

Higher Education aspirations
and choice: The case of young
Bangladeshi individuals in East
London

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by
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DECLARATION

I declare that neither this thesis, nor any part of it, has been previously submitted for the award of a degree at this or any other institution of learning.

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education aspirations and choice: The case of young Bangladeshi individuals in East London

by

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The purpose of this study was to understand the factors influencing the university decision-making process of British Bangladeshi students. Whilst a considerable amount of research exists on factors influencing the university decision-making process of different ethnic groups, there are very few studies that provide details on the university decision-making process of Bangladeshi students, and the studies that have attempted to do this were limited in scope. The major research question guiding this study was: How and why do British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue higher education (HE)?

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was used in this study, where quantitative data (university questionnaire) informed the qualitative phase (semi-structured interviews). 140 Year 13 Bangladeshi students from schools in London (in Tower Hamlets and Ilford) completed the questionnaire, and 19 students took part in the interviews.

The study finds that access to social capital resources enables the social network to influence British Bangladeshi's HE decision-making process. Students' HE aspirations were mostly influenced through the norms and expectations that their parents had conveyed; however, they were unable to foster the mechanisms to achieve this goal. Thus, other sources of social capital were needed to support students' pursuit of HE. Students had to rely on significant individuals to support them through the university application process by being their main sources of information.

The study also finds that students are rational decision-makers and that their educational choices are made to maximise economic and social returns, although it was clear that economic returns are more important. Bangladeshi students, based on the availability of information in their social networks and subject to constraints posed by their social background, chose HE to maximise total expected returns.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BERA	British Educational Research Association
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HEIPR	Higher Educational Initial Participation Rate
KS2	Key Stage 2
KS4	Key Stage 4
KS5	Key Stage 5
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SRCT	Sociological Rational Choice Theory
TA	Thematic Analysis
UCAS	University and Colleges Admission Service
UK	United Kingdom
WP	Widening Participation

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

More British Bangladeshis are enrolling at university and gaining degrees than ever before. Between 2005 and 2016, Bangladeshi undergraduate student enrolment at university rose from 34% to 61.1% (Department for Education [DfE], 2018a); this is even though they are the most economically disadvantaged ethnic group in the UK (Shale et al., 2015). In comparison, White student enrolment grew more slowly, rising from 28% to 36.4% (Crawford and Greaves, 2015, Department for Education, 2018a). However, it is important to acknowledge that a steep rise is easier when starting from an extremely low base. The upward trend of Bangladeshis' HE participation is expected to continue for some time (Atherton and Mazhari, 2018) which is baffling, as research has shown that 'social class' (which has been defined in different ways) has a significant influence on educational attainment, particularly in terms of HE participation, and historically, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been less likely than those from more affluent backgrounds to progress to HE (Connor et al., 2001, Croll and Attwood, 2013). To explore this paradox, this study seeks to understand what is enabling Bangladeshi students to transcend their large-scale, sociologically corroborated disadvantages.

Despite British Bangladeshis' high HE participation rate, there remains a great deal of room for improvement. Data show that students from Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds continue to be considerably under-represented in the UK's most academically selective and prestigious universities. Only 31.2% of Bangladeshi students applying to Russell Group universities, which are research-intensive universities, are met with offers of admission, whereas for White students, the offer rates are much higher, reaching 54.7% (Boliver, 2016). The data also show that Bangladeshi students are also underachieving at university. Recent figures show that only 67.5% of Bangladeshi students graduated with either a first or upper-second class degree, compared with 80.9% of White students (Amos and Doku, 2019).

The economic value of university education to Bangladeshis cannot be underestimated. In 2018, graduates earned £10,000 per year more than individuals who did not go to university. The median salary for graduates aged 16–64 was £34,000, whereas non-graduates earned a median salary of £24,000 (Department for Education [DfE], 2019). Accordingly, Bangladeshi graduates can earn a higher salary over a lifetime than those who are non-graduates. According to a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an undergraduate degree is worth £130k for men and £100k more in lifetime earnings compared to their peers holding A-levels or equivalent, once taxes and student loans have been taken into account. In percentage terms, this means that graduates gain, on average, net lifetime earnings of around 20% more than non-graduates (Department for Education, 2019). In addition to the ability to earn more over a lifetime, HE is also correlated with employment. In 2018, the graduate employment rate of graduates was 87.7%, which is much higher than the employment rate of non-graduates of 71.6% (Department for Education, 2019). Clearly, there are considerable individual benefits that result from investment in university, and research has shown that there are also societal-level benefits. Having an educated workforce and lower unemployment rates and higher earnings would also bring benefits to the United Kingdom as a whole, including faster economic growth due to increased graduate skills accumulation, higher tax contributions, greater innovation and increased productivity of co-workers (Department for Business Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2013). With consideration of these benefits, economically disadvantaged students need to enter HE if they are to achieve upward social mobility. As noted by Brown (2014), HE participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is an important first step towards achieving social mobility.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors influencing the university decision-making process of Bangladeshi students residing in East London. The major research question and sub-question guiding this study were:

How and why do British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue HE?

1. How do the networks of British Bangladeshi students influence their decision to participate in HE?
2. What are the motivating factors that have led British Bangladeshi students to pursue HE? a) personal goals, b) career goals.
3. What factors have the strongest influence on Bangladeshi students' choice of HE institution?

Although a considerable amount of research exists that explores factors that influence the HE decision-making processes of various groups of students (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000, Connor et al., 2004, Chowdry et al., 2008, Holland, 2010), there are very few studies that have explored this with respect to British Bangladeshi students, and the studies that have attempted to do this are very limited in scope (Crozier and Davies, 2006, Dale, 2002). This study was therefore conceived to provide some much-needed empirical evidence to illuminate the phenomenon of Bangladeshi students' HE decision-making process, attempting to explain their over-representation in HE.

In the past, studies that have looked at ethnic minority groups and HE participation have focused on explaining their under-representation. These studies have done this by focusing on the difficulties that the students faced and the obstacles that they had to overcome. This approach may have been useful in the past when ethnic minority groups were under-represented in HE; however, this is no longer the case. Connor et al. (2004) stated, "*there is a tendency in this area to focus mostly on the least successful, and on difficulties, rather than successes. Some minority ethnic students are doing much better than comparative White groups. This should be given greater recognition, along with success 'drivers'*" (p. xxi). In this study, I intend to take a more positive approach,

focusing on the success stories of Bangladeshi students to derive lessons to help others who are unlikely to progress to HE.

My personal motivation for studying this specific topic and participating in the Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) has been influenced by personal experiences in my life. My own family background has been a significant influence on my research interests. I come from both a working-class and ethnic minority background. My paternal grandfather grew up in Algeria and migrated to France to find work. My father left compulsory education and went straight into work as a painter; he later opened his own business. After marrying my mother and having three daughters, my parents decided to leave France due to the systematic racism we had to endure for simply being Arab and Muslim. We migrated to the UK when I was 13 in the hope of a better life.

Moving to a new country did not come without its challenges. I was in Year 8, surrounded by new people and not speaking a word of English, which was difficult; however, it taught me resilience. As the years passed, I overcame the language barrier. I was never interested in education or took it seriously, probably because my parents never had high aspirations for us. I revised very little for my GCSE exams, and as a result, I did not do very well. At the age of 16, my parents got divorced, which is when everything changed. My mother had to work for the first time in her life, which is when she realised that having a degree was important. Her personal struggles in the labour market became a motivation for ‘pushing’ us to go university. From then on, I put my head down and worked hard, really hard. My educational journey was not smooth sailing – far from it – but I made it to university. I could never have imagined that a person ‘like me’ could ever go to university. This was a huge achievement, but I did not want to stop there. I wanted to make a difference, and I felt it was important to be in a position where I would be heard and be taken seriously to be able to achieve this goal. The only way I believed I could do this was through research, which is why I am doing a PhD.

Attending university has not only changed me as a person, but it has also opened up so many doors and given me so many amazing opportunities. For this very reason, I am interested in research that focuses on widening participation in HE. This is not to say that I believe that everyone should go to university in order to lead happier and more fulfilling

lives; however, I firmly believe that everyone, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, should have fair access to HE.

1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

I used a mixed-methods approach to examine the university decision-making processes of Bangladeshi students residing in the East London. In this study, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, as it appeared to be the best fit for the research problem that was being investigated. Both qualitative and quantitative data were required to answer the main research question ‘How and why do British Bangladeshi students choose to pursue HE?’, highlighting the need for a mixed-methods approach. This study used an explanatory sequential design, meaning that the data collection process began with a quantitative phase (a questionnaire), which was followed by a qualitative phase (semi-structured interviews). I chose an explanatory sequential design because it is a useful tool when *“the researcher wants to assess trends and relationships with quantitative data but also be able to explain the mechanism or reasons behind the resultant trends”* (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) .

For the first phase of the data collection process, a self-developed survey questionnaire was used to collect background information about my participants in order to have a better understanding of whom the sample concerned and to whom the findings might apply. The participants shared details about their age, gender, immigrant generation status, family’s education, socioeconomic background, their qualifications before university application, and their degree and university choices. Additionally, the questionnaire was also used to identify the factors that had influenced participants’ decision to pursue HE and their choice of university. I chose to use a cross-sectional questionnaire survey, meaning that the data were collected at a single point in time (Wyse et al., 2016). Due to the nature of the research question, there was no need to use other types of survey questionnaires, i.e. longitudinal surveys or trend studies. In the second phase of the data collection process, semi-structured one-to-one interviews were used to explain and elaborate on the quantitative data from the first phase. Structured interviews were not chosen for this study because of the lack of freedom it would have given me, as it would have restricted me in terms of the questions that I could have asked. Unstructured

interviews were also not an option because it would have made it difficult for me to get answers to all the questions I had.

Four 11-18 high schools in London (in Tower Hamlets and Ilford) agreed to participate in the study. 140 Bangladeshi students in Year 13 were recruited from four schools, with support from staff within each school, to take part in the first phase of the study (questionnaire). Then, 19 Bangladeshi students in Year 13 were recruited from three schools to take part in the second phase of the study (interviews). As will be explained in Chapter 3, one school did not take part in the second phase of the study, as no students had volunteered. The survey questionnaire was administered and completed over a period of three months (December 2017–February 2018), and a follow-up interview was also conducted over a period of three months (March–May 2018).

1.4 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis is divided into six chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces the phenomenon under investigation in this study. Figures have shown that more British Bangladeshis are enrolling at university and gaining degrees than ever before, despite being the most economically disadvantaged ethnic group in the UK (Department for Work and Pensions [DWP], 2015). In this study, I attempt to explore the various factors that are enabling Bangladeshi students to participate in HE, despite their large-scale, sociological corroborated disadvantages. This chapter also highlights the fact that very few studies have provided details on the university decision-making process of British Bangladeshi students, and the studies that did attempt to do it were very limited in scope (Crozier and Davies, 2006, Dale, 2002). This study was therefore conceived in order to provide some much-needed empirical evidence to illuminate the phenomenon of Bangladeshi students' HE decision-making process in an attempt to explain their over-representation in HE.

Chapter 2 begins by discussing who British Bangladeshis are and their place in British society. It does this by describing British Bangladeshis' immigration journey to the UK and socioeconomic contexts. The second section of this chapter gives an overview of the current patterns and future predictions of HE participation and progression amongst British Bangladeshis. The next section explores the various factors (Widening Participation policies, prior attainment, educational aspirations; influence of parents and

significant individuals; and motivating factors) that influence HE participation of students in the UK. It then goes on to exploring the educational experiences of ethnic minority students in the UK and some of the barriers that prevent students from accessing HE. This chapter concludes with the identification of the different factors that influence students' university choice. The chapter identifies and establishes the theoretical frameworks by reviewing the relevant literature. The two frameworks chosen for this study were social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) and sociological rational choice theory (Jaeger, 2007). I draw from the constructs found within each framework rather than operate within the strict parameters of one particular theory.

Chapter 3 presents and justifies the research methodology, which is a mixed-methods approach, gives a discussion of the objectives, and explains how participants were selected and data were collected and analysed. **Chapter 4** presents the findings and the narrative that develops from the data. **Chapter 5** provides an in-depth discussion and analysis of the findings through theoretical perspectives of social capital and sociological rational choice theories. Finally, **Chapter 6** will begin by presenting a discussion of the original contribution to knowledge this study has made. This chapter further provides recommendations for theory, policy, practice and future research, as well as acknowledging the research limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature review aims to critically assess the various existing literature that is relevant to this study. The literature review is organised into four main sections: characteristics of British Bangladeshis, current patterns of HE participation and progression amongst British Bangladeshis, factors that influence HE progression, and factors that influence university choice.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF BRITISH BANGLADESHIS

To understand Bangladeshi students and the choices they make about university, it is crucial to first discuss who they are and what their place is in British society. This section describes British Bangladeshis' immigration and socioeconomic contexts. Without knowledge of these contexts, researchers, policymakers and practitioners would be poorly informed about British Bangladeshi students.

The migration of Bangladeshis to the UK began in the twentieth century (see Table 1), with a large number migrating in the 1950s. The majority have migrated from Sylheti, a rural region in north-eastern Bangladesh (Zeitlyn, 2014). Today, Bangladeshi immigrants account for approximately 0.7% of the overall British population (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2013a) and have been identified as comprising one of the fastest-growing communities in the country (Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2005). According to the 2011 Census, 222,100 people of Bangladeshi heritage were living in London, which is 50% of the overall Bangladeshi community residing in the UK (Census Information Scheme [CIS], 2015). The Bangladeshi community has a relatively young population, with a median age of 24 compared to 42 for the White population (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2013b).

Table 1: Estimates of the Bangladeshi Population in the UK (1951-2011)

Year (Census)	Total Number of Population
1951	2,000
1961	6,000
1971	22,000
1981	65,000
1991	163,000
2001	283,000
2011	451,529

Source: Peach, 2005:24, ONS, 2013a

The migration of Bangladeshis to the UK is considered an ‘economic migration’; none of the Bangladeshis came as political refugees. They migrated because Britain had better employment opportunities available to them than there were in Bangladesh, which was once a British colony (Bhatti, 1999). Economic migration refers to individuals who have migrated not only to get a job and earn a living (the enjoyment of immediate benefits) but also to individuals who have migrated because of their desire for long-term prosperity for themselves, their children and future generations. As Dahya (1988) states, “*their migration is not simply job-oriented for earning a livelihood or for enjoying a higher standard of living; rather, they see their jobs as a means of realising aspirations for the status mobility of their families*” (p. 441).

Bangladeshi immigrants are overwhelmingly uneducated, with almost 40% of Bengali men and 49% of Bengali women having no academic qualifications, resulting in their prevalence in low-paying jobs (Alexander et al., 2005). Recent figures on employment by occupation show that Bangladeshi workers are mainly concentrated in the least-skilled occupations (‘elementary’,* ‘sales and consumer services’ and ‘process, plants and machines operative’ jobs) (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2020). They are under-represented in the labour market, and their economic inactivity and unemployment rates are significantly higher than the national average (DWP, 2016, ONS, 2020). This is especially the case for Bangladeshi women, as they have the lowest employment rate of any women from all ethnic groups. Platt (2007) explains that child-rearing is linked to

*‘Elementary’ jobs: the lowest skilled type of occupation

low maternal employment. Having children reduces economic activity for women in general, but evidence has shown that there are clear differences between different ethnic groups; for example, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women were least likely of all ethnic groups to combine paid work with motherhood (Dale et al., 2006). This, in turn, contributes to low household incomes (Corlett, 2017).

Recent figures show that British Bangladeshis are more likely than the UK general population to be economically disadvantaged. Figure 1 shows typical (median) incomes of all ethnic groups in the UK from 2013 to 2016. Disposable incomes were used (i.e. after benefits and taxes) and equivalised to reflect household size. Bangladeshi households have, on average, more children than any other ethnic group. There is evidence that larger families are more likely to live in poverty than those with smaller families (Platt, 2007). This proved to be the case even when other relevant factors associated with poverty were taken into consideration (Bradshaw et al., 2006). Bangladeshi households have an equivalised income of £16,400, making them the most economically deprived ethnic group in the UK (Corlett, 2017).

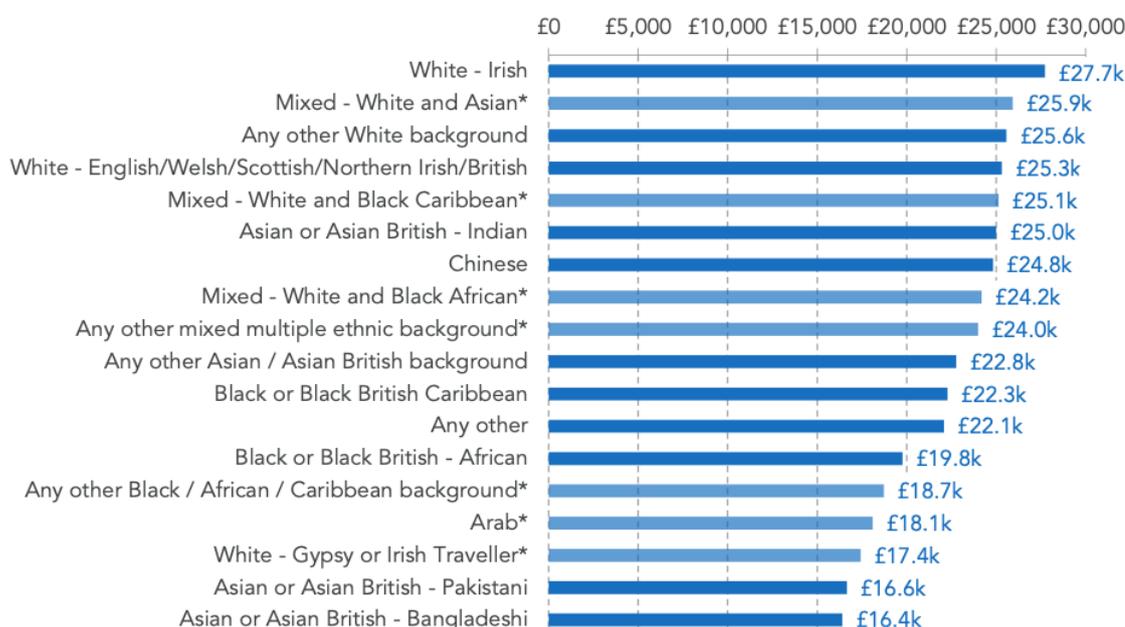


Figure 1: Typical household incomes by ethnicity (Median equivalised disposable income 2013-14 to 2015-16)

Notes: Figures for starred categories are based on very small sample sizes and should be treated with particular caution. The ‘White-Irish’ category is only available in England, Scotland and Wales.

Source: RF analysis of DWP, Households Below Average Income (Corlett, 2017)

2.3 CURRENT PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION AND PROGRESSION

The official measure of participation of English students in HE is the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR). This measure estimates the likelihood of young people entering HE by age 30, based on the current entry rate of previous non-entrants. It is not a measure of participation by particular entry cohorts. The HEIPR estimates will be used in this section to demonstrate the scale of the over-representation of British Bangladeshis in HE. This measure has been widely used in reports, articles and books relevant to this study; however, I am cautious of the fact that all existing datasets suffer from certain weaknesses – key definitions have changed over time, sets have missing data or cases, there is incomplete coverage or sets are incomplete in range or aggregation with other datasets (Gorard et al., 2006).

Overall, the participation of British Bangladeshis in HE has been steadily increasing over the past few years. Figure 2 summarises the trend in HE participation rates for students at age 18 or 19 (between 2005–06 and 2011–12) from different ethnic backgrounds for the cohorts who sat their GCSEs between 2003 and 2008 (Crawford and Greaves, 2015). In the 2003 cohort, all ethnic minority students, except those from other Black and Black Caribbean ethnic origins, were more likely than White students to enter HE. This changed with the consecutive cohorts, where all ethnic minority students were more likely than White students to participate in HE without any exception. Figure 2 also shows that there are significant differences in the participation of Bangladeshi students when comparing the 2003 cohort with the 2008 cohort. In the 2003 cohort, around 34% of Bangladeshis participated in HE at age 18 or 19, compared to around 49% in the 2008 cohort, a considerable increase of 15% in a matter of five years. Additionally, all ethnic groups, except for those from Chinese, Indian, Black African and any Other Asian background, had lower HE participation rates than Bangladeshi students. The evidence shows that there has been an upward trend in the number of Bangladeshi students participating in HE in the past several years.

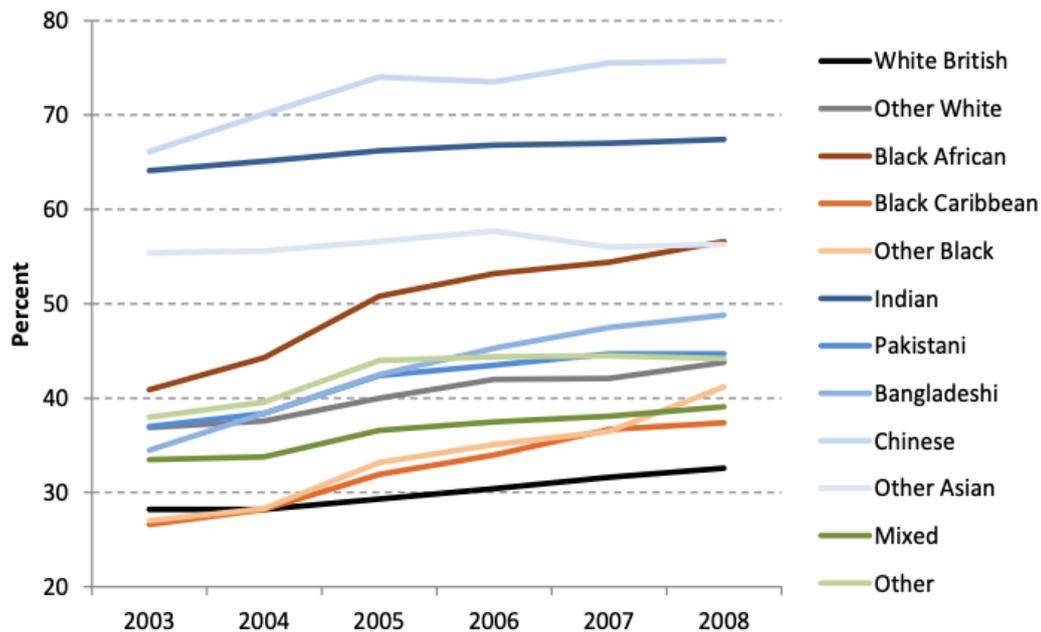


Figure 2: HE participation at age 18 or 19 amongst cohorts taking their GCSEs in 2003 to 2008, by ethnic group*

Source: Crawford & Greaves, 2015

* State school students only

Evidence shows that the upward trend in the number of Bangladeshi students participating in HE has continued. The Department for Education has released recent figures showing that Bangladeshis' progression rates are way above average. Figure 3 summarises the trend in participation rates for students at age 15 by ethnic group who entered HE by age 19 by the 2016/17 academic year. The figures show that the participation rates for British Bangladeshis have increased again, reaching a record high of 61.1%; this is an increase of 12.1% for the 2016/17 academic year (from 49% in 2011/12). Once again, all ethnic groups, except for those from Chinese, Indian, Black African and any Other Asian background, had lower HE participation rates than Bangladeshi students.

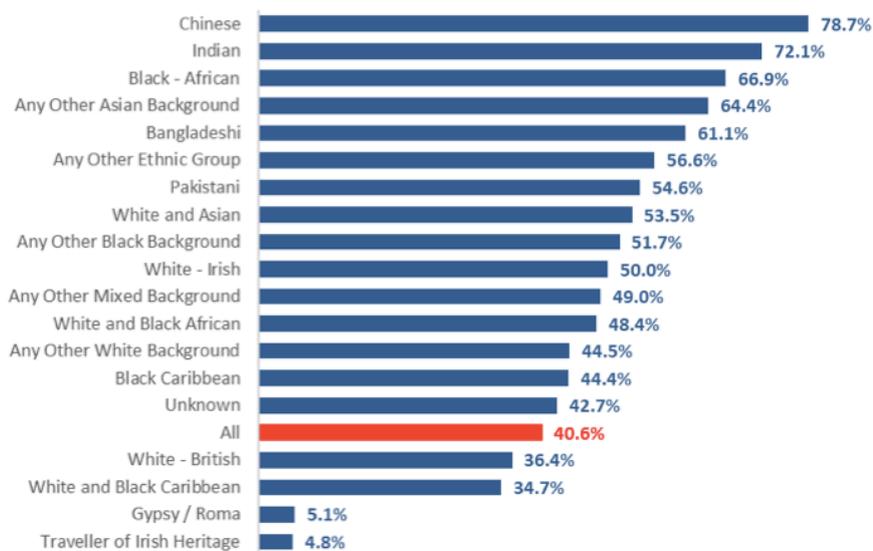


Figure 3: *Estimated percentage of 15-year-old state funded pupils by ethnic group who entered HE by age 19 in 2016/17*

Source: DfE, 2018a

The upward trend of Bangladeshis' HE participation is expected to continue for some time, particularly in London. Atherton and Mazhari (2018) have published a report that looked at trajectories of the younger student body (18–24 years old) entering HE in London by 2030. They predict that universities in London will become 'hyper-diverse' by 2030 and that there will be an increase in the number of students from under-represented groups. Figure 4 shows the projected student numbers (aged 18–24, domiciled in London) by ethnic background based on expected changes in demography (predicted changes in population) between 2016 and 2030. Their predictions show that students' participation in HE in 2030 will be somewhat different from that in 2016. Some ethnic groups will see a rise, others will see a fall. The proportion of other students (including mixed) is forecast to be higher by 6%, African students by 4%, Bangladeshi students by 3%, and Other Asian students by 2% in 2030. On the other hand, the proportion of White students is forecast to be lower by 10%, Indian students by 3% and Caribbean students by 2% in 2030. It is important to point out that these forecasts were based on existing trends and data. A lot could happen to disrupt these predictions; for example, broad macro-level policy changes have the potential to affect HE participation i.e. changes to the student finance system. Nonetheless, recent statistics show that it is almost certain that young people entering HE from London will be from diverse backgrounds (Atherton and Mazhari, 2018).

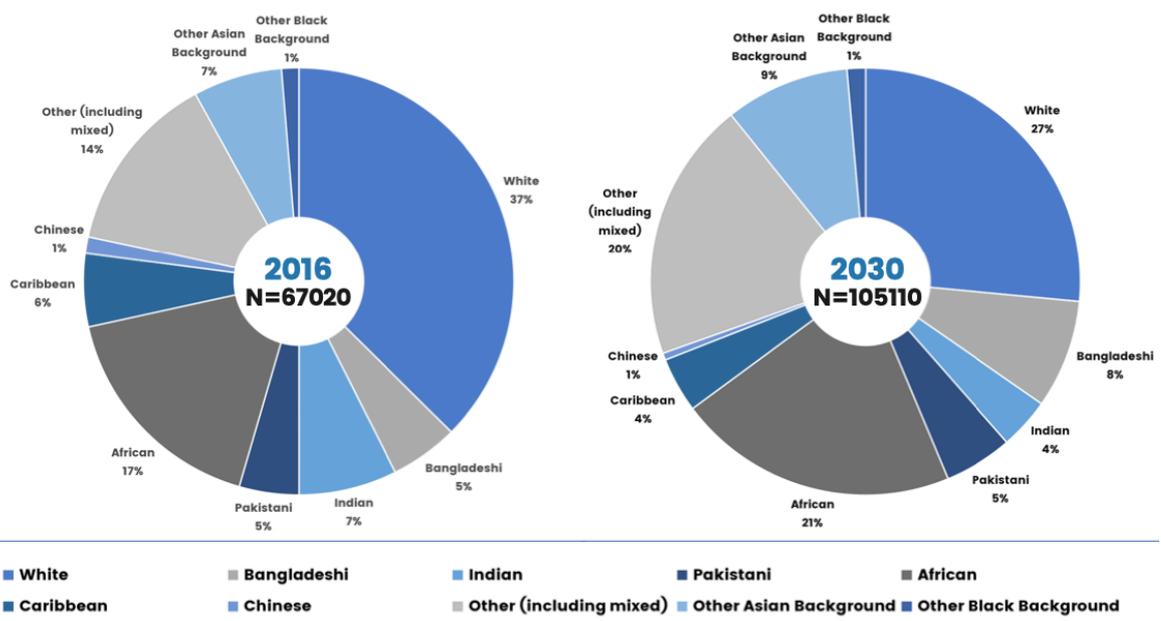


Figure 4: A comparison of the composition of the student body (aged 18-24) by ethnicity, in 2016 and 2030

Source: Atherton & Mazhari, 2018

As discussed above, the participation of British Bangladeshis in HE has been steadily increasing over the past few years, but data and figures also show that this trend is similar for other ethnic minority groups. Using the data published by Crawford and Greaves (2015) and the Department for Education (2018a), Table 2 shows the extent to which the changing rate of Bangladeshi students' HE participation replicates the situation for other ethnic minority groups. The evidence clearly shows that there has been an upward trend in the number of ethnic minority groups participating in HE from 2005 to 2017; however, the evidence shows that some ethnic groups have experienced a higher increase than others. Participation amongst Bangladeshi students had the most rapid increase than any other ethnic minority group, followed by Black African and other Black students. On the other hand, Chinese, Other Asian and Indian students have experienced the lowest increase.

Table 2: *Change in HE participation by age 19 2005-2017, by ethnic*

	2005/06 (%)	2011/12 (%)	2016/17 (%)	Total change between 2005 and 2016/17 (%)
Bangladeshi	34.0	49.0	61.1	+27.1
Black African	41.0	57.0	66.9	+25.9
Other Black	26.0	41.0	51.7	+25.7
Other	38.0	44.0	56.6	+18.6
Pakistani	37.0	44.0	54.6	+17.6
Black Caribbean	27.0	38.0	44.4	+17.4
Mixed	33.0	39.0	49.0	+16.0
Chinese	66.0	76.0	78.7	+12.7
Other Asian	56.0	57.0	64.4	+8.4
White	28.0	32.0	36.4	+8.4
Indian	64.0	68.0	72.1	+8.1

The data and figures clearly show that there has been an increase in the number of young Bangladeshis progressing to HE; however, these figures do not explain why this is the case. Consequently, this study was conceived with the aim of providing some much-needed empirical evidence to explain the reasoning behind young Bangladeshis' HE decision-making, which could be used as a starting point for researchers and policy makers interested in widening participation. The following sections in this chapter examine various factors that may prove to be influential in Bangladeshi students' decisions to pursue HE.

2.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING HE PROGRESSION

2.4.1 Widening Participation in the UK

The widening participation (WP) agenda has been at the forefront of UK educational policy for several decades (Hinton-Smith, 2012). With a decline in traditional manufacturing industries, and economies being more developed, there has been increasing demand for people to develop the necessary skills for employment in more skilled, non-manual occupations. As a result of this, there was a need to increase participation in post-compulsory education, including HE, to meet these demands (David et al., 2009; Hinton-Smith, 2012). This suggests that WP was not developed for the purpose of achieving social justice, but rather it was intended to be used as a tool to

maximise economic profit for a selected few. Initially, WP focused on increasing the number of traditional students in HE; however, due to demographic shifts (birth rate decline), which has resulted in a falling number of school-leavers, it became important for universities to widen their target populations in order to meet their intake targets (Edwards, 1993; Gallagher et al., 1993). Their focus then turned to non-traditional students, which included ethnic minorities, women, working-class students, mature students and those with disabilities. Hinton-Smith (2012) argues that this *'initially functioned as a quota-filling exercise of subsuming previously excluded groups into the existing dominant framework of HE'* (p.3). However, it proved problematic for 'non-traditional' students to fit into a system that was designed to educate a privileged minority – young, white men who do not have the constraints of dependents, employment or disabilities (Hinton-Smith, 2012).

The WP agenda became increasingly significant during the twentieth century in Great Britain. One of the earliest pieces of legislation linked to the expansion of HE was the *Education Act 1944*, which set out to raise the number of students qualified to enter HE, with the objective of increasing the number of university-trained professionals (Burke, 2013). The discussion surrounding expansion then became more prominent after the Robins Report (1963) on the future of HE was published. One of its key aims was to increase participation from eight per cent of young people attending university at the time of the report to seventeen per cent by 1980. This report highlighted the importance of the expansion and democratisation of the UK HE system as a means of creating a society that is committed to learning throughout life (Boliver, 2015). The government's commitment to WP continued over the years; however, the level of support the government was willing to provide to achieve this started to diminish in 1997. Major reforms in funding were happening as a result of pressures on public budgets, with the government struggling to raise more funds through taxes (Wilkins et al., 2013). During the same year, the Dearing Report was published, which set WP as a main policy goal, yet it argued that students should be contributing towards the cost of HE. This resulted in tuition fees of £1000 a year being introduced a year later (Burke, 2013; David et al., 2009). However, in order to make this affordable for all, fees were means-tested and were only to be repaid once the graduates were working (Trowler, 1998). In 2006, the Labour government increased the fees again, this time reaching £3000. In order to not deter people from going to university, the government offered a number of financial support measures, including

grants and bursaries for low-income groups (Burke, 2013). In 2009, the Brown Review was launched, exploring possible future funding strategies for HE in England. The report was published in October 2010 and recommended that students should be contributing even more towards their tuition fees (Browne, 2010). As a result of these recommendations, the cap on tuition fees was removed, meaning that students were now being charged up to £9000 a year (Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018). Although many were worried that the introduction of fees would result in a drop in applications, it appears that this was not the case, as the rate of enrolment has been increasing even since the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 and the increases in 2006 and 2010 (Bathmaker, 2016; Browne, 2010; Galindo-Rueda et al., 2004; Hubble and Bolton, 2018). This has been the case at both an overall level and among those from poorer backgrounds (Fagence and Hansom, 2018).

In order to achieve WP in HE, three strategies have been implemented by the government. The first was the outreach work done by the secondary and further education sectors, which focused on improving students' pre-university academic attainment as a means of increasing the number of students eligible for university admission (Gorard et al., 2019). Evidence shows that prior attainment is a key barrier; it has prevented disadvantaged students from accessing HE, especially high-tariff institutions. Furthermore, students with good grades at A-level (AAB or above) have been found to be more likely to receive a good degree (first or upper-second class) compared with those with lower A-levels (CCC or lower) (Office for Students, 2020). These findings show the importance of raising students' prior attainment, not only to improve fair access and participation in HE, but also to ensure that they do well at university. The second strategy was the work by HE providers, which focused on encouraging disadvantaged students to apply to university (Gorard et al., 2019). This implies that disadvantaged students have limited aspirations, however the evidence contradicts this suggestion. A number of studies have found that many students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, intend to pursue HE (Gorard et al., 2019), which suggests that limited aspirations only play a small role in explaining the low take-up of HE opportunities by disadvantaged students (Gorard et al., 2012; Kintrea et al., 2011). More recently, a third strategy has been developed which encourages universities to consider contextual data about applicants' educational and socioeconomic circumstances when assessing their applications. Research has shown that students from under-represented groups are achieving grades under difficult

circumstances in which many underachieve (Gorard et al., 2019). Thus, it is important for universities to make use of contextualisation in admissions, including reduced grade offers, to achieve fairer access to HE.

Although the WP agenda has been successful in addressing some of the differences in access to HE, it has been criticised by a number of researchers for its approach. WP initiatives have been found to target and recruit young people “*through a superficial examination that effectively pathologizes non-traditional entrants as a homogenous group*” (Burke, 2013, p.104); students from ethnic minority groups or low-income backgrounds, unemployed people, single parents, women returners and so on are all put into one category (the ‘non-traditional’ category), meaning that they are perceived as all being the same. However, it has been argued that institutions should not be making this assumption; the barriers that these students face, their needs and their interests are varied, therefore the support that they require will also vary (Thompson, 2019). Thus, if the WP agenda is to be more successful, its initiatives should be more personalised for individual students.

Another criticism of the WP agenda is its focus on ‘raising aspirations’. Initiatives have been developed which target students who are perceived as lacking aspiration; this is problematic as it puts the blame on young people for not recognising the value of going to university (Burke, 2013). In this scenario, social inequality and material poverty are rebranded as inequality and poverty of aspiration (Morley, 2003). Here the focus is not on how institutions can respond and adapt; rather, it is on how non-traditional students should ‘aim higher’, pointing to a deficit model approach (Jones and Thomas, 2005). As argued by Wilkins and Burke (2015), potential entrants ‘*are summoned to adjust their behaviour and learning to fit with culturally implicit norms and pedagogical demands*’ (p. 435). Some researchers have argued that there is a need for higher education institutions (HEIs) to focus on their cultures and practices, and to develop pedagogies and curricula that reflect the needs and interests of non-traditional students (Burke, 2013). In other words, the real problem lies with HEIs, so they should be doing more to accommodate non-traditional students.

Although the number of students is at a record high, progress toward government targets has been slow. Recent figures from UCAS (2017) show that students from a privileged

background were still 3.8% more likely to go university than those from the most disadvantaged group. As a result of this lack of substantial progress, the government set two new targets that it wanted to meet by 2020 (Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018):

- To double the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering HE
- To increase by 20% the number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds going into HE

Although these targets seem promising, there remains a great deal of room for improvement. For example, they fail to tackle the problem faced by ethnic minority students in terms of accessing elite institutions. Although the number of ethnic minority students entering HE has been rising significantly in the past few years (Crawford and Greaves, 2015), they tend to be concentrated in ‘new’, post-1992 universities (Boliver, 2016; Amos and Doku, 2019). One of the main reasons given for this trend is that ethnic minority students are less likely to attain the grades needed to gain entry to elite universities (Department for Business Innovation and Skills [BIS]; 2013, Connor et al., 2004). Yet, a number of studies have found that Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani applicants to highly selective universities were less likely to receive an offer, even when they had achieved the same grades as their White British counterparts (Boliver, 2015). This shows that inequalities remain, so the government and HEIs have still more work to do to ensure that ethnic minority students have the same chance of accessing HE as white students.

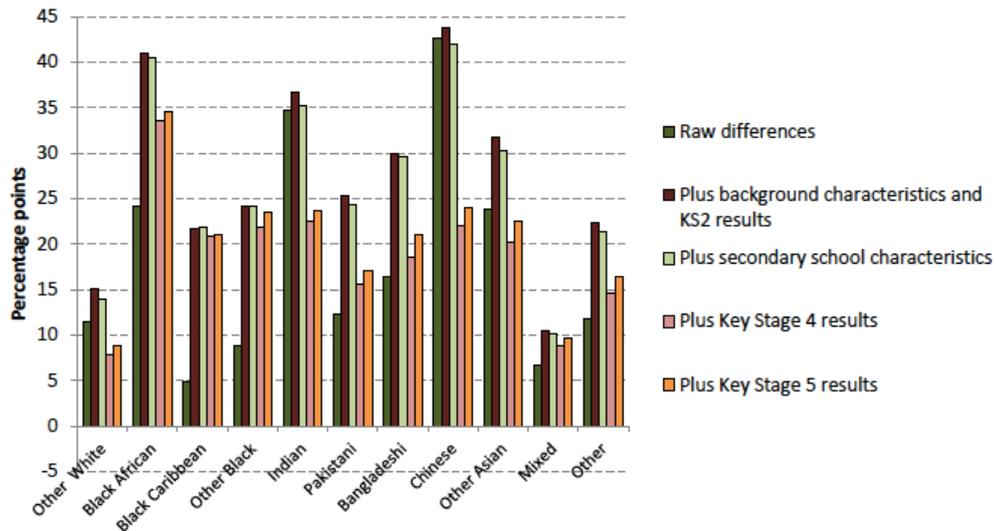
In conclusion, it is clear that the government and HEIs have put a lot of work and effort into addressing the differences in access of different groups of students. As a result, the number of ‘non-traditional’ students entering HE has risen significantly in the past few years (Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018). This has also been the case for Bangladeshi students who have been enrolling at university and gaining degrees at a record high rate recently (DfE, 2018a). WP is not central here, because the focus of this study is to understand how students’ social networks and motivation shape British Bangladeshi students’ aspirations and choices; however, it would be interesting to explore the role played by WP in future research. The following section discusses the factors that may influence HE participation for this particular group.

2.4.2 The role of prior attainment

The academic performance of Bangladeshi students has improved in recent years (2006–14) at almost every key stage of education, and they have managed to do so at a more rapid rate than other ethnic groups (Shaw et al., 2016). It has been suggested that this trend has been caused by changes in the population, with more ‘second generation’ young people not facing as many, if any, language barriers compared to the previous generation (Shaw et al., 2016). This improvement in academic performance may explain, to a certain extent, the over-representation of British Bangladeshis in HE. Several studies have established that prior educational attainment is the most important predictor of HE progression and that it explains the majority of the variation in HE participation (Chowdry et al., 2013; Strand, 2012; Wiseman et al., 2017); however, it is unclear which stage of education has the biggest impact on HE participation (Crawford and Greaves, 2015). It is expected that prior attainment will play a very important role, as it is the key entry requirement for most universities (Bowes et al., 2015); young people with better A-level (or equivalent) grades have a much better chance of getting accepted into university (Wiseman et al., 2017). Past studies (Chowdry et al., 2013; Galindo-Rueda et al., 2004; Gayle et al., 2002) have reported that prior attainment, particularly at KS4 and KS5, plays an important role in explaining why students from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to enter HE than those from deprived backgrounds. This implies that what young people experience earlier on in their lives, particularly during secondary school, will have an impact on their education choices and progress.

Nevertheless, previous studies have not been as successful in using prior attainment to explain why students from certain ethnic groups are more likely to enter HE than others (Bowes et al., 2015; Crawford and Greaves, 2015). For example, Bangladeshi students are significantly more likely than their White British peers to go to university. These differences in participation remain even when accounting for prior attainment and a number of background characteristics (including gender, month of birth, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, whether English is an additional language, region, special educational needs). Figure 5 shows that for Bangladeshis, the difference in participation relative to their White peers increases once their background characteristics and Key Stage 2 results are accounted for. This may be explained by the fact that Bangladeshis are heavily concentrated in the lower socioeconomic quintiles, which is not the case for

White British students. I would like to point out that it is difficult to see the full effect of Key Stage 2 attainment on HE participation, as Crawford and Greaves (2015) have combined it with background characteristics. It would have been much more useful if they had introduced each factor separately. Once Key Stage 4 was controlled for, there was a large reduction in the remaining difference in participation relative to their White peers. This suggests that KS4 attainment is an important factor in predicting participation in HE. Similarly, Bowes et al. (2015) and Wiseman et al. (2017) assert that prior attainment at KS4 is a major determinant of HE participation. Figure 5 also shows that the addition of KS5 attainment slightly increases the difference between Bangladeshi and White students. Most importantly, this figure shows that Bangladeshi pupils from similar backgrounds, who attend similar schools and have similar attainment to their White British peers, are almost 22 percentage points more likely to go university. Additionally, Figure 5 shows that all ethnic minority groups follow a similar trend – they are all significantly more likely to enter HE than their White British peers, even when accounting for prior attainment and several background characteristics. The evidence shows that there remain substantial and statistically significant differences that cannot be explained, which indicates that there are unobserved characteristics of the students (or their family or school) that are positively associated with HE participation. Crawford and Greaves (2015) have suggested that the remaining differences may be a result of higher aspirations; however, they were unable to explore this assumption using the data at their disposal. This indicates that further research is needed to explore what might be driving these remaining differences in HE participation. I intend to contribute to this line of enquiry by focusing my study on British Bangladeshi students. This could be used as a first step towards explaining the differences in participation rates between different ethnic groups.



Notes: all differences are significantly different from zero at the 5% level.

Figure 5: Differences in HE participation at age 18 or 19 by ethnic group

Source: Crawford and Greaves, 2015

2.4.3 Educational aspirations

Aspirations have been defined as abstract statements or values and beliefs that individuals have about their future. They reflect young people’s hopes or desires to attain a certain level of education or a particular type of job (Khattab and Modood, 2018); however, they do not necessarily reflect their socioeconomic realities (Gorard et al., 2012). Thus, aspirations represent idealistic preferences that young people have for their future (Bohon et al., 2006). Kintrea et al. (2015) points out that although aspirations for education and jobs can be separate, the main requirement for workers in highly skilled (and better paid) jobs is having HE credentials, meaning that in practice, they are very conjoined.

A wide range of studies has explored the role that aspirations play in explaining different educational outcomes. There is substantial evidence indicating that students’ educational aspirations have a considerable effect on the education that they obtain. Khattab (2015) found that high aspirations amongst students are not only associated with rates of achievement at GCSE, but also with a higher likelihood of participating in HE. Similarly, Bowes et al. (2015) also find that aspirations have a significant impact on whether adolescents decide to apply to university and that they play a part in explaining the differences in application levels by ethnicity, gender and disadvantage. Recent studies conducted in the UK have found that ethnic minority groups have high educational aspirations (Butler and Hamnett, 2011, Francis and Archer, 2005, Shah et al., 2010).

Despite their minority status and the fact that they are more likely than their White British counterparts to experience discrimination and blocked opportunities, individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds still had higher aspirations than White British students (Strand and Winston, 2008). This may seem puzzling to those who argue that educational aspirations reflect socioeconomic inequalities, since it would be expected that White pupils would have higher aspirations because, on average, they come from more affluent backgrounds (DWP, 2015). Bowes et al. (2015) suggest that this may be the result of three factors: first, ethnic minority groups may be less influenced by their working-class habitus than White British groups. Ethnic minority students have been found to adopt middle-class values towards education despite their working-class background (Reay et al., 2007; Scandone, 2018). Research shows that this is particularly the case for economic migrants (Chen, 2004; Tomlinson, 2005). Second, ethnic minority students may have strong beliefs that HE can enable them to gain wider cultural capital and move into higher socioeconomic groups. Basit (2013) has found that working-class British Asian students tend to put a lot of emphasis on the acquisition of academic credentials because they perceive this as a route to economic success and upward social mobility. Last, White British adolescents may not perceive HE as being a good economic investment in terms of employability and may see it as being ‘too risky’. Baars et al. (2016) suggest that this may be because White working-class families tend not to be familiar with the realities and benefits of going to university and are less inclined to see it as an option for their children.

The argument put forth by those who are in favour of raising and maintaining young people’s aspirations is that regardless of students’ starting point and material circumstances, education can provide everyone with the same opportunities to succeed if they have the desire to do so (Bowers-Brown et al., 2019). In many countries, including the UK, raising young people’s aspirations has become the primary solution used by policymakers in tackling educational inequalities (Tarabini and Ingram, 2018). Some argue that this concept of aspiration promotes the idea that educational success or failure is primarily the result of an individual’s (in)capacity to imagine and achieve his/her desired future. In other words, the blame is put solely on the individual and disregards any structural issues in the education system and society that could be to blame (Bowers-Brown et al., 2019). In terms of HE, Houghton (2017) argues that pre-entry processes to HE are class-based, and instead of supporting participation, it actually quashes the idea

of 'raising aspiration'; the economic requirements for getting into university can stand as a barrier for disadvantaged students, i.e. not having the material goods to achieve 'good' grades. Universities often do not consider students' backgrounds, meaning that disadvantaged students have to work harder than more privileged students in order to achieve the same grades.

2.4.4 Influence of parents

Examination of the literature regarding the role that parents play in their children's pursuit of HE will be presented here. Parental engagement has been found to have a positive impact on young people's educational outcomes, including attainment, educational aspirations and university progression (Mulcahy and Baars, 2018). It is not surprising to find that parents play such an important role in their children's education considering the fact that they are their child's first teacher (Lucas, 2019). The literature indicates that there are different types of parental engagement, which influence young people's educational outcomes in different ways.

2.4.4.1 Parental influence on prior attainment

As mentioned previously, prior educational attainment is the most important predictor of HE progression (Chowdry et al., 2013; Strand, 2012; Wiseman et al., 2017).

Research has shown that parental engagement in their child's education has a positive impact on their educational attainment, more than any other factor (Lucas, 2010). I will begin by discussing some of the ways in which parental behaviours can support children's learning. It is important to point out, from the outset, that there is no single activity or mindset that will raise children's attainment, or that can be said to be 'good parental engagement' (Goodall, 2013). That being said, there are certain aspects of parental engagement that have proven to be effective. However, these different aspects all work together; meaning that on their own, they may have very minimal or no effect at all (Steinberg, 2001). Authoritative parenting, beginning engagement with learning early, taking an active interest in their child's learning and education, continuing this interest throughout the child's education, holding and passing on high educational aspirations, and staying engaged throughout their child's education have all been identified as important elements of effective parental engagement (Goodall, 2013).

Other studies have had similar findings; for example, Lucas (2010) asserts that parents can help to raise students' achievement through the setting of high aspirations, having regular and meaningful conversations with their child and by showing an interest in and supporting their learning both at school and at home. It is clear from past studies that parents' attitudes towards learning and education, and the environment that they create in the home, have a significant impact on student achievement.

Despite there being an increasing number of studies acknowledging the benefits of parental engagement, there have been a small number that argue that parental engagement has a negative or no effect on attainment. However, these conflicting and inconsistent findings have been explained by variations in the definition and methodology used. For example, some have interpreted parental engagement as being 'good parenting', taking place in the home. For others, it meant 'talking to teachers'. Additionally, researchers used different measures, even when the same definition was used. Some measured parental engagement using parents' judgements, others used pupils' judgements, teachers' judgements or researcher's observations (Harris and Goodall, 2007). Thus, inconsistencies are bound to occur when researchers are measuring a different phenomenon under the same name and measuring the same phenomenon but with different measures (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003).

2.4.4.2 Parental influence on educational aspirations

As mentioned previously, young ethnic minority students tend to have high educational aspirations for themselves. It is a well-established fact that aspirations cannot exist within a vacuum; they are the result of people's environments and social contexts (Ray, 2006). The existing literature has shown that parents play a critical role in influencing their children's aspirations, and that this influence is much more significant amongst ethnic minorities, especially South Asian students (Connor et al., 2004, Ivy, 2010). Evidence has shown that the relationship between a parent and a child provides a smooth and positive transmission of the family's norms, values and attitudes related to education and careers to their children (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000, Perna, 2006, Perna and Titus, 2005). They can do this by providing emotional support to their children by verbally communicating to them that they should go to university (e.g. university as students' responsibility and obligation to themselves and family) and by showing a consistent

interest in their university aspirations (Basit, 2012, Connor et al., 2004, Lehman, 2009). Thus, parents shape their children's aspirations, propensity to pursue HE and career choices (Gutman and Akerman, 2008, Khattab, 2014, Watts and Bridges, 2006). However, it has been pointed out by Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) and Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008), who have conducted studies in the US, that parental support can be hindered or enhanced by structural factors, such as educational level and income, creating inequities for adolescents going through the university application process. Past studies have generally portrayed first generation university students (students whose parents have not attended university) as succeeding despite their family background, implying that their family has been an obstacle stopping them from pursuing HE (Gofen, 2009). The reality is that ethnic minority families are often both a resource and a constraint. In Ceja (2006) study on ethnic minority students in the US, the findings show that ethnic minority parents have a positive influence on their children's pursuit of HE by encouraging and motivating them to persevere through the university application process. However, Ceja also found that parents' lack of educational experience and their social and economic realities make it difficult for them to be able to guide their children through the process of applying and selecting universities. Thus, the literature shows that ethnic minority parents play a crucial role in motivating their children to pursue HE; however, their involvement is not sufficient to foster the mechanisms to achieve this goal.

Parental ethnicity is an important factor that needs to be considered in investigations of parental aspirations for their children's educational attainment (Spera et al., 2009). The findings from the literature indicate that educational aspirations differ across ethnic groups. On average, parents from ethnic minority backgrounds have higher educational aspirations for their children than White British parents (Strand and Winston, 2008). Bowes et al. (2015) also find that disadvantaged ethnic minority parents (with little or no formal education and are unemployed or employed in a semi-routine/routine occupation), including Bangladeshi parents, have considerably higher levels of educational aspirations for their children in comparison to disadvantaged White British parents. Spera et al. (2009), whose study was conducted in the US, speculated that this may be because ethnic minority parents perceive education and learning as a way to achieve social and economic mobility, and therefore use it as a tool to improve their lives. On the other hand, White parents blame their lack of attainment on uncontrollable factors, such as a fixed level of intelligence, which hinders their children's education. This suggests that White parents

tend to surrender to their situation, whereas ethnic minority parents are more willing to ‘fight’ and endeavour to change their lives for the better.

Research has shown that, overall, ethnic minority groups tend to have high educational aspirations for their children (Bowes et al., 2015); however, the causes for these aspirations are not the same across the board. Shah et al. (2010) found that ethnic minority parents’ attitudes towards education and achievement reflect an ethnicity that was formed in a British context, caused by the wider accessibility of education in the UK and parents’ belief that HE qualifications can lead to social and economic mobility for their children. In other words, these parents did not have these aspirations prior to migration; these developed after they experienced a new way of life in the UK. On the other hand, several studies, both from the UK and the US, have indicated that ethnic minority parents’ attitudes actually stem from pre-migration, as many of these parents have prosperous and educated backgrounds in their country of origin (Feliciano and Lanuza, 2017, Lee and Zhou, 2015, Modood et al., 1997). For these parents, it is less about wanting to achieve social mobility, but more about class reproduction, as HE is seen as a means of reversing the initial downwards mobility that they experienced as a result of migrating to a new country (Feliciano and Lanuza, 2017, Modood, 2004). Therefore, the claim made by many researchers that social class does not influence second-generations’ aspirations and educational achievements is somewhat flawed, as this is not the case for all ethnic minority groups when parents’ social class origins and educational level are taken into account (Orupabo et al., 2020).

As highlighted previously, the critical role of parents in university preparation has been recognised in several studies. The norms, values and attitudes transmitted to young people by their parents that focus on educational achievement can enable access to university. However, the literature shows that although parents play an important role in students’ HE decisions, parents’ support can be hindered by structural factors, such as their own education and income level, creating inequities for young people navigating the university application process (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000, Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important to explore the role that other people within students’ social networks play in their university decision-making process.

2.4.4.3 Parental influence and HE progression

The literature has demonstrated that parental engagement can have a positive impact on young people's educational attainment and aspirations, both of which are important but indirect determinants of HE participation. The research shows that parental engagement can also have a more direct effect on HE enrolment and entry. A wide range of studies has found that the extent of support that young people have from parents regarding staying in education was strongly linked to university participation (Apps and Christie, 2018; Mulcahy and Baars, 2018). In other words, students who are encouraged by their parents to pursue HE are more likely to do so than those who do not receive any encouragement. Philips and Newton (2014) have found that parental influence is becoming more important on HE decision-making, mainly due to three key factors: 1) the loss of career advice services (e.g., Connexions), 2) the increasing cost associated with HE, which means that parents have a greater stake in its funding, and 3) the increasing number of parents in each generation who have been to university and therefore can provide support to their children regarding university.

However, parental engagement does not stop at the moment that their child makes the decision to pursue HE. Their involvement goes beyond this point; they are very much involved in the decisions that their child makes whilst navigating the university application process. Research has shown that young people tend to consult their parents when considering their HE choices, in turn parents provide them with the guidance and support needed to make these choices (Archer et al., 2003). Philips and Newton (2014) also found that parents exerted an influence on their children's choice of university and degree. Interestingly, they also found that parents are three times more influential on decisions about whether to pursue HE than teachers, and six times more influential when choosing which university to attend. Parental engagement in the decision-making process has been found to have several benefits for students, including increased satisfaction with their chosen university/course (Dietrich et al., 2011), and with well-being in the first few weeks of being at university (Wintre and Yaffe, 2000; Chang et al., 2010).

However, the level of support and guidance parents are able to provide for their child varies. Parents from less advantaged backgrounds are often less knowledgeable and

confident about the university application and admission process and thus struggle to support their child through it. This may be due to the fact that many of them have had no direct experience of HE (Apps and Christie, 2018). Mulcahy and Baars (2018) argue that it is very helpful when parents are familiar with the HE system, as it not only enables them to be more comfortable in helping and advising their child(ren) with their university application, but they are also more likely to have access to networks from whom they can ask advice. But parents with no university experience are less likely to have access to relevant, accurate and up-to-date information (Apps and Christie, 2018). These findings indicate that economically disadvantaged students are having to make some important decisions (i.e., choice of course and institution) without having the necessary help and support to make informed decisions; more needs to be done to tackle this problem in order to create a fairer HE system.

2.4.5 Influence of significant individuals

Other individuals within students' social networks, such as siblings, extended family members, peers and teachers can provide guidance, encouragement and resources, all of which can mitigate the inequities that some disadvantaged students may face in gaining access to university (Portes and Fernández-Kelly, 2008, Tierney and Auerbach, 2005). The literature indicates that significant individuals have multifaceted roles in supporting young people's university access and choice. Significant individuals provided emotional support in the form of encouragement and empathy in students' HE aspirations and throughout the university application process. Mwangi (2015) found that older university-educated siblings were able to provide emotional support by modelling university as a realistic goal for their younger siblings. They play an important role in creating a university-going expectation and tradition in their family, encouraging their younger siblings to believe that going to university is a realistic goal that they could attain (Ceja, 2006, Elias McAllister, 2012). Similarly, evidence shows that same-generation role models and family members who have been to university can pave the way to university for students (Ceja, 2006). Younger siblings seeing their older siblings go through the university application process gives them an insight into how the process works. This has proven to be particularly useful for first generation university students who have limited exposure to university-educated individuals within their social networks (Holland, 2010).

Whereas university-educated significant individuals were able to offer emotional support by modelling university as a realistic goal for young people, uneducated significant individuals also provided emotional support. Even though they had not attended university themselves, they still communicated to students the importance of going to university based on their personal experiences of being faced with financial hardships as a result of not going to university (Beasley, 2011, Crozier and Davies, 2006, Holland, 2010). Overall, the evidence shows that significant individuals help to establish university participation as an expectation and a norm by showing a consistent interest in students' university aspirations, telling students that they should go to university and providing them with emotional support throughout the university application process (Mwangi, 2015).

The literature shows that significant individuals not only provide students with emotional support but also with a wide range of instrumental support. This has included assisting students with the university application process: helping them to complete university applications, assisting them in the shortlisting of universities and deciding on their final choice of university (Ceja, 2006, Elias McAllister, 2012, Holland, 2010, Kaczynski, 2011). For university-educated significant individuals, the primary way of providing instrumental support was by sharing their experiences and the information they have regarding the university application process (Gonzalez et al., 2003, Kiyama, 2011). This suggests that their guidance is embedded with their values; thus, their advice could potentially be biased, incomplete or incorrect. This can result in students making decisions based on other people's experiences without giving much thought to the consequences that their decisions may have in the long run (Perez and McDonough, 2008).

In the studies, instrumental support often took place through lateral mentorship with other same-generation individuals (peers, friends, cousins) by exchanging information and giving advice about university and university choice (Holland, 2010). Although it is beneficial to receive lateral mentorship from individuals who are going through the same educational journey, it is also important for students to have experienced, knowledgeable and objective individuals within their social network who can guide them during this process (Tierney and Venegas, 2006). Although the approach taken by different

significant individuals in providing students with instrumental support was different from person to person, they were still able to assist students with specific tasks during the university preparation. This type of support appears to be more direct and action-oriented, in comparison with emotional support, which is a more subtle way of influencing students' HE participation. The evidence shows that although most supportive agents in students' social networks were able to provide emotional support, supportive agents that provided instrumental support were usually individuals who had been to university, were working in a university or had children that had been to university (Mwangi, 2015).

2.4.6 Motivating factors

The literature indicates that young people's motivations for pursuing HE are multiple, multifaceted and varied for each individual (Tumuheki et al., 2016). Similarly, Kember et al. (2008) also found that motivation is a complex phenomenon where young people have multiple motivations that are context-dependent. The evidence from the literature shows that the main motivating factor that influences young people's decision to pursue HE is career development and expected earning returns after graduation (Moogan and Baron, 2003), particularly for first generation, working-class students (Holland, 2010, Knutson et al., 2010). A survey by Callender and Jackson (2008) indicates that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely than wealthier young people to perceive the cost of university as a debt rather than an investment, and therefore place greater weight on immediate financial security. Thus, HE qualifications are seen as prerequisites for good employment prospects and high earnings (Thapar and Sanghera, 2010). Lehman (2009) argues that first generation, working-class students embark on a transition pathway that indicates a move away from their working-class background. However, their decision to study at university is based on a strong reflection of their class background. For them, university is associated with working-class virtues of value and hard work. They use education as a means of escaping "*the hardship in which their parents are seen toiling or the disadvantages that their lack of education has created for their employment and lives*" (Lehman, 2009, p. 141).

Although career development was the main theme running through the literature, some studies have found that students are also influenced by the broad and experiential aspects of attending university. Young people choose to pursue HE because they want to meet

new people, make friends, experience different social contexts and cultures, and learn about themselves out of their peers, family or existing institutional situation. They believe that attending university will enable them to achieve these things (Bowes et al., 2015). Similarly, Knutson et al. (2010) found that first generation, working-class students are also motivated by having new experiences and making new friends; however, achieving social and economic mobility was a more important motivating factor. Additionally, the evidence presented by Moogan and Baron (2003) shows that high-achieving students are more likely than less-able students to be motivated by the social aspects of attending university (socialising and meeting new people); however, no explanation was given for this trend.

It is important to highlight that some of the social returns discussed above can also be linked to economic returns. As pointed out by Knutson et al. (2010), meeting new and diverse people, being exposed to new ideas and having new experiences all fall under the umbrella of social mobility. Each of these aspects can help improve one's chance of attaining a 'good' job. It is evident that the literature on social returns is not as substantial as it is for economic returns; however, one cannot disregard the fact that young people choose to pursue HE to maximise social outcomes.

2.4.7 Factors influencing university choice

The choice of university is an important aspect of the application process journey, as it can have a considerable effect on later life; it can have profound implications on post-university career progression and also on post-university earnings (Chevalier and Conlon, 2003, Porter, 2002) . According to Moogan and Baron (2003), university choice is a pragmatic and rational, highly complex and multi-factorial process that can be influenced by information, access, cost, life, school experience and academic achievement. Similarly, Reay et al. (2001) assert that young people who are applying to university are making different types of choices within different circumstances and restrictions. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) carried out a systematic review of the current research literature on HE choice and concluded that there is no single characteristic or factor of universities that drives the choices of all applicants. However, research from several studies does indicate that the right subject of study is one of the most important factors that applicants consider when choosing where to study (Callender and Jackson, 2008,

Leslie, 2003). Location also plays an important role, particularly when students have chosen to stay at home and have to commute daily (Briggs, 2006, Elias McAllister, 2012) which has been the case for many students since the value of maintenance loans has decreased (Bayne, 2001). Finally, the reputation or prestige of the university is also an important factor (Briggs, 2006, Imenda et al., 2004).

The literature indicates that choice factors often vary for different groups of students. Connor et al. (1999) found that non-traditional applicants, specifically older students and ethnic minorities, gave more importance to quality and reputation and location. In contrast, traditional applicants (young, academically qualified) wanted to have the right balance between social life and academic quality. Nevertheless, they have found that for most applicants, good employment prospects were essential for them, particularly for female applicants, Asian and Black applicants, Scottish applicants and younger (under 25) applicants.

The literature also indicates that the factors influencing HE student choice vary according to the type of university that students are applying to. The findings from Briggs (2006) study show that students applying to high-status universities, in this case, pre-1992 universities, were largely influenced by 'academic reputation' and factors linked to academic quality, such as 'quality of faculty' and 'teaching reputation'. On the other hand, students applying to low status universities, in this case, post-1992 universities, were found to be heavily influenced by 'entry requirements'. These participants' decisions were based on the assumption that low status universities have low entry requirements. Briggs also found that a large number of students applying to post-1992 universities were influenced by 'academic reputation' and 'graduate employment'. Interestingly, the findings show that 'location' was one of the least important factors for students applying to the oldest pre-1992 universities, indicating that students were willing to travel to access 'reputation'. These findings are in agreement with past studies that have argued that students' university choice is both rational and pragmatic (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001).

The 'cost of package' is not as influential when students are considering which university to attend (Briggs, 2006). However, this study referred to the Scottish fee environment, where most students do not have to pay any fees, suggesting that the results might be

different in countries where there are tuition fees. Yet, Dunnett et al. (2012) make similar findings in his study of English students, where fees were also the least important factor. Christie et al. (2001) argue that applicants and their parents tend to understate the cost of HE. The ‘cost of package’ may not have had a considerable influence, but cost was a prominent factor influencing ‘location’ and ‘distance from home’. In other words, those students who indicated that location and/or distance from home were important influencing factors in their choice of university were, in fact, influenced by the costs associated with moving out (rent and utility bills).

2.4.8 Experiences of other ethnic groups

Although this study is only concerned with the experiences of Bangladeshi students, the experiences of other ethnic groups will be explored here with the aim of strengthening the claims made by this study. As mentioned previously (see section 2.3), Bangladeshi students are not the only ethnic group that has experienced a steady increase in HE participation over the last two decades. This upward trend has been due to the fact that there have been substantial improvements in academic performance overall, although the amount of progress made by different ethnic groups has varied (Stokes et al., 2015). Strand’s (2015) analysis of data from the Youth Cohort Study found that between 2004 and 2013, Black African, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean Free School Meals (FSM) students have made the most progress in their GCSEs (see table 3). On the other hand, White British FSM students made the least progress during the same period. Interestingly, the evidence also shows that by 2013, all ethnic minority groups eligible for FSM were outperforming their white counterparts. These findings suggest that ethnic minority students are more resilient to the pressures that poverty puts on educational attainment. Shah (2016) argues that this is possibly because ethnic minority students have support structures that white working-class young people do not have, and these enable them to excel at school.

The greater resilience of economically disadvantaged ethnic minority groups has been attributed to the importance of aspirational culture (Strand, 2014). High parental aspirations and expectations have been identified by a number of studies as the most important factors in the higher attainment of ethnic minority students (Stokes et al., 2015). This proved to be quite significant for Asian and Black African students in particular

(Modood, 2003; Archer and Francis, 2006; Iberi, 2020). On the other hand, white working-class British parents have significantly lower educational aspirations (Strand and Winston, 2008). This demonstrates that ethnicity has a clear impact on parental educational aspirations. Strand (2014) argues that this is the case for two main reasons; the first is that there are cultural differences between ethnic groups regarding the value of education. Secondly, some students are from families who have recently migrated to the UK, which in some cases means that they have less financial capital, resulting in them putting a lot of emphasis on education as a means of achieving social mobility.

Research has shown that schools have also contributed to ethnic minority students' improved educational attainment, although in a much smaller way than the role that parents have played. Only around 15% of the attainment difference is dependent on what happens inside the school gates (Sammons, 2009; Strand, 2014). Although this figure is relatively small, it does show that schools do play a role in explaining ethnic minority students' attainment, and therefore should not be disregarded. Demie (2020), based on London schools, has identified a number of success factors that have enabled schools to drive educational improvement. These included high quality teaching and learning, effective use of data (used to provide additional support), strong links with parents and the community, effective use of a diverse multi-ethnic workforce and providing targeted interventions. These are effective practices; however, it is important to point out that London schools receive more funding than anywhere else in the UK, so they have been able to invest money to tackle inequalities in educational outcomes. This means that these factors may only be relevant in explaining the improved educational attainment of ethnic minority students who reside in London, but more research is required to establish this.

Table 3: Attainment of 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics for FSM pupils, by ethnic group, 2004 and 2014

5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and Maths (%)		
	2004	2013
White British	14.1	32.3
White Other	20.1	43.8
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	13.7	37.5
Indian	35.3	61.5
Pakistani	22.5	46.8
Bangladeshi	29.3	59.2
Black African	19.1	51.4
Black Caribbean	13.9	42.2
Chinese	55.4	76.8

Source: Stokes et al. (2015)–adapted from Table 9 in Strand (2015)

So far, I have looked at the literature on the educational experiences of ethnic minorities prior to entering HE; now I shall discuss their experiences whilst in HE. Shireen Housse (2011) has conducted a study at a West Midlands university, exploring the relationship between experiences, cultural identities and ethnic positionalities. She concluded that students’ experiences of HE are complex and are influenced by their racial, cultural and class backgrounds, and their gender. Her findings indicate that, generally, ethnic minority students had positive experiences of being at university, although this was mainly attributed to the fact that they were attending a university that was very multi-cultural. To these students, being with other students who looked ‘like them’ made them feel more comfortable as minorities. This suggests that there is a concern amongst ethnic minority students that they would feel out of place and be treated differently had they attended a university that was less diverse. It raises the issue of the impact of racism on the university experiences of ethnic minority students. Housse’s findings also show that the diversity of a university also has an impact on how students feel in the classroom. Students reported feeling confident in class because of the diversity of the student body. However, Housse

points out that these students were less involved in classroom discussions; their ‘outsider’ status seemed to have been preventing them from speaking in class and sharing their personal experiences. But their responses indicated that they wanted to see more democratic and inclusive discussions in which they could join. This suggests that more should be done to initiate and maintain inclusive and interactive spaces for all, both majority and minority ethnic students. Lastly, the study finds that ethnic minority students who had failed an assignment/module had very different experiences of the retrieval process and academic support they had received. Those who had failed but believed that their assessment and feedback were fair were more likely to seek staff support for retrieval. On the other hand, those who believed that their failure was a result of their lecturer’s lack of interest, tended to feel that their failure was unjust and unfair and were more reluctant to seek help. It is evident from these findings that the experiences of ethnic minority students in university are complex and contradictory; for some, it is supportive and inclusive, but for others, it is alienating and dismissive. The way in which students view their experiences at university is important, as it can have an impact on the choices made by others who follow them (Ceja, 2006; Elias McAllister, 2012; Holland, 2010; Kaczynski, 2011).

In conclusion, it is clear that Bangladeshi students are not the only ethnic group to have achieved educational success despite their socioeconomic disadvantages. All ethnic minority groups have experienced improvement in academic performance in recent years, some more than others. Consequently, there has been a steady increase in HE participation amongst all ethnic minority students. The evidence indicates that the factors behind this improvement in attainment appear to be the same for most ethnic minority groups, suggesting that Bangladeshi students’ educational experience may not be an isolated case; students from other ethnic minority backgrounds are having similar experiences to them.

2.4.9 Barriers to higher education

Up to this point the literature review has focused on exploring the factors that enable students’ pursuit of HE, as this is the main focus of the study; however the barriers that prevent students from accessing HE will be explored here to offer a contrasting perspective. The review of the literature indicates that prior attainment is the most

important factor determining whether an individual will participate in HE. This is not surprising, given the fact that universities offer places mainly based on students' prior attainment; students with better A-levels (or equivalent) are more likely to be offered university places than those with lower grades (Wiseman et al., 2017). Interestingly however, attainment at Key Stage 4, not Key Stage 5, is a more important predictor of future participation (Croll and Attwood, 2013; Wiseman et al., 2017).

There are substantial differences in attainment between students from different socioeconomic groups (Croll and Attwood, 2013; Turhan and Stevens, 2020). Students from advantaged backgrounds tend to perform better academically compared to those who are disadvantaged (Turhan and Stevens, 2020), and advantaged students participate in HE at a much higher rate than their less advantaged peers (Wiseman et al., 2017). Interestingly, the evidence indicated that the socioeconomic differences in HE participation are reduced to nearly zero once prior attainments (at Key Stages 2 and 4) are taken into account (Chowdry et al., 2013; Harrison and Waller, 2018). This suggests that the socioeconomic differences do not occur because working-class students are simply choosing not to pursue HE, or are prevented from doing so; rather it is because they are not doing as well academically as their more privileged counterparts (Chowdry et al., 2013).

Although prior attainment was the main barrier to participation for many students, there were also other barriers. Students' aspirations have been found to be an important predictor of HE participation. Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between students' intentions of going to university expressed at a younger age (age 14/15) and actual participation a few years later (Croll and Attwood, 2013). However, the evidence has indicated that there are socioeconomic differences in terms of aspirations, although this was not as significant as for prior attainment. Baker et al.'s (2014) study of 14-year-olds reveals that, generally, students hold high educational aspirations, however those from less advantaged backgrounds have somewhat lower aspirations than their more privileged peers. Similarly, Croll and Attwood (2013) have concluded that advantaged students were more likely to aspire to go university; however, they also pointed out that disadvantaged students have aspiration levels that were well above their actual participation. This is contradictory to the argument made by so many that blames the low-take-up of HE opportunities by disadvantaged students on their

limited aspirations. The evidence clearly shows that aspirations only play a small part in explaining socioeconomic differences in participation; it rather suggests that the real problem is that disadvantaged students are struggling to translate these aspirations into actual participation (Croll & Attwood, 2013).

Research has shown that the costs associated with university attendance have also worked as a deterrent for some students, tuition fees more than living costs (Fagence and Hansom, 2018). This difference may be explained by the fact that all students must pay tuition fees but not all will have increased living costs, as some choose to live at home. Although students are not expected to cover the cost of tuition fees while at university, as student loans are available to them, the costs are still seen as a barrier for many students. Callender and Mason (2017) explains that this is a result of being debt-averse (reluctant to incur debt); this attitude seems to be more pronounced in students from ethnic minority and low social class backgrounds (Callender and Jackson, 2005; Fagence and Hansom, 2018). These debt-averse students are against taking student loans because they believe that owing money is wrong, that it is difficult to get out of debt, and that student loans are an expensive way to borrow money (Callender and Mason, 2017). Perna (2008), whose study was conducted in the US, finds that students from disadvantaged backgrounds held views about loans that reflected their parents' experiences and views. These findings suggest that debt-averse students may not fully understand how student loans work, as they are unable to receive accurate information regarding student finance from their parents.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.5.1 Introduction

This study draws on two theoretical frameworks: social capital and sociological rational choice. I draw from the constructs found within each framework rather than operate within the strict parameters of one particular theory.

2.5.2 Social capital

The review of the literature has provided clear evidence that students' social networks play an important role in shaping their educational decisions. Knoke and Yang (2008) have defined a social network as *"a structure composed of a set of actors, some of whose members are connected by a set of one or more relations"* (p. 8). Numerous studies have employed the concept of social capital to illuminate the influence of students' social networks in the university decision-making process (Basit, 2012, Crozier and Davies, 2006, Heath et al., 2010, Kao and Rutherford, 2007). Social capital has been chosen as it provides the conceptual tools to examine the role that parents, siblings, extended family members, peers and teachers play during the university application process and the extent to which these individuals are able to transmit university-related resources.

Semo and Karmel (2011) have highlighted that *"the concept of social capital is far-ranging, and so is the literature"* (p. 9). As such, there are numerous definitions of social capital; however, the consensus amongst scholars is that social networks have value (Field, 2003). Similarly, Croll (2004) has pointed out that *"the central idea underlying social capital is that social relationships and personal networks which they create are a resource which can be used to generate outcomes which are valued"* (p. 398). In other words, social networks are vital resources that individuals who are part of these networks use to support each other to achieve individual goals that would otherwise be impossible in the absence of social capital. The following three theorists have been identified as the leading figures behind social capital: Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000). Each of these theorists has presented a different perspective on social capital theory, which will be discussed below. Field (2003) has pointed out that all three agree

that “*social capital consists of personal connections and interpersonal interaction, together with shared sets of values that are associated with these contacts*” (p. 13).

Bourdieu’s (1986) research on social capital focuses on explaining the reproduction of inequalities of power and social division. He looked at how social networks reinforce and maintain a social hierarchy. His work is important, as it built the foundations for the general logic of social capital and its accumulation. Bourdieu defines social capital as:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership of a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capita, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various sense of the word (1988, p. 248).

Bourdieu’s definition highlights the fact that social capital is used as a tool by the elite to maintain their privilege – the privileged few use their connections with other privileged individuals to maintain their position in society (Field, 2003). Bourdieu argues that social capital is an asset of individuals that draws its value from the power of social connections available to them.

However, Bourdieu’s work is not without its limitations. He has been criticised for not having much to say about ethnicity and assumed a cultural homogeneity (at least within classes) (Modood, 2004). Another criticism is that his work is only focused on the elite, as he firmly believed that social capital was an asset that only the privileged few possessed (Field, 2003). In the context of education, Bourdieu was interested in finding out how individuals with financial capital could convert it into human capital (education, skills and knowledge) and then back again (Modood, 2004). Thus, Bourdieu’s interpretation of social capital cannot be used to explain the educational success amongst ethnic minorities (in this case, Bangladeshi students), who lack class-related resources for mobility. Similarly, Tzanakis (2013) has pointed out that ethnic minorities residing in the UK seem to use social capital that is not class-based.

For Coleman, social capital is perceived as productive, meaning that it is used so people can achieve particular goals that they are unable to achieve without it; thus, it has an

instrumental purpose (Tzakanis, 2013). Similar to Bourdieu, Coleman defines social capital as a collective resource that is used by goal-oriented people. Coleman defines social capital as:

The set of resources inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive development of a child or young person. These resources differ from different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital (1998, p. 300).

Coleman's definition shows that social capital is a resource. It also highlights the important role that the family and the community play in providing children and young people with resources to support their development. Additionally, the definition points out that young people who have access to social capital resources can use them to generate human capital.

Coleman's work on social capital has helped to explain why young people who come from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds have different rates of school retention. He illustrated this in his study of Catholic schools, where he found that ethnic minority students who attend Catholic schools are less likely to drop out than students of comparable ability and backgrounds who attended state schools. He found that community norms placed upon parents and students, which endorsed teachers' expectations, explained this pattern. Thus, Coleman concluded that communities were a source of social capital that could counteract some of the effects of economic and social disadvantages within the family (Field, 2003). Unlike Bourdieu, Coleman identifies the "value of connections for all actors, individual, privileged and disadvantaged" (Field, 2003, p. 28). In other words, social capital is not just limited to the privileged few, but can also be 'enjoyed' by the poor and marginalised communities.

Coleman's (1988) work is relevant to this study as it highlights the importance of social capital for the acquisition of human capital, and it identifies some of the mechanisms through which social capital can be used to create human capital. According to Coleman, social networks generate social capital in three main forms: (1) by generating social norms, (2) by providing information potential and (3) by generating high levels of obligations and expectations (Zontini, 2004). I draw on the work of Coleman to explore

the mechanisms and processes through which Bangladeshi students obtain the resources that are embedded in their social networks to be able to pursue HE.

However, Coleman's work is not free of flaws. His work has been criticised for over-emphasising the importance of dense networks (for example, the circle of family and close friends) as a necessary condition for the emergence of social capital and underestimating the role of weaker ties (for example, teachers) (Portes, 1998). In order to avoid making the same mistake as Coleman, in this study I do not intend to prioritise either dense networks or weaker ties, meaning that I will be giving equal importance to all of the members of students' social networks who are involved in students' HE decision-making process.

Whereas Coleman was interested in social capital for the generation of human capital, Putnam was more interested in the impact of social capital on economic and democratic prosperity. Putnam defines social capital as "*features of social organisations, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit*" (Putnam et al., 1993, p. 35). He argues that social capital is a public good that is produced in the community rather than in the family (Putnam, 1993). Putnam asserts that strong links within families (bonding social capital) are less valuable for both individuals and society than weaker links, which bridge outside the family (bridging social capital). This is contrary to the argument made by Coleman. Putnam states that bonding social capital is "*inward-looking and tend[s] to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups*" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22), and, on the other hand, he notes that bridging social capital is "*outward-looking and encompasses people across a diverse societal cleavages*" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). In his view, the former only allows individuals to 'get by', but the latter allows people to get ahead, resulting in communities' abilities to prosper (Zontini, 2004).

Putnam's work is not without its limitations. His work does not acknowledge the existence of class division. He argues that social capital is "*a ferment of social cohesion because of its very capacity to bypass socioeconomic differences*" (Englebert, 2001, p.2). In addition, Field (2003) points out that there is little scope for human agency in Putnam's account. Putnam's work on the functioning of contemporary liberal-democratic societies is some distance from how certain ethnic minorities, in this case, Bangladeshi students, can pursue HE despite being economically disadvantaged.

To conclude, using social capital as a framework will allow me to examine the role of Bangladeshi students' social networks during their university choice process and the extent to which these individuals are able to transmit university-related resources. Also, the social capital framework gives me the conceptual tools to explore the mechanisms and processes through which students have obtained these resources.

2.5.3 Sociological rational choice theory

There is a considerable body of literature that has explored decision-making in education, each coming up with different conclusions regarding how young people make educational decisions. This study will use sociological rational choice theory (SRCT) as an analytical tool to explain the decision-making process of British Bangladeshi students. This theory has been used in a number of studies to explore the different factors that motivate young people's educational decisions (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997, Jaeger, 2007, Morgan, 1998).

In recent years, the new theory of SRCT, which is an extension of rational choice theory (RCT), has emerged. SRCT incorporates the economic dimensions of RCT and adds a social dimension to it. In the context of education, SRCT, like RCT, claims that students are rational decision-makers and that their educational choices are made with the objective of maximising the utility of their education (Jaeger, 2007). However, there are apparent differences between the two theories, with the conventional economic theory focusing only on the economic returns to education (earnings or labour market returns) (Becker, 1975, Manski and Wise, 1983), whereas the more recent SRCT focuses on both economic and social returns. SRCT has put forward the idea that decisions are always embedded in social contexts and influenced by "*socialisation mechanisms through which parents, teachers and peers push and pull students*" (Morgan, 1998). SRCT also posits that students make decisions to maximise social returns (i.e. conforming to dominant peer-group behaviour, by maintaining family status or by preserving existing social networks) and that, by doing so, they are deriving social utility (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997, Morgan, 2005). However, SRCT asserts that social returns are not as important as economic returns when students are making educational decisions (Jaeger, 2007).

SRCT makes three main assumptions (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997, Hillmert and Jacob, 2003, Morgan, 2005). First, young people derive utility from education. Second, young people are forward-looking and fairly rational; i.e. they can make informed decisions regarding their education according to the expected returns (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Morgan, 2005). Third, young people base their decisions on the information available to them and constraints and uncertainty that they are faced with and choose an educational route that will maximise their total expected utility. These assumptions will be used as the foundation for my analysis.

In the past, empirical studies have investigated the effect of economic and social returns on educational outcomes, but they did so separately (Becker, 2003, Morgan, 1998, Thomas et al., 2002, Wilson et al., 2005). However, as highlighted by SRCT, the total utility of young people's educational choices combines both social and economic components; therefore, both utility-generating dimensions should be analysed simultaneously to be able to understand their separate and combined influences on educational choices (Jaeger, 2007). This is the reason why I have chosen to use SRCT rather than separate sociological and economic theories (i.e. RCT).

SRCT is not without limitations. The main criticism is the fact that it is a relatively new theory, and therefore there have only been a limited number of studies that have empirically tested its key assumptions. However, SRCT is an extension of RCT, which is a well-developed theory that has been widely used in research and policy making, meaning that its foundation should be relatively sound. Additionally, the ideas put forth by SRCT are not new. As mentioned earlier, previous studies have investigated the effects of social and economic returns, but they did so separately. In addition, there have been studies that have looked at the effects of perceived benefits on educational decisions (including economic and social returns), but they did not employ SRCT as an analytical tool to make sense of their findings (e.g. Callender & Jackson, 2008; Holland, 2010). Taking on board these three points, I decided to use SRCT in my study as it is an effective tool to analyse the extent to which Bangladeshi students choose HE based on expected economic and social returns on HE. Consequently, this study adds to the small but growing body of empirical research using SRCT that examines the idea that young people

are forward-looking and respond to both economic and social incentives when making educational choices.

To conclude, the concept of SRCT is an important framework for identifying and analysing the factors that influence Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE.

2.5.4 Link between Social Capital and SRCT

Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital and Jaeger's (2007) concept of sociological rational choice are very much related. Both Coleman and Jaeger took RCT as a starting point but rejected the individualistic premises that come with it. Both concepts incorporate the economic dimension from RCT and the social dimension from functionalism to explain social action (Jaeger, 2007; Coleman, 1988). From an economic perspective, both theorists recognise that individuals' goals are determined by the utility-maximising pursuit of their own interests; therefore, social interaction is perceived as a form of exchange (Field, 2008). Whereas Coleman did not specify what self-interests he was referring to, leaving it open to interpretation, Jaeger made it clear that he was referring to economic and social returns.

From a sociological perspective, they both agree that individuals' actions are determined by their social and cultural environment. Jaeger (2007) points out that individuals' actions are shaped by their social context and their interaction with other individuals (i.e. peers and significant others). Coleman (1988) takes this argument a step further by identifying some of the mechanisms through which social contexts shape individuals' actions (i.e. social norms, rules and obligations). The main argument that both concepts make is that actors engage in purposive action in order to fulfil their goals; however, their actions are conditioned by social structure.

2.5.5 Shift in theoretical framework

Initially, one of the theories employed in this study was Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. The main aim of this theory was to understand the various factors that influence people's motivations (Ryan and Deci, 2000). They highlighted that individuals who are motivated to achieve a goal are either intrinsically motivated,

because they enjoy it or are interested in it, or, on the other hand, extrinsically motivated and are motivated to achieve their goal because it results in a separate outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The data analysis of my study indicates that the participants' responses were focused on extrinsic motivations, primarily financial returns. At the point that I understood this outcome, I made the decision to use SRCT as an analytical tool because I wanted to explain, rather than describe, patterns of educational choice. A focus on micro-level behaviour and explanatory, rather than descriptive, models enables me to explore the mechanisms that are involved in students' HE decision-making processes. This change has enabled me to explore and explain how certain factors have influenced young Bangladeshi students' HE decisions.

2.5.6 Literature review conclusion

This literature review has highlighted that prior educational attainment has an important influence on young people's educational progression. Attainment in compulsory education enables progression to HE; however, it cannot explain why some ethnic groups are more likely to progress to HE than others. For example, there is a large difference in HE participation between British Bangladeshi students and White British students, even after accounting for differences in prior attainment and background characteristics (including social class). This suggests that there must be other factors that are common amongst Bangladeshi families that are positively associated with HE participation, which are not common amongst White British families.

The literature indicates that ethnic minority students have higher aspirations than their White peers, which may explain the differences in HE participation. Educational aspirations are influenced by students' social networks, including family, peers and teachers. The evidence shows that these social networks not only raise students' educational aspirations, but they also provide them with the resources required to achieve these educational aspirations (i.e., participating in HE). Further research is required to understand specifically who influences British Bangladeshi students to participate in HE, and through which mechanisms and processes they can do this. Social capital theory has been chosen as it gives me the conceptual tools to examine the role that students' social

networks play during the university decision process and the extent to which these individuals are able to transmit university-related resources.

This review suggests that students' HE participation is also influenced by their desire to maximise returns, both economic returns (including career development and financial returns) and social returns of HE (meeting new people, making friends, experiencing different social contexts and cultures, and learning about themselves from their peers, family or existing institutional situation). However, the evidence presented in the review does not provide any insights into the motivation of British Bangladeshi students; therefore, further research is required to understand what motivates British Bangladeshi students to progress to HE. SRCT will be used as an analytical tool to identify the various factors that motivate young Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE, as well as how these motivations are shaped.

Lastly, the literature review finds that university choice is a highly complex and multi-factorial process. The evidence shows that there is no single characteristic or factor of universities that drives the choices of all applicants. However, a number of factors have been identified as being important: availability of chosen subject, location and reputation of the university. Once again, the evidence presented in the review does not provide any insight into the factors influencing the university choice of Bangladeshi students in particular; thus, further research is required to identify which factors or characteristics of universities drive the choices of British Bangladeshi students. SRCT will be used as an analytical tool to identify the different factors that influence Bangladeshi students' university choice. As a result of a better understanding of British Bangladeshi students' HE decision-making, valuable lessons can be derived that can be used to develop specific initiatives and resources to support students who may be unlikely to progress to HE.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study's main focus is on exploring the various factors that influence British Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE. This chapter begins by addressing the research objectives and key research questions, as well as the justification for the pragmatic paradigm and mixed-methods research design. It is then followed by a discussion of the participant selection strategy, data collection, data analysis processes and the pilot study. Last, the chapter describes the issues of validity, reliability and ethics.

This research has been designed to contribute to the very limited body of knowledge and fill an empirical gap that exists in relation to the HE decision-making processes of British Bangladeshi students. The major research question guiding this study was: How and why do British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue HE? The study aims to answer this question from the students' perspectives, as they are the ones deciding to go to university.

The pragmatism research paradigm has been adopted, as it enabled me to use the methodological approach that works best for the research problem in this study. In pragmatism, the study's aims and research questions always shape the choices made about the research design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003), meaning that no method is privileged over others. In this study, a mixed-methods approach has been adopted, as it appears to be the best fit for the research problem being investigated. My main research question, "How and why do British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue HE?", requires both qualitative and quantitative data in order to be answered, so there is clearly a need to use a mixed-methods approach.

This study has been designed to explore British Bangladeshi students' decision-making process using a survey questionnaire (see Appendix F) and semi-structured interviews (see Appendix G). The study used an explanatory sequential design, meaning that the data collection process began with a quantitative phase (a questionnaire), followed by a qualitative phase (semi-structured interviews). One of the main reasons why I chose an explanatory sequential design was because it enables me to use qualitative data from the

second phase to explain and elaborate in more detail the initial quantitative data from the first phase of the study (Creswell, 2014).

3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study was conceived in order to provide some much-needed empirical evidence to illuminate the phenomenon of Bangladeshi students' HE decision-making process in an attempt to explain their over-representation in HE. More specifically, the study investigated the various factors influencing the decision of Bangladeshi students to pursue HE, which could help researchers to understand other similar cases and to inform policy makers and those in professional practice interested in WP. One main research question and three sub-questions have been developed to provide specific insights:

Main question: How and why do British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue HE?

1. How do the networks of British Bangladeshi students influence their decision to participate in HE?
2. What are the motivating factors that have led British Bangladeshi to pursue HE? a) personal goals, b) career goals
3. What factors have the strongest influence on Bangladeshi students' choice of HE institution?

3.3. MIXED METHODS

The paradigm that underpins this study is pragmatism. Pragmatism is based on the idea that researchers should use the methodological approach that works best for their research problem (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), meaning no method is privileged over another. The study's aims, research questions and purpose of the research project should always shape the choices made about the research design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Whilst designing this study, I considered the various ways I could design and conduct this project and thought about the potential consequences of the different choices. I chose to adopt a mixed-methods approach, as it appeared to be the best fit for the research problem being investigated. Mixed-methods research has been defined as "*research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences*

using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007, p.4). A strong mixed-methods study tends to start with a strong mixed-methods research question that clearly demands the use and integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods or approaches. My main research question, “How and why do British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue HE?”, requires both qualitative and quantitative data in order to be answered, so there is clearly a need to use a mixed-methods approach. This question was then broken down into separate qualitative and quantitative sub-questions, as seen above.

Table 4: *Relevant literature sources*

Topic explored	Evidence	Method used
Individuals who influence students’ decision to pursue HE	Basit, 2012	Interviews
	Ceja, 2006	Interviews
	Connor et al., 2004	Questionnaire and interviews
Factors motivating students to pursue HE	Connor et al., 2004	Questionnaire and interviews
	Loeber & Higson, 2009	Questionnaire
	Skatova & Ferguson, 2014	Questionnaire
Factors influencing students’ university choice	Connor et al., 1999	Questionnaire and interviews
	Maringe, 2006	Questionnaire
	Simoes & Soares, 2006	Questionnaire

Table 4 outlines the studies that have informed this study and the methods used for their data collection. It indicates that similar studies have either used a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approach. Generally, studies that have looked at factors that influenced young people to pursue HE tend to use survey questionnaires. On the other hand, the studies that have explored how these factors have influenced them to pursue HE tend to use interviews. I intend to answer both of these questions; therefore, I chose a mixed-methods approach. This is also the approach that was taken by Connor et al. (1999; 2004), whose work has largely influenced this study.

Some of the advantages associated with using mixed-methods include (Molina-Azorin, 2012) development (researchers can use the findings from one method to develop the other method), complementary (classification or elaboration of the findings from one

method with the results from the other method) and expansion (researcher can extend the range and breadth of enquiry by using different methods for different enquiry elements). In addition, the strengths and weaknesses of each method can be exploited. For example, quantitative methods can handle large amounts of data and use different statistical testing to produce results of measured accuracy, which cannot be achieved using qualitative methods. On the other hand, qualitative methods can produce varied and rich data, which is not achievable when using quantitative methods (Walliman, 2015). When the results from both strands point in the same direction, this helps to strengthen the conclusions being made (Walliman, 2015). Nevertheless, this approach has some limitations. Mixed-methods can be a challenge, as they require researchers to develop a broader set of skills in both qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, Molina-Azorin (2016) argued that this should not be perceived as a barrier, but rather as an opportunity to extend and sharpen one's methodical skills. When I began to think about the research design of this study, I was at first hesitant to use a qualitative method, as I did not have much experience in it; however, because the research questions demanded the use of it, I did invest some time to develop my qualitative research skills.

3.4 MIXED-METHODS DESIGN

The study uses an explanatory sequential design (see Figure 6). The process begins with the quantitative phase (questionnaire), which uses a large sample size so the findings can be generalised to a population; then, there is a qualitative phase (interviews) to explore areas/topics or lines of enquiry in more depth (Creswell, 2003). This approach aims to use the qualitative data from the second phase to build upon the quantitative data from the first phase, and consequently, the conclusions are based on the data from both phases. The purpose of this mixed-methods sequential explanatory study was to identify factors contributing to British Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE by obtaining quantitative results from a survey of current Year 13 students and then following up with a number of selected students to explore those results in more depth through qualitative semi-structured interviews to explore how these factors have influenced them. For the qualitative sample, I chose to include only participants who were in the initial quantitative study because my intention was to follow-up on the quantitative data and explore the data in more depth (Creswell, 2014). I found this design most suitable for my study, as the research questions could only be answered using both quantitative and qualitative data. I

also had limited time and resources; therefore, I needed a design in which only one type of data was collected and analysed at a time (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

The advantages of using this approach include its straightforwardness and that it gives the researcher the freedom to explore the quantitative data in more detail (Morse, 1991). This design was particularly useful when I was faced with unexpected findings in the quantitative phase, as I was able to explore these in more depth in the qualitative phase. However, this design is not free of flaws. Using an explanatory sequential design requires a significant amount of time and can be costly to be able to collect and analyse both types of data (Ivankova et al., 2006). I found it difficult to analyse the questionnaire data and then use the findings to shape the interview schedules in the limited amount of time I had between the two phases of the data collection process. However, in terms of cost, because only four schools were participating in this study, the cost was not very high. Conveniently, I was residing in London during the whole data collection process, so all participating schools were only bus- or tube-rides away from my home.

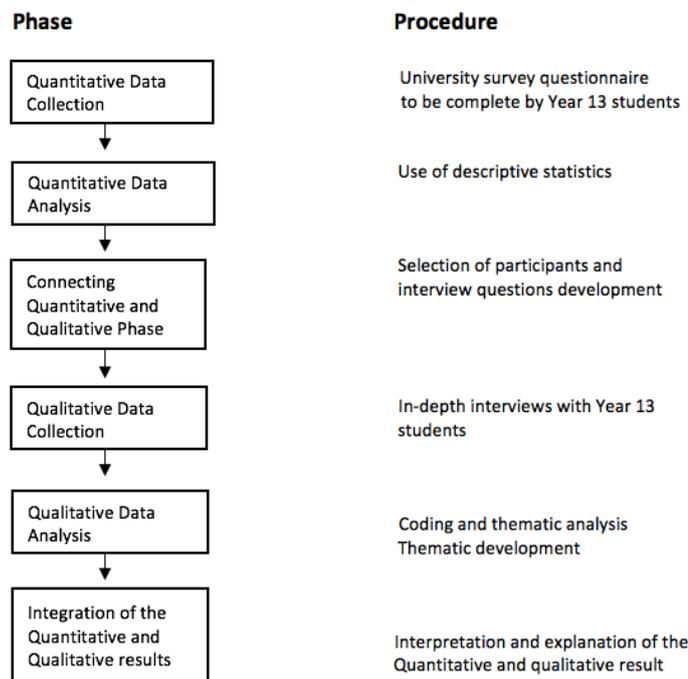


Figure 6: *Mixed-methods Sequential Design*

3.5 CONTEXTUAL DETAILS ABOUT THE SCHOOLS

In this section I will be discussing some of the contextual details about the localities of the schools that took part in this study. As mentioned previously, these schools were located in London, thus the policies and strategies that will be discussed in this section will only be relevant to this region of the country. The aim of this discussion is to explore the potential effects of place and the environment, and how they may have affected Bangladeshi students' decisions to pursue HE.

The London Challenge, which was a set of policies, was a school improvement initiative aimed at improving the performance of London secondary schools. Before this initiative was introduced, secondary schools in London had the worst performance in the country, so more needed to be done to turn this around (Hutchings et al., 2015).

The London Challenge school improvement programme had three key objectives.

- 1) to create more good and outstanding schools
- 2) to reduce the number of underperforming schools, particularly in English and maths*
- 3) to improve the educational performance of disadvantaged students

The programme had two phases; the first, known as 'Transforming Key Areas' which ran between 2003 and 2008, targeted secondary schools in five London boroughs (Tower Hamlets, Newham, Lewisham, Hackney and Westminster). The second phase, which ran between 2008 and 2011, saw the addition of primary schools and two additional areas – Manchester and the Black Country (Baars et al., 2014). As seen in Figure 7, secondary schools in London saw exceptional improvement since 2003; they started to perform much better and their performance improved at a much faster rate than schools in other parts of the country. In fact, they are now ranked as comfortably the best in the country (Claeys et al., 2014; Ofqual, 2021), and this success has been widely attributed to the London Challenge programme (Baars et al., 2014); as this programme has contributed to the improved academic performance of students in London, it is assumed that it has also contributed to Bangladeshi students' improved academic performance in London, and

* The Government had set a 'floor target': by 2011, that no secondary school should have fewer than 35% of its pupils achieving 5+ A*-C at GCSE, including English and mathematics

thus, their pursuit of HE, as prior attainment is the most important predictor of HE progression (Chowdry et al., 2013; Strand, 2012; Wiseman et al., 2017).

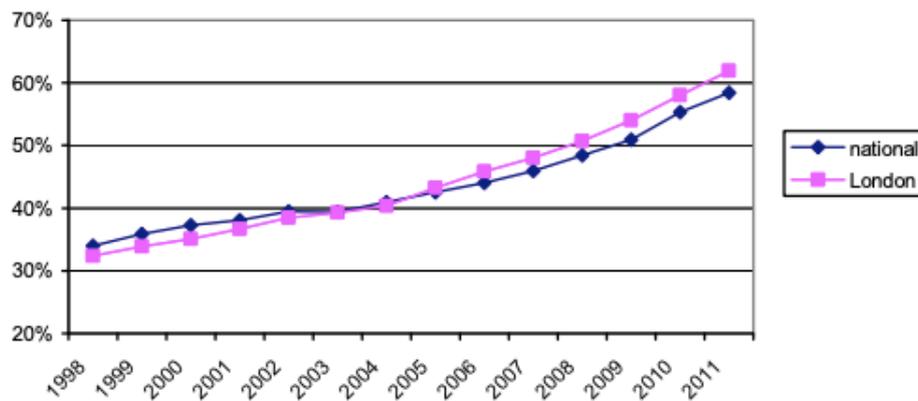


Figure 7: Percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and maths: London and national figures for maintained schools, 1998-2011

Source: Hutchings et al., 2015, Figure 3.1

Table 5 gives an overview of the participating schools in relation to the London Challenge objectives. Before exploring the performance of the different participating schools, it is important to point out that three of the four schools were located in the borough of Tower Hamlets, which is one of the areas targeted by the ‘Transforming Key Areas’ initiative, meaning that they received substantial support during the London Challenge programme. One of the schools was located in Ilford, in the Borough of Redbridge, which was not in one of the ‘targeted areas’. However, this does not mean that this school did not receive any support, but it is unclear what type of support it did receive during the programme.

When comparing the schools that took part in this study, there are clear differences between those in the targeted areas and the school that was not. The schools in the targeted areas (Schools A, B and D) performed much better than the one that was not (School C). Those three schools were judged by OFSTED as either ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, and more than 35% of their pupils, which was the floor target, had achieved a grade 5 or above (equivalent to a grade C or above) in English and maths GCSEs, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, the school that was not located in the area targeted by the ‘Transforming Key Areas’ initiative (School C) was judged by OFSTED as ‘requires improvement’; fewer than 35% of its disadvantaged pupils had achieved a grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs, although, more than

35% of its non-disadvantaged pupils had achieved a grade 5 or above. The reason behind these differences is unclear, though it may be because the schools in Tower Hamlets have received more support through the London Challenge programme in comparison to the school in Ilford. We cannot know for sure that this is the case using the data at hand, so more research needs to be conducted in order to fully understand this phenomenon.

Table 5 : Participating schools' performances

School	Ofsted judgements	General performance – grade 5 or above in English & maths GCSEs) (2018-19)	Disadvantaged pupils performance – grade 5 or above (2018-19)
School A	Outstanding	42%	41%
School B	Outstanding	56%	56%
School C	Requires Improvement	39%	31%
School D	Good	52%	46%

Source: UK Government, 2020

The London Challenge was a significant set of policies that affected schools in London as a whole; however, there were also other policies and strategies that were important but were more specific to certain London boroughs. Tower Hamlets Borough Council launched a number of policies and strategies to raise the attainment of young people residing in the borough. The Council established the Tower Hamlets Education (THE) Partnership as a response to the white paper – to find ‘a local solution to a national challenge’. This partnership involved bringing together different schools in the borough to work and learn from and with each other (Tower Hamlets Borough Council, 2017); underperforming schools were given the opportunity to raise their standards with the guidance and support of more ‘successful’ local schools (Tower Hamlets Education Partnership, 2020). This strategy aimed to improve student outcomes in Tower Hamlets as a whole, but there were other strategies that specifically targeted certain groups of students, e.g., ethnic minorities. After gathering information about people living in the area, the Tower Hamlets Borough Council concluded that most underperforming students were from homes where English was their second language (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019). As a result, the Council invested a great deal of effort in ensuring that ethnic minority students in Tower Hamlets improved their school performance. One of the strategies used to achieve this goal was to encourage and strengthen parental involvement with their child’s school/setting, equipping parents with the tools and

knowledge that they needed to be able to guide and support their children in their learning and education (Tower Hamlets Borough Council, 2020). Another strategy was to increase the recruitment of local ethnic minority teachers across the borough's schools, to provide ethnic minority students with realistic role models who share their identities and look like them, in the hope that it would raise their aspirations (Tower Hamlets Borough Council, 2003; BAME Inequalities Commission, 2021). Additionally, the Council worked to improve school attendance, as Tower Hamlets had the highest levels of truancy in the country. Schools were encouraged to work in partnership with faith groups, in particular local mosques, to improve attendance (Tower Hamlets Borough Council, 2002); mosque representatives worked with the families of children identified as attending inconsistently in order to tackle this problem (Taylor, 2002).

It is clear that a great amount of effort has been invested by the local authority to tackle the poor academic performance of young people living in Tower Hamlets; however the same cannot be said about the local authority in Redbridge. My search on policies and strategies aimed at raising educational attainment in the Borough of Redbridge has found close to none. Apart from the establishment of the Redbridge Education Partnership (Redbridge Education Partnership, 2021), which was similar to the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership, it seemed that not much effort has been invested to raise the attainment of young people residing in the borough. However, this may have been due to either of two things, the first being that outer city boroughs, such as Redbridge, do not receive as much education funding as inner-city boroughs such as Tower Hamlets (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2020). This suggests that Redbridge local authority may not have had the means to invest as much in improving student outcomes as other, better funded, boroughs. The second possible explanation could be that because the educational achievements of young people in Redbridge have been among the best in London (DfE, 2021), there has been no real need to have policies and strategies to tackle poor academic performance.

To conclude, it is clear that a great amount of effort has been invested, by both the government and local authorities, to improve the academic performance of students in London. Although the policies and strategies were not specifically aimed at improving HE participation, they may have played a role in facilitating Bangladeshi students' pursuit of HE.

3.6 SAMPLING STRATEGY

I used convenience and self-selected sampling to select respondents from the participating schools. Convenience sampling is a type of non-random or nonprobability sampling, meaning that this technique is not intended to be used to infer from the sample to the wider population in statistical terms (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Convenience sampling consists of taking the sample from the target population, which is available to researchers by virtue of their accessibility, i.e. geographical proximity, willingness to participate, or availability at a given time (Etikan et al., 2016). Due to the difficulty in getting access to schools and the time restrictions that were in place, I chose to conduct the data collection in the schools that were willing to participate in this study. Self-completion questionnaires were administered to four schools: three in Tower Hamlets and one in Ilford. Although it is a popular sampling method that is inexpensive and not as time-consuming as other methods, it also has some disadvantages. The data generated are not very generalisable to the target population, and the results may be biased due to the reasons why some students choose to take part and others do not (Salkind, 2012).

I further used self-selected sampling, also known as volunteer sampling, which is another type of nonprobability sampling design. Self-selected sampling consists of recruiting individuals who agree to participate in the study when asked indirectly or in response to an advert (Jupp, 2006). In this case, students were asked in the questionnaires whether they would like to volunteer to participate in an interview. All the respondents who responded 'yes' were interviewed in the second stage of the data collection. Self-selected sampling, like convenience sampling, requires little time and is inexpensive. However, the data cannot usually be generalised, and the sample may not be representative of the target population. This can occur when some people choose to volunteer because they have strong opinions or feelings about the study, an interest in the study, or because they simply want to help (McMillan, 2000).

Using simple random sampling would have eliminated the opportunities for "*human bias to manifest itself*" (Bryman, 2001, p.89), as each individual in the population would have had an equal chance to be part of the sample. However, this technique would not have worked in this study as the target population consisted of only Bangladeshi students, and therefore, using random sampling would have likely resulted in a mixed ethnic sample.

Therefore, using convenience sampling was more appropriate for recruiting respondents to complete the questionnaire. Additionally, I had a limited amount of contact with the students during the administration of the questionnaires, so using self-selected sampling was the only feasible technique in this case.

3.7 THE SAMPLE

The study's main focus was to explore the experiences of young Bangladeshi students prior to entering HE. The target population was final-year Bangladeshi students (Year 13) in the UK who were in the process of applying to university. Due to pragmatic and financial reasons, I was unable to gather data on the entire population; thus, the research was conducted with a sample of the population of interest. Additionally, given my topic, a population study would have been disproportionate, and so probably unethical. I chose to focus on students living in Tower Hamlets and Ilford (London) as these communities both have large Bangladeshi communities. I got in contact with all the high schools in Tower Hamlets and Ilford via email, asking for their participation in the study. Four schools agreed to take part in the questionnaires; one school was an all-girls' school (school A), and the other three were mixed-sex schools (schools B, C and D). It proved to be quite challenging to get access to schools in London, as I had no connections there.

Table 6: Distribution of survey questionnaires by schools

School	Number of Bangladeshis applying to university	Number of Bangladeshis who completed my questionnaire	Sample %	Response rate %
School A	112	42	29.8	38
School B	70*	65	46.1	93
School C	22	7	5.0	32
School D	55	26	18.6	47
Total	259	140	100	

*This figure does not include one Year 13 class that did not take part in this study, as they were not approached.

As you can see from Table 6, the response rate ranged from 32% to 93%. Initially, I only intended to focus on schools in Tower Hamlets; however, due to low questionnaire response rates, I had to recruit more respondents from schools in Ilford to increase the

sample size. The questionnaires were administered and completed over a period of three months (December 2017–February 2018). The one-to-one semi-structured interviews were also conducted over a period of three months (March–May 2018). All four schools took part in the questionnaires, but only three took part in the interviews, as there were no volunteers from the all-girls’ school. School teachers/school advisers administered the questionnaires, and I, with no teachers present, conducted the interviews. Table 7 gives a breakdown of the interview sample, including their pseudonyms, gender, immigrant generation status, social class, school attended and the degree they are intending to study at university.

Table 7: Characteristics of the interview sample

Name	Gender	Generation of migrants	Social class*	School**	Degree chosen
Nadia	Female	Second generation	L3	B	Law
Aboni	Female	Second generation	L4	B	Business and marketing
Bilqis	Female	Second generation	L4	C	Psychology
Saymah	Female	Second generation	L8	D	Political science and philosophy
Sabirah	Female	Second generation	L4	D	Pharmacy
Tashrin	Female	Second generation	L4	B	Psychology
Maisha	Female	Second generation	L6	D	Computer Science
Najiyah	Female	First generation	L8	D	Politics
Hafiza	Female	Second generation	L8	D	Chemistry
Samirah	Female	First generation	L4	D	Occupational Therapy
Mehraj	Female	Second generation	L4	C	Sociology and Criminology
Karim	Male	Second generation	L4	B	Computer Science
Tahmid	Male	Second generation	L4	B	Medicine
Samir	Male	Second generation	L8	B	Business and Economics
Waseem	Male	Second generation	L4	B	Computer Science

Shakil	Male	Second generation	L1	D	Economics
Mushi	Male	Second generation	L2	C	Accounting and Finance
Mohammed	Male	First generation	L3	D	Advertising and Finance
Rejwan	Male	First generation	L6	D	Computer Science

*See Appendix A for NS-SEC categories

**School A, B and D were located in Tower Hamlets, School C was located in Ilford

3.8 SAMPLE SIZE

It was important to ensure that I had generated enough data to be able to conduct credible analysis and reporting. Marshall et al. (2013) stated that *“other than selecting a research topic and appropriate research design, no other research task is more fundamental to creating credible research than obtaining an adequate sample”* (p. 11). I managed to receive 140 completed questionnaires from the four schools that granted me access. No extra time could have been spent recruiting more respondents, as I had a restricted amount of time left in which to analyse the questionnaire data, to structure the interview schedules and conduct the interviews, all of which had to be done before the students’ A-level study leave. As only descriptive statistics were to be used in this study, 140 completed questionnaires were acceptable. However, if multiple regression were to be used, then a bigger sample size would have been needed (e.g. 200–500); the sample size has to fit with the planned analysis (Israel, 1992).

The sample size for the interviews was justified by precedent. I used the sample sizes of studies with similar research problems and designs to estimate the sample size required for the success of this study. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) assert that *“before deciding on an appropriate sample size, qualitative researchers should consider identifying a corpus of interpretive studies that used the same design as in the proposed study and wherein the data saturation was reached”* (p. 118). This method is useful for determining the point at which data saturation was reached in similar studies, which can be used to indicate when data saturation would be reached in this study. Several studies (Basit, 2012; Ceja, 2006; Dale et al., 2002) influenced the qualitative side of this study, and their sample sizes ranged from 18 to 20 participants in interviews. Additionally, it has been recommended that large projects (e.g. PhD) should have between 15 and 20 participants in one study (Clarke et al., 2015). This was achieved, as 19 students took part in the

interviews, with each interview lasting between 12 and 17 minutes. I had hoped that the interviews would last longer, but since the participants had never met with me before, some of them were quite shy and did not open up as much as I would have liked them to.

3.9 QUESTIONNAIRE

One of the methods of data collection used in this study was a self-developed survey questionnaire (see Appendix F). This is the most popular survey option because of its versatility. Any of the several goals of research (description, exploration, explanation or evaluation) can easily be pursued via survey questionnaires (Ruane, 2016). There was no limit to what could be asked, but I had to pay close attention to how I phrased my questions. Questionnaires were used as they are useful for gathering factual information, data on opinions, preferences and attitudes, predictions and beliefs, behaviour and experiences from the past or present (Aldridge and Levine, 2001). I chose to use a cross-sectional questionnaire survey, meaning that the data were collected at a single point in time (Wyse et al., 2016). Due to the nature of the research question, there was no need to use any other type of survey questionnaires, i.e. longitudinal surveys or trend studies. The questionnaire served two purposes: first, to explore the experience of Bangladeshi students during the university application process in order to identify the factors contributing to their decision to pursue HE. Second, it provided an entry into the schools that participated in the study and therefore facilitated qualitative data collection.

The questionnaire asked participants to share basic information about themselves that was relevant to this study. Data were collected about participants' backgrounds to provide a better understanding of who comprised the sample and to whom the findings may apply. The participants shared details about their age, gender, immigrant generation status, family's education, socioeconomic background, their qualifications prior to university application, and their degree and university choices. The questionnaire was also used to pinpoint the factors that had motivated their decision to pursue HE. Finally, the questionnaire was used to identify the factors that had influenced the participants' choice of university. I identified those factors through the analysis of the related literature and the theoretical framework chosen (Coleman, 1988; Jaeger, 2007). For the purposes of this

study, descriptive statistics were used to describe the data provided by participants. Descriptive statistics were chosen because of the nature of the research questions.

3.10 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The research design planning began by taking into consideration the limitations of time and costs. Despite the considerable growth in online surveys, I chose to use paper-based questionnaires because I was concerned about the response rate. If students were left to their own devices to complete the online questionnaire, the response rate may have been much lower because there was no guarantee that they would complete it once they got home. On the other hand, with the paper-based questionnaire, students had to complete it during lessons and return it to their teachers on the same day.

When designing the questionnaire, I tried my best to ensure that respondents found it easy to complete. This was done by ensuring that the survey questionnaire was kept short (5–10 minutes to complete) to maximise the response rate. Students were more likely to complete the questionnaire if it was simple, short and used terminology that they all could comprehend (Lawal, 2009). It was also essential to keep the questions and statements in the questionnaire as short and simple as possible to ensure that the respondents understood them (Holbrook et al., 2006).

The questionnaire was mainly made up of closed questions, although some open-ended questions were also included. The closed questions were used to generate data that would enable me to identify trends and patterns in the participants' responses. The open-ended questions allowed participants to offer personal and honest comments. Generally, answers to open-ended questions are difficult to interpret, but in this case, respondents were only asked to give one-word answers, which made it easier to analyse. The central part of the questionnaire was comprised of three 4-point Likert-type scales related to several factors that affect students' HE participation, which were identified as being important in the literature. This device was useful for building a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of responses whilst still being able to generate numbers (Cohen et al., 2007). At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to leave their name if they wanted to take part in the interviews. The advantages of questionnaire use are many, including the fact that it is a useful tool for collecting survey information, it provides

structured numerical data, it can be administered without the researchers having to be present and it is also straightforward to analyse (Wilson and McClean, 1994). On the other hand, the process of developing, piloting and refining a questionnaire can be time-consuming. The use of questionnaires can potentially result in an unsophisticated and limited scope of the data (Cohen et al., 2007).

3.11 ADMINISTRATION OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Once the survey questionnaire of the study was designed, it had to be administered and completed by a sample of the target population for data collection. In this study, the target population was British Bangladeshi students in four schools located in London. Staff within each school played a critical role in recruiting participants by telling students what my project was about and what the research process would entail. Additionally, in one of the schools, I was given the opportunity to present my research project in front of a Year 13 assembly and was able to answer questions that students had. As a result of these efforts, I received 140 completed questionnaires, and 19 students indicated that they also wanted to take part in the interview stage.

3.12 INTERVIEW

The next phase of the data collection involved conducting semi-structured, one-to-one interviews (see Appendix G) with students in three of the participating schools. One of the schools had no volunteers and therefore was disregarded during this phase of the data collection process. Interviews were used in this study as they “*enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view*” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.267). In this study, participants were allowed to express how they believed their decision to pursue HE was made. Interviews enable participants’ attitudes, beliefs, values and preferences to be considered (Arksey and Knight, 2011).

As the study uses an explanatory sequential design, the interview schedules were grounded in the quantitative results from the first phase of the study. They were used as a tool to follow-up on unexpected or interesting results from the questionnaires. The results from the questionnaires helped to customise the interview schedule for each of the

students who participated in the interviews. Some generic questions were asked of all 19 students, and some questions were specific to each individual student, so not all participants were asked the same questions. This was because not every question was relevant to every participant; for example, not everyone wanted to move out, and not everybody aspired to go to a Russell Group university. The main purpose of the interview was to explore how certain factors, which have been identified in the first, quantitative phase of the study, have contributed to Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE.

In this study, the semi-structured interview format was employed because it allowed me to follow a specific agenda and explore selected relevant themes and topic areas that I wanted to pursue. In addition, because semi-structured interviews are loosely structured, I was free to probe responses, follow-up on ideas and ask for clarification or further elaboration (Arksey & Knight, 2011). Structured interviews were not chosen for this study because of the lack of freedom that format would have allowed, as it would have been restrictive in terms of the questions that I could have asked. Additionally, unstructured interviews were not an option either because that format would have made it difficult for me to get answers to all the questions I had. The semi-structured format also enabled me to go deeper into the motivations of respondents and to understand the reasons for responding the way that they did. Interviews were also used to explore complicated research questions that could not have been investigated in the questionnaire. An interview schedule was created before the interviews were conducted in order to ensure that I covered the main areas that I thought were important.

The advantages of using interviews are many, including the fact that they are a flexible tool for data collection in which researchers can use multi-sensory channels (non-verbal, verbal and spoken) to help answer the research questions. Interviewers have control of the order of the interview, but there is still room for spontaneity. They can ensure that they receive complete answers and that respondents are answering questions about deep and complex issues sufficiently. However, there are also some disadvantages to using interviews. The interviews can be lengthy, they can be inconvenient for the respondents, they are open to interviewer bias and anonymity could be difficult to achieve (Cohen et al., 2007).

Table 8 outlines the relationship between the study’s research questions, the conceptual framework and the research design. Social capital will be used to explore and make sense of the data generated by the questionnaires and interviews to answer the first research question, whereas SRCT will be used as the scholarly foundation to investigate and understand the data generated by the questionnaires and interviews to answer the second and third research questions.

Table 8: Link between conceptual framework and research design

Research questions	Data collected	Relevant key theories
1. How do the networks of British Bangladeshi students influence their decision to participate in HE?	Questionnaire and interview	Social Capital Theory
2. What are the motivating factors that lead British Bangladeshis to pursue HE? a) personal goals b) career goals	Questionnaire and interview	Sociological Rational Choice Theory
3) What factors have the strongest influence on Bangladeshi students’ choice of HE institution?	Questionnaire and interview	Sociological Rational Choice Theory

3.13 PILOT STUDY

Before collecting information in the field, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the research tools chosen for this study. Pilot studies are essential because they increase the likelihood of success in the main study. The main benefit of conducting a pilot study is that it can give researchers advanced warning about any problems with the research project, whether the proposed instruments or methods are too complicated or inappropriate, or where research protocols may not be followed (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). However, pilot studies do not come without limitations. In essence, there is a possibility that they may result in inaccurate assumptions or predictions being made based on pilot data, and problems may arise as a result of data contamination (data from pilot study mixing with data from the main study) (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). To diminish the likelihood of this happening, I have chosen not to include the data generated from the pilot study with the main study. However, this does not entirely avoid the risk

of contamination, since the analysis of the pilot study data could still influence the main study's design or analysis (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002). This is unlikely to be the case in this study, as there were no substantial problems with the research tools, so no major modifications were made.

The pilot study was fairly straightforward. Fifteen first-year university students completed an online questionnaire, and six first-year university students took part in a one-to-one interview. The students who participated in the pilot study were not part of the target population, but because of time constraints, it was difficult to recruit Year 13 students. However, this was not problematic, as I had only intended to test the instruments and was not planning on using these findings in the main study. The main purpose of the pilot study was to test both the questionnaire and interview questions; this included determining whether participants were able to understand the questions clearly, whether the questions served the purpose of this study and whether they needed to be altered for the main study.

After conducting the pilot study to test the questionnaire, I concluded that there were a few changes that needed to be made. The questionnaire used in the pilot study was an online questionnaire, meaning that participants were left to their own devices to complete it; as a result, the response rate was low. In order to increase the response rate in the main study, I chose to use paper-based questionnaires, meaning that participants would be expected to complete and return them to their teachers on the same day. The findings showed that respondents faced no difficulties in understanding the questions asked of them and that they were able to respond to the questions; nevertheless, the questionnaire needed a few minor changes. At the beginning of the pilot study, one participant pointed out that there were not enough options to choose from for one of the questions, so that was amended. All the other participants faced no problem in completing the questionnaire. Additionally, a note was also added at the end of the questionnaire to make participants aware of what they should do if they wished to take part in the next stage of the research (interview stage).

Although there were no major issues with the interview schedule and participants understood all the questions asked of them and were able to answer them accordingly, the interview instruments still needed some specific changes. I noticed that not everyone

who was being interviewed had completed the questionnaire, which meant that I did not know key information about them (i.e., background information) prior to the interviews, which would have helped me to better understand the data that were being generated. In addition, it would have saved me a lot of time if some of the questions had been answered in the questionnaire. This is particularly important when conducting interviews in schools, as students have a limited amount of time that they can spend taking part in research projects like this one, due to other commitments that they have (i.e. attending lessons). As a result of this finding, I decided to only interview students who had completed the questionnaire before the interviews.

3.14 ANALYSIS

As mentioned previously, this study employs an explanatory sequential design, which is made up of two phases. The first involves the collection and analysis of quantitative data, which is subsequently followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

The results from the qualitative stage are used to build upon the quantitative results (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In this study, the quantitative analysis identified those factors that influenced Bangladesh students' choice to pursue HE, and the qualitative analysis explained how these factors had influenced them. The questionnaire (quantitative phase) was first analysed, and the in-depth face-to-face interviews (qualitative phase) were analysed later. The priority, which determines which method of research was given more attention or weight throughout the data collection and analysis process (Creswell, 2003) was given to the qualitative component in this study. The decision to prioritise the qualitative data collection and analysis was influenced by the purpose of the study, which was to identify and explain the various factors that affect Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE.

Different statistical procedures can be employed to analyse quantitative data (questionnaire); the choice depends on the function or use of the statistics (Black, 1993). For this study, the questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive (univariate) analysis on SPSS. Descriptive statistics simplify the communication of quantitative data and the search for patterns in data (Wyse et al., 2016). It can be used to describe the characteristics of a single group of people (Loeb et al., 2017), which, in this case, were Bangladeshi university entrants. If the study had looked at ethnicity as a variable, then

using another statistical procedure would have been more appropriate. The results from the descriptive analysis will be presented in the form of frequency counts.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed (Creswell, 2005). The qualitative (interviews) aspect of the research was analysed using thematic analysis (TA). TA was chosen because it is a useful method for exploring the perspectives of different individuals, highlighting differences and similarities, and generating unexpected insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006). TA does not consist of merely counting words or phrases; it involves the identification and description of the implicit and explicit ideas derived from the data, which are known as themes (Guest et al., 2012). I chose an inductive-deductive approach to TA, meaning that the analysis was grounded both in the data and in the existing literature, concepts and theories. Pure induction is impossible in most qualitative research, since the analysis is always influenced by the researcher's knowledge, theoretical assumptions, prior research experiences, research training and personal standpoints (Clarke et al., 2015).

The coding and analysis of the data were done by hand on hard-copy data. I chose this approach mainly because it allowed me to immerse myself in the data, something I felt like I could not do if I used data management tools (i.e. NVivo). I followed the following six steps when conducting TA (Braun & Clark, 2006):

- 1) Familiarisation: an exploration of the data by reading and re-reading transcripts and writing memos. This enabled me to move beyond the most obvious meanings.
- 2) Coding: coding the transcripts by segmenting and labelling them. I identified patterns of data during this process.
- 3) Searching for themes: similar codes were clustered together to create themes.
- 4) Reviewing themes: I stopped generating themes and checked whether the themes I had created so far 'fit' in with the coded data and the whole dataset.
- 5) Defining and naming themes: I defined each theme and gave them names. This step ensured the conceptual clarification of each theme, which would help with the final write-up stage.
- 6) Writing the report: I presented my analytic narrative and data extracts. The themes provided me with an organising framework for the analysis; however, analytical conclusions made in the analysis were drawn across themes.

It is important to point out that the data analysis process was by no means linear; it involved moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between description and interpretation, and between inductive and deductive reasoning (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). The analysis process mainly took place once all the interviews were over; however, there were instances where I found myself conducting basic analysis as the data were being collected. For example, during the interviews, I was making judgements about what question I should be asking next and when I should deviate from the interview schedule to explore further topics and ideas that I may not have considered previously. After the interviews took place, the interview transcripts were printed off and were analysed manually (see Appendix H), following the six steps discussed by Braun and Clark (2006). Table 9 presents the main codes and themes that were developed during the analysis of the interviews. I began the process by reading all the transcripts and re-reading them and developing analytical memos. During the next stage, I began to develop initial codes (first column). The next step involved clustering similar codes together to create themes. The sub-themes and themes (second and third column in Table 9) specifically refer to the main themes (fourth column), which are related to my main research questions. Once the TA took place, I ended up with three main themes: influencers, motivating factors and factors influencing university choice. The first theme refers to the first research question, the second theme refers to the second research question and the third theme refers to the third research question. The rationale for organising the main themes in this manner is that each question is independent from the others.

Table 9: Process of developing codes and themes

Initial codes*	Sub-themes	Themes	Main themes
High expectations, pressured, no choice, disapproval of alternative routes, internalised parents' expectations	Pressure	Parents	Influential individuals
Supportive, no pressure, free to make own choices, alternative routes are an option	Support		
Gaining recognition from others, leading better lives	Parents' motivation		
Guidance with personal statement, university choice, degree choice	Provided support	Siblings	
Witnessed uneducated siblings struggle, uneducated siblings encouraged to go university	Negative experiences as deterrents		

Guidance with personal statement, degree choice, career advice	Provided support	Extended family		
Witnessing benefits of university, financial stability, extravagant holidays	Insight into HE benefits			
Friends at university, friends going to university, not wanting to miss out, university-going culture	Following friends	Friends		
Balanced approach, talks and activities about all routes	Approaches taken by schools	Teachers		
Talks and activities focused on university, all students had to apply to university				
Guidance with personal statement, university choice, degree choice	Provided support	Bangladeshi community		
High expectations, not going to university is shameful, seen as a failure	Pressure			
Girls allowed go to university, recent shift, marriage not a priority, delay in starting a family	Shift in culture			
Higher qualification, first in the family, an achievement	Academic credentials	Economic benefits		Motivating factors
Difficult to get a 'good' job, degree a requirement, graduate employment, career aspirations, labour market	Widening career prospects			
Better life, high-paying job, financial stability, support family, middle-class aspirations, escape working-class	Financial stability			
Independence, social skills, communication skills, self-confidence, being more mature	Personal growth	Social benefits		
Meeting new people, diverse people, different cultures, new perspectives	New experiences			
Making parents proud, parents' sacrifices, proving oneself to others, being 'good enough'	Social recognition			
Enjoys chosen subject, done subject previously, intellectual growth and stimulation	Interest in a subject	Past experiences		
Good previous exam results, predicted grades, confidence	Prior academic achievements			
Offered chosen degree course, interesting modules, placement year	Course	Course characteristics	Factors influencing university choice	
University reputation, course reputation	Reputation	University characteristics		
High entry requirements, low entry requirements, meeting entry requirements	Entry requirements			
Local university, commuting distance, cost, parents as barrier, not local, outside of London, moving out, university experience, independence	Location			

*Not an exhaustive list

3.15 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability are two important and fundamental characteristics in the evaluation of any measurement tool or instrument for a good study. It has been pointed out by Cohen et al. (2011) that *“threat to validity and reliability can never be erased completely; rather the effect of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a piece of research”* (p. 179). Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument is measuring what it intends to measure. Reliability refers to the degree to which a research instrument produces consistent results (Thomas, 2017). This

section discusses the various steps I took to increase the validity and reliability of the measurement procedure and results.

Content validity and triangulation were used to secure the validity of the questionnaire and interview schedules. Content validity tests whether the content of the instrument(s) used measures what it sets out to discover (Cohen et al., 2008). This includes the appropriateness of the instruments for its intended users and the relevance of the questions (Gorard, 1997). I ensured that the content validity of this study was achieved in several ways. First, the questionnaire and the interview schedule were designed using the findings from prior literature on HE participation and supplemented by my own knowledge as a university student. Second, the questionnaire and interview schedule were reviewed by my supervisor and two other academics at the University of Leicester who have some knowledge of this field. Their feedback resulted in the reordering and deletion of some questions. Third, the questionnaire and interview schedule were pilot tested, as mentioned in a previous section. Only a few changes were made as a result of feedback (see page 60).

Triangulation occurs when researchers use more than one method to collect data on a topic. This approach proved to be useful in securing the validity and reliability of this study. Exploring a phenomenon from several points is better than exploring it from one. Using another analytical method or exploring a phenomenon from a different viewpoint may result in the rejection of an explanation that researchers may have come up with after the first analysis. Alternatively, it may strengthen the explanation made after the first analysis (Thomas, 2017). In this study, I was interested in finding out the different factors that had influenced Bangladeshi students' decision to participate in HE. A questionnaire and interviews were used to answer this question; this approach is called methodology triangulation, as more than one method is used to collect data (Denzin, 1978). The findings from the in-depth interviews were used to support the findings from the questionnaire; thus, the weaknesses from one method were counterbalanced by the strengths of the other. Triangulation enabled me to avoid the weaknesses of one method by using another method that was strong in the same area where the first one was weak. For example, generally, questionnaires allow little flexibility for respondents' responses; however, interviews in this study were used to give participants the freedom to go into as

much detail as they want. The students' responses in the questionnaire were used as the basis for the interviews.

3.16 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study received ethical clearance from the University of Leicester Ethics Committee for the main field work before I started the data collection process (see Appendix I). I had a moral responsibility to ensure that the participants were not put at risk of harm during the study. I also ensured that the participants remained anonymous and that their responses remained confidential throughout the research process. This was important to protect the privacy of the participants whilst collecting, analysing and reporting findings (Allen, 2017). Keeping the participants' identities hidden did not prove difficult because participants were not part of an identifiable group. Participants came from thousands of Year 13 Bangladeshi students attending high school in London (Tower Hamlets and Ilford). Nevertheless, to be extra cautious, I chose to give participants pseudonyms that I used during every stage of the study to avoid their identification and protect their anonymity. In addition, the data (questionnaire results, audio-recording, transcripts) were stored on a password-protected laptop to avoid any breach of confidentiality (Opie and Brown, 2019). Participants were aware that the only person who could view their responses other than me was my supervisor, as mentioned in the consent forms; however, my supervisor has chosen not to look at them.

The study complies with BERA's guidelines, which point out that researchers should be mindful of the extent to which young people "*can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to participate*" (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018, 2018, p.15) in research studies. As the research was conducted in schools with students under the age of 18, consent was sought from the headteachers of each school. As part of this process, the headteachers asked to review the questionnaire and the interview schedules, along with my Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. Head teachers were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix B), which gave them the necessary understanding of the objectives and the motivations for this study, along with a consent form (see Appendix C). Once the headteachers had given their consent, the students' consent was sought. Before they could complete the questionnaire, they were given an information sheet (see Appendix D) and a consent form (see Appendix E)

to sign. At the end of the questionnaire, students were asked to write their names to indicate their interest in taking part in the next stage of the study. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the research for any or no reason until 30/04/2018, as stated on the consent form. After that point, it would have been difficult, since the data would have been combined with the rest of the data.

Both the questionnaire completion and interviews took place in school, where the participants felt comfortable and safe. The schools were cooperative and helpful, and they allocated a room to me where I could conduct the interviews without being disrupted by anybody. During each visit to the schools, I was in possession of a visitor badge that the schools provided me with to show teachers and students that I was authorised to be on the premises, which made them feel more comfortable around me. I attempted to build rapport with the participants during the interviews by introducing myself to them, giving them a brief outline of what my research project is about and allowing them time to ask questions. This was important for me, as it helped to 'break the ice' and got participants to open up about their experiences. It also made talking about potentially sensitive issues (i.e. family support, their life struggles) easier. I kept an eye on signs that a participant was uncomfortable discussing a particular topic. I was prepared to take a break or even terminate an interview if someone became too distressed; however, this did not occur. My priority was to ensure that students were not exposed to any harm, even if it meant that I would lose data. As stated by Berman et al. (2016), "*while the primary purpose of research, evaluation and data collection and analysis is to generate new evidence, this goal should never take precedence over the rights of individual participants or place them in harm's way*" (p. 11).

3.17 CONCLUSION TO METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three summarises the mixed-methods approach that was used to explore the experiences of British Bangladeshi students during the university application process. This chapter highlights the research objectives and research questions, pragmatic paradigm and mixed-methods research design, the sampling strategy, the sample size, the data collection tools used, the pilot study, the data analysis processes, issues of validity and reliability, and the ethical issues raised from the study. The research methodology

used was able to generate the empirical evidence required to understand the HE decision-making process of British Bangladeshi students.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings of the study, which used a mixed-methods research approach involving a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data were interpreted and presented in this chapter to answer all three of my research questions and explore some insights and in-depth information relevant to the study topics. Based on empirical evidence, descriptions and interpretations were made on the factors that influence the choices British Bangladeshi students make regarding HE. Chapter 5 will give a more in-depth analysis of the research findings in relation to the literature review and the conceptual framework.

This study incorporates elements from two theories. The theories employed in this study are social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) and SRCT (Jaeger, 2007). The two theories not only assisted with the development of the literature review, but also helped with the creation of the survey questionnaire and the interview schedule, and guided the analysis of the data. Social capital theory was used in this study to analyse the various processes and mechanisms used by students' social networks to influence their pursuit of HE. In contrast, SRCT was used to explore whether young Bangladeshi students' choice to pursue HE and their choice of university were influenced by the expected economic and social returns, in order to determine whether these students were rational decision-makers.

The self-developed survey questionnaire used in this study was launched in December 2017. In total, 140 responses were received during the period of three months (December 2017–February 2018). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted over a period of three months (March–May 2018). The questionnaire asked respondents to share basic information about themselves that was relevant to this study. Students gave details about their age, gender, immigrant generation status, family's education level and socioeconomic background, all of which have been identified in the literature as influential factors. It was important for me to have basic information about my sample because it enabled me to not only know who my sample was but also to whom my findings were applicable. Both the questionnaire and interviews were used to identify the main influencers, which included parents, siblings, extended family members, peers and

teachers, and to explore the various ways these individuals were able to influence students' pursuit of HE. It also enabled me to pinpoint the factors that had motivated the participants' progression to HE, which included wanting to gain a higher qualification, improved job and career prospects, being financially stable, gaining recognition from parents, extended family members and the Bangladeshi community, and attaining their social and experiential goals. Last, the tools used in this study helped to pinpoint the factors that influenced the participants' choice of HE institution, which included course availability, career prospects, university reputation, university environment/atmosphere, location and entry requirements.

Since I am looking at three different types of factors, the study's findings are separated into three main sections: (1) influencers, (2) motivating factors and (3) factors influencing university choice. Using descriptive analysis to analyse the questionnaires and TA to analyse the interviews, this chapter provides a detailed discussion of the university decision-making process of 140 Bangladeshi students in phase 1 and 19 Bangladeshi students in phase 2.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

4.2.1 Gender

Results emerging from the questionnaire indicate that a large percentage of the respondents were female (68%); males were significantly fewer (32%). These figures are not representative of the rest of the country; recent figures have shown that in 2017, 57% of all HE students were females and 43% were males (Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA], 2020). This gender imbalance in my sample was expected because one of the four high schools that took part in this study was an all-girls school (see Table 10).

Table 10: Gender breakdown by schools

Schools	Males (%)	Females (%)
School A	0	42
School B	35	30
School C	2	5
School D	8	18

4.2.2 Country of birth

Respondents were asked about their birthplace and their parents' birthplace in order to establish whether they were first- or second generation migrants. The study found that most respondents (89%) were born in the UK, meaning that most of the sample was second generation migrants. Since the majority of the sample was born and brought up in the UK, it is assumed that these respondents have had the same education and opportunities as anyone else who was born and brought up in the UK.

4.2.3 Parental education

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of both their father's and mother's education, and the survey required participants to state whether their parents had gone to university. It appears from the data gathered that many of the respondents' parents were not educated at the university level (84%), meaning that these respondents would go on to become first generation university students. Research has shown that parental educational level is a crucial predictor of children's educational outcomes. Students who have parents who are highly educated are also likely to be highly educated (Dickson et al., 2016). Therefore, it would be expected that the participants in this study would have been unlikely to be aspiring to go university, since their parents have not been to university themselves; however, this was not the case.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they had other family members who had been to university and, if so, to disclose who they were. The results show that many participants (68%) indicated that they had other family members who were at or had been to university. When asked who these 'other family members' were, a substantial number responded that they were referring to their sibling(s) (72%), a small number to their extended family (18%), and an even smaller number of respondents to both siblings and extended family (4%). When participants identified extended family members, they explicitly said that they were referring to their aunts, uncles and cousins. These findings show that although most participants' parents were not educated at the university level, a large proportion of participants still had access to other family members who were educated at the university level. This is important, as research has shown that educated siblings and extended family members can play an important role in supporting young people's university access and choice (Mwangi, 2015).

4.2.4 Socioeconomic background

In this study, FSM eligibility was used as an indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage. Data were collected to determine the number of respondents who were entitled to FSM. The results show that just over one-third (37%) of the sample had received FSM. This figure was a lot higher than overall London figures, which indicate that only 15.9% of secondary school pupils were eligible for and claimed FSM in 2017–2018 (Department for Education [DfE], 2018b). This suggests that these participants were more deprived than other students in London. This is important, as recent figures have shown that young people who receive FSM are 18% less likely to enter HE than non-FSM students. However, it is important to point out that using FSM entitlement as a measure of deprivation has some limitations, including the likelihood of under-reporting deprivation (some parents choose not to apply for FSM), and it measures income only (disregards other aspects of deprivation) (Perry, 2010). Despite these concerns, FSM still remains widely used as a proxy for socioeconomic status within the government and amongst academic research. The main reason for this is the absence of any other suitable measure that is (a) almost universal (except for independent schools), (b) routinely collected and (c) is based directly on students' individual circumstances (i.e. not derived from other sources) (Taylor, 2018).

Additionally, I also used parents' occupations to determine participants' socioeconomic backgrounds. The survey required participants to state their father's and mother's type of occupation, which were then categorised into eight classes using the National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification (NS-SEC):

- 1) Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
 - 2) Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupation
 - 3) Intermediate occupations
 - 4) Small employers and own account workers
 - 5) Lower supervisory and technical occupations
 - 6) Semi-routine occupations
 - 7) Routine occupations
 - 8) Never worked and long-term unemployed
- (see Appendix A for NS-SEC categories).

It appears from the data gathered that most of the participants' fathers were either in low-skilled occupations (small employers and own account workers) or were unemployed (see Table 11). The most popular occupations included taxi driver, restaurant owner, and shopkeeper (see Appendix A). This was expected, as the literature review reflects these findings (Office of National Statistics, 2020). For mothers' occupations, most mothers were unemployed, but a very small number had 'Intermediate occupations' (see Table 12). The most popular occupations included teaching assistant, dinner lady and nursery nurse (see Appendix A). Again, these findings were reflected in the literature review (DWP, 2016; ONS, 2014). Research has shown that parental occupational status and family income are important predictors of children's educational outcomes. Students whose parents have high-ranking occupational status generally tend to be more likely to apply to university than their counterparts whose parents have low-ranking occupational status (Blackburn et al., 2016, Harrison, 2017). Therefore, it would be expected that the participants in this study would have been unlikely to aspire to go to university because they come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds; however, the evidence shows that this was not the case.

In order to deal with the relationship between fathers'/mothers' occupations in arriving at the classification, I have taken the following two steps: 1) if both parents' occupation status were the same, then that is the status that I shall be using; 2) if they had different occupation statuses, meaning that one parent was higher than the other, then I shall be using the higher parental occupation status of the two to measure the student's socioeconomic position, as has been done by others (Jones, 2003).

Table 11: Fathers' occupation (NS-SEC 8 classes)

NS-SEC (Eight classes)	Frequency	Sample (%)
L1 - Higher managerial, administrative occupations	7	5.0
L2 - Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	8	5.7
L3 - Intermediate occupations	8	5.7
L4 - Small employers and own account workers	41	29.3
L5 - Lower supervisory and technical occupations	12	8.6
L6 - Semi-routine occupations	18	12.9
L7 - Routine occupations	5	3.6
L8 - Never worked and long-term unemployed*	41	29.3

*Including occupations not stated or inadequately described

Table 12: Mothers' occupation (NS-SEC 8 classes)

NS-SEC (Eight classes)	Frequency	Sample (%)
L1 - Higher managerial, administrative occupations	1	0.7
L2 - Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	8	5.7
L3 - Intermediate occupations	11	7.9
L4 - Small employers and own account workers	0	0.0
L5 - Lower supervisory and technical occupations	0	0.0
L6 - Semi-routine occupations	3	2.1
L7 - Routine occupations	2	1.4
L8 - Never worked and long-term unemployed*	115	82.1

*Including occupations not stated or inadequately described

4.2.5 Choice of programme

The empirical evidence shows that students in this study were making distinctively different choices than the wider population in terms of degree choice. Data were collected to determine which university courses were most popular amongst my sample, and then they were categorised by subject areas and compared with data from the wider population provided by UCAS (see Figure 8). I conducted my data collection around January 2018, so the data from UCAS also reflected that. The results show that there was a considerably higher representation of my participants applying to subjects allied to medicine; social studies; business studies; biological science; computer science; law; medicine and dentistry; history and philosophical studies; and linguistics, classics and related. Notably, my participants were under-represented in creative arts and design, engineering, sciences combined with social sciences and arts, mass communication and documentation, mathematical sciences and education (see Figure 8). These results not only show that there were apparent differences in terms of the subjects chosen by the participants and the wider population, but also that my participants were more inclined to choose a professional, applied degree, with accounting, nursing, computer science and law amongst the most popular degree choices.

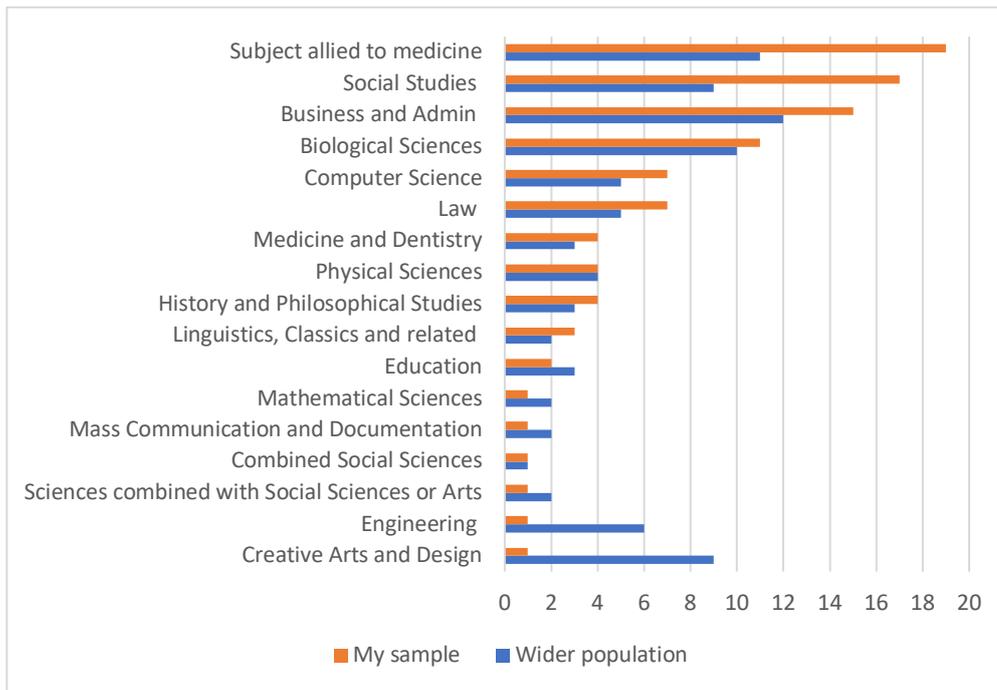


Figure 8: Participants' chosen subject area as a percentage*

*Subject areas that had <1 application were disregarded in this figure

4.3 INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS

As indicated in the literature review, young people's intention to undertake full-time education after Year 13 is shaped by individuals within their networks, including their family, teachers and friends. In the questionnaire, participants were asked what their perceptions were of the influence of different people in their social network. The study used a Likert scale of 'not at all' to 'a lot' to measure who had the most influential effect on these young people's choice to pursue HE. Participants were given a chance to mention anyone else that had influenced them, which may have been missed in the survey question. For ease of analysis, the four different response options of 'a lot' to 'not at all' were categorised into the following two groups: 'a lot' and 'moderate' into one group and 'a little' and 'not at all' into another.

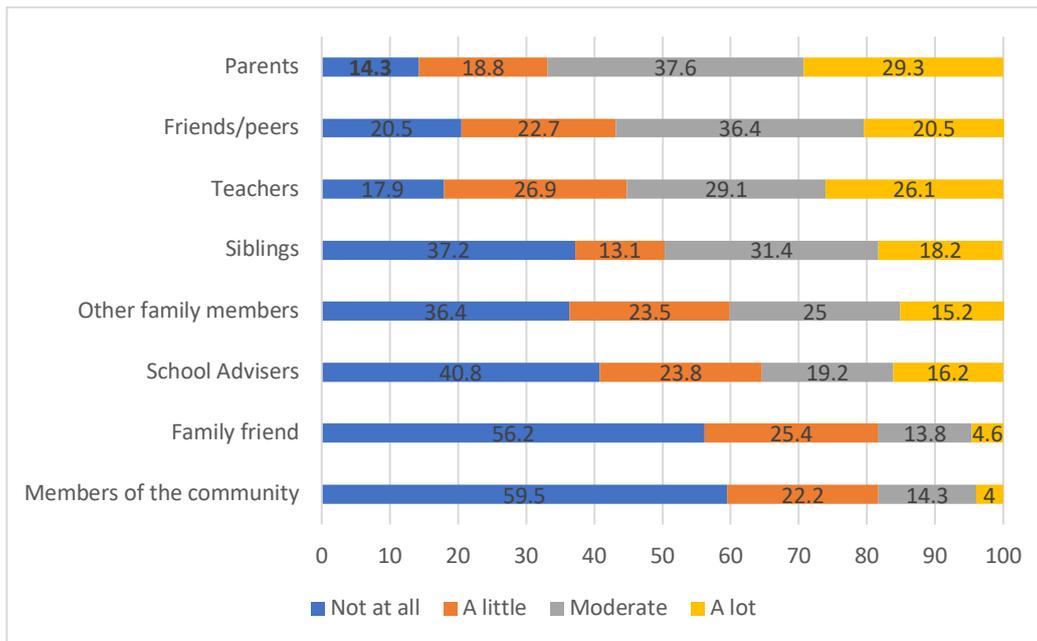


Figure 9: Findings from the Likert scale on influencers on HE progression as percentage

4.3.1 Influence of parents

Respondents were asked about their opinions and perceptions of the influence of individuals within their social networks. The findings from the study, which are outlined in Figure 9, indicate that parents were the most important influencers in Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE. This is surprising, given that most respondents' parents (84%) had not gone to university themselves. Despite parents' low level of education, this was not seen as a barrier to students' progression to HE; in fact, it was seen as an enabling factor.

Respondents were given the opportunity to discuss with me the different ways their parents had influenced them. From the respondents' perspectives, this influence was based on parents providing them with emotional support, verbally communicating to them that they should go to university, and showing a consistent interest in their university aspirations. This was the case for 16 out of the 18 participants who had indicated that their parents had considerable influence on their decision to pursue HE. Interestingly, the findings show that both educated and uneducated parents were able to provide emotional support to their children, indicating that the level of parental education has no influence on this type of support. These are some of the responses from the interviews.

“I think from a young age, my parents were like ‘you know go study, get a good job, be successful’, so from then on, you know I was thinking I got to study, study and become successful.” Tahmid, L4 , School B (Tower Hamlets)*

“Just, they (parents) always had high expectations, and I’ve always wanted to be able to fulfil all their expectations that they have.” Bilqis, L4, School C (Ilford)

Although most parents’ involvement only entailed giving their children emotional support, there were a few participants [n=2] who mentioned that their parent(s) had provided them with instrumental support by giving them advice about university choice and degree choice. Interestingly, neither of the students’ parents had been to university themselves, but they clearly wanted to put the limited knowledge they had to good use by supporting their children through the university application process. Some of the responses in the interviews included:

“My father, he’s always been interested in universities, so he’s always told me ‘oh this university is good for this course, this is better for that’, so he’s always been intrigued in that aspect.” Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“Well, he... did want me to go into like a lawyer kind of side. I wasn’t interested in that.” Aboni, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

Some students’ [n=5] indicated that alternative routes (i.e. apprenticeships) were looked down upon by their parents, as they perceived them to have lower status compared to HE. In turn, this worked by limiting the options that students believed were available to them after compulsory education. This view amongst Bangladeshi parents may be explained by their lack of awareness of the benefits of taking a more vocational route, including being able to gain a degree qualification with some apprenticeships. This could be because parents are applying their knowledge of the Bangladeshi education system to their children’s experience in the UK. These are some of the responses from the interviews.

“I think it’s also like the expectation that my parents had on me. Like my brothers, they didn’t go uni, they went into apprenticeships and stuff like that, so they (parents) were like we want you to go to uni.” Mehrak, L4, School C (Ilford)

*Socioeconomic classifications (see Appendix A)

“They want the best for me, like better future. I could go into an apprenticeship, but they wanted me to go to uni.” Shakil, L1, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Respondents were given the opportunity to share with me why they thought their parents had wanted them to pursue HE. A number of students' [n=6] narrations show that their parents were very much motivated by a desire for their children to lead better lives than their own (better job and better financial standing), suggesting that they were driven by the economic advantages of HE. This indicates that these parents attributed their low socioeconomic status to their lack of education and, in response, wanted to ensure that their children did not follow their path. Concerning this factor, Mushi commented that:

“Like they (parents) have influenced me by telling me that it's the best choice to open up my own business because all of my other relatives, they've all opened up their own businesses, they all have Accounting and Finance degree.” Mushi, L2, School C (Ilford)

This study finds that parents' motivations were not only for economic gain, but also for social gains. The results show that some students [n=5] indicated that the family's social standing in the Bangladeshi community had a direct effect on parents' aspirations for their children. This indicates that parents felt pressured to ensure that their children went to university in order to avoid bringing shame to the family. The evidence shows that this form of 'control' was only possible because these Bangladeshis were part of a close-knit community. Some of the responses in the interviews included:

“With the Bangoli community you have to go university, or else you're a failure ... They just won't talk about you, they won't gas you up, they won't talk big of you which I don't like, but it's so big into that community, oh someone did this degree and this person who is not even, it somehow related to this person is talking about this person 'oh this guy got this, this guy got that'. Who talks like this? Older people and the parents, my mum does as well.” Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“My mum and dad wanted me to go to uni as well, and that's partly because they're so cultural that when anyone asks what is your daughter doing? They want to be able to say that 'oh she's going to uni'.” Bilqis, L4, School C (Ilford)

4.3.2 Influence of siblings

Concerning the influence of siblings, many respondents indicated that their siblings were key influencers in their decision to progress to HE (see Figure 9). In most cases, they explicitly referred to their older siblings; however, when they did not, I assumed that they were still talking about their older siblings, who were or had been to university, meaning that they must have been older than them. Respondents were allowed to share with me the different ways they believed that their siblings had influenced them. The interview findings point out that siblings' relationships are influential in two primary ways:

1. For those who had siblings who were or had been to university, their experiences worked as a motivator for students to follow the same path.
2. For those who had siblings who did not go university, their negative experiences in the labour market worked as a deterrent from following the same path.

The findings indicate that having a sibling who was at or had been to university raised students' aspirations by establishing university progression as an expectation in their family. This was the case for five out of the nine participants who indicated that their siblings had considerable influence on their decision to pursue HE. Although parental involvement played a critical role in the respondents' decision to pursue HE, seeing their older siblings go to university led the students to believe that university progression was a realistic option for them. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents' comments included:

"It started developing as was my brother goes uni." Shakil, L1, School D
(Tower Hamlets)

"I always knew because all my sisters did it, so it wasn't an option for me not to." Tashrin, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

Students' narrations [n=4] indicate that older siblings who were educated at the university level were able to provide their younger siblings with guidance and support based on their personal experiences of university. The data show that when older siblings have a positive experience (i.e. university choice and/or degree choice), they tend to encourage

their siblings to make the same choices as them, so they too could have a good experience. On the other hand, if they have had a negative experience, they tried to convince their younger siblings to make alternative choices to prevent them from going through the same difficulties. This suggests that siblings were giving genuine advice and had their siblings' best interests at heart. Some of the responses in the interviews included:

“They all, most of them (siblings) went to Queen Mary, so they wanted me to follow because they thought it was a good place and it’s quite close to home”.
Tashrin, L4, School (Tower Hamlets)

“I have an older sister, she’s two years older than me, and she goes to Queen Mary as well. She does Accounting and Finance. She likes it.” Nadia, L3, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“Well, my sister she did a psychology degree but she was giving me advice about the subjects that I wanted to do because she said that her subject, the thing that she realised is that it’s hard to pursue that field, especially in this country.”
Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

It is not surprising to see that these siblings played an important role, given the fact that they had first-hand experience of the university application process and therefore had knowledge that their parents did not have.

Although most respondents mentioned educated older siblings as being a source of support during this process, the evidence also shows that a small number [n=2] of uneducated siblings played an important role too. They were able to use their negative experiences in the labour market, which they had attributed to not going to university, as a way to convince their younger siblings to pursue HE and avoid making the same ‘mistake’. This suggests that they too, like their parents, perceived HE’s main purpose as a way of achieving economic benefits.

“They (siblings) didn’t go uni but they were like ‘oh go uni like’, because you know apprenticeships after you’ve finished there’s no guarantee that they’ll keep you and stuff, and so my brother is doing his apprenticeship now and his contract is about to finish and he’s like ‘I’m scared because they might not keep me even though I did so well, like there’s also that uncertainty they may not keep me on.’”
Mehraj, L4, School C (Ilford)

Interestingly, the study finds that all respondents mentioned that their older siblings had raised their aspirations, except for one respondent, Bilqis, whose younger sibling was the reason for her wanting to pursue HE. Her sibling had shown interest in going to university in the future, which made Bilqis consider it too. However, I would like to point out that this is a rare example, as in most cases, older siblings were the ones going to university first, and therefore they were the ones paving the way for their younger sibling(s). She commented that:

*“My sister that is younger than me, she is doing her AS right now and for her GCSEs she actually got nine A*s. She wants to do medicine and then when I realised that she’s actually going to go places, I was like I need to fix up. I need to do something with my life as well.”* Bilqis, L4, School D (Ilford)

4.3.3 Influence of the extended family

This section discusses the influence of extended family members (mainly uncles, aunts and cousins) on the decision to go to university. Extended family members emerged in this study as having some influence (see Figure 9). This was expected because half of respondents had indicated that they had extended family members who were educated at university level. In addition, it was evident that these students were part of closely-knit families and that their extended families played an important role in their lives.

This study found that seven out of the 19 participants pointed to their extended family as having considerable influence on their decision to go university. When asked about how these family members had influenced their decision to progress to university, two respondents indicated that having an educated extended family had served as an example of the benefits of university. Seeing family members benefiting economically from going to university was a strong motivating factor. Witnessing them having secured respectable jobs and being able to go on extravagant holidays reaffirmed students’ decision to go university.

“My mummy’s sister, she’s a radiographer and currently she’s banned for, and she’s going back to uni next year and she is now... she has been to nice countries in the past year. For her honeymoon, she went to five countries, and for her

birthday she went to Iceland, right now she's in Turkey and I was like I'm not going to be able to do the travelling that I want to do if I don't get the right job." Bilqis, L4, School C (Ilford)

Extended family members have been found to be very much involved in the university application process by providing students with guidance and support to ensure that they were successful. However, this was not always a perfect process. Although Bilqis and Karim were grateful for the support they received, their responses indicate that their extended family members took over the application process, leaving these students to feel that they did not have much of a say or control over certain aspects of the decision-making process. However, because these family members were perceived as role models and they had the knowledge and the experience that these students did not have, students did not have the confidence to oppose their views. These are some of the responses from the interviews.

"I think the only thing that was a bit draining was the personal statement because I've never written a personal statement in my life and the first one that I've written, my aunty read it, the one that has already got a degree, she was like 'what on earth is this?' She completely changed it from top to bottom, she was like nope scrap that, scrap that." Bilqis, L4, School C (Ilford)

"I would have done a very niche-specific course on cybersecurity over three years, but my cousins said it should be a good university, so with the good universities they have broad courses of computer science, and that's kind of influenced me a little bit more than what I would have chosen" Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

The students' responses indicate that the support they received was based on their extended family members' personal experiences and knowledge of the university application process; however, there was one exception – Karim's uncle was working as a lecturer and was using his expertise to provide his nephew with privileged information. What became clear is the fact that this type of information and support was not accessible to most respondents in this study. This is not surprising, given the fact that most of these students come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, meaning that their access to professional individuals within their social networks was very limited. He commented that:

“My uncles they’ve had a lot of networks, one of them is a lecturer so they have networks within the university, so they advised me on what courses and what the content and how it will be like, so they’ve supported me, which is why I chose King’s rather than another university.” Karim, L4, School C (Ilford)

4.3.4 Influence of friends

This section discusses the influence of peers (e.g. friends and classmates) on Bangladeshi students’ decision to go to university. Peers emerged as the second most important influencers after parents (see Figure 9). Nine of the 19 students interviewed indicated that their school peers influenced their decision to go university. Interestingly, students’ responses indicated that only their close friends were influential in their decision. Peers have been found to play an important role in the development of university aspirations; however, unlike others in the students’ social networks (parents, siblings), their influence was indirect, meaning that they did not have conversations in which peers actively encouraged them or expected them to go university.

A few students [n=5] considered going to university because their friends were also planning to go to university. Their responses indicate that most of the students spoke with their friends about their future plans, including their aspirations to go to university. These talks played an important role in convincing those who may have been unsure about their next step to choose HE. This finding suggests that students who have high educational expectations can raise the educational aspirations of their friends. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents’ comments included:

“Because like they’ll (friends) be talking about ‘oh I want to go here for uni, I want to go there for uni’, and then I’ll just be very confused, like I don’t know what to do, like I don’t know whether I should be going to uni or not, so just them talking about it... That’s how they’ve influenced me.” Mehraj, L4, School C (Ilford)

“I think deep down, I know that... because there is a lot of other people, my friends going to university, it does, it makes you want to go as well.” Najiyah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

The findings show that two students' responses indicated that they were not only influenced by friends who were going through the same educational journey, but also friends who were already at university. Their responses indicate that these friends shared with them their positive experiences of being at university. This insight worked to reinforce their decision to pursue HE because they did not want to 'miss out' on this experience. However, this was only limited to two students with friends at HE; therefore, the influence is not very profound. A few reasons cited in the interview included:

"Them talking about it... like I want to experience that too." Mehraj, L4, School C (Ilford)

"I have a few [friends] that are older. They said it's a good experience as well." Shakil, L1, School D (Tower Hamlets)

It is clear from the above that students received instrumental support from individuals who are ahead of them by at least a couple of years or more, so it is surprising that one student, Karim, reported receiving help from his friends during the university application process. Considering that these students and their friends were going through the university application together, it is not surprising that the majority of their friends were not able to provide them with instrumental support. He commented that:

"So, like my group of friends, we are like a mix so I'm the computer science, someone is doing economics, someone is doing engineering, so we're all kind of aspiring for the high Russell Group, so we're kind of like competitive but in the same way they will be saying "you should be applying for that university, it's better for you so like we all kind of influence each other." Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

The evidence shows that generally people who make up friendship groups have similar goals and aspirations in life; however, there was one student, Samir, whose friends had attempted to discourage him from going to university. He chose to take a different route to his friends', which made him an outcast. Nevertheless, this did not stop him from applying to university, even if it meant losing their friendship. It is clear that Samir valued his goals more than his friendship with people he perceived to be holding him back. He commented that:

“The people that I grew up with and they’re still my mates and stuff like we hang about, I’m like the only one that’s gonna go uni and all of them were saying ‘oh no it’s a waste’ like ‘oh you would rather just get the apprenticeship, work, you might as well not get in a debt’ and stuff like that, but obviously I don’t know, I just want to be able to prove them wrong as well so imagine me out of all my whole mates getting a degree like they will probably hate.” Samir, L8, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.3.5 Influence of teachers

This section discusses the influence of aspects of the school context, specifically teachers, on Bangladeshi students’ decision to go to university. The results from the questionnaire show that more than half of the respondents indicated that their teachers had a considerable amount of influence on their decision to pursue HE (see Figure 9). However, the findings show that the degree of influence teachers had on students varied between schools (see Table 13). The evidence shows that the students who attended school B reported that their teachers had the most influence, although this is not a coincidence, as it is also the only school that made all their students apply to university, regardless of whether they intended to go or not. The reasoning behind this approach was that if their students’ initial plans did not materialise, then they would still have university as an option.

Table 13: Teachers’ influence

School	‘Not at all’ + ‘A little’ (%)	‘Moderate’ + ‘A lot’ (%)
School A	46.4%	53.6%
School B	37.7%	62.3%
School C	57.2%	42.9%
School D	56.0%	44.0%

Ten out of the 19 students spoke about how their teachers had influenced their HE decisions, particularly from tutors, as they had a close relationship with their students and had more of a pastoral role than other teachers. These are some of the responses from the interviews:

“Like my sociology teacher, like just her teaching me and stuff like that like she’ll always talk about like umm... like if you do it in uni, it’s like really like interesting and stuff like that so like yeah so we just have those uni talks and stuff because she’s also my form tutor so then we talk, and her ex-students would come, and they would say that uni life is like this, uni life is like that, and I would be like ok maybe I want to go to uni and stuff.” Mehraj, L4, School C (Ilford)

“I think my tutor, he was just explaining to me how going outside of London is just, outside going to university is like a different experience, it’s like coming out of your own kind of bubble that you have already created, and it’s just... he was saying how you’re just going to learn a lot more new stuff and I think because of that, that idea of... and meeting new people because I like meeting new different people that kind of excited me, so it’s just like yeah I kind of like to do that.” Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

A number of students [n=6] reported that teachers purposefully focused most of their talks and activities about post-18 options on HE. At times, they would discuss other possible avenues, but they would always mention how university was a better option in the long run. Their responses indicated that teachers perceived a university qualification as being somewhat superior to other qualifications. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents’ comments included:

“You wouldn’t notice, but if you kind of keep an eye they always want university... so they say you can do an apprenticeship but have uni as a back-up, they always pressing on apply to uni in case they... I don’t know if anyone notices but I notice that whenever they talk about apprenticeships, always towards the end they will subtly say in case [they] apply for university, they always have the focal point of you should apply for university.” Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“They do talk about university a lot but they do try to balance it a bit with apprenticeship and stuff but they do say like you get a degree from university, you’re most likely you’re going to get a respectful job, at least good salary, decent salary.” Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Two participants indicated that because their teachers had focused so much of their attention on university that they were unable to pursue other avenues. The teachers’ approach was biased towards HE, which resulted in limiting the options students had access to.

“I think they (teachers) mainly focus on uni and that’s why I like struggled with looking for an apprenticeship because they don’t do that much.” Maisha, L6, School D (Tower Hamlets)

However, some teachers took a more balanced approach. Three participants reported that their teachers had spoken to them about various options that were available to them post-compulsory education, and they acknowledged that university was not for everyone. This is one of the responses from the interview:

“They do talk about a lot of routes, apprenticeships, jobs that you can get and everyone, uni as well. Like a lot of times, we have assemblies about apprenticeships because they know that uni is not always the way. They make people choose different paths just in case.” Rejwan, L6, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Five students also indicated that their teachers had high expectations for them, which in turn raised their aspirations. They expected them to go to university, get a degree and lead successful lives. These expectations reflected the parents’ requirements for their children’s future. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents’ comments included:

“Our school definitely does want students to go to university, and I wouldn’t say there is pressure like overloading pressure, but there are expectations and... there’s definitely umm like expectation for us to do well, secure a future in which we have a degree.” Najiyah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“Obviously because they have a degree, they would say oh university is... you have to go to university like they say you can get an apprenticeship and stuff, but then they don’t really focus on that, so it’s like if you don’t go to university then what’s the point of being here, that’s their mentality.” Hafiza, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Teachers not only had high expectations for their students, but they also provided them with the tools to achieve them. A number of students [n=7] indicated that their teachers had played an important role in guiding them through the university application process and that they were a primary source of privileged information. Teachers did this by facilitating a range of preparatory activities to support students, including organising university and employer talks, informing students about spring/summer schools at universities, offering workshops and holding mentoring sessions with current university students and professionals. This is one of the responses:

“There was this programme this school did it was INTO SCIENCE and it got me into this UCL target market medicine, so one of my mentors you know I took his email, I was contacting him saying ‘oh guide, you know tell me how to write a personal statement.’” Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.3.6 Influence of school advisers

The study established that school advisers did not play an important role in Bangladeshi students’ decision to pursue HE, with only 35.7% of the sample indicating that school advisers had influenced their decision (see Figure 9). However, the findings show that the amount of influence school advisers have had on students varied between schools (see Table 14). The findings suggest that school advisers in schools A and B may have been more involved in students’ HE decision-making process than those at schools C and D.

Table 14: School advisers' influence

School	‘Not at all’ + ‘A little’ (%)	‘Moderate’ + ‘A lot’ (%)
School A	65.8	34.2
School B	53.4	46.6
School C	71.4	28.6
School D	87.5	12.5

School advisers’ limited influence may be explained by the fact that their involvement mainly entailed providing students with guidance and advice on alternative routes (non-HE); therefore, their role in the students’ HE decision-making process was seen as moderate. According to two participants, school advisers only provided them with information on more vocational routes (i.e. apprenticeships). These findings suggest that in some schools, teachers and school advisers were allocated different roles; school advisers were the main sources of information about alternative pathways, whereas teachers were the main sources of information on HE. This is reflected below:

“It was at my secondary school, so she (school adviser) advised me to do an Apprenticeship, so that’s when I started going to family and asking them whether apprenticeships are... they said it would have been better if you go university.” Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“With school adviser it’s more about like work experience, it’s more about like he comes up with like apprenticeships and stuff, he introduces it to us and then

we apply. With university I feel like it's more like our form tutors, they persuade us." Nadia, L3, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.3.7 Influence of family friends

The evidence indicates that family friends also played a limited role in this process, with 18.4% of participants indicating that their family friends had influenced their decision to pursue HE. Unfortunately, none of the students who took part in the second phase (interview) of the study had indicated that they had family friends that had influenced their decision to go to university in the first phase (questionnaire), so I was unable to explore this line of enquiry any further. However, what became evident was the fact that these students were part of a community that is close-knit and mostly based on kinship ties, suggesting that parents did not have many friends, which may explain their limited role during the university process.

4.3.8 Influence of the Bangladeshi community

The study establishes that Bangladeshi students were part of a close-knit community, yet only 18% of respondents indicated that they were influenced by community members when making the decision to pursue HE. Although from the students' perspective, the community may not have shaped these young people's educational aspirations, the evidence does show that they shaped the aspirations that the students' parents had for them, indicating an indirect effect. Students' narrations [n=7] indicate that there was a lot of pressure put on Bangladeshi parents to ensure that their children went to university. There was a concern that shame and embarrassment would be brought onto the family should they not pursue HE, because young people without a degree were perceived as failures by the community. One of the responses included:

"I think the people we know from Bangladesh, like around here who are Bengali, university is obviously like a main thing, and people do talk bad about people who don't go uni." Mohammed, L3, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Two female participants mentioned that there has been somewhat of a shift recently in terms of cultural expectations for women in the Bangladeshi community, which is another influence on the students' decision to go to university. Getting married and

having a family was seen as the natural next step for young women after high school; however, these views have changed in recent years, and it is becoming more acceptable for them to go to university. This may be explained by the community's exposure to Western values, where men and women are seen as being equal and have the same opportunities. This is reflected in Nadia's response:

"I guess like previously it wasn't expected, I think previously especially girls they got married really young, like my mum got married when she was 17 so I don't think it was expected, but now it's more and more expected, like my father he doesn't like you know when people get married young, he's so against it now."
Nadia, L3, School B (Tower Hamlets)

However, there were also female participants [n=2] who indicated that those cultural expectations still remained in their community, although they were not as prevalent. This pressure was not experienced by male respondents, so there were clearly deep-rooted beliefs and traditions that promoted a patriarchal society that encouraged women to stay at home whilst the males got an education. In the case of these girls, they managed to fight through it and still pursue HE, despite facing obstacles from their community. These are some of the responses given in the interviews:

"What really pushed me is that I have some family members, like aunties and stuff like that, and they have like traditional thinking like don't go uni, like girls can't go uni." Mehraj, L4, School C (Ilford)

"That's something else that has encouraged me to go university. I don't want to get married now." Bilqis, L4, School C (Ilford)

The students' narrations [n= 3] show that the Bangladeshi community's motivations were very much driven by the economic returns of HE. This is not surprising given the fact that Bangladeshis came to this country as economic migrants. Although the findings show that the Bangladeshi community put a lot of emphasis on HE, the reasons for this were less about the values that students would acquire (knowledge and skills) and more about the economic benefits. Tahmid's statement reinforces this notion, as he points out that if he had chosen not to go university and had taken another pathway, but was successful, meaning he was in a good financial position, then the community would not have perceived him as a 'failure', despite not having gone to university. He says:

“With the Bengali community you have to go university or else you’re a failure, and basically if you don’t go uni and you do something else, as long as you have money then you are successful, if you don’t have money then they won’t talk about you, they won’t talk big of you.” Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.3.9 Summary

This section investigated the role that students’ social networks have played in influencing their decision to pursue HE. The study identified which individuals have the most and least influence, and then investigated how these individuals were able to shape students’ decision-making. The findings indicate that parents were the most important influencers, followed by friends, teachers, siblings and other family members. The individuals with the least influence were school advisers, family friends and members of the community. Participants were also given the opportunity to discuss the different ways that their social networks had influenced them. The evidence shows that parents played an important role in shaping students’ decision to pursue HE by placing expectations on them and encouraging them to go to university; this, in turn, raised their aspirations. However, most parents were unable to provide the students with the guidance and support that they needed to achieve this goal, but other individuals in students’ social networks were able to step in to bridge this gap. Educated older siblings, extended family members and teachers were able to provide students with the much-needed instrumental support that enabled them to navigate the university application process with confidence and ease. However, there were some individuals in students’ social networks who did not provide the same level of support. For the most part, friends did not provide much guidance and support; however, this is not surprising given the fact that they were going through the university process at the same time, meaning that it would not be expected that they would have more knowledge. Additionally, according to the participants’ responses, the Bangladeshi community had very minimal influence on their decision to go to university; however, it seems that community members had an influence on the aspirations that their parents had for them, indicating an indirect effect. Lastly, the empirical evidence shows that family friends had very minimal influence, which may be explained by the fact that these students were part of a community that is close-knit but mostly based on kinship ties.

4.4 MOTIVATING FACTORS

As indicated in the literature review, young people’s intention to continue with full-time education after compulsory education is shaped by various factors. In the questionnaire, participants’ attitudes to HE participation were explored by seeking their views on a list of 11 statements. This approach allowed me to determine which factors had the most/least influence in their HE decision-making process. Once again, a Likert scale ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘a lot’ was used to measure which aspects had the most influential effects on these young people’s choices (Figure 10). These findings were then explored in more depth during the interviews to understand how these factors shaped their decision.

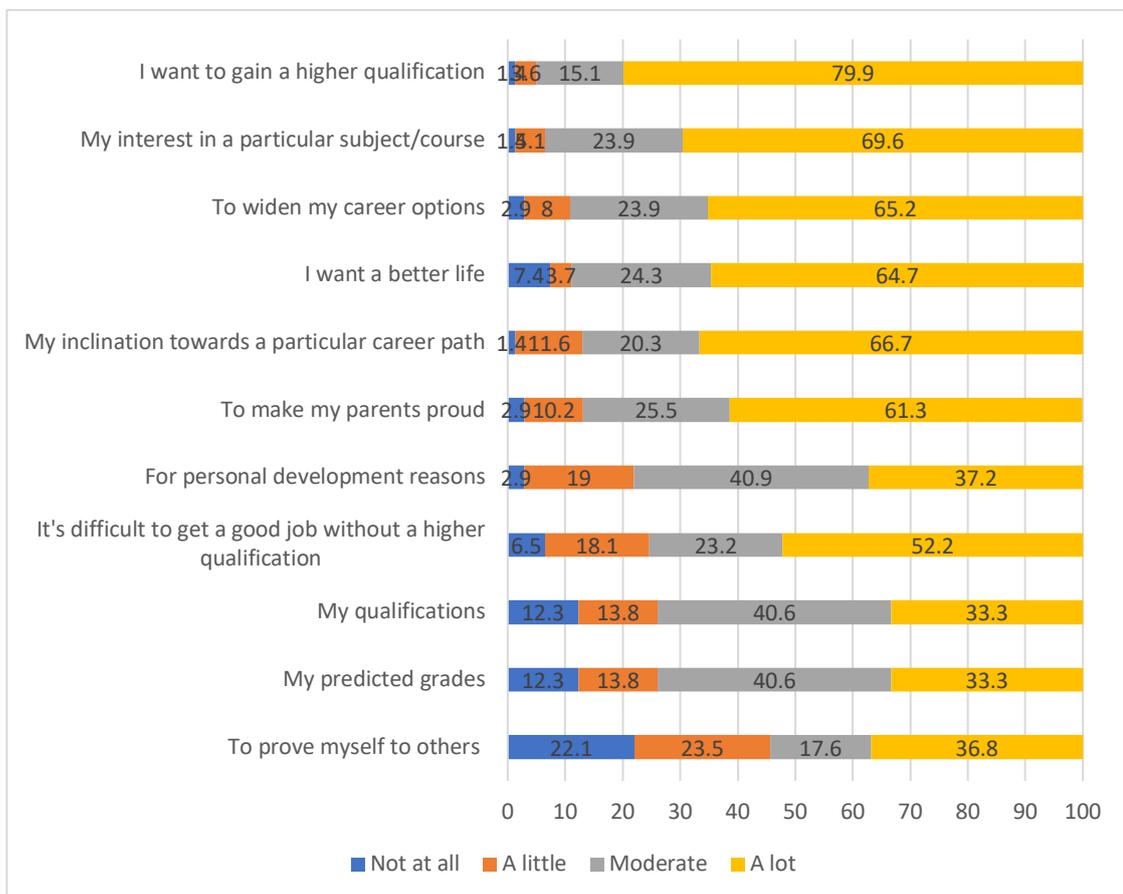


Figure 10: Influencing factors and choice to pursue HE as percentage

4.4.1 Academic credentials

The most important factor that influenced the students’ decision to attend university was to gain a degree. When further asked about the reasons for gaining a degree, the students highlighted two main reasons; the first of which was that having a degree would widen

their job opportunities. Students' narrations [n=17] show that academic credentials were perceived as having an important role in shaping employment outcomes in this competitive labour market. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents' comments included:

"I personally feel like if I went to university and I got a degree like I would be guaranteed a job." Sabirah, L4, School D (Tower Hamlets)

"The main reason is for a degree. It's going to make it easier for me to get jobs." Hafiza, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Another reason that influenced students' decision to go to university was that they [n=5] wanted to be the first family member to achieve this accomplishment. As no one in their immediate family had done it before, going to university was perceived as an important achievement that they could be proud of. Interestingly, their first generation university student status did not seem to faze or worry them; in fact, they were looking forward to going to university – gaining a higher qualification was more important than the apprehension of this new challenge. These are some of the responses from the interviews:

"Because firstly I would have a degree, no one in my family went to uni, so I would be the first one." Samir, L8, School B (Tower Hamlets)

"I got to study, study and become successful and no one in my family ever got a degree, so I've got to be the first one." Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.4.2 Degree as a prerequisite for a 'good' job

Figure 10 shows that most respondents were motivated to go to university because they believed that it was difficult to get a 'good' job without a degree qualification. In this case, a 'good' job was referred to as professional and high-paying jobs, which they aspired for. They perceived an almost guaranteed linkage between a degree and employment because they believed employers valued applicants with degree qualifications. This was the case for 17 out of the 19 participants. Although this shows that students had some knowledge and understanding of the labour market, which they used to choose the route that they believed would be most financially rewarding, their knowledge was limited. They were not aware of the need to develop additional credentials and resources to be able to stand a good chance of finding a graduate job.

Their labour market understanding reflected meritocratic expectations and a reliance on the buying power of the degree. This may be explained by the fact that the main message coming from their parents was that a university degree would secure a graduate job. Some of the responses in the interviews included:

“A degree doesn’t just show that you have the knowledge, but the skills and it’s the transferable skills that I really think that are more valuable to an employer... like if I was an employer, I would want my employees to have some sort of degree background. So, if you think of it from their point of view, it makes sense why they would want that.” Najiyah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“To get a good job because those who go to uni get better jobs.” Waseem, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.4.3 Inclination towards a particular career path

Respondents were asked whether their decision to go university was related to their career aspirations; most respondents (81%) agreed with this. According to the responses of a number of participants [n=13], their chosen degree was a requirement for them to be able to pursue a job in their chosen field. Once again, the evidence shows that students’ motivations for entering HE were instrumental, as reflected in some of the comments:

“I want to study medicine because obviously, the end job is to become a doctor, so that was always what I wanted to be. So that’s why I pursued it.” Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“Because of the sector I want to get into, it would be very difficult to just purely work and then gain the skills, rather than getting the skills and applying them, so the course that I’m doing comes with a year of industrial experience so as I’m learning, I’m also going to be working.” Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

Respondents were also asked to state what their career aspirations were in order to provide a better understanding of the type of jobs they were aspiring to. Most students were able to answer this question, indicating that they had clear career aspirations before their entry to HE (see Table 15). All were aspiring for professional jobs, except for those who were unsure about their future career plans. Becoming an accountant was very popular amongst this sample, followed by being a lawyer/solicitor/barrister or a teacher. When looking at the classification of these jobs using the NS-SEC classification, the

results show that the majority (79%) of participants were aspiring for higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations. It is evident that these students had high career aspirations and were positive and hopeful about their future. It is clear that the end goal of the students was obtaining the jobs that they see themselves in, and their choice to go to university was based on this.

Table 15: Job aspiration

Job aspiration*	Frequency	Percentage
Doctor	8	6.3
Nurse	8	6.3
Biologist	3	2.4
Banker	4	3.2
Lawyer/solicitor/barrister	14	11.1
Pharmacist	4	3.2
Teacher	9	7.1
Social worker	3	2.4
Optometrist	3	2.4
Designer	2	1.6
Therapist/Psychologist	5	4.0
IT	2	1.6
Finance	2	1.6
Engineer	3	2.4
Programmer	4	3.2
Civil servant	2	1.6
Accountant	15	11.9
I don't know	15	11.9

*Jobs aspired to that had <1 were disregarded in this table.

4.4.4 Financial stability

Students were also heavily motivated by their desire to lead 'better lives' (Figure 9). When asked what they meant by a 'better life', their responses indicated that they were referring to financial security [n=9]. These respondents saw an almost guaranteed linkage between graduate employment and a high salary; hence, they expected high financial returns from HE. Participation in HE was perceived as an instrumental means of achieving upward mobility, indicating that they were attempting to escape their working-class roots. Thus, their decision to study at university was based on a strong reflection of

their class background. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents' comments included:

“Because you know my family is from a working-class background, so no one in my family has done anything that big or anything in that sense, and I feel like it's not just for me, but I feel a bit of pressure to kind of change that and do something different and try to get a respectable job and earn good money at the same time.” Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“I think you know when you go to university it opens more doors for you so like obviously like the basics you get better pay, because if I don't get a degree, say I don't and I go out, I don't know what I'll do to be honest with you. I would probably have to get a job in retail or something.” Nadia, L3, School B (Tower Hamlets)

The findings also indicate that some students [n=6] chose to go university not only to benefit themselves, but also to benefit their immediate family. A number of respondents stated that they wanted to go to university because they wanted to be able to support their family financially. They were referring to their parents, siblings and their future families. Interestingly, both genders felt that it was their duty to support their family. Having witnessed their parents struggle to support them financially through their education has made them feel that they needed to give something back to show their appreciation. However, the findings do not suggest that this was an expectation that their parents had of them, as none of the respondents indicated that their parents had explicitly asked them to support them financially; rather, this was something that the students wanted to do for them. These are some of the responses from the interviews:

“So, a better life I would say for me would be to please my parents... and just, I have seen how much they struggled so it's just like, to go to the traditional way I feel like most people have succeeded that way as well so to go that way, the best chance to impress my parents and support them as well.” Mohammed, L3, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“Better life is going into a shop and not having to look at the price tag, just buying whatever you need and want because I'm the type of person, for me everything revolves around my family so everything I buy is never for me, it's always for someone else, like my mum's birthday. I don't want to struggle to... I don't want to have to struggle where I'm thinking 'oh can I buy this for him, or can I buy this for her.’” Bilqis, L4, School C (Ilford)

“Being able to pay for my parents’ mortgage and stuff like that.” Tahmed, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.4.5 Interest in a subject

Respondents were highly motivated to go to university because they had an interest in a particular subject and were therefore eager to learn more about it (see Figure 10). The vast majority had done their chosen subject previously at GCSE and/or A-level, or had covered aspects of their chosen subject, which had given them an insight into what it would be like to study it further. Many participants [n=13] mentioned that their decision to pursue HE was driven by their desire to achieve intellectual growth and stimulation. What is of interest is that students took into account the enjoyment of going to university, as well as other important factors, to guide their decision. There are some of the comments from the interviews.

“I’ve always wanted to do that (Business and Marketing degree) since like Year 10, so when I got into media in GCSE, I kind of liked the marketing side so from there I just kind of stuck with it.” Aboni, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“I really enjoy the subject and I’m doing Politics A-level right now so that has already given me a flavour of what the degree might be like and I want to explore some parts of the course such as Global Politics more... I just really want to enjoy my degree.” Najiyah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

4.4.6 Prior academic achievements

The study established that respondents’ past academic performance shaped their educational choices. Most respondents indicated that their prior qualifications and their predicted grades had influenced their decision to go to university (Figure 10). Four respondents stated that they chose to pursue HE because they knew that they were academically able to do so. This was based on the fact that they had done well in prior examinations, which made them feel confident that they would be able to deal well with university demands. Amongst these first generation university entrants, there was also an attitude that prior academic achievements provided self-validation and offered a sense of legitimacy to enter HE. These findings show that academic attainment is an important

factor that students take into consideration when deciding whether they should pursue HE. This is reflected in Najiyah's response below:

“Because of the grades that I am achieving now and I have achieved with my GCSEs, because it shows that I have been able to get this far and been able to show progress with my education and I am academically able so I don't think it's a barrier in terms of like oh I'm worried about whether I will be passing the exams.” Najiyah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

4.4.7 Personal growth

Figure 10 shows that most respondents were motivated to go to university by their desire to achieve personal growth. They saw the university experience as a good opportunity to be able to work on themselves and maximise their potential on a personal level. When respondents were asked what they wanted to develop about themselves, the answers included their social skills [n=4], self-confidence [n=4], maturity level [n=4] and having a larger social circle [n=8]. These findings point to the fact that students were not only motivated by the long-term benefits (an increase in employment prospects, financial security) of having a degree, but also by the more immediate benefits they would experience whilst still being at university. This is not surprising, given the fact that the focus of the advice that students received is based on academic growth rather than personal growth. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents' comments included:

“I think I need to work more on my social skills and it's not always about academic skills. You have to know people. You have to have connections and like you have to like have a social life to like grow up and have a family and everything like that.” Mohammed, L3, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“I think it would be confidence, so being able to walk up to a group and just being able to speak like confidently, getting my point out without like hindering myself so I think yeah I would say I'm a bit shy so I would want to be to get myself out there more.” Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“I think as a character, as a person right, you know I want to become more mature.” Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“The fact that I'm going to be entering higher education, I'll be able to make more networks with other people from different backgrounds. I think it's very

important to expose myself in that kind of environment.” Najiyah, L8, School D, Tower Hamlets

4.4.8 Gaining recognition

The findings from the study, which are reported in Figure 10, indicate that most respondents were motivated by their desire to make their parents proud. A few students [n=8] felt a sense of responsibility to give back to their parents for their hard work and sacrifices, suggesting that their parents had gone above and beyond to give them the best start to life, despite economic and social disadvantages. These students felt an obligation to be successful to prove that their parents’ sacrifices were not in vain, and one way they believed they could achieve this was by going to university. This is one of the responses from the interview:

“I want to do it for my parents too because I want to make them proud as well.” Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

The study further establishes that the least important factor that influenced students’ decision to pursue HE was to prove themselves to other people; however, the findings do show that just over half of respondents were motivated by this factor (see Figure 10). When asked who these people were, a number of participants [n=6] indicated that they were referring to their family, particularly parents and extended family. University participation was perceived as a common trend in the Bangladeshi community; as a result, students felt pressure to prove that they were also capable of going to university. These findings reaffirm the fact that these students’ decision to pursue HE was largely influenced by external rewards, in this case gaining recognition. Here are some of the responses:

“Family, extended family.” Maisha, L6, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“Mostly my family, I do really care about what they think.” Tashrin, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“To prove myself to people like family, to my cousins, to my parents.” Nadia, L3, School B (Tower Hamlets)

4.4.9 Summary

This section explored the motivating factors underpinning students' decision to pursue HE. The study has identified the factors that had the most and least influence on students' HE decision-making process. The findings show that the most important factor was to 'gain higher qualification', which was followed by 'having an interest in a particular subject' that students wanted to learn more about. The evidence also shows that students' decision to go to university was heavily motivated by an expected increase in career opportunities and income. These students perceived an almost guaranteed linkage between having a degree and employment because they believed that employers valued applicants with degree qualifications. Although this shows that students had some knowledge and understanding of the labour market, which they used to choose the route that they believed would be most financially rewarding, their knowledge was limited. They were not aware of the need to develop additional credentials and resources to be able to stand a good chance of securing a graduate job. Additionally, the findings show that students were also largely motivated by their desire to make their parents proud. This is because their parents have sacrificed a lot in order to give them the best start to life; therefore, students felt obliged to go to university to show that their parents' sacrifices were not in vain. On the other hand, the least important factor that influenced students' decision to pursue HE was the need to prove themselves to people within their social networks.

4.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING UNIVERSITY CHOICE

As indicated in the literature review, young people’s choice of institution has been shaped by various factors. In the questionnaire, participants’ attitudes to HE participation were explored by seeking their views on a list of 12 statements. The aim of this was to understand what was most and least important for these respondents when choosing a university. Once again, a Likert scale of ‘not at all’ to ‘a lot’ was used to measure what had the most influential effect on these young people’s choice of university (Figure 11).

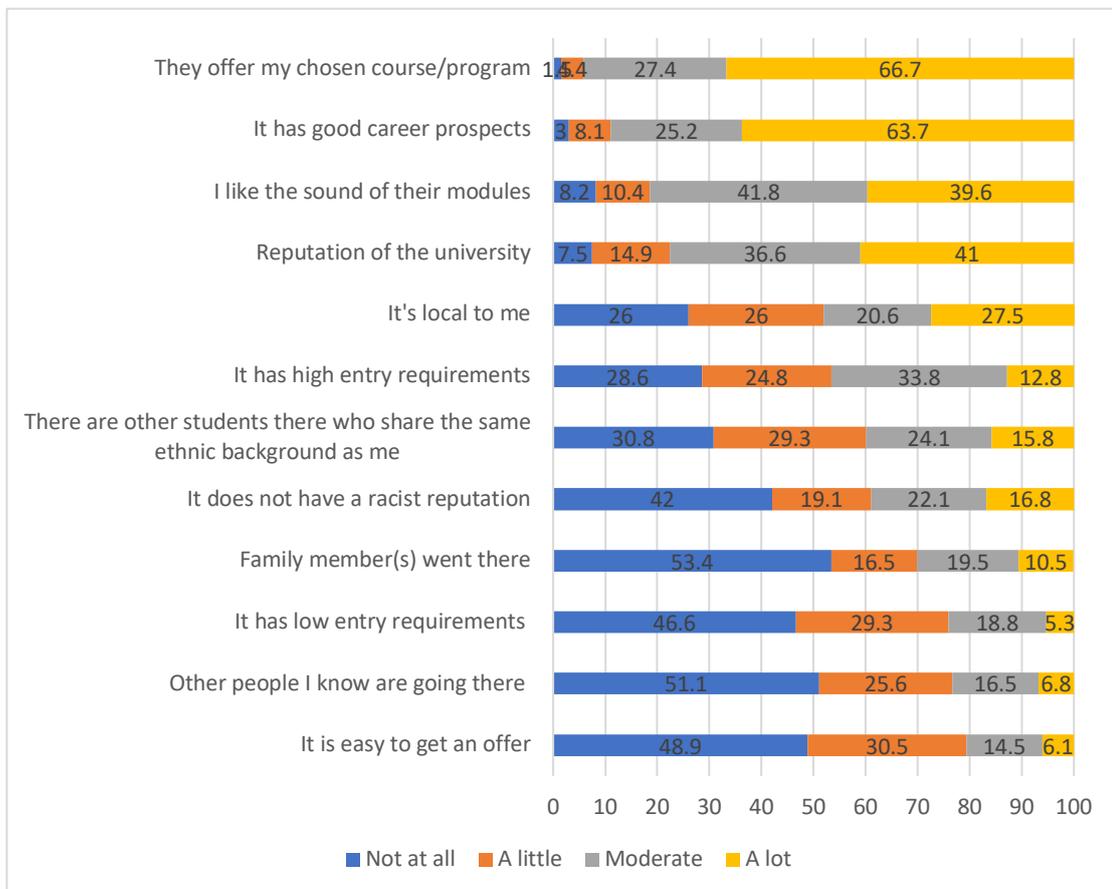


Figure 11: Influencing factors and choice of university as a percentage

4.5.1 Chosen universities

Participants were asked which universities they had applied to in order to determine which universities were the most and least popular amongst the sample. Figure 12 indicates that Queen Mary was the most popular university, followed by King’s College and City University London. Interestingly, all three of these universities are located in London and were a short commuting distance from Tower Hamlets and Ilford. On the

one hand, the findings show that Oxford University, University of Liverpool and the University of Leeds were the least popular universities. All three of these universities are located outside of London, with the closest university, Oxford University, being around two hours away.

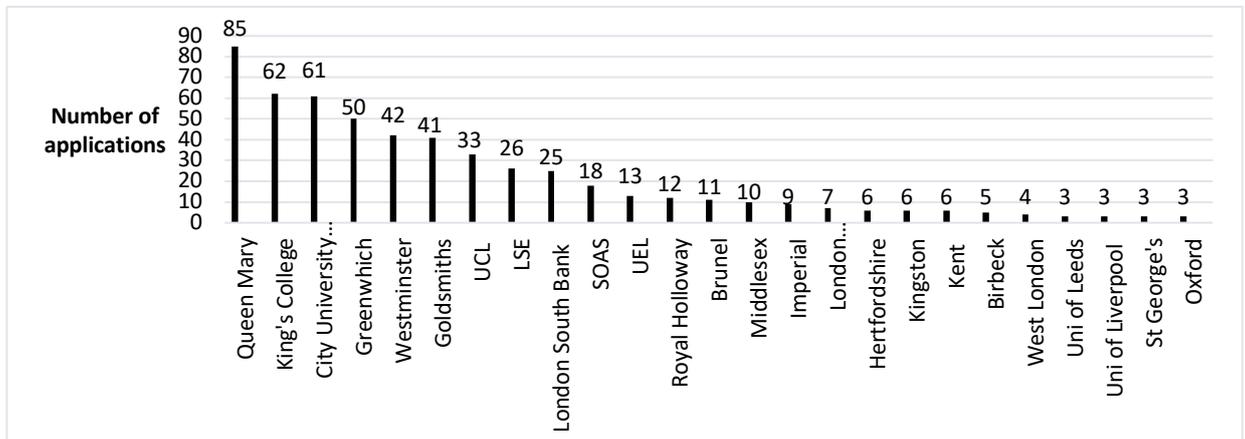


Figure 12: Universities participants applied to

*Universities that had <2 application were disregarded in this table.

Gathering information regarding the universities that participants had applied to helped to determine whether these students were more inclined to apply to elite or non-elite universities. The study used Russell Group universities (leading UK universities) and pre-1992 universities as indicators for elite, research-intensive universities. On the other hand, post-1992 universities were used as indicators for less prestigious universities. The findings show that 68% of the students' applications were made to pre-1992 universities, over half (56%) of which were made to Russell Group universities. The difference between Russell Group and pre-1992 universities may be influenced by proximity and the fact that there are more pre-1992 universities than Russell Group universities. The findings show that only 32% of applications were made to post-1992 universities, showing that participants were more inclined to apply to elite universities, particularly pre-1992 universities, than non-elite universities.

Participants were also asked which university they were aspiring to attend in order to determine which of the universities they actually wanted to go to. Once again, Queen Mary was the most popular choice, followed by King's College and Goldsmiths, University of London. The findings show that 86% of participants aspired to attend a pre-

1992 university, 69% of which were Russell Group universities. The findings clearly show that these students had high aspirations and that they aspired to attend the ‘best’ universities in the country.

4.5.2 Course

Participants were asked about their opinions and perceptions of the courses offered by a university. In particular, they were asked if their decision about choice of institution would be influenced by whether a university offers their chosen course. Figure 11 shows that most respondents were not willing to compromise on their subject choice, meaning that universities that did not offer their chosen course were not considered in the shortlisting process. This means that the choice of university hinges on the course that the students want to study: if the university does not offer their chosen course, the student will not even consider that university. This is a primary factor of influence. Students’ narrations [n=13] indicate that this is the case because their chosen degree was an entry requirement for their chosen career.

“Well, I want to study medicine because obviously the job is to become a doctor so that was always what I wanted to be... So that’s why I pursued it. I like science, I like helping people so I was gravitating towards that.” Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

One of the secondary factors of influence is the content of the modules offered by the university. Participants were asked about their opinions and perceptions of the modules offered by a university. That is, whether the content of the modules offered would influence their choice of university. The study establishes that a large number (81.4%) of respondents’ choice of university was influenced by the modules that they offered. The evidence shows that it was important for these students to attend a university that would enable them to further their knowledge about topics that they had an interest in and that they would enjoy. Below is one of the responses from the interviews:

“The contents and the modules they seem to be really interesting compare to other unis.” Samirah, L4, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Some participants (n=3) indicated that universities offering students a placement year was a factor that they took into consideration when making their university choice. Although they did not specifically mention the reasons for wanting a placement year, the evidence shows that it was important for these students to attend a university that would give them the opportunity to gain some work experience relevant to their degree. Some of the responses in the interviews included:

“They have a placement year which you can go abroad to and that’s something that really interests me, so I really want to go there and do that.” Mohammed, L3, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“Because I know that university offers work placement.” Aboni, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“It’s just because they had a placement year.” Mehraj, L4, School C (Ilford)

4.5.3 University reputation

Participants were asked about their opinions and perceptions of whether the perceived overall reputation of a university was an important factor. The majority of participants deemed the factor of the university reputation to be of some importance (see Figure 11). Students aspired to attend elite universities, particularly Russell Group universities, because of the prestigious status that comes with them. The importance of attending an elite university was only highlighted by their teachers rather than their parents, as indicated by the number of students that were supported by their teachers in the application process [n=10]. From the parents’ perspective, their child is successful if they go to university, regardless of the rank of the university. These are some of the responses from the interviews:

“Because it’s a Russell Group (King’s College). I really want to get into a Russell Group university, and I know how competitive it is within London to get into a Russell Group.” Najiyah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“Because I think obviously the uni (Queen Mary) has a really good reputation.” Tashrin, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“King’s is like a good university, it’s a Russell Group and yeah I really want to go there.” Hafiza, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

The students’ narrations indicated that the course reputation was also an important determining factor amongst my sample. Some [n=3] participants mentioned that attending a university that is excellent for their chosen subject was an influential factor in their choice of university because it was perceived as a good indicator of the quality of teaching, course content and resources available. Below are some of the responses.

“They (Hertfordshire University) have one of the best marketing courses.” Mohammed, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“Well, they (City University) specialise in Business, they have a business school, so I want to take Business and Marketing.” Aboni, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

Participants were asked about their opinions and perceptions of whether they perceived the reputation of a university’s career prospects as an important factor. That is, whether the reputation of a university that has a perceived high employment rate amongst its graduates would influence their choice of university. The findings from the study, which are shown in Figure 11, indicate that most students would consider universities that had a reputation for offering their students good job prospects; some students perceived this as a good indicator for their future career prospects [n=5].

“If I go to a university that is known for having employable graduates, then I’m likely to also likely to get a job after I finish my degree.” Tashrin, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

Unlike the other university factors mentioned above, the racist reputation of a university did not have a large impact on students’ choice of university. The racist reputation of a university refers to a university’s perceived reputation of racial harassment on campus. The findings show that only 39% of participants indicated that attending a university that does not have a racist reputation was a critical determining factor in their choice of institution. This evidence suggests that for these students, facing racism on campus was not one of their main concerns when considering a university, likely because these

students have not experienced racism in school, and therefore are not expecting any racism at university. Concerning this factor, some of the respondents' comments included:

"I know people that went there so they were saying everyone is alright with each other." Samir, L8, School B (Tower Hamlets)

"I hope that they don't have a racist reputation, from the students you know what they call it, they do the survey thing to see how much they enjoy their course, so it's like 80% 95%, so from that I keep on thinking that if the students are happy, they must be doing something right, and I don't think that if there was racism that the students would be happy." Tahmid, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

Participants were asked about the opinions and perceptions of the ethnic diversity of students in universities and how this may affect their choice. That is, whether universities that have more homogenous student populations, particularly large Bangladeshi populations, would influence their choice of university. The empirical evidence indicates that attending a university where other students share the same ethnic background was only an important determining factor for 40% of the sample; this suggests that 60% of students were open to other cultures.

"I know some people that go to Queen Mary like family friends. I know there is a lot of Bengolies, that is what they say, but I haven't heard anything bad about that uni." Rejwan, L6, School D (Tower Hamlets)

4.5.4 Entry requirements

Participants were asked about their opinions and perceptions of a university in relation to the entry requirements, and whether the entry requirements, which are the asking qualifications, subjects and exam grades, would influence their choice of university. Almost half of the participants (47%) indicated that they were more likely to choose a university because it had high entry requirements (see Figure 11). This may be explained by the fact that high entry requirements tend to be associated with elite universities. As highlighted in the chosen university section, most students applied to elite universities; therefore, it is clear that high entry requirements do not dissuade students from choosing an elite university.

On the other hand, around a quarter (24%) of participants indicated that they would choose a university because it had low entry requirements. The evidence also shows that around a fifth (21%) of participants indicated that they would choose a university because it was ‘easy’ to get into. A number of participants [n=10] indicated that their choice of university was based on the fact that they could meet their entry requirements. These findings show that these participants had chosen to apply to universities that would coincide with their academic level in order to maximise their chances of receiving an offer. Some of the responses in the interviews included:

“I’m going Queen Mary because they’re giving me a decent requirement and then I thought it would be achievable, so I chose it.” Rejwan, L6, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“I chose King’s because of their requirements, so my initial avenue of approach was to do maths A-level, and then it would have allowed to go on to higher universities, but unfortunately I didn’t get in, so it limited my options.” Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“A lot of universities in London, surprisingly, they don’t do chemistry, so King’s is like a good university, it’s a Russell Group and I really want to go there. So that was the only one that I think I could reach the entry requirements for that and that is in London, so that’s like my firm choice.” Hafiza, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

4.5.5 Location

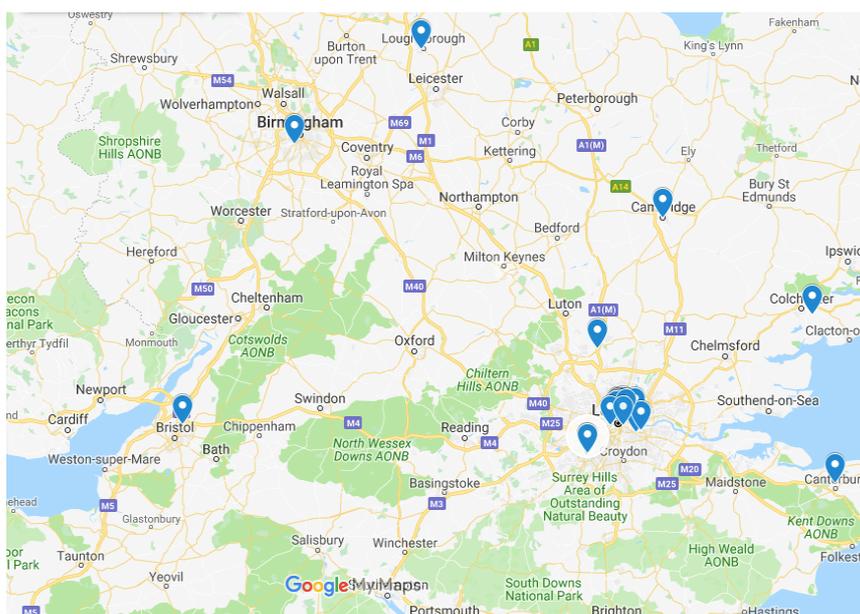


Figure 13: Location of universities participants aspired to attend

Participants were asked about their opinions and perceptions of universities in relation to location and whether the distance of a university would influence their choice. The study shows that almost half of the participants (48%) considered whether a university is in a convenient location as being important to their choice of university (see Figure 11). However, the findings show that a much higher number of participants (93%) aspired to attend a university in London (see Figure 13). This disparity may be explained by the fact that participants could have interpreted the question about location differently. The evidence shows that for some students, as long as the university was in London, it meant that it was local, whereas for others, a university was only perceived as being local if it was close to their home or within a short commuting distance. Despite this difference, it is evident that the majority of these students would have preferred to go to a university located in London rather than outside of London. These findings suggest that many of these students experienced geographical constraints when choosing their university. Below are some of the responses:

“It (Queen Mary) was a good place and it’s quite close to home.” Rejwan, L6, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“It’s just convenient in terms of like the travelling as well because I live in Manor Park, so it takes me by car... it’ll take be about 15-20 minutes, and by train, it’ll probably be about the same amount. So, it’s quite easy for me to go there as well.” Bilqis, L4, School C (Ilford)

“It’s not that far; it’s only a 15-minute drive.” Samirah, L4, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Only a small number of participants (7%) indicated that they would prefer to attend a university outside of London. Interestingly, these students’ university choices, as seen in Figure 13, were still located relatively close to London (Birmingham, Nottingham, Loughborough, Cambridge, Colchester, Canterbury, Bedfordshire and Bristol). This suggests that although these students wanted to go to a university outside of London, they still did not want to be too far away from home.

During the interviews, participants were allowed to share with me their reasons for wanting to attend a local university. The main reason given for this choice was that

moving out of university was not a feasible option, for a number of reasons. The rising costs associated with moving out were off-putting for some students [n=5]. This was expected, given the fact that these students come from unprivileged backgrounds, so it would have been difficult for them to receive financial support from their parents if they had chosen to move out. This finding suggests that there was a powerful influence of structural factors on their university choice. Some of the responses in the interviews included:

“I would be excessively just building up costs instead of living at home, like there is no point. If there was no alternative plan, then I would probably move out of London. I have my parents, I have support as well as I can be working, so there is no reason for me to kind of leave.” Karim, L4, School B (Tower Hamlets)

“Because it’s actually very local and I just thought because of like budget, moneywise, I think it’s much better.” Nadia, L3, School B (Tower Hamlets)

Students’ narrations [n=4] also indicate that they were unable to move out because their parents had made it very clear that they were against it. Parents acted as a barrier by limiting the students’ university choices, which could have compromised their chances of securing a university place. Students had this to say:

“No (moving out is not an option). It’s mainly to do with my own family reasons because I am the only child. Moving out would mean leaving my mum by herself.” Najiyah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“My parents have forbidden me to go Royal Holloway because of the time and the distance and stuff like that. Moving out is not an option.” Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

“With my parents, the big issue was moving out. It was really hard, now they have finally agreed, now they are supporting me but before that, it was really hard, it was very stressful because they were not understanding my point of view.” Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

During the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to share with me their reasons for not wanting to attend a ‘local’ university. Their responses indicate that they did this for different reasons, one being the fact that they wanted to have the ‘university

experience'. The social and experiential benefits of going to university were evidently important for these students [n=3]. These are some of the responses from the interviews:

"I think I want that university experience in that sense." Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

"I want to have an experience basically." Samirah, L4, School D (Tower Hamlets)

Wanting to become more independent was another reason given by two participants for wanting to move out to university. The evidence shows that some students feel like they were too reliant on their parents, and for them, moving out of university was seen as a good opportunity to learn to be more self-sufficient. Their responses suggest that there may be social pressures that influence their decision to move away from home to become more independent.

"For me is like, if I move out, I'll be more independent so it's like I'll just grow up because normally I am really dependent on my parents, I'm such a shy person, I want to meet new people and want know how their life is, I just want learn so I want to know how it is like living by yourself." Samirah, L4, School D (Tower Hamlets)

"Be more independent, that's another thing that kind of drove me." Saymah, L8, School D (Tower Hamlets)

4.5.6 Other influences

Of the least important factors that influenced the students' choice of university was whether they had family members who had been to that university or whether they knew somebody who was going to attend the university with them. For the former factor, only 30% of participants felt that the prior attendance of a family member was important, and for the latter factor only 23.3% felt that going to university with somebody they know is important. The choices made by others around them had very limited influence on their own decisions. Given the fact that the majority of the participants did not have any family members who attended university, it is clear that these students are willing to decide to go to university based on their own experiences. Additionally, when students know somebody in the process of applying to university, that person's choice of university has

only a limited influence on these students' university choice. These findings clearly show that these students make their own choices in regard to the specific university to attend; however, their decision to go to university is heavily influenced by individuals in their social networks.

4.5.7 Summary

This section explored the various factors that influenced Bangladeshi students' choice of HE institution. The study identified the factors that had the most and least influence on students' university choice, and the findings show that the most important factor was 'course availability', as students were not willing to compromise on their subject choice, mainly because it was an entry requirement for their chosen career. The second most important factor was 'employment prospects', as students perceived it as a good indicator for their own future career prospects. Third, 'the module content' was another important factor, as students indicated that they wanted to attend a university that offered modules that they were interested in. By contrast, the least important factor that influenced students' choice of university was the university's entry requirements; only a few participants expressed that they would choose a university because it was 'easy' to get into, indicating that students would prefer universities that had higher entry requirements.

4.5.8 Conclusion of findings chapter

This chapter included an analysis of 140 questionnaires and 19 interviews with British Bangladeshi university entrants. The purpose of this study was to explore their experiences of the university application process in order to gain a better understanding of how British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue HE. The findings have been split into three central themes:

1. Influential individuals, which explored the influences of different individuals within students' social networks on students' decision to pursue HE.
2. Motivating factors, which examined various motivational factors that have contributed to the students' decision to pursue HE.

3. Factors influencing university choice, which looked at a number of key influential factors underpinning students' choice of university.

The study identified parents, siblings, extended family members, teachers and peers as enablers of the progress of British Bangladeshi students in HE. The study also found that economic benefits (enhanced marketability for a better job, attaining their career goals and an increase in their financial earning power) and social benefits (gaining recognition from family, particularly parents and extended family and attaining their social and experiential goals) strongly influenced students' decision to pursue HE. Last, the evidence indicates that the most influential factors underpinning students' choice of university were the availability of course, employability prospects, course content and reputation of the university. The next chapter, Chapter 5, includes the analysis of these themes, grounding them in the existing literature and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of the overarching conclusions that emerged from the findings chapter on the experiences of Bangladeshi university entrants. It seeks to explain how the findings contribute to the body of knowledge on how social capital and sociological rational choice influence young Bangladeshi students with regard to their HE decision-making process. The findings will also be discussed and related to the previous literature, which was presented in Chapter 2.

The study draws from two theoretical frameworks: social capital theory and SRCT. I draw from both constructs found within each framework, rather than operate within the strict parameters of the two theories. This discussion chapter will begin by explaining how the social capital found in Bangladeshi students' social networks contributes, rather than hinders, their decision to pursue HE. The central idea underlying social capital is that social relationships can create resources that can be used to generate desired outcomes (Croll, 2004). In other words, social networks are vital resources that individuals who are part of these networks use to support each other to achieve individual goals that would otherwise be impossible in the absence of social capital. In this study, I attempt to explore how students use the social capital from their social networks to achieve their goal of going to university. I intend to do this by focusing on three specific forms of social capital: (1) social norms, (2) obligations and expectations and (3) information channels. Focusing on these forms of social capital enables me to describe students' actions within a social context and to explain the way their actions have been shaped, constrained or redirected by the social context (Coleman, 1988).

In the second part of this chapter, I intend to use SRCT as an analytical lens to explore the different factors that have influenced Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE and their choice of university. The main idea underlying SRCT is that students are rational decision-makers and that their educational choices are always made to maximise the utility of their education. It also claims that decisions are always embedded in social contexts and influenced by socialisation mechanisms (Jaeger, 2007). In this study, I

intend to explore whether students' choice to go to university and their choice of university was influenced by the expected economic returns and social returns of education. Focusing on these motivating factors enables me to determine whether these students are rational decision-makers whose educational choices were made to maximise utility.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question of this study was “How and why do British Bangladeshi students decide to pursue HE?” This aimed to ascertain the various significant factors that influence British Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE. Using a framework of social capital and sociological rational choice, the following questions were posed:

1. How do the networks of British Bangladeshi students influence their decision to participate in HE?
2. What are the motivating factors that lead British Bangladeshis to pursue HE? a) personal goals, b) career goals
3. What factors have the strongest influence on young Bangladeshi students' choice of HE institution?

Following the three research questions introduced in this study, three research themes were developed, which will be discussed in this chapter. These three themes are (a) influential individuals, (b) motivating factors, and (c) factors influencing university choice.

5.3 THEME 1: INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS

The first question explores how Bangladeshi students' social network members influenced their HE decision-making process. Using the theoretical framework of social capital, this study discerns the significant contributors of social capital for Bangladeshi students in accessing HE. It explores the mechanisms and processes through which those students obtained the resources that were embedded in their social networks. I intend to do this by focusing on three specific forms of social capital: (1) social norms, (2) obligations and expectations, and (3) information channels (Coleman, 1988).

The study has found that the main influencers on Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE are parents, siblings, extended family members, peers and teachers. This is in line with past studies (Elias McAllister, 2012; Wiseman et al., 2017). These influencers play a key role in enabling Bangladeshi students' access to HE by providing them with different forms of support.

It was not my intention to measure the impact of social capital on the students' progression to HE, as this is difficult to measure; I only intend to discuss the way it operates. (Bankston and Zhou, 2002) argue that social capital is difficult to measure because it is a "*metaphorical construction, does not consist of resources that are held by individuals or by groups but of processes of social interaction leading to constructive outcomes*" (p. 285).

5.3.1 Parents

One of the main aims of this study is to investigate the extent to which social capital theory explains the choices of Bangladeshi students. In this section, I focus on exploring the various processes and mechanisms used by parents to influence the students' decision to pursue HE. The findings seem to concur with social capital theory, as students most frequently alluded to their family's norms, obligations, expectations and the information provided by parents as having shaped their decision to go to university.

The research conducted indicates that parental support is critical to the university decision-making process. Most of the prospective Bangladeshi university students in this study identified their parents as being the most prominent contributors to their decision to pursue HE. This is intriguing, given the fact that most of the participants' parents had not been to university themselves. This contradicts a wide range of studies that claim that parents' HE experience is a key predictive measure of students' university participation (Lehman, 2007, Thomas and Quinn, 2007). One explanation given for this is that students with more highly educated parents tend to have greater access to social capital and resources through their family relationships and social networks, and therefore have an advantage over first generation students when navigating the HE application process (Coleman, 1988, McDonough, 1997, Saenz et al., 2007). However, my findings show

that Bangladeshi parents with limited educational experience are also able to generate social capital that enables their children's progression to HE. Similarly, Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera (2010) found that ethnic minority parents' own disadvantage (including little or no formal education, limited finance, unemployment or lack of opportunities) does not get passed on to their children. They claimed that "*parents were able to transcend low stocks of human capital with greater investment in social capital that promoted high educational aspirations*" (p. 252). Similarly, Modood (2004) argues that it is possible to be poor in one form of capital, but rich in another. The findings in this study indicate that Bangladeshi parents were able to influence their children's decision to progress to HE through the three forms of social capital that Coleman (1988) talks about: obligations and expectations, information channels and social norms. I will begin by discussing the norms that these parents established in their families that 'pushed' students to pursue HE.

5.3.3.1 Social norms

This study asserts that the positive familial norms associated with higher education progression were considerably influential on the respondents' decision to pursue HE. Parents played an important role in establishing university participation as a norm in their immediate family. The main way that parents established effective norms was through parent-student conversations, during which parents expressed their expectations and encouragement for HE. In turn, parental expectations and encouragement worked by 'boosting' students' motivation and expectations, which influenced educational outcomes. My findings are consistent with previous findings that suggest that parental expectations can function as a mechanism that conveys to pupils the value their parents' place on educational achievement. This then results in pupils perceiving this communicated value as a norm, which they internalise as a standard that they should strive to attain (Yamamoto and Holloway, 2010). This shows that despite parents not having any university experience and being economically disadvantaged, they were still able to establish norms that encouraged university participation in their family. As highlighted by Modood's (2004) findings, there are a number of factors, including familial adult-child relationships, the transmission of aspirations and enforcement of

attitudes and norms, that can enable educational achievement and social mobility amongst young people with limited economic capital.

The study findings suggest that being expected to conform to those social norms felt like a lot of pressure for some respondents. When students were asked how they felt about their parents' expectations and encouragement to attend university, their responses indicated that although parental involvement was evidently of great importance, some respondents felt that they did not have much of a say or control over their decision to pursue HE. Nevertheless, the academic pressures arising from such expectations did not seem to make students resent their parents; they believed that their parents had their best interest at heart. Similarly, Zhou and Xiong (2005) have also used Coleman's concept of social capital to explain the high academic achievement of Asian American migrants. She found that young people experience a lot of pressure as a result of intense parental expectations and scrutiny. Nevertheless, the evidence from this study indicates that parental involvement was not always experienced as pressure; some respondents felt a sense of agency, as the decision was left to them. Parents gave their children the freedom to decide whether they wanted to pursue HE. Although these students indicated that their parents would have been supportive of whichever path they had decided to take, their responses suggest that their parents would have only supported them if they had chosen to progress to HE. Thus, the findings indicate that these students experienced at least indirect parental pressure to pursue HE. According to Sletten (2010), indirect parental pressure is a feeling of responsibility that develops in young people's minds, which makes them feel sinful if they choose not to honour their parents' demands. He argues that parents having high expectations is a form of indirect parental pressure. These findings suggest that parents may have taken different approaches to deliver their norms, some more forceful than others. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that regardless of how students felt about their parents' expectations, they still ended up internalising them and developing ambitions and priorities to meet these expectations. This shows that students had no choice – they had to go to university.

The findings show that the social norms established by parents facilitated the students' pursuit of HE, but constrained them from pursuing other routes. Respondents referenced conversations in which parents saw non-academic routes (i.e. apprenticeships) as being 'low status' compared to HE. These conversations generally put forth the idea that

apprenticeships did not lead to successful careers and were, therefore, routes that they could not choose. Parents' focus was on the economic benefits of education, indicating that their child's wants and needs were not considered or were ignored during the decision-making process. Although there are financial incentives involved in doing an apprenticeship, the evidence shows that parents were not aware of them. Respondents' experiences substantiate much of the previous research that has found that ethnic minority parents tend to perceive apprenticeships as a 'second best, second chance' route or as a route to trade and craft occupations rather than professional occupations (Newton and Williams, 2013). The study finds that not all students had always intended to go to university; there were a small number of students who had considered doing an apprenticeship, but were unable to do so because it did not meet their parents' high expectations. Despite not being able to pursue their chosen route, students accepted their parents' guidance because they trusted their judgement. Nevertheless, these findings show that parental support acted as a barrier, suggesting that if it was not for them getting in the way, some of the students would have probably taken different path trajectories.

Respondents indicated that future employment and earning opportunities informed their parents' expectations and encouragement for HE. Students described how their parents' own working conditions and economic struggles were critical to their parents' motivation for them to pursue HE. This is because parents attributed their low socioeconomic status to their lack of HE qualifications; thus, they wanted to ensure that their children would go to university so they would not have to experience the same kinds of struggles. The evidence shows that these parents saw HE as the only means for their children to escape the hardships associated with poverty. This goes against the popular culture-blaming approach to the underachievement of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mishra, 2020). The findings in this study clearly show that parents' expectations and encouragement of participation were founded on their understanding of the value of HE and its expected economic returns. However, it is unclear how parents accessed the cultural capital to understand the benefits of HE when they had not attended university themselves. The findings show that parents attempted to convince students to go to university by highlighting the financial benefits that they would be expected to enjoy and how much their life would change if they went down this route. This knowledge worked as a strong motivator for students to pursue HE and achieve social mobility.

Students also reported that safeguarding family status and honour also influenced their parents' expectations and encouragement for HE. Although participants had indicated that the Bangladeshi community did not shape their educational aspirations, the evidence does show that the community shaped the aspirations that parents had for the students, indicating an indirect effect on the students' decision to pursue HE. Participants indicated that there was a lot of competition within familial and community networks, which usually occurred when parents spoke to other Bangladeshi parents over the phone or when they got together at particular functions (i.e. weddings), during which parents shared stories about their children's educational progress. As a result, parents were under a lot of pressure to ensure that their children performed as well as, if not better than, other children; otherwise, shame and embarrassment would be brought on the family, as young people without a degree are perceived as failures in the community. As noted by (Archer and Francis, 2006), social competition between ethnic families and community members can function as a source of motivation for high academic achievement, including university participation. Interestingly, the study finds that the Bangladeshi community held the same aspirations for young men and women when it came to their expectation of HE progression, which indicates a shift in cultural expectations for women. Similarly, Shah et al (2010) found that there has been a shift in gender ideologies amongst the Asian community as a result of a rise in divorces and economic constraints. Thus, the women were supported in their education and employment pursuits so they would be able to financially support themselves if the need were to arise. The findings clearly show that parents 'pushed' their children into HE because of the respect and status that comes with having a degree qualification. In this study, parents attempted to convince students to go to university by highlighting the benefits that the whole family could enjoy if they chose to take this pathway.

5.3.1.2 Obligations and expectations

The study found that there was an expectation for students to forgo self-interest and abide by their parents' expectations, meaning that students had to give up a part of their life, for the sake of the family having a good reputation. In turn, students felt an obligation to abide by their parents' norms because of the sacrifices that their parents had made by migrating to the UK to create educational and financial opportunities for their children. Therefore, the students felt obligated to take advantage of those opportunities, so their

parents' sacrifices would not be in vain. This shows that the students were well aware of the hard work that their parents had put in to ensure that they had the best start to life, despite their disadvantages. Several studies have cited the guilt and obligations felt by ethnic minority students whose migrant parents tell them of their sacrifices (Kao, 2004, Urdan et al., 2007). The students' narrations also indicate that they felt obliged to meet their parents' expectations because family loyalty and obligation, as well as obedience and self-sacrifice towards one's elders, were expected of these students. These values are different from those more individualistic values that are found in the dominant Western culture (Shariff, 2009). It is intriguing to see that students held so strongly to their cultural values despite most respondents being second generation migrants. Taking into consideration these two factors, students felt that they had to meet their parents' expectations and go to university. Kao (2004) argues that the combination of social norms, obligations and expectations could be a powerful method of controlling people's actions.

5.3.1.3 Information channels

The findings show that Bangladeshi parents not only established university progression as a norm and an expectation, but they also invested their time in sharing the limited information they had about HE. Despite their lack of human capital, parents with limited educational experience were able to use their own disadvantages in the labour market to transmit to their children the importance of education. Their experiences and knowledge of the competitiveness of the labour market was an important source of information for Bangladeshi students, as it gave them an insight into what life would be like if they chose not to go to university. Although this information proved to be important in motivating students to pursue HE, parental involvement was unable to foster the mechanisms to achieve this goal. The literature shows that although parents play an important role in students' HE decisions, parents' support could be hindered by structural factors, such as education and income level, creating inequities for young people navigating the university application process (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000, Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). It is clear from the empirical evidence that for most participants, their aspirations to go university were a result of the social capital they had access to through their parents; however, they were unable to accumulate privileged information or knowledge about university because of their parents' lack of HE experience and knowledge. For example, parents were unable to guide them through the university application process. Similarly,

Saenz et al. (2007) found that parents with limited educational experience also have limited social capital and thus have limited access to informational and social resources; as a result, first generation students tend to face many challenges during the university application process. It is evident that simply raising children's educational aspirations is not sufficient for them to acquire the opportunity to attend university; nevertheless, without these high aspirations, these students would have been unlikely to pursue HE. This type of parental involvement is important because although it did not entail privileged forms of university information and guidance, it did represent the strong value that their parents had always placed on getting a university education. Similarly, Wiseman et al. (2017) argue that young people's aspirations need to be nurtured, but that it is also important to support them with reliable information, advice and guidance. These findings echo previous research that has suggested that parents of first generation students often acted as 'cheerleaders' but that their direct involvement in university preparation is limited (Holland, 2010). Thus, other sources of social capital are needed. The empirical evidence shows that parents had to rely on others for support to bridge the gap in their knowledge.

5.3.1.4 Unexpected findings

Despite the findings indicating that Bangladeshi parents did not provide guidance to their children during the university application process, there were some exceptions. Three participants indicated that their parents guided them in choosing a degree programme. This was not because these parents had high levels of human capital, as neither of the students' parents had been to university; these parents wanted their children to pursue a specific career path, i.e. medicine, engineering and law. The evidence suggests that this approach is driven by the parents' cultural values, as attaining these types of jobs is perceived by the Bangladeshi community as achieving the ultimate success. Similarly, Shah et al (2010) found that South Asian parents tend to associate professions in those fields with high earnings and prestige. Although the findings of this study show that some parents played a role in influencing their children's degree choice, the reality is that these parents chose their children's career path, which in turn influenced their children's degree choice. Therefore, students are the ones who picked the degree programme that they believed would enable them to pursue the career path that their parents had chosen for

them. This shows that parents were unable to provide privileged forms of information or guidance to enable their children to fulfil the career aspirations that they had for them.

In the interviews, two female participants indicated that their parents guided them in choosing a university. Once again, these parents had no university experience. The reason for their involvement was because they did not want their children to attend a university far away and because they felt moving out of university was not an option. Once again, this type of involvement was influenced by the parents' cultural values; having their daughters move out would have brought shame to the family because in the Bangladeshi community women are only expected to move out after they get married. Similarly, others have found that South Asian Muslim female students are often faced with parents who do not approve of them moving out for university (Connor et al., 2004; Dale et al., 2002). Although these findings show that these parents played a role in influencing their children's university choice by restricting them from going to certain universities, in reality, the evidence shows that these parents were unable to provide valuable information and guidance that would help them choose the right university for them.

5.3.2 Significant individuals

In this section, I focus on exploring the various processes and mechanisms used by significant individuals to influence students' decision to pursue HE. The findings seem to concur with social capital theory, as students most frequently alluded to social norms, and information provided by significant individuals as having shaped their decision to go to university; however, obligations and expectations had no influence.

The research conducted indicates that the support of significant individuals is important in the university decision-making process. The prospective Bangladeshi students in this study identified peers, teachers, siblings and extended family members (in order) as being the most prominent contributors to their decision to pursue HE, after parents. This is in line with other studies (Ceja, 2006; Elias McAllister, 2012; Holland, 2010; Kaczynski, 2011; Mwangi, 2015). However, Mwangi (2015) pointed out that although significant individuals are important figures in students' HE decision-making process, parents are still perceived as having the greatest impact on students' university aspirations and the university choice process. Similarly, my findings indicate that significant individuals

were not a substitute for parents' involvement, but they acted in a supportive role to parents.

5.3.2.1 Social norms

The study asserts that the social norms associated with higher education progression, which significant individuals create or reinforce, were considerably influential on the respondents' progress to HE. The main way that significant individuals established or reinforced effective norms was through conversations with the student, during which they expressed their expectations and encouragement for HE and by role-modelling university attendance. In turn, these expectations and encouragement worked by raising students' aspirations and motivating them to go to university.

Interestingly, respondents only identified significant individuals with no university experience, except for teachers and extended family members, as having expressed explicit verbal expectations and encouragement of university attendance. This seemed odd at first, but after further investigation, I came to the realisation that the students who described the influence of educated significant individuals mainly focused on their modelling of university attendance and provision of valuable information and guidance, which helped the students navigate the university application process. Therefore, these findings do not insinuate that educated significant individuals did not expect or encourage students to go to university; it is just that their role in the HE decision-making process was focused more on providing students with instrumental support rather than emotional support.

The evidence shows that older siblings with no university experience used their negative experience of the labour market to persuade their younger siblings to go to university and avoid making the same 'mistake' as them. Like their parents, their expectations and encouragement for HE participation were founded on their understanding of the value of higher education and its expected returns. In this case, older siblings reinforced the norms of HE participation by highlighting the possible hardships that students may face if they choose not to go to university. This finding substantiates much of the previous research that has found that significant individuals with no HE experience are still able to provide students with emotional support in the form of encouragement. They were found to do

this by communicating to students that going to university could provide them with more opportunities for economic stability (Beasley, 2011; Holland, 2010; Miller Dyce, 2009). Here, siblings are seen to be supporting each other's initiatives rather than utilising their social and cultural capital for personal gain, which shows selfless behaviour on the part of these siblings. Although they did not go to university and subsequently regretted it, they used their negative experience and the lessons they learned from it to enforce norms of HE participation in their family to ensure that their younger siblings did not follow the same path. In turn, students became more convinced that they should go to university, as they did not want to be in the same position as their older siblings. The findings clearly show that university education experience is not a determinant of whether someone is able to establish or reinforce university attendance as a norm in their family. The evidence suggests that anyone can establish norms of HE participation in their family, as long as they are aware of the benefits of HE and can convey them to others.

The study also finds that extended family members, both with and without university experience, also played a role in creating norms of HE participation in the family. Students' narrations indicate that this usually took place when parents were having discussions with their children about their plans after compulsory education, during which extended family members, usually aunts and uncles, would get involved. The role of extended family members entailed reaffirming parents' views and reinforcing parents' social norms in relation to HE participation. This suggests that in some instances, parents needed help to convince their children to go to university, so they turned to extended family members for support. As pointed out by Lehti and Erola (2017), extended family members can create a normative family environment that provides guidelines for preferable life course choices regarding education and future careers. They add that having close relations with extended family members can help alter young people's educational expectations in ways that may improve their academic achievement. The findings of this study show that extended family members played a role in shaping students' decision to pursue HE, although this is not surprising, given the fact that these students were part of closely-knit families and their extended families played an important role in influencing key choices students made throughout their lives.

The findings show that teachers played an important role in creating a normative school environment where university progression was the preferred choice. However, the

approaches taken to establish this norm varied across the four schools. In three schools (schools A, C and D), teachers took a balanced approach, meaning that students were expected and encouraged to go to university; however, they were not forced into it and were given the freedom to make their own choices. However, it is clear that because teachers expected them to go to university, this motivated them to take this route. Respondents reported that having teachers believe that they were capable of going to university gave them the strength to follow through with it, which suggests that students may have lacked confidence in their ability to deal with university demands. McDonough (1997) also found that the normative expectations that teachers have of students are important in the development and maintenance of university aspirations. The study also found that in the remaining school, school B, a more extreme approach was taken and all students were made to apply to university, regardless of whether they intended to go. The reasoning behind this approach was that if the students' initial plans did not materialise, then they would still have university as an option. However, by taking this approach, teachers completely disregarded students' wants, needs and, most importantly, ability, meaning that some students would not have been able to meet the university requirements. It is clear that the school had good intentions; however, these students were, in fact, coerced into applying to university, and they did not have much of a say in it. These findings indicate that the approaches that schools take to enforce the norm of HE participation will influence students' motivations for going to university.

As mentioned previously, significant individuals were also able to reinforce university participation by role-modelling university attendance. For obvious reasons, only significant individuals with university experience, meaning those who attended or are attending university, were able to model university attendance. The study finds that the university attendance of same-generation significant individuals (siblings, cousins and friends) created a normative environment where university progression was an expectation. Witnessing their significant individuals attending university not only inspired students to go to university themselves, but also led them to believe that university progression was a realistic option for them. It was important for students to see others from similar backgrounds and with whom they could identify go to university, as it made them believe that they could go too. This proved to be particularly important for these respondents; as first generation students, they had a limited number of role models in their networks to whom they could relate. The influential role of significant

individuals who attended or are attending university has been confirmed in previous studies. For example, using social capital, Crozier and Davies (2006) investigated the involvement of the family and community in Pakistani and Bangladeshi students' education. They found that educated older siblings, cousins and friends acted as high-status role models, often being important sources of encouragement and advice.

The findings also show that extended family members who went to university and subsequently embarked on professional occupations were also perceived as role models. Having an educated extended family served as an example of the benefits of university, and seeing family members benefiting economically from going to university was a strong motivating factor. Witnessing them having secured respectable jobs and being able to go on extravagant holidays reaffirmed students' decision to go to university. Although other educated individuals within the students' social networks were influential, their guidance and support were limited to the university application process, since they would have only limited experience and knowledge of the workforce. However, because older educated extended family members (i.e. uncles, aunts and older cousins) had passed through the university stage in their life and were established in their careers, they were already enjoying the benefits of having a HE qualification. Although parents had spoken to students about the labour market returns to having a degree, these findings show that students needed to see it first-hand to be convinced. Similarly, Wiseman et al. (2017) assert that when students have access to positive graduate role models, they tend to be more convinced of the benefits of pursuing HE, which raises their aspirations.

5.3.2.2 Information channels

The findings suggest that educated significant individuals were a primary source of privileged information and knowledge about university. As students were unable to turn to their parents for information, they had to rely heavily on other individuals within their social networks to fulfil this role. Educated significant individuals played an invaluable role in supporting students through the university application process, including providing assistance with writing personal statements, completing university applications and providing guidance on course and university choices. Similarly, other studies have also found that significant individuals with university experience acted as important sources of information during the university application process (Ceja, 2006; Kaczynski,

2011; Miller Dyce, 2009; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). The empirical evidence indicates that significant individuals were an important source of social capital that counteracted the lack of resources that the Bangladeshi students' parents had access to.

Observing their older siblings and cousins attend university gave Bangladeshi students an insight into what the university application process entails. Students talked about having a better understanding of the university application process as a result of seeing an older sibling or cousin experience it. This made them aware of the difficulties that they could encounter during the application process, as well as strategies for overcoming them. This understanding was made possible simply by setting an example of attending university, rather than through a more direct approach. For the first generation university entrants in this study, this proved to be extremely important, as it enabled them to navigate the university application process with confidence and ease. Similarly, Holland (2010) found that siblings and cousins are considered role models by many students. Witnessing other family members experience university preparation, enrolment, and graduation provided students with "concrete blueprints" as to how to access HE. This shows that witnessing older siblings and cousins attending university not only raises students' aspirations and motivates them to go to university, it also shows them how to achieve this goal.

The findings also indicated that same-generation individuals within students' social networks (siblings, cousins and peers) provided privileged information through lateral mentorship by sharing and exchanging their own experiences and information about university and university choice as a means of guidance and advice (Kiyama, 2011, Martinez, 2012). Although it was beneficial to receive lateral mentorship from individuals who were going through or had been through the same educational journey, the knowledge and guidance provided by these individuals were limited compared to other more experienced and knowledgeable significant individuals (i.e. teachers). In many cases, siblings, cousins and peers' advice was limited to their own narrow experiences of university, which means that their guidance was embedded within their values; thus, their advice risked being biased, incomplete or incorrect. Similarly, Perez and McDonough (2008) found that informal social networks tend to provide students with non-neutral university planning guidance that is based more on how they feel about

the students and less on what type of academic support the students need. This is a concern, particularly in this study, given the fact that the participants were first generation university entrants who relied heavily on members of their informal networks to provide them with information about university planning and preparation. An example of this was given by students who spoke about how their older siblings were advising them on which university to apply to, which was based on their own experiences at their respective institutions – good or bad. Thus, their guidance was embedded with their own values with regard to the university they were recommending. This may have been problematic, as it could have limited students' university choices and/or compromised their chances of securing a place. This is supported by Goodman et al. (2015), who found that siblings' university choices were connected, as younger siblings tend to apply and enrol at the same university as their older sibling(s). They also found that the quality of university chosen by an older sibling(s) also affected the type of university their younger sibling would choose.

The empirical evidence also indicates that educated extended family members, particularly older ones who were well established in their careers, provided students with important and useful information and advice regarding educational and career choices, based on their direct experiences. This is what Ball et al. (2002) refer to as 'hot knowledge', first-hand and direct knowledge based on 'direct' experience, meaning that students did not have to rely on generic or secondary sources. These extended family members played a critical role in increasing students' knowledge and understanding of the graduate labour market, something they were unable to get from other significant individuals. The findings show how important it is for students, particularly first generation university entrants whose parents are likely to have working low-skilled jobs, to be surrounded by individuals in their social networks who have professional occupations. However, my findings show that only a few Bangladeshi students had access to extended family members who had professional occupations, which shows that there is a need for it.

The findings show that teachers provided support by broadening students' 'information channels', which proved to be important when students were navigating the university application process. Teachers utilised their resources of social capital, both within and outside their school, to facilitate a range of preparatory activities to support students,

including organising university and employer talks, informing students about spring/summer schools at universities, and holding mentoring sessions with current university students and professionals. Broadening students' 'information channels' proved to be particularly valuable, as it enabled students to interact with individuals who they would not have the opportunity to meet otherwise, and most importantly, it gave them access to a more diverse range of resources. Unlike the information that students received from other individuals in their networks, the information channels associated with the school-based social networks provided more objective information and guidance to students, which in turn enabled them to make informed decisions about their education. However, the amount of time students were able to spend with those individuals was limited to school hours; thus, the resources they were able to generate were also limited. Nevertheless, it is evident that the students in this study were able to make use of the limited time and resources they had access to in school to achieve their educational goals.

5.3.2.3 Unexpected findings

Although the findings indicated that the students' friends played an important role in influencing their decision to pursue HE, there was one participant who indicated that his friends had attempted to discourage him from going to university because going to university was not the norm in his friendship group. In this case, the social norms within this student's friendship group worked to reinforce behaviour that would have led to a negative educational performance. As argued by Kao (2004), social capital does not always work to promote educational outcomes. Nevertheless, this student deliberately decided to go against these norms and chose to be different from the rest of his friendship group. However, this was not common, which shows that the influence of peers is strong; however, it does suggest that young people who make these counterpoint decisions are more single-minded when it comes to decision-making (Bowes et al., 2015). In this study, Tahmid is considered an outlier, as his experience is very different from the rest of the sample.

5.3.3 Conclusion to theme 1

In conclusion, this section, which outlines the primary influential individuals, adds to the argument made by numerous researchers that students' decision to pursue HE is largely

shaped by their social networks (Basit, 2012; Connor et al., 2004; Holland, 2010; Mwangi, 2015). This study builds on this literature by identifying some of the mechanisms and processes through which social networks are able to influence students' HE decisions. This study has identified parents, siblings and extended family members within the family, and teachers and peers within the school context as important agents of social capital. The findings show that the following forms of social capital have been found to enable students' access to HE: social norms, obligations and expectations and information channels.

The social norms found in students' social networks promoted HE participation, which worked by raising students' educational aspirations and motivating them to pursue HE. In addition, there were also expectations placed on students by their social networks, in particular parents, for students to forgo self-interest and conform to the norms associated with HE progression that their parents had established in their family. In turn, students felt an obligation to abide by these norms because their parents had made considerable sacrifices by migrating to the UK to create educational and financial opportunities for them. Thus, the students felt obligated to take advantage of those opportunities so their parents' sacrifices were not made in vain. Students did not mention that significant individuals expected them to abide by established norms, and students also did not feel obligated to conform to these norms. These findings may be explained by the fact that the relationship that students have with significant individuals does not provide a set of obligations and expectations between them. In other words, significant individuals have not done something where the students feel that they owe them anything.

Last, the empirical evidence shows that students' social networks not only established university progression as a norm and an expectation, but they, with the exception of parents, also provided students with valuable information and guidance to be able to achieve this goal. Parents were unable to provide their children with reliable information and guidance due to their limited knowledge and exposure to HE. To conclude, the findings of this study suggest that these students would have been unlikely to be in a position where going to university was a feasible option if it were not for the social capital that they had access to through their social networks. The next section presents a discussion on students' motivation, which helps to illuminate the influence of a number of factors on the HE decision-making process of Bangladeshi students.

5.4 THEME 2: MOTIVATING FACTORS

The second research question attempted to identify the motivating factors underpinning Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE. Using the theoretical framework of SRCT, this study aimed to find out whether young Bangladeshi students are responsive to economic and social returns when deciding to progress to HE. This was done by focusing on three assumptions made by SRCT: (1) students derive utility from education, (2) students are forward-looking and reasonably rational, i.e. meaning that they can make informed educational decisions based on the expected returns of those decisions, and (3) students, based on the availability of information and subject to constraints and uncertainty, choose education to maximise total expected utility (Jaeger, 2007).

The results show that students expressed career aspirations and specific goals throughout the data-gathering process. The goals that respondents shared revealed that achieving a degree qualification represented (a) enhanced marketability for a better job, (b) help in attaining their career goals, (c) an increase in their financial earning power, (d) gaining recognition from parents and extended family and (e) help in attaining their social and experiential goals. The evidence shows that Bangladeshi students were influenced by different motivation factors, which can be split into two groups: economic returns and social returns.

5.4.1 Economic returns

One of the main aims of this study is to investigate the extent to which SRCT explains the choices of young Bangladeshi students at the end of high school (Year 13). In this section, I focus on whether the decision to pursue HE was made with the objective of maximising the economic returns of education. The findings seem to concur with SRCT, to some extent, as students most frequently alluded to future/career reasons for pursuing HE, which seems to point towards a rational outlook on education. However, what SRCT does not take into account are the other reasons that comprise students' choice, such as subject interest or desire to achieve personal growth.

The empirical evidence of this study clearly indicates that the expected economic returns to education, in this case, better career opportunities, had significant effects on

Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE. The study findings suggest that the most important factor that motivated respondents to pursue HE was their desire to gain a higher qualification. When students were asked for the underpinning reasons for wanting a higher qualification, their responses indicated that future employment opportunities informed their decision; thus, their choices may be interpreted as 'rational'. Most respondents rationalised their entry into HE as being a gateway to improved career prospects. Respondents' experiences substantiate much of the previous research that has found that the expected increase in job/career opportunities as a result of possessing a degree was a strong motivator (Fagence and Hansom, 2018, Moogan and Baron, 2003), particularly for first generation and working-class students (Connor et al., 2001, Holland, 2010, Schmidt, 2014). The findings of this study clearly show that students expected high returns, which motivated their decision to pursue HE. Similarly, using a rational choice lens, Lehman (2009) sought to explain the importance of the applied value of education for working-class students. Lehman noted that working-class students perceive HE as a high-level investment, and they tend to expect a reasonable return from it. The findings in my study also show that respondents were worried about the high tuition fees, but they perceived university as an investment in their future that was worth making – the students perceived that the economic returns outweighed the costs associated with going to university.

The findings of this study clearly show that students' strongest motives for entering HE were instrumental. Most respondents reported that their decision to go to university was related to their chosen career path. Respondents spoke about how their chosen degree was a requirement for them to be able to pursue a career in their chosen field. Thus, students in the study approached HE with an ethos of vocational education. This vocational-instrumental attitude expressed by respondents was a source of strength and determination that helped put them in a position where university progression was a feasible option. Similarly, Lehman (2009) found that approaching university with an ethos of vocational education is a promising attitude for economically disadvantaged students to take. He found that having a set goal that is achievable within transparent and understood boundaries can create incentives for young people to overcome class-cultural barriers. Respondents' concerns about the employment value of HE were reflected in their chosen degree subjects (mostly vocational degrees) and career goals. All respondents in this study, except for those who were unsure about their future career plans,

had goals in professional type occupations: teachers, accountants and lawyers topped the list of aspirational occupations. This can be explained by the fact that there is a close linkage between HE qualification and employment for these types of careers (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2018). The findings from this study show that students had clear career aspirations before their entry to HE; whether these career aspirations are realistic cannot be answered using the data available.

This study's findings suggest that students were not only motivated by their desire to maximise returns in the form of better career opportunities, but also in the form of high earnings, which also indicates an element of 'rational' calculations. Almost all respondents were motivated to go to university by the desire to lead a better life. When asked what they meant by a better life, respondents indicated that they were referring to financial stability. The influence of financial incentives has also been documented by other researchers (Connor et al., 2001; Knutson et al., 2010) as a strong motivator, particularly for working-class students. The findings of this study indicate that HE was perceived as an instrumental means of achieving upward mobility, an attempt to escape their working-class roots. Their personal experiences of financial hardships coupled with their parents' guidance comprised the driving force behind their decision to go university, indicating that their decision was based on a strong reflection of that social background. Similarly, Lehman (2009) found that in the case of working-class students, class positions created strong incentives for transformation and change, rather than social reproduction. Students' motivation to achieve social mobility was not only intended to benefit them, but also to benefit their family. Students had the intention of providing their families with more comfortable lives by going to university and getting high-paying jobs. Interestingly, both male and female students took it upon themselves to financially support their families, suggesting that traditional gender norms have weakened with the rise in educational attainment amongst women. Similarly, Jaeger (2007) also highlights that although students are rational and utility-maximising agents, they do not necessarily make educational decisions based on purely individualistic goals. This was the case for these students, as they were brought up with family norms that expected family loyalty and obligation, as well as obedience and self-sacrifice towards one's family, particularly parents. This is contrary to 'normal' family norms in which parents are the ones generally expected to financially support their children (West et al., 2016). The evidence from this study shows that for these students, their low socioeconomic disadvantage was not a

hindrance; on the contrary, it was what motivated them to be successful, both in their education and their career.

The study finds that the students, subject to constraints, chose HE to maximise economic returns. In this context, opportunity constraints refer to social background and demographic characteristics (Jaeger, 2007). The evidence shows that Bangladeshi students' decision to go to university was shaped by the constraints imposed by their social background. Due to their working-class background and the challenges that come with it, a degree qualification was perceived as the only thing that would give the students a sense of legitimacy to enter the graduate labour market. Students often spoke about university being their only route to a successful career. As pointed out by Lehman (2009), working-class adolescents do not possess the social capital that would guarantee (or ease) their access to lucrative middle-class professions. Thus, respondents in this study believed that having human capital, in this case, a HE qualification, would enable them to break into middle-class paths. The evidence shows that students were well aware that they would be disadvantaged in the labour market as a result of their social class position; as a result, they tried to overcome this problem by gaining more qualifications.

The empirical evidence clearly shows that students' decision to pursue HE was shaped by the information they received regarding expected returns of education. The study found that most respondents were motivated to go to university because they believed that it was difficult to get a 'good' job without a degree qualification. Here, a 'good' job refers to professional and high-paying jobs. Although the findings show that the respondents had some knowledge and understanding of the labour market, their knowledge was limited. Their labour market understanding reflected meritocratic expectations and a reliance on scholastic capital, but disregarded other aspects that increase one's chance of being successful in the graduate labour market. This is explained by the fact that students' conceptions of HE returns, particularly economic returns, were found to be shaped by their parents. However, most of these parents had no experience of the graduate labour market because they were not graduates themselves; therefore, their knowledge and understanding of the graduate labour market were very limited. This finding is supported by Van der Merwe, who noted that "*parental guidance, in respect of study and career plans, was shown to be instrumental in promoting respondents' economic expectations of higher education*" (2010, p. 91). Having a limited

understanding of the labour market can result in a lack of preparation and appreciation of the importance of non-academic experience that students can gain through extra-curricular activities (Kim and Bastedo, 2016, Tomlinson, 2007). This suggests that although respondents had high career aspirations, they are likely to face difficulties when navigating the labour market due to a lack of appreciation for how it works and which attitudes and actions are likely to be rewarded.

5.4.2 Social returns

The narratives of the respondents indicate that their decision to pursue HE was motivated not only by the expected economic returns but also by the social returns of higher education. These findings seem to concur with SRCT, as students often alluded to their desire to gain social utility as a result of going to university. However, the findings indicate that the social returns were not as significant a factor, which reflects the argument made by Jaeger (2007).

The empirical evidence in this study clearly indicates that the expected social returns of education, in this case, social recognition, had significant effects on Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE. The study findings suggest that one of the most important factors that motivated respondents to pursue HE was their desire to make their parents proud through high academic achievement; this is not surprising, given that the majority of Bangladeshi students chose to pursue HE because their parents expected them to. Respondents expressed their desire to give back to their parents for the sacrifices they had made to give them the best start to life, despite their economic and social disadvantages. Urdan et al. (2007) note that first- and second generation students feel strong feelings of obligation to do well in education in order to repay their parents for the sacrifices involved with immigrating to a new country. The findings indicate that it is because students had a more collectivist self-definition that they prioritised their parents' needs over their own. As mentioned previously, this is the case because students have been brought up with family norms that expect family loyalty and obligation, as well as obedience and self-sacrifice towards one's parents. These findings suggest that perhaps only students who are exposed to similar values would feel obliged to satisfy their parents' expectations and make them proud; however, using the data at hand, I cannot know this for sure.

This study finds that students were also motivated to pursue HE by their desire to prove themselves to others; however, this was not as prominent as their desire to make their parents proud. Students wanted to prove to their family, particularly parents and extended family members, that they were 'good enough' and capable of going to university. Students spoke of how their parents would contact other relatives to discuss their children's achievements, which created competition between families in their community. It is evident from the findings that the growing expectation within the Bangladeshi community for young people to attend HE, which has trickled down to the parents, has placed added pressure on the new generation. These discussions that parents had amongst themselves have clearly influenced some students' decision to go university, as they felt the need to prove themselves.

In addition, this study finds that students, based on the information they received from their parents and the constraints with which they were faced, chose HE to maximise social returns. The evidence shows that Bangladeshi students' decision to go to university was influenced by the information that their parents gave them regarding the importance of earning good merit for the family through education. Students felt that they had to go to university for the sake of the family having a good reputation. This was reflected when students indicated that they wanted to prove themselves to others, particularly extended family members. As a result of this information and the values that they were brought up with, students felt constrained in choosing HE, as choosing any other pathways would bring shame to the family. The evidence of this study shows that students did not have a choice; they had to go to university if they wanted to please their parents. Thus, Bangladeshi students received social utility by pursuing HE, as it minimised the risk of disappointing their parents. The evidence suggests that if it were not for the parental pressures that they had experienced, it is likely that some of these students would have taken a different trajectory from the one they currently are on.

The study finds that these students' decision to pursue HE was not only based on the fact that they wanted social recognition; in some instances, students were also motivated by the social and experiential benefits of attending HE. University was perceived as an opportunity to meet new and diverse people, to be exposed to new ideas and to have new experiences not otherwise available to them. These reflect more individualistic goals than

the two social returns that were discussed previously. These findings echo previous research (Connor et al., 2001) that has suggested that young people are influenced by the social and experiential aspects of attending university. These included meeting new people, having a better social life, getting away from home, autonomy from their family and increased independence. However, these factors were secondary to the anticipated labour market advantages of attending university, particularly for first generation and low-income university entrants (Knutson et al., 2010). Similarly, only a third of the students interviewed in this study stated that they were motivated by the social and experiential benefits. This indicates that these types of social returns were not as important for the Bangladeshi students as the economic and social returns discussed previously. This is not surprising, given that the focus of the advice students received from their networks, particularly parents, was based on academic growth rather than personal growth.

5.4.3 Unexpected findings

Despite the findings indicating that Bangladeshi students were motivated to pursue HE for rational reasons, there were exceptions. The findings show that 94% of respondents were motivated to go to university because they had an interest in a particular subject. This finding shows that these participants' decision to pursue HE was driven by their desire to achieve intellectual growth and stimulation. Therefore, the empirical evidence shows that most students were motivated by non-rational reasons. However, the evidence shows that these students were able to combine these reasons with rational reasons. This indicates that although most students were pursuing HE with their futures/careers in mind, at the same time, they also wanted to be intellectually stimulated. This finding is supported by Callender (1997), who also found that students' strongest motives for pursuing university were related to achieving economic returns; however, these were combined with their interest in a course or subject.

Additionally, the evidence also shows that 78% of the sample were motivated to go to university from a desire to achieve personal growth. These students aspired to develop a number of new skills at university, including social skills, communication skills, self-confidence and being more independent. This finding about students' desire to fulfil self-development was supported by Callender's (1997) study about students' motivations for

entering HE. Once again, the empirical evidence shows that many students were motivated by non-rational reasons; however, these non-rational reasons could actually be rational. Students possessing these skills could benefit from an improvement in employment opportunities, which could increase economic returns. Additionally, students possessing these skills could also improve their chances of making new friends and having more social connections, therefore generating social returns. However, the evidence shows that although students recognised the contribution university would make to their generic skills development, they did not specifically state that they wanted to develop these skills as a way to improve their job prospects or make new friends. Therefore, using the data at my disposal, I cannot say for sure whether these students intended to develop new skills because they wanted to maximise economic and social returns or not.

5.4.4 Conclusion to theme 2

In conclusion, this section on motivation supports the assumptions made by HE institutions and policymakers that students participate in HE for the practical economic benefits that result from having a degree (Mowjee, 2013). However, this study builds on this assumption by highlighting that students also choose to participate in HE for the social benefits it offers. The findings show that students were motivated by the following expected economic and social benefits: (a) enhanced marketability for a better job, (b) attaining their career goals, (c) an increase in their financial earning power, (d) gaining recognition from parents and extended family and (e) attaining their social and experiential goals. Therefore, students' choice to attend university was based on rational, economic and social calculations, which were governed by self-interest. However, it appears that some students were also motivated by non-rational reasons, which demonstrates that students acted mostly rationally, but some non-rational elements seemed to also be present. The next section presents a discussion on students' choice of institution, which helps to illuminate students' criteria for institution selection.

5.5 THEME 3: FACTORS INFLUENCING UNIVERSITY CHOICE

The third research question attempted to identify the factors that had the strongest influence on Bangladeshi students' university choice. Using the theoretical framework of SRCT, this study aimed to test whether young Bangladeshi students are responsive to economic and social returns when choosing a HE institution. Before exploring the various factors that influence Bangladeshi students' university choice, it is important to acknowledge that choice factors often vary for different groups of students (Harker et al., 2001); thus, the influential factors that will be discussed here will not be important for all types of students – they differ in importance depending on a range of demographic factors and lifestyle characteristics (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Therefore, my findings only apply to young Bangladeshi students living in the UK.

The main conclusion that I can draw from this research is that choice of university is influenced by a complex interaction between a number of key variables. The study findings show that 'course availability', 'employment prospects' and 'university reputation' were the most important influential factors in Bangladeshi students' university choice. When exploring the reasoning behind these three factors, it becomes clear that for the most part, the findings were in agreement with SRCT, as Bangladeshi students' choice of institution was made to maximise economic returns (improved job and career prospects). My findings echo the findings of previous studies (Briggs, 2006; Fangence & Hansom, 2018; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Maringe, 2006; Simoes & Soares, 2010). The narratives of the respondents indicate that social returns were insignificant at this stage of the university application process. This finding is surprising, given the fact that social returns played an important role in students' decision to pursue HE. Similarly, Paulsen (2001) has pointed out that although the university-going decision is not a purely financial one, students do base their choice of university partly on their perceptions of returns (earnings potential) related to their investment.

5.5.1 Course availability

The narratives of the respondents indicate that the availability of students' chosen course was the most important influential factor on university choice. This finding is supported by a number of other studies (Connor et al., 1999, Fangence and Hansom, 2018, Maringe,

2006). My findings show that students were unwilling to compromise on their chosen degree because it was directly linked to their career aspirations and needs. This is not to say that there were no other reasons for students to be unwilling to change their chosen degree, as students did give other reasons, including having an interest in a particular subject, but the main reason given was that they would have been unable to pursue their chosen career path if they changed their chosen course, pointing to a fairly 'rational' way of thinking. The data show that most respondents were applying for vocational degrees, which included accounting, medicine and nursing amongst the most popular choices. As mentioned previously, vocational courses lead to specific careers; thus, students changing their chosen degree course would have meant a change of career trajectory, which would have prevented them from reaching their aspired careers. Imenda et al. (2004) argue that it is much safer for young people to enter HE in specific career-directed programmes of study if social mobility is on their agenda. This may explain why Bangladeshi students were more inclined to apply for vocational degrees. The evidence shows that students behaved in a fairly rational way, as their choice of institution was based upon future economic and labour market prospects. This is somewhat surprising given that their networks, particularly parents, did not have much involvement in the university choice process; therefore, students had more control over which university to attend. Yet their choice of institution reflected a desire to maximise economic returns, suggesting that they had internalised their parents' attitudes towards HE.

5.5.2 Employment prospects

The narratives of respondents indicated that a university's job prospects comprised the second most important influential factor on university choice. Similarly, research by Fangence and Hansom (2018) concluded that universities' potential for high future earnings has a strong influence on students' university choice. This was particularly the case for ethnic minority students and those applying to elite universities. My findings indicate that universities' employability reputation proved to be an important factor for most respondents in this study, as students perceived it to be a good indicator of their own future career prospects. Thus, attending a university with a high employment rate was believed to increase students' chances of securing a respectable job. Once again, the data revealed that students' criteria for institution selection were rationally oriented towards maximising returns. It was evident that because of students' preference for

economic returns, universities were chosen that were expected to generate the most labour market returns. The findings suggest that the more students value economic returns from their post-18 educational choices, the more likely they are to apply to a university that is expected to generate high future income. Interestingly, universities' job prospects were not an aspect that the students' networks had talked to them about, so it is unclear how these students knew about the importance of attending a university with good job prospects.

5.5.3 University reputation

The reputation of an institution was found to be another significant influential factor in choosing a university. This is not surprising since many respondents spoke about how their teachers had emphasised the importance of attending a university with a good reputation. Similarly, Shanka et al. (2006) affirm that other people's opinions, including teachers, moderate students' choices about their host institutions. As indicated in Chapter 4, many students aspired to attend Russell Group universities. The evidence shows that for many students, their decision to go to a Russell Group university was based on information they received from their teachers. When students spoke about the reasoning behind their decision to attend an elite university, their responses indicated that it was because of these universities' outstanding reputations and the expected economic returns associated with possessing a degree from them. These degrees were perceived as being more worthy because students believed that employers valued them more than those from non-elite universities. Once again, this points to a fairly rational way of thinking, as students' choices were motivated by expected economic returns. Similarly, Mowjee (2013) found that university reputation had many connotations for a rational way of thinking; she states, "*the implication of well-reputed institution was always connected to the potential benefits that students perceived ensue from it, usually in the form of highlighting one's Curriculum Vitae and opening up opportunities for their future pursuits*" (p. 207). The findings show that students were well aware of the characteristics that they should be looking for, especially those that will maximise economic returns when choosing a university.

5.5.4 Unexpected findings

Despite the findings indicating that Bangladeshi students' choices of universities were motivated by rational reasoning, there were some exceptions. In total, 81% of respondents indicated that their choice of university was influenced by the modules that they offered. The evidence indicates that it was important for these students to attend a university that would enable them to further their knowledge about topics that they had an interest in and that they would enjoy. This shows that although most students were choosing an institution with their futures/career in mind, many of them also wanted to ensure that they enjoyed their degree as well. Thus, the empirical evidence indicates that these students' choice of institution was based on non-rational reasoning, although it was most often combined with rational reasoning. Similarly, Mowjee (2013) also found that often students combined 'rational' and 'non-rational' factors when choosing a university to attend.

5.5.5 Conclusion to theme 3

This section adds to the growing literature investigating the main factors influencing university choice (Briggs, 2006; Elias McAllister, 2012; Imenda et al., 2004); however, this study takes this a step further by exploring the reasons why those factors of universities are important in students' choice of university. The study findings show that 'course availability', 'employment prospects' and 'university reputation' were the most important influential factors on Bangladeshi students' choice of university. In terms of the reasoning behind these three factors, for the most part, students' choice of institution was made to maximise economic returns (improved job and career prospects). Therefore, students' university choice was based on rational, economic calculations that were governed by self-interest. However, the findings also indicate that 'module content' was another important influential factor, which shows that students' choice of institution was also motivated by non-rational reasoning.

5.6 CONCLUSION TO DISCUSSION CHAPTER

The first part of this chapter discussed the pertinent influence of social norms, obligations and expectations, and information channels on British Bangladeshi students' HE

decision-making. This chapter discussed how HE decision-making is bound by access to social capital resources available within students' social networks.

Previous research has demonstrated that students' social networks, including family members, peers, and teachers, are key contributors to students' decision to pursue HE. Despite this important outcome, research findings have been limited in scope, as researchers have failed to explore how social networks enable students' access to HE. In this study, I broadened the scope by exploring the processes and mechanisms through which students obtained the resources embedded in their social networks. The results of this study indicate that the following forms of social capital enable students' access to HE: social norms, obligations and expectations, and information channels; however, there were variations. My findings indicate that students' HE aspirations were mostly influenced by the norms and expectations conveyed by their parents, although parents were unable to foster the mechanisms to achieve this goal. Thus, other sources of social capital were needed to support students in their pursuit of HE. Students had to rely on significant individuals (siblings, extended family members, peers and teachers) to support them through the university application process by being their main sources of information. The empirical evidence indicates that without these resources, the students may not have had the tacit knowledge necessary to pursue HE.

Previous research has demonstrated that students are rational decision-makers and that their educational choices are made to maximise the economic returns to education; however, the social returns were not taken into consideration. The objective of this study is to contribute to filling this gap. In this study, I explored both types of returns in order to gain a better understanding of the main factors that underpin Bangladeshi students' decision to pursue HE. The results of this study indicate that the vast majority of Bangladeshi students made the rational decision to progress to HE with the objective of maximising both economic and social returns, although it was clear that economic returns were more important than social returns. Students' conceptions of HE returns, particularly economic returns, were found to be shaped by their social networks, particularly their parents. This, in turn, seems to have raised Bangladeshi students' aspirations and 'pushed' them to progress to university. These findings not only point to the fact that students acted rationally, as they made this educational decision to maximise total expected utility, but also that this decision was embedded in social contexts. Based

on the availability of information in their social networks, and subject to constraints posed by their social origins, Bangladeshi students believed that the best option for them was to pursue HE in the hope that it would lead them to have a ‘better life’.

Finally, the results also show that most Bangladeshi students’ choice of institution was linked to their desire to maximise economic returns; however, the study also discussed some exceptions. The factors that had the strongest influence were course availability, employment prospects and university reputation. The universities that were expected to generate the most labour market returns were chosen by students. These findings show that students’ choices were based on rational, economic calculations that were governed by self-interest. The study finds that social returns were insignificant at this stage of the university application process; however, this is not surprising given that students’ networks did not put much emphasis on social benefits, instead focusing more on the economic benefits of HE.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the original contribution to knowledge made by this thesis, along with its implications for theory, implications for practice and policy, research limitations and suggestions for future research.

6.2 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The study provides an important contribution to knowledge of the influence of social networks and motivating factors for Bangladeshi students' choice to pursue HE, which will enable policymakers and educational practitioners to have a better understanding of how they make this decision. These findings can be used as a foundation for the development of strategies aiming to address discrepancies in the take-up of HE opportunities by under-represented groups of students.

In relation to the role that social networks play in shaping Bangladeshi students' decisions to pursue HE, parents play an important role by establishing university participation as a social norm in their family, despite their lack of university experience. This contradicts the claims made, by others, that parents' HE experience is a key predictive measure of their involvement in their child's HE decision-making process (Apps and Christie, 2018; Mulcahy and Baars, 2018). In the case of British Bangladeshis in London, this was not the case. In fact their lack of university experience was the reason for their involvement. The financial struggles that parents had experienced, which they attributed to a lack of education, was the driving force behind their involvement in their child's HE decision-making. This was combined with the pressures that they felt as a result of community expectations. The evidence suggests that these Bangladeshi parents were only able to have such a strong influence because of the cultural values with which their children were brought up. These young Bangladeshis felt obliged to meet their parents' expectations; family loyalty and obligation, as well as self-sacrifice and obedience to their parents, were expected of them. The effect of culture on young people's HE decision-making process has been relatively under-examined in the literature; however the evidence shows that it is important to take this into consideration.

Although parents played an important role in motivating their child to pursue HE, they were unable to foster the mechanisms to achieve this goal. Their lack of university experience and knowledge prevented them from providing the guidance and support their child needed to navigate the university application process with confidence and ease. The findings suggest that these students were disadvantaged, as they were unable to make informed decisions based on support received from their parents. This has resulted in them having to rely heavily on other, more educated, individuals within their social network to support them during the university application process. The involvement of older siblings, extended family, friends/peers and teachers proved to be extremely important in providing students with privileged information and knowledge about university. However, the advice given, particularly by their informal social networks, may, potentially, have been biased, incomplete or incorrect at times. The evidence shows that there is a need for more experienced, knowledgeable and, most importantly, unbiased individuals in Bangladeshi students' social networks.

The desire to lead a better life, free from financial hardship, was the main motivator behind these students' decisions to go to university. HE was perceived as the only route to better employment opportunities and higher earnings, due to their disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence indicates that it was the students' social environment that led them to approach HE with an ethos of vocational education. The vocational-instrumental attitude expressed by respondents was a source of strength and determination that put them in a position where university progression was a feasible option. These findings show that it was important for Bangladeshi students to perceive HE as a profitable investment, as it led to their decision to pursue it.

The students were also motivated by the expected social returns, although it appears that these were not as important as the expected economic returns. Making their parents proud by obtaining a degree proved to be a strong motivator, although this is not surprising, given the fact that the majority of students chose to progress to HE because their parents expected them to do so. These findings indicate that the students' decision to pursue HE was not based on purely individualistic goals; they suggest that they had a more collectivist self-definition and prioritised their parents' needs over their own. This was the case because they have been brought up with cultural values that encouraged family

loyalty, obligation, and obedience. Once again, these findings demonstrate how influential the students' culture was on their decision to pursue HE.

Proving themselves to others, particularly parents and their extended family, was another motivator. Students felt the need to show others that they were 'good enough' and capable of going to university. The findings show that this was influenced by forms of social competitiveness within familial and community networks, which promoted and encouraged HE participation. Consequently, choosing alternative routes (e.g., apprenticeships) would have had a detrimental effect on family reputation. As these students were brought up with values that put a lot of emphasis on family reputation, it was critical that they pursued HE to avoid bringing supposed embarrassment and shame on their family. The evidence suggests that these students did not have much of a say in, or control over their decision, as there were a lot of external pressures directing them towards HE. Perhaps, had these students been given more of a say in the matter, without the fear of any negative consequences, some may have taken alternative routes.

The expected economic returns not only influenced students' decisions to pursue HE but also their choice of university. Course availability, employment prospects and university reputation were all important factors, because students anticipated that these would affect their future jobs and careers. These findings are surprising, given the fact that the students' social networks, particularly parents, did not have much involvement in the choice of university; students had more control over which university to attend, yet their choice reflected a desire to maximise economic returns. The evidence suggests that students had internalised their parents' attitude towards HE, strengthening the argument made earlier that these students approached university with an ethos of vocational education.

6.3 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study makes significant empirical and conceptual contributions to the field of university access and choice. One of its key contributions is an exploration of the influencers in the HE decision-making process of British Bangladeshi students in London. While there are studies that have examined the social networks involved in influencing this decision-making, much of it only focuses on informal networks – parental, familial and community influences (Connor and Tyers, 2004; Crozier and Davies, 2006; Dale,

2002) – and disregards other influences. Studies that have investigated other ethnic groups found that both formal and informal networks play a role in shaping students' decisions to pursue HE, although their roles can vary (Mwangi, 2015; Tierney and Auerbach, 2005). From this perspective, this study provides new knowledge to the field of university access and choice, as it investigates the impact of both formal social networks (teachers, career advisers) and informal (parents, siblings, friends, extended family, community members) on Bangladeshi students' decision to go university. Rather than focusing on a few individuals within the students' social networks, as other researchers have done, I have captured a wide range of influences in the decision-making process to pursue HE.

Another important contribution of this study is the exploration of the different means through which social networks were able to influence these decisions. Previous studies in the field mainly focused on identifying the main influences but failed to explore in great depth how they were able to shape students' decisions to go university (Connor and Tyers, 2004; Crozier and Davies, 2006; Dale, 2002). In order to fully understand the role that students' social networks play in the HE decision-making process, it is not enough only to identify who the influencers are; there is also the need to take this a step further by exploring how these influencers helped to shape and facilitate Bangladeshi students' decisions to pursue HE. This study makes a great contribution to the field by identifying some of mechanisms and processes through which social networks have shaped Bangladeshi students' choices.

Past studies in this field have mainly focused on the influence of British Bangladeshi students' social networks but have provided little insight into the underlying reasons for them wanting to pursue HE. Although Connor and Tyers (2004) did attempt to do this and were successful in pinpointing some of the motivating factors, their focus was largely on the economic motivations. Their assumption, shared by many other researchers in this field (Lehman, 2009; Wilson et al., 2005), is that educational decisions, such as HE decisions, are made with the objective of maximising the economic benefits of education, but they have overlooked the fact that educational decisions can also be motivated by expected social benefits (Jaeger, 2007). This study is novel as it investigates the extent to which British Bangladeshi students respond to both economic and social incentives when

deciding to go to university, and could be a basis for future studies considering both of these motivations for wanting to pursue HE.

The decision to go to university is multifaceted and can depend on individuals (influencers) and also motivations (influences). While previous researchers have mainly focused on exploring the factors that influence students' decision to pursue HE, this study takes a different approach by also investigating the factors that influence university choice and exploring why these factors are significant. This is an important aspect of the university application process, as it has a considerable effect on later life (post-university career progression and earnings) (Chevalier and Colon, 2003; Porter, 2002). Therefore, it is important that we have a good understanding of why choices are made in order to explain why certain institutions are more or less popular than others. From this perspective, this study is an original contribution to the field, not only because it identifies the most important factors influencing university choice, but it also explains why those factors were influential for these British Bangladeshi students.

This study makes significant conceptual contributions to the field in two main ways. Firstly, the concept of social capital was employed in this study to illuminate the influence of students' social networks in the HE decision-making process. While other studies using this concept (Basit, 2012; Crozier and Davies, 2006) are of value and have influenced my research, I specifically focused on exploring the effects of three forms of social capital – social norms, expectations and obligations, and information channels. By focusing on these, I was able to explore in great depth the mechanisms and processes through which social networks shaped Bangladeshi students' choices. This study makes a contribution by confirming the findings from previous studies – the impact of verbal encouragement and various information channels on students' decisions (Basit, 2012; Crozier and Davies, 2006); it also makes new findings – the impact of established social norms, and expectations and obligations on students' decisions. Secondly, SRCT was used in this study to explain the motivations behind students' 1) decisions to pursue HE and 2) university choice. This theory enabled me to go beyond just identifying different motivating factors; it enabled me to explore and explain how and why these motivating factors had influenced young Bangladeshi students' HE decision-making process. Future studies should consider using SRCT if they intend to explain, rather than just describe, patterns of educational choices.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

This study was informed by two concepts: Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital and Jaeger's (2007) concept of sociological rational choice. In general, these two concepts proved to be useful for describing and explaining the university decision process of British Bangladeshi students. The findings demonstrate that the networks of Bangladeshi students, which include their parents, siblings, extended family members, peers and teachers, governed their decision to progress to HE. In addition, the study results confirm that students' choice to pursue HE and choice of institution were both motivated by the total expected utility of education.

In this study of Bangladeshi students, the findings validate that social norms, obligations and expectations, and information channels are important forms of social capital through which students are able to effectively mobilise the resources embedded in their social networks. However, the evidence also speaks to the findings of others who have critiqued the theory. As an example, the findings confirm that Coleman's concept, which only acknowledges the positive consequences of sociability, is somewhat flawed, as "*the mechanisms appropriable by individuals and groups as social capital can have other, less desirable consequences*" (Portes, 1998, p. 15). Portes also adds that the existence of negative social capital, which are the less desirable consequences, can be manifested in the norms and relationships of particular groups of people. The data in this study show that family and community norms have constrained students by taking their freedom of choice away from them. Some students indicated that their parents had pressured them to go to university and that they (the students) did not have much say on the matter. Additionally, some students had considered taking an alternative route (i.e. an apprenticeship), but their parents had prevented them from doing so. The findings show that although going to university is a positive consequence of social norms, particularly for these disadvantaged students, their choice to do so was partly because they were pressured into it. Therefore, it is important to not only investigate the positive effects of social capital; the evidence from this study suggests that the theory could be improved by adding a component that looks at the negative consequences of social capital. It is important to look at both positive and negative consequences of social capital in order to fully understand how people make choices.

Additionally, the findings confirm that, to a large extent, students' choice to pursue HE is motivated by the expected economic and social returns of education, indicating rational behaviour. However, the evidence confirms the findings of others who have critiqued rational choice models for failing *“to account for much of the actual observed behaviour of people in the real world, which deviates from the expectations of rationality”* (Diamond et al., 2012). The data in this study show that not all students were behaving rationally. Many students were motivated to go to university by their interest in a particular subject, indicating non-rational behaviour. However, the evidence shows that students combined non-rational reasoning with rational reasoning.

The findings show that for the most part, students' university choice is influenced by their desire to maximise utility, which points to a rational decision-making behaviour. Once again, the data in this study show that not all students were behaving rationally. A large number of students indicated that it was important for them to attend a university that offered modules of interest to them, indicating non-rational behaviour. However, the evidence shows that students combined non-rational reasoning with rational reasoning. Therefore, it is clear that students' educational decisions are mostly made with the objective of maximising both economic and social returns, although this is not always the case. Although SRCT was a huge improvement over traditional RCT, the findings from this study suggest that the theory could be improved even further by acknowledging that people's decision-making behaviour is not always rational, as occasionally people will behave non-rationally. More research is needed to build a solid theory, and the findings from this study provide some ideas that can help in achieving this.

6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Bangladeshi university entrants and examine the various factors that influenced their decision to pursue HE. This section offers implications for policy that may help individuals to support British Bangladeshi students as they embark on their university journeys. The focus of these implications will be on information access, as this proved to be a challenge for many Bangladeshi students.

The study found that educated significant individuals play an invaluable role in supporting Bangladeshi students through the application process, mainly through lateral mentorship. However, this can be somewhat problematic because this type of guidance and support is limited to the individuals' own narrow experiences of university, and therefore is embedded within their own values. The evidence shows that there is a need for more experienced, knowledgeable and, most importantly, unbiased individuals in Bangladeshi students' social networks. Although it is evident from the findings that schools have attempted to tackle this issue by broadening students' information channels and bringing in professionals to schools, more still needs to be done. One way to achieve this is to create opportunities for students to receive customised support throughout the university application process from university advisers. In the UK, a similar strategy has been implemented by the Department for Education for teacher training applicants. Candidates are given access to Teacher Training Advisers who give practical advice and guidance remotely at each stage of the application process. A similar strategy should be developed for university entrants – perhaps this could be a service that UCAS can provide. Although providing students with customised support will require extra resources, the government needs to acknowledge that this is an investment worth making to ensure that all students are able to make an informed decision and can access support when needed.

The findings also show that students' parents played an important role in shaping students' conceptions of HE returns, particularly labour market returns. However, because these parents had no experience of the graduate labour market, the knowledge they transferred to their children was limited, which indicates that these students may have unrealistic expectations of the returns of HE. This finding suggests that these students are likely to face difficulties when navigating the labour market of the future. This shows that Bangladeshi students are in dire need of access to more privileged information about the graduate labour market in order to make informed decisions about their careers and to stand a better chance of succeeding in the graduate labour market. Therefore, I would recommend that policymakers work on developing a policy that would work on improving the focus and quality of career guidance. Career advisers tend to focus on telling students about the different options that are available to them post-compulsory education; however, they should also be educating students regarding how the labour market works and informing them of attitudes and actions that are likely to be rewarded, so students are better prepared when entering and navigating the graduate labour market.

In doing so, disadvantaged young people can have a better chance of securing the professional jobs that they aspire to after they graduate.

6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This section offers implications for practice that may help individuals to support British Bangladeshi students as they embark on their university journeys.

This study found that parents had a major influence on shaping students' decisions to participate in HE, mainly by raising their educational aspirations. However, most parents were unable to provide concrete guidance and support whilst their children were navigating the university application process due to their limited knowledge and exposure to HE. These findings clearly show that more should be done to educate migrant parents, in this case Bangladeshi parents, about how the HE system works in the UK. In order to tackle this issue, I recommend that schools should allocate some time to invite parents, particularly those with no university experience, into school to take part in a short course that aims to inform them about the university application process. This course could cover various aspects, including application timelines, key decision dates, personal statements, available financial support and, most importantly, give them the opportunity to ask questions that they may have. This course would aim to raise parents' awareness and understanding of the HE system and the university application process, which would, in turn, enable them to provide guidance and support to their children when they are navigating through the university process.

In this study, parents were found to have put pressure on their children to go to university, preventing them from pursuing other routes that they perceived as being 'low status'. This reflected a lack of knowledge and understanding. One way this could be dealt with is for schools to work with parents to dismantle this stereotype by educating them about the benefits of choosing alternative routes (i.e. apprenticeships), so they are aware that there are other routes that their children can choose that will lead to high quality careers. This could result in parents being more open-minded and accepting of alternative routes. This would help students be more in control of their choices, as they may then not be pressured to go down a particular route when they would have preferred to go down a different one.

It is positive to see Bangladeshi students entering HE in large numbers; however, the challenge is to ensure that they are making informed choices. Schools and parents must work together to provide students with the information and support they need to be able to make the right decision for them. Often the focus has been on increasing the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE; however, there is a need to go beyond that. There is a real need to make sure that disadvantaged students have access to better quality information, and one way of doing this is by ensuring that the people closest to them have that information.

6.7 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This section includes reflections on the research process and is intended to support future researchers studying British Bangladeshi university entrants.

First, recruiting British Bangladeshi students to participate in this study was a real challenge. All high schools and colleges in Tower Hamlets and Ilford (London) were contacted, but only four agreed to take part in this study. As discussed previously in Chapter 3, there was a substantial gender imbalance (primarily because one of the schools was an all-girls school), and there were considerably more females than males in the sample. The questionnaire respondents consisted of 68% females and 32% males, and in the interviews, there were 58% females and 42% males. Although I wanted a more gender-balanced sample, due to time constraints, I was unable to recruit additional participants. Additionally, because I had no connections with any schools in London, it proved very difficult to get schools to agree to participate in this project. Nevertheless, I was grateful to the four schools that granted me access to their students. On reflection, if I were carrying out this study again, instead of approaching schools and colleges in September/October, I would have done it much sooner, around June/July time.

Second, in one of the high schools that took part in this study, no participants volunteered to take part in the interview stage, despite a large number having completed the questionnaire. To overcome this, I would present my project at Year 13 assemblies to give students an introduction to the study and give them the opportunity to ask any questions that they may have about it. This way, students would have a better

understanding of what the process entailed, and most importantly, it would give them the chance to meet the person who would be interviewing them.

Third, the gatekeepers let teachers administer the questionnaires to their students, and I was not involved in the process. I understand that this approach is more practical, as teachers have access to their students at all times. However, I would have preferred to be more involved in the administration of the questionnaires, as it would have enabled me to develop a rapport with the students, helping them feel more comfortable with me, and hopefully ‘pushing’ more students to participate in the interviews.

Last, during the interviews, I worked hard to develop a relationship and connection with the students on a personal level, as I wanted them to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings about their HE decision-making process. However, because schools had allocated a limited time for me to interview all participants, usually one afternoon, it proved difficult to build a good rapport with all participants. It was evident that a few students rushed through the interview, as they just wanted it to be over and done with. This reduced the content of the interviews; for example, one participant gave very brief answers to my questions, which proved to be somewhat unhelpful in the data analysis stage. To overcome this, I would ask schools to allocate more time for me to conduct the interviews, even if it meant that I had to come back a few times instead of once.

6.8 FUTURE RESEARCH

This section outlines future research that could be undertaken in order to extend and progress this study.

1. Based on the outcomes for the Bangladeshi students in London in this study, I highly recommend that a similar study is undertaken to explore the phenomenon of Bangladeshi students in other parts of the UK. This would help to determine whether the experiences of Bangladeshi students in London reflect the experiences of other Bangladeshis around the UK. As this study used a small sample of students from East London, I was unable to generalise my findings to the whole of the UK.
2. I would also recommend conducting another similar study exploring the experience of other ethnic minority students in order to determine whether my findings are specific to Bangladeshi students, or if they are applicable to other ethnic groups. Although the literature suggests that Bangladeshi students’

educational experiences may not be an isolated case, more research needs to be conducted to be able to establish this.

3. Further research focusing on the effects of local education policies (such as the London Equality Challenge) on Bangladeshi students' HE decision-making needs to be carried out. The impact that some policies may have had on students' decision-making has been discussed in previous chapters (literature review and methodology chapters), but these were purely speculation and not based on concrete evidence.
4. Although the role of students' social networks (parents, siblings, extended family, peers and teachers) was investigated in this study, this was done from the students' perspective. Further research exploring the role of these social networks from their perspective would enable us to explore their influence even further.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: NS-SEC categories *

Eight classes	Occupations
1. Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Government Minister, HR Manager, Local Councillor, Regeneration Officer, Solicitor
2. Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations	Computer Technician, Estate Agent, Housing Officer, Interpreter, Nurse, Respiratory Therapist, Store Manager, Teacher
3. Intermediate occupations	Administrator, Cashier, Clerk, Nursing Assistant, Nursery Nurse, Police Officer, Teacher Assistant, Travel
4. Small employers and own account workers	Driving Instructor, Shop Keeper, Small Business Owner, Takeaway/Restaurant Owner, Taxi Driver
5. Lower supervisory and technical occupations	Chef
6. Semi-routine occupations	Kitchen Porter, Receptionist, Retail Assistant, Restaurant Worker, Royal Mail Sorting Officer, Security Guard, Shop Worker, Tailor
7. Routine occupations	Business Driver, Butcher, Cleaner, Delivery Driver, Dinner Lady
8. Never worked and long-term unemployed	

*Coded using ONS Occupation Coding Tool

APPENDIX B: Gatekeeper Information Sheet

Dear whom it may concern,

I am writing to ask your permission to conduct research at your college for a study entitled 'British Bangladeshis pursuing Higher Education: A Success Story'. This research is being conducted by Djihad Drari from the University of Leicester as part of her PhD in Education thesis. The study has been approved by the University of Leicester Research Ethics Committee and, as part of that approval process, I am required to obtain gatekeeper permission from the institutions where I recruit participants from.

The aim of this study is to find out why young Bangladeshi people make a particular choice during their education. I intend on doing this by exploring the influences on participation in HE of Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets. This will enable me to understand what is making disproportionately high numbers of Bangladeshi individuals go to university despite being one of the most economically disadvantaged group in the UK. This is an interesting area as this increase in HE participation amongst this group is a relatively recent phenomenon. The project consists of a short questionnaire and an interview with myself.

If you would like to be involved would you please sign the consent form that acknowledges that you have read the Participant Information Sheet, you understand the nature of the study being conducted, and give permission for the research to be conducted at your institution.

Yours sincerely,
Djihad Drari BA (Hons) MSc

APPENDIX C: Gatekeeper Consent Form

- I..... voluntarily agree to help facilitate this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to help now, I can withdraw without any consequences of any kind (cut-off date 30/04/2018).
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will assist by allowing the researcher to have access to my students for this study.
- I understand that all data collected in this study is confidential and anonymous.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in this research to seek further clarification and information.

Djihad Drari
PhD Candidate in Education
University of Leicester
21 University Road
Leicester
LE1 7RF
Email: dd183@leicester.ac.uk

Signature of gatekeeper

Signature of gatekeeper

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Djihad Drari
Signature of researcher

23/11/2017
Date

APPENDIX D: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

I would like to ask you to participate in the data collection for a study that explores the choice process of university applicants. I'm currently a PhD student in Education at the University of Leicester and my project explores the various factors that influence people who choose to go to university.

Through this project, I hope to better understand the following issues:

- **What are the experiences of ethnic Bangladeshi students when making the choice of going to university?**
- **How do internal and external factors influence Bangladeshi students' choice to pursue a higher education?**
- **How do Bangladeshi students' long-term life and career goals shape the choice that they make?**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It will involve completing a questionnaire which will take 5-10 minutes to complete and a short interview for those who wish to take part in it.

You may decide not to answer any of the questions if you wish. You may also decide to withdraw from this study at any time by advising the researcher. If you notify us of your withdrawal, all identifiable data will be destroyed. The cut-off date for participants to withdraw from research is the 30TH April 2018. Once data has been anonymised, it will be impossible to identify the origin and cannot be destroyed.

The information you provide is confidential, except that with your permission anonymised quotes may be used. If you request confidentiality, beyond anonymised quotes, information you provide will be treated only as a source of background information and alongside literature-based research. This means that no quotes derived from your questionnaire or interview will be used in the study. If this is the case, please inform the researcher.

Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any publications resulting from this study; neither will there be anything to identify your place of study.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information, please ask the researcher before, during, or after taking part in the interview.

Yours sincerely,

Djihad Drari
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University of Leicester
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APPENDIX E: Participant Consent Form

Issue	Respondent's initials
I have read the information presented in the Participant Information Sheet about the study “British Bangladeshis pursuing Higher Education: A Success Story”.	
I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, and received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.	
I am also aware that excerpts from the questionnaires and interviews (if applicable) may be included in publications to come from this research. Quotations will be kept anonymous.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during this study may be looked at by the researcher’s supervisors when needed. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my responses.	

With full knowledge of all forgoing, I agree to participate in this study.

I agree to being contacted again by the researcher during the course of this study if my responses give rise to interesting findings (cut-off date is 30/04/2018).

- No
 Yes

Participant Name		Consent taken by	
Participant Signature		Signature	
Date		Date	

APPENDIX F: Questionnaire

University Questionnaire

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

- A) Male B) Female

3. Which of these statements applies to you? (circle your answer)

- I was born abroad
- I was born in the UK and so have both of my parents
- I was born in the UK and both of my parents were born abroad
- I was born in the UK, one of my parents was also born in the UK but the other was born abroad. Please specify who.....
- Other (please specify).....

4. Did your parents go to university? (circle your answer)

- A) No B) Yes, my mother
C) Yes, my father D) Yes, both of my parents

5. If either or both of your parents have gone to university, please specify which university (if known)

Father.....

Mother.....

6. If either or both of your parents have gone to university, please specify what they studied (if known)

Father.....

Mother.....

7. Has anyone else in your family been to university? If yes, please specify who.

- A) No
B) Yes

8. Are you parents employed? (circle your answer)
 A) Mother Yes/no B) Father Yes/no

9. If yes, what do they do?

My mother _____
 My father _____

10. Did you qualify for Free School Meals in secondary school? (circle your answer)
 A) Yes B) No

11. Which universities are you applying for?

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....
- 4.....
- 5.....

12. Which university would you like to attend?

.....

13. Which course/program have you chosen to study at university?

.....

**14. Please indicate what influenced you during the process of choosing to go to university.
 (Please tick as many as apply)**

a) The following people have influenced my choice...

	A lot	Moderate	A little	Not at all
Parents				
Siblings				
Other family members				
Friends/peers				
Family friend(s)				
Member(s) of the community				
Teachers				
School advisers				

Other (please specify)

b) The following things have influenced my choice to go to university...

	A lot	Moderate	A little	Not at all
My predicted grades				
My qualifications				
My interest in a particular subject/course				
My inclination towards a particular career path				
I want a better life				
I want to gain a higher qualification				
It's difficult to get a good job without a higher qualification				
For personal development				
To widen my career options				
To make my parents proud				
To prove myself to others				

Other (please specify)

c) The following things have influenced my choice of university....

	A lot	Moderate	A little	Not at all
Family member(s) went there				
Other people I know are also going there				
Reputation of the university				
It has low entry requirements				
It has high entry requirements				
It is easy to get an offer				
It does not have a racist reputation				
There are other students there who share the same ethnic background as me				
I like the sound of their modules				
It's local to me				
They offer my chosen course/program				
It has good career prospects				

Other (please specify)

15. What is your dream career/job?

.....

16. Is your choice of going to university and course/programme linked to your dream career/job? (Circle your answer)

A) Yes B) No

17. What would you like to achieve from going to university?

.....

Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire. The next stage of this study involves taking part in an interview. If you would like to take part in the interview, please write your name below

APPENDIX G: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule (with prompts and cues)

1. Why did you want to go to university?
2. What would you like to achieve from going to university?
3. What university will you be attending?
4. What degree did you pick?
5. Why did you pick this degree?
6. Talk about how you came to the decision of wanting to go to university.
7. How much of this was your choice?
8. How did you find university the application process?
9. Did you face any obstacles along the way? If so, how did you overcome them?
10. How did your parents influence your decision to go to university? (if applicable)
11. Did your parents' expectations feel like pressure or support?
12. How did your siblings influence your decision to go to university? (if applicable)
13. How did your extended family influence your decision to go to university? (if applicable)
14. What is your school's view regarding university?
15. Does your school only talk about university or do they talk about other avenues?
16. How did your teachers influence your decision to go to university? (if applicable)
17. How did the School Advisers influence your decision? (if applicable)
18. What is the Bangladeshi community's views regarding university?
19. How did the Bangladeshi community influence your decision to go to university? (if applicable)
20. You said it is difficult to get a good job without a degree, how do you know this? (if applicable)
21. What is a good job for you?
22. What type of job are you aspiring for?
23. You said you wanted a better life, what does that mean to you? (if applicable)
24. You said you chose to go to university for personal development reasons, what do you want to develop about yourself? (if applicable)
25. You said that you wanted to prove yourself to others, who are you referring to? (if applicable)

26. You said one of the reasons why you chose to go to university was because you did not want to do a vocational course, why is that? (if applicable)
27. You said one of the reasons why you chose to go to university was because you did not want to go out and work, why is that? (if applicable)

APPENDIX H: An example of working on interview transcript of main study

Why did you want to go to university?

higher qualification "I want a degree, a degree that will directly affect what job I take." *degree requirement*

Why did you pick King's College?

meeting entry requirement "Well, I applied to the ENPD program at the health A requirement for medicine, that's why I was like these are achievable grades, I'm in that bracket for what they need also it's a Russell Group uni, it's a really good uni." *university reputation.*

Did you manage to get an offer?

"No, I got the interview and then they rejected me."

Did you get any offers?

"No: didn't get any medicine offers, I got all Biomed."

Why did you pick medicine and biomedicine?

"Well, I want to study medicine because obviously, the end job is to become a doctor so *career aspirations* that was always what I wanted to be. So that's why I pursued it. I like science, I like helping people so I was gravitating towards that and purely doing science, so I was thinking you *enjoys chosen subject* know if I'm purely doing science I probably will get bored of it and if I do medicine, there's so much you can do inside that subject."

How did you make the decision that you wanted to go to university?

first in the family "So I think from like a young age, my parents were like 'you know you go study, get a good job, be successful' so from then on you know I was thinking right I got to study, study and become successful and no-one in my family ever got a degree so I said I've got to be the first one so yeah that's why." *high expectations (parents).*

Did you feel pressure or support from your parents?

no pressure (parents) "No, no it wasn't pressure."

So did they tell you what they wanted you to go to university?

have no make own choices "They didn't tell me what to do to study, they told me go university but they never said you have to go uni, they said get good grades and go uni so good grades always correlate with uni."

So do you feel that you had a choice?

"Well I think that I have a choice but maybe I got conditioned, if I get good grades go uni." *internalised parents' expectations*

Were you faced with any struggles?

"I didn't have a problem picking the degree, I didn't have problems the choices like what unis because I wanted to stay all local but then I realised my predicted grades and certain London unis they don't match the requirements so I applied to two out of London unis and one London uni so I know what I was gonna do and the struggles were because no-one in my family has ever done you know uni, got a degree and never gone through UCAS, that was difficult bit because even till now I haven't done my student finance, I don't know what to do so I want to start step-by-step ask people from school and like I have done like certain programs where I've done networking and got people's contacts, I've been asking them and that's how I have managed to build my personal statement, how to write it this and that. So it was struggle because I had no clue what to do but during the process I learned a lot."

Lack of family support

Meeting entry requirements

School support

So you struggled because your parents were not familiar with how things are done?

"I didn't have no siblings to look at and ask, I didn't have any cousins to look to ask."

Lack of family support

Where did you get the support from?

"So I had, there was this program the school did it was INTO SCIENCE and it got me into this UCL target medicine so one of my mentors you know I took his email, I was contacting him saying 'oh guide oh you know tell me how to write a personal statement this and that' and also one of my further distant cousin he was the one that went uni, he went uni and then his younger brother who is a year older than me he's got uni at Oxford so when I was doing my application you know I asked him how did you write yours and I ask him and then his older brother he gave me someone's number and he said this person does medicine at King's, ask him so I've been talking to him, he's been the most helpful in terms of how to build my application, that's how I've done it so there's a lot of stretching far and wide finding people."

School support

Family support

Guidance with personal statement

You said that you didn't want to do a vocational course, why is that?

"Because I feel like the subjects that I study doing an apprenticeship is pointless, that's why. The subjects that I am doing for A level right it's best to go uni."

Apprenticeship

What is a better life for you?

"Well a stable job, a stable job to put food on the plate, being able to pay for my parents mortgage off and stuff like that."

Stable job

Financial stability

support family financially.

You said that it is difficult to get a stable job without a degree, how do you know this?

Apprenticeships
"I think it's difficult to get a job period, that's what I think and I think like apprenticeships some apprenticeships, like the higher end ones they're really good like the KPMG ones, them ones are the best of the best but say for example you come out of GCSE and you're doing an apprenticeship then ones from people I know that have done them, they haven't gone far with them. Obviously it's a small pool of people but I can only judge from what I have seen so from that I think, I have seen people going uni like if you ask all the teachers they have done degrees and you know look what they are doing. Some people are making you know good money. When I was at these events, I ask oh you know what did you want to do first, what did you want to study and he studied this degree and then you know they did this job which is completely relevant to this degree so I feel like when you have a degree, it's basically something for you to fall back on. If you don't want to pursue this any further you be like oh I have this degree right, I don't want to this right now so oh let me invest in this, ok this business failed right I have no money ok I have this degree I can use that apply for a job, you know start earning a living and restart and that's why I think it's a good thing, it's a good back-up."

witnessing benefits of university

Back-up plan

What is it that you would like to develop about yourself?

new experiences
"Uh I think as a character, as a person right you know I want to become more mature, more experiences but I want to also keep study I don't want to go straight into the real world and not study and what I mean by not study as in like institution study, I feel like everyone whatever they are doing they are studying something that's why I feel like when you know when you go to university you know there's a lot of different activities/clubs things that you can do right and you can build yourself, experience new things that you haven't experienced before like I don't think that the life that you have at uni you would experience it if you did an apprenticeship or doing this and that."

being more mature

new experiences

apprenticeships

Where did you get offers from?

"I got offers at Queen Mary for Biomedic and St George's and then King's they rejected me from medicine but they gave biomedicine."

They're all quite good universities

"They are but that's not what I wanted originally."

Can't you go through Clearance?

"Yeah you can go through Clearance. I heard that say for example on results day you can go through clearing, if you don't get anything from clearing, you can still accept your offers. That's what people are telling me and then if you've got good grades then adjustment."

well informed about the application process.

You said you wanted to go to university to please, who are these people?

pleasing parents

"My parents, I mean actually only my parents, I don't really care what everyone else thinks. Come on my parents right, day and night they are doing stuff to help me better my education like my dad is you know a cab driver right and he is not earning massive living right but anything that I want to in terms of study he gives it whether it costs £1000, £2000 whatever the money is he will pay for it because he knows it's an investment right for the future so I want to be like a successful investment for him."

Investment

parents sacrifices

What is the Bangoli community's view/opinions about going to university? Is going to university something that is expected from everyone?

Seen as a failure

"With the Bangoli community you have to go university or else you're a failure and basically if you don't go to uni and you do something else right and as long as you have money than you are successful, if you don't have money than they won't even talk about you. They just won't talk about you, they won't gas you up, they won't talk big of you which I don't like but it's so big into that community, oh someone did this degree and this person who is not even, it somehow related to this person is talking about this person 'oh this guy got this, this guy got that.'"

success

community talk

Who talks like this?

"Older people and the parents, my mum does as well and I tell her to stop it. I tell her to stop doing it because it's not right you know what you do, gossip like ok gossip but don't talk about other people saying 'oh he's got this degree, I don't what he's gonna get.'"

community talk

What is your school/college's view about going to university? Do they talk about other avenues too?

meeting entry requirements

"Nobody talks about nothing. In this school I think oh the people that I hang around with only focus on study so they think study, get the grades and then once you get the grades and then think about your next goal. That's the students and that's me as well, I agree with them because you can apply to all these unis and all that but if you don't get the grades it means nothing so like step by step."

similar thinking (friends)

What about your teachers?

No talks on HE (teachers)

"Teachers they're more stressed about getting the content finished, we don't really talk much about uni."

How did you know about the reputations of the universities that you have applied for?

own research

"I did some research, I just googled write Russell Group uni and then see a list of them although King's is not the highest in the Russell Group, it's still a Russell Group same with Queen Mary, Queen Mary is a newly Russell Group."

Russell Group universities

How did you know about Russell Group universities?

"It's just that people talk about Russell Group, like they are the best ones, elite uni."

university reputation

How did you know the universities that you have applied for don't have a racist reputation?

student satisfaction - action

"Well I hope that they don't have a racist reputation, from the students you know what they call it, they do the survey thing to see how much they enjoy their course so it's like 80%, 95% so from that I keep on thinking that if the students are happy they're must be doing something right and I don't think that if there was racism that the students would be happy."

Why did you want to stay local?

local university

"I want to stay local but if you look at my application, there's two out of London. If it's medicine, I would go anywhere but for anything else stay local because I can't afford accommodation right so if I can stay at home and go uni, it's the cheapest way."

willing to compromise on chosen course

cost

What is your plan B?

high expectations (parents)

"If I get the grades, I'll reapply. If I don't get the grades I'll reapply but for a different course. Because my parents told me study, go uni so I'm gonna study and go uni and then once I go uni get that degree and then I do whatever I want."

Freedom of choice post HE

APPENDIX I: Ethical approval granted by the University of Leicester's ethics committee



Title	British Bangladeshis pursuing Higher Education: A Success Story
Application	13812-dd183-education
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Applicant Details

Lead Applicant

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Principal Investigator

Drari, Djihad (dd183)

Co-researcher(s)/co-applicant(s) Names

-

Status

Postgraduate Research (e.g. PhD, DSocSci, DClinPsy, EdD)

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