participant age range from 16-20 to 16-27 years, a formal amendment was submitted and approved before proceeding with revised recruitment materials. The research was conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2021), the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014), and the Health and Care Professions Council Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HCPC, 2016).

3.10.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained through a two-stage process. Prior to the first interview, participants were provided with a combined information and consent form (Appendix L) explaining the purpose of the research, what participation would involve, how their data would be used and stored, the limits of confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. This was sent via email and participants completed by either typing their name or providing a digital signature before returning it electronically.

At the beginning of the first interview, verbal consent was also obtained. Participants were asked whether they had any questions about the consent form, and key points regarding confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw were reiterated. This verbal confirmation

ensured that consent was not merely a procedural formality but a genuine, informed agreement to participate.

3.10.2 Right to Withdraw

Participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. In line with UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) requirements, a specific deadline for data withdrawal was set at three weeks following each interview, after which point data would be anonymised and withdrawal would no longer be possible. This was clearly explained in the information sheet and reiterated verbally before interviews commenced.

3.10.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

All data was treated confidentially and securely stored, accessible only to myself and my research supervisor. Audio recordings were deleted following transcription verification, and transcripts were anonymised through the assignment of pseudonyms and the removal or generalisation of identifying details such as school names and specific locations.

The risk of deductive disclosure – where the combination of demographic details and personal narratives might allow someone familiar with a participant to identify them – was a particular ethical consideration given the small sample size, the inclusion of countries of origin as contextual information, and the richly detailed accounts that IPA requires (Kaiser, 2009; Saunders et al., 2015). Where details involving identifiable features risked disclosure, they were altered without distorting the experiential account. The tension between anonymity and idiographic richness is an inherent feature of IPA research (Smith et al., 2022), and was

explicitly discussed with participants during the consent process. All five participants indicated they understood and accepted this limitation.

Participants were also informed of the limits to confidentiality: specifically, that if they disclosed information indicating risk of harm to themselves or others, I would be obligated to share this information with appropriate professionals. No such disclosures occurred during the research.

3.10.4 Potential Distress

Discussing experiences of migration and school belonging had the potential to evoke difficult emotions or memories. Several measures were put in place to minimise and manage any distress. Before each interview, I explicitly acknowledged that the conversation might bring up different feelings, and asked participants how I would know if they were feeling upset or needed to stop. All participants indicated they would tell me explicitly if they wished to pause or stop.

In line with relational ethics principles that position participants as active agents rather than passive data sources (Câmara, 2025), participants were reminded that they had authority over what they chose to share, and that they could decline to answer any question by simply indicating they would rather not discuss that topic or would prefer to move on. Throughout the interviews, I remained attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues of discomfort. No participants indicated distress during the interviews, and the distress protocol (Appendix M) prepared as part of the ethics application was not required.

All participants chose to participate alone, though the option to have a trusted adult present was offered.

3.10.5 Debriefing

At the end of each first interview, a brief debriefing was conducted – checking in with participants about how they were feeling, explaining the next steps in the research process, and inviting reflections on the experience of participating. Participant feedback was uniformly positive, with several noting they valued having a space to reflect on their migration and school experiences – something they described as a significant life event they rarely had occasion to discuss. While this was not an intended outcome, it aligns with observations in the qualitative research literature that the interview process can itself be experienced as meaningful by participants (Archard & O'Reilly, 2021; Smith et al., 2009).

3.10.6 Data Management

All data is stored securely in accordance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Audio recordings were stored temporarily on an encrypted device before being transferred to secure university storage, and were deleted immediately following transcription verification. Anonymised transcripts and analytical materials will be retained for ten years in accordance with RCUK guidance, after which they will be securely destroyed.

3.11 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is central to IPA research. The researcher's interpretations are inevitably shaped by their experiences, assumptions, and theoretical commitments, and IPA does not attempt to eliminate this influence but instead requires transparent examination of how it shapes the analytical process (Smith et al., 2009). This section offers a reflexive account of my own

positionality in relation to this research, the strategies I employed to manage my assumptions, and how the reflexive process relates to the concept of bracketing within IPA.

I approached this research from a position of both proximity and distance to my participants' experiences. Under Rumbaut's (2004) decimal generation framework, I am classified as Generation 1.0 – a first-generation migrant who arrived as an adult, rather than the Generation 1.25 adolescent arrivals who are the focus of this study.

3.11.1 Insider-Outsider Positioning

My relationship to participants was shaped by a complex insider-outsider dynamic. I shared notable common ground with several participants – cultural background, language, and in some cases remarkably specific connections. Vincent and Jacob had attended the same international school in Hong Kong that a close family member attends. When this emerged during interviews, the dynamic shifted noticeably: there was an immediate familiarity, a dropping of awkwardness, and a quality of exchange that felt more like conversation between old friends than a research interview. Vincent began incorporating Cantonese words into his responses, and I noticed myself feeling a strong pull of recognition when he did so.

These moments of connection presented both opportunities and challenges. The rapport facilitated rich, detailed accounts – participants appeared to feel understood and comfortable sharing their experiences. But I was also aware that shared cultural understanding could lead me to fill in gaps based on my own experience rather than genuinely attending to what participants were saying. I noticed, for instance, that I was sometimes more inclined to follow up certain points than others, and that I might nod or smile in recognition at experiences that resonated with my own. At the same time, my position as a Generation 1.0 migrant who arrived as an adult

meant I had not experienced migration during adolescence, and this distance required me to approach participants' accounts with genuine curiosity rather than assumed understanding.

3.11.2 Professional Identity and Theoretical Orientation

My position as a trainee EP shaped the research relationship in ways I needed to remain attentive to. My theoretical orientation presented a subtle challenge. My Masters was in Psychoanalytic Developmental Psychology, and I am drawn to psychodynamic, person-centred, and narrative traditions. This naturally attunes me to concepts like transference, unconscious processes, and psychological defences – and while it enriched my sensitivity to relational dynamics in the interview, it also meant I was predisposed to interpret through a psychodynamic lens rather than staying with what participants actually expressed. Early in the analysis, my supervisor observed that I sometimes seemed to slip into “diagnosing” – applying theory to participants' experiences rather than remaining close to their own words and meaning-making. Recognising this tendency was essential for honouring IPA's phenomenological commitment to understanding experience from the inside, in participants' own terms, before moving to interpretation. Managing these preconceptions required the kind of “reflexive bracketing” that IPA demands – not Husserl's complete setting-aside, but a sustained effort to notice and examine my fore-understandings (Smith et al., 2022).

3.11.3 Strategies for Managing Assumption

Several strategies supported this “reflexive bracketing” throughout the research process. I maintained a reflexive diary (Appendix G) in which I recorded my responses to interviews and

analytical decisions, noting moments of strong identification or emotional reaction – for instance, my heightened sense of familiarity with participants from Hong Kong (Finlay, 2002). Regular research supervision provided essential external perspective; sharing transcripts and developing analyses with my supervisor allowed my interpretations to be questioned and refined (Smith et al., 2022). The interview schedule was designed with predominantly open-ended questions to minimise the extent to which my assumptions might shape participants' responses (Smith et al., 2022), and the lifeline grid technique provided a participant-led structure that allowed individuals to identify the moments most meaningful to them (DerSarkissian et al., 2022). Finally, member checking offered participants the opportunity to correct or nuance my interpretations, helping to ensure the analysis remained grounded in their experiences rather than departing into purely researcher-driven interpretation (Birt et al., 2016).

3.12 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has set out the methodological framework for the study. IPA was selected for its capacity to attend to the lived experiences, meaning-making, and individual voices of Generation 1.25 students. Five participants were recruited through a purposive sampling strategy incorporating snowball techniques, and data were collected across ten individual interviews – five initial interviews using the belonging ladder, lifeline grid, and semi-structured interview, and five member checking sessions. Analysis followed the seven-stage process outlined by Smith et al. (2022), moving from idiographic engagement with each case to cross-case Group Experiential Themes, supplemented by found poems and digitalised lifeline grids to foreground participant voice. The ethical considerations, quality criteria, and reflexive positioning described above provide the foundation for the findings that follow.

Chapter 4: Findings – Personal Experiential Themes

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) identified through analysis of individual interviews and member checking sessions with each of the five participants. In line with IPA methodology (Smith et al., 2022), analysis began with each case individually before moving to the cross-case comparison that forms Chapter Five. Each case section follows the same structure. A contextual introduction situates the participant biographically, giving a sense of who they are and the circumstances of their migration. A table of superordinate themes provides an overview of the key experiential territories identified through analysis. A found poem – constructed from the participant's own words across both interviews – offers an expressive entry point into their account, foregrounding voice and affect before the analytical narrative begins. A digitalised lifeline grid provides a visual anchor for the participant's belonging trajectory over time. The narrative summary then traces how the superordinate themes interconnect and together contribute to each participant's wider belonging story, drawing on quotations from the interviews to keep participant voices at the centre. A member checking contribution reports how the participant responded to the analysis, and an integrative reflection considers what is distinctive about the case.

The five participants – Cassey, Daisy, Jacob, Vincent, and Savannah – are introduced individually in the sections that follow. Throughout this chapter, quotations are drawn from both

the initial interview and the member checking session, which took place approximately two months later.

4.2: Cassey

Cassey, a female participant in her early 20s, is a fashion design student who moved from India to England in her mid-teens to complete her A-levels, subsequently continuing to university. Hers was a story of accumulating transitions – multiple moves across Indian cities before migration, a family relocation to the UK, her family's return to India while she stayed, and then starting over alone in a new city for university. Cassey arrived with her entire immediate family – parents and younger brother – positioning her as a voluntary migrant from a relatively comfortable socioeconomic background. However, migration still represented a dramatic material adjustment: "we've had like, caretakers, cleaners, cooks all of our lives," she explained, and suddenly none of those privileges existed. English had been Cassey's language of education throughout her life, yet she discovered this provided little preparation for British accents – "I couldn't understand... where are my subtitles?" – and they could not understand her, leaving her first month spent learning to code-switch "well enough for people to not ask me to repeat myself again and again." Her early experiences in England were significantly buffered by her mother, who found Indian stores, restaurants, and community networks while Cassey observed and learned strategies she would later need independently. After her family returned to India, Cassey experienced what she called a belonging collapse before gradually rebuilding connections through multiple distinct friend groups in university.

4.2.1: Found Poem: Four is the Max

In India, it's a full 5—

I've lived here my entire life.

In the UK, it's never fully felt

like I'm gonna belong.

So I guess 4 is the max it's ever gonna go.

It's just how it is and that's fine.

They said, we'll hold a seminar about this.

I needed answers then.

I did not know if later

was gonna be good enough.

At uni, they had an entire week.

They told us about NHS,

how to set up all that.

Most of our students are international students –

There was nothing I had to struggle to figure out.

My mum – she was the blueprint.

We didn't realise how much she was doing.

Then I moved by myself

and I was like – what the fuck do I do?

Those were forced friendships –

we kind of just stuck together.

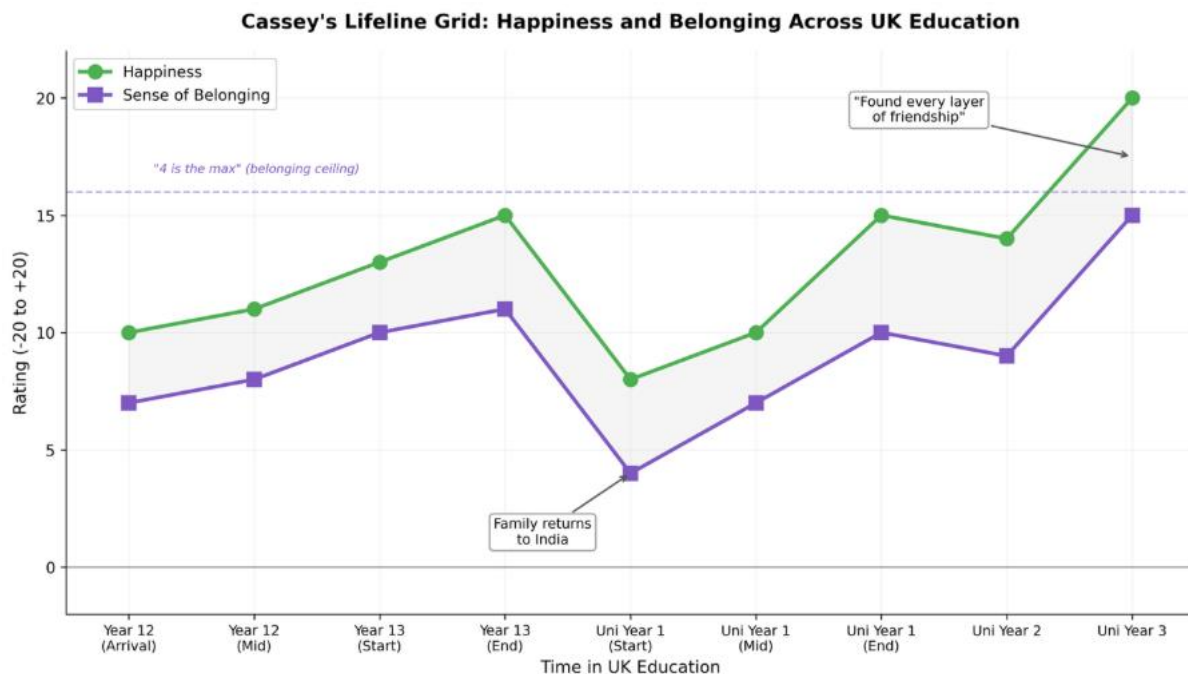
*But then I found Indian friends.
People from the fashion community.
And at work, unexpectedly.
I found every layer of friendship I needed to find.*

*I'm a wild party animal type in the UK.
In India, I sit at home.
It's two completely different people.
But it's great. It's perfect.*

*4 is the max it's ever gonna go.
And honestly? That's fine.*

4.2.2: Lifeline Grid

Figure 1 *Cassey's Lifeline Grid (Digitalised for Clarity)*



Note. Cassey spontaneously distinguished between happiness and belonging, stating “those are not the same thing.” Her lifeline shows happiness and belonging tracked separately, with belonging peaking at Year 13 and Uni Year 3 (following periods of integration), while remaining consistently lower than happiness scores. A dashed line marks the ceiling Cassey explicitly articulated: 4 out of 5 on the belonging ladder, converted to the grid's 20-point scale (four points per rung) as 16.

4.2.3: Narrative Summary of Key Themes

Table 4 *Cassey's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)*

No.	Superordinate Themes	Key Focus
1	"4 is the max it's ever gonna go" – Accepting that UK will never fully feel like home.	Belonging is built up over a lifetime and cannot be replicated elsewhere; accepting this without distress; happiness and belonging as two separate things.
2	"She was the blueprint" – Mum as anchor, and what happens when she leaves.	Mother as navigation blueprint and community-builder; family departure as belonging collapse; Managing parental boundaries: selective disclosure as a route to independent exploration.
3	"I needed answers then... later was not gonna be good enough" – Schools meaning well but missing the mark.	School support as well-intentioned but inadequate; reliance on social capital; university as better equipped for INA students; contrast with secondary school's unpreparedness.
4	"Those were forced friendships" – From circumstance to authentic connection.	Circumstantial early friendships among outsiders; differential validation of white versus POC (people of colour) acceptance; shared struggle as catalyst for genuine connection.
5	"It's two completely different people, but it's great" – Two countries, two selves.	Code-switching as survival and ongoing labour; compartmentalised identity across geographies; paradox of fragmentation-as-freedom versus integration producing peak belonging.

The first theme captures Cassey's central insight: *UK belonging has a ceiling*, and she had made peace with it. She was clear that "4 is the max it's ever gonna go" – but she did not say this with defeat or resignation. For Cassey, belonging is something that accumulates over a lifetime, and India will always hold her entire life, her community, her history. That cannot be recreated somewhere else, no matter how long she stays or how hard she tries, and she had accepted that.

Her spontaneous distinction between happiness and belonging – drawing separate lines on her lifeline and saying "those are not the same thing" – revealed a sophisticated understanding that contentment in a place differs from feeling of that place.

The second theme centres on Cassey's mother, who she only fully appreciated looking back – "we didn't realise how much she was doing when she had to start it all from scratch." Her *mother built the material infrastructure of belonging* during the family's early years in the UK – finding Indian stores, restaurants, and community networks while Cassey observed and learned. When her family returned to India while Cassey stayed in the UK for university, she described feeling "completely lost", having to rebuild community from scratch – precisely the task she had watched her mother perform, and which she now understood to have been far more labour-intensive than she had realised. Her account suggests just how much her mother's presence had been holding things together – and how exposed she felt the moment that support was no longer there.

The third theme concerns the *gap between institutional intention and institutional competence*. Cassey's secondary school was not indifferent to her transition – seminars were promised, support was offered – but the timing was wrong: "I needed answers then... later was not gonna be good enough." By the time information sessions were held, Cassey was worried it would already be too late – she knew she needed more time than most to navigate unfamiliar systems, and that decisions about subjects, grades, and university applications could not wait. She found herself relying on her parents' social network – friends who had navigated the same system before her – to fill the gaps that school could not. The contrast with university was illuminating. At university, INA students were the norm rather than the exception, and practical guidance – how to register with a GP, how key systems worked, what support was available – were communicated proactively and clearly. For the first time, Cassey experienced an institution that had built support

in from the start rather than adding it on as an afterthought: "most of our students are international students... they do quite well with this."

The fourth theme traces the *difference between forced and authentic connection*. Cassey described her early friendships among other new students as "basically forced" – "there's no foundation to that friendship other than the fact that everyone's new." She was also forthcoming about the way racial dynamics shaped whose acceptance felt most meaningful, acknowledging that white peers accepting her felt "validating" in ways that connection with other people of colour did not – a recognition she named openly. Later, genuine connections emerged through shared interests or heritage, and at unexpected spaces like work, eventually forming "every layer of friendship" Cassey needed. Rather than finding everything in one place, Cassey built a constellation of connections – friends who shared her cultural background, friends from her work, friends from the fashion world – each group allowing her to express a different facet of herself.

The fifth theme concerns *two-country, two-selves navigation*. Cassey described her UK self as "wild party animal type me" and her India self as someone who has to be more careful – more constrained by family expectations and social norms – "it's two completely different people." She framed this fragmentation as "great" and "perfect," and once she felt settled enough she began reclaiming parts of her Indian life in the UK – hobbies, cultural practices, interests she had set aside during the initial survival period: "I could just be more myself." Yet her lifeline revealed that her highest belonging was felt during periods of integration rather than fragmentation – suggesting that contact between her two selves, rather than their separation, is where belonging flourished most fully.

4.2.4: Member Checking Contribution

In the member checking session, Cassey confirmed all five themes, stating: “you've basically covered all of it, you've got my entire UK experience in a nutshell”. The session elaborated several themes meaningfully. On mother as blueprint, she described how her mother's guidance remained internalised even from India: “I was just calling home way more often than I used to... figuring out how to do those things in a way that works for me”. The two-selves theme was further brought to life: speaking from India during the session, Cassey described UK friends' bewilderment during video calls at seeing a side of her they didn't recognise – “Who are you?” When presented with the paradox that she frames fragmentation as perfect despite her highest belonging came through integration, Cassey engaged thoughtfully, explaining she has established enough anchors and safe spaces to navigate the uncertainty.

4.2.5: Integrative Reflection

Cassey's account is organised around the acknowledgement that her sense of belonging in England is real, but it has limits. Contentment within acknowledged limits, her reflections suggest, may be a form of adaptation in its own right rather than evidence that belonging has fallen short of what it could or should be. Perhaps most striking is the gap between how Cassey narrated her experience and what her lifeline showed. She described keeping her two selves separate as “great and perfect” – and yet her highest belonging came precisely when those selves came together: Indian friends, fashion community, cultural festivals, all in the same UK space. The story she told about herself is one of expressing completely different sides of oneself across two cultural contexts – but her lifeline grid showed she flourished when those two sides came together. This tension – between how she described herself and what actually produced her strongest belonging – resurfaces in Chapter 5, where other participants navigate similar experiences of managing dual selves across geographies.

4.3: Daisy

Daisy, a female participant in her early 20s, moved from Hong Kong to England in her late teens to complete her A-levels and is now in her second year of university, commuting daily and continuing to live at home with her family. She arrived with her entire immediate family – parents and younger sister – joining a grammar school where she knew nobody. Daisy is observant – someone who pays close attention to what is happening around her, but then questions whether she is reading it right. Cantonese is Daisy's first language – while she had studied English academically, operating in it as her primary daily language was a fundamentally different demand

– cognitively and emotionally – and her account made this clear at every turn. Her family’s conservative approach to her social independence has created what she described as ongoing tension between her social needs and familial obligations.

4.3.1: Found Poem: At Least It's Not Raining

I don't know how to say in English.

Do you know Chinese?

*I've been very focused to actually listen to English
because I'm exhausted every day.*

*They seem like they're offering help
but they actually don't want to help.*

*Like they're smiling, but they didn't look like smiling.
Maybe I'm a very sensitive person.*

*At least I know what do I need to do, right?
So that I can mentally prepare
before the thing actual happen.*

*Girl, you're already uni – why can't you go out?
I understand. But not that much.
They can't control her.
So they try to control me.
If you don't expect something,
then you won't be disappointed.*

At least it's not raining.

At least it's not raining.

I've been living in Hong Kong for 17 years.

I become more used to,

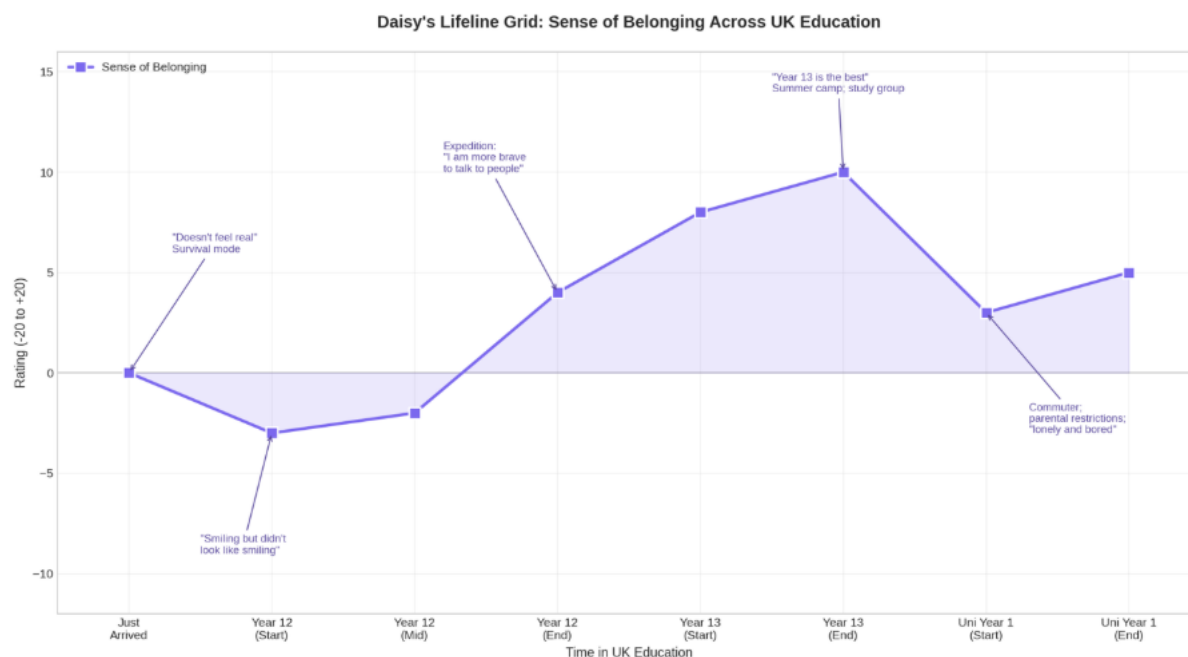
but I won't say I belong to the UK.

I still feel like home more in Hong Kong.

Probably because I just got more friends there

4.3.2: Lifeline Grid

Figure 2 *Daisy's Lifeline Grid (Digitalised for Clarity)*



Note. Daisy plotted a single line representing her overall sense of belonging, suggesting she experienced happiness and belonging as intertwined. The trajectory shows a neutral arrival ("doesn't feel real"), a dip during early Year 12, a turning point when structured activities enabled connection, a peak in Year 13, and a notable drop on starting university as commuter status and parental restrictions constrained social participation.

4.3.3: Narrative Summary of Key Themes

Table 5 Daisy's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

No.	Superordinate Themes	Key Focus
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1	"I don't know how to say in English" – Speaking a language that can't hold your real self.	Exhaustion of constant translation; untranslatability of authentic experience in Cantonese; loss of communicative power in English-only contexts.
2	"They're smiling, but they didn't look like smiling" – Not knowing whether to trust your own perceptions.	Superficial versus authentic friendliness; not knowing whether to trust her own read of social situations; wondering if the problem is the environment or herself.
3	"At least I know what I need to do" – Belonging through structure and preparation.	Knowing what to expect beforehand makes social situations manageable; structure removes the guesswork that puts her at a disadvantage; ending up in a group with others who also didn't fit in elsewhere.
4	"Girl, you're already uni – why can't you go out?" – Being held back when you need to grow.	Parental restrictions preventing age-appropriate independence; tension between filial duty and developmental needs; displaced parental control from sister onto Daisy.
5	"At least it's not raining" – Lowering expectations to protect yourself from disappointment.	Belonging redefined as endurance rather than fulfilment; adjusting herself rather than expecting things around her to change.

Daisy's account was organised around one core distinction: getting used to a place is not the same as belonging there. Her own words made this precise – "I become more used to, but I won't say I belong to the UK." Seventeen years in Hong Kong cannot be undone by three years in England. Daisy did not say it with bitterness, but she stated it clearly and kept coming back to it.

The first theme is about the *exhaustion of living in a language that cannot hold everything Daisy needs to say*. The clearest moment came mid-interview, when Daisy switched into Cantonese – after checking I shared the same language – to explain 諷刺: the feeling of being mocked through exaggerated politeness, with no real English equivalent. She found the word immediately in Cantonese and could not find it at all in English. This is not just a vocabulary gap.

It is the experience of having your sharpest, most precise self available in one language and unavailable in the other – every single day.

The second theme is about *not knowing whether to trust her own read of social situations*. Daisy noticed that people sometimes seemed friendly on the surface but did not actually want to help – "they're smiling, but they didn't look like smiling" – but then immediately wondered if she was simply misreading things: "maybe I'm a very sensitive person." She went back and forth between these two explanations throughout the interview, never quite landing on either. Not knowing whether the problem is the environment or yourself is its own exhaustion – one nobody around her could see.

The third theme is about how Daisy found it *easiest to connect with people when there was a clear structure to follow* – an expedition, a summer camp, a study group. As she explained, "at least I know what do I need to do, right? So that I can mentally prepare before the thing actual[ly] happen." Knowing what was expected of her in advance meant she could ready herself, and that preparation made the difference.

The fourth theme is about *Daisy's parents: they are her source of stability and her link to the life she knew in Hong Kong, but their restrictions on going out and socialising have also held her back*. Friends would ask her, "girl, you're already uni – why can't you go out?" – a question she could not easily answer, partly because the reason were cultural as much as personal. Daisy expressed a sense of filial duty towards her parents – "I understand that they as a parent they they worried about their daughter, his daughter. No, I understand. But but but not that much." – the stuttering repetition captured her painful negotiation between respecting their concern and recognising her own needs. At the same time, a family system was at work: her parents struggled to manage her younger sister, and so, Daisy said "they try to control me." The dynamic was both

culturally shaped and situationally specific – filial obligation meant she could not simply push back, and being the dutiful daughter meant the pressure landed disproportionately on her.

The fifth theme captures *her way of protecting herself from disappointment* – by not expecting too much in the first place. She described the logic plainly: "I would just lower it for others so that I won't feel disappointed." It works as a coping strategy, though her account leaves open the question of whether adjusting expectations downward also means accepting less than she might otherwise hope for.

4.3.4: Member Checking Contribution

In the member checking session, Daisy confirmed all five themes. On language, she further offered an anecdote of operating in a second language through a moment at her summer job where she was too upset to find the words in English. Daisy ended up putting it into Google Translate to show her manager – "like the kids," she said, which captured both the frustration and the humour of the situation. On structured inclusion, she offered a contrasting example from her second year at summer camp, where managers assumed returning staff already knew what to do: "they are not structured and then it makes me feel like... sometimes a bit mad because they are just not doing the right thing." The contrast confirmed that her preference for structure was not just about anxiety but also about being able to prepare herself for what was coming, especially when you are already at a cultural and linguistic disadvantage.

4.3.5: Integrative Reflection

Daisy's story showed that belonging does not arrive on its own – it had to be built, carefully and slowly, through the right relationships and opportunities, while carrying the daily weight of language, self-doubt, and family pressure. What Daisy achieved in sixth form was real, but her lifeline showed how quickly it unravelled when she started university – the commute, parental

restrictions, the loss of the structured environment that had made connection possible in the first place. What worked in one context did not travel with her. Her trajectory made visible something that a single timepoint could not: belonging is not a one-time achievement but something that can be built carefully in one context and unravel quickly in the next. Several dimensions of Daisy's experience – the fracture of living between two languages, the constraints of family obligation, and the fragility of belonging when structures change – were identified as shared patterns in the cross-case analysis in Chapter Five.

4.4: Jacob

Jacob, a male participant in his late teens, moved from Hong Kong to England in his early teens to attend an all-boys boarding school, arriving as a Year 9 student during the COVID-19 pandemic. He followed his older brother (participant Vincent), who had moved to a different UK boarding school several years earlier. Jacob is someone who spoke in sharp contrasts and in a definitive way – three years he would never repeat, two years he would willingly relive; a friend group he rated at 3.5 then revised to 1.5 – and his account was structured by the same clarity. He came from an international school background where English was his first language, yet this linguistic preparation did little to ease his transition into English boarding school culture – a

distinction he articulated clearly. His arrival was further complicated by academic calendar misalignment, placing him back a year, and his first days were shaped by quarantine requirements and online classes. His five-year trajectory from profound isolation to eventual belonging represents a distinctive trajectory – shaped less by institutional support or cultural adjustment than by the gradual accumulation of genuine peer connections, many formed outside school entirely.

4.4.1: Found Poem: Surviving Versus Living

*In my first year, my attitude was
less like living in school
and more like surviving in school.
Each day was just a countdown to the next holiday.*

*Those first three years?
No. Definitely not. Oh, hell, no.
Those last two years?
Yeah. Definitely. I would redo them again.*

*I didn't have a real friend
until the summer of Year 11.*

That was my biggest turning point.

That was when everything went wrong (in Hong Kong)

and everything started going right (in the UK).

Belonging is all about the people.

It has nothing to do with the place.

A different place could have been anywhere —

the belonging came from finding the people.

I'm not British enough.

I'm not Chinese enough.

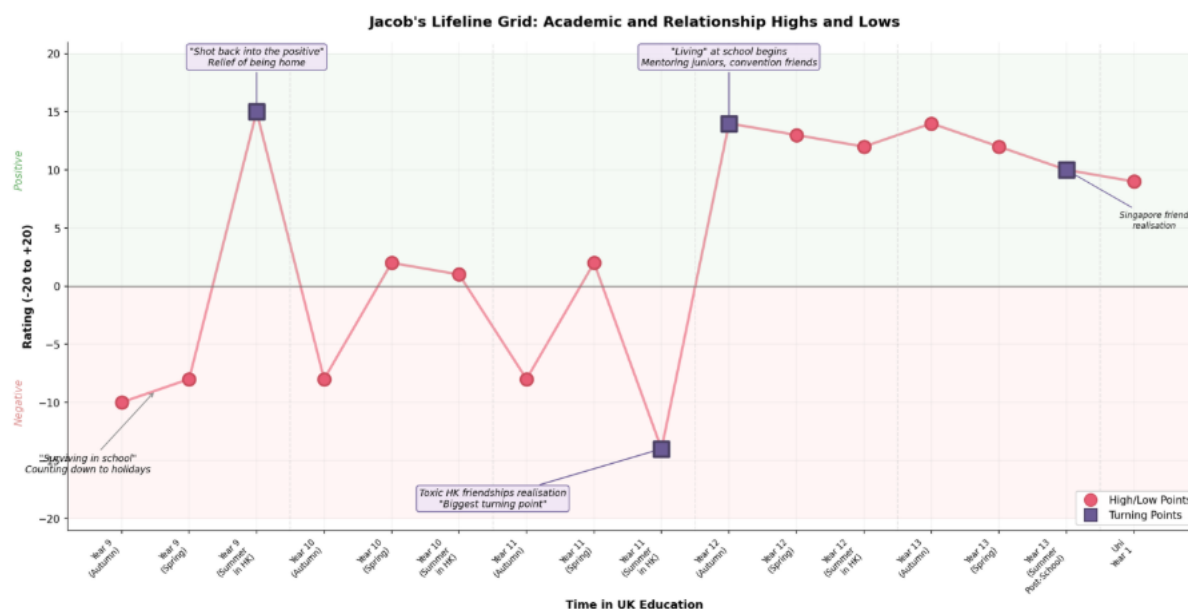
But I'm okay with that.

I've learned to navigate between the misses

to find the biggest hits.

4.4.2: Lifeline Grid

Figure 3 *Jacob's Lifeline Grid (Digitalised for Clarity)*



Note. Jacob plotted a single line representing overall wellbeing, combining academics and relationships. The grid's most striking feature is the reversal between Year 11 and Year 12: term-time lows and holiday highs for the first three years, followed by an inversion when his Hong Kong friendships – recognised as having been “ripping up my mental health”— collapsed in the summer after Year 11, and school became the site of genuine belonging from Year 12 onward.

4.4.3: Narrative Summary of Key Themes

Table 6 *Jacob's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)*

No.	Superordinate Themes	Key Focus
1	"Less like living, more like surviving" – Two fundamentally different modes of being at school.	First three years as endurance rather than engagement; transformation in Year 12 from survival to genuine participation; vehement refusal to repeat early years.
2	"Belonging is all about the people" – Connection, not place, as the foundation.	Belonging as exclusively relational; every turning point connected to relational change; distant friendships providing more support than physically present but disconnected peers.
3	"Not British enough, not Chinese enough" – Living in between cultures as a permanent position.	"Not British enough, not Chinese enough" as permanent position; selective adoption of cultural elements from both contexts; outsider status predating and outlasting migration.
4	"Looking back, it was a 1.5" – Realising past belonging wasn't what you thought.	Re-rating Hong Kong friendships from 3.5 to 1.5 with hindsight; recognising that relationships which had sustained him were "ripping up my mental health"; realising in hindsight that past belonging was not what it seemed at the time.
5	"Navigate around the misses to find the biggest hits" – Finding agency in constrained circumstances.	Actively navigating toward "hits" among "misses"; strategic exits from harmful relationships; building non-school social networks through conventions and cosplay communities.

Jacob's account was organised around a central distinction he himself articulated: the difference between surviving and living at school. He described this not as gradual improvement but two fundamentally different modes of being. The first three years were characterised by counting days to holidays, homesickness, and a string of small harms – "I had a lot of food stolen,"

he said, an understated summary of what it meant to not just have something nourishing being withheld, but being actively and consistently taken. His last two years he would willingly repeat.

The first theme, *surviving versus living*, captures how belonging emerged exclusively through peer relationships rather than institutional structures or cultural adjustment. Jacob insisted repeatedly: belonging is all about the people. It had nothing to do with the place. His most isolating periods arose not through academic difficulty but through the absence of genuine connection; his turning point came not from adapting to British culture but from finding people who accepted him as he was.

The second theme, *belonging through people rather than places*, extends this insight across contexts. Jacob's most significant belonging – through convention friends, cosplay communities, and eventually genuine school peers – consistently transcended geographic boundaries. Cosplay conventions, where attendees dress as and embody characters from anime, gaming, and other popular media, were central to this. One friend – someone he had met in Hong Kong who also attended a different school in the UK, and shared his interest in cosplay – “saved my social life genuinely. Not just in the UK, but also in Hong Kong.” As this peer existed in both 'worlds', the friendships she introduced him to transcended geography, giving him belonging in both places simultaneously.

The third theme is about *never quite fitting into either culture* – not British enough, not Chinese enough – but Jacob has made a kind of peace with this. Rather than experiencing it solely as exclusion, he had come to see it as a position from which he can pick and choose what he takes from each side. Notably, he positioned this sense of being different as continuous with his pre-migration identity: “I don't think I've ever really been in the norm in a lot of ways.”

The fourth theme is about how Jacob's *understanding of his own past belonging shifted over time*. He went back to his Hong Kong friend group on the lifeline and changed his rating from 3.5 to 1.5, recognising only in hindsight that those relationships had been, as he put it, “ripping up my mental health”. He described staying longer than he should have - “I kept making excuses for them ... to not have to lose them and to like, feel alone again in the UK”. This matters because it suggests that belonging is not simply felt or not felt in the moment – it is also something we look back on and reinterpret as we grow. What felt like belonging at the time may be revised, sometimes dramatically, once there is enough distance to see it clearly.

The fifth theme is about *how Jacob kept himself going in difficult circumstances* – not through any single breakthrough, but through what he called navigating toward the hits among the misses: moving toward people and experiences that worked, stepping away from those that didn't, and finding community outside school when school could not offer it.

4.4.4: Member Checking Contribution

In the member checking session, Jacob confirmed all five themes, stating: “that basically encompasses it all”. He elaborated on the cultural in-betweenness theme, adding that his slightly different sense of self had preceded migration and persisted through it – his outsider status was not created by migration but was deepened and then eventually transformed by it. He reflected on his growth as “developing more self-respect and being a bit more okay with being alone and knowing when to leave”, framing these as his most significant “character arc” moments. This is consistent with the logic that runs through Jacob's whole account – belonging, for him, has always been about people and whether they are worth trusting, not about culture or place.

4.4.5: Integrative Reflection

Jacob's account centres on a single conviction that runs through everything he describes: belonging is, at its core, relational. Cultural adjustment and linguistic adaptation feature in his reflections, but they were not what determined his wellbeing – that has always come down to whether he could find people who genuinely saw him, a process that took years and unfolded largely outside school. His revisiting the ratings of past friendships suggests that belonging does not accumulate steadily over time – connection felt in the moment may be recognised, with hindsight, as something considerably less. Most significantly, the distance between his first three years – which he would not repeat – and his last two – which he would – speaks to both the gains and the cost of transformation through sustained adversity. That shift did not result from institutional support or structured intervention, it came from people – and from Jacob learning, slowly, how to find them. His is perhaps the most explicit articulation across all five participants of belonging as fundamentally relational, a thread drawn together in Chapter Five.

4.5: Vincent

Vincent, a male participant in his early 20s, moved from Hong Kong to England in his early teens to attend boarding school alone – arriving several years before his younger brother Jacob, at a different school. From an international school background, English was functionally his first language, yet he quickly discovered that language competence did not translate into cultural belonging. He arrived as someone he described as "quite shy, quite timid, would not speak to anyone" – the person who sat for this interview could not be more different. The oldest of all

five participants, Vincent's account spans the longest period – nine years – and covers severe bullying, gradual transformation, and the people who helped him survive both. Throughout, he measured what he went through against those who had it worse, describing even the most difficult experiences with a matter-of-factness that suggested not indifference but the perspective of someone who had come through it. The interview, conducted after he had just completed his master's degree, marked what Vincent described as a "fairy tale ending" – not because everything is resolved, but because completing the educational journey that brought him to the UK feels like the fulfilment of its original purpose.

4.5.1: Found Poem: The Ones Who Stayed

Year 9 and Year 10 was probably my worst years.

I don't think I got the worst end of the stick —

*I was the only one after the people who really got bullied
that stayed behind and stayed until the end.*

Some people just – three people after the first year gone.

It's not even language barrier.

It's culture.

*I could live in the area,
but I can't integrate well.*

*The upper years, they really, really saw me for who I was.
Not the rumours. Not the 'different' one.
Just me.*

*I could literally just walk up to her office.
Don't bother going through the house health service.
Just email me.*

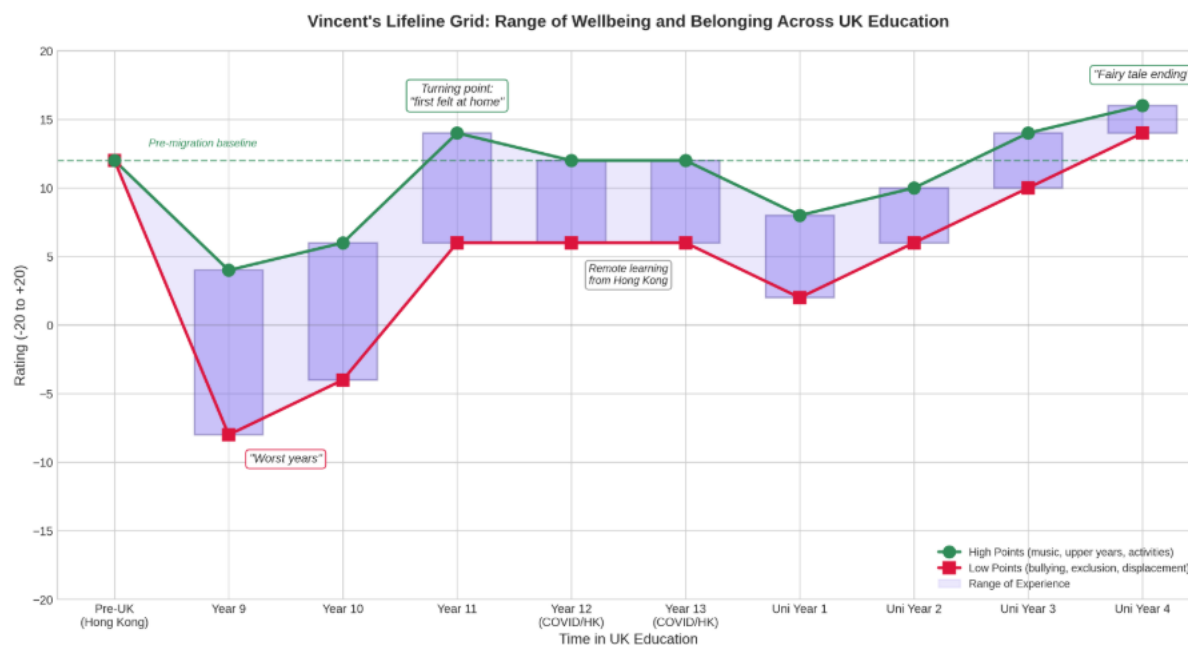
*Year 11 – first felt at home.
It took that long.*

*I don't feel British enough.
But I also don't feel Hong Kong enough anymore.
And there's also the Malaysian side.
I always have a sense of identity crisis.*

*Nine years to get back to where I started.
Neither place fully home.
But maybe that's okay.*

4.5.2: Lifeline Grid

Figure 4 *Vincent's Lifeline Grid (Digitalised for Clarity)*



Note. Vincent spontaneously chose to represent each time period as a range rather than a single point, explaining he experienced both highs and lows simultaneously. The shaded range represents this duality—positive experiences (music, upper years, activities) coexisting with negative experiences (bullying, exclusion). The dashed line represents his pre-migration baseline; his final position sees both highs and lows converge around or above this level, suggesting nine years of effort brought him back to approximately where he started.

4.5.3: Narrative Summary of Key Themes

Table 7 Vincent's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

No.	Superordinate Themes	Key Focus
1	"I don't think I got the worst end of the stick" – Surviving by comparing yourself to those who had it worse.	Measuring experience against those who suffered more or left; endurance as identity marker; downplaying what happened without fully realising he is doing it.

2	"It's not even language barrier. It's culture" – Being able to survive but not integrate.	Language competence insufficient for cultural integration; international school background enabling survival but not belonging; culture as the real barrier.
3	"I could literally just walk up to her office" – Individual staff who created safety nets when systems failed.	Upper years providing acceptance through music; individual staff creating safety nets that formal systems failed to offer; choosing not to pull rank as a senior student, and treating younger students as equals.
4	"They were gaming together every night... I'm just stuck in UK getting bullied" – Missing the friendships that were forming without you.	Double displacement from both UK peers and Hong Kong friends' formative experiences; drifting apart from friends in HK without anyone meaning to; summers as psychological reset.
5	"I don't feel British enough, but I also don't feel Hong Kong enough" – Belonging to neither place fully.	Too Westernised for local Hong Kong students; carrying cultural markers that set apart in UK; triple identity crisis including Malaysian dimension.
6	"I'll be fine by uni – I was not fine by uni" – How long belonging actually takes.	Belonging requiring active effort across a decade; finishing his master's felt like the fulfilment of why he came to UK; university gave him the freedom to find his own people in his own time.
7	"It's always better to be said than not spoken" – Turning your experience into something useful.	Willingness to share difficult experiences as evidence of growth; sharing his experience in the hope it helps others; actively trying to communicate differently with his own family than his parents did.

Vincent's account is organised around a central contrast: he described experiences of bullying, physical threats, and systematic exclusion – and yet what emerged was not a story of victimhood but of resilience and quiet determination.

Seven superordinate themes came from the analysis of his nine-year arc. The first is about *how Vincent survived by measuring his experiences against those who had it worse* or left the school because of the bullying. "I don't think I got the worst end of the stick" – a comparison that made what he was going through feel bearable.

The second theme is built around one of his own insights: *that language competence and cultural belonging are not the same thing*. You can know all the words and still not know the world in which those words make sense.

The third theme captures how Vincent found *belonging through alternative routes when peer pathways were blocked* – and the individual staff who made that possible. Students from upper years groups who welcomed Vincent through music "really saw me for who I was" – not the rumours, not the label of being "different," but him. Being seen authentically, rather than through others' projections, emerged as a prerequisite for belonging. Alongside these peer connections, specific adults created safety nets that formal systems failed to offer – a housemaster whose check-ins were helpful in that they were "random" and "unprompted" rather than procedural, a mental health practitioner who bypassed bureaucratic systems with "don't bother going through the house... just email me." What these relationships had in common was not their institutional function but the perceived genuineness of their attention – which Vincent described as giving him a "sense of peace." When he later became a Year 13 senior himself, he actively refused to replicate the social hierarchy dynamics in boarding school that had once harmed him: "I really made that point that I don't care about hierarchy. I just want to treat people for respect or who they are as a person."

The fourth theme addresses what was happening to *Vincent's Hong Kong friendships while he was navigating all of this*. He was not only excluded from UK peers through bullying – he was simultaneously losing the friendships that had sustained him before migration: "My friends back

in Hong Kong, you know, they were gaming together every night... they really formed a really strong bond... going for barbecues, hot pots together. You know, I'm just stuck in UK doing nothing, getting bullied." This was not a falling out. It was the quiet drift of living in different places during the years when friendships solidify – his Hong Kong friends were building shared experiences he was not part of, and there was nobody to blame for that. Summers back in Hong Kong offered an emotional reset, but they could not undo the growing distance.

The fifth theme discerns the experience of *never quite fitting into either Hong Kong or UK culture* – and in member checking, Vincent added a third dimension to this: his Malaysian heritage, which means the identity question has always had more complexity to it than a simple Hong Kong versus UK tension. "I always have a sense of identity crisis," he said.

The sixth theme concerns *how long belonging actually took* – a meaningful turning point did not come until Year 11, and even then it remained uneven for years. His "fairy tale ending" referred not to finally feeling at home, but to completing the master's degree that was the whole reason he came to the UK in the first place – a nine year journey to fulfil the original purpose of migration.

The seventh theme is about *what Vincent had chosen to do with everything he went through* – rather than leaving it behind, he had turned it into something purposive: "if somehow what I say can somehow help future decisions or impact things, it's always better to be said than not spoken."

4.5.4: Member Checking Contribution

In the member checking session, Vincent confirmed all seven themes. He reflected that he doesn't consciously downplay what happened with the bullying in his earlier years in the UK – "I don't think I'm conscious of it actually" – but that it is part of how he has always navigated difficult

experiences: trying to find something to learn from rather than dwelling on the harm itself. On sources of belonging, he expanded beyond the older students he had initially credited, to include friends across year groups and from Hong Kong, emphasising that what made these relationships authentic was the stripping away of hierarchy: they really try to see you as a friend and seniority did not come as a factor. On never quite fitting into either culture, Vincent explicitly introduced the Chinese-Malaysian dimension of his identity, confirming that the third culture kid concept resonated strongly with his experience. He also described how, when he became a Year 13 senior, he actively tried to make things easier for younger students by refusing to replicate the hierarchical dynamics he had experienced in boarding school. Having been on the receiving end of that system himself, he chose not to pass it on.

4.5.5: Integrative Reflection

Vincent's account traced what belonging looks like when the environment is actively working against you. His experience suggests that Generation 1.25 students can develop genuine belonging even in hostile institutional environments, but that doing so requires alternative routes that formal systems rarely provide and may not even know to look for. It is also worth noting what his lifeline actually shows after nine years: his sense of belonging returned to roughly where it was before he migrated, with neither the UK nor Hong Kong feeling fully like home. He did not end up somewhere better than where he started – he ended up somewhere comparable, but different. This matters because it unsettles the assumption that integration is a journey toward something more complete. For Vincent, and perhaps for other Generation 1.25 INAs, the destination was not resolution but a settled acceptance of never fully belonging anywhere – and that deserves to be recognised as an outcome in its own right, not a stepping stone to something better.

4.6: Savannah

Savannah, a female participant in her late teens, is a British Bahraini university student who moved from Bahrain to England during her mid-teens to complete her GCSE examinations and subsequently her A-levels. Born to an English mother and Arabic father, she described herself as having two first languages. Despite being educated in Bahrain at an international school following British curriculum and spending her childhood summers visiting the UK, permanent relocation revealed that knowing a place and belonging there are entirely different things. Savannah captured her sense of not-quite-belonging through something almost physical – the weather feeling wrong, the environment not quite fitting her body – a sensory dimension of belonging that was harder to articulate but no less real for that. She struck me as self-aware and direct – someone who has thought carefully about what she feels and why, and who does not dress it up. She initially lived with her older half-sister before experiencing housing instability that required moving in with a peer for two months, eventually returning to her sister's household. Now in her second year of university, Savannah maintained that Bahrain remains definitively home and views her UK life as temporary, despite developing solid friendships and taking on leadership roles in cultural societies at university.

4.6.1: Found Poem: The Workweek and the Weekend

*I kind of see it as the workweek —
the working days is how I imagine being in England.
And then the weekend, where I can relax,
is me being back in Bahrain.*

*You can show me a lamp post
and I know exactly where it is.
The weather felt correct,
not abnormal in any way.
Every time I came back to Bahrain,
I forgot about England.*

*I knew that it was either I stand out
or I follow their behaviours.
It wasn't worth it
to give up like morals and stuff.
If I stuck to how I normally was,
I would end up finding a friend anyway.*

*She kicked me out.
I had to sleep on my friend's sofa.
I couldn't even name what was happening.*

I was just angry.

3 to 4. That's what it is.

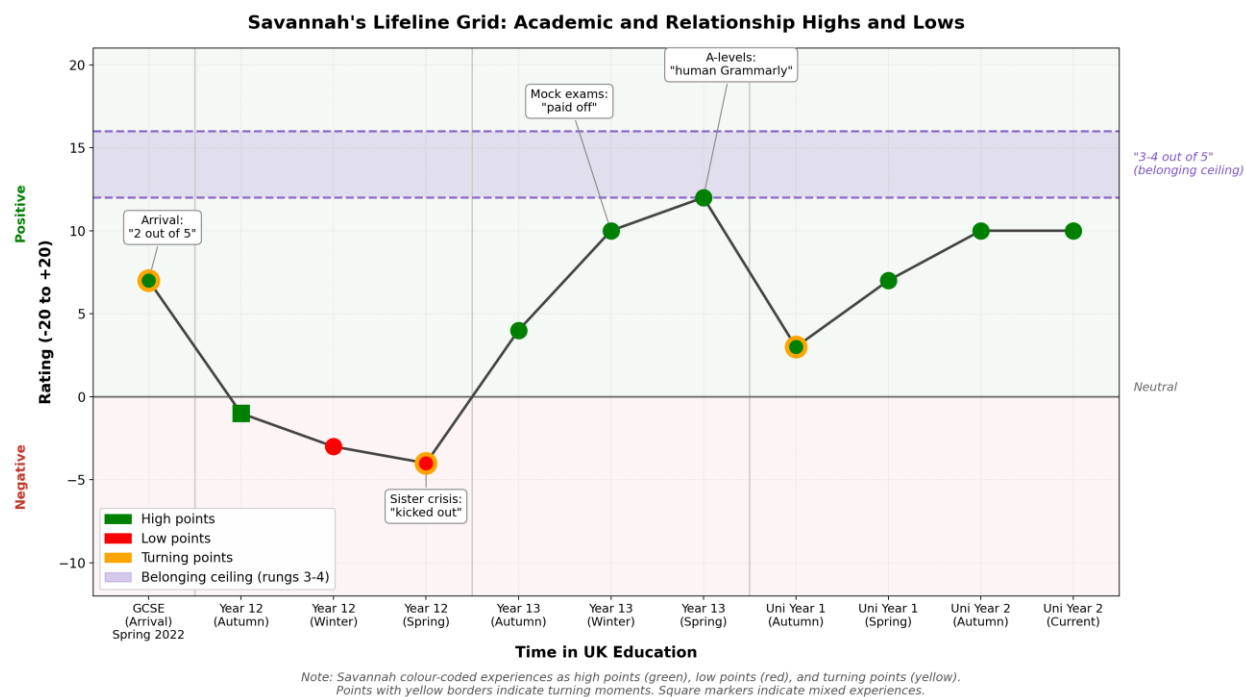
Even 5 to 10 years in the future.

England can be comfortable.

But it will never be home.

4.6.2: Lifeline Grid

Figure 5 Savannah's Lifeline Grid (Digitalised for Clarity)



Note. Savannah colour-coded her experiences using green for high points, red for low points, and yellow for turning points. The shaded band represents the "belonging ceiling" she articulated – "3 to 4 out of 5" even "in 5 to 10 years

in the future." A band rather than a line is used because she gave a range; at four grid points per ladder rung, rungs 3 to 4 fall between 12 and 16. Her highest point (Year 13 A-levels) reaches the lower edge of this band and no point rises above it, suggesting she has approached what she considers her maximum possible UK belonging.

4.6.3: Narrative Summary of Key Themes

Table 8 Savannah's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

No.	Superordinate Themes	Key Focus
1	"I knew it was either I stand out or I follow their behaviours" – Choosing yourself over fitting in.	Early decision to stand out rather than compromise values; confidence that being herself would eventually attract genuine connection; discomfort of being different held alongside conviction it was right.
2	"The workweek and the weekend" – England as effort, Bahrain as home.	England requiring constant vigilance and adaptation; Bahrain as embodied relaxation and correct environment; belonging ceiling of "3 to 4" predicted as permanent.
3	"Living there is different from what I expected" – What visiting a place can't prepare you for.	Holiday familiarity creating misleading preparation for permanent relocation; visits to Bahrain temporarily obscuring the ongoing effort of living in England; sensory and practical displacement.
4	"I wouldn't consider English my second language – I have two first languages" – Bilingualism as complexity, not advantage.	Integrated bilingual-self forced into English-only presentation; stuttering and accent slippage under emotional pressure revealing the cost of suppressing Arabic; misidentification as second-language speaker despite lifelong English fluency.
5	"She kicked me out" – When the person meant to support you doesn't.	Housing crisis with half-sister as foundational belonging collapse; homelessness at 16-17 in a country of less than two years; anger as protective framing over grief.
6	"Being valuable for being different, but also paying the price" – The cost of never fully belonging anywhere.	Biracial position as simultaneously asset and marker of never fully belonging; finding a role and a voice through cultural societies, while still never feeling fully at home; moving between different social worlds depending on what each situation called for.

Savannah's account is organised around two convictions she held simultaneously: she had chosen to be herself rather than fit in, and she knows she will never feel fully at home in England. She was clear about this – rating her UK belonging between 3 and 4 and expecting that to stay the same even in 5 to 10 years – not with resignation, but with a kind of settled certainty that feeling truly at home is not something time or effort can manufacture.

Six superordinate themes were developed from the analysis of Savannah's experience. The first, *choosing yourself over fitting in*, captures her early decision that standing out was preferable to abandoning her values: "I knew that it was either I stand out or I follow their behaviours". This decision was partly informed by observing her siblings' experiences and trusting that authenticity would eventually find its people – a trust that proved well-placed, though not without cost. Staying true to herself made Savannah visible in ways she couldn't always control: teachers drawing on her cultural knowledge in class, and hearing the sighs from peers that followed.

The second theme, *England as effort, Bahrain as home*, is captured in Savannah's workweek/weekend metaphor – England requires constant vigilance and adaptation; Bahrain is where she relaxes, forgets to check Google Maps, and feels the weather as correct. The language of correctness is worth attending to: not merely preference, but a feeling that her body and surroundings are in the right relationship to each other – that she is where she is supposed to be.

The third theme is about how visiting a place, even repeatedly and across a whole childhood, does not prepare you for what it actually feels like to live there. *Living somewhere revealed demands that visiting had concealed*: managing utility bills, navigating sensory displacement, coping with the absence of embodied familiarity. As Savannah put it, "I had an idea of how the UK was already, but it wasn't as much" – holiday knowledge had provided cultural literacy but not lived competence.

The fourth theme is about what it means to have *two first languages rather than one*. Bilingualism is a genuine resource for Savannah, but it did not resolve the complexity of living in a context where only one of those languages is available to her. She described operating in English alone as being "stuck at 70 percent loading" – her sense of self is built across both languages, and neither alone is the full picture. When she is emotional or trying to make a point, her accent slips back into Arabic involuntarily – her body revealing what English-only performance cannot hold.

The fifth theme, *when the people meant to support you don't*, addresses the housing crisis with her half-sister directly. Being effectively homeless at age 16–17 in a country where she had lived less than two years, forced to tolerate unwanted religious pressure because she had nowhere else to go, represented acute vulnerability. In both interviews, Savannah framed this experience through anger rather than grief – "I wasn't upset. I was angry" – a distinction that may itself be worth attending to.

The sixth theme, *being valuable for being different but paying the price*, captures the complexity of her biracial position: simultaneously an asset in diverse social contexts and a marker of never fully belonging anywhere. She described being "the only source of variation" in her school – valued when explaining Arabic sounds in English class but hearing sighs from peers when teachers drew on her cultural knowledge. The recognition felt good; the cost of being the only one carrying it did not.

4.6.4: Member Checking Contribution

In the member checking session, Savannah confirmed all six themes, stating: "that was all spot on". She elaborated on the *England-as-effort* theme, describing how even small daily details – punctuality, using Google Maps, the cold and darkness – constantly signalled she is not in her "correct" environment: "I'm always aware that this isn't like the correct surrounding". When

presented with the belonging ceiling observation, she immediately affirmed it, adding her spontaneous closing comment: “it’s just like highlighting my thoughts of like I can’t wait to go home now” – demonstrating that even reflecting on her UK experience oriented her toward Bahrain.

4.6.5: Integrative Reflection

Of all five participants, Savannah was the most explicit about the fact that more time in the UK will not change how she feels about it. Her prediction that belonging will remain at 3 to 4 indefinitely – despite good friendships, cultural society involvement, and academic success – suggests that for Savannah, there is a ceiling on UK belonging that is set not by how long she has been here or what she has built here, but by where her body and history are rooted. Her workweek/weekend metaphor reframed belonging not as either/or but as differentiated across contexts: she can be content in England while knowing it will never be home; she can build friendships and take on leadership roles while maintaining that Bahrain is where she belongs. What her narrative left open is whether moving between two different versions of yourself – England mode and Bahrain mode – is something that gets easier over time, or whether the effort of keeping that up quietly takes its toll. Her clarity about the limits of UK belonging – and her conviction that those limits will not shift – provided one of the most direct articulations of the belonging ceiling that emerged as a shared pattern in the cross-case analysis in Chapter Five.

4.7: Chapter Conclusion

The five individual cases presented in this chapter each offer a distinct account of school belonging shaped by their countries of origin, migration configuration, institutional context, and

the specific relationships participants encountered. Cassey's pragmatic acceptance of a belonging ceiling sits alongside Jacob's insistence that belonging is entirely relational; Daisy's careful, structured approach to connection contrasts with Savannah's settled certainty that time will not change how she feels; Vincent's nine-year arc from survival to resolution demonstrates what belonging looks like when the environment is actively working against you. Several participants also expressed the hope that telling their story might be useful to others navigating similar journeys – a purposeful orientation returned to in Chapter 6. Chapter 5 places these individual analyses in dialogue with one another, identifying the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) that was identified across the five accounts.

Chapter 5: Group Experiential Themes

5.1 Chapter Introduction

What emerged from moving across five participants' accounts was not a single story of migration and belonging, but a set of shared structural positions – each navigated differently, but recognisable across all five. The six Group Experiential Themes (GETs) developed in this chapter

collectively suggest that belonging for Generation 1.25 students is partial, relational, non-linear, and sustained through ongoing negotiation rather than achieved through a definitive moment. What varied was how participants made sense of their belonging and what resources they drew on in doing so. In Smith et al.'s (2022) second edition of IPA, these cross-case patterns represent not simply a terminological update but a conceptual development in how IPA approaches the move from individual to group analysis.

The process of developing GETs involved laying out each participant's PETs and working across them to identify convergences and meaningful divergences. Smith et al. (2022) suggest that in IPA studies of four to six participants, a GET should appear in at least half the sample – at least three of five participants here – though frequency alone was not the deciding criterion. What mattered equally was whether a pattern carried genuine weight in how participants made sense of their experience. All six GETs were present across all five participants' accounts, though the form they took and the emphasis they carried varied considerably.

Table 9 provides an overview of the six GETs. The ordering moves from what was identified as most foundational – the recognition that belonging has limits, and that relationships matter more than place or institution – through the ways participants navigated their circumstances – language, family, time – to the broader questions of identity and cultural position they came to occupy. The ordering is analytical rather than chronological; participants lived these themes simultaneously rather than in sequence.

Each GET section follows the same structure: a summary table mapping the pattern across participants, an integrated narrative analysis, and an interpretive commentary. Throughout, the analysis moves between participant voice (direct quotes), descriptive voice (narration of what participants expressed), and interpretive voice (analytical engagement with what these patterns

might mean). Participant quotes are drawn from both interviews without distinguishing between them, consistent with the dual function of the member checking interview as both confirmatory and generative.

Table 9 *Overview of Group Experiential Themes*

GET	Theme Title	Cassey	Daisy	Jacob	Vincent	Savannah
1	The Ceiling of Belonging—Accepted Limitation Without Resignation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Belonging as Relational Rather Than Geographic or Institutional	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	The Labour of Linguistic Navigation—Code-Switching as Survival and Self-Fracture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Family as Both Anchor and Constraint—Two Sides of Intergenerational Support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

5	Navigating Between Survival Mode and Genuine Engagement—Belonging as a Journey Over Time	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Cultural In-Betweenness as Permanent Position Rather Than Transitional State	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note. Ticks indicate the participant contributed to that GET. All six GETs appeared across all five participants, though manifestation varied considerably.

5.2 GET 1: The Ceiling of Belonging—Accepted Limitation Without Resignation

Across all five participants, a pattern emerged that challenges usual assumptions about successful integration: the recognition that UK belonging has an upper limit – a ceiling that could not be exceeded regardless of time spent, friendships formed, or achievements accumulated. What stood out equally was that participants did not experience this as failure. In every case, an important distinction was made between accepting a limit and giving up. What varied considerably was the form this took – the language, the biographical anchors, the mode of expression – while the underlying structural position was shared across all five accounts.

Table 10 brings together each participant's articulation of this ceiling, showing both the convergence of the phenomenon and the distinctiveness of the language each person found for it.

Table 10 *Manifestations of the Belonging Ceiling Across Participants*

Participant	Their Language	Example of How the Ceiling Manifests
Cassey	"4 is the max it's ever gonna go"	Numerical limit; India always "full 5"; distinguished happiness from belonging.
Daisy	"I become more used to, but I won't say I belong"	Distinguished "used to" from "belong to"; 17 years in HK versus 3 in UK.
Jacob	"Slightly different... doesn't mean I don't belong"	Reframed in-betweenness as identity rather than deficit; neither place fully home.

Vincent	"Fairy tale ending" = 3.5–4/5 (same as pre-migration)	Nine years of effort and completing the education he came for; yet belonging returned only to where it started – neither HK nor UK fully home.
Savannah	"3 to 4... even 5 to 10 years in the future"	Predicts her belonging ceiling to hold regardless of future time spent; England as "workweek," Bahrain as "weekend".

The ceiling was described in different ways across the five accounts, but the underlying recognition – that UK belonging had a limit – was consistent. Cassey expressed it numerically: "So I guess 4 is the max it's ever gonna go because I don't feel like UK is ever gonna fully feel like I belong there." India was "a full 5" because it held her entire life history and community – the UK, however positive the experience, could not replicate what a lifetime there had built. When asked whether the ceiling felt restrictive, she was clear: "It's never going to, you know, upset me that I don't feel like I belong in the UK completely. It's just how it is and that's fine." A notable dimension of her account was her spontaneous decision during the lifeline grid to draw two separate lines – one for happiness, one for belonging – noting that "those are not the same thing." Happiness in the UK could reach 20 out of 20 while belonging remained constrained. That distinction between flourishing in a place and feeling of it ran as an implicit thread through the other accounts too.

Vincent arrived at a similar number after nine years – a belonging score of 3.5 to 4 out of 5, which was where his pre-migration belonging in Hong Kong had started. Despite that time and effort, he had not moved beyond his own baseline. He had similarly arrived at a position of acceptance – framed not as resolution but as an honest account of where he stood: "I don't feel British enough, but I never associated myself with British, but I don't feel Hong Kong enough, but I also don't feel Malaysian enough." When asked where he felt most at home culturally, he trailed

off: "There's no saying to what I am." This was not expressed as loss, but as an honest description of a position he had settled into.

Savannah also reached for a number, placing herself between 3 and 4 and expecting that to hold regardless of how much more time she spent in the UK. The ceiling reflected what Bahrain held rather than what the UK lacked – every time she returned home, England seemed to recede: "every time I came back to Bahrain, I forgot about England... it felt like, oh, I've been here the whole time." Being in the UK required a sustained orientation she did not need to maintain at home, captured in her metaphor: England as the working week, Bahrain as the weekend.

Daisy expressed the same recognition through language rather than figures, drawing a careful distinction between being "used to" the UK and "belonging to" it:

I've been living in Hong Kong for 17 years and I moved to UK and not not for too long. I say it's still not very belong to but like at least I'm like start to become like more used to. I would say I become more used to, but I won't say I I am belong to the UK. No, not that strong relationship.

Being "used to" meant functional competence – working within its systems, understanding expectations, managing daily life. Belonging required something deeper that three years could not establish when set against seventeen in Hong Kong.

Jacob's account was different in character. Rather than naming a ceiling and accepting it, he actively reframed what it meant to feel in-between: "That doesn't mean that I don't feel like I belong. It just feels, it just means that I'm slightly different. And that doesn't really matter to me." Feeling culturally in-between was not new to Jacob – he had grown up between cultures in Hong Kong as someone of Malaysian-Chinese heritage attending an international school. His response

was to treat belonging as something to be drawn selectively from across cultures rather than fully achieved within one. Where the other four named a limit and settled with it, Jacob refused the framing of limitation altogether.

5.2.1 Interpretive Commentary: What the Ceiling Reveals

Taken together, what participants described suggests that contentment within acknowledged limits may represent a form of mature adaptation rather than incomplete integration. Cassey's distinction between happiness and belonging is useful here: if happiness can flourish while belonging remains constrained, then maximising belonging may not be the only goal worth supporting. Enabling students to flourish within accepted limits matters alongside – and may sometimes matter more than – efforts by schools and practitioners to push their sense of belonging further.

The variation in how participants related to their ceiling – through numbers, language, biographical anchors, or active reframing – suggests that the ceiling is not a single experience but a shared structural position that each person navigated differently. What the accounts have in common is not a comparable emotional state, but the same recognition: that belonging in the UK would not exceed a certain point, and that this did not have to be a problem.

5.3 GET 2: Belonging as Relational Rather Than Geographic or Institutional

If GET 1 established that UK belonging has limits regardless of effort or time, GET 2 reveals what belonging actually rested upon: not the place participants inhabited, or the institutions they attended, but rather the people with whom they connected. Across all five accounts, the key turning points in the experience of belonging – both upward and downward – were relational events. Friendships formed or dissolved; mentoring relationships emerged; family proximity

shifted; social networks grew or fractured. Place and institution provided context, but people provided belonging. For example, Vincent's belonging shifted not when his school changed anything structurally, but when older students chose to see him for who he was.

Table 11 brings together the relational patterns across participants, showing how relationships functioned differently depending on circumstance, though always as the central mechanism of belonging.

Table 11 *Relational Belonging Across Participants*

Participant	Key Relational Language	How Relationships Determined Belonging
Cassey	"forced friendships" versus authentic bonds	Distinction between circumstantial (shared outsider status) and genuine connection; belonging collapsed when family departed; acceptance into a white peer group felt like stronger evidence of genuine integration.
Daisy	"I don't have friends... but actually very free"; belonging in structured settings that force proximity	Time with UK peers not sufficient to build relational depth matched in HK; structured activities reduced the cognitive load of social interaction.
Jacob	"the social aspect was what really makes or breaks"; mentoring juniors; convention friends across distance	Every lifeline turning point relational; belonging through being needed as much as through being connected.
Vincent	Older students in higher year groups "really saw me for who I was"; housemaster who "really checked up on everyone"	Year group rejection blocked normative belonging; alternative routes through older peers and individual staff.
Savannah	"meeting people here does help"; cultural society leadership at university; solid friendships insufficient to relocate home	Friendships affirmed but did not fundamentally shift her belonging orientation toward UK.

Jacob named the pattern directly when his lifeline was laid before him: "The overarching theme is that like the social aspect was what really makes or breaks the kind of like how I felt about it." What Jacob identified was discernible across all five accounts: the turning points were

not academic milestones, cultural adjustments, or institutional interventions, but relational events. For Vincent, the shift came not from anything the school did structurally, but from upper year students who got to know him through shared involvement in music. They "welcomed me as a person and... really saw me for who I was." When a rumour spread in Year 10, they dismissed it directly: "that's bullshit." For Cassey, belonging collapsed not when she left school or moved cities, but when her family returned to India – the relational anchor was gone, and everything else shifted with it. For Daisy, belonging shifted between Year 12 and Year 13 when she gained access to structured activities that brought her into contact with peers around a shared purpose.

But the presence of relationships was not sufficient – their quality determined whether belonging followed. Cassey drew an explicit distinction between early "forced friendships," built on shared outsider status, and later connections formed on genuine shared interests. Only the latter produced belonging. Vincent's year group, though physically present, could not offer belonging because they misrecognised him – relating to a version built from rumour rather than contact. Daisy could be surrounded by peers in a classroom while remaining relationally isolated, because the informal social world of school required conditions – unstructured time, parental permission to socialise – that were not consistently available to her. Vincent's housemaster stood out not for structured support but for consistent, personalised checking in – "if I didn't have that, I don't think I would have been where I am now." What made the difference, across these accounts, was not the existence of relationships but whether they involved being genuinely perceived.

For several participants, the most sustaining relationships developed outside school altogether. Jacob's convention and cosplay community, accessed through a Hong Kong friend who also attended UK conventions, offered him something school had not: people he could "vibe quite well with," built around shared interests rather than shared circumstance. Cassey's mother built

community networks that structured Cassey's early belonging entirely outside the school environment. School was rarely sufficient on its own – the relational networks that mattered most often extended well beyond it.

Savannah's account adds a necessary counterpoint. By the end of A-levels her friendships were real and sustaining, yet she distinguished carefully between what those relationships did for her day-to-day life and what they did for her sense of home: "I think that meeting people here does help. But I wouldn't say that it's really changed exactly what my outcome will be." Daisy made a similar distinction: she still felt more at home in Hong Kong because she had more friends there. For both, the relational foundation of belonging was not absent in the UK – it was outweighed by what had accumulated over many more years elsewhere. Relationships shaped how welcoming the UK felt without relocating where home was.

5.3.1 Interpretive Commentary: What Relational Belonging Reveals

What these participants made clear was that the experience of belonging could not be engineered by the school environment alone – welcoming curricula or inclusive spaces provided context, but not belonging itself. What mattered was whether conditions existed for genuine connection to form: structured opportunities that brought people together around a shared purpose, active attention to peer exclusion and bullying, and staff who saw students as individuals rather than managing them at a distance.

The quality and authenticity of relationships mattered as much as their presence. Proximity alone – being placed near peers through a buddy system or group activity – did not produce the relational depth these accounts suggest belonging requires. What these examples also reveal is that the relational ecology sustaining these participants extended well beyond school: family

connections, friendships maintained across borders, and communities built outside institutional structures all featured as significant. School was one node in a wider relational network, not its centre.

5.4 GET 3: The Labour of Linguistic Navigation—Code-Switching as Survival and Self-Fracture

Linguistic and communicative performance emerged across all five participants as a site of sustained and often invisible labour – not merely a practical challenge of comprehension but an ongoing negotiation of identity, authenticity, and self-presentation. The demands of communicating in UK contexts required more than vocabulary or grammar or even fluency; they required navigating accent, social register, cultural reference and the unspoken norms of how language is used. This included modifying how the self was expressed, perceived, and received in that process. What united varied experiences was the recognition that language was not simply a tool for communication – it shaped what each participant felt they could express of themselves and how they were received.

Table 12 maps each participant’s language background and prior relationship to English, alongside the key challenges they encountered, showing both the variety of starting points and the convergence of experience around code-switching as ongoing labour.

Table 12 *Linguistic Navigation Across Participants*

Participant	Language Background	Key Challenge	Resolution/Cost
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Cassey	English as language of education throughout life alongside native language.	Indian accent unfamiliar in British context: "Had to relearn English all over again"; faking accent as "pressure".	Three years to feel comfortable; easier, not natural.
Daisy	Cantonese as daily language and most authentic self; English taught in academic settings in Hong Kong.	Cannot express emotional life in English; Cantonese self locked inside.	Ongoing fracture; English competence without emotional fluency.
Jacob	English as first language through international schooling; Cantonese and Mandarin as second languages.	Linguistically prepared but not culturally; accent less central.	Selecting what to take from each culture rather than fully adopting either one.
Vincent	English as first language through international schooling; Cantonese and Mandarin as second languages.	"Not even language barrier... it's culture"; linguistically prepared but not culturally.	Code-switching as cultural performance.
Savannah	Two simultaneous first languages (English + Arabic); bilingual integrated self.	Forced monolingual English presentation causes stuttering; misread as lack of fluency.	Sustained immersion in English produced fluency, but at the cost of feeling less connected to her Bahraini self.

For Cassey, Jacob, and Vincent – all of whom had been educated through English mediums prior to arriving in the UK – the expectation might have been that language would not be a significant site of difficulty. This expectation proved wrong for all three, though in different ways. Cassey's experience was the most immediately disorienting. Having spoken English her entire life, she found on arrival that communication broke down at the level of accent rather than language itself: "the language thing was surprising because I've spoken English all my life and I came to the UK and it felt like I had to relearn English all over again because no, nobody could understand me. People would keep asking me to repeat because of my accent." She came to describe understanding and adopting British accents as "honestly a skill that needs to be taught" – reframing what is often

treated as automatic adjustment as something that requires active learning and support. After three years, she described code-switching as easier, though the labour involved diminished rather than disappeared. For Jacob and Vincent, the adjustment was less about accent and more about the gap between linguistic fluency and cultural integration. Vincent captured this directly: "It's not even language barrier. It's like, what's the word, culture? I think culture is the big word where it's like I could... I can live in the area, but I can't integrate well." English competence had not given him access to the shared references, social assumptions, and cultural codes that made genuine integration possible. Jacob described navigating this through a kind of selective cultural code-switching – "what do I like about this? What don't I like about this? What do I keep and what do I discard?" – treating cultural elements as something to be chosen from rather than inhabited. This offered flexibility, but also meant moving between worlds rather than settling into any one of them.

Where those three experienced the gap between linguistic fluency and cultural belonging, Savannah and Daisy each experienced a different and more acute fracture – the separation of language from self. Savannah had grown up with two simultaneous first languages, English and Arabic, from an English-speaking mother and Arabic-speaking father: "I feel just as equally confident in both, but I feel the best when I mix them together." England required her to present exclusively in English, splitting what had always been integrated. The consequence was involuntary – when emotional or making a strong point in debate, her accent slipped back into Arabic, and she described people "noticing it really quickly and pointing it out." She had never registered this as unusual before: "I had never acknowledged it before because I thought it's standard." Her bilingual self was simply normal to her; being marked for it revealed how UK monolingual norms rendered her normal as abnormal. The experience of being required to present exclusively in English was palpable even at interview – "I can't I I stutter a lot and I change my

sentences a lot just to try and fit how it is in normal, complete English." Where Savannah's sense of self was fractured by having an integrated bilingual-self forced into monolingual presentation, Daisy's was of a different kind. She had only ever encountered English through school in Hong Kong; it had never been the language of her social or emotional life. She switched into Cantonese during the interview itself when English could not carry what she needed to say – she struggled to find an English word for the concept 諷刺 (loosely translatable as sarcasm or irony) that she could access readily in Cantonese. This moment illustrated something that ran through her account more broadly: while she could function in English, the language in which she most naturally thought and felt remained Cantonese. Appearing competent in English did not mean she could express the full depth of who she was.

What relief from linguistic demand looked like is also visible in these accounts. Cassey described the contrast at university, where a much more internationally diverse peer group meant that navigating accent differences was no longer primarily her burden – the environment had changed, not only her adaptation. Savannah found something similar when a period without returning to Bahrain temporarily stopped the constant movement between linguistic worlds: 'I could literally speak in English without stuttering, without hesitating, like I didn't even have to think.' The relief was not about ability but about no longer being required to suppress one version of self in order to present another.

5.4.1 Interpretive Commentary: Language, Self, and Belonging

All five participants had learned functional English even prior to arriving at the UK. The gap that runs across these accounts is between being able to speak and being able to be oneself while speaking – and that is where the labour of linguistic and communicative navigation lived. It

was labour that rarely gets named, let alone supported. Savannah's bilingual self was not deficient; it was complex in ways that monolingual contexts did not accommodate. Daisy's Cantonese was not an obstacle; it was the language through which she experienced herself most fully.

The relief described – when diverse peer groups or sustained immersion reduced the need for code-switching – suggests where the most durable support lies. Individual adaptation has limits; what these accounts point toward is the value of linguistic diversity within school environments as a condition for belonging, rather than monolingual conformity as the standard against which all students are measured.

5.5 GET 4: Family as Both Anchor and Constraint—The Two Sides of Intergenerational Support

Family emerged across all five accounts as a significant relational context of belonging – and perhaps the most internally complex one. What was consistent was not that family helped or that family constrained, but that there was an inherent duality to both functions – inseparable from each other and often operating simultaneously. The same parents who provided stability also imposed limits; the same relationships that anchored participants also generated obligation and concealment. How this played out depended considerably on migration configuration – whether participants had arrived with family, or alone. Table 13 maps the family dynamics across participants, showing both the anchoring and constraining dimensions for each.

Table 13 *Family Dynamics in Participants' Accounts*

Participant	Migration Configuration	Family as Anchor	Family as Constraint
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Cassey	With family initially; alone at university.	Mother as community-builder and navigator; “a God at that stuff”.	Belonging collapsed when family departed; strategic truth-management to protect autonomy.
Daisy	With family throughout.	Physical co-residence and financial support; cultural continuity at home.	Parental expectations restrict socialisation; displaced anxiety from sister becomes control of Daisy.
Jacob	Alone at boarding school; older brother at different school.	Hong Kong family as emotional anchor; group chats and holidays in Hong Kong maintaining connection.	No family present to absorb difficulties or mediate with the school; older brother at a different school limits day-to-day support.
Vincent	Alone at boarding school.	Family as motivation (“they sacrificed”); long-distance connection.	Vincent’s instinct to protect parents from distressing news led to concealment of difficulties; “bottle it in”.
Savannah	Initially with sister; effectively alone after their relationship broke down.	Sister’s presence was the condition on which Savannah’s migration was premised; eventual reconciliation; parents across borders.	Sister's conditions collapsed; housing instability as consequence; family support conditional.

For Cassey and Daisy, who both migrated with family, the most immediate function was practical. Cassey's mother built much of the infrastructure of her early UK belonging: “She found Indian stores, Indian restaurants. She found so much stuff around – she found like a community of Indian people” – while Cassey watched and learned, knowing she would need to do the same when she moved to another UK city for university alone. Daisy's family provided financial means and cultural continuity, with home remaining a Cantonese-speaking space that offered some relief from the demands of the external world. For both, family presence was the condition that made the early period of settlement navigable.

The constraint dimension of participants’ family experience was just as present, however, and emerged from the same parental concern that drove the support. Daisy was most direct about this. Her parents' restrictions on socialising – preventing her from attending events, requiring her

to work part-time rather than socialise at weekends – were the single biggest barrier to the peer relationships that belonging, as established in GET 2, depends upon. She articulated a tension between understanding where her parents were coming from and struggling to reconcile their restrictions with her own social needs: "I understand. But but but not that much." In Daisy's account, the restrictions she experienced were not simply about parental protectiveness toward her. They were also shaped by what was happening with her sister – who had a greater resistance to parental control.

Cassey's account points to a different form of constraint – more strategic than structural. Having learned from her mother's example, she was careful about what she disclosed, managing the information flow between her UK life and her family in India to protect both her own autonomy and her parents' peace of mind. The constraint here was not imposed but self-imposed, a form of protection that nonetheless created distance. Both Cassey and Daisy demonstrate how the same parental investment that provided stability could also require something to be given up in return.

For Jacob and Vincent, who arrived alone for boarding school, family relationships operated differently. Physical absence meant that the anchoring function had to be sustained across distance – through group chats, video calls, and holiday returns. Vincent's relationship with his family carried an additional weight: the sacrifice dimension. His parents' investment in his UK boarding school place created a sense of obligation that shaped how he managed difficulty. He did not disclose the severity of the bullying he experienced, referencing a cultural norm he articulated directly: "Asian kids sometimes we don't, we don't really share how we feel about things... I tried to bottle it in... I don't want to scare my parents." Family as anchor thus also meant family as the reason for endurance – sustaining him through difficulty while simultaneously preventing him from accessing parental support. Jacob's family dynamic was less fraught but similarly shaped by

distance – his belonging in Hong Kong never fully fell away, with his emotional life remaining oriented toward people who were not physically present.

Savannah's experience brought the anchor-and-constraint dynamic to its sharpest point. Her migration had been premised on her older sister's presence: "the conditions of me coming to the UK were that she would be there with me." When her sister's new partner moved in and the relationship deteriorated, Savannah was effectively required to leave – staying for two months with a school friend, with no scheduled return flight to Bahrain and nowhere else to go. The anchor had not simply weakened; it had become the source of her greatest instability. Her response was anger rather than grief, which she distinguished clearly from being "really upset and missing home." The anger was adaptive – it maintained her agency in a situation largely outside her control – but the experience may have reinforced her fundamental orientation toward Bahrain as the only truly reliable ground, even while her parents across borders could acknowledge the situation but were unable to intervene.

5.5.1 Interpretive Commentary: The Duality of Intergenerational Support

Family emerges here as a complex site of belonging – neither simply supportive nor simply constraining, but both at once. Parents who made difficult decisions to support their children's UK education carried their own anxieties, cultural expectations, and histories of disruption, and these shaped both the support they offered and the limits they imposed. That role was not stable: it shifted depending on who came, who stayed behind, how far away they were, and what expectations travelled with the move. Understanding a Generation 1.25 student's belonging trajectory may therefore require understanding the specific configuration of their family circumstances – seeing the family as a unit navigating migration together, rather than simply as backdrop to the student's individual experience.

5.6 GET 5: Navigating Between Survival Mode and Genuine Engagement—Belonging as a Journey Over Time

The preceding GETs have focused on what belonging felt like at particular moments. GET 5 attends to how belonging changed over time: the movement from an initial period of survival – managing, enduring, getting through – toward something closer to genuine engagement. This movement was visible across all five participants, though it happened at different speeds, through different turning points, and landing on different destinations. What it was not, in any of the five accounts, was steady or linear.

Table 14 maps the temporal arc of each participant's trajectory, from survival phase through turning point to engagement phase.

Table 14 *Temporal Arc of Belonging Across Participants*

Participant	Survival Phase	Turning Point	Engagement Phase
Cassey	Anxiety/depression; “forced friendships”; linguistic pressure; institutional invisibility.	Authentic friendships in diverse sixth form cohort; finding Indian community and fashion network in University.	Peak belonging (happiness 20/20); multiple identity layers coexisting in UK space.
Daisy	Year 12: isolated; video games alone; relational poverty despite having more free time than when she was in Hong Kong.	Structured activities (expedition, summer camp); Year 13 tentative belonging.	University belonging went back to earlier levels of isolation; constrained by parental restrictions and assignment pressure.
Jacob	First 3 years survival mode; “countdown to next holiday”; homesickness; food stolen.	Year 12 and 13: real friendships; convention community; belonging through mentoring.	Years 4–5: “living” not just “surviving”; “oh hell no” versus “definitely would redo”.
Vincent	Years 9–10: worst years; bullying; isolation; 1–2/5 belonging.	Upper year acceptance; housemaster support; sixth form community.	University: active effort; societies; eventual 3.5–4/5 after nine years.

Savannah	Initial months: homesickness; achievement-focus; housing instability.	Cultural society leadership; A-level Year 13 settled confidence.	University: solid friendships; recognised for cultural contribution; but home still Bahrain.
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Jacob gave the clearest articulation of what survival mode felt like from the inside:

In my first year, like my attitude towards like school was more – less like living in school and more like surviving in school. If you know what I mean. So like each day was kind of just like a countdown to the next holiday. I was like, when's the next holiday? When can I get out of here?

This framing – surviving rather than living, each day a countdown – captures something that ran through all five participants' accounts of their early years in the UK, even if they did not name it in those terms. Vincent's first two years involved sustained bullying and what he rated as a 1 to 2 out of 5 on belonging; Cassey's first period was marked by linguistic difficulty, forced friendships, and an institutional invisibility around the UK application process that left her navigating by guesswork; Daisy's Year 12 was characterised by relational isolation and video games alone in her room. The specific form of survival mode varied, but the underlying orientation was similar: getting through, rather than engaging. What shifted the trajectory, across all five accounts, was not time or institutional support alone but the specific relational encounters discussed in GET 2. None of the turning points were produced by programmes or policies – they came through conditions that allowed real connection to form.

What stood out across these accounts was how consistently the timelines involved were longer than participants, those around them, or schools had anticipated. Jacob described three years before genuine engagement; Vincent's was the most striking: nine years from arrival before reaching what he called his "fairy tale ending," and even then returning only to the belonging level

he had left behind in Hong Kong. His reflection captures what that underestimation felt like: "I think people definitely tend to underestimate it. I also I think I also honestly underestimate it as well – oh, I'll be fine by uni. I was not fine by uni." His member checking added a further dimension: "boarding school is still a bubble... until you step into university, that's when the real UK starts." For Generation 1.25 students in the relatively contained, closely supervised environment of boarding school, the transition to university could represent both a new challenge and the first genuine encounter with UK society at scale.

Their belonging trajectories were also non-linear in ways that suggests progress could be undone. Cassey's experience is the clearest illustration: her Year 13 peak – genuine friendships, cultural connection, academic confidence – collapsed when university brought a new city, dispersed friendships, and her family gone all at once. She described feeling completely lost, and rebuilt from scratch using the strategies she had absorbed from watching her mother. By third year at university she had found, in her words, "every layer of friendship that I needed to find" – a recovery that surpassed her Year 13 peak. For Cassey, belonging was less a steady climb than a set of conditions that could come together, fall apart, and be reassembled. Daisy's trajectory pointed in a similar direction: the tentative belonging she had built in Year 13 was disrupted at university when her closest friend moved to a different city for her own studies, and by the time of interview her belonging had not recovered to where it had been. Savannah's arc showed development toward greater relational confidence and engagement – she became involved in cultural society leadership and built real friendships – but her fundamental belonging orientation remained stable throughout: the UK was, as she put it, "just kind of like a temporary part of my life." Growing engagement with UK life did not shift where she felt she belonged.

5.6.1 Interpretive Commentary: Limits of Timeline Expectations

Across these five accounts, what stands out is how consistently the timescales involved were underestimated – by the participants themselves, by those around them, and by any implicit institutional assumption about when adaptation should be complete. Jacob's three years; Vincent's nine; Daisy's belonging still unresolved at time of interview. Extended timelines were the norm rather than the exception within this sample, which raises the question of whether the same may be true more broadly for Generation 1.25 students.

The shift from surviving to engaging was not produced by time alone – it came through specific relationships and encounters, and for most participants these required active seeking rather than passive accumulation. Every participant could identify the moment or relationship that shifted them from surviving to genuinely engaging. Schools might therefore usefully attend to creating conditions for those encounters, rather than assuming adaptation will occur given enough time.

It is also worth noting what survival mode produced for participants. It was not only a period of difficulty – it was a period of learning. Jacob's framework for navigating imperfect circumstances, Vincent's capacity for endurance, Cassey's strategic approach to rebuilding: these are real competencies developed under pressure. Survival mode was not only a period of difficulty – it was a period in which real competencies were being developed, even if neither participants nor those around them named them as such.

5.7 GET 6: Cultural In-Betweenness as Permanent Position Rather Than Transitional State

The final GET brings together a thread running through all the preceding themes: the experience of occupying a cultural position that is neither fully of their country of origin nor fully

of the UK, and the coming to terms – or not – with this as an enduring rather than transitional state. Across all five participants, cultural in-betweenness was not a phase to be worked through on the way to eventual integration. It was where they were. Jacob named it as feeling "not British enough for the UK, but not Chinese enough for Hong Kong... kind of in the middle." Vincent described it across three positions rather than two, naming British, Hong Kong and Malaysian identities as all insufficient on their own. Cassey held two distinct selves across India and the UK. Savannah moved between England and Bahrain with neither claiming her fully. Daisy's belonging remained anchored in Hong Kong while her material life was in the UK. None of them described this as temporary, and none expected it to resolve. Table 15 maps each participant's relationship to cultural in-betweenness, showing both the shared structural position and the different orientations each person developed toward it.

Table 15 *Cultural In-Betweenness Across Participants*

Participant	Their Framing	Relation to Permanence
Cassey	"Two completely different people, but it's great"; compartmentalisation as adaptive resolution.	Accepts permanent dual-self arrangement; paradox: integration produces peak belonging, not compartmentalisation.
Daisy	Still "home more in Hong Kong"; used to versus belong to distinction.	In-betweenness experienced as ongoing displacement rather than identity position; UK still foreign to belonging.
Jacob	"Not British enough... not Chinese enough... slightly different".	Actively reframes in-betweenness as identity rather than deficit; "Be confident in being you".
Vincent	"I don't feel British enough... I don't feel Hong Kong enough... I don't feel Malaysian enough".	Three-identity cultural position; in-between as the only available location; home defined by people, not place.
Savannah	Biracial, bicultural, bilingual; the week/weekend between England and Bahrain metaphor.	Strategic management of cultural visibility; permanent dual-orientation; UK as workweek, Bahrain as weekend.

Two participants had arrived at a relatively settled relationship with the position, though by different routes. Jacob actively reframed in-betweenness as identity rather than deficit – "that doesn't mean that I don't feel like I belong. It just feels, it just means that I'm slightly different. And that doesn't really matter to me." His approach was to treat aspects of culture as things to be drawn from selectively across contexts – a flexibility in navigating between worlds that more fully assimilated peers did not have. His advice in member checking distilled this into a single phrase: "be confident in being you." Cassey's settlement looked different – celebratory rather than reframed. She described her two selves across India and the UK as something she had made peace with: "it's completely different people, but it's great because, like there's parts of my personality that I get to show in different places and that's perfect." Yet her lifeline grid told a slightly different story: her peak belonging occurred when multiple aspects of her identity – Indian community, fashion friendships, cultural festivals – coexisted in one UK space. Where Jacob's acceptance involved choosing what to take from each culture, Cassey's involved maintaining two distinct selves – though her own lifeline suggests she flourished most when they did not have to be separated.

For Vincent, Daisy, and Savannah, in-betweenness was still being negotiated in ways that felt less settled. Vincent's position triangulated across three worlds rather than two, and when asked where he felt most culturally at home he trailed off: "there's no saying to what I am." His resolution was practical rather than internal – considering working in Asia after his studies, with the careful distinction that it "won't be home home, but you know it's close to home." He had relocated the meaning of home into relationships rather than geography, a capacity for connection that did not depend on physical proximity or cultural sameness. Savannah's in-betweenness carried the particular weight of visibility. As the only Middle Eastern student in most of her A-level classes,

she was regularly required to explain or represent a culture her peers did not share. Yet this also produced moments of reversal – "when it was kind of like in reverse where I was explaining my own stuff and people were actually interested in it, I felt kind of strong in my identity" – in which the same visibility that marked her as different became something she alone could offer. Daisy's relationship to in-betweenness appeared to be the most unresolved. Where the others had arrived at some form of orientation – reframing, compartmentalising, or practically repositioning – Daisy was still living it as displacement. Her belonging remained fundamentally in Hong Kong; no stable identity position had yet emerged from the gap between where she felt she was from and where her daily life now was.

5.7.1 Interpretive Commentary: What Permanence Means for Identity Development

Taken together, what these five accounts challenge is the idea that cultural in-betweenness is a phase. It is not something these participants were passing through on the way to belonging somewhere. It is where they were – and for most of them, where they expected to remain. This challenges something fundamental about how integration is typically understood: if the expected trajectory from outsider to insider does not describe the actual experience of Generation 1.25 students, then frameworks oriented toward that destination may be pointed at somewhere neither reachable nor necessarily desirable.

The internal relationship to in-betweenness – how each participant made sense of and related to their position – varied considerably across these five accounts, and that variation mattered as much as the structural position itself. How that position of in-betweenness is experienced depends on what meaning is made of it, what resources are available, and whether others around the student can see and acknowledge it for what it is. Across all five accounts, the

capacities they developed – Jacob's cultural flexibility, Vincent's relational definition of home, Savannah's moments of cultural authority – came directly from living between worlds, not despite it.

GET 6 establishes cultural in-betweenness as a permanent position rather than a transitional state for Generation 1.25 students – something to be lived with and made sense of, rather than resolved. Together, the six GETs construct a picture of Generation 1.25 belonging as neither failure nor achievement but as ongoing negotiation: with limits, relationships, language, family, time, and ultimately with who one is becoming in the space between worlds.

5.8 Chapter Conclusion

Taken together, the six GETs illuminate how Generation 1.25 belonging is neither a story of successful integration nor one of straightforward exclusion. Participants described belonging as partial and bounded – accepted as having a ceiling that time and effort alone could not raise. Belonging rested on the quality of specific relationships rather than on geography or institutions, and it developed over timelines that were consistently longer, and less predictable, than participants or those around them had anticipated. Language was not simply a practical challenge but a site of ongoing labour, shaping what of themselves each participant could express and how they were received. Family provided both the foundation for belonging and, at times, the conditions that constrained it. And cultural in-betweenness was not a phase on the way to eventual integration – it was where participants were, and for most of them, where they expected to remain.

What these themes share is an account of belonging as something actively negotiated rather than passively accumulated. Each of the six GETs points to a dimension of that

negotiation: with limits, with other people, with language, with family, with time, and with identity. They do not resolve neatly into a single conclusion, and that is itself a finding – the experience of belonging for this group resisted the simple before-and-after narratives that integration frameworks often assume.

Chapter 6 takes these themes forward, asking what they mean in relation to existing literature on migrant young people's schooling experiences, what psychodynamic frameworks might offer practitioners seeking to understand the emotional dimensions of what participants described, and what the implications are for Educational Psychology practice.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Chapter Introduction

The six GETs developed from this study both draw on and depart from existing narratives of how migrant students integrate into UK schools – extending what is already known, bringing more nuance to some of its interpretations, and pointing toward dimensions of belonging that existing frameworks only partially capture. This chapter asks what they mean – in relation to one another, and in relation to what is already known.

Section 6.2 summarises the key findings across Chapters 4 and 5. Section 6.3 situates each GET within the broader literature on migrant young people's school experiences in the UK. Rather than offering a single summative account of the findings – the approach many discussion chapters take – this chapter works through each GET individually. As each theme captures a qualitatively distinct dimension of belonging, with its own relevant literature and limitations, this approach allows for more precise engagement than a synthesis alone would permit. Section 6.3 closes with an integrative synthesis that draws the threads across all six themes together. Section 6.4 considers what psychodynamic frameworks – particularly Akhtar's (1995) concept of a third individuation, developed in relation to the psychic demands of immigration, Klein's (1935, 1946) depressive position, and a transcultural approach to working with migrant children and adolescents (Radjack et al., 2021) – offer practitioners as a way of thinking about the emotional dimensions of what participants described. Limitations follow in Section 6.5, implications for Educational Psychology practice in Section 6.6, and directions for future research in Section 6.7. A brief conclusion closes the chapter.

This study is situated as a practitioner research project (Archard et al., 2025), undertaken within a practice-orientated research culture at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust – one in which practice experience serves as what Cooper (2009) described as a fount of ideas for "practice-near" empirical enquiry. It is that same practice context that makes the psychodynamic frameworks in Section 6.4 relevant here. They are not offered as a reinterpretation of the data but as a practitioner lens, drawn from the intersection of phenomenological findings and the psychodynamic orientation I have developed through my training.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings – Returning to Research Questions

This study set out to explore how Generation 1.25 students – those who migrated to the UK between the ages of 13 and 17 – experience and develop a sense of school belonging. Through semi-structured interviews and lifeline grid technique, analysed using IPA, the accounts of five participants – Cassey, Daisy, Jacob, Vincent, and Savannah – were examined first idiographically (Chapter 4) and then across cases (Chapter 5). What emerged was not a narrative of progressive adaptation – arriving, adjusting and eventually settling into UK life – but something considerably more layered: an experience marked by partial belonging, ongoing negotiation, and the persistence of cultural in-betweenness long after the initial period of arrival.

The six GETs identified across participants' accounts collectively challenge several assumptions about what belonging means, how it develops, and what it looks like for this group. Belonging was partial and accepted as such. It was relational rather than institutional. It involved ongoing linguistic labour, was shaped by family configuration, developed non-linearly over years, and was culturally in-between – not as a transitional phase but as an enduring position.

Taken together, these findings suggest that participants experienced belonging in ways that the existing definitions and measures only partially capture. Their accounts point to belonging as something partial, relational, non-linear, and sustained through ongoing negotiation rather than achieved through a definitive moment of arrival.

Returning to the research questions in turn helps illuminate this further, including their links with the six GETs. The first – *how Generation 1.25 students experience and develop school belonging* – is answered by the finding that belonging for this group was experienced as partial, relational, and distributed across geographies rather than concentrated in any single site. The second – *how they manage the concurrent demands of adolescent development and cultural adaptation* – is addressed through the themes of code-switching, cultural in-betweenness, and the temporal arc from survival to engagement, which together point to ongoing negotiation rather than linear adaptation. The third – *what influences support or hinder belonging* – is answered most directly by the relational nature of belonging (GET 2) and the complex role of family (GET 4). What supported belonging was the presence of individuals who saw and accepted the whole person, while what hindered it was isolation, linguistic exclusion, and the loss of key relationships. The fourth – *how pre-migration experiences influence the process of developing school belonging* – is addressed through the temporal arc of belonging (GET 5) and the psychodynamic interpretation offered in section 6.4, which together suggest that pre-migration attachments, language, and cultural identity operated as both resources for navigating belonging and sources of grief when continuity with earlier life could not be maintained.

6.3 Situating the Findings Within Research Literature

6.3.1 GET 1: The Ceiling of Belonging – Accepted Limitation Without Resignation

Participants in this study did not describe belonging as absent. They described it as partial – and, over time, accepted as such. What they described about the ceiling is something Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis did not account for. The hypothesis proposes that human beings possess a fundamental drive to form and maintain lasting interpersonal relationships, and that unmet belonging is inherently distressing – social exclusion, they argued, may be the most common cause of anxiety, and depression can be precipitated by failing to feel accepted or included.

The early period of participants' experiences aligned with this picture – unmet belonging produced genuine distress. What Baumeister and Leary's (1995) framework did not anticipate was what came after. Over time, participants arrived at their belonging ceiling not with ongoing deprivation but with resolution and even acceptance. These are not expressions of distress but of people who have come to terms with a limit on belonging, rooted not in failure to integrate but in what they had already accumulated elsewhere before arriving. What this suggests is not that the framework is wrong, but that it does not fully account for how the belongingness drive operates when partial belonging becomes the accepted condition of a young person's life. Contentment and belonging, it seems, are not the same thing.

Daisy's position was the exception. Her parental restrictions and relative isolation meant she had not yet had the conditions to establish belonging on her own terms. Her experience may come closer to what Baumeister and Leary (1995) described – precisely because the relational and material conditions for belonging were not available to her. The ceiling is not inherently

distressing; what determines whether it produces distress is whether the young person has the relational resources to sustain contentment within it.

Goodenow's (1993) PSSM scale raises a related problem. The scale assesses perceptions of acceptance, respect, and inclusion – and Goodenow (1993) found that newcomers scored significantly lower than longer-term residents. But the more fundamental question is whether the scale can distinguish between the different reasons a student might score moderately: a deficit – wanting to belong more than they do – or a ceiling, accepted rather than suffered. These are qualitatively different experiences that would produce the same numerical score. If belonging and contentment are not the same thing, then measures designed to assess the former may tell us very little about the latter.

6.3.2 GET 2: Belonging as Relational Rather Than Geographic or Institutional

For the participants in this study, belonging was relational before it was anything else – not geographic, not institutional.

Allen et al.'s (2016) meta-analysis identified teacher support as the strongest predictor of school belonging during adolescence, while O'Shea (2018) found that her participants identified peers rather than teachers as the primary source. Building upon such assertions, findings from the current study suggested that specific adults and peers did matter, yet what distinguished the relationships that produced belonging was not the person's role – teacher, peer, housemaster – but the quality of their attention. Participants described belonging in terms of being genuinely known, not in terms of professional practice or institutional provision. What this suggests is that the teacher support Allen et al. (2016) identified as predictive may matter less in its frequency or availability than in whether the student feels genuinely known by the adult providing it.

Sobitan (2022) found that belonging was enhanced when cultural and religious identities were received with respect and curiosity. Savannah's experience illustrates both sides of this. When she was displaced from her sister's home and forced to tolerate unwanted religious pressure from the peer she was staying with, her wellbeing dropped to nearly -5 – the lowest point on her entire lifeline, and the period she described as her lowest sense of belonging in the UK. Conversely, Culture Day – where she could explain her own background and peers were genuinely interested – produced a rare feeling of strength in her identity. What shaped belonging across these accounts was how participants' cultural selves were received, not what provision surrounded them.

For Generation 1.25 students in this study, belonging was not contained within any single site or even country. It was distributed across borders, maintained through digital connections, and accumulated over years rather than terms. This raises a question about how the school's role in supporting belonging is understood – not as the primary site, but as one node within a wider relational network. Measuring belonging only within the school risks missing where else these students' belonging is also located.

6.3.3 GET 3: The Labour of Linguistic Navigation – Code-Switching as Survival and Self-Fracture

All five participants had functional English prior to migration. What they described, nonetheless, was ongoing linguistic labour – not because they lacked the words, but because the English words available to them did not carry everything they needed to say.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 frames language primarily as a barrier to be overcome – documenting how limited English proficiency creates obstacles to socialising

(Moskal, 2016), how informal speech patterns and slang extended these barriers into the social realm (Fuller & Hayes, 2020) and how institutional "linguistic enclosure" separates the social self from the heritage self (Evans & Liu, 2018). What Evans and Liu (2018) described as external boundaries – rules about which language could be used where – participants in this study experienced internally. Daisy's most authentic self lived in Cantonese, yet her daily life required performance in English – and the gap between the two was a site of constant labour. Sharples (2017) observed that migrant students navigate "conflicting identities in the multilingual classroom" – the present findings add what that conflict feels like from inside, and the cost of sustaining it over years.

O'Shea (2018) found that her participants occupied different positions along a spectrum in relation to their heritage language – but her data, collected two to three years after arrival, did not capture what happens over longer timeframes. Reflecting on up to nine years, participants in this study suggest the relationship to language does not simply settle. Cassey's Indian accent was unfamiliar enough to peers that she was repeatedly asked to repeat herself despite lifelong English fluency. Savannah's Arabic accent surfaced involuntarily at moments of greatest emotional intensity – the bilingual self resisting containment. These are not stories of incomplete acquisition. They are stories of selves that exceed what monolingual contexts can hold.

Tereshchenko et al. (2019) argued that the EAL category itself constitutes a form of othering – reducing complex multilingual identities to a single axis defined by deficit. The present findings add a psycho-social dimension to that argument. Code-switching was experienced differently across the five accounts – for some, a form of ongoing self-fracture where parts of the self became inaccessible depending on linguistic context; for others, like Jacob and Cassey, a navigation they had made peace with or even claimed as a strength. But

even where participants did not frame it as loss, the labour of moving between linguistic selves was constant. If language is where identity is negotiated rather than simply a tool for communication, then support focused solely on English acquisition misses the psychological dimension entirely. Creating spaces where bilingual identity is valued – not merely tolerated – is a matter of whether students can bring their whole selves into the school environment.

6.3.4 GET 4: Family as Both Anchor and Constraint – The Two Sides of Intergenerational Support

Family was not a background condition for these participants' belonging – it was its architecture. But it was architecture that could both hold and confine, sometimes at the same time, through the same people.

The existing literature presents family's role in relatively binary terms. Bulsara et al. (2025) found that family members supported refugee adolescents' academic motivation; Fuller and Hayes (2020) documented what happens when family is absent entirely; O'Shea (2018) found that where family was present, it functioned as clear support. Moskal (2016) added a further dimension – parents who were present and invested but institutionally excluded, unable to communicate with schools due to language barriers. What none of these studies fully captures is the supportive and constraining functions coexisting within the same relationships. Cassey's mother built the material infrastructure of belonging and then, in leaving the UK, collapsed what she had built. Jacob and Vincent's families anchored them emotionally across distance but also oriented their belonging away from the UK. Savannah's sister was the condition of her migration and, when that relationship changed, the source of acute vulnerability.

Moskal's (2016) finding about parental institutional exclusion takes on a different character in the present study. Where her participants were excluded by language barriers, Daisy's family illustrates a different form of the same problem – not language but legibility. Her parents were present and actively monitoring her sister's schooling. But in Hong Kong, if a student was struggling, the teacher would tell parents directly. In the UK, teachers described her sister as "quiet" and "good," framing silence positively when the reality was that she could not speak English. The extent of her sisters' struggles was as such not visible till after the Year 10 mock exams. The school's norms for communicating concern were culturally opaque to a family shaped by entirely different expectations.

What Daisy's example illustrates – and what ran through all five accounts – is that family's role in belonging cannot be reduced to whether support is present or absent. A both/and framing is more accurate: the same family who anchored these participants also constrained them. For EPs, this means asking not just whether family support is present, but how it is configured – who came, who stayed behind, what expectations travelled with the move – because those specifics shaped the belonging trajectory that followed.

6.3.5 GET 5: Navigating Between Survival Mode and Genuine Engagement – Belonging as a Journey Over Time

Belonging, for these participants, did not develop on a predictable schedule. It accumulated, stalled, and sometimes regressed – over years, not terms.

O'Shea (2018) found that her participants described belonging as a broadly progressive journey, moving from not belonging to belonging within two to three years. The present findings extend this timeframe considerably. Reflecting on trajectories spanning up to nine years,

participants described belonging as non-linear, vulnerable to regression, and consistently underestimated in its timescales. After nine years, Vincent arrived at his 'fairy tale ending' – yet this placed him at the same level of belonging he had felt before migrating. Daisy's belonging, tentatively built in Year 13, unravelled when her closest friend left for university in another city. These are not stories of gradual improvement but of accumulation, disruption, and recalibration – patterns that only become visible when the timeframe is long enough to reveal them.

What ended the survival-mode period was the slow gathering of relational connections – a pattern that echoes Bulsara et al.'s (2025) finding that disruptions to support networks produced cascading effects on educational engagement among young people with refugee backgrounds. What the present study adds is the specificity of what enabled recovery: not a programme or a policy, but moments in which a young person felt seen and valued. Câmara's (2024) funds of knowledge perspective offers a useful reframing: rather than viewing the survival-mode period as a failure of adaptation, the capacities participants were developing – resilience, code-switching ability, cross-cultural competence – were resources not yet visible to the schools around them. The timescales within which schools expect adaptation to occur may be considerably shorter than what these trajectories suggest is needed (Rumbaut, 2004).

It is also worth noting that while participants referenced macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) events such as COVID-19, none explicitly connected them to their sense of belonging. Hughes (2021) documented how recently-arrived migrant students found themselves at the intersection of contradictory policy agendas during this period (e.g. Brexit, European Migration Crisis, the Prevent Duty), yet participants in this study located belonging entirely in the interpersonal domain. Whether macrosystemic forces shaped their experience indirectly –

through the conditions they did describe, such as bullying, misplaced assumptions, and cultural marking – is not something this study can determine.

6.3.6 GET 6: Cultural In-Betweenness as Permanent Position Rather Than Transitional State

Berry's (2006) acculturation model proposes four strategies for how migrants relate to heritage and host cultures – integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation – positioning integration as the most adaptive outcome. O'Shea (2018) found Berry's framework applicable to her participants two to three years after arrival, but the participants in this study do not fit neatly within these categories.

Cassey would score as “integrated” by Berry's (2006) measure – maintaining her Indian identity while actively participating in British cultural life. What she described, however, was not synthesis but coexistence: two complete selves operating in parallel without a felt need to reconcile. Berry's (2006) model captures the outcome but not the texture – “two completely different people, but it's great.” Vincent's position presents a different difficulty: his in-betweenness triangulated across three cultural reference points rather than two, none of which claimed him fully. This is not marginalisation – it is a position between multiple cultural worlds that Berry's binary model simply has no category for.

Sobitan's (2022) findings assumed that the cultural identities to be affirmed were relatively stable and knowable. However, for Generation 1.25 students who have lived between cultures for years, cultural identity may not be singular or stable. Cassey's two selves, Vincent's three-way position, Daisy's ongoing displacement – these cannot be fully affirmed through a Culture Day or a curriculum acknowledgement, because they are not fixed positions. The

question for EPs is not how to affirm a student's cultural identity as though it were a single thing, but how to create environments where multiplicity can be held. In practice, this might look less like a programme and more like a quality of attention: asking not "where is this student from?" but "how does this student relate to where they are from?"

What these accounts reveal is not a failure to integrate but a position in its own right – one lived with creativity and acceptance in Cassey's case, or with ongoing tension in Daisy's. Berry's (2006) categories are not wrong so much as limited – and it is in those limits that the experiences of Generation 1.25 students most clearly live.

6.3.7 Integrative Synthesis

Taken individually, each of the six GETs illuminates a distinct dimension of how Generation 1.25 students experience school belonging. Taken together, they suggest that belonging for this group has a particular shape – one that the existing frameworks partially capture but do not fully account for.

The most consistent thread across all six themes is that belonging, for these participants, was never fully realised. It was partial, distributed, and maintained through ongoing negotiation rather than arrived at through a definitive moment of integration. The ceiling described in GET 1, the relational rather than institutional grounding of GET 2, the transnational spread of GET 2's ecology, the temporal non-linearity of GET 5, the cultural coexistence without synthesis of GET 6 – all point toward belonging, for these participants, as something continually tended to rather than definitively arrived at. This has implications for how belonging is assessed and supported. Frameworks that treat belonging as a continuum from absent to present – whether Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis, Goodenow's (1993) PSSM scale, or Berry's (2006)

acculturation model – may capture where a student sits at a given moment without capturing the particular quality of that position, or the labour required to sustain it.

A second thread concerns the invisibility of what these students carry with them emotionally. Much of the internal labour described across GETs 3, 4, and 6 is not visible in conventional assessments. A student who appears settled, language-proficient, and culturally adapted may be managing forms of ongoing internal labour that neither they nor the adults around them have named. Sobitan's (2022) four superordinate themes – agency, participation, safety, and separation – point toward some of these dimensions, but the present findings suggest that for Generation 1.25 students specifically, the invisible psychological work runs deeper and persists longer than a two-to-three-year window reveals.

A third thread runs through every theme: relationships matter more than programmes. In each case, what shifted belonging was relational – specific people, bilingual friendships, family configuration. This does not mean institutions are irrelevant. Schools cannot produce belonging directly, but they can facilitate the conditions under which it forms – by enabling relational encounters, by encouraging an atmosphere where diverse cultural heritage are received with curiosity, by building peer groups around shared interest, and by understanding each student's specific migration circumstances.

6.4 The Value of Psychodynamic Thinking for Understanding Generation 1.25 Experiences

Psychodynamic theory was not used as an a priori framework for analysis in this study, and it does not reinterpret the findings here. What it offers instead is a vocabulary – developed through my professional training at the Anna Freud Centre and the Tavistock, and extended

through my own engagement with the migration literature – for thinking about the emotional dimensions of what participants described in ways that may be useful to EPs, school staff, and other practitioners working with this population. The connections drawn between participants' experiences and psychodynamic concepts are tentative rather than demonstrated – offered in the spirit of practice-orientated research that generates opportunities for psychodynamic ideas to be examined and applied beyond their original therapeutic context (Archard et al., 2025). Held lightly, and with the reflexive awareness that integrating practitioner and researcher identities requires care (Archard & O'Reilly, 2022; Bradfield, 2012), they may deepen the quality of attention practitioners bring – which, as the findings suggest, may itself be a form of intervention.

6.4.1 Akhtar's Third Individuation and the Migration Experience

For Jacob and Vincent, boarding school meant managing adolescent development, cultural adaptation, and physical separation from family simultaneously. For Cassey, belonging collapsed when her family left the UK – a separation that, when it came, undid the relational infrastructure her belonging had rested on. For Daisy, the difficulty was of a different kind: her parents' protective impulses – closely managing her social life, prioritising academic achievement, and carrying anxieties about her younger sister that inevitably shaped their expectations of Daisy – had a constraining effect on the normative work of separating from parental figures as internal objects (Mahler et al., 1975). The filial obligation she carried, rooted in cultural expectations of respect and compliance, meant that the autonomy Akhtar's (1995) framework suggests is necessary for the third individuation to proceed was not readily available to her. What these accounts share is the convergence of multiple separation processes at once – and it is here that Akhtar's (1995) concept of a third individuation offers a useful frame.

Akhtar (1995) describes immigration as demanding a psychic restructuring that parallels, and often reactivates, the earlier separation-individuation processes of infancy (Mahler et al., 1975) and adolescence (Blos, 1967). For Generation 1.25 students, who migrate during the developmental period when adolescent separation-individuation is already underway, these processes do not occur sequentially – they overlap. What might appear as difficulty settling, ambivalence about school, or a strong orientation toward family and home country may reflect the psychic work of managing this convergence during a period when developmental resources are already stretched.

Akhtar (1995) also describes how the immigrant initially experiences the world through a split: customs, food, language, and values felt as either "mine" – belonging to the home culture – or "yours" – belonging to the host culture. Over time, through mourning what has been lost and gradually investing in the new, a capacity for "ours" may develop. Participants varied in how far they had moved through this process. Daisy's emotional interior remaining in Cantonese suggests the mine/yours split felt most acute for her. Cassey and Jacob had each found ways to navigate between cultures, though whether this represents the mourning and reinvestment Akhtar (1995) describes, or something more like functional accommodation, is a question this study's design cannot fully answer.

6.4.2 Klein's Depressive Position and Winnicott's False Self

Cassey's capacity to say "four is the max it's ever gonna go" – and to say this with peace rather than despair – suggests an ability to hold the good and the bad of her UK experience together without splitting: valuing her friendships and her education while recognising that these would never produce the depth of belonging she felt in India. Jacob's reframing of in-

betweenness as identity rather than deficit shows a similar capacity to tolerate ambiguity rather than demanding resolution. Klein's (1935; 1946) depressive position offers a way of thinking about what this represents. Klein proposed that we move throughout life between two modes of experience: a paranoid-schizoid position, in which experience tends to be split into idealised or persecutory extremes, and a depressive position, in which contradictory feelings – good and bad, gain and loss – can be held together without that splitting. These are not stages reached once and for all but modes between which we oscillate. For practitioners, what matters is not which position a young person occupies at any given moment but whether the capacity to move between them remains available.

It is worth noting, however, that what looks like depressive-position functioning may in some instances be something closer to resignation or suppression than genuine psychological integration. Daisy's ongoing displacement and Vincent's trailing-off when asked where he felt most at home – "there's no saying to what I am" – suggest that holding the good and the bad together was still something they were working through rather than something that had settled.

The cost of maintaining two separate selves is worth examining through a further psychodynamic lens. Cassey's account of being "two completely different people" and Savannah's navigation between her Arabic emotional self and her English-only performing self connect to what Winnicott (1960) described as the true and false self – the gap between an authentic inner life and an adapted, compliant surface presented to the world. Where that gap becomes habitual and unacknowledged, it may accumulate into what Khan (1963) termed cumulative trauma: not a single overwhelming event but the slow accrual of repeated small impingements that, over time, exact a toll on the developing self. The sustained labour of code-switching, cultural performance, and self-management that participants described – often

unremarked upon by those around them – can be understood in these terms. Cassey's characterisation of her arrangement as "great" suggests she had found a way to live within the split that felt sustainable – her Indian self had community, friendships, and cultural space in which to exist alongside her UK self. Daisy's experience was different: her emotional interior remained in Cantonese, with no equivalent relational space in UK life where that self could be received. The same internal division – holding two selves – carried a very different weight depending on whether both selves had somewhere to belong.

6.4.3 Moro's Transcultural Approach and Cultural Métissage

Cassey described being two completely different people across India and the UK – and finding that arrangement not conflicted but generative. Savannah's Culture Day offered a moment of reversal, shifting from the position of cultural outsider to cultural teacher, finding something she alone could offer. These are not simply moments of adaptation. They can also be understood as what Moro describes as cultural *métissage* – the building of identity by drawing on both cultural worlds rather than choosing between them – a concept developed through her transcultural work with migrant children and adolescents (Radjack et al., 2021a). Much of Moro's substantive work is published in French; the Radjack et al. (2021a, 2021b) chapters represent the most accessible English-language articulations of her framework and are drawn on here accordingly. Moro's approach suggests that when EPs and school staff work with migrant young people without attending to the cultural dimensions of their experience, something important is likely to be missed – not only what students are struggling with, but what they are already doing creatively with the position they occupy.

Moro's broader framework identifies three periods of particular psychic vulnerability for children of migrant families: the perinatal period, the beginning of formal schooling, and the

transition to adolescence (Radjack et al., 2021b). For Generation 1.25 students, who enter the UK school system during the third of these periods, this has particular relevance. They arrive at a moment when identity is already in formation, cultural belonging is already being negotiated, and the normative developmental demands of adolescence are already underway. The convergence of these pressures – migration, adolescence, and entry into a new school system simultaneously – is not incidental. Moro's framework suggests it constitutes a specific form of vulnerability that generic assessments of school adjustment or belonging are unlikely to capture.

What Moro's approach adds to the frameworks already discussed is an explicit attention to culture as resource rather than complication. Where Akhtar (1995) attends to the psychic work of separation and reinvestment, and Klein (1935; 1946) to the capacity to hold ambivalence, Moro points toward what becomes possible when both cultural worlds are held as generative rather than competing. Together, these three frameworks – Akhtar's third individuation, Klein's depressive position and Winnicott's (1960) true and false self, and Moro's cultural *métissage* – do not replace the phenomenological findings of this study. They offer EPs, school staff, and relevant professionals a vocabulary for thinking about the emotional lives of Generation 1.25 students, carried often invisibly through their school days. Their value lies not in diagnosing or categorising, but in deepening the quality of attention practitioners bring. Research that holds psychoanalytic and phenomenological orientations together – neither subordinating one to the other – remains relatively rare and represents a direction this study begins to explore (Bradfield, 2012; Csordas, 2012; Midgley, 2006). Contemporary psychoanalysis, characterised by a pluralism of research methods and an openness to interdisciplinary dialogue, has developed the capacity to engage productively with qualitative and phenomenological approaches without requiring either to subordinate itself to the other (Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2026).

6.5 Study Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged, as they shape the scope and applicability of the findings. First, the participant group, while appropriate for IPA's idiographic focus, was relatively homogeneous in several ways. All five participants were voluntary migrants from relatively comfortable socioeconomic backgrounds, with family support available – even if, as in Jacob and Vincent's cases, that family was physically elsewhere. None were refugees, asylum seekers, or unaccompanied minors, and none had experienced forced displacement, precarious immigration status, or uncertainty about their right to remain. By the time of interview, all had progressed to higher education – representing a narrow and relatively high-achieving subset of the wider population of INA students in UK schools. The study's initial engagement with the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association aimed to include refugee voices, but no participants were recruited through this route. This absence matters in two distinct ways. Firstly, it may speak to barriers this population faces in research participation – both in accessing these voices meaningfully and in creating a space where those in this group feel safe enough to take part. Secondly, it means the findings may not be easily applied to the full range of internationally mobile students in secondary schools in England. Refugee, asylum-seeking, and unaccompanied young people – as well as voluntary migrants from less stable socioeconomic backgrounds – represent a substantial portion of the Generation 1.25 population whose experiences remain unexamined here, and whose circumstances may produce qualitatively different belonging trajectories. For those still living with an unresolved asylum claim or the recent aftermath of forced displacement, being asked to give a reflective account of their experiences to an unfamiliar researcher may have felt premature or unsafe. Some may not have felt ready to revisit

experiences that were still recent, unresolved, or tied to an ongoing sense of precarity – the reflective distance this study asked of participants is hard to reach while still in survival mode.

Second, all participants had some degree of English proficiency prior to arriving in the UK. While this did not protect them from the difficulties of accent, dialect, and code-switching described in the findings, their experiences differ from those of Generation 1.25 students who arrive with no English and must learn the language from scratch while simultaneously navigating a new school. Such students may also carry additional responsibilities – translating for parents, mediating between family and institutions – that were not present in these participants' accounts.

Third, the retrospective nature of the interviews means that participants were reflecting on experiences from a position of temporal distance, having completed their secondary schooling by the time of interview. Although this distance may have allowed for greater reflective capacity, the accounts are reconstructions shaped by subsequent experience rather than real-time reports of belonging as it was developing. The lifeline grid technique mitigated this to some extent by providing a visual scaffold for retrospective recall, but this remains a design limitation. A related consideration is that participants' relationship to their belonging ceiling may itself shift over time. At interview, all participants had lived in the UK for fewer years than they had lived in their country of origin – and whether the ceiling looks different when that balance reverses is something this study cannot determine. Longitudinal research would be better placed to explore whether the ceiling is a fixed position or a function of where participants currently sit in their migration timeline. This might take the form of multiple interviews conducted across the secondary school years and into further education – allowing belonging trajectories to be tracked as they unfold rather than reconstructed retrospectively. Such an approach would also speak to the growing recognition that qualitative methods have a distinctive contribution to make to

developmental psychology (Demuth & Mey, 2015), and to the possibilities offered by qualitative longitudinal research for capturing how practices, perceptions, and orientations change over time (Hollstein, 2021).

Fourth, the study centred the voices of Generation 1.25 students themselves and did not include the perspectives of parents, teachers, school staff, or peers and friends. While this was a deliberate methodological choice – and one consistent with the study's aim to amplify voices that are seldom heard in research – it means the findings offer only one perspective on what is a multi-actor relational process. How parents, teachers, and peers experienced and shaped these students' belonging trajectories are questions that remain unanswered.

Finally, the psychodynamic frameworks offered in Section 6.4 are proposed as lenses for practitioner thinking rather than empirical claims about participants' internal worlds. The study was not designed to investigate psychodynamic processes, and the connections drawn between participants' experiences and psychodynamic concepts remain tentative rather than demonstrated. The absence of a more explicit psychodynamic methodology – such as free association narrative interviewing or researcher process notes – means these links are offered illustratively rather than as analytically demonstrated claims (Archard, 2025). This is acknowledged as a boundary of the present study's scope, and it provides a rationale for the future research directions outlined in Section 6.7.

6.6 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

The findings carry several implications for how EPs and schools understand and support Generation 1.25 students. These are offered not as prescriptive recommendations but as areas for reflection informed by what participants described and on my own reading of what those

accounts suggest for practice. I want to name a tension that runs through them: participants consistently described belonging as relational, yet the implications below are largely directed at institutions and practitioners. This is not a contradiction but a reframing – the institutional role, as these findings suggest, lies in creating conditions under which meaningful relationships can form, rather than in producing belonging directly. While school settings cannot manufacture belonging, they might help in facilitating the conditions that make it more possible.

Support needs to be relational before it is structural. Participants' accounts consistently pointed to the primacy of relationships – being known, seen, and understood by specific individuals – over programmes, policies, or institutional arrangements. While schools understandably focus on structural provision, such as EAL support, induction programmes, and mentoring schemes, the quality of relational contact matters more than the quantity of provision (Allen et al., 2016; Sobitan, 2022). For EPs consulting with schools about supporting Generation 1.25 students, this means helping schools think about the relational conditions for belonging – not just the practical arrangements. The question worth raising in consultation is not "what have we put in place for this student?" but "who in this school actually knows this student?"

Conventional measures of belonging may not capture what matters. If belonging for this group exists at a ceiling rather than on a continuum, and if contentment can coexist with partial belonging, then standardised measures of school belonging may not be the most useful assessment tools for this population (Goodenow, 1993). EPs working with Generation 1.25 students might instead draw on qualitative approaches – conversation, narrative, visual methods such as lifeline grids, cultural genograms, or Tree of Life (Ncube, 2006) – that allow students to articulate the particular shape of their belonging rather than rating it on a scale that may not reflect their experience.

Language support must extend beyond proficiency. The emotional and identity dimensions of code-switching suggest that EAL provision focused solely on English acquisition may miss the psychological cost of linguistic navigation (Evans & Liu, 2018; Sharples, 2017). A student who appears to have adequate English may still be carrying the weight of maintaining multiple linguistic selves. In practice, this might mean raising in consultation that apparent fluency does not mean the emotional work of code-switching has resolved, or encouraging schools to consider how bilingual peers are grouped – since several participants described the relief of not having to switch as one of the most significant supports they experienced.

Timescales for belonging need to be reconsidered. Belonging development can take many years, is non-linear, subject to regression, and dependent on circumstances that can change unexpectedly – this challenges assumptions that students will settle in within a matter of terms (O'Shea, 2018). EPs can help school staff understand that a Generation 1.25 student who appears settled is not necessarily finished settling, and that changes in circumstances outside the school's control – a shift in family arrangements, the loss of a key relationship – can undo what looked like established belonging. The value of this awareness is not that schools can prevent these shifts in belonging, but that they can avoid misreading them as behavioural problems or as a student who has simply stopped trying.

Psychodynamic awareness can deepen practitioner understanding. The frameworks of Akhtar, Klein, and Moro offer a way of thinking about the invisible emotional work Generation 1.25 students engage in (Akhtar, 1995; Radjack et al., 2021). This does not require EPs to become psychoanalytic practitioners, but it suggests the value of engaging in psychodynamic thinking – an awareness of ambivalence, loss, fragmentation, and the developmental significance of separation – when working with this population. The Tavistock's Relational Model of

Consultation (Kennedy & Lee, 2021), which explicitly attends to cultural context, difference, and the dynamics of power and privilege in professional relationships, offers one framework for bringing this psychodynamic sensibility into EP practice without requiring clinical psychoanalytic training.

Family configurations and circumstances of migration must be understood. The variation in family arrangements across participants – and the influence these had on belonging trajectories – suggests that EPs need to attend carefully to the specific conditions of each student's migration (Moskal, 2016). Whether a student arrived with their full family, was sent ahead to boarding school, or came to live with a sibling under particular conditions shapes the relational landscape within which belonging can develop. A both/and framing – rather than either/or – may more accurately reflect the reality of family relationships that simultaneously anchor and constrain. Key dimensions worth exploring include the student's relationship to their country of origin, the nature and reason for the move, whether migration was chosen or imposed, and culturally shaped expectations around education and home-school communication.

Practical consultation tools can support more systematic exploration. The range of dimensions highlighted across these implications – language configuration, family circumstances, timescales, cultural positioning, strengths and existing strategies – suggests a need for structured frameworks that help EPs explore them systematically, such as adapted question sets or models like the social graces (Burnham, 2012), rather than relying on generic categories of "EAL" or "migrant." A further direction suggested by participants' own reflections is the development of personalised induction resources – created with student input and including accounts or short videos from previous migrant students – that acknowledge the

particular shape of Generation 1.25 experience rather than treating all new arrivals as interchangeable.

6.7 Directions for Future Research

Several directions emerge from this study that could extend and deepen understanding of Generation 1.25 belonging.

First, *qualitative or mixed methods longitudinal research* that tracks belonging development in real time – rather than relying on retrospective accounts – would build on the present study and represents a natural avenue for future inquiry. Interviewing Generation 1.25 students at multiple points during their secondary schooling, and potentially into further education, would allow researchers to observe the non-linear trajectories identified here as they unfold rather than reconstructing them after the fact. Such research could also capture the relationship between belonging development and contextual changes – family transitions, school moves, policy shifts – as they occur (Demuth & Mey, 2015; Hollstein, 2011).

Second, *research that includes multiple perspectives* alongside students' own accounts would provide a more complete picture of the relational dynamics that shape belonging. Parents' experiences of migration, their hopes and anxieties for their children, and the way they navigate the UK education system are all likely to influence their children's belonging in ways that this study could not capture. Similarly, the perspectives of teachers, school staff, and peers – who appear centrally in participants' accounts yet whose own experiences remain unexamined here – would deepen understanding of what belonging looks like from within the relational networks that sustain or hinder it.

Third, future research could *expand the demographic range* of participants to include Generation 1.25 students from different migration pathways and socioeconomic backgrounds. This study's participants were voluntary migrants from relatively comfortable socioeconomic backgrounds, all of whom had some degree of English proficiency prior to arriving in the UK. Future research with refugee students, unaccompanied minors, and students from more economically precarious backgrounds would test whether the themes identified here hold across different configurations of migration, and would capture experiences that may be qualitatively different.

Fourth, the tentative connections drawn between participants' experiences and psychodynamic frameworks in this study could be pursued more explicitly through *research that combines phenomenological and psychodynamic methodologies* – for example, free association narrative interviewing (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) alongside IPA data collection (Bradfield, 2012; Csordas, 2012). This combination is theoretically complex: psychosocial methods assume unconscious processes requiring expert interpretation, whereas IPA is committed to staying close to participants' own meaning-making. How these orientations might be productively combined remains an open methodological question, but the emotional intensity that emerged across these interviews suggests there is a case for research designed from the outset to attend to these dimensions.

Fifth, the *distinction between belonging and contentment identified in this study warrants further empirical investigation*. If these are indeed separate constructs for Generation 1.25 students, this has implications for how school belonging is measured, how interventions are evaluated, and how success is defined. Research that develops measures acknowledging partial or ceiling-limited belonging as a position in their own right – rather than treating anything short

of full belonging as deficit – would make a useful contribution. The development and evaluation of consultation frameworks designed specifically for work with Generation 1.25 or multilingual students, drawing on the dimensions identified across this study's findings, would represent a valuable practice-oriented direction for EP research. The findings of this study will also be shared with the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association, who were consulted during its development. Dissemination via publication is intended through two routes – an EP or educational psychology practice journal, to reach practitioners best placed to act on what participants described, and a qualitative psychology journal, to contribute to methodological conversations about phenomenological and psychodynamic approaches in research with migrant young people.

Finally, this study *attempted to extend beyond a straightforward application of IPA* – incorporating found poetry as a representational tool, and structuring interviews around lifeline grids rather than relying solely on question and answer. One critique of qualitative research in psychology, particularly work undertaken on doctoral training programmes, is the prevalence of what Demuth and Mey (2015) describe as methodological conformity – the tendency toward off-the-shelf approaches that prioritise procedural rigour over creative engagement with the phenomena under study. The found poems produced in this study represent one attempt to resist that tendency, staying close to participants' own language while opening a different register of attention. Future research might develop this further – exploring what other creative or arts-based methods might offer in work with migrant young people, and what it means to hold methodological innovation alongside the commitments of phenomenological integrity (Hollstein, 2011).

6.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has done more than position the findings within existing literature. It has attempted to hold two orientations together – a phenomenological commitment to participants' own meaning-making, and a psychodynamic attentiveness to what may be carried beneath the surface – without subordinating one to the other. That attempt is itself a contribution, modest but deliberate.

A thread runs through this research: staying close to what participants described, while remaining honest about the interpretive lens I bring. The found poems, the lifeline grids, the two sets of interviews – each was a choice to keep participants' voices central. The psychodynamic frameworks in this chapter were brought in at the end, not at the beginning, for the same reason. What this discussion chapter quietly questions is whether existing frameworks for measuring and understanding belonging are adequate for young people whose experience of belonging is partial, distributed, and sustained across borders. The distinction between belonging and contentment that emerged from this analysis is one small, but significant, challenge to those frameworks.

This thesis has not produced a concrete model. What it has produced is a starting point – evidence that belonging for Generation 1.25 students is located across multiple nodes of a young person's life, not contained within school, and that supporting this population well means working across family, community, and school simultaneously. It is also worth restating the developmental backdrop against which these findings sit. Adolescence is already a period of significant developmental intensity for any young person – identity formation, the work of separating from family (Blos, 1967), academic pressure, and the particular salience of social belonging during this period (Allen et al., 2016; Goodenow, 1993). Generation 1.25 students are navigating all of that while simultaneously managing the psychic reorganisation that migration demands. That combination is what this thesis has tried to take seriously. These implications, and

the psychodynamic and transcultural frameworks offered alongside them, are not definitive answers. They are an invitation to look more carefully at a group that is easy to overlook precisely because they appear to be managing well. That even this high-achieving, well-resourced group carried the psychic weight documented here raises a question worth pursuing for future research: what does that weight look like for those with fewer resources and support around them?

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Chapter Introduction

In this thesis, I reported on research which sought to explore how Generation 1.25 INAs experience school belonging in UK secondary schools. What it found – and what five young people were generous enough to share – was considerably more layered than I had anticipated. I return here to bring the thesis to a close, not to stand above the findings but to reflect on what the process of undertaking this research has meant.

This chapter moves across three connected reflections: on what it meant to occupy an insider-outsider position in this research, on the tension between psychodynamic and phenomenological orientations that ran through the work, and on what it means to carry both a body of knowledge and professional self across contexts.

7.2 On Leaving Belonging Undefined

One aspect of the research design deserves further reflection: I did not offer participants a definition of belonging at any point – not in the information sheet, the interview, or the lifeline grid. This was not a deliberate design choice, unlike studies that set out a working definition first (O'Shea, 2018). However, on reflection, leaving the definition of belonging open did important work. Because the concept was undefined, participants did not answer a question I had framed for them – they shaped what the question was. Cassey plotted happiness and belonging as two separate lines on her grid and told me plainly that "those are not the same thing," a distinction that became this study's central conceptual contribution and one I suspect a prior definition would have closed off. Vincent altered the form of the grid itself, drawing each period as a range rather than a single point because he lived his highs and lows at once. Had I handed them a

definition, I think they would have worked within it – and shown me a narrower version of what belonging was.

7.3 On Being an Insider Research

I came to this research as someone with my own migration story – one that, as described in Chapter 1, has created a life lived between worlds. After a decade abroad, Hong Kong is still home, but I am acutely aware that my experiences abroad have marked me with differences from peers and family who never left, just as their years of shared experience without me have created a distance I cannot close. While my circumstances differ from my participants', the core experience of living between cultural worlds is one I carry – and one that drew me to this research before I had language for why I was drawn to it.

There were also moments where my “insider status” became impossible to ignore. Daisy, Jacob, and Vincent were all from Hong Kong, and this shared origin shaped the relational quality of our interviews. With Daisy, it surfaced most explicitly: mid-interview, struggling to find an English word, she asked if I spoke Cantonese – and when I confirmed, something shifted. She switched languages, and I felt an instant sense of connection. Vincent dropped into Cantonese at multiple points – single words where English did not have an equivalent. These moments contributed, I believe, to the richness of the interview material. When Daisy switched to Cantonese, she was not simply finding a more efficient word – she was reaching for the language in which her most authentic self lived. For someone whose daily life required constant English performance among peers who could not access that part of her, my ability to meet her in Cantonese offered something beyond rapport: a momentary relief from the fracture that GET 3

describes, and an assurance that what she expressed would be understood not just linguistically but culturally.

I am also aware that my insider status carried risks. The sense of familiarity could lead me to assume understanding where there was only resemblance – to map my own experience of navigating between cultural worlds onto theirs, when their specific configurations of family, language, and loss were not mine. Supervision played a critical role here: my supervisor held me accountable to the data as it was, rather than as I might have wished it to be, and the second interview allowed participants to correct or nuance my interpretations.

7.4 Between Two Orientations

Completing the research, what I did not fully anticipate was how much my positioning as someone between worlds would also describe my role in this research more broadly: between cultures, between practitioner and theoretical identities, between psychodynamic and phenomenological traditions. Bradfield (2012) writes about the parallels between the psychoanalytic disposition and the qualitative research process – both require a particular quality of attention, a willingness to not-know, a tolerance of sitting with what has not yet resolved into meaning. I recognise that description in how I tried to work. My psychodynamic training shaped how I listened – what I attended and held on to, what I brought forward, or left alone. Whether that enriched the phenomenological work or complicated it is a question I hold without resolving. What I can say is that the two orientations were never fully separate for me, and that the reflective processing this required – moving between my practitioner self and my researcher self, between the data and my responses to it – was itself a significant part of the work (Bradfield, 2012).

What stayed most with me however, was not simply the methodological tension – it was also what participants themselves brought. I was struck by how much participants had already worked out – about themselves, about belonging, about what they needed and what they had found ways to live without. After interviews, there were comments from participants that they had not had a chance to think about their belonging in this way before. The interviews seemed to hold something beyond data collection: a space for reflection that, while not therapy, carried its own value. None of them asked for more programmes or more support in the conventional sense. They asked to be connected, to be seen, and to have their experiences taken seriously.

7.5 Migrant Knowledge

I want to close with something my supervisor raised in supervision that has stayed with me: the idea that psychoanalysis is itself a kind of migrant science – produced through the movement of psychoanalysts globally, carried across borders during and after the Second World War, reshaped by each new cultural context it encountered. There is something fitting about bringing a psychodynamic orientation to bear on the experiences of young people who are themselves living the consequences of migration – not as an abstraction but as the daily texture of their lives. This research has been, for me, a way of thinking about both of those things at once: what it means to carry a body of knowledge across contexts, and what it means to find a professional identity that holds both a commitment to giving voices seldomly heard as well as carrying a psychodynamically-informed way of understanding young people.

7.6 Chapter Conclusion

This thesis began with a question about how Generation 1.25 students experience school belonging. What it found was that belonging, for this group, is partial, relational, non-linear, and

sustained through ongoing negotiation. These are not findings that lend themselves to neat policy recommendations. They are an invitation – to listen more carefully, to hold definitions more lightly, to recognise that not all belonging looks the same. Young people who live between worlds have already developed ways of navigating what that means – the simultaneous cultural selves, the linguistic labour, the belonging trajectories that fluctuates – that those of us who work with them might learn from. That is what these five young people offered in their recounts of their belonging trajectory in the UK. And that is what this thesis has sought to honour.

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Appendix A: Search Terms/Inclusion-Exclusion List

Table A1 *Search Strategy Development*

Date	Database	Search Terms	Results	Notes
14 Aug 2025	PsycINFO	("school belonging" OR "sense of belonging" OR "school connectedness") AND (adolescen* OR "secondary school*")	2,980	Initial scoping search to establish volume of field
10 Oct 2025	PsycINFO	("Secondary school" AND "School Belonging" AND "immigrants or immigration or immigrant or refugee or refugees")	3	Narrowed to migration and belonging
10 Oct 2025	PsycINFO	("UK" AND "School Belonging" AND "immigrant*" OR "refugee*") Filters: Peer Reviewed, Academic Journal, Past 10 years, English Language, adolescence age range	16	Added geographic and population filters
16 Jan 2026	PsycINFO	(migrant* OR immigrant* OR refugee* OR "new arrival*") AND (school* OR education*) AND (adolescen* OR "secondary school")	825	Broadened migration and education terms

		OR teen* OR youth*) AND ("United Kingdom" OR UK OR England OR Britain)		
21 Jan 2026	PsycINFO	(migrant* OR immigrant* OR refugee* OR "new arrival*") AND (school* OR education*) AND (adolescen* OR "secondary school" OR teen* OR youth*) AND AB ("United Kingdom" OR UK OR England OR Britain)	80	Final search — geographic terms limited to abstract
26 Jan 2026	ERIC	(migrant* OR immigrant* OR refugee* OR "new arrival*") AND (school* OR education*) AND (adolescen* OR "secondary school" OR teen* OR youth*) AND AB ("United Kingdom" OR UK OR England OR Britain)	61	Same strategy applied to ERIC
27 Jan 2026	EThOS	"migrant school experiences"	—	Doctoral thesis search (unavailable during search window)

Note. The search strategy was developed iteratively, with initial broad searches refined through piloting and supervision review. Geographic terms were moved to abstract-only searching after full-text searching produced results with only incidental UK references. EThOS was unavailable during the search window; this is acknowledged as a limitation in Chapter 3.

Table A2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
(a) Empirical research on migrant or refugee students' experiences of school (b) Conducted in the United Kingdom (c) Focused on adolescents in secondary school (d) Peer-reviewed journal articles or doctoral theses (e) Published in English (f) Captured students' own perspectives (interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observation)	Focused exclusively on adult populations Examined educational outcomes without attending to lived experiences Conducted outside the UK Focused primarily on health or mental health services rather than school experiences Presented only staff or parent perspectives Focused on second-generation rather than newly-arrived migrants Primary school rather than secondary school populations

Table A3 *Sample of Inclusion/Exclusion Decisions*

The table below provides a sample of inclusion and exclusion decisions to illustrate how criteria were applied during the screening process.

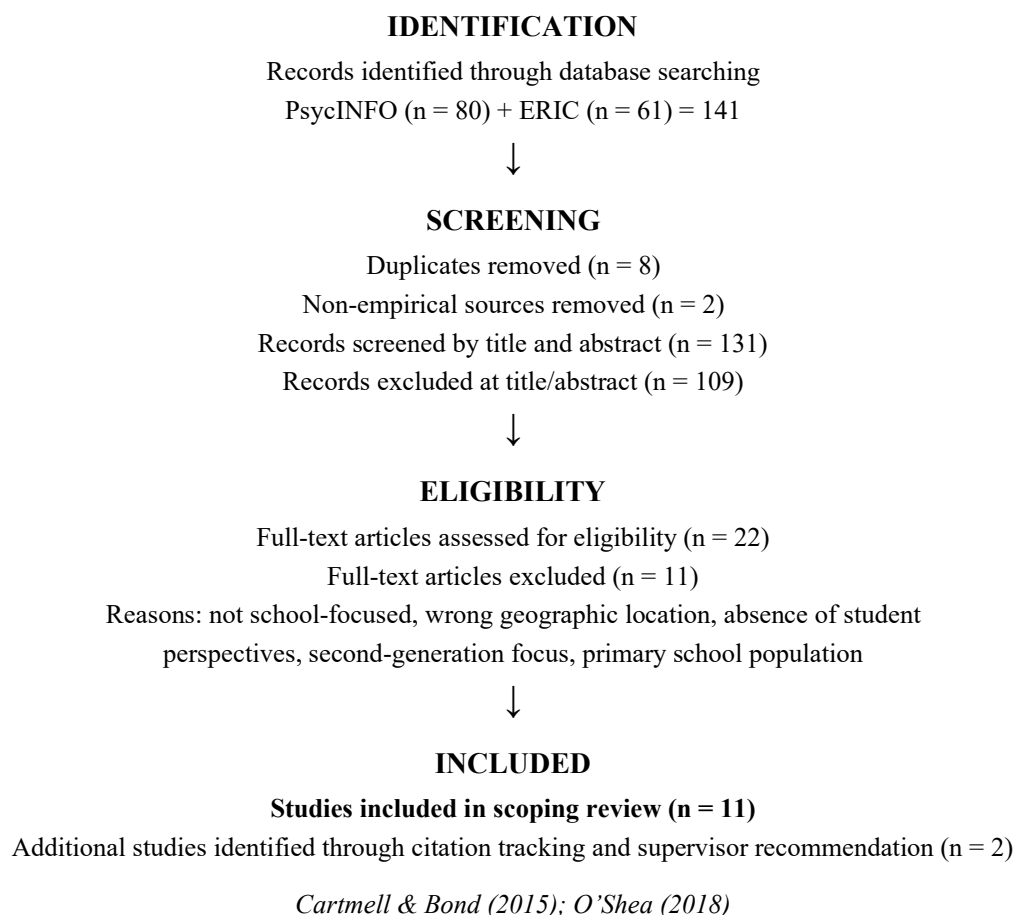
#	Study	Database	Decision	Reason
1	Funds of knowledge (Câmara, 2024)	PsycINFO	Included	Empirical; UK-based; refugee students; student perspectives
5	Understanding the Experiences of School Belonging (Sobitan, 2022)	PsycINFO	Included	Empirical; UK-based; refugee students; school belonging focus; student perspectives
8	Experiences of education for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors (Fuller & Hayes, 2020)	PsycINFO	Included	Empirical; UK-based; UASM population; student perspectives
2	Do know harm: young people from refugee backgrounds through community sport (Smith et al., 2023)	PsycINFO	Excluded	Not school-focused — community sport programme
6	The myth of Australia's migrant youth gang (Benier & Higginson, 2025)	PsycINFO	Excluded	Not UK-based

11	Resettling into a new life: acculturation and mental health of young refugees (Mulongo et al., 2021)	PsycINFO	Excluded	Mental health/acculturation focus, not school experience
34	Challenging the exclusion of immigrant peers (Palmer et al., 2023)	PsycINFO	Excluded	Studies British students' bystander attitudes, not migrant students' experiences
5 (ERIC)	Wellbeing support for newly arrived refugee and migrant adolescents (Kelley et al., 2025)	ERIC	Excluded	Staff perspectives only — no student voice

***Note.** The full screening log is available from the researcher on request. The complete list of 11 included studies is presented in Table 1 (Chapter 2).*

Appendix B: PRISMA Flowchart

The following diagram illustrates the screening process following PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021).



Not included in scoping review; drawn on in later sections

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer



RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

01.

Are you:

- ★ Between ages: **16-27 years old**
- ★ Someone who **moved to the UK during secondary school** (ages 13-17)?
- ★ Been living in the UK for at least **3 years?**
- ★ Comfortable chatting in **English?**





02.

What's this about?

My name is Megan Ng, a **trainee Educational Psychologist** at the University of Essex and Tavistock and Portman NHS. I am doing research about young people's **experiences of belonging** at school after **moving to the UK**. Your stories can help schools better support other young people in the future.

03.

What's Involved? ⌚

- **Two meetings** (60 minutes each meeting)
- Create a **timeline of your school journey** in the UK
- Chat about your experiences
- Option to review your interview and **co-construct themes**

Where? 📍

- At Afghanistan and Central Asia Association or suitable community venues
- Private and comfortable space
- Online Meetings
- Trusted adult can be present if you wish





04.

Please Reach Out! 📞

☎ **Phone/WhatsApp:** _____

✉ **Email:** _____

This research is partly in collaboration with the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) and approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust Ethics Committee.



The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

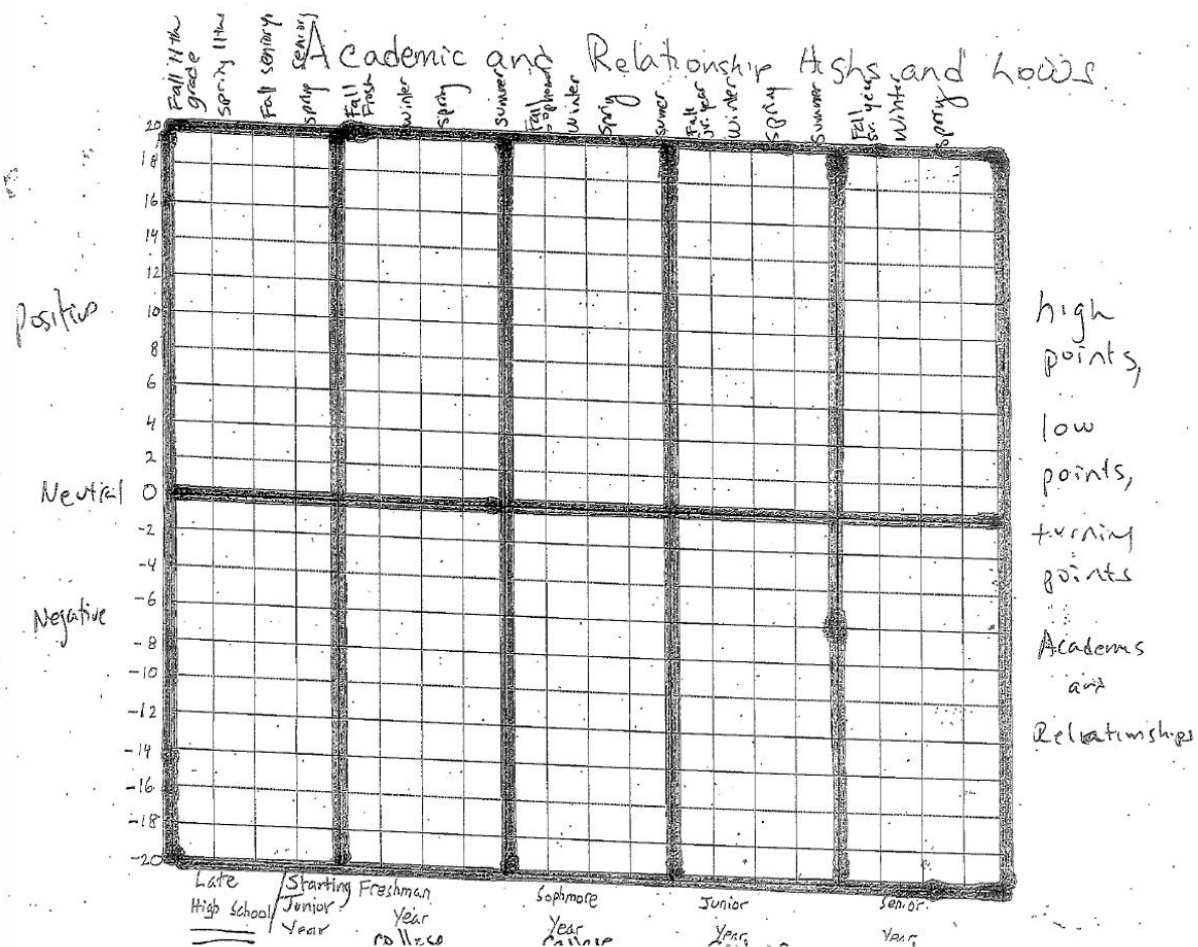




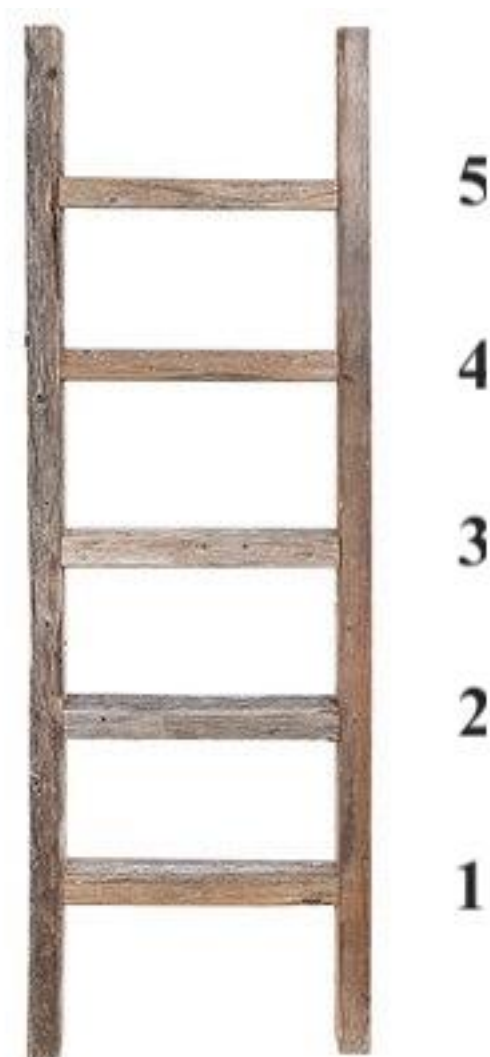
✓ Good to Know:

- It's **completely your choice** to take part
- Everything you share will be **kept private**
- You can **stop at any time**
- Support available if needed
- Whether you take part or not **won't affect any services you receive**

Appendix D: Lifeline Grid Template (blank)



Appendix E: Belonging Ladder Visual



Appendix F: Interview Schedule (first interview)

Generation 1.25 International New Arrivals — School Belonging Experiences

Duration: 60–90 minutes | Format: Online via Microsoft Teams

INTRODUCTION (5–10 minutes)

- Welcome and thank you
- Review of information sheet and consent form
- Reminder of right to pause, stop, or skip questions
- Explanation of audio recording and confidentiality
- Any questions before we begin?

PART 1: BELONGING LADDER ACTIVITY (5–10 minutes)

“I’d like to start by getting a sense of how your feeling of belonging has changed over time. I’m going to show you a simple ladder with 5 steps, where 1 means you didn’t feel you belonged at all, and 5 means you felt you completely belonged.”

[Show visual of 5-step belonging ladder]

Participants were asked to rate their sense of school belonging on a scale of 1 to 5 at four time points:

1. “Think about your life before coming to the UK. What number would you give your sense of belonging at that time? Why?”
2. “Now think about when you first arrived in the UK and started school. What number would you give? What made you choose that step?”
3. “What about now — where would you place yourself on the ladder? What makes you feel that way?”
4. “Looking to the future, perhaps 5–10 years from now, where do you think you’ll be on the ladder? What makes you think that?”

This activity served as an initial frame of reference, orienting participants toward reflecting on how their sense of belonging had developed over time and providing anchor points for the subsequent lifeline grid and interview questions.

PART 2: LIFELINE GRID ACTIVITY (15–20 minutes)

“Now I’d like us to create a more detailed timeline of your school belonging journey since arriving in the UK.”

- Explain X-axis (timeline from arrival in UK to present) and Y-axis (subjective wellbeing scale –20 to +20)
- Email blank lifeline grid template to participant for digital completion
- Support participant to plot significant moments, experiences, and turning points

For each point marked:

- “Can you tell me about what was happening here?”
- “What made this a high/low point?”
- “Who was involved?”
- “How did you feel during this time?”

PART 3: SCHOOL EXPERIENCES (20–25 minutes)

Initial Arrival:

- “Could you tell me about your first few days at school in the UK?”
- “What stands out in your memory from that time?”
- “What helped you during those early days?”
- “What was challenging?”

School Belonging Development:

- “When did you start to feel like you belonged at school?”
- “What helped you feel more connected to school?”
- “Were there times you felt you didn’t belong?”
- “How did teachers and other students help or hinder your sense of belonging?”

PART 4: NAVIGATING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES (15–20 minutes)

Cultural Identity:

- “How did you maintain connection to your home culture while at school?”
- “What was it like balancing different cultural expectations?”
- “How did the school respond to your cultural background?”

Adolescent Development:

- “What was it like being a teenager while also adjusting to a new country?”
- “How did this affect your relationships with family and friends?”
- “What helped you manage these changes?”

PART 5: SUPPORT AND COPING (15–20 minutes)

Support Systems:

- “Who were the most helpful people during your school experience?”
- “What kind of support made the biggest difference?”
- “What additional support would have been helpful?”

Coping Strategies:

- “How did you handle difficult situations at school?”
- “What strategies helped you feel more comfortable?”
- “What advice would you give to other students in similar situations?”

CONCLUSION (5–10 minutes)

- “Is there anything else you’d like to share about your experiences?”
- “What do you hope schools and professionals learn from your experience?”
- Thank participant
- Explain next steps (member checking session)
- Check emotional state
- Review support options if needed

PROMPTS USED THROUGHOUT:

- “Could you tell me more about that?”
- “How did that make you feel?”

- “What was that like for you?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- “What do you mean by...?”

Appendix G: Example Page of Reflexive Diary

The following entries are excerpts from the reflexive diary maintained throughout the research process. Participant pseudonyms have been applied and identifying details have been removed or generalised.

Date	Subject	Reflections
01/10/2025	Initial noting and commenting on transcripts	• Cassey: struck by her resilience and determination, also described in her mother — an attitude towards life that runs through her account. • Vincent: sense of familiarity struck me whenever he dropped a few words in Cantonese. Wondered if he felt the same in his increasing use of it. Longest interview. Common international school background as me, same cultural background — made me feel for him when talking about bullying, as well as being the older sibling and the sense of responsibility that carries. • Struck me that both Cassey and Vincent said they didn't share things with parents, because it was easier that way. Cassey spoke about no point getting them to understand; Vincent talked about not wanting them to worry or do something drastic, or scaring his younger brother. • All participants kept referring to their home country as "home," some describing their time in the UK almost as the holding space before they are "back in their element." • Vincent mentioned differences between people who moved here for university as opposed to people like himself who moved here young — feeling a split of identity. This shows some integration of host country values and cultures and dis-identifying from peers who arrived later.
05/09/2025	First two interviews	Daisy: • Morning interview with a participant from the same cultural background as me (Hong Kong). • She talked a lot about the importance of peers, cultural differences such as school–teacher–parent relationship differences, feeling exhausted in the beginning because it was English everywhere. • Noticed myself (thinking psychodynamically) feeling more inclined to follow up on certain points than others, and asking leading questions that may have introduced biases — perhaps due to what I assumed to be shared cultural understanding. • Nervous at first, and technology made it not the most ideal setting, but once we got into the flow of conversation it went well.

- Daisy talked about her younger sister who moved at the same time but was younger and is struggling more. However, it took longer for school and home to notice, as school's feedback was always that she's well behaved and doesn't talk much — when in reality it was because she was struggling and doesn't speak much English. Daisy mentioned this was already an existing pattern before the move, but even more so now in the UK.
- Talked about feeling accepted but not seen. Felt the friendliness in the beginning was not true helpfulness — peers would say things like “ask us for help,” but when Daisy actually tried, they didn't follow through.
- I felt a tug of recognition of my own experiences in her story. Wondered if I nodded or smiled at certain points to agree with her, whether that made her feel more comfortable (rapport) in sharing more, but also meant she may have overly leaned into that position.
- Mentioned separation-individuation in terms of parental strictness and academic expectations — barriers to making friends or establishing a social life. Peers don't always understand why her parents still have a prominent role in her daily life.

Savannah:

- Felt myself relating to her in a very different way — we both attended international schools in our home countries, developing an accent that is noticed and puts us apart from the UK population no matter how fluent.
- Bilingualism — underestimated, and having to translate thoughts into one language rather than mixing languages.
- Doing well in school, feeling important.
- Actively looking for connections to home culture — cultural day where she proudly wears clothes from home.
- Missing the food, as well as the independence developed from living here.
- Home as “reward” — described it as a work week and weekend, which is very similar to how I feel. I spend the whole year in the UK doing what I'm meant to do, waiting for the next time I get to go home.
- Getting to experiment more with fashion in the UK.
- The split between going home often then not being able to solidify friendships in the UK over holidays.

Appendix H: Example Transcript Pages with Exploratory Noting (Cassey, pp. 1-5)

Descriptive Comments

Linguistic Comments

Conceptual Comments

Transcript	Descriptive and Linguistic Comments	Conceptual Comments
Researcher 1:05 So I want you to go back and think about what it was like before you moved to the UK. What sense of belonging? What number would you put for yourself when you were living in India? CASSEY 1:05 Oh, in India, it's a strong 4 or 5 because I've lived here my entire life. I've known people. I have my entire community here. I've have my friends. I have a huge support system here. So India is always going to be like a full 5. Researcher 1:25 Yeah. CASSEY 1:35 And yeah, I don't know like in the UK, it's never fully felt like I'm gonna belong. Like, it's easier now that I've spent like three years to switch, like code switch and feel more comfortable with people in the UK it just. It's not my home, you know. Researcher 1:52 Yeah. OK. So would you say now then in the UK, did you say it was like a 3 or 4? Did I hear you wrong? CASSEY 1:54 Yeah. Yeah, no, 3 or 4 is exactly right, yeah. Researcher 2:04	CASSEY describes her sense of belonging at India as a full 5 because it is where she lived her "entire life", where she "known people" and where she "entire community" and "friends" and "huge support system" resides. In contrast, in the UK she "never fully felt like I'm gonna belong", though it has been easier having lived here for 3 years. However, it's still not "my home". Currently, CASSEY feels around 3 to 4 in <u>sense</u> of belonging at the UK. She feels she	Belonging as geographically and temporally bounded - CASSEY constructs belonging as fundamentally tied to place and duration of residence. The "entire life" lived in India creates a strong baseline (4-5) that cannot be replicated in the UK, suggesting belonging requires not just familiarity but biographical continuity. The contrast reveals how CASSEY understands belonging as accumulated through lived history rather than something that can be quickly established in a new context. Acceptance of permanent liminality - CASSEY expresses a resigned acceptance that UK belonging has reached its ceiling at "4 max," indicating an internalized understanding of herself as permanently between worlds. This isn't expressed with overt distress but rather as a pragmatic assessment - there's a quality of settled realism in acknowledging "UK is never gonna fully feel like I belong there, you

Or OK. And <u>so</u> if you see yourself 5 years in the future, where would you put yourself, do you think, for belonging in UK? CASSEY 2:10 Mm-hmm. Honestly, I keep coming back to India every break I have every like anytime I have any free time, I run back to <u>India</u> and I feel like that's <u>gonna</u> reduce a lot more once I leave college. And once I start working and stuff, which will probably make me feel like I belong more. Researcher 2:23 Mm-hmm. Hmm. CASSEY 2:36 Or make UK feel a little bit more like home. <u>So I</u> guess 4 is the Max it's ever <u>gonna</u> go because I don't feel like UK is ever <u>gonna</u> fully feel like I belong there, you know.	goes back to India very often which disrupts her sense of belonging. However, she anticipates as university and work life begins, she won't be able to return to India as <u>often</u>, and predicts this may support her to feel like she <u>belong</u> more. However, she still capped it at "4 is the max it's ever <u>gonna</u> go" and that she won't "ever <u>go</u> <u>na</u> fully feel I belong there"	know." This suggests CASSEY has made peace with occupying a liminal space rather than expecting full integration. The impossibility of replicating "home" belonging - CASSEY's comparison reveals an implicit understanding that the depth of belonging experienced in India (grounded in "my entire life" there) represents a qualitatively different experience that cannot be recreated elsewhere. The specificity of "4 or 5" for India versus the ceiling of "4" for UK suggests CASSEY distinguishes between complete belonging (only possible in one's origin country) and functional belonging (achievable but inherently limited in the host country).
Researcher OK, awesome. Are you able to see it on? OK, so talk me through it. What are the green points and what are the purple points? CASSEY 17:28 Yes. Mm-hmm. I can see. The <u>purple</u> points are basically how like how at home <u>ish</u>. I felt in the UK and how comfortable I was being in the UK at that moment and the <u>green</u> points are how happy I was being in the UK at that time because those are not the same thing. Researcher 17:44 OK. OK.	CASSEY made a distinction between sense of belonging (purple) and level of happiness (green) - "those are not the same thing".	Dual framework for understanding belonging - CASSEY spontaneously constructs two distinct but interconnected dimensions for understanding their school experience: feeling "at home-<u>ish</u>" (purple points) and happiness levels (green points). This self-

CASSEY 17:54 Yeah. Researcher 17:54 OK, that is true. How do you think they're different for you? CASSEY 17:59 So like in when I came to the UK originally, I had of course I was still like clinging on to my life in India. I was holding on to everything. So I was very happy to come because I was. This is what I wanted to do and this is like what I wanted to do with my life. I wanna advance my future, whatever, but there was still a lot of me that was stuck back in India and I wasn't able to, like, fully give myself and be like, oh, OK, this is me here now. I need to settle in. I need to be able to make friends here. I need to feel like build a community here. So that's probably why I wasn't as comfortable in the UK, but I was very happy comparatively to be in the UK. Researcher 18:41 That's a really interesting kind of distinguishment, but yeah, that's very fair and very true. OK, so if you don't mind that we're going to look at kind of each of those points that you've mapped out together and if you feel comfortable, share what you want to about what was going on at that time, so I'm going to start here at the very first point you've made here kind of in the two to four box where you've put green and then it's the corresponding how comfortable you felt, was that the purple that is at the -8 to -10? OK. CASSEY 19:00 Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yes.	CASSEY recalls "clinging on to my life in India" in the beginning despite being "very happy to come". She acknowledged the purpose of her moving to the UK, but admits she wasn't able to "fully give myself and be like, oh, OK, this is me here now. I need to settle".	generated distinction suggests CASSEY conceptualizes belonging and wellbeing as related but separate constructs - one can feel relatively happy without necessarily feeling "at home," or vice versa. The purple "at home-ish" points represent a more relational, place-based sense of fitting in and familiarity, while the green happiness points capture a more general emotional state that may be influenced by factors beyond belonging alone. The fact that CASSEY organizes her narrative around these two parallel trajectories suggests she experiences her UK transition as operating on multiple registers simultaneously, with emotional wellbeing and sense of belonging following potentially different paths over time.
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Researcher 19:16 Those are kind of one set of point. CASSEY 19:19 Mm-hmm.		
Researcher 19:20 OK. <u>So</u> tell me about what it was like when you first came. CASSEY 19:25 So <u>when I first came to the UK, I'd had like a long term boyfriend in India. I was suddenly leaving him behind and I was coming to the UK with leaving all my friends behind.</u> Eight years of friendships, 8 years of like you know. Whatever community and stuff, which was very difficult, <u>but I have been moving like around my entire life, so it wasn't a new feeling, it was just this was the first time that I had managed to find like a been in a place long enough to build community. So it was a lot harder to leave this time,</u> but again, as I told you, I was <u>gonna</u> do, like, <u>advance my future. I was gonna be able to do fashion design, and I was gonna be able to do all of that. So it was great. And I was very happy being there in, like, comparatively happier being there in the UK,</u> at that point, yeah. Researcher 20:15 Yeah. And tell me about what was like kind of first coming here like, language wise, what was it like <u>like</u> food wise, all those other things that probably felt <u>really different</u> as well. CASSEY 20:15 So The thing is, <u>I came with my family. So food. My mom was still here. She was still cooking. Although it UK food compared to Indian food is honestly so difficult to get used to and I still don't think I'm used to it. I had to</u>	CASSEY recalls what she left behind when she first moved, including her <u>long term boyfriend</u>, friendships built over 8 years and community. While CASSEY has moved around her “entire life, so it wasn’t a new feeling”, the previous place she was living at in India was the longest she’d stay where she stayed long enough to “build community, so it was a lot harder to leave this time”. Once again, CASSEY highlights the positives and purpose of her moving to the UK (e.g. advance her future, fashion design). CASSEY moved here with her family (father, mother, younger brother). She still	Relationship separation as anticipatory loss - CASSEY frames the physical separation from her long-term boyfriend as a source of sadness (“obviously I was very sad”), suggesting the move involved not just leaving a place but rupturing an important intimate relationship. The migration created geographic distance that introduced uncertainty into the relationship's future, representing an emotional burden layered on top of the cultural and practical challenges of transition. This highlights how migration disrupts multiple dimensions of life simultaneously - CASSEY wasn't just adjusting to a new country but managing relational loss and uncertainty. Linguistic comprehension as foundational barrier - CASSEY identifies understanding the British accent as “honestly a skill that needs to be taught,” revealing a critical but often overlooked dimension of language adjustment. Despite presumably

learn <u>cooking</u> and I hate cooking just so that I don't have to constantly eat UK food, I can't do it. Researcher 20:57 Yeah. CASSEY 20:59 And honestly, <u>the language thing was surprising because I've spoken English all my life and I came to the UK and it felt like I had to relearn English all over again because no, nobody could understand me. People would keep asking me to repeat because of my accent,</u> like my accent was different. Researcher 21:05 Yeah. CASSEY 21:16 And <u>I couldn't understand either because the English in the UK is a lot faster and it's the the accent is not easy to understand like I was like, where are my subtitles? I don't understand these people. Help me.</u> Yeah, so. Researcher 21:30 Yeah. CASSEY 21:31 For like a good like month or so. <u>I was just trying to figure out how to code switch well enough for people to not ask me to repeat myself again and again because it got frustrating after a while,</u> right? And learning the British accent is honestly a skill that needs to be taught because this it was so difficult to understand people is when I just came here. Yeah. No, I don't. Researcher 21:51 Yeah. OK. So yeah, tell me you. I think I interrupted	had access to familiar foods due to her mother <u>cooking,</u> and reflected she "had to learn cooking and I hate cooking just so I don't have to constantly eat UK food". CASSEY then reflected that "surprisingly", she struggled with the language despite having "spoken English all my life", she still felt she had to "relearn English all over again" as no one could understand CASSEY due to her accent being different.	having English proficiency, CASSEY experienced a fundamental barrier to accessing spoken communication ("it was so difficult to understand people"). This wasn't about her ability to speak or construct sentences, but about the basic comprehension needed to participate in social interaction. The framing of accent comprehension as a teachable "skill" suggests CASSEY felt this challenge was predictable and could have been better supported, rather than something she should have intuitively managed. Navigating ambivalence - excitement amid loss - CASSEY presents this early UK period as emotionally complex, holding multiple truths simultaneously. While she experienced sadness from separating from her boyfriend and struggled with linguistic barriers, she also contextualizes this within a lifetime of mobility ("I've been moving around my entire life") and a sense of purposeful forward movement - coming to the UK to "advance my future" and pursue fashion design. The phrase "I was happy at that time" coexists with acknowledgment of
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Appendix I: From Experiential Statements to PETs (Cassey)

This appendix illustrates how experiential statements derived from exploratory noting (Stages 2–3) were clustered into subordinate themes (Stage 4) and organised into Personal Experiential Themes (Stage 5) for one participant, Cassey. The process followed Smith et al.'s (2022) seven-stage framework for IPA analysis.

PET 1: “4 is the max it’s ever gonna go” — Accepting that UK will never fully feel like home

Experiential Statements	Clusters	Personal Experiential Theme
Cassey spontaneously distinguishes between belonging (purple) and happiness (green) on her lifeline: “those are not the same thing” Happiness in UK can reach 20/20 while belonging remains constrained at ceiling of 16/20 India is “a full 5” because it holds her entire life history and community “I don’t know, like in the UK, it’s never fully felt like I’m gonna belong” Acceptance expressed without distress: “It’s never going to upset me... it’s just how it is and that’s fine”	Belonging and happiness as separate constructs Belonging as accumulated through biography — cannot be replicated Permanent ceiling accepted with pragmatic clarity rather than distress	“4 is the max it’s ever gonna go” — Accepting that UK will never fully feel like home Belonging is built up over a lifetime and cannot be replicated elsewhere; accepting this without distress; happiness and belonging as two separate things

PET 2: “She was the blueprint” — Mum as anchor, and what happens when she leaves

Experiential Statements	Clusters	Personal Experiential Theme
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“My mother is a God at that stuff” — found Indian stores, restaurants, community of Indian people Cassey watched her mother build community infrastructure, knowing she would need to do this herself later Mother helped with job, school, navigating systems — “in a family, having people that you’re familiar with, there’s a lot better” When family returned to India at start of university: belonging collapsed dramatically Strategic information management with parents — selective disclosure to protect autonomy and parents’ peace of mind	Mother as navigation blueprint and community-builder Family departure as belonging collapse Managing parental boundaries: selective disclosure as route to independent exploration	“She was the blueprint” — Mum as anchor, and what happens when she leaves Mother as navigation blueprint and community-builder; family departure as belonging collapse; managing parental boundaries through selective disclosure
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PET 3: “I needed answers then... later was not gonna be good enough” — Schools meaning well but missing the mark

Experiential Statements	Clusters	Personal Experiential Theme
School organised a barbecue months in — “by then we already were separated into our own groups” Tutor check-ins felt like information gathering, not support: “that wasn’t like advice. It was more information”	Institutional support as well-intentioned but inadequate and poorly timed Reliance on social capital rather than institutional provision	“I needed answers then... later was not gonna be good enough” — Schools meaning well but missing the mark School support as well-intentioned but inadequate; reliance on social capital; university as the

No structured activities to force connection between new and existing students Reliance on parents rather than school for navigating systems: “If it wasn’t for my parents, I wouldn’t have known” University offered what school had not — diverse peer group where accent difference was shared rather than individual burden	University as corrective — environment changing rather than individual adapting	environment that finally matched her needs
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PET 4: “We were all people of colour and we kind of just stuck together” — The hierarchy of friendship

Experiential Statements	Clusters	Personal Experiential Theme
Initial friendships with other new students and people of colour: “it was basically forced” Friendship with white peers described as “validating... if that makes sense” Genuine community emerging through shared struggle rather than shared outsider status Year 13 peak: Indian friends, fashion community, cultural festivals — “I found every layer of friendship that I needed to find”	Forced friendships built on shared outsider status versus genuine connections built on shared interests Differential validation of white versus POC acceptance Shared struggle as catalyst for genuine connection	“We were all people of colour and we kind of just stuck together” — The hierarchy of friendship Forced friendships among outsiders; differential validation; shared struggle as catalyst; genuine connection through shared interests

University collapse and rebuild: “I rebuilt from scratch” using strategies learned from mother		
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PET 5: “It’s two completely different people, but it’s great” — Two countries, two selves

Experiential Statements	Clusters	Personal Experiential Theme
“I had to relearn English all over again... people would keep asking me to repeat because of my accent”	Code-switching as ongoing labour despite lifelong English fluency	“It’s two completely different people, but it’s great” — Two countries, two selves
“Where are my subtitles? I don’t understand these people. Help me”	Compartmentalised identity across geographies	Code-switching as survival and ongoing labour;
UK self: “wild party animal type me,” impulsive, independent; India self: more reserved, family-oriented	Paradox of fragmentation-as-freedom versus integration producing peak belonging	compartmentalised identity; paradox of fragmentation versus integration
“Whatever I suppressed in India, I can express all of that stuff somewhere else as well”		
Compartmentalisation described as “perfect” — yet lifeline peak occurred when integration happened, not separation		

***Note.** Experiential statements in the left column were derived from exploratory noting across the full transcript. Clustering (middle column) involved identifying convergent patterns across statements, following Smith et al. 's (2022) Stage 4. The right column shows the final PET name and key focus as confirmed through member checking (Stage 7). Quotation marks indicate Cassey's own words used as theme titles to maintain closeness to her lived experience.*

Appendix J: From PETs to GETs

This appendix illustrates how PETs from each participant were laid out and compared to identify convergent patterns across the five cases, resulting in six Group Experiential Themes (Smith et al., 2022, Stage 7). Some PETs contributed to more than one GET, reflecting the interconnected nature of participants' experiences. Where a PET contributed a specific dimension to a GET rather than mapping onto it wholly, this is noted in parentheses.

Group Experiential Theme	Cassey	Daisy	Jacob	Vincent	Savannah
GET 1: The Ceiling of Belonging — Accepted Limitation Without Resignation	<i>PET 1: “4 is the max it’s ever gonna go”</i>	<i>PET 5: “At least it’s not raining”</i>	<i>PET 3: “I’m not British enough... not Chinese enough”</i>	<i>PET 6: “People definitely tend to underestimate... I also underestimate it”</i>	<i>PET 2: “The workweek and the weekend”</i>
GET 2: Belonging as Relational Rather Than Geographic or Institutional	<i>PET 4: “Those were forced friendships”</i>	<i>PET 3: “At least I get the opportunity to actually talk to people”</i>	<i>PET 2: “The social aspect was what really makes or breaks”</i>	<i>PET 3: “I could literally just walk up to her office”</i> <i>PET 4: “They were gaming together every night... I’m just sitting there”</i>	<i>PET 1: “I stand out or I follow their behaviours”</i>
GET 3: The Labour of Linguistic Navigation — Code-Switching as Survival and Self-Fracture	<i>PET 5: “It’s two completely different people, but it’s great”</i> <i>(language dimension)</i>	<i>PET 1: “I don’t know how to say in English”</i>	<i>PET 3: “I’m not British enough... not Chinese enough”</i> <i>(language dimension)</i>	<i>PET 2: “It’s not even language barrier. It’s culture”</i>	<i>PET 4: “I feel the best when I mix them together”</i>

GET 4: Family as Both Anchor and Constraint — The Two Sides of Intergenerational Support	<i>PET 2: “She was the blueprint”</i>	<i>PET 4: “Girl you’re already uni... Why can’t you go out?”</i>	<i>PET 4: “Looking back... I didn’t really fit in” (family dimension)</i>	<i>PET 5: “I was in Hong Kong, but it basically felt like Hong Kong”</i>	<i>PET 5: “She kicked me out”</i>
GET 5: Navigating Between Survival Mode and Genuine Engagement — Belonging as a Journey Over Time	<i>PET 1: “4 is the max” (temporal dimension)</i> <i>PET 3: “I needed answers then”</i>	<i>PET 2: “They’re smiling, but they didn’t look like smiling”</i> <i>PET 3: “At least I get the opportunity” (temporal dimension)</i>	<i>PET 1: “Less like living in school and more like surviving”</i> <i>PET 5: “Navigating around the misses”</i>	<i>PET 1: “I don’t think I got the worst end of the stick”</i> <i>PET 7: “It shows now how I am as a person”</i>	<i>PET 3: “Different from what I expected despite my familiarity”</i>
GET 6: Cultural In-Betweenness as Permanent Position Rather Than Transitional State	<i>PET 5: “It’s two completely different people, but it’s great” (identity dimension)</i>	<i>PET 5: “At least it’s not raining” (cultural dimension)</i>	<i>PET 3: “I’m not British enough... not Chinese enough” (identity dimension)</i>	<i>PET 2: “It’s not even language barrier. It’s culture” (identity dimension)</i> <i>PET 5: “I was in Hong Kong”</i>	<i>PET 6: “I was the only source of variation there”</i>

Note. PET titles use participants’ own words to maintain closeness to lived experience. All six GETs were present across all five participants’ accounts, consistent with Smith et al.’s (2022) recommendation that GETs appear in at least half the sample. The mapping reflects the analytical process of identifying shared experiential patterns while attending to the variation in how each participant experienced them.

Appendix K: Second Interview (Member Checking) Schedule (Cassey)

The following schedule was prepared for the member checking interview with Cassey. Five Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) were presented back to the participant using her own words as theme titles. For each theme, subordinate themes were briefly described with supporting quotes, followed by open prompts inviting the participant to confirm, challenge, or nuance the interpretations.

Opening: “Thank you for meeting with me again. Today I want to share what I’ve understood from our conversation and make sure I’ve got it right. I’ve tried to use your own words as much as possible. You’re the expert on your experience, so please tell me honestly: does this capture what you meant? Have I misunderstood anything? Is the emphasis wrong anywhere? What’s missing?”

PET 1: “4 is the max it’s ever gonna go”

Accepting that UK will never fully feel like home

Subordinate themes:

- “In India, it’s a full 5... I’ve lived here my entire life” — Belonging as accumulated through biography
- “I don’t know, like in the UK, it’s never fully felt like I’m gonna belong” — Permanent liminality accepted with pragmatic clarity
- “Those are not the same thing” — Spontaneous distinction between happiness (green line) and belonging (purple line) on lifeline grid

Prompts for participant:

- *Does this capture how you think about belonging in the UK versus India?*
- *The phrase “4 is the max” — is that something you’ve made peace with, or does it still feel limiting?*
- *You distinguished between happiness and belonging. Can you say more about that difference for you?*

PET 2: “She was the blueprint”

Mum as anchor, and what happens when she leaves

Subordinate themes:

- “She’s a God at that stuff” — Mother finding Indian stores, restaurants, community networks while Cassey watched and learned
- “We didn’t realise how much she was doing... she had to start it all from scratch all over again” — Recognising her sacrifices in retrospect
- “Obviously I started going back down once I moved to London by myself” — Belonging collapsing when family left
- “I come from a Brown family. My parents are very strict” — Strategically managing information to create space for independent exploration

Prompts for participant:

- *Does this capture your mother’s role in your transition?*

- *When your family left and your belonging collapsed — what was that experience like?*
- *The strategic managing of information with your parents — does that still feel accurate?*

PET 3: “I needed answers then... later was not gonna be good enough”

Schools meaning well but missing the mark

Subordinate themes:

- “Oh, we’re gonna hold a seminar about this” — Institutional timelines not matching urgent need for information
- “They did like one barbecue... a few months in... but by then we already were separated into our own groups” — Too late, and activities that did not force connection
- “If it wasn’t for my parents... they had friends who had gone through this” — Relying on family social capital when school support failed
- University “did quite well with this because most of our students are international students” — Finally, an institution designed around her as the norm

Prompts for participant:

- *Does this capture your experience of school support?*
- *Looking back, what would have actually helped?*
- *The difference between your secondary school and university — what do you think made university better at this?*

PET 4: “We were all people of colour and we kind of just stuck together”

The hierarchy of friendship

Subordinate themes:

- “Neither of us had any friends that weren’t new... kind of just stuck together” — Early friendships based on shared outsider status
- “We were all people of colour... it wasn’t that kind of a friendship” — Describing those friendships as “basically forced”
- “It felt validating that the white people were being friends with me” — Naming that acceptance from white peers felt different
- “This feeling of togetherness... we were studying in the library for hours on end” — Shared struggle creating actual community
- Making friends at work: “I did not expect” — Genuine connections emerging in unexpected places

Prompts for participant:

- *Does this capture the difference between those early friendships and later ones?*
- *The thing you said about white acceptance feeling validating — does the way I’ve presented it feel okay, or would you describe it differently?*
- *The shift from forced proximity to authentic bonds — what do you think made that possible?*

PET 5: “It’s two completely different people, but it’s great”

Two countries, two selves

Subordinate themes:

- “I had to relearn English all over again... people would keep asking me to repeat because of my accent” — Despite speaking English her whole life
- “Where are my subtitles? I don’t understand these people. Help me” — Gap between presumed competence and lived experience
- UK: freedom to be “wild party animal type me,” impulsive, independent — but also: ceiling of belonging, loneliness, constant rebuilding
- India: “I have to be careful... it’s a lot more of a conservative country” — but also: full 5 belonging, community, culture, festivals
- “Whatever I suppressed in India, I can express all of that stuff somewhere else” — Framing fragmentation as freedom

Prompts for participant:

- *Does this capture how you think about having different selves in different places?*
- *You framed fragmentation as “perfect” — but your highest belonging came when you brought aspects of your Indian identity into UK space. How do you make sense of that?*
- *The code-switching — accent, presentation, personality — you said it’s “easier now.” Does it still feel like effort?*

Closing Questions

- “Looking at all five themes together, what have I missed that’s important to your experience?”
- “Is there anything that feels wrong or misrepresented?”
- “Would you name any of these themes differently?”
- “Now that you’ve heard these themes, is anything new coming up for you?”
- “Is there anything you want to add or clarify?”

Appendix L: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form



The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Generation 1.25 International New Arrivals - A Sense of Belonging

Researcher: Megan Ng Email: [REDACTED] Phone: [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor: Lisa Bostock

Purpose of the Study: This research aims to understand how young people who moved to the UK during their secondary school years (ages 13-17) experienced belonging at school. We want to learn about:

- What helped you feel like you belonged at school
- What made it harder to feel like you belonged
- How you managed being a teenager while adapting to a new country
- What support was helpful and what could have been better

Why is this research important? Your experiences can help schools and professionals better understand how to support other young people who move to the UK during their teenage years. Your story matters and can make a real difference in improving support for future students.

Please read each statement carefully and tick the boxes if you agree:

Statement	Tick Box (if agree)
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, until two weeks after my interview, and without penalty.	
3. I understand that choosing to take part or not take part will not affect any services I receive from ACAA.	
4. I agree to my interview being audio recorded.	
5. I understand that the identifiable data provided will be securely stored on the Tavistock and Portman NHS OneDrive and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the project, and that confidentiality will be maintained.	
6. I understand that the recording will be typed up and made anonymous within two weeks, and that all identifying information will be removed from the interview transcript.	
7. I understand that my information will be kept confidential unless there are concerns about safety.	
8. I agree that anonymous quotes from my interview may be used in the research report and publications.	
9. I am aware that anonymized data will be kept for 10 years after the study ends.	
10. I understand this research is part of a Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology and that the findings will be shared in a thesis and may be published in academic journals.	
11. I understand that I can request a summary of the findings when the research is complete.	

12. I know I can stop or take breaks during the interview if I need to, and that support is available if I become upset during or after the interview.	
13. I have the researcher's contact details if I have any questions after the interview.	
14. I agree to take part in the above study.	

Your Details:

Name: _____

Age: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

One copy for participant, one copy for researcher

Contact for concerns: If you have any concerns about this research, please contact: Head of Academic Registry Email: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix M: Distress Protocol**DISTRESS PROTOCOL FOR RESEARCH WITH GENERATION 1.25 INTERNATIONAL NEW ARRIVALS****1. PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION**

- Discuss with participant how they typically show distress
- Establish participant's preferred ways of communicating discomfort

- Agree on verbal/non-verbal signals for needing breaks
- Identify specific triggers to avoid if any
- Confirm preferred support person and contact details
- Review available support services with participant

2. **SIGNS OF DISTRESS TO MONITOR**

Mild Signs:

- Shifting in seat, fidgeting
- Changes in tone of voice
- Becoming quieter/more withdrawn
- Minor physical reactions (e.g., tapping foot)
- Brief pauses in responding

Moderate Signs:

- Crying or tearfulness
- Trembling or shaking
- Difficulty speaking
- Noticeable anxiety or agitation
- Extended silences
- Rapid breathing

Severe Signs:

- Uncontrolled crying/sobbing
- Panic attacks
- Inability to continue speaking
- Expressing wishes to end participation
- Physical distress (shaking, sweating profusely)
- Dissociation

3. **RESPONSE PROTOCOL**

Level 1 (Mild Distress):

1. Acknowledge observed changes: "I notice you seem uncomfortable..."
2. Offer brief break
3. Check willingness to continue
4. Remind of right to skip topics/questions
5. Monitor for escalation

Level 2 (Moderate Distress):

1. Stop interview immediately
2. Offer water and tissues
3. Implement grounding techniques if appropriate
4. Allow time for recovery
5. Ask directly about continuing vs postponing
6. Remind of support services
7. Check if they want trusted person contacted

Level 3 (Severe Distress):

1. Terminate interview immediately
2. Implement immediate support measures:
 - a. Contact designated support person if requested

- b. Call ACAA counselor if available
 - c. Stay with participant until stabilized
- 3. Assess need for additional professional support
- 4. Make referral to appropriate services if needed
- 5. Follow up within 24 hours

4. **POST-DISTRESS ACTIONS**

- Document incident and response
- Inform research supervisor
- Review if additional supports needed
- Consider implications for future interviews
- Schedule follow-up check-in
- Review consent for continued participation

5. **PREVENTIVE MEASURES**

- Regular check-ins during interview: "How are you feeling about our conversation?"
- Planned breaks every 30 minutes
- Clear signposting of sensitive topics
- Reminder of right to pause/stop
- Water and tissues available
- Quiet, private interview space
- Support service information readily available

6. **FOLLOW-UP PROTOCOL**

Within 24 hours:

- Wellbeing check via preferred contact method
- Confirm support accessed if needed
- Review participation decision

Within one week:

- Additional wellbeing check
- Review of support needs
- Discussion of continued participation if relevant

7. **SUPPORT SERVICES CONTACT LIST**

[List to include:]

- ACAA counseling services
- Local mental health crisis services
- Refugee support organizations
- Young people's counseling services
- Emergency contacts

8. **RESEARCHER SELF-CARE**

- Regular supervision
- Debrief after difficult interviews
- Access to personal therapy

- Clear boundaries and time management
- Regular reflection on emotional impact

Appendix N: Example of Supervisor Feedback During Analytical Process

The following notes were recorded during a research supervision session in which developing themes from Savannah's transcript were shared with my research supervisor via screen-sharing. The supervisor's verbal reflections were captured in note form.

Observations on transcript content:

- Exams: shared comradeship, supporting junior students
- Bahrain and India participant: really engaged in a reflexive experience of moving and making new friends/new country, a sense of self-making — dexterous, moving around even within their own countries

Supervisor's reflective images:

- Glass bottle on the sea — corked bottle (stormy sea) — still stays afloat
- Glass bottle with the cork out — still floating, but with the sense that it might sink and water might be getting in

Analytical observations:

- Passiveness vs proactive (self-making and the social aspect)
- Institutional support — absence or not (mentoring, structured opportunities, relational connections, couldn't be perfectly tailored, not accessing any support)

Appendix O: TREC Ethical Approval (Amendment Confirmation)

Dear Megan,

I can confirm that I have received your updated TREC documentation and application to an amendment to your research protocol in light of the challenges you have experienced with recruiting participants and I can confirm that the changes have been approved. You may proceed with your research.

Your updated TREC form is attached.

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

Kind regards,

Paru

Paru Jeram

Senior Academic Governance and Quality Officer

Pronouns: she/her

Normal working hours – 8am to 4.30 pm

Spelling mistakes are possible – apologies in advance