

Lived Experience of Undergraduate Students with Access Arrangements: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background. The number of students receiving access arrangements at the University of Malta has increased substantially over the past five years. As of 2020, 210 students qualified for and received access arrangements at the University of Malta. Previous local studies on the lived experience of students receiving access arrangements have been restricted to secondary and post-secondary education. The aim of this dissertation is to address this gap through a qualitative study of the lived experience of undergraduate students who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta. **Methodology.** The sample population was undergraduate students at the University of Malta between their second and final year of their course and who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta. Semi-structured individual interviews were carried out with 9 participants (the duration of each interview was approximately 25 minutes), which were then transcribed, and subsequently analysed through thematic analysis. **Results.** Six overarching themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: Equity, Anxiety, Assessment, Application Process, Appropriate Access Arrangements, and Support. Participants' experiences within these themes relate to a sense of justice and dignity in relation to students' lived experiences with access arrangements. Participants experienced higher levels of anxiety due to examinations and course-related work, and viewed access arrangements as fair adjustments which level the playing field. Participants suggested that examinations could be carried out online on computers in their home setting and given a choice to do an assignment instead of an examination. Lived experiences also involved experiences whereby participants felt supported and hence dignified by members of the ADSU throughout the application process, as well as deeming provided access arrangements as appropriate, hence dignifying them. Participants also reported negative experiences pertaining to the application process and inappropriate (or lack of) provision of access arrangements, and anxiety over what they perceived as their peers' judgement regarding fairness of receiving access arrangements as well as lecturers' and teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities and willingness to support their access arrangements. **Conclusions.** The results indicate that communication between University entities, students and lecturers could be improved in order to raise awareness among students and lecturers, thereby addressing attitudinal barriers in relation to students with disabilities and access arrangements. Assessment methods may be improved by a shift back to online examinations in the home setting. Given the chronicity of disability and continuity of education, further research should focus on students' lived experiences with access arrangements at primary, secondary and post-secondary levels, and their experiences of assessment with regards to online examinations as a result of the COVID situation in the Maltese context.

Key words: Access arrangements; Disability; University students; Tertiary education.

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1. Introducing the research

1.1. Context of the study

As of 2020, approximately 210 students qualified for and received access arrangements (AAs) for a variety of conditions (including dyslexia, autism, ADHD, mental health conditions, physical and visual impairment, epilepsy, and diabetes) at the University of Malta through the Access Disability Support Unit (ADSU) (M. Mangiafico, personal communication, November 16, 2021). Furthermore, the number of students receiving AAs at the University of Malta has increased substantially over the past 5 years (M. Mangiafico, 2021, personal communication, January 26, 2021), which hence merits further research into how University students experience AAs.

1.2. Research question

The research question of this study is: ‘What are the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta?’, which I will address throughout this dissertation. Addressing this research question will contribute to a better understanding of the effects of access arrangements on students’ education through gaining insight into their personal lived experiences.

1.3. Motivation for the study

The research area of access arrangements is one which is significant in my eyes, for two main reasons. The first is the significance I feel should be given to the struggles which students endure due to their disabilities in the setting of education. This includes, but is not limited to, persons with dyslexia who may benefit from assistive technology such as readers, persons with anxiety disorders who may benefit from distraction-free rooms and extra time, persons with obsessive-compulsive disorder who may benefit from extra time and the use of a word processor, and persons who are on the autism spectrum who may benefit from extra time, a room with fewer students, and the presence of a prompter, among others (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015). The second reason which has motivated me to carry out this study draws from my personal experience with education and access arrangements. I have Tourette’s Syndrome and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, which has persisted from a young age and has affected my experience with education, especially with regards to examinations. When I was 10 years old, I started receiving access arrangements pertaining to extra time and a distraction-free

room (i.e., a room with very few students, or a venue alone), which I continued to receive throughout my secondary education, up to and including the completion of my Ordinary, Intermediate, and Advanced level examinations. I then began to struggle with written examinations due to my obsessive-compulsive disorder, which caused my handwriting to be seemingly messy and nearly illegible at times. I hence applied for and subsequently received an additional access arrangement regarding examinations, i.e., the use of a word processor during examinations, an access arrangement which I used throughout my undergraduate and post-graduate level education at the University of Malta (between the years 2018 and 2023). The opportunity to carry out my dissertation on the topic of access arrangements hence interested me deeply, and I opted to research further into it to contribute to a better understanding of students' lived experiences with access arrangements at the University of Malta. Due to my personal experience regarding the research question of this study, I did my utmost not to bias the participants during the interviews and maintained my role as the interviewer.

1.4. Structure of the dissertation

The structure of the study comprises of the aims and rationale of the present study, the local context regarding the application process for access arrangements, followed by a literature review of related works pertaining to the research area of students' lived experiences of access arrangements. The study will then relate to the methodology adopted during this study, followed thereafter by the findings and analysis, discussion of findings, implications for policy and research, reflections on the research process and limitations, followed lastly by the conclusions of the study. The decision to present the findings and discussion sections separately lends to the research by Lincoln & Guba (1985), where they recommend presenting the descriptive information separately within the findings section, and interpretations of the results within the discussion. This decision was also based on the research by Reay et al. (2019), whereby they suggest that presenting findings and discussions separately in qualitative research serves to increase rigour and authenticity of the findings. All names of participants who took part in this study mentioned in this dissertation have been pseudonymised. The referencing style used for this dissertation is APA 7th edition.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. *Structure of this section*

This section is premised by the aims and rationale of the study, followed by definitions of terms key to the study area. This is followed by the local context and relevant research in this study area.

2.1.2. *The literature review process*

An extensive literature search via 5 databases (Hydi, Education Magazine Archive, Education Collection, ERIC, and Emerald Insight) was carried out to identify relevant research regarding access arrangements. The following key words were utilised to carry out the literature search: access arrangements, examination access arrangements, special access arrangements, modifications access arrangements, disability access arrangements, accommodations, and higher education access arrangements. Upon reading the abstracts of the resulting search tabs, those which were relevant to the study were selected and reviewed.

2.1.3. *Aims and rationale*

The research by (Marić, 2018) focused on the lived experiences of students regarding inclusion at post-secondary and tertiary education in Malta in relation to their physical and sensorial disabilities, and indicated that there may be an inconsistency between policies and what is implemented regarding inclusive education. While this study focused on those with physical and sensorial disabilities and referred to AAs and accommodation, it did not focus on students receiving AAs for other conditions such as autism, ADHD, anxiety, depression, epilepsy, and dyslexia. Camilleri et al. (2019) also delved into experiences of secondary and post-secondary students (16-18 years old, after having sat for their Ordinary level or Intermediate and Advanced level examinations) with dyslexia regarding examinations, which gave further insight into their experiences with examinations and access arrangements. This dissertation hence aims to focus on the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive AAs at the University of Malta, where I define AAs as an umbrella term referring to examination access arrangements and access arrangements received by students throughout the rest of the university year. Delving into the perceptions and lived experiences of individuals and students with disabilities with access arrangements is furthermore essential due to increasing recognitions of schools and those in charge of education and disability

related policy decisions (Durkin et al., 2009). The research approach will be based on an interpretivist paradigm and a subjectivity ontology, whereby social interaction will be fundamental to gaining and constructing knowledge regarding students' lived experiences (O'Donoghue, 2006).

2.2. Key terms

2.2.1. Disability

Disability, as defined by *United Nations General Assembly* (2007), relates to those who have “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments” which can present hinderances to their participation in school and wider society when they encounter environmental barriers. The social model of disability further suggests the oppressive nature of having a disability within a wider society, such that persons with disabilities may have restricted opportunities to participate within social scenarios (Hopkins, 2011; Oliver, 2013). Persons with disabilities should hence be provided with sufficient accommodations and modifications such that they may participate in and benefit from all human rights and freedoms on an equal, level playing field (*United Nations General Assembly*, 2007). These accommodations should be reasonable to ensure that all students can participate in learning activities and benefit from services equally (*Equal Opportunities (Persons With Disability) Act Cap 413*, 2000; *The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). These accommodations should not give any student any advantage over other students, in that they should be given rationally (*Equal Opportunities (Persons With Disability) Act Cap 413*, 2000; *The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). These accommodations may be provided in the form of access arrangements within the education setting, such as the use of a scribe, word processor, extra time, a distraction free room, and any form of assistive technology (any form of equipment or system which can be utilized to improve functional capability in persons with disabilities) (Bryant et al., 1998; *United Nations General Assembly*, 2007).

2.2.2. Access arrangements

Access arrangements (AAs) are suitable accommodations and modifications made to allow students with disabilities to access services (including lectures, assessments, and other services) and all human rights and freedoms (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). AAs further refer to amendments designed to even the playing field for students with disabilities and/or special educational needs (Hipkiss et al., 2021; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012). AAs often comprise of accommodations (such as distraction-free rooms and extra time for examinations) tailored to meet

the needs of each student, to make assessment fairer and more accessible for all students (Wood & Happé, 2020). Commonly allocated AAs include the use of a computer/word processor, supervised rest and/or movement breaks, the allocation of a scribe to write what the student wants to input as the answers, a reader (someone to read out the examination questions to the student), extra time during examinations, and the presence of a communicator to translate the examination questions into the students' spoken language (Woods, 2007). AAs hence allow for students with special educational needs and disabilities to receive the necessary accommodations to aid them in their educational experience, both throughout the year, and during their examinations (Hipkiss et al., 2021). AAs, however, often require the diagnosis and/or permission of a professional in the related field (such as a psychiatrist or psychologist) for AAs to be granted to students (Woods, 2007). However, certain AAs, such as the allocation of 25% extra time for examinations, may be given more commonly and without the need for a professional's diagnosis (Woods, 2007).

2.2.3. Access

The term 'access' refers to physical accessibility as well as the accessibility of information (and how it is communicated) and services (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). 'Access to education' refers to the identification of barriers which learners (of any age) may face when attempting to access education, as well as identifying and supplying suitable resources to increase access to education ("Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education," 2009). Allowing for all children to access services and resources for optimal education is essential in working towards inclusive education, which refers to widening the extent at which the education system reaches out to all students to strive for education for all ("Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education," 2009). The allocation of access arrangements can be an indispensable tool in striving to achieve access to education for all students, including those who have disabilities, since their specific learning difficulties, impairments, and/or disabilities may otherwise hinder them from reaching their full potential throughout their education (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015). Access also relates to inclusive education, which may be defined as systems whereby all students are enabled to participate within an educational setting, where they are all valued as equals in terms of rights and where diversity is appreciated (Smith et al., 2021). Access and inclusion hence relates to universal design for learning, which implies that work environments, services, and classroom instructional methods should incorporate accessibility (with regards to both physical accessibility and access to education) in the design stage, not as an afterthought (*United Nations General Assembly*, 2007). Making courses at post-secondary and tertiary levels more accessible for students with disabilities may

also increase the rate at which persons with disabilities are being employed, since numerous professions and jobs require post-secondary and tertiary degree training (Dowrick et al., 2005).

2.3. The local context – applying for access arrangements

In the local context, the specific AAs to be given to each applicant throughout secondary and post-secondary education is decided by the MATSEC board (Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate board). Upon entry into University or similar higher education, students who require AAs are directed to the Access Disability Support Unit (ADSU) board, the members of which then decide upon whether to give students their requested AAs. The first step to obtaining AAs at the University of Malta is to approach the Access Disability Support Unit (ADSU) as soon as possible in order to gather the necessary documents and submit their applications (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements, 2018*). Students must then set up a meeting with the coordinator of the ADSU, ideally prior to the start of their course, to discuss the arrangements they require, for either examinations/assessment (Examination AAs), or throughout the year (Course AAs), or a combination of the two (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements, 2018*). In order to apply, students will need to complete an application form (provided by the ADSU) to indicate which AAs they would like to apply for (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements, 2018*). Along with the application, students are also required to attach documents pertaining to evidence of need, which may be in the form of a report from a professional, such as a psychiatrist's report, psychologist's report, occupational therapist's report, or neurologist's report, among others, according to each condition or impairment (see Table 2 and Table 3 for the an overview of potentially necessary report requirements according to each condition students may have) (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements, 2018*). Students may also contact the ADSU coordinator at any point throughout their courses if they require any additional help or if they require an alteration in which AAs they receive (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements, 2018*). A detailed overview of the different course and examination access arrangements which are available can be seen Table 1.

Additionally, Table 2 portrays the Examination AAs which are available on the Access Arrangements Application Form in *The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018)* (table amended from), while Table 3 portrays the documents/reports which may be required as per the condition/impairment of each applicant (table amended from *The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018)*). AAs are considered and given on a case-per-case basis, whereby each student is taken into consideration at a

committee level to decide upon the best AAs for each individual. AAs which are often considered/given to students according to their conditions may be seen in Table 4, and Table 5 portrays the AAs normally considered/given for each condition/impairment (amended from The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018)).

Course Access Arrangements
Copies of lecture note/slides
Recording of lectures
Flexibility with deadlines for coursework and assignments
Use of relevant equipment during lectures
Permission to stand during lectures
Permission to leave the lecture room
Accessible venue
Recommendations for external support
Extension of course deadline
Assistance from UM Occupational Therapy

Table 1: Course Access Arrangements which are available on the Access Arrangements Application Form in The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018) (table amended from The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018)).

Examination Access Arrangements
Extra Time – can be used as settling down time and/or supervised rest periods
Venue away from centre
Examination room with fewer students
Examination room alone
Enlarged Question Paper
Practical Assistant
Scribe/Amanuensis
Voice activated computer
Provision of a word processor
Provision of a word processor with spell check on (for non-language-based exams)
Exam scripts to be taken apart
Permission to use toilet frequently
Permission to eat and drink
Permission to use a hand towel

Table 2: Examination Access Arrangements which are available on the Access Arrangements Application Form in The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018) (table amended from The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018)).

Evidence/Reports which may be required
Psychologist's report
Psychiatrist's report
Relevant Consultant's report
Ophthalmologist's report
Audiologist's report and Audiogram
Rheumatologist's report
Occupational Therapist's report
Neurologist's report
ASDC/MATSEC Access Arrangements Letter
Speech Language Pathologist's report

Table 3: Documents/reports which may be required as per the condition/impairment of each applicant (table amended from The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018)).

Impairment	Professional needed to write a report
Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADD/ADHD)	Psychologist or Psychiatrist
Autism Spectrum Condition	Psychologist or Psychiatrist
Developmental Coordination Disorder/Dyspraxia	Occupational Therapist
Diabetes Mellitus	Endocrinologist
Epilepsy	Neurologist
Hearing Impairment	Audiologist
Irritable Bowel Syndrome	Gastroenterologist or Family Doctor
Myalgic Encephalopathy/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Post Viral Fatigue Syndrome	Neurologist or Endocrinologist
Mental Health Difficulties	Psychiatrist or Psychologist
Physical and/or Mobility Impairment	Relevant specialist
Neurological Disorder	Neurologist
Specific Learning Difficulties	SpLD specialist or psychologist with expertise in psycho-educational assessment
Speech Impairment	Speech Language Pathologist
Systemic Lupus Erythematosus	Relevant medical specialist who has known the student for at least one year
Visual Impairment	Ophthalmologist or Orthoptist

Table 4: Documents/reports required for each condition or impairment (table obtained from (The University of Malta Access Arrangements, 2018)).

Impairment	Access arrangements normally considered/given
Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADD/ADHD)	Extra time during examinations – can be used as settling down time, supervised rest/movement breaks
	Examination room with fewer students
Autism Spectrum Condition	Clear instructions regarding course/examination requirements
	Consideration of potential difficulties related to collaboration requirements during group assignments
	Avoidance of distracting stimuli during lectures
	Extra time during examinations – can be also used as settling down period, supervised rest/movement
	Examination room with fewer students or alone
Developmental Coordination Disorder/Dyspraxia	Extra time during examinations – can be also used as settling down period, supervised rest/movement
	Use of a word processor
Diabetes Mellitus	Permission to use a blood glucose measuring device
	Permission to bring their own medication
	Extra time to compensate for when blood glucose levels decrease until it is normalised
	Permission to bring water and food
Epilepsy	Arrangements for student to do all/part of the course on a part-time basis
	Clear instructions on course/examination requirements
	Lighting arrangements for students with photosensitive epilepsy
	Consideration of potential difficulties related to collaboration requirements for group assignments
	Extra time that can also be used as settling down period and as supervised rest/movement breaks
	Examination room with fewer students or alone
	Trained first aider available
Hearing Impairment	Extra time during examinations – up to 25%
	Sign Language Interpreter for Deaf students to access lectures and other activities involving spoken communication (except for written examinations)
	A live-speaker may be requested to present the recorded material
	Students to be seated close to the speaker

	Use of a radio-aid and examiner/speaker requested to wear a microphone
	Students may need extra time during oral assessments which require written answers
Irritable Bowel Syndrome	Compensation time if students require frequent use of bathroom
	Examination room with fewer students alone
	Venue close to the bathroom
	Students allowed to leave the lecture room
Myalgic Encephalopathy/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Post Viral Fatigue Syndrome	Extra time during examinations – can be also used as settling down period and supervised rest/movement breaks
	An examination venue with fewer students or for students to be seated on their own
	Arrangements for extensions of deadlines for assignments
Mental Health Difficulties	Arrangements for student to do all/part of the course on a part-time basis
	Clear instructions on course/examination requirements
	Consideration of potential difficulties related to collaboration requirements for group assignments
	Extra time during examinations – also be used as settling down period and supervised rest/movement
	Examination venue with fewer students or alone
Physical and/or Mobility Impairment	Physical access to venues – arrangements made to give students equal opportunity to use all services
	Parking – students given permission to be dropped off as close as possible to the lecture/examination rooms
	Ergonomic/environmental adaptations
	Personal assistant – may be necessary where students have difficulty manipulating objects
	Use of a word processor – difficulty with hand movements
	Extra time given during examinations – difficulty writing/making use of a word processor
	Alternative equipment if students are unable to use standard equipment
Practical work should observe safety measures	

Neurological Disorder	Arrangements for student to do all/part of their course on a part-time basis
	Clear instructions on course/examination requirements
	Consideration of potential difficulties related to collaboration requirements for group assignments
	Extra time – can also be used as settling down period and supervised rest/movement breaks
	An examination venue with fewer students or for students to be seated on their own
	A first aider can be on call
Specific Learning Difficulties	Extra time during examinations – can also be used as settling down period and supervised rest/movement breaks
	Examination venue with fewer students or alone
	Use of a word processor during their examinations (optional – spell check turned on)
Speech Impairment	Allow enough time (and do not give unnecessary prompts) during oral examinations for students to express themselves
Systemic Lupus Erythematosus	Extra time – can be also used as settling down period and supervised rest/movement breaks
	Examination venue with fewer students or alone
	Extensions of deadlines for assignments
Visual Impairment	Mobility – visually-impaired students can make use of a long white cane or guide-dog
	Arrangements for students to carry out course on a part-time basis
	Provision of soft copies of course materials
	Technological aids considered to ensure access to course material
	Extra time (up to 50%) – can be used as settling down period, supervised rest/movement breaks

Table 5: Access arrangements normally considered/given for each condition/impairment (amended from The University of Malta Access Arrangements (2018)).

2.4. Related literature

2.4.1. Allocation of appropriate access arrangements

Allocating appropriate AAs should be a key focus in the educational experiences of students who have disabilities, especially those with disabilities which can negatively impact their educational experiences and academic achievement if their modes of assessment are not adapted/altere d (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015). Although other students may be outwardly handling the academic workload, their optimal mode of assessment may not be the standard mode of assessment (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015). This can be exemplified by a student with anxiety who may seem to be handling the workload of university, whereas they may benefit from a distraction-free room and extra time during examinations, to alleviate some of the anxiety that may otherwise hinder them throughout their examination sessions. Although this is indeed the ideal scenario, this is not always the case. A study carried out regarding students with disabilities following higher education in Cyprus found that numerous students were not given the AAs which they needed, as exemplified by not receiving extra time when needed (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008). Further examples include not permitting students with visual impairments to use magnifiers to facilitate reading of examination papers, and not providing examination texts in braille for students with visual impairments (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008).

A key consideration regarding the allocation of appropriate AAs is that of allocating the most suitable AAs to each student such that they will not have any unfair advantages or disadvantages when it comes to carrying out their examinations (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015). The provision of AAs should therefore work towards allocating reasonable adjustments for students, to make the course material, assessments, and their overall educational experience more accessible to them (McGhee, 2020). Furthermore, the AAs provided should not compromise the fairness and validity of the marks obtained through examinations carried out (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015). Although they may be seemingly receiving 'extra' arrangements, if allocated fairly, these AAs actually attempt to place these students on a more level playing field as those who do not receive AAs (Hipkiss et al., 2021). It is also essential to note that receiving AAs during examinations does not invalidate any certificates achieved as a result of those assessments (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). The consideration of fairness in AA allocation can be exemplified by the use of scribes and word processors as examination and course AAs for students with dyslexia. It has been found that students who have dyslexia may experience difficulty with writing as a result of their impairment, i.e., finding it challenging regarding motor information and visual integration (Ghirxi, 2013). In the education setting, the

practice of writing is commonplace, whereas students who have dyslexia may benefit more from making use of a word processor as a course AAs (Ghirxi, 2013). This is consistent with the technological age, since many students frequently utilise technological devices such as word processors and are hence becoming faster at typing (Ghirxi, 2013). Furthermore, students with dyslexia could benefit from having either permission to use a word processor or permission to have a scribe for examinations so as to allocate the most appropriate and fair AAs for each student (Ghirxi, 2013). A shift from paper-based examinations to computer-based examinations could hence aid countless students, especially since the numbers of applications for AAs seem to be increasing (Ghirxi, 2013). Hadjidakou & Hartas (2008) further stress the importance of taking each individual student and their specific education requirements into consideration to allocate the most appropriate AAs to improve their overall educational experiences.

It has been found that students with issues such as specific language impairments who may or may not receive some form of 'special education' during their education may be more likely to fall behind in comparison to their peers (Durkin et al., 2009). This may be due to insufficient monitoring and following up of each student's learning and educational experiences (Durkin et al., 2009). This study found that while around 90% received some form of educational support throughout their education, only around one third of those with specific language impairments had a statement of special educational needs (Durkin et al., 2009). A statement regarding Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) refers to statements issued by professionals which are reviewed periodically and which state that young individuals who have SEND require specific educational and health-related assistance, and states clearly what types of supports they need to be provided with (Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), 2022). This raises the important issue of the lack of provision of AAs for numerous students who do not have a statement of special educational needs (Durkin et al., 2009). This hence stresses the importance of research to delve into the process of giving statements of special educational needs, so as to be able to allocate appropriate supports and AAs to all students who could benefit from them (Durkin et al., 2009).

2.4.2. *Unequal access to and provision of access arrangements*

In a local study, Camilleri, Chetcuti, & Falzon (2019) suggested that the eligibility process of receiving examination AAs was strict such that students did not always receive the AAs that were more suitable for their needs. More reliable tests to measure eligibility should therefore be carried out to improve the educational experience of all students (from primary to tertiary levels), through reducing examination anxiety (Camilleri et al., 2019). The findings of (Camilleri et al., 2019)

further suggest that delving into students' lived experiences with AAs can be essential in developing a better understanding of factors which have helped and hindered them throughout their education. Woods et al. (2010) further stress the importance of allocating appropriate AAs, as well as involving the students in the decision-making process regarding which AAs they receive. A study by Woods (2007) further supports these findings, in that it was found that teachers thought the system for allocating AAs to be relatively unfair, and that it may be beneficial to students if the allocation of AAs were to be made more lenient to reach more students who may need additional support through AAs. This can be seen clearly in the classroom setting, whereby there may be certain students who may be supported by an LSE and receive AAs (such as being allowed to have movement breaks when needed, and to have adapted notes/similar educational material prepared for them to use), while others may not. Those who do not receive AAs but could benefit from them could hence be given more support, although this may require more resources and supervision (Woods, 2007). Woods (2007) supports this notion through finding that a lack of resources may be a factor barring the provision of AAs to more students, hence supplying more resources and personnel (such as readers and scribes) could allow for more students to receive appropriate AAs to improve their educational experiences. This can be further exemplified by the projected increase in need for staff and empty classrooms if more students were to receive distraction-free rooms and extra time during examinations (Woods, 2007).

Woods et al. (2010) found that although AAs (such as extra time and assistance during examinations) may be provided to those who are eligible, there seems to be an inadequate monitoring system, through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. They utilised interviews and thematic analysis to gain insight on student and parent perspectives on the AAs received (Woods et al., 2010), hence justifying the use of individual interviews and thematic analysis for this proposed research to gain insight into the lived experiences of students who receive AAs at the University of Malta. Similarly, Hipkiss et al. (2021) utilised forms and interviews with students (aged 11-16 years with more than one AA recruited through purposive sampling) to give voice to their perceived AA needs regarding assessments and examinations. Hipkiss et al. (2021) found that scores from standard tests were not sufficient in indicating what AAs would be needed for certain students' examination needs, hence stressing the importance of rooting AA provisions in constant monitoring of students' given AAs. Woods et al., (2010) found that further work was needed to more reliably provide adequate arrangements for students with any form of disability throughout their education. They noted that students with disabilities were more likely to experience examination anxiety, along with expressing a discrepancy between the AAs that they received and the AAs they believed they would benefit from (Woods et al., 2010). A process of reviewing students'

experiences with their given AAs together with parents and teachers could allow for better personalization of AAs (Woods et al., 2010). These results support the importance of carrying out interviews in the Maltese education setting to examine the perceptions and experiences of students with AAs throughout their tertiary education. Lived experiences of students with AAs could work towards implementing AAs in schools and bringing to the forefront the importance of identifying difficulties and reviewing the AAs given to students with mental health conditions and any form of disability.

2.4.3. *The expense of assessments*

A further barrier to the allocation of appropriate AAs stems from the fact that assessments by professionals to diagnose children can often be expensive (Woods, 2007). This translates to numerous students not being able to receive AAs simply because their families were not financially able to pay the amount requested by professionals (Woods, 2007). Other families may be more financially able to pay the stipulated fees, but even this is not a guarantee for students to receive AAs – the students would require a formal diagnosis to receive any of an array of AAs that require a professional’s diagnosis (Woods, 2007). This means that a student with a mild learning difficulty may not be diagnosed since they may be slightly below the ‘threshold’ to be diagnosed as having a specific type of learning difficulty (Woods, 2007). Schools may also offer free assessments, but these are often given to the students whose needs or difficulties are the most prominent, leaving the other students with less prominent needs or difficulties to ‘slip through the nets’ (Woods, 2007). In this case, a student with severe dyslexia may be assessed and qualify for and subsequently receive AAs and continue their progression in school, whereas a student with milder dyslexia may not be assessed due to a lack of funding (Woods, 2007). The findings of Woods (2007) clearly portray the inequality in who receives AAs due to the parental social class – students whose families are financially able to pay the fees for assessments will often do so. This may result in a further social stratification, whereby students who come from higher class families may be more able to progress academically, whereas those who come from lower class families may be more at risk to falling behind due to inadequate learning conditions and the absence of appropriate AAs (Woods, 2007).

2.4.4. *Applying for and monitoring of access arrangements*

Woods et al. (2010) delved into the perspectives of students with disabilities and their parents regarding their educational assessment methods via ‘special access arrangements’ through focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. They found that various aspects may require improvement, including communication between

stakeholders within the school, along with students and their parents, combined with taking test anxiety into consideration, the individualised needs of each student, and combining the perspectives of both students and their parents into a dual student-parent voice (Woods et al., 2010). The implementation of more transparent AAs allocation guidelines coupled with greater cooperation and communication between teachers and parents, could aid in supporting students with disabilities (Woods et al., 2010). It was also suggested that educational psychologist assessments could incorporate a dual student and parent voice in combination with continuous monitoring of AAs after formal assessments. This could create more fair and less rigid system of allocating and monitoring students' AAs (Woods et al., 2010). The proposed universal system for AAs monitoring and allocation consists of communication about examinations with all stakeholders, followed by assessing students' needs (Woods et al., 2010). If this results in the lack of identification of a student's need to receive AAs, a meeting could be held to discuss studying strategies (Woods et al., 2010). If the student is deemed to be eligible to receive and benefit from AAs, teachers, parents, and students could work together to explore the different AAs options through identifying the individual difficulties each student may find with formal examinations/assessments (Woods et al., 2010). Following the allocation of AAs thought to be suitable, periodic reviews could be carried out to identify whether the students still require the same AAs, or whether different accommodations could be better suited to each student (Woods et al., 2010). Hipkiss and Woods (2022) and Griffiths and Woods (2010) further emphasize the importance of monitoring students' use of AAs to identify whether any alterations in the provision of AAs may be required. Constant communication and reviewing could hence be essential in optimizing students' educational experiences, since it has been found that students who receive AAs may receive but not utilise certain arrangements, whilst not receiving the arrangements that they feel would support them more in their educational experiences (Woods et al., 2010).

2.4.5. *Anxiety and awareness*

Identifying and addressing students' feelings of anxiety due to assessment and course-related tasks as a result of students' conditions, coupled with the communication and expression of other feelings regarding their education (especially related to assessments) play a key role in improving students' experiences of education (Woods et al., 2010). Woods et al. (2010) identified various themes with regards to students who have disabilities and their educational experiences, including feelings of anxiety about formal assessments, disaffection towards education, and more specific struggles due to specific aspects of their disabilities. They found that students with disabilities tended towards feelings of stress and disaffection in relation to examinations, such as students with autism

experiencing negative emotions during examinations where appropriate AAs were not provided (Wood & Happé, 2020; Woods et al., 2010). Camilleri et al. (2019) also found that students who have dyslexia may feel increased levels of stress and anxiety due to examinations, linked with higher-than-expected test anxiety as a result of the difficulties associated with their dyslexia. McGhee and Masterson (2022) also found that reasonable adjustments and accommodations can serve to reduce anxiety and stress levels felt as a result of assessment and course-related work. Research regarding the lived experiences of students who have disabilities could hence continue to provide an ever-growing supply of knowledge to improve their experiences of education and motivate all students to be active and lifelong learners. Increased awareness and communication between University entities and students who may need AAs could also aid in guiding students through the application process to obtain AAs, especially during transition periods between different education levels (Maric 2018).

2.4.6. *Extending access arrangements and ‘levelling the playing field’*

An emerging theme in this field is that of access to AAs by all students (by extending AAs), and not just those who have applied to receive AAs due to a particular reason. Woods (2007) found that parents tended to disagree regarding which students should receive AAs, i.e., whether only students with disabilities or special educational needs should be eligible to receive AAs, or whether all students should be able to receive AAs. Some argue that since certain arrangements may be helpful for certain students, they may also be beneficial for all students, regardless of whether they have been diagnosed with a disability or whether or not they have been stated – this raises the question of whether AAs such as extra time should be given to any student (Woods, 2007). Students in a study by Ghirxi (2013) also suggested that AAs could be extended to all students. It was further found that there were few respondents who felt that assessments should be the same for everyone, regardless of their diverse needs, meaning that each student would have the same allocated timeframe to carry out the examination, and in the same room/setting (Woods, 2007). The inference made by a minority of respondents was that students who receive AAs such as extra time would have an unfair advantage over their peers, and that the assessment mark can be altered where necessary if a child has a different need (Woods, 2007).

This leads to the notion of ‘levelling the playing field’. In a study by Hipkiss et al. (2021), they found that students who received AAs (including extra time) obtained lower test scores than students who did not receive AAs in 4 subjects (English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, and Science). This suggests that the students’ use of AAs in this study did not have an unfair advantage when compared

with other students who did not receive AAs, and hence that AAs can in fact 'level the playing field' (Hipkiss et al., 2021). It may be that the provided AAs are used mainly to achieve what is expected of students in their cohort, which they may be able to reach only through the use of provided AAs (Hipkiss et al., 2021). Hipkiss et al. (2021) further exemplify this through their results, whereby the majority of students who receive extra time during examinations referred to extra time as 'helpful' and used it 'to finish'. Others used it to 'think and write', to do what they could, using extra time to get 'closer to finishing', and reviewing and checking their work (Hipkiss et al., 2021). These results suggest that the majority of students in this study who received AAs did in fact utilize their AAs in an attempt to achieve and reach expectations expected of their cohort (Hipkiss et al., 2021). Studies have also found that the provision of AAs leads to increases in the test results of students who have disabilities and receive AAs, although these results were still found to be less than the scores of students who do not have disabilities and/or who do not receive AAs (Alster, 1997; Centra, 1986; Duncan, 2021; Elliott & Marquart, 2004; Runyan, 1991). The findings from these studies suggest that allocating AAs to students who have disabilities does not provide them with an unfair advantage, but instead may attempt to make up for the difficulties students with disabilities may face which may in turn have a negative and hence unjust effect on their test results if they are not provided with AAs (Alster, 1997; Elliott & Marquart, 2004; Runyan, 1991).

2.4.7. *Students' experiences and peers' views of access arrangements*

Accounts of students who receive AAs have suggested a wide spectrum of experiences and linked emotions related to their use of AAs. Hipkiss et al. (2021) found that students may see extra time as a 'helpful' AA which they can use to 'review and check' their work, to prevent unnecessary rushing during examinations, and to allow them more time to 'think and write'. Other AAs, such as prompters, readers, scribes, and supervised rest breaks, can also serve to aid students in carrying out their course work and examinations. Although AAs may be helpful for numerous students, Woods et al. (2010) found that students who receive AAs may also express the desire to complete assessment tasks independently, in such as a way that the work would then be more 'their own'. Students may also express these desires if they feel that having assistance during examinations (such as the presence of a scribe), in that the work produced will not be solely theirs (Woods et al., 2010). Certain EAs such as prompters which can be allocated to a student during an examination may furthermore introduce an element of distraction whilst they are working on their examination papers (Woods, Parkinson and Lewis, 2010). Others express the desire to carry out their examinations within the same timeframe as other students who do not receive AAs, as well as deeming AAs unfair since they

may be other students who could also benefit from them too, but do not qualify for or receive them (Woods et al., 2010).

The effect of peers' views of AAs and subsequently their view of those who receive them cannot be discounted in the lived experiences of students who receive AAs. Woods et al. (2010) found that students who knew about AAs (but did not receive them) thought of them as arrangements utilised to cheat in examinations. This lends to the notion that certain students may see AAs as an unfair advantage, which could, in their view, discredit/reduce value of assessment performance and achievements. This can then lead to students (who receive AAs) experiencing emotions related to shame and embarrassment, which may cause a barrier in peer groups (Woods et al., 2010). Students' reading difficulties may also affect students' self-esteem due to accounts whereby students felt stupid and embarrassed when compared to their peers (McGhee, 2020). Peers may also perceive the use of certain access arrangements such as the use of a word processor and receiving extra time as cheating (Zammit, 2017). Peers' negative views of AAs may also hinder students from asking for guidance regarding AAs if they feel that they may benefit from AAs, in both those who have not previously had AAs, and those who receive AAs and feel that they may benefit from additional AAs (Woods et al., 2010). This is seen further in a study by Woods et al. (2018), where it was found that students were reluctant to speak up regarding their learning and AAs due to fear of being perceived as different from peers.

2.4.8. *Teachers' and lecturers' preparedness and attitudes*

The role of teachers and lecturers in providing relevant and necessary accommodations, and their attitude when doing so, in the classroom setting across various age groups should not be understated (Scott & Gregg, 2000). Research has consistently found that how teachers and lecturers present information, organize/structure their lessons, and how they interact with each student, can impact the lived experiences of students with their education (Scott & Gregg, 2000). Teachers and lecturers should be sufficiently trained to be able to recognize signs of learning disabilities to be able to refer them where necessary, as well as communicating important points in a clear way (Scott & Gregg, 2000). Other crucial strategies in reaching all students include varying modes of representation and expression to reach all learning styles (including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles), giving consistent structure to presentations and lessons and providing students with useful studying tips to aid in their preparations for their examinations (Scott & Gregg, 2000).

The attitudes of lecturers towards students with disabilities has also been reported in the literature with regards to willingness to provide AAs. The findings of Alalyani (2021), Alster (1997), and Matthews et al. (1987) suggest that although attitudes of lecturers regarding AAs and disabilities can be negative, the implementation of awareness and information sessions can serve to lead to a shift towards positive attitudes and higher levels of willingness to provide access arrangements to students which are at the lecturers' discretion to provide. Lecturers may also find difficulty in recognizing the difficulties faced by students with disabilities which are not visually apparent, and hence why they may need AAs to improve their experiences with assessments and course-related work (Smith et al., 2021; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018).

2.4.9. *Transitions between education stages*

Transition periods between education stages/levels (namely, primary to secondary to tertiary education levels) may also present difficulties with regards to knowledge about how to apply for AAs at different education levels (Lombardi et al., 2016). Furthermore, the lived experiences of students with AAs during transition periods may be further influenced by the nature of the relationships present involving the students, as well as the social supports which students with disabilities have access to (Lombardi et al., 2016; Morina, 2017; Morina et al., 2015). Teachers at primary and secondary level as well as lecturers at post-secondary level may also have varying levels of awareness and knowledge regarding how to present content in an inclusive way according to Universal Design for Learning approaches, as well as varying levels of received training regarding accessibility regarding content knowledge and curricula (Lombardi et al., 2016; Morina, 2017; Morina et al., 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research epistemology

The research approach used in this work is based on an interpretivist paradigm and a subjectivity ontology. This basis posits that social interaction was fundamental in gaining and constructing knowledge regarding the lived experiences of students (O'Donoghue, 2006). The epistemological underpinning of this study, being interpretivism, roots knowledge construction in social interactions and interpretations, and is hence methodologically descriptive (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Furthermore, adopting an interpretivist epistemology for this research project was necessary since it deals with obtaining further insight into others' perceptions and lived experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Therefore, interpretivism was adopted since students' lived experiences regarding AAs will inevitably incorporate experiences regarding interactions with others, as well as the nature of data collection, i.e., interactions between the interviewer and interviewees involving communication through carrying out interviews (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The nature of interpretivism and the use of interviews infers that I, as a researcher, cannot be completely objective, as I need to interpret what is said during the interviews, which may be further affected by my own perspectives (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). However, I planned to minimize the intrusion of personal perspectives throughout the data collection process by asking numerous follow-up and probing questions to ensure rigour and authenticity regarding my interpretation of what is said, along with documenting subjective reactions to the data during the first read in a research diary. The use of the interpretivist epistemology hence allowed me to encourage the construction of knowledge regarding the lived experience with AAs at the University of Malta of each of the participants taking part in the research study.

3.2. Research design

The present study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design to gain further insight into the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive AAs at the University of Malta. The study includes undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Malta who have applied for and receive AAs. Eligible participants were any undergraduate students who had already completed their first year at the University of Malta, i.e., students who were in their second or any other year, excluding the first year. The reason for this decision was that data collection was to be carried out at the beginning of the scholastic year, and first year students would be at the very start of their courses. First year undergraduate students were hence

excluded due to the high probability of a lack of experience with AAs at the University of Malta.

Participants were contacted by an administrative staff member of the Access Disability Support Unit (ADSU) team who served as gatekeeper for the study. The gatekeeper also acted as the intermediary through distributing information letters drawn up by myself to potential participants. Participants who were interested were asked to contact me via email to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Saturation of data was expected to be achieved after 6-8 participants had been enrolled in the study.

3.3. Collection of data

3.3.1. Participant inclusion criteria

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eligible participants who satisfied the following selection criteria:

- (1) Student is reading for an undergraduate degree at the University of Malta
- (2) Student is between the 2nd and final year of their course (hence, excluding participants who are in the 1st year of their undergraduate course)
- (3) Students are at least 18 years of age
- (4) Students currently receive AAs at the University of Malta

3.3.2. Recruitment of participants

Participants were first contacted by an administrative member of the ADSU, who acted as gatekeeper for the study and served as the intermediary through distributing information letters (see Appendix 2 for a sample information letter) drawn up by myself. Participants who were interested in participating in the study were asked to contact me via email, and those who satisfied the above-mentioned selection criteria were chosen on a first-come-first-served basis and presented with a consent form (see Appendix 3 for a sample consent form).

3.3.3. Research Tool

Each participant was asked a set of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix 4) through individual interviews to gain insight about their lived experiences regarding AAs in their tertiary education at the University of Malta. The interview questions were developed through a scoping review of the literature,

whereby potential questions were derived deductively through general themes which arose through the review.

3.3.4. *Merits of semi-structured interviews*

Each participant was to be asked semi-structured interview questions regarding their own lived experiences of AAs throughout their education, up to and including their tertiary education. The use of semi-structured interviews is beneficial in the study since posing descriptive and open-ended questions is essential to encourage and prompt the participants to talk about their own experiences regarding AAs, pertaining especially to experiences which have been meaningful to them (Taylor et al., 2015). The research approach pertaining to semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis can be used to gain further insight into the experiences of students diagnosed with disabilities, such as students diagnosed with dyslexia. Camilleri et al. (2019) used this research approach and methodology to gain insight into the experiences of students who have dyslexia with national examinations and AAs. Another study utilizing interviews was carried out by Marić (2018), who used this methodology (interviews, as well as the use of questionnaires in this case) to gain insight into the lived experiences of inclusion related to physical and sensorial disabilities. The use of semi-structured interviews instead of structured interviews by Maric (2018) was decided upon since semi-structured interview questions can help to delve further into answers and accounts expressed by participants. Although the research by Woods et al. (2010) triangulated data collected through a combination of research methods (qualitative and quantitative), they used interviews to collect data from students and guardians with regards to perspectives and experiences with AAs. The present study therefore used a qualitative approach through semi-structured interview questions to answer the research question of our study due to the flexibility and conversation-like nature which semi-structured questions have the potential of providing. Instead of testing a presupposed theory, our study adopted an inductive approach to gain insight into students' lived experiences with AAs throughout their education, up to and including their tertiary education, which were then analysed via thematic analysis and subsequently interpreted so as to derive themes and sub-themes.

3.3.5. *Limitations of semi-structured interviews*

The limitations of individual interviews must also be taken into account, since individuals may have a tendency to act differently than 'usual' in different scenario, which hence implies that answers expressed during interviews may not be the entire truth (Taylor et al., 2015). Conversations elicited through interviews may be beneficial such that participants' are encouraged, through recounting events and

stories, to draw out experiences which were meaningful for them, which further aids in gaining perspective into their lived experiences with AAs (Taylor et al., 2015). Since the interviewer in this case will not be observing participants in every-day life circumstances, the interviewer must trust the accuracy of told stories and subsequently extract and interpret meaning from the transcripts, even though certain quotes/excerpts may have the potential of being interpreted in multiple ways by different researchers (Taylor et al., 2015). Notwithstanding this, interviewing does remain a reliable and essential source of information, since people individually perceive the world around them through reflecting upon personal experiences and communicated them to others through expressing and recounting stories and experiences (Taylor et al., 2015). Interviewer-participant conversations can hence prove to be an indispensable research tool in gaining insight into participants' lived experiences (Taylor et al., 2015). Due to the nature of the research method, interviews were audio-recorded, and transcripts transcribed verbatim by the researcher, whereby the accuracy of the data was retained. Although participants may be negatively affected by the presence of an audio-recording device (potentially causing a degree of self-censorship, I addressed this limitation through encouraging the participants to not feel pressured and to relax (Taylor et al., 2015). I also placed the recorder in a discrete place, after ensuring that the notion of audio-recording was clearly discussed in the consent process (Taylor et al., 2015). Despite its potential drawbacks, the use of an audio-recorder in the interviews has the potential to increased accuracy and reliability throughout the data collection process, such that the experiences expressed by the participants can be more fully encapsulated within the subsequent transcripts (Taylor et al., 2015).

3.4. Ethical considerations

3.4.1. *Safeguarding of vulnerable participants*

An ethical consideration central to this study is that of safeguarding participants' vulnerability. The first aspect is related to participants' respective disabilities which may potentially make them feel stigmatised through their participation. The second aspect is related to the AAs which they receive, which has the potential of creating a perception related to coercion to participate. Participants may also fear unintended consequences linked with potentially being critical of the services received with regards to AAs provision at the University of Malta. In order to safeguard against these sources of vulnerability through not stigmatising participants, participants were informed that they were free to consent or otherwise, along with being clearly informed of the investigator's independence from the Access Disability Support Unit (ADSU). No undue pressure was placed upon participants to speak about anything

they did not feel comfortable talking about/expressing and ensuring that they were informed that all responses would remain non-identifiable.

3.4.2. *Benefits to society*

This research may benefit society through contributing to a better understanding of students' experiences of access arrangements. This research study may also identify issues which could be further addressed in future research projects towards the goal of improving students' experiences of AAs throughout their education.

3.5. Data analysis

3.5.1. *The thematic analysis process*

The data analysis process was carried out via reflexive thematic analysis of the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2019) which were obtained through verbatim transcription of audio-recorded semi-structured individual interviews, and the subsequent thematic analysis proceeded using the 6-phase approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Braun and Clarke (2013). The first step of the thematic analysis process was to read through the transcripts to become familiar with the data, followed by reading through them another two times to generate primary and secondary codes, each code being comprised of various quotes which portrayed shared meaning in relation to the participants' lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These codes were then adapted and altered as necessary through a process of reviewing the codes which emerged from the transcripts, and the codes were then used to aid in searching for themes within the transcripts (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). After the first themes were elicited from the transcripts based on the primary and secondary codes, the themes were reviewed and defined, followed by the writing up of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). After the themes were elicited from the transcripts, the codes and related quotes were compiled into tables (see Appendix 1, Tables 8-13) such that reference could be made to it throughout the process of presenting the findings.

3.5.2. *Justification for the use of thematic analysis*

The data collected through semi-structured interviews will be idiographic in nature, since it will focus on participants' experiences, along with interpreting interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although experiential and interpretative analyses suggest the use of the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA), I intend on adopting thematic analysis (TA) since it gives importance to the developing themes

and sub-themes, linked with idiographic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, IPA focuses mainly on experiential analysis, in that it relates to how individuals make sense of the world around them and through personal experiences, more so than in TA (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Our research question does not require discourse analysis (the analysis of patterns within spoken language) or grounded theory (developing specific theories from data) (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which hence further suggests the relevance of using TA to investigate our research question. The thematic analysis approach in our study will be an inductive approach (a bottom-up approach), although it will also adopt notions of experiential thematic analysis related to how participants make sense of the world around them (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis also lends to aspects of flexibility and the importance of being capable of being used to delve into individuals' accounts and derived overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013) with regards to how the participants' felt their experiences with AAs influenced them throughout their education. This hence supports the use of thematic analysis in gaining insight into students' lived experiences with AAs at the University of Malta.

4. Findings and analysis

4.1. Introduction

This chapter comprises of descriptive results pertaining to each participant regarding their AAs and conditions, and results pertaining to the 6 themes derived from the data set through thematic analysis, together with all sub-themes and sub-sections.

4.2. Descriptive results

The study consisted of individual semi-structured interviews with 9 participants. The sample comprised of 8 female participants (89%) and 1 male participant (11%) ranging from 18 to 30 years of age. The access arrangements and relevant conditions (in cases where the participants chose to disclose this information) are shown in Table 6.

Participants' pseudonyms	Access arrangements provided at the University of Malta	Condition
Nina	20 minutes extra time during examinations and examination room in close proximity to a bathroom	Intolerance (further information not disclosed)
Jane	Extension of deadlines and examinations carried out in a class comprised of up to 5 students	Generalised anxiety disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder
Marie	15-25% extra time during examinations	Not disclosed
Monica	10% extra time during examinations and examinations carried out in a class comprised of up to 5 students	Dyslexia
Sophia	Extension of deadlines, recording of lectures, can ask for lecture material to be given beforehand, and a quiet room, movement breaks, and extra time during examinations	Attention Deficit Disorder and Anxiety
Phoebe	Can request a copy of lecture notes, recording of lectures, flexibility with deadlines, permission to leave the room, and 25% extra time and a class comprised up of 5 students or less during examinations	Not disclosed
Miriam	Extra time during examinations	Dyslexia
Rita	Extension of deadlines, recording of lectures, and 15% extra time, a word processor with spell-check turned on, and a class with 5 or less students during examinations	Attention Deficit Disorder, Dyslexia, and Anxiety
John	Can ask for extra lecture material, and 30 minutes extra time during examinations	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Dyslexia

Table 6: Access arrangements provided to each participant at the University of Malta, and the related condition (in case where the participants chose to disclose this information). The names of the participants in the above table are pseudonymised.

The contents of Table 6 show that the most common AAs provided to the participants involved in the study were extra time (ranging from 15-25%) and a class of up to 5 students during examinations, extension of deadlines, and the option to ask for lecture material to be given to them. The conditions related to receiving these AAs were Dyslexia (the most common condition identified among the participants involved in the study, which 4 participants identified as having), Attention Deficit Disorder (the second most common condition identified among the participants involved in the study, which 3 participants identified as having), Anxiety (which 1 participant identified as having), Generalised Anxiety Disorder (which 1 participant identified as having), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (which 1 participant identified as having), an intolerance (which 1 participant identified as having; further information was not disclosed), and 2 participants did not disclose the condition/reason for which they were receiving AAs. The aforementioned conditions were present either alone or in combination with another condition.

In relation to education levels prior to University, 7 out of the 9 participants involved in the study did not receive/mention having received AAs during primary, secondary, and sixth form education, whereas only 1 participant (Marie) received AAs during primary, secondary, and sixth form education (which comprised of the AAs of extra time during examinations). The AAs provided to the participant (Monica) who received AAs at secondary school and sixth form were extra time and a class with other students who also receive AAs during examinations.

4.3. Themes and sub-themes

The 6 themes derived from the data set are equity, anxiety, assessment, application process, providing appropriate AAs, and support. The themes, sub-themes, and codes can be seen in Table 7.

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
1. Equity	Equity	(a) AAs level the playing field (b) Not aware of eligibility to receive AAs
2. Anxiety	Anxiety and stress	(a) Anxiety and stress during exams (b) Reduced anxiety due to AAs provided
	Coping	(a) Not keeping up with work (b) Conditions affect work (c) Developing study skills
	Fear of future	(a) Uncertainty – will I receive AAs in O levels? (b) Will my condition affect my job? (c) Differences between education levels
3. Assessment	Distractions	(a) Exams – noise and distractions
	Assessment methods	(a) Online exams and positive experience with online exams during COVID (b) Assignments preferred over exams (option of choosing) (c) Assessment method not appropriate
4. Application process	Positive experiences of the application process	(a) Application process was positive (b) Involved in application process (c) Could voice my opinion with ADSU and support and cooperation between student and ADSU
	Negative experiences of the application process	(a) Application process was negative (b) Not involved in the application process (c) Missed lessons due to application process

		<p>(d) Long process to be diagnosed</p> <p>(e) Not everyone has a diagnosis</p> <p>(f) Experiences before being diagnosed</p> <p>(g) Not everyone can afford a therapist</p>
5. Providing appropriate access arrangements	Positive experiences of access arrangement provision	<p>(a) Satisfied with AAs provided</p> <p>(b) AAs given changed</p> <p>(c) AAs given (not asked for) and useful</p> <p>(d) AAs offered but not wanted</p> <p>(e) Leniency in access arrangement provision – positive experience</p>
	Negative experiences of access arrangement provision	<p>(a) Not satisfied with AAs provided</p> <p>(b) AAs not provided</p> <p>(c) Leniency in access arrangement provision – negative experience</p> <p>(d) AAs given but not benefitted from or used</p> <p>(e) AAs changed but did not affect student</p>
	Suggestions regarding the provision of appropriate AAs	<p>(a) Extending AAs to other circumstances</p> <p>(b) Assignments preferred over exams – option of choosing</p> <p>(c) Provision of certain AAs could be temporary</p> <p>(d) Monitoring process</p>
6. Support	Peers	<p>(a) Support from peers</p> <p>(i) Support from peers</p> <p>(ii) Relating to others who have AAs and in same class as others who receive AAs</p> <p>(iii) Peers convinced them to apply for AAs</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (b) Worries about peers' thoughts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Worries about peers' thoughts (ii) Feelings of shame (iv) 'Need' to be 'normal' (vi) Wanted to challenge self (vii) Need to work harder than peers
	Lecturers and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) (i) Lecturers/teachers were understanding regarding AAs and/or condition (ii) Lecturers/teachers were not understanding regarding AAs and/or condition (b) Worries about lecturers'/teachers' thoughts/perceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Will AAs and lecturers knowing about them affect how my work is graded? (ii) Worries about teachers' perceptions of AAs – leniency and pity marks (iii) Will teachers understand what I'm writing? (iv) Perceptions of lecturers' thoughts regarding mental health (c) (i) Negative experiences related to asking for AAs which are at the discretion of the lecturers to provide (ii) Negative experiences with teachers regarding behaviour behind conditions (iii) Not disclosing difficulties with university, and (d) (ii) Lecturers and teachers teaching styles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (ii) The need for parents and teachers to work together (iii) The need for an inclusive school (iv) Not being provided with an LSA
	Parents	(a) Parental support
	Therapists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Support from therapist (b) Negative experiences related to therapists

		(c) Not everyone can afford a therapist
	Awareness	(a) More awareness among lecturers regarding what AAs are, as well as what AAs are and who is eligible to receive them

Table 7: Themes, sub-themes and codes which emerged as a result of thematic analysis of the data.

In the next part of this section, each of the 6 themes and subsequent sub-themes are discussed, in relation to the codes and quotes which emerged through thematic analysis. The findings are also related to relevant research pertaining to the research areas of the findings.

4.3.1. Theme 1: Equity

The theme of equity pertains to two codes: AAs levelling the playing field, and that not everyone is aware of their eligibility to receive AAs.

4.3.1.1. A level playing field

Various accounts of fairness were mentioned by the majority of the participants, whereby participants felt that *“there should be valid reasons”* (Monica) for receiving AAs, that *‘someone is going to misuse it for sure’* (John), and that *“it would be taken advantage of... if it was just available for all students without a valid reason”* (Marie). One participant felt that giving extra time to everyone *“wouldn’t give you an advantage”* (Monica), since participants may *“already have something that’s stopping [them] from being equal to [their] peers”* (Miriam). Certain participants expressed that their conditions made it harder for them to be at an equal standing as their peers, as exemplified by one of the participants, when she says *“I already have something that’s stopping me from being equal to my peers”* (Miriam). The notion of fairness was also brought out by Sophia, whereby her condition (ADHD) affects how she works, and so she compares AAs to having *“glasses... to see better [as a metaphor]”* (Sophia). In a study by Camilleri et al. (2019), the accounts of students who have dyslexia also raised the point that they wanted a level playing field, and that if someone needs glasses, it infers that they need them, hence relating needing glasses to needing extra help as provided through AAs.

The participants continually brought out aspects of equity with regards to AAs serving to level the playing field. Nina characterized AAs as being *“very fair, even with ADHD and conditions like that, it would help level up”* (Nina), followed by the notion that *“not everyone studies, learns and thinks the same way”* (Nina). The effect

of the participants' conditions on their work and experiences cannot be understated – the majority of the participants linked their condition to needing AAs to be on a level playing field, as exemplified by Sophia in the following quote, whereby she stresses why she needs AAs, including that of extensions of deadlines: *“as a person with ADHD, my thinking is very different and that different thinking kind of... pushes back rather than helps me”* (Sophia). To this end, Marie succinctly stated that AAs make it *“fair for everyone to achieve what they want to achieve”* (Marie). Additionally, Hipkiss et al. (2021) found that the AAs given to students did not give them an unfair advantage, in that their performance was not higher than that which was expected of them by their teachers. Although an account in a study by Maric (2018) referred to AAs as a means to level the playing field through making the setting more equal, a further point by an interviewee emerged related to AAs potentially not encouraging independence at University level.

Four out of 9 participants commented about whether or not all students should be given AAs, to which the consensus was that they should not, as exemplified by Monica's statement: *“no, not for all students”*. A further insight into the issue of equity is seen in another account, where a participant remarks upon her friends leaving early from an exam, hence going on to say that it would be useful for some people, but not for everyone. This is exemplified by Miriam's account: *“I doubt that everyone would need it, cause my friends would like I left to like half an hour before”* (Miriam).

4.3.1.2. *Awareness of eligibility for access arrangements*

Numerous participants also expressed that they previously had not known what AAs were (as exemplified by *“I didn't even know it exists, access arrangements”* (John)), or that they could even obtain AAs based on their condition. The latter is exemplified by *“I only applied at University because I was diagnosed in sixth form and I didn't know I was eligible for access arrangements at the time”* (Nina). Accounts of students (in higher education) in a study by Maric (2018) further suggested a need to be better guided through the application process to obtain AAs.

4.3.2. **Theme 2: Anxiety**

The theme of anxiety emerged from the data set, whereby participants expressed feelings of anxiety and stress, fears of coping, and fear of the future. The 3 sub-themes which emerged within the overarching theme of anxiety are hence anxiety and stress, fears of coping, and fear of the future.

4.3.2.1. *Anxiety and stress*

The codes which emerged pertaining to the sub-theme of anxiety and stress are anxiety and stress during exams (including feeling overwhelmed and pressured), feeling that their anxiety was reduced as a result of their provided AAs, and feeling that AAs are a peace of mind.

4.3.2.1.1. *Feelings of anxiety and stress during examinations*

Accounts linked to experiences of heightened levels of anxiety in stressful situations were frequent in the majority of the participants' interviews, whereby students felt *"stressed out during exams"* (Nina), *"very overwhelmed"* (Jane), and that *"the pressure of exams [is]... over stressful"* (Jane). Although certain participants recalled lower levels of stress and anxiety when they were younger (such as Miriam – *"during exams when I was younger, I didn't used to like stress out or panic"* (Miriam)), the majority of participants characterized examinations in negative terms, such as *"O levels and A levels were a nightmare, dreadful"* (Sophia). This anxiety is also linked to struggles during exams, whereby participants struggled during examinations due to aspects of their conditions, including *"time management"* (Phoebe). Feelings of anxiety and panic due to examinations compounded by aspects of their condition are further stressed in the following account:

"I get breakdowns like crying cause like I would know my stuff but then I would be afraid that during the exams the main problem would be I'm not understanding the question and I'd be like is he asking me about that or that I wouldn't be 100% sure, so I would need to take my time to read the question clearly ... so yeah nowadays I get a little more stressed and panicked honestly" (Miriam).

A study by McGhee (2020) also found that students who have dyslexia may find difficulty concentrating, in understanding what is being asked of them through questions, as well as finding difficulty regarding writing for a long time. Although one participant was offered to have a reader with her, she expressed that if she were to have a reader, she *"would be too nervous and pressured and feeling that someone is watching [her] constantly"* (Monica). This is consistent with a study by Zammit (2017), where they found that students with dyslexia felt uncomfortable having a human reader since they felt that they were constantly observing them.

4.3.2.1.2. *Anxiety levels reduce due to access arrangements*

Feelings of anxiety were found to be reduced due to the AAs provided to the participants, as exemplified by Rita – *"[access arrangements] makes it easier for me*

because I feel less stressed, I mean for me personally it takes me longer to write by hand than by computer, so just that alone I'm already winning time" (Rita). This account clearly portrays that having access to use of a word processor during examinations reduced her anxiety and has allowed her to gain time which would have otherwise been used less efficiently if she were to have to write examinations by hand. Others commented that AAs help them *"cope"* (Jane) and serve to *"take the pressure off"* (Marie). Furthermore, it emerged that AAs such as extra time *"take a huge load off your shoulders"* (Marie) and help them to *"keep calm"* (Phoebe) due to there not being (or there being a reduced level) of *"time pressure"* (Marie). In a study by Camilleri et al. (2019), students with dyslexia also reported that extra time helps to them to calm down, to reduce their anxiety levels and to not leave any questions out. Participants in the study by Camilleri et al. (2019) also expressed that even if they did not use the extra time during examinations, it reduced their anxiety levels simply because they knew that they would have the extra time if they needed it. AAs also serve as a peace of mind, whereby students are assured that if they 'lose' time due to aspects of their condition during examinations, they *"won't miss a huge chunk of the exam"* (Nina). Another study also found that students benefitted from the provision of AAs, such as not freaking out due to the presence of extra time and having more time to think due to the provision of a word processor during examinations (Tyrrell & Woods, 2018). Additionally, Sophia found that while she got nervous whilst *"staying in a classroom for 6 hours"* (Sophia), at University she finds it *"really helpful"* (Sophia) that she has 2 hour lectures (instead of 6 hours sitting down) and movement breaks as part of her AAs (whereas she did not have AAs in her previous educational experience). Hipkiss et al. (2021) also found that students found the use of extra time as helpful, to be able to finish the examination, and to have time to think and write.

4.3.2.2. *Coping*

The codes which emerged pertaining to the sub-theme of coping are not keeping up with work, conditions affecting work, the sense that university and related work is challenging, and developing study skills as a result of it.

4.3.2.2.1. *The effects of conditions on examinations and work*

Not keeping up with work, in part as a result of their conditions which affect their work, was a key sub-theme which emerged from the data set. John expressed that he needed AAs at university as he was *"struggling... with reading and writing a lot and that comes from [his] dyslexia and ADHD"* (John). Due to various aspects of their conditions, the participants expressed that they were *"falling behind"* (Phoebe) and could not keep up with their work, in part due to having *"trouble focusing"* (Rita),

not managing to copy from the board quickly enough (as was the case with Marie), and difficulty in abiding to schedules (as was the case with Sophia, as a result of her ADHD). Other participants needed *“a lot of prompts”* to cope, and due to their conditions were seen as *“just a bad student”* (John). The link between not managing to cope with educational workload tied to their conditions is therefore prominent. This is further reflected in the findings of McGhee and Masterson (2022) where guardians expressed that their children had to work harder due to their difficulties (including those related to dyslexia and ADHD). Guardians also reported that their children expressed feelings of embarrassment and feeling stupid due to their respective difficulties, and that they lacked self-confidence in examination-related skills (McGhee & Masterson, 2022).

4.3.2.2.2. *Strategies for studying*

Two participants expressed how over time they developed skills, referred to as *“tricks and trades that work best for you”* by Miriam, related to studying and/or preparing for examination, whereby Monica expresses that she *“got used to how to study”* to *“feel confident... in the material that I need to know”* (Monica). Monica further expresses that she *“has to work harder than others”*, and so she *“starts studying before”* to *“reduce any stress or any anxiety or nervousness and do good in my exams”* (Monica). The influence of their lived experiences based on these accounts is hence further portrayed in developing studying skills to ‘compensate’ for the way they work in relation to relevant ‘effects’ from aspects of their conditions.

4.3.2.2.3. *Fear of the future*

The codes which emerged pertaining to the sub-theme of fears of the future are whether they will get AAs during their O level examinations and whether their condition will affect their job.

Uncertainty in relation to examination AAs and coping in future jobs also emerged from accounts of three participants. Two participants expressed a sense of fear regarding whether or not they would actually obtain relevant AAs during the O and A level examinations. This is exemplified by Monica, where she expressed that she decided not to take *“extra time with that fear that [she] won’t... have acceptance for the extra time during [the] main exams, meaning [her] O levels and A levels”* (Monica). Another participant explained that, in relation to her ADHD, she *“always hoped that in [her] job it doesn’t really affect me as much”* (Sophia) due to there being less pressure of being a failure, and that she’d feel *“more relaxed”* (Sophia). In this aspect, the element of fear that their condition will affect their future job, and hoping that it won’t affect it, emerges. The transition between education and future

employment is further seen in Bezzina (2018), where it is suggested that students with learning disabilities could be informed about arrangements/benefits which they could obtain in future employment settings. The findings by (Marić, 2018) also suggest that it could be beneficial to guide students towards developing coping strategies in relation to difficulties they may experience, since they may not have access to the AAs given to them in their formal education.

4.3.3. Theme 3: Assessment

The theme of assessment is divided into two sub-themes – distractions and assessment methods.

4.3.3.1. Distractions during examinations

The codes pertaining to the sub-theme of distractions relate to noise and distractions present whilst carrying out examinations.

The sub-theme of distractions during examinations emerged based on participants' accounts of experiences of being distracted during examination, such as being in a quiet room whilst other students *"were walking by and almost entered in the classroom during an examination"* (Miriam), further stating that *"there needs to be more control of the environment about [the room being] quiet"* (Miriam). Another account brought out the relevance of *"construction going on outside"* whilst doing A level examinations. One participant expressed that distracting situations also occur in scenarios whereby *"people... clicking their pen"* (Sophia), can lead to her feeling *"more nervous"* (Sophia) and feeling *"that they're staring at [her], not at the paper"* (Sophia), the latter of which being compounded by anxiety. Although the AAs provided included a 'quiet' or 'distraction-free' room, participants expressed that there in fact were numerous distractions whilst carrying out their examinations. To this end, another participant also recounted that she was *"trying to concentrate [during an examination] and everyone is going out of the room and talking to each other... and I'm still doing the exam"* (Marie). To this end, Tai et al. (2023) found that various students expressed positive experiences in relation to being in a separate room with fewer students during examinations, in part due to there being less distractions.

4.3.3.2. Assessment methods

The code related to the sub-theme of assessment methods is finding more appropriate assessment methods.

4.3.3.2.1. *Are current assessment methods appropriate?*

Comments regarding examination versus assignments led to the designation of the sub-sections of appropriate assessment methods and assignments preferred over examinations. One participant shared that she doesn't "remember much of what [she] did last year, however with [her] assignments [she] can still recall because [she] researched more [she] wrote a lot more" (Rita), further stressing the difference between the assessment methods and how she experiences each type. Not being "*limited with time*" (John) can also make assignments "*easier*" (John), which can also help to reduce needing to "*read and write, immediately pronounce something on the spot*" (John, who has dyslexia). Furthermore, Rita also suggested that students could "*be given the option of doing an assignment over an exam*" (Rita). A study by Woods et al. (2010) also portrayed an account of a parent, whereby they express that although a student is good at Mathematics, he struggles in writing and reading. They hence suggested an improvement to the appropriate assessment method, in that it may be better if exams of specific subjects were to be carried out orally (Woods et al., 2010). John further expressed that AAs helped him to finish study units "*but [he] did not express and was not able to express the whole potential of what [he had] learnt or what [he] can write*" (John). The findings of Maric (2018) also suggest that orals could be beneficial for various students, and that numerous students feel that written examinations are not an appropriate assessment method for them, and subsequently that numerous students do not end up sitting for their examinations.

4.3.3.2.2. *Students' experiences with online examinations*

Online examinations as a result of the COVID situation inevitable changed the setting of examinations, but the shift from written to online examinations however, was seen as "*comfortable*" (Nina), "*perfect*" (Sophia), and "*amazing*" (Rita). The aspect of staying "*comfortable in [their] own home to do the exams*" (Nina) and whilst in online lecture calls was prevalent. This is also reflected in a study by Tai et al. (2023), where students with learning disabilities felt more comfortable and more relaxed since their examinations were being carried out in their own homes as online examinations. Students in this study also expressed that they did not need to worry about the possibility of their AAs being disregarded or not given, since they had the necessary arrangements in place in the home setting (Tai et al., 2023). With regards to examinations, the participants liked the aspect of having access to the internet if required (Rita), and the ability to type on a computer instead of hand-written exams (writing was seen as impossible by John – "*writing is impossible, I wouldn't pass an exam if it was writing*" (John)). This brings in the aspect that online examinations due to the COVID situation reduced their need for AAs, whereby one of the participants did not even apply for the AAs of having access to a word processor or a different

room (“*I don’t need to ask for [a] laptop or different room*” (John)) during written examinations since the examinations were online from their homes. A study by Tai et al. (2023) also found that the shift from written to online examinations due to the COVID situation was reported to be more inclusive by students, since they were able to use a word processor instead of needing to carry out traditional handwritten examinations, as well as the introduction of 24-48-hour assessments in place of short examination periods whereby many students would possibly need extra time.

4.3.4. Theme 4: Application process

The theme of the application process for AAs comprises of two sub-themes – instances of positive experiences of applying for AAs, and instances of negative experiences of applying for AAs.

4.3.4.1. Application process – positive experiences

The sub-divisions of the sub-theme of positive experiences of the application process to receive AAs are that the application process was deemed to be positive, instances where they felt that they were involved in the application process, when they felt that they could voice their opinion, and feeling supported by the Access Disability Support Unit.

4.3.4.1.1. Positive experiences of the application process

Six of the participants recounted positive experiences of the application process for AAs (ranging from secondary to tertiary education levels). Participants characterized the process of applying to receive AAs with the Access Disability Support Unit at the University of Malta as “*a very smooth process*” (Phoebe), that the “*process was very easy*” (Rita), and that “*applying... wasn’t that much of a hassle*” (Marie). Participants also recounted that the staff at the Access Disability Support Unit were “*very quick to respond*” (John), “*very sweet*” (Rita), “*helpful*” (Phoebe), and “*very nice and understanding*” (Monica). There is then a link between the smooth/easy process and the “*relief*” (Monica) felt through these positive experiences. This relief also emerges through one account whereby the participant characterizes her experience at the time as “*a very turbulent time*” (Rita) emotionally, and that the process was very easy and that she found support (“*she was very sweet*” (Rita)) from the Access Disability Support Unit. Five of the participants further commented that they felt involved in the application process in that they felt they were given a choice in which AAs they would receive, as exemplified by “*I only applied for extra time, my choice*” (Miriam), and “*I had a list I remember of what it is I need... I had an option to choose*”

(John). The involvement in the application process can be expressed further through the following account:

“I had a meeting with the lady from the support unit, and she explained to me what I was eligible for, and I could either choose for access arrangements for classrooms and exams, or classes only, or exams only, I personally chose exams only because for classes I didn't need them” (Nina).

In the above account, Nina's positive experience comprised of having the different access arrangement she was eligible for explained/presented to her, and then given a choice of which AAs she felt she would need. Nina also expressed that she could *“voice [her] opinion”* with the Access Disability Support Unit. This support from the Access Disability Support Unit is mentioned again in another account, whereby a participant *“decided to get in touch with the [ADSU] offices and they were very very nice... they gave me access arrangements accordingly and as much as they could”* (Rita). The ability to voice their opinions and experiences may also help students learn more about themselves, as found by Maric (2018). Furthermore, when Sophia felt she would benefit from having extra extensions for assignments, she *“went to talk to them and was like I need this... I think I want to add that”* (Sophia). The findings of Tyrrell (2018) also suggest that it would be beneficial for there to be greater student involvement (referring to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, in this case) in deciding which AAs they should be given.

4.3.4.2. *Application process – negative experiences*

The sub-divisions of the sub-theme of negative experiences of the application process to receive AAs are that the application process was deemed to be negative (long, scary, and confusing), instances where they felt they were not involved in the application process, missing lessons due to assessments required to apply for AAs, experiencing a long process to be diagnosed, the fact that not everyone has a diagnosis, various experiences before being diagnosed, and the fact that not all people can afford to see a therapist/psychologist/psychiatrist.

4.3.4.2.1. *Negative experiences of the application process*

The majority of the participants recounted lived experiences whereby the application process was seen to have been negative, including elements of being *“a long process”* (Nina), *“difficult”* (Nina), *“a fearful experience”* (Monica), *“a tedious process or a scary process”* (Monica), a *“hassle”* (Miriam), and there being *“a lot of stress”* (Rita). One participant remarked that during her assessment for dyslexia, and although she couldn't *“pronounce certain words or tell time or directions”*, she

recalled that the assessment results suggested that *“those are passable apparently”* (Sophia), Furthermore, a secondary school assessment of Sophia’s dyslexia suggested that although she has dyslexia, *“it’s not enough for us to build a report on it”* (Sophia). In a study by Camilleri, Chetcuti, and Falzon (2019), a participant who has dyslexia also reported negative experiences with assessment processes related to specific learning disabilities. In this account, the participant reported that he scored just above the threshold to obtain the access arrangement of access to a reader, as well as noting that the assessment was not used correctly, since they tested his ability to read an individual word, whereas in an examination he may be given an entire paragraph to read (Camilleri et al., 2019).

Woods (2007) also presented an account suggesting that pupils ‘slip through the net’ due to learning difficulties deemed to be slight and hence not a priority. Similarly, it has also been reported that students with dyslexia with weaker diagnoses may not be eligible for obtaining AAs (Griffiths, 2008). One participant also noted that if you don’t have the right information regarding the diagnosis and how to help, *“you’re kind of locked outside”* (Sophia). Other participants recounted that the process was long for them as they had to renew documents to apply (Rita). Furthermore, the long process regarding paperwork was seen as the *“only reason”* (Rita) not to apply to *“change from 15% to 25% extra time”* (Rita), portraying the negative experience of participants which can in turn affect the AAs they obtain. Participants also felt that they were not involved in the application process, as seen in the following accounts: *“they choose for you... they do an assessment, it depends on... how bad the case is... no I wasn’t involved”* (Marie), *“no, you only give... the psychologist’s report”* (Monica), and *“if I had the option, I would like that [to be more involved]”* (Marie). Not being involved in the application process was also seen in the findings in a study by Griffiths & Woods (2010), where they found that although students were involved regarding whether or not they would like to have AAs, they were not involved in any further discussions regarding the provision of the specific AAs. Assessments as part of the application process can also result in missing lessons, such as *“they used to take time from schools and lessons, which honestly I needed, but there’s nothing you can do”* (Miriam), and that assessments could *“take an hour or two so I would miss around 2 lessons”* (Miriam).

Another aspect of the application process which was seen as negative is that getting a diagnosis *“takes month, and in those months the person... [is] suffering, and you can’t get access arrangements if you don’t have a diagnosis”* (Nina). In fact, one participant did not receive AAs to have *“that extra access arrangement because [she] was undiagnosed”* (Sophia). This is also seen in a study by Woods et al. (2010) where a teacher recounted that students who do not have a diagnosis are unlikely to receive AAs. A subsequent emerging topic is that of experiences before being

diagnosed, whereby numerous participants felt bored and that they did not get “*extra help*” (Sophia). This further emerges in cases where participants who had dyslexia did not get the “*extra help*” (Sophia), and experienced lessons as “*boring in a way that I wouldn’t be paying attention*” (Miriam), and that prior to being diagnosed with dyslexia and ADD one participant was in “*a cloud*” (Rita). One participant further pointed out that “*some people can’t afford a therapist... especially if you’re just a student and on a stipend*” (Sophia), an aspect which can be important in the application process.

4.3.5. Theme 5: Providing appropriate access arrangements

The theme of providing appropriate AAs is divided into three sub-themes – instances of positive experiences of the provision of appropriate AAs, instances of negative experiences of the provision of AAs, and suggestions regarding the provision of appropriate AAs.

4.3.5.1. Providing appropriate access arrangements – positive experiences

The sub-divisions pertaining to the sub-theme of positive experiences of appropriate AAs are feeling satisfied with the AAs they were provided with, instances where AAs provided were changed, where AAs provided were useful (although not originally asked for), where AAs were offered but not wanted, and leniency in the provision of AAs (positive experiences).

There were numerous accounts of positive experiences of provided AAs which were deemed to be appropriate and “*helpful*” (Jane) by the participants. One of the AAs which the participants deemed to be the most helpful/useful is that of extra time, whereby participants experienced extra time as an arrangement that helps them “*focus more*” (Miriam), “*to reread [their] work*” (Monica), for “*reading and understanding and answering questions*” (Miriam), to help “*to keep calm*” (Phoebe). Another participant expressed how useful extra time was, when he said “*without that half an hour I wouldn’t be able to finish the degree. I would be failing constantly*” (John). Another instance portrayed that a participant (Marie) did not have a percentage of extra time in primary and secondary school – they “*just have [her] as much time as [she] needed*” (Marie). Other positive experiences are that participants found having a computer with spell check on “*very helpful*” (Rita), having a quiet room with 2-3 students being “*more relaxed*” (Sophia) and helps to feel less “*overwhelmed or disrupted*” (Phoebe), and that extension of deadlines for assignments “*really helps [her] regarding assignments*” (Sophia).

Another positive aspect where participants expressed that their needs regarding AAs were met are seen in Sophia's account, whereby, linked to her ADHD and anxiety, she *"couldn't manage with... the deadlines of the assignments"* (Sophia), so she asked the ADSU at University and *"they said okay we can add this to the access arrangement"* (Sophia). Similarly, another participant expressed that he *"would not be ashamed to ask"* (John) for other AAs if he thought he'd need different/more AAs. Sophia further recounted that the ADSU was very helpful when she approached them to ask for an additional access arrangement of extension of deadlines for assignments – *"they were very understanding of it"* (Sophia). Furthermore, although another participant did not ask for extra time, she was provided with it anyways and she expressed that extra time does *"help like to keep calm"* (Phoebe). Further to the provision of appropriate AAs, other participants may have been offered additional AAs and they chose to not take/use it, as was the case with Rita where she was offered a pen/reader for her dyslexia, but she didn't feel that it was necessary – she was given the choice to accept or to not accept the AAs she was offered. Linked to a positive experiences of access arrangement provision are the findings by Durkin et al. (2009), where approximately half of students (aged 11-16) with specific language impairments (SLI) received AAs (such as 44/88 participants with SLI receiving extra time in examinations), and that 88% of the participants with SLI reported that they were satisfied with their examination achievement.

4.3.5.2. *Providing appropriate access arrangements – negative experiences*

The sub-divisions pertaining to the sub-theme of negative experiences of appropriate AAs are feeling discontent with the AAs provided, instances where appropriate AAs were not provided, where AAs were wanted but not provided, leniency in AAs provision (negative experiences), not benefitting from or using provided AAs, and no difference felt after a change in the AAs provided.

Numerous participants recounted experiences whereby the AAs provided may not have been appropriate, including instances where AAs were not given. Jane expressed that although she has the access arrangement of extensions of deadlines, she *"doesn't approve of"* (Jane) this arrangement being at the discretion of the lecturers, since *"not everyone like understands mental health"* (Jane). This is reflected in the findings by Langorgen et al. (2018), whereby lecturers were uncertain and hesitant regarding accommodating for students with disabilities, such as providing them with special arrangements. In this study, this uncertainty was found to be attributed to a lack of openness and understanding regarding how to support/accommodate student with disabilities such as mental health conditions (Langorgen et al., 2018). Another participant had negative experiences related to A levels and O levels examinations since she *"wasn't given the access arrangements"*

(Sophia), and subsequently expressing that receiving AAs at university *“really helped”* (Sophia). Cases where there is a lack of access arrangement provision have also been found to be due to insufficient resources whereby there may not be enough staff members, space, or funding to cater for all students who may require assessments and subsequent AAs, as found by Rodeiro & Macinska (2022). Phoebe also expressed that although she had the approval/permission of both the ADSU and the head of department to have the option of recording of lectures, *“when it came to actual practice it didn’t get anywhere”* (Phoebe), followed by her deciding not to *“risk the extra hassle of... reporting a lecturer”* (Phoebe). Other participants mentioned that they might benefit from having an extra access arrangement which they were currently not receiving, such as *“requesting more thorough notes from the lecturers”* (Jane) and *“being able to type instead of write”* (Marie). In another instance, although the extra time percentage of a participant was reduced (Monica), she commented that it didn’t affect her.

Another participant commented that in primary and secondary school, although it was positive that she had as much extra time as she needed, she characterized the experience as *“chaotic”* (Marie) and would have preferred to be in a *“separate room... that you don’t do the exam with others”* (Marie) who don’t have extra time. Experiences regarding the transition between education levels regarding the provision of AAs is further exemplified wherein a participant *“found A levels and O levels much worse [than university] given that [she] wasn’t given the AAs”* (Sophia) that she needed. An account in a study by Woods et al. (2010) also reported that through the transition between primary education to secondary education, parents felt ‘a little bit at sea’ and uncomfortable and that they weren’t as involved regarding obtaining AAs.

4.3.5.3. *Suggestions regarding the provision of appropriate access arrangements*

The third sub-theme of suggestions comprises of extending AAs to other circumstances, the possibility of choosing whether to do an exam or an assignment, providing certain AAs on a temporary basis, and suggestions about the monitoring process.

With regards to the provision of appropriate AAs, numerous suggestions emerged from the transcripts. Firstly, one participant suggested that AAs should not *“be limited to maybe disabilities and conditions”* (Sophia), and furthermore that certain AAs could be given on a temporary basis. Temporary AAs, as suggested by one of the participants, could be due to *“a physical injury – broke your arm – you need someone to write for you... a temporary fix where you needed the extra help”* (Sophia). Temporary (referring to a semester or a whole year by Sophia) AAs could also be

given in cases where there was a loss of *“a loved one or something traumatic happened to them”* (Sophia). Students could also *“be given the option of doing an assignment over an exam”* (Rita). Other suggestions included potentially receiving AAs from the wellbeing team *“without having to have proof of disability”* (Phoebe). In the latter suggestion, the participant suggested that the provision of AAs could be *“circumstantial”* (Phoebe), whereby *“you can go visit the wellbeing team and... if you need something they can give it to you for... however long you need it”* (Phoebe). However, *“if you have proof of disability, they’re entitled to go have these extra which normal students wouldn’t be”* (Phoebe) entitled to. Another suggestion pertained to having a meeting every year regarding AAs *“to see if you need a different modification”* (Sophia). This is reflected in the findings of Griffiths & Woods (2010) whereby monitoring and communication regarding potentially reviewing the AAs given to each student was absent (within four schools in England), which intensifies the notion that monitoring is needed. Hipkiss & Woods (2022) also reported that whether or not AAs are used should be monitored during secondary school.

4.3.6. Theme 6: Support

The theme of support comprises of 5 sub-themes – peers, lecturers and teachers, parents, therapists, and awareness.

4.3.6.1. Peers

The sub-theme of peers comprises of (i) support from peers, relating to others who also have AAs, peers convincing them to apply for AAs, and being in the same class as others who receive AAs, and (ii) worries about peers’ thoughts, feelings of shame, the ‘need’ to be ‘normal’, wanting to challenge self, and needing to work harder than their peers.

4.3.6.1.1. Feeling supported by peers

Support from peers was a prominent sub-section of the sub-theme of peers, whereby participants expressed that their friends were *“quite understanding”* (Miriam), there was *“a little compassion”* (John) when information regarding AAs and/or their condition was shared with friends, and *“quite supportive”* (Jane). The indication that friends were supportive is further portrayed in another account, where a participant recounted an instance where she conversed with a friend about her experience with examinations. This was expressed in her friend noting that (Jane) knows her *“material during the exams but [she doesn’t] get the same mark”* (Jane), which Jane attributed mainly to how she understandings the questions.

Another aspect of support from peers which emerged was that of convincing/encouraging each other to apply for AAs. One participant *“encouraged her [friend] to apply”* (Jane) for AAs, as well as another participant telling her peers about AAs and *“they found out they were also entitled to AAs”* (Phoebe). Phoebe therefore expressed that it *“was very helpful to be open about it because then they could apply and also get what they needed”* (Phoebe). Other participants *“got to know [about AAs] from another student”* (Jane) and were talked into starting the process of getting AAs by a friend who had gone through the process of applying for and receiving AAs (Sophia). Two participants also expressed positive experiences of being in a classroom with 5 or less students with others who also receive AAs since *“they’re in the same boat as you... you relate to them”* (Marie). This is also seen in the findings by Zammit (2017), where a student recounted that they preferred to be in a classroom with students who also receive similar AAs or supports since they feel that they would be able to understand each other better.

4.3.6.1.2. *Negative experiences related to peers’ thoughts*

Worries about peers’ thoughts, and hence the perceived lack of peers’ support, was very prominent in the transcripts. Numerous participants expressed that they were not sure *“how they [referring to their peers] would react”* (Marie), often resulting in them not telling them that they have AAs (Marie), so that they would not *“be treated differently”* (Rita) than others. An account in a study by Woods et al. (2018) also suggested that students may refuse to seek to obtain or use AAs due to the perception that they would be different than their peers. An account in a study by Zammit (2017) also suggests that students may feel different in relation to their peers. Another participant remarked that she tries to limit sharing information regarding her AAs with others *“to a small circle of my friends who know my conditions”* (Nina) as she expressed that she doesn’t *“want others to think oh because she has extra time, what does she have, or she has extra time – that’s not fair”* (Nina). Several participants noted feelings of shame, whereby participants would feel *“a bit of shame”* (John) as they felt they might *“be judged about it”* (John), as well as not telling others about AAs with the fear of being *“criticized”* (Monica). The aspect of peers’ perceptions is also seen in (Zammit, 2017), where students expressed that they did not want peers to perceive their AAs wrongly, such as being sceptical of what students are doing if they have access to a word processor, or peers thinking that they (students who receive AAs) may be getting better marks due to their AAs.

The ‘need’ to be ‘normal’ was a prominent one in the transcripts (although there is no one definition of the term ‘normal’ – here it is noted in speech marks since the

notion of 'being normal' based on the comments which emerged from the transcripts refers to those who do not receive AAs). Marie summarizes this point through expressing that *"even the fact that everyone is like ara why is she still doing her exam? What's wrong with her?"* (Marie), where she points out that at times she does feel like *"the odd one out"* (Marie). She also expressed that perhaps her peers think that *"she has privileges"* (Marie), and hence, why don't they (her friends) also receive extra time? Student accounts in a study by Zammit (2017) also show that they feel strange in response to peers asking why they were not in the same class as them. Feelings of embarrassment and shame are also seen in a study by Woods et al. (2010) where students and peers seemed to view AAs as a form of cheating, as well as those who receive AAs experiencing feelings of shame and embarrassment. Feelings of being the odd one out also emerged in characterizing oneself as the *"black swan"* (Marie), and feelings of guilt, of *"doing something wrong"* (John), regarding potentially being the only one to receive a PowerPoint presentation (related to the AAs of asking for extra lecture material). The notion of fairness and peers' thoughts also emerged in a study by Woods (2007) where they found that other students deemed the allocation of extra time as unfair.

The effect of their conditions as well as their thoughts regarding what peers are thinking inevitably seems to influence how they work – as exemplified by Miriam when she expresses that she has *"to work harder than all [her] peers"* (Miriam). This also emerges in another account, where one participant expressed that as she grew, she became more *"confident in that I have to work harder, I don't feel ashamed anymore"* (Monica). Two participants also expressed that their use of AAs was linked to challenging themselves, by trying to *"limit my use"* (Phoebe) of AAs and opting for 15% extra time instead of 25% *"because I wanted to challenge myself"* (Rita). The findings of Woods et al. (2010) portrayed that numerous students receiving AAs did not agree to receiving certain AAs, in part due to wanting to carry out the examination by themselves (the importance being placed on independence) and feeling that examinations carried out with the assistance of a scribe wasn't fully their own work.

4.3.6.2. *Lecturers and teachers*

The sub-theme of lecturers and teachers comprises of (i) lecturers and teachers being understanding regarding their condition and/or AAs, not being understanding regarding their condition and/or AAs, (ii) worries about lecturers'/teachers' thoughts and not disclosing difficulties with university (iii) negative experiences related to asking for AAs which are at the discretion of the lecturers to provide, and negative experiences with teachers regarding behaviour behind conditions, and (iv) lecturers

and teachers teaching styles, the need for parents and teachers to work together along with an inclusive school, and not being provided with an LSA.

4.3.6.2.1. *Are lecturers and teachers understanding of conditions and/or access arrangements?*

Accounts regarding whether lecturers and teachers were perceived to be understanding of their conditions and/or AAs appeared numerous times in the transcripts. Monica recounted that *“the teachers were very understanding”* (Monica) and that her teachers got to know her and hence knew that she was *“a hard-working student”* (Monica). Another participant noted that her head of department met her at the beginning of the semester to see how she was with regards to *“how lectures were going, and if [she] needed anything else”* (Phoebe), which clearly portrays that she felt supported by her head of department. A further study also found that college students with disabilities felt supported by lecturers during lectures/lessons (Barnar-Brak et al., 2010).

On the other hand, participants also expressed that lecturers were not always understanding of the conditions and/or AAs, as exemplified by Phoebe noting that some lecturers *“would think that it’s an excuse”* (Phoebe), referring to her AAs. Miriam also pointed out that she *“thinks they would maybe label”* (Miriam) her, and that teachers in her primary school *“were reluctant so they would just go on and wouldn’t take any notice”* (Miriam), since she recalled that there wasn’t too much awareness about dyslexia. In a study by Scott & Gregg (2000), college students with learning disabilities have also reported various barriers to higher education, including a lack of understanding from lecturers with regards to providing AAs.

4.3.6.2.2. *Perceptions of lecturers’ and teachers’ thoughts*

Another aspect of lecturers and teachers from the transcripts related to the support (or lack thereof) is that of worries about lecturers’ and teachers’ thoughts, whereby participants expressed that they were *“worried about what the lecturer would think of [them]”* (John), and hence that they did not feel supported. This was expressed by Marie as a worry that teachers knowing that she had extra time would be linked to them being *“more lenient or harsher in a way”* (Marie), in that *“maybe she’s not good... as the others so let’s not give her a good mark”* (Marie), or, conversely, *“she needs extra help so let’s be more lenient on her”* (Marie). This is further reflected in another account, whereby a participant thought that perhaps some *“pity marks”* (Jane) were given to her as a result of teachers knowing of her condition and/or that she has AAs. Another emerging notion is that of worries that teachers’ and lecturers’ perceptions of AAs such as extra time could potentially affect how their work would

be graded (as expressed by John). Although students expressed worries regarding leniency and pity marks, a study by Hipkiss et al. (2021) found that the AAs given to students did not give them an unfair advantage – their performance in examinations was not higher than that which was expected of them by their teachers. Another participant expressed that whilst working on examinations, she has to “*see [whether] this actually makes sense for the examiner when coming to correcting*” (Monica).

Although peer support in spreading word regarding what AAs emerged from the transcripts, one participant also recounted that someone she knows didn’t apply for AAs as this student was “*not sure about disclosing [the student’s] difficulties to the University*” (Jane), suggesting that the student wasn’t sure how lecturers/staff at the University of Malta would react, and whether they would treat the student differently based on this disclosure. Smith et al. (2021) and Martin (2010) further suggest that students with mental health conditions reported to feel uncomfortable disclosing information regarding their conditions to others, including lecturers and peers. A study by Maric (2018) also suggests that the rigidity in forms regarding assessment and applications to obtain AAs at higher education impose a level of stress upon students to disclose information regarding their disabilities.

Two participants also recounted instances where teachers were not understanding or aware of the behaviour linked with their conditions. This is exemplified by an account where a participant expressed that if teachers had “*acknowledged that it [her behaviour linked with her condition] was not carelessness, careless mistakes, or not caring, but procrastination and anxiety. I think that would have completely changed the trajectory*” (Jane).

4.3.6.2.3. Lecturers’ discretion to provide access arrangements

In the transcripts, there were various accounts regarding participants feeling uncomfortable or expressing that there were issues regarding cases where the provision of AAs was at the discretion of lecturers. These include extensions of deadlines (as in the case of Jane, where she didn’t “*really approve of*” (Jane) certain AAs being at the discretion of lecturers to give) and recording of lectures (as in the case of Phoebe, whereby she was not allowed to record lectures, as lecturers were “*very stuck on fearness*” (Phoebe)). The link between recording lectures and lecturers’ discretion is seen in *The University of Malta Access Arrangements* (2018), whereby lecturers at UM may choose to allow students to record lectures, as well as signing a consent/declaration form. The findings of Maric (2018) also showed that certain AAs were provided according to lecturers’ willingness to understand and accommodate for students’ needs. The point raised in the findings by Maric (2018) further raised the question of whether access arrangement provision which is at

lecturers' discretion should be left to chance, in that certain lecturers may be more understanding than others. Participants may also feel uncomfortable asking for lecture notes and PowerPoints to be given, even if it is one of their provided AAs, as in the case of John, whereby he felt that he *"wasn't comfortable with [that] because you immediately feel that – I remember not asking, although I needed it"* (John). John felt it was unfair to be the only one asking for PowerPoints from lecturers, that he was *"doing something wrong"* (John). John then expressed that it might be better if PowerPoints were *"made available"* (John), without needing to ask for them.

4.3.6.2.4. *Experiences within the context of lessons/lectures*

Participants recounted that teaching styles also related to their conditions and AAs, such as benefitting from being *"taught in a dyslexic way"* (Sophia), and from lecturers *"who would ask questions to keep me engaged that way"* (John), a level of engagement which would not be reached *"if the lecturer would just be reading slides"* (John). As expressed by Miriam, the presence of more awareness (about dyslexia, as in the case of Miriam) is another important aspect, whereby it could lead to the realization that more students may be eligible to receive AAs. Increased levels of awareness could also lead lecturers to think *"maybe I need to arrange my lectures"* (Miriam). Other experiences with education include the notion that *"it's the parents and the teachers that work together, they realise certain things"* (Sophia), as well as the importance of schools being *"inclusive"* (Sophia), *"more flexible"* (Sophia), and *"understanding"* (Sophia). The importance of collaboration between teachers and parents is also seen in the findings by (etc.), where it was found that parents felt that communicating with school staff was very valuable regarding their children's educational experiences and outcomes regarding assessments (Woods et al., 2010). Experiences with education may also be negative if students who need a learning support educator (LSE) are not provided with one, as was the case with Rita.

4.3.6.3. *Parents*

The sub-theme of parents comprises of quotes pertaining to the code: parental support.

The aspect of parental support emerged from numerous comments made by numerous participants, linked to instances whereby participants felt supported in the educational experiences together with obtaining AAs and understanding their own conditions. In one instance, a participant's *"mother and father worked hard to get a psychologist's diagnosis... I started going to private lesson... since I was in year 3"* (Monica). Additionally, *"everyday, [Monica] used to read with [her] mother... to*

improve [her] understanding and to read correctly" (Monica). These comments hence bring out the importance of parental support in students' experiences of education and obtaining AAs. Furthermore, Sophia pointed out that since a child may not be aware that they have ADHD or anxiety, *"it comes from the teachers and the parents, that's how the access arrangements started"* (Sophia). Recollections of the importance of support from parents, especially when they were younger were hence numerous. This is further exemplified by a participant who has dyslexia recounting that from when she was young her mother encouraged her to learn more about dyslexia (linked to more awareness), which led her to have more opportunities and *"accept... what I have, and I know what I have to do to work on it"* (Monica). Parents can also help in encouraging schools to raise awareness in schools, as portrayed by a participant's parents who, *"with a lot of dedication... managed to [encourage] some of the teachers... make them more aware about me being dyslexic"* (Miriam), and hence raising awareness regarding *"how they can help and alter some of their lessons to make them more attractive to me"* (Miriam). The effect of parental support in students' experience with education vis-a-vi obtaining AAs is also seen in a study by Woods et al. (2010), where a parent of a student with dyslexia recounted that she managed to obtain the access arrangement of use of a word processor because she put pressure on the school. This was also compounded by her working within the same school, and further implying that those who do not have the same support may not be as lucky (Woods et al., 2010).

4.3.6.4. *Therapists*

The sub-theme of therapists comprises of support from therapists, negative experiences regarding therapists, and that not everyone can afford to see a therapist.

With regards to feeling supported by therapists regarding the access arrangement provision process, when one participant felt she needed an additional access arrangement, rather than being hard on herself, she went to talk to the ADSU and ask for the access arrangement, all the while having *"the support of the therapist who again had [her] back"* (Sophia). Conversely, another participant noted that when she *"was getting retested for [her] ADD... the therapist was a bit impatient"* (Rita). She then remarked that *"if she were a bit more understanding towards my case maybe it would have been better"* (Rita).

4.3.6.5. *Awareness*

Within the theme of support, the sub-theme of awareness comprises of comments pertaining to a need for more awareness among lecturers about what AAs are, and

more awareness among students about what AAs are and who is eligible to receive them.

Support can also be experienced through there being more awareness regarding AAs related to conditions. To this end, numerous participants pointed out the importance of there being more awareness regarding AAs (with regards to what they are and who is eligible to receive them) amongst students and lecturers. It emerged that an important aspect is that of *“students being aware that there is such help”* (Miriam) and *“informing them that it would not affect the way... the university views them”* (Miriam). Students speaking up when they need help is also important, as exemplified by Rita’s account – *“if I never spoke about my struggles last year, I don’t think I would have made it... because I was struggling in the very small things [related to her ADHD]”* (Rita).

Participants also pointed out that *“not all lecturers know”* (Marie) about her AAs – neither full-time lecturers nor visiting lecturers. More awareness amongst lecturers could be achieved through *“reaching out to lecturers”* (Jane), and if a lecturer, at their discretion, decides not to give an access arrangement (such as an extension of a deadline), the lecturer could try *“to be understanding of the access arrangements”* (Jane). In a study by Hill & Roger (2016) as cited in Langorgen et al. (2018), students also recounted that they felt that there was insufficient awareness and provision of arrangements amongst lecturers and staff regarding disability. Additionally, if more lecturers were to know about AAs, it could lead them to *“arrange [their] lectures”* (Miriam). The findings of Wilson et al. (2000) further suggest that lecturers and administrative staff may feel insufficiently supported regarding students with disabilities and the provision of AAs, which could be remedied through the provision of staff training sessions regarding means of communicating with and catering for the diverse needs of University students who have disabilities. Training regarding AAs can therefore be beneficial in aiding students with learning disabilities, such as how to use assistive technology, as reported by (Bryant et al., 1998).

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Introduction

The six themes which emerged through thematic analysis are equity, anxiety, assessment, the application process, providing appropriate AAs, and support, all of which elicit various lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive AAs at the University of Malta. The participants also gave suggestions and recommendations for potential improvements, with the scope of making the experience of other students with AAs more effective and just.

5.2. What are the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta?

In this section of the discussion, the 6 themes which emerged from the transcripts through thematic analysis will be discussed in order to address the research question, which is: What are the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta?

5.2.1. *Meaning behind the themes*

Qualitative research inevitably involves sorting through data transcripts and identifying patterns, and also involves finding meaning, through developing codes and themes. To this end, within and through the six overarching themes emerged the importance of a sense justice and dignity. This central notion of justice and dignity was evident in the accounts of the 9 participants involved in this study whilst they gave insight into their lived experiences with AAs. The definitions of these terms are as follows.

5.2.1.1. *Justice*

Justice, or to be just, refers to treating individuals with fairness and equity, and furthermore that justice pertains to social justice, whereby all persons should have equal access to and receive social, economic, and political rights, regardless of disability, ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, or social class, among others (Griffiths, 2003). Justice is also prominent in students' educational experiences, in that students are treated fairly and equitably, and that they can all access equal opportunities, i.e., that the door to opportunity is not closed to any student, regardless of any external factors.

5.2.1.2. *Dignity*

Dignity refers to the inference that all human beings deserve to be treated according to their intrinsically high value and worth (Kateb, 2011). This also implies that all individuals are equal in relation to their status, in that the dignity of any one individual is equal any one other individual (Kateb, 2011). Education is a basic human right, and so dignity cannot be disconnected from the right that all persons should have regarding education and related educational experiences which dignify them as human beings (Schweitzer, 2016).

With these definitions in mind, the following sub-sections shall delve into the relationship between each of the six themes emerging from the thematic analysis and the research question: What are the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive AAs at the University of Malta?

5.2.2. **Theme 1: Equity**

5.2.2.1. *Are access arrangements 'fair'?*

Equity and fairness were prominent in the transcripts, as exemplified by Sophia's analogy/metaphor, that of comparing AAs to having glasses to see better, which points directly towards the relevance of working towards justice through providing AAs to students. This points towards achieving a just situation where those who need the 'extra help' to put them on a 'level playing field' with their peers can obtain appropriate AAs, as also found in Camilleri et al. (2019). Having AAs pertaining to their conditions can therefore help students feel at level with their peers, in that they make it "*fair for everyone to achieve what they want to achieve*" (Marie). The provision of accommodations can also work towards increasing equity, since students with disabilities in higher education may experience frustration and a false perception of inclusion (Gibson, 2015). The participants felt that AAs should not be given to all students, which links to AAs being 'reasonable' adjustments which are made for students to work towards justice (Hipkiss et al., 2021). Other studies suggest that providing AAs such as extra time to students who do not receive AAs resulted in a lesser discrepancy in test score marks (i.e., similar test results when comparing scores in tests where they did have extra time and in tests where they did not have extra time) when compared with those who do receive AAs such as extra time (Alster, 1997; Elliott & Marquart, 2004; Runyan, 1991). This suggests that students who do receive AAs may benefit from extra time more than those who do not have a condition or related reason (Elliott & Marquart, 2004). The findings of Duncan (2021) also portrayed that despite the provision of AAs to students with

specific learning difficulties (SpLD), the discrepancy between the marks of typically developing students and students with SpLD remains. Although students with SpLD achieved significantly lower results, the provision of examination AAs do serve to level the playing field with regards to working towards narrowing the achievement gap through reasonable adjustments (Duncan, 2021). AAs may hence be a fair adjustment to work towards equity in relation to assessment for students with disabilities which affect their work. While Centra (1986) found that students with conditions/impairments seemed to obtain higher scores when given extra time, another study found that students who have disabilities may not obtain significantly different test results due to the accommodation of extra time (Elliot and Marquart; Fuchs et al., 2000). This emphasises the need for further research regarding how much time should be given and whether or not all students should be given AAs such as extra time (Elliott & Marquart, 2004; Fuchs et al., 2000). While AAs may be invaluable to students with disabilities, they may also be useful in accommodating for students such that they are more able to participate in social activities at University, which makes their experience at University more dignified and fair due to higher levels of involvement within social settings (Wessel et al., 2009).

All students learn, study, and think in different ways (*“not everyone studies, learns and thinks the same way”* (Nina)), through various learning styles and taking varied amounts of time to complete tasks (CAST, 2022). This further stresses the importance of providing equitable AAs for those who would otherwise be barred from achieving what they would otherwise have achieved had their work not been affected by their condition/s. It is, however, important that students should not be given an ‘unfair advantage’ (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008), and that the examination’s integrity as an assessment tool is not adversely affected (Maric, 2022). Equity and fairness were hence key lived experiences mentioned within participants’ accounts in relation to AAs.

5.2.2.2. *Eligibility for access arrangements*

Another aspect is that of participants not being aware that they could receive AAs, or that they even exist (as in the case of John). The notion that certain students may apply for AAs in sixth form and not be aware of their eligibility for to receive them (as was the case for Nina, who then received AAs at the University of Malta) elicits the importance of increased awareness and communication from entities and students regarding what AAs are and who can receive them. Maric (2018) also emphasizes the importance of students being guided more effectively through the application process to obtain AAs.

5.2.3. Theme 2: Anxiety

5.2.3.1. Anxiety and stress

Participants continually accounted experiences of heightened levels of anxiety in stressful situations, whereby they felt “*stressed out during exams*”, “*very overwhelmed*” (Jane), and that “*the pressure of exams [is] over stressful*” (Jane). Here, there is a distinction between the terms ‘stress and ‘anxiety – stress in this instance refers to emotional and physiological responses to a perceived threat (such as an examination and related studying), whereas anxiety is a particular individual’s reaction to the threat (Asif et al., 2020). In this case, participants seemed to experience increased levels of anxiety when compared to their peers for the same stress cause, i.e., examinations. This hence implies that it is not ‘fair’ that some students, such as the participants in this study, should experience higher levels of anxiety than their peers as a result of their conditions which may affect their work – this would be unjust. This is seen even more clearly in Miriam’s account, where she expresses how she was stressed and found difficulty due to having to take her time to read questions clearly during examinations (linked to her dyslexia), to make sure she is understanding the questions, hence implying that it is fair that she gets extra time as an access arrangement to put her on a level playing field with her peers. This has also been found by Camilleri et al. (2019), where students who have dyslexia expressed that examinations could be fairer if ‘compensatory measures’ were taken to make the examinations more accessible to them. The students in this study also recounted that examination questions were often written in overly elaborately, leading to them not understanding the questions and potentially increasing anxiety levels (Camilleri et al., 2019). Although it is common for students to feel a degree of stress and anxiety due to tests/examinations (regardless of whether or not they have a condition or impairment) (Asif et al., 2020), it is additional anxiety-related factors influenced by conditions such as dyslexia (Camilleri et al., 2019). These factors linked with students’ conditions can hence lead to increased levels of anxiety due to examinations, hence potentially disadvantaging certain students (Burden, 2008; Camilleri et al., 2019) – again, evoking the prevalence of a sense of justice (or injustice) in the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive AAs at the University of Malta. The prevalence of feelings of anxiety and self-deprecation of students due to conditions such as dyslexia as a result of school-based assessments and examinations further implies that research and awareness should focus on improving their lived experiences through providing them with appropriate AAs and modifications (Kannangara, 2015). Furthermore, the prevalence of accounts of participants feeling that their anxiety was reduced due to the AAs provided once again brings out the importance of achieving a sense of justice through receiving AAs. Test anxiety among both students who receive AAs such as extra time and

those who don't could potentially be ameliorated and reduced through giving all students more time for examinations (Zeidner, 1998). The usefulness of extra time is further seen in McGhee (2020) through students' experiences being improved through the provision of extra time as an access arrangement to reduce anxiety. This could further be accomplished by making the questions less complicated (where possible and where complicated words/phrasing are unnecessary for the aspect being tested) and hence fairer for all students (Zeidner, 1998). Phrasing sentences in a simpler way may also be achieved through plain language editing, whereby the question's message remains the same, whilst making the sentences more comprehensible and hence more easily understood by students who have dyslexia (Camilleri et al., 2019).

5.2.3.2. *Coping and fear of future*

The vast majority of students have the capability of coping with new stressful situations such as examinations, where the term 'coping' refers to an individual's capability to altering cognitive and behavioural aspects in an attempt to continue tolerating and reducing resulting anxiety through stressful causes and situations (Zeidner, 1998). However, coping with stressful situations and resulting anxiety may be more difficult for students who have conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD, and generalized anxiety disorder, as was found in the accounts of the participants in this present study. The participants expressed that they found difficulty in keeping up with work in that aspects related to their conditions affected their work, such as "*falling behind*" (Phoebe), having "*trouble focusing*" (Rita), as well as finding it difficult to abide to schedules, as was the case with Sophia, linked with her ADHD. McManus et al. (2017) also found that participants expressed that the mental health conditions affected their ability to abide to study schedules, to finish assignments before deadlines, and to work on course material related to assessment. Additionally, McGhee and Masterson (2022) found that students with dyslexia and ADHD appeared to need to work harder due to their conditions. This could indicate that AAs, reasonable adjustments to examinations, could indeed aid students with conditions which affect their work to cope better with the stress and anxiety they experience in relation to education and examinations (McGhee & Masterson, 2022). McGregor et al. (2016) further emphasize the importance of accommodations through finding that students with learning disabilities who had accommodations experienced less difficulty in relation to assignments. Another coping strategy to reduce anxiety felt during examinations is that of starting to study earlier, such that doing so would "*reduce any stress or any anxiety or nervousness*" (Monica, a participant who has dyslexia). Starting to study earlier than they would otherwise have started linked with their conditions may hence present another coping strategy to make up for the effects of their conditions. Therefore, the provision of AAs does

indeed help, but it is coupled with other coping strategies. Additionally, participants worrying about not having AAs in O level examinations and fear of how their conditions may affect them in their future employment evokes the importance of informing students with learning disabilities regarding arrangements and benefits which they could receive in their future employment (Bezzina, 2018), as well as guiding students in relation to coping strategies related to difficulties they may experience to make further education and employment more accessible for them (Maric, 2018).

5.2.4. Theme 3: Assessment

5.2.4.1. *Distractions during examinations*

Another pertinent theme based on the participants' lived experiences with AAs is related to assessment, with regards to distractions experienced during examinations as well as questioning the more appropriate method of examination that would best suit their needs. Numerous participants expressed that they felt distracted during examinations by students almost entering the examination room (Miriam), people clicking their pens (Sophia) and talking whilst going out of the classroom while the student was still finishing her examination using extra time (Marie). These accounts suggest that they felt more distracted in connection with their conditions for which they receive AAs, which may point towards the necessity for "*more control of the environment*" (Miriam) in rooms designated as 'quiet' and 'distraction-free' rooms.

5.2.4.2. *Finding the most appropriate assessment methods*

Furthermore, participants suggested that they might benefit from being given the choice to do an assignment instead of an examination for a study unit – this could potentially make assessments fairer for students who find greater difficulty/anxiety related to sitting for examinations. Other assessment methods may also make assessment tasks more accessible for all students, such as carrying out examinations orally instead of in the traditional written form, which could reduce the number of students who do not end up sitting for their examinations (Maric, 2018). Woods et al. (2010) also found that parents of students who struggle with writing/reading may benefit from examinations being carried out orally. Furthermore, in a study by Woods et al. (2010), guardians and teachers noted that written examinations may not be a suitable assessment approach for students who have disabilities, and that oral examinations for certain subjects, such as science, may be more suitable.

5.2.4.3. *Appropriate assessment methods: The COVID situation*

The COVID situation in Malta is yet another facet of the participants' experiences, a situation which began affecting educational institutions and related lectures and assessments as of the end of 2019. The concept of online examinations as a result of COVID was linked with positive assessment experiences in numerous participants' accounts. This suggests that online examinations may actually make assessments fairer and more equitable for students with dyslexia, ADHD, ADD, and anxiety since the participants did not need as many AAs whilst doing examinations in the home setting. To exemplify this, there emerges the example of John, whereby he finds writing "*impossible*" (John) and so prefers to type examinations. To that end, he did not even need to apply for the use of a word processor, since his examinations were carried out during the online examinations time-period due to COVID, and so his 'AAs' of a word processor was unnecessary. Instead, he, like other students, had access to a computer to type their examinations, hence making the examination fairer for him and reducing his need to receive the associated access arrangement. Tai et al. (2022) also note that the shift from written to online examinations due to the COVID situation was reported to be more inclusive for students since there wasn't as heavy of a necessity for extra time due to having 24-48 hour time intervals for examinations (instead of 2 hour time slots), as well as the availability of word processors instead of the necessity for hand-written examination methods. Furthermore, since many students frequently utilise technological devices such as computer, and are hence becoming faster at typing, conducting examinations through word processors instead of through writing could be a fairer alternative for numerous students, regardless of whether or not they receive AAs (Ghirxi, 2013).

5.2.5. *Theme 4: The application process*

5.2.5.1. *Positive experiences of the application process*

There were numerous accounts regarding the application process to receive AAs, a process which is inevitably linked with communication and interactions between the students, parents, teachers, lecturers, members of the ADSU, therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists, among others. Interactions between human beings whereby one party is seeking assistance from another invariably lends to the notion that those seeking assistance are endeavouring to feel dignified through these interactions. Furthermore, education is seen as a basic human right, and so all persons have the right to receive and education and related experiences which dignify them as human beings (Schweitzer, 2016). To that end, the participants within this research study delved into various

lived experiences with the process of applying for AAs, consisting of both positive and negative experiences.

The participants' positive experiences with the application process included characterising the process as *"very smooth"* (Phoebe) and *"easy"* (Rita), along with expressing that the ADSU was *"very quick to respond"* (John), *"very sweet"* (Rita), *"helpful"* (Phoebe), and *"very nice and understanding"* (Monica). The positive words used to describe the staff at the ADSU who assisted them through the application process to receive AAs hence suggests that the participants felt that they were understood and dignified. Another participant expressed that she went to the ADSU and asked for an additional access arrangement, potentially inferring that she felt comfortable enough to approach the staff at the ADSU. Similarly, Nina recounted that the staff at the ADSU explained which AAs she was eligible for, and furthermore that she chose to receive examination AAs only, and not course AAs – the key factors here being that (i) she felt that the ADSU did explain which arrangements she was eligible for, and (ii) she was given a choice regarding which AAs she should receive.

5.2.5.2. *Negative experiences of the application process*

On the other hand, numerous participants also expressed negative experiences pertaining to the application process, including characterising the process as *"long"* (Nina), *"difficult"* (Nina), *"fearful"*, and an experience which caused *"a lot of stress"* (Rita). Another participant also remarked that the results of a dyslexia assessment which she received concluded that there was *"not enough for [them] to build a report on"* (Sophia), even though she expressed that she couldn't *"pronounce certain words or tell time or directions... those are passable apparently"* (Sophia). Sophia's experience with the assessment part of the application process hence suggests that her needs were not met, that her struggles and difficulties were not recognized as requiring further help. A student's account in Camilleri et al. (2019) also showed that his experience with the application process was negative since the professionals assessing his dyslexia deemed that he was just above the threshold to receive AAs pertaining to a reader, as well as not using the assessment tool appropriately (i.e., testing his reading skills in relation to single words instead of paragraphs). This further stresses the notion that appropriately assessing students' disabilities in relation to educational skills should be carried out in a dignified way, whereby the students' needs are taken into consideration, and not only taking a potentially overly rigid test score as the sole consideration for whether or not a student should receive AAs. This is seen even further in Woods (2007), where they suggest that some students 'slip through the net' due to weaker diagnoses, leading to an application process which culminates in the lack of access arrangement provision. Students may also 'slip through the net' and not receive AAs if they do not have a diagnosis, again

emphasizing that having a diagnosis can help students to feel that their feelings and experiences are valid, that they have been validated by professionals (Woods et al., 2010; Woods, 2007). The other side of this is that students who do not receive a formal diagnosis, and consequently not receive AAs (as is often the case, according to a study by Woods et al. (2010)), may feel invalidated since their experiences and difficulties with education were not seen as valid enough to receive AAs. The application process may also be difficult through transition periods between education levels, such as students with dyslexia in Malta who initially receive examination AAs during their O levels but may need to be re-assessed and subsequently potentially not receive further examination AAs if they get a grade 3 or better in their English O level (Camilleri et al., 2019). Transition stages between education levels may also be affected by the nature of relationships and social supports which students with disabilities have access to, as well as lecturers not being sufficiently knowledgeable or trained regarding how to present lecture material for students with disabilities (Lombardi et al., 2016; Morina, 2017; Morina et al., 2015). Participants also felt that they would prefer to be more involved in the application process, as was also found to be the case in another study, where they found that greater student involvement in deciding which AAs to apply for could be beneficial (Tyrrell, 2018). Griffiths & Woods (2010) put further emphasis on this through suggesting that during the application process, students felt that they were not sufficiently involved in deciding which AAs they could apply for and receive.

5.2.6. Theme 5: Providing appropriate access arrangements

5.2.6.1. Positive experiences regarding receiving appropriate access arrangements

There were numerous participants in this study who referred to the AAs they were provided with in a positive way, which suggests that their needs were heard and catered for, hence dignifying them as individuals worthy of receiving the assistance they felt they required in order to carry out their education and related assessments to the best of their abilities, despite their conditions. Their lived experiences with AAs are hence linked with the need to be understood and be seen as worthy of receiving the help they feel they require and have a right to. Participants also expressed that the ADSU at UM catered for their changing access arrangement needs during their time at UM, such as Sophia (a student who has ADHD) who went to the ADSU to request an additional access arrangement pertaining to extensions of deadlines, a request which was taken into consideration and accepted. Durkin et al. (2009) also found that the majority (88%) of students with specific language impairments who receive AAs reported that they were satisfied with their examination achievement, inferring that they saw their AAs as appropriate in aiding them through assessment processes. Similarly, Elliott & Marquart (2004) also found

that students who had conditions reported a higher degree of positive experiences when given AAs when compared to students who had conditions who did not receive AAs, again further emphasizing the importance of validating individuals with disabilities through providing them with appropriate AAs.

5.2.6.2. *Negative experiences regarding access arrangement provision*

Participants' lived experiences also relate to expressing that the AAs provided were not appropriate and hence did not meet their perceived needs. This is exemplified by participants not receiving AAs at primary and/or secondary education levels, a difference which was seen even more so when they were eventually given the AAs they felt they needed at University level. Additionally, participants expressed that they deemed it to be unfair and don't approve of the fact that certain AAs at UM are given at the discretion of lecturers, who, according to Jane, may not understand mental health. This raises the point that lecturers may be hesitant and uncertain regarding accommodating for students with disabilities which may result in not providing the AAs that they need (Langorgen et al., 2018).

5.2.6.3. *Suggestions regarding the provision of appropriate access arrangements*

One of the suggestions which emerged was that sessions to monitor/review students' experiences with their AAs could be beneficial, so that students would have the opportunity to voice their opinions and lived experiences regarding whether they may need any additional AAs or any other changes with regards to AAs. Similarly, through the use of interviews with parents of children with dyslexia and specific language impairments, Woods et al. (2010) found that reviews and communication between the school and themselves regarding their students' assessment needs (including experiences regarding AAs and examinations) were not taking place frequently enough, further suggesting the need for more communication between parents and teachers regarding their students' assessment needs. Hipkiss and Woods (2022) and Griffiths and Woods (2010) also reported the importance of monitoring the use of AAs, i.e., whether or not they are being used, and whether alternative/additional AAs may be needed. In this way, each student's assessment needs would be more fairly addressed, such that the arrangements received would be as reasonable as possible, and hence as just as possible insofar that it would not give students who receive AAs an unfair advantage (Hipkiss et al., 2021). Woods et al. (2010) further suggested that AAs could be given on a trial basis such that subsequent reviewing would take place, since students expressed that they needed fewer AAs and less time (in relation to extra time) than they were receiving, emphasizing the importance of a monitoring process.

5.2.7. Theme 6: Support

The theme of a sense of support, or a lack thereof, from peers, lecturers, teachers, parents, and therapists was a predominant theme across all of the interview transcripts, where participants recounted experiences where they were either understood and dignified by interactions with others, or where they recounted that they were perceived negatively by others' thoughts regarding their AAs (i.e., that having AAs is unfair).

5.2.7.1. The effect of peers

The presence of a sense support from peers was predominant in that various participants recounted positive experiences whereby they found their peers to be understanding and supportive, along with peers supporting each other through encouraging each other to apply for the AAs they believed to be entitled to. One participant noted that, after she told others about AAs, "*they found out they were also entitled to access arrangements*" (Phoebe), emphasizing that there is a strong element of entitlement to receive what is just, to receive the help that will make up for the effects of their conditions with regards to their work, studying, and examinations. Participants also expressed that they felt comfortable doing their examinations in a room with fewer students and with those who also receive AAs since they could relate to them. Woods et al. (2010) also found that students felt supported by the presence of peers whilst doing examinations as well as preferring smaller rooms with fewer students (but not individually away from other students).

Worries about peers' thoughts, however, were also prevalent in the transcripts, whereby participants tended to feel that they might be judged and criticized if their peers were to know that they receive AAs, since they perceived that peers may think that they would be getting an unfair advantage due to their AAs. Zammit (2017) further found that peers may perceive using a word processor as cheating, that it gives them an unfair advantage in that they would get better marks potentially due to their AAs, and hence that being in a separate examination room from those who do not receive AAs could help to remedy this issue. Woods (2007) also reported that students deemed the allocation of extra time to be unfair. Another study also found that the negative effect of peers in relation to accommodations was also related to peers being skeptical of disabilities which could not be seen (i.e., non-physical disabilities which are not visually apparent, such as anxiety and other mental health conditions) (Smith et al., 2021; Thompson-Ebanks & Jarman, 2018). Furthermore, feelings related to feeling like "*the odd one out*" (Marie) and thinking that peers might that there's something wrong with them lend towards the notion that they

are different than their peers, and that they may feel ashamed and embarrassed. Feelings of shame were also recounted in a study by Woods et al. (2010), where students and peers who received AAs felt embarrassed and ashamed due to other peers viewing AAs as a form of cheating. McGhee (2020) also found that students' reading difficulties had a negative impact on self-esteem, as evidenced by their parents recounting that their children felt stupid, as well as embarrassed in relation to peers, which further emphasizes the impact of conditions such as dyslexia on students' school-/University-related work. Woods et al. (2018) also found that students were reluctant to speak up regarding their needs in relation to AAs due to fear of being perceived as different than their peers. Having to work harder than their peers (Miriam) also emphasizes that it may not be just that they have to put in more effort, and hence having AAs helps to make up for needing to work harder.

5.2.7.2. *The effect of teachers and lecturers*

Undergraduate students' lived experiences with AAs were closely linked with interactions with teachers and lecturers, which resulted in both positive (and hence dignified) experiences, and negative experiences. Although lecturers were perceived by numerous students as "*understanding*" (Monica), other reported that they were not always understanding, and that they thought lecturers would think that AAs are an excuse and that they would label them. Scott and Gregg (2000) also reported that college students with learning disabilities expressed that a lack of understanding from lecturers in relation to the provision of AAs was one of the barriers to their higher education. Lecturers may also be hesitant and uncertain regarding accommodating for students with disabilities which may then result in not providing the AAs that the students need (Langorgen, Kermit & Magnus, 2018). Another emerging notion is that of worries that teachers' and lecturers' perceptions of AAs may affect how their work would be graded (i.e., grading work in a more lenient or harsher way, and giving pity marks). Smith et al. (2021) also found that students with disabilities reported frustrating experiences regarding lecturers as well as a sense of pity. Participants also expressed that lecturers may not approve of giving certain AAs such as extensions of deadlines and recording lectures. Maric (2018) further elicited that certain lecturers may be more understanding than others, inferring that the fact that certain students will be given AAs due to the discretion of a more understanding lecturer may be unfair for other students who are not as lucky. Other studies found that the majority of lecturers reported that they were willing to provide the AAs which are at their discretion to give, and that this willingness was shifted from negative attitudes to positive attitudes towards students with disabilities as a result of lecturers becoming more familiar with disabilities (Alalyani, 2021; Alster, 1997; Matthews et al., 1987). This suggests that (i) awareness is key in aiding lecturers to help students in their educational experiences in relation to AAs, and that (ii)

students' perceptions of lecturers' willingness to provide AAs may differ from their actual willingness to provide AAs which are at their discretion to give (Alalyani, 2021; Alster, 1997). On the other hand, another study suggested that faculty members may find issue with believing that students actually have difficulties related to their disabilities, coupled with willingness to provide accommodations (Hong et al., 2010). The invisible nature of certain disabilities such as dyslexia and ADHD may also lead lecturers and peers to question how valid their disabilities are, even though the invisible nature of their disabilities may allow them to be seen more 'equally' by others (Mullins & Preyde, 2013). Further to this, one participant specified that he (John) did not feel comfortable asking for lecture material (PowerPoints) from the lecturer as he felt that it would be unfair for him to be the only one to receive them (and that he was "*doing something wrong*" (John)), again emphasizing the recurrent notion of fairness. Teachers may also not be aware of how their conditions may be represented in their behaviour, instead of thinking that their behaviour is solely due to carelessness or not caring, as was the case with Jane. The perceived insufficient levels of awareness regarding links between conditions, AAs, and behaviour further suggest that more awareness is required amongst teachers in relation to diverse conditions and what AAs are, and how teachers can create a fairer assessment method through accommodations (Zammit, 2017). College students who have disabilities in a study by (Lehmann et al., 2000) also identified that a lack of understanding, insufficient services, and lacking self-advocacy skills present as barriers to the success of college students with disabilities.

Furthermore, raising more awareness regarding how to integrate students who receive AAs into the classroom/lecture room setting can also encourage teachers and lecturers to arrange their lectures in more dyslexia-friendly ways and keeping them engaged through asking questions. The use of Universal Design for Learning principles such as offering multiple modes of representation, allowing the students to express what they've learnt in multiple ways and through addressing their affective networks by encouraging students' motivation and engagement in learning can hence serve to address the diverse learning modes, taking different conditions and disabilities into consideration (CAST, 2022).

5.2.7.3. *The effect of parents and therapists*

The aspect of parental support emerged strongly in the transcripts, whereby parents "*worked hard to get a psychologist's diagnosis*" (Monica, who also went private lessons to help with understanding and reading), as well as dedicated parents who helped to raise awareness among teachers regarding the condition experienced by their children. The element of parental support may hence serve to dignify the students in relation to the struggles they experience due to their conditions. The

findings of Ghirxi (2013) further emphasize the importance of increasing levels of parental involvement regarding school-based assessment and advocacy for their children's right to receive AAs. The importance and relevance of parental advocacy is also emphasized in a study by Woods et al. (2010), where a teacher recounted that the students who receive AAs are often those whose parents pushed for them, whereas the students whose parents do not push for them may not receive AAs. This emphasises the need for further research regarding parental advocacy and students with disabilities who may require AAs. Participants also recounted negative experiences regarding therapists in that they did not understand them and that not everyone has access to or can afford to receive services from a therapist, suggesting undignified experiences, and that it may not be fair that certain individuals may receive help from therapists whereas others do not on the basis of expense.

5.2.7.4. *The need for awareness*

Numerous participants emphasized the importance of there being more awareness regarding what AAs are and who can receive them, amongst lecturers and students, and that students should be aware of the help offered by the ADSU, and that contacting them and receiving AAs will *"not affect the way... the university views them"* (Miriam). Reaching out to lecturers and raising awareness about what AAs are could serve to work towards lecturers becoming more aware of students' struggles, and hence be more informed and more likely to assist them, potentially through providing requested AAs which are at their discretion to give.

5.3. **Implications for policy**

5.3.1.1. *Equity and eligibility for access arrangements*

The findings point towards achieving a just situation where those who need the 'extra help' to put them on a 'level playing field' with their peers can obtain appropriate AAs. The findings of this study suggest that ensuring that participants are aware of the presence of and their eligibility for AAs, as well as increasing communication during transitions in education (for example, from post-secondary to university) and between University entities and students, are essential in aiding undergraduate students in their educational experiences. This is aided through the ADSU offering support through communication between students and the ADSU coordinator, combined with directing students to services such as the University Counselling Unit and Mental Health Services (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). It also emerged that it was unfair that participants seemed to experience higher levels of anxiety when compared to their peers for the same

stress cause. Counselling services, mental health services, and stress management seminars may hence aid students in coping with stressful situations and anxiety which may be more difficult for them due to their conditions (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018).

5.3.1.2. *Appropriate modes of assessment*

Due to the COVID situation at UM, numerous students had access to a computer to type their examinations, hence making the examination fairer for students who benefitted from using a word processor and reducing their need to receive the associated access arrangement. Tai et al. (2023) also note that the shift from written to online examinations due to the COVID situation was reported to be more inclusive for students through the introduction of 24-48 hour time intervals for examinations and availability of word processors. Although extra time can be provided for examinations and flexibility of deadlines for course work (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015), participants in the present study further suggested that they might benefit from being given the choice to do an assignment instead of an examination for a study unit. Additionally, amendments in guidelines could include the possibility of carrying out examinations orally for students who find difficulty in written examination circumstances, since this could potentially reduce the number of students who do not end up sitting for their examinations (Maric, 2018).

5.3.1.3. *Suggestions for improvements upon the application process*

The assessment of students' disabilities in relation to educational skills should be carried out in a dignified way, whereby the students' needs are taken into consideration, and not only taking a potentially overly rigid test score as the only consideration for whether or not a student should receive AAs. According to *The University of Malta Access Arrangements* (2018), in order to receive AAs, students need to present appropriate evidence of their needs in relation to their disabilities (such as a psychiatrists' report for anxiety-related needs). However, students who do not receive a formal diagnosis may feel invalidated since their experiences and difficulties with education may not be seen as valid enough to receive AAs, suggesting that temporary AAs could be given case-by-case if a diagnosis is not presented.

5.3.1.4. *Providing appropriate access arrangements*

Acknowledging, accommodating for, and providing appropriate AAs is a process which aims to meet and abide by the rights of persons with disability, such as

through altering the way questions are answered through the use of word processors and enlarged paper size and font, as well as the provision of scribes, a distraction-free room, and extra time (*Guidelines to MATSEC Examinations Access Arrangements*, 2015). Although AAs at MATSEC and University level are provided to numerous students in an attempt to make their educational experiences more just, more frequent communication coupled with sessions to monitor/review students' experiences with their AAs may also be beneficial, so that students would have the opportunity to voice their opinions and lived experiences regarding whether they may need any additional AAs or any other changes with regards to AAs, as supported by Woods et al. (2010), Hipkiss & Woods (2022), and Griffiths & Woods (2010)

Participants expressed that they deemed it to be unfair and don't approve of the fact that certain AAs at UM are given at the discretion of lecturers – lecturers may be hesitant and uncertain regarding accommodating for students with disabilities which may result in not providing the AAs that they need (Langorgen et al., 2018)

5.3.1.5. *Suggestions for effective support for undergraduate students*

The ADSU at UM offers support through communication and collaboration with students to reach their needs and may also direct students to receive assistance from a variety of services, such as the University Counselling Unit, Mental Health Services, Agenzija Sapport, and the Richmond Foundation (*The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). Information regarding AAs and these services could also be communicated to all university students. Services such as the University Counselling unit also assists students through seminars aimed at aiding students regarding skills related to studying and managing stress (McGhee, 2020; *The University of Malta Access Arrangements*, 2018). Such services may assist students to cope with the workload of their coursework/assessments, as well as dealing with feelings of shame and embarrassment as a result of perceptions of peers' thoughts regarding AAs being unfair and a form of cheating, as these may further affect students' self-esteem and anxiety levels, as supported by Woods et al. (2010) and McGhee (2020). University-wide discussions for students and lecturers regarding the topic of diversity, disability, and accessibility could also serve to increase awareness amongst students and faculty regarding disabilities and AAs (Matthews, 2009).

According to *The University of Malta Access Arrangements* (2018), lecturers are required to give consent regarding their discretion to provide certain AAs such as the recording of lectures, a point which participants expressed they did not approve of, which evokes the notion that this system may not be appropriate. Reaching out to lecturers and raising awareness about what AAs are could further serve to work towards lecturers becoming more aware of students' lived experiences, and hence

be more informed and more likely to assist them through providing them with AAs. Additionally, more awareness and training (including information regarding conditions, AAs, and principles of Universal Design for Learning) may be required amongst teachers, as well as suggesting methods through which teachers can create fairer assessment methods (Zammit, 2017). This is supported by *The Salamanca Statement and Framework For Action On Special Needs Education* (1994) whereby education systems should ideally be constructed in an inclusive way, such that the individual needs of students with diverse needs and requirements are reached. Educational material and instructional methods should also be designed in such a way wherein students with disabilities/conditions are considered and the 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' abided by through providing students who have disabilities with reasonable accommodations and amendments of instructional content and assessment modes in order to meet their diverse needs (*Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education*, 2009). Lecturers may also be more willing to shift towards more inclusive instructional methods if they are given sufficient training, since one of the barriers to lecturers regarding teaching is that of attitudinal barriers in relation to attitudes regarding students with disabilities (Hong & Himmel, 2009; Morina, 2017).

There is hence a need for awareness regarding what AAs are and who can receive them, both amongst lecturers, and other students, and furthermore that students should be aware of the help offered by the ADSU, and that contacting them and receiving AAs will in no way affect the way in which the university views them in relation to their disabilities and/or AAs. Furthermore, more awareness could be raised among parents and their involvement in school-related assessment, as well as potentially extending the provision of certain AAs such as extra time to all students, and continually reviewing AAs guidelines (Ghirxi, 2013).

5.4. Implications for research

This research focused on the experiences of undergraduate students at UM who receive AAs, which suggests that further research into students' lived experiences at primary, secondary, and non-University post-secondary education levels would be useful in gaining further insight into students' lived experiences with AAs across the Maltese Islands. The accounts of lived experiences in the present study were based on a sample population who had one or a combination of dyslexia, ADD, ADHD, anxiety/generalized anxiety disorder, and intolerance. Since students with other conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, dyspraxia, diabetes mellitus epilepsy, hearing impairments, irritable bowel syndrome, other mental health difficulties, and visual impairment (The University of Malta Access Arrangements, 2018) did not

participate in the present study, future studies may seek to gain further insight into these students' lived experiences with AAs at UM and other education levels.

Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that participants feel that AAs should not be extended to all students, a finding which is supported by Centra (1986), Elliot and Marquart (2004, and Duncan (2021), in that the provision of AAs positively influenced test scores (i.e., increasing results) for students with disabilities who receive AAs when compared to those who do not. However, Fuchs et al. found that there was not a significant difference between the test scores of students with disabilities when compared between the presence or absence of AAs. This brings out the importance of further research to be carried out related to the provision of appropriate AAs and monitoring of provided AAs. These studies, together with the finding of the present study in that not all students receive a diagnosis and hence do not receive AAs, further indicates that further research could focus on the lived experiences of students (in primary-tertiary Maltese education levels) who have conditions which were deemed insufficient to receive AAs, hence causing them to 'slip through the net' (Woods, 2007).

Future research could also focus on lived experiences regarding therapists and other health professionals with regards to being diagnosed and the with regards to the application process to receive AAs at UM. Parental involvement, parental advocacy, and self-advocacy regarding obtaining AAs and reaching out to support services are other research areas which would need to be addressed. The effect of AAs on anxiety and stress levels among students with disabilities in Maltese education levels may also serve to gain further insight into their lived experiences and provide further suggestions for improvements to policy. Research could also be carried out in relation to lecturers' attitudes regarding accessibility, inclusive instruction, AAs, and students with disabilities at UM.

Another issue raised by participants was that of appropriate assessment methods and the effect of the COVID situation on assessment and their received AAs. This suggests that further research could be carried out with regards to students' experiences of assessment and AAs (and related anxiety and stress) regarding online examination assessment methods as a result of the COVID situation (including 24-hour take-home examinations and the use of a word processor in the home setting). A similar study was carried out by Tai et al. (2023) regarding students with disabilities in Australian universities in relation to inclusivity and the COVID pandemic situation, suggesting that a similar approach could be applied to the Maltese context.

5.5. Reflections about the research process

5.5.1. Rigour and trustworthiness of the study

The qualitative nature of this study allowed for emerging themes and sub-themes to reflect undergraduate students' lived experiences with AAs, which raises the importance of trustworthiness and rigour of the study. The approach to the process of presenting the results is that of detailed descriptions of the themes included as a separate section for findings and analysis, intending to provide thick descriptions such that there would be an opportunity for an audit trail (Stahl & King, 2020). Opportunities for audit trails are essential in allowing for transferability of patterns and descriptive data from the current data set to other scenarios through the provision of thick descriptions within the results, hence increasing rigour and trustworthiness of the present study (Forero et al., 2018; Stahl & King, 2020).

5.5.2. Limitations of the study

The use of semi-structured interview questions was beneficial in that semi-structured open-ended questions promoted participants to delve into their lived experiences with AAs. The limitations pertaining to subjectivity related to interpreting transcripts and bringing out themes through thematic analysis was ameliorated through adopting the 6-phase approach as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). The interpretivist paradigm adopted within this research project posited that social interaction was essential in gaining and constructing knowledge regarding students' lived experiences with AAs. The relevance of social interaction hence infers that as a researcher I could not be completely objective, as I needed to interpret transcripts and meaning. However, I minimized subjective perspectives through the use of planned semi-structured questions, and through utilising the 6-phase approach as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). The use of individual interviews instead of observing students in their every-day life circumstances may pose a limitation in that the interviewer must trust the accuracy of their told stories and interpret meaning from them, which may pose the limitation of misinterpretation or multiple interpretations. However, the use of interviews is an invaluable source of information since students perceive the world around them through reflecting upon and recounting these experiences to others (Taylor et al., 2015). Additionally, although participants' responses may have been biased by the presence of an audio-recording device and through wanting to answer questions 'correctly' (Taylor et al., 2015), I attempted to place the recorder in a discrete place and encourage participants to relax and not to be pressured. Additionally, although the sample population was small ($n = 9$), this was necessary such that detailed and in-depth lived experiences could be delved into to gain further insight into the lived

experiences of students who receive AAs at the University of Malta. With regards to saturation of data, negligible new information was gleaned beyond the interview with the 8th participant, inferring that saturation of data was reached.

5.6. Conclusions

5.6.1. Addressing the research question

The results of this study suggest that the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive AAs at UM relate to equity, anxiety, assessment, the application process, appropriate AAs, and support. The codes within each of the themes further relate to a sense of justice and dignity in relation to students' lived experiences with AAs. Equity emerged through AAs being seen as fair and reasonable adjustments to level the playing field for all students. The theme of anxiety was prominent as participants recounted that they experienced higher levels of anxiety due to examinations and assignments, situations which are made to be more fair and just through the provision of AAs. Altering assessment methods to better serve all students also emerged from the results, including giving students the choice between carrying out an examination and doing an assignment, and the possibility of carrying out examinations on word processors in the home setting with extended time periods. Participants' lived experiences of the application process comprised of experiences whereby they were helped (and hence dignified) by members of the ADSU throughout the application process and experiences which were deemed negative due to the application being seen as long and scary. Participants' lived experiences with the provision of appropriate AAs involved feeling validated through receiving AAs deemed to be appropriate, and invalidated by not being provided with appropriate AAs. This suggests a need for further monitoring/reviewing of students' access arrangement needs throughout their education. Experiences pertaining to support (or the lack thereof) involved worries about peers' thoughts, students' perceptions of lecturers' attitudes regarding AAs and students with disability, and students' perceptions of lecturers' and teachers' willingness to present instructional material in more inclusive ways and provide AAs.

5.6.2. Implications for policy

Policies regarding AAs at UM could be improved through increasing communication between University entities, students and lecturers to increase awareness regarding AAs, which may also serve to address attitudinal barriers towards students with disabilities and AAs. Temporary AAs could also be provided in certain cases where a diagnosis cannot be presented. Students' lived experiences could also be improved

through the use of online examination assessment methods with the provision of more time for all students, as well as increased monitoring of students' use of and needs regarding AAs.

5.6.3. *Contribution to the research area and future research*

Although local studies have delved into the experiences of students who have disabilities (physical and sensorial disabilities and dyslexia) at secondary and post-secondary level (Camilleri et al., 2019; Maric, 2018), the results of this study present the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive AAs at the University of Malta. The results of this study provide suggestions regarding how examinations and lessons/lectures could be made to be more inclusive and just for all students. Future research could focus on students' lived experiences with AAs at primary, secondary, and post-secondary education levels, the effect of assessment methods and AAs on anxiety and stress levels, and students' experiences of assessment with regards to online examinations as a result of the COVID situation in the Maltese context.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1: Themes, sub-themes, codes, and quotes

Theme 1: Equity			
Sub-themes	Codes	Line numbers	Quotes
Equity	AAs level the playing field	Marie 349-352	"I think that it would be taken advantage of, if it was just available for all students without a valid reason because then it would be the same you know if everyone had the same thing for example everyone had extra time it wouldn't give you an advantage"
		Marie 356-360	"Maybe they have more time for example to check the exam paper when I'm still going like doing the questions and that's not fair on the person who has access arrangements then, cause they would use that time for something else than I'm using it"
		Monica 222-223	"I think not for all students, there should be valid reasons"
		Miriam 250-251	"It's levelling it since I need the extra help"
		Miriam 251-254	"I already have something that's stopping me from being equal to my peers sort of, so actually its sort of coming on the same playing field"
		Miriam 283-285	"people who have also extra time and they would leave before and I'm like are they sure they need the extra time"
		Sophia 130-132	"I'm asking quite a lot, um, quite a lot I mean, the needs have to be met, but there has to be a reason why you state things are there"
		Sophia 191-194	"it comes down to how you are engaging in class, if you're missing class a lot if you're not participating, yeah, they're not going to give you the extra the extension"
		Sophia 224-229	"for me it's more like for me I have these glasses [as a metaphor] this to see better, the same way then I know that my brain won't be able to have a certain confirmation of scheduling. I can do a schedule I try, it's something really difficult to abide to it, that is the ADHD"
		Phoebe 262-265	"I don't think you need to do things on hard mode like just because like I think it's okay to ask for help and at the end of the day you don't get them if they don't think you need them"
Rita 377-380	"I think to those who might need them in order to have an equal learning experience. Otherwise it will end up again those who are the greater students who are naturally brave and those who are still struggling"		

	John 155-158	"I felt it was like I'm doing something wrong, like no one else got the PowerPoint so why should I get it in a way, so it was quite a bit of guilt there"
	John 350	"[if everyone had access arrangements] someone is going to misuse it for sure"
	Nina 229-235	"if I have to stay in the bathroom for 20-30 minutes, that's 20 minutes lost from the exam – if the exam was an hour I lost a huge chunk of time and we need to write a lot ... so if I'm stuck in the bathroom, people are finishing their exams and I'm just wasting time"
	Nina 236-240	"So I think its very fair, even with people with ADHD and conditions like that, it would help level up, because not everyone studies, learns and thinks the same way, so you need to adapt to your students, not the students adapt to the exams, because that's not fair"
	Nina 240-242	"Everyone's mind is built different and everyone's body is built different so you need to arrange to that, kind of, and not everyone does that"
	Jane 366-374	"I agree with that, because like if you're if you're making a race of animals okay, they're all animals but a fish can't walk on land you know? It needs to be in a bowl of water and be on wheels, you know? So and no one questions that sort of, like, but why doesn't the fish why isn't the fish able to like walk without wheels? It just doesn't it's not able, so, if I needed because I'm not able to keep up I think I deserve to have the wheels and the fish bowl you know?"
	Marie 349-352	"I think that it would be taken advantage of, if if it was just available for all students without a valid reason because then it would be it would be the same you know if everyone had the same thing for example everyone had extra time it wouldn't give you an advantage"
	Monica 210-217	"it does level the playing field – as I said it takes me a while to understand or to read something or to understand what I need to answer so whilst others immediately click on on what needs to be done or written, for me I need a bit more a bit more seconds or minutes, so it does for me I see it it does equalize the playing field, for others it was easier, let's say that – for me it takes some time"
	Miriam 250-254	"It's levelling it since I need the extra time... I already have something that's stopping me from being equal to my peers sort of, so actually its sort of coming on the same playing field"
	Miriam 254-262	"like she has something so to make it eaiser like more fair for her ... just that extra thing that will help, but I'm pretty sure for them it would be helpful to finish their

			exam, while for me it would be helpful to understand the question, like my answer correctly”
		Sophia 233-235	“for me it’s like the glasses [as a metaphor] could help me see better the same way access arrangements help me to be like this is the extra help I need to be equivalent to my classmates”
		Sophia 391-399	“I didn't choose this ilfe, like I was born with something that I have no control with, like its already difficult to experience day to day, so it's nice to have something where there's an understanding... sometimes not because I'm lazy or becace I'm they just use lazy, but it's literally because I can't focus on anything else and I just you know for example I miss a deadline”
		Sophia 399-410	“The one [project, one of 5] that is supposed to be my first priority is not ... as a person with ADHD, my thinking is very different and that different thinking kind of um pushes back rather than helps me”
		Phoebe 116-119	“looking back I could see, there were things that sort of like had I had them they would ... put me on an equal like stepping as other people”
		Phoebe 257-261	“like at first I was reluctant from like I didn't want it to be unfair but then like at the same time it's not a competition or anything at the end of the day, like as long as you can get your degree like at the end of the day you're fine”
		Rita 363- 364	“I think if it's given to the individuals that need it I think all students will be equal”
		Marie 341-343	“it [access arrangements] makes it fair for everyone to achieve what they want to achieve”
		Marie 349-351	“no, not all students I think that it would be taken advantage of, if if it was just available for all students without a valid reason”
		Monica 222-223	“I think not for all students, there should be valid reasons”
		Miriam 283-286	“people who have also extra time and they would leave before and I'm like are they sure they need the extra time, so I don't think its applicable to everyone”
		Miriam 288-291	“I doubt that everyone would need it, because my friends would like I left... like half an hour before, so sometimes like it'd be useful for some people”
		Rita 377- 380	“I think to those who might need them in order to have an equal learning experience. Otherwise it will end up again those who are the greater students who are naturally brave and those who are still struggling”
		John 340-345	“being a university student I feel there has to be a little bit more of of you know beyond your ability to write and learn, there is also a degree of commitment and all those

			things, so I don't think we should be giving out... access arrangements to all to to everyone, I think it should be... on an individual basis"
Not aware of eligibility to receive AAs	Nina 39-41	"I only applied [for access arrangements] at University because I was diagnosed in sixth form and I didn't know I was eligible for access arrangements at that time"	
	Nina 108-110	"and I didn't have that before in sixth form because I didn't know that my condition had access arrangements"	
	Nina 123-124	"I didn't know it was a condition that had arrangements"	
	Nina 290-291	"I wasn't aware that my condition, I didn't know sixth form had access arrangements to be honest"	
	Jane 50-52	"I got the access arrangements when I was in ... university, and I knew about them because my ... friend has them – I didn't know it was an option"	
	Miriam 78-81	"I used to almost test myself not to take any help from school because if I don't have it during my o levels and A levels which were the main exams, it would affect me"	
	John 257	"I didn't even know it exists, access arrangements"	

Table 8: Codes and quotes pertaining to the sub-themes within the theme Equity. 'AAs' refers to access arrangements.

Theme 2: Anxiety			
Sub-themes	Codes	Line numbers	Quotes
Anxiety and stress	Anxiety during exams	Nina 24	"I always get stressed out during exams"
		Jane 14-16	"Very overwhelmed, I think. I love knowledge but the pressure of exams it feels like over stressful"
		Jane 37-38	"mostly examinations are the part that scare me the most"
		Miriam 44-54	"honestly during exams when I was younger, I didn't use to like stress out or panic because I would just go to an exam and whatever happens happens now cause what I know is what I know I cannot change it in the moment like during the exams. So I wouldn't be in a panicked stage ... like okay yes, it's an exam it's just because we're very based on exams and how we go but at the end of the day all you need is a pass honestly because then life goes on and then maybe you'll work harder next time round"
		Miriam 54-63	"But now as I grow older no they get to me get stressed I get breakdowns like crying cause like I would know my stuff but then I would be afraid that during the exams the main problem would be I'm not understanding the question and I'd be like is he asking me about that or that I wouldn't be 100% sure, so I

		would need to take my time to read the question clearly ... so yeah nowadays I get a little more stressed and panicked honestly”
	Sophia 62-63	“with examinations um for me o levels and a levels were a nightmare, dreadful”
	Phoebe 24-26	“they've [exams] always been a bit of a stressful thing for me, because like I struggle with like maybe like time management so I always say what it is a bit challenging”
	Rita 85-87	“in the exam particularly, cause, cause even though I tried studying, it never really stuck in my head”
	Rita 92-93	“Most of the time I try, but then I get frustrated, and I end up drawing”
	John 63-69	“It has never happened that I managed to finish it in time. It does not matter how much I study or prepare for it in terms of proper preparation, writing essays in advance. So even though I would get my allocated 30 minutes extra for my disability, or whatever you want to call it, I still it was a frustrating experience”
	Sophia 268-270	“when I did my o levels I remember going crying to my counsellor for help to get the extra time”
	Rita 219-223	“primary and secondary I can't say I did exams back then because I didn't even study to be in the experience of an exam... I think maybe the stress is a bit less, maybe I can contain it more manage it more”
	Jane 39-44	“I lose my attention as well sort of yes and I think that's part of the overwhelm part, that I'm not paying attention during the lesson because I have attention difficulties and that when its exam time I feel like I have to keep up and manage to write everythign that I didnt learn in class sort of so the pressure is sky high”
	Monica 76-78	“did get offered to have a reader with me but I felt that it's too like pressure on me like to understand properly so I would rather have my own time and use that time”
	Monica 108-112	“if I would have a reader I would be too nervous and pressured and feeling that someone is watching me constantly, so I would need my space, so I would prefer just to have that extra time which I think I have a valid amount of time and not have a reader”
	Rita 198-201	“it [access arrangements] makes it easier for me because I feel less stessed, I mean for me personally it takes me longer to write by hand than by computer, so just that alone I'm already winning time”
Reduced anxiety due	Nina 174-175	“it was stress-relieving which helps my condition as well”

	to AAs provided	Jane 163-164	“them helping me cope yes they are useful”
		Jane 227-230	“Oh my god, the extra time was so helpful ... I forgot about that. I don't know how I would have managed without extra time because I used almost every time the extra time”
		Marie 102-105	“It takes a lot of pressure off ... stressing on how much time I have left em it takes a huge load off your shoulders”
		Marie 150-151	“for university and [sixth form] the fact that they put you in a separate room it really really helps”
		Miriam 133-137	“it helps me obviously cause even it it's just 10 minutes, like I wouldn't be stressing about the time cause like I know I have those 10 minutes where I can read the question carefully, try to understand it, and answer and make sure what I'm writing is clear”
		Miriam 141-144	“I really have to like think twice about reading and understanding and answering questions so that extra time even if it's for a minute it really helps”
		Phoebe 81-83	“the extra time I was like sometimes it does help me like to keep calm or like or take a walking break so I found it does help me and I think also being in a small room”
		Rita 198-201	“it [access arrangements] makes it easier for me because I feel less stressed, I mean for me personally it takes me longer to write by hand than by computer, so just that alone I'm already winning time”
		Sophia 47-58	“with other sixth form and secondary that was just the teachers used to kind of tell my my mom during parents day that I'm always distracted, distract other people, get nervous, so there it was more of a uniform behaviour especially in staying in a classroom for 6 hours, like in university 2 hours max and I have the accessibility to go to the bathroom, but we have a 5 minute break so that's really helpful, but I can get up and have a 10 minute break extra, because that's part of my access arrangements, like I said secondary and junior college, they didn't have that, just sitting down”
		Nina 100-101	“It's a peace of mind that I won't miss a huge chunk of the exam”
	Marie 107-111	“if I see them turning the page and I'm still on the first question, that panics me a lot and if I say like okay I studied as much as they did but I'm slower tipo why is that uh so that used to help a lot, the fact that I don't have time pressure”	

Coping	Not keeping up with work	Marie 20-27	“and secondary where we always had to take notes and try to keep up with the whiteboard and everything uh, I used to find it quite difficult. In primary it was the most I think where they would give us class work to do in class and I would still be doing and then they would tell me okay do it later and out it under the desk and everything would start piling up”
		Phoebe 283-287	“[Prior to access arrangements] you would still be going through it and like sort of experiencing the consequences but then obviously when you like go to ask for help or if you're falling behind and you don't have anything on paper to back you up”
		John 194-198	“if you look at my marks they would be [high] and then you would have an essay that I had to write, a D, like barely passing, so without that half an hour I wouldn't be able to finish the degree. I would be failing constantly”
		John 235-237	“just considered a bad student and uh that's how it was all the time”
	Condition affects work	Marie 20-27	“and secondary where we always had to take notes and try to keep up with the whiteboard and everything uh, I used to find it quite difficult. In primary it was the most I think where they would give us class work to do in class and I would still be doing and then they would tell me okay do it later and out it under the desk and everything would start piling up”
		Sophia 227-229	“I can do a schedule I try, but it's something really difficult to abide by it, that is the ADHD”
		Sophia 391-399	“I didn't choose this life, like I was born with something that I have no control with, like it's already difficult to experience day to day, so it's nice to have something where there's an understanding he sometimes not because I'm lazy or because I'm they just use lazy, but it's literally because I can't focus on anything else and I just you know for example I miss a deadline”
		Rita 256-257	“I only have trouble focusing. For example, that tumbling noise is really annoying”
		Rita 266-267	“the little things is what really disrupt me”
		John 21-24	“when I was younger, I always found difficulty let's say working in an educational environment let's say, I needed a lot of prompts, I needed supports”
	John 28-31	“at university, I was um I was struggling also with reading and writing a lot and that comes from my dyslexia and ADHD so that's where I need what do you call it arrangements”	

		John 60-61	“assignments yes it would take me much longer than a person who is neurotypical”
		Jane 26-28	“my mental health was declining at the time and... I couldn't bear it [sixth form]
		Rita 12-18	before university to be honest it [experience with education] was quite horrible my mum knew that I had ADD which isn't ADHD, and I also had dyslexia which I was never treated for”
		Rita 75-81	“when I didn't know that I had dyslexia and ADD um I was basically a cloud really, I was sitting there and um I didn't know how to study, my memory is pretty fried I'd say so even if I tried to study it never stuck in my head... I would spend drawing”
		John 21-24	“when I was younger, I always found difficulty let's say working in an educational environment let's say, I needed a lot of prompts, I needed supports”
	Developing study skills	Monica 22-26	“as I got older I knew that I knew that I had to work harder than others so I had to start studying from before I had to start working before so that. Could reach the exams reduce any stress or any anxiety or nervousness and do good in my exams”
		Monica 35-37	“now I got used to how to study. I still try to plan beforehand to study so I can feel confident in my own in the material that I need to know”
		Miriam 37-39	“you also find out certain tricks and trades that work best for you when you're studying and how best to tackle certain subjects”
Fear of future	Uncertainty - Will I get AAs at O/A levels?	Monica 45-47	“When I was in like junior and secondary school I was offered extra time but I refused em with the fear that for my O levels I won't have that opportunity”
		Monica 51-55	“I never took the opportunity I never took as my own decision to take extra time with that fear that I won't get accepted I won't have acceptance for the extra time during the main exams, meaning my O levels and A levels”
		Miriam 69-73	“primary they used... to offer... extra time and or a quiet place or a reader, but honestly I used to refuse”
		Miriam 74-83	“then for like o levels and a levels you would have to apply, show them a psychology report, sometimes they'd call me and do an exam, like they test me to see what percentage you have and if you're eligible for certain criteria, so I used to almost test myself not to take any help from school cause if I don't have it during my o levels and A levels... it would affect me, so I used to almost train myself like I'm not going to have it at all, cause you don't know what happens sometimes”

	Will my condition affect my job?	Sophia 375-379	“with ADHD... I always hope that in my job it doesn't really affect me as much because there is not the pressure of me being a failure it's a job that I like working so I'd feel more relaxed. At university it's more stressful”
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Table 9: Codes and quotes pertaining to the sub-themes within the theme Anxiety. ‘AAs’ refers to access arrangements.

Theme 3: Assessment			
Sub-themes	Codes	Line numbers	Quotes
Distractions	Examination access arrangements – noise/distractions	Miriam 187-192	“to have like good quiet room. I never had a quiet room, but like I had an examination of my o level there were students of the school who were walking by and they almost entered in the classroom during an examination so there needs to be more control of the environment about quiet”
		Miriam 192-196	“I remember in my A level there's construction going on outside and like for me it's like I'm trying to understand the question and there's this noise in my ear”
		Sophia 440-443	“if a lot of people start even clicking their pen, I might get distracted and annoying and I feel more nervous because somehow, I feel like they're staring at me not at the paper, but that is me the anxiety manifesting itself”
		Marie 136-140	“it was very em confusing for me, I'm trying to concentrate and everyone is going out of the room and talking to each other like how was the exam sometimes I even overheard answers from the back and I'm still doing the exam”
Assessment methods	Online exams and positive experience with online exams during COVID	Nina 32-34	“most of them were online so that was very fun - most were online and it was comfortable, I could stay comfortable in my own home to do the exams, so it was nice”
		Nina 299-302	“I was diagnosed exactly a month before or maybe a week before COVID hit, so that was all at home so I didn't need access arrangements, so if something happened I could just leave the lecture and go”
		Sophia 77-80	“[COVID] for me it was online exams, which was perfect, so it was like online exams, which can be more calm because I was at

			home and the environment was sort of familiar to me”
		Rita 161	“they [online exams] were amazing to be honest”
		Rita 166-168	“I prepared beforehand I went thoroughly through my notes I had my notes beside me I had the internet if I wanted to”
		Rita 176	“if I had to choose yes it would be online
		Rita 281-283	Yes, very much, I would literally prepare four essays, and during those two hours I would just cut copy and extract and just edit”
		John 78-81	“COVID happened so we didn't have essays on campus anyways so we were writing it ... writing is impossible, I wouldn't pass an exam if it was writing”
		John 101-106	“considering that we were at home I never applied when we were doing exams I never really applied when we were doing exams I never really applied because I was still at home and whatever could have been done could have been done there because I have the laptop so I don't need to ask for laptop or different room”
	Assignments preferred over exams – option of choosing?	Rita 273-274	“maybe if we can be given the option of doing an assignment over an exam”
		Rita 287-291	“I don't remember much of what I did last year, however with my assignments I can still recall because I read more I researched more I wrote a lot more so there's a really good contrast”
		John 53-56	“assignments, uh those I found to be easier for me because I kind of wasn't so limited with time in terms, I didn't have to read and write, immediately pronounce something on the spot”
	Assessment method not appropriate	Phoebe 24-30	“they've [exams] always been a bit of a stressful thing for me, because like I struggle with like maybe time management so I always say that is it a bit challenging because like sometimes I would know is in the paper but then it's like sometimes like I don't think it's necessarily a good way to assess what someone knows or is capable of”
		Phoebe 30-32	“like I do well in the exams but more because I've learned the techniques for a

			good exam and how to actually like do knowledge”
		John 78-81	“COVID happened so we didn't have essays on campus anyways so we were writing it ... writing is impossible, I wouldn't pass an exam if it was writing”
		John 227-230	“they helped me finish [study units] but I did not express and was not able to express the whole how we say potential of what I have earned or what I can write, so it's in no way representative of”

Table 10: Codes and quotes pertaining to the sub-themes within the theme Assessment. ‘AAs’ refers to access arrangements.

Theme 4: Application process			
Sub-themes	Codes	Line numbers	Quotes
Positive experiences of the application process	Application process was positive	Marie 48-58	“I just presented the report and it was all done. Then at university I think they did an interview I think and we had to renew the report again, but for applying it wasn't that much of a hassle ... you'll just have to do it once at the beginning”
		Marie 403-404	“the staff were very helpful as well so any questions I have they answered”
		Monica 56-59	“at the University of Malta in first year I immediately applied em the coordinator was very nice and understanding and it was like a very easy process to be fair, so that was a bit of a relief”
		Sophia 127-135	“I sent forward my tests for my ADHD, the my psychiatrist evaluation form my therapist, so there was um a lot of paper notes regarding why do I deserve it, which makes sense, I'm asking quite a lot, um, quite a lot I mean, the needs have to be mer, but there has to bne a reaosn why you state things are there. Um so yeah it was very straightforward, we had the meeting she told me to send the paperwork, and after a few days I was kind of part of the access arrangements”
		Sophia 159-167	“I asked one of my professors if I could have an extension, and then I sent an email to [the coordinator of the ADSU] and telling her listen this is the issue I'm deadline with um I don't know how to go about it because um my brain

			knows that I have an assignments but also my brain isn't letting me to, it's a very complicated issue, so yes they were, so first I emailed my professor, hoping that they would be very understanding, but obviously I wanted the back up of [the coordinator of the ADSU] as approval"
		Phoebe 134-136	"in terms of the arrangements themselves like I applied like the first week of university and in that sense, it was a very smooth process"
		Rita 34-37	"I decided to get in touch with the [ADSU] offices and they were very very nice, awfully nice, I would say. And yes, they gave me access arrangements accordingly and as much as they could"
		Rita 108-116	"the process was very easy. It was a very turbulent time I would say for me emotionally ... [the coordinator of the ADSU] - she was very very sweet, very sweet"
		Rita 123-126	"even though I started fairly late with the process ... until the next exams I was already with the access arrangements which I'm very grateful for"
		John 363-366	"when I applied they were very quick to respond... they communicated with my department and advised them about this"
	Involved in application process	Nina 54-58	"I had a meeting with the lady from the support unit, and she explained to me what I was eligible for, and I could either choose for access arrangements for classrooms and exams, or classes only, or exams only, I personally chose exams only because for classes I didn't need them"
		Miriam 126-127	"I only have extra time, I always only applied for extra time, my choice"
		Phoebe 48-50	"[so you felt involved in the process?] Yes"
		Rita 190-192	"they [which access arrangements she could get] were thoroughly discussed as well, even she told me what I'm entitled to and what I can choose from"
		John 93-97	"I had an option, I had a list I remember of what it is I need... I had an option to choose"
	Could voice my opinion with ADSU	Nina 59	"I could voice my opinion [with the ADSU]"

	Support/ cooperation between student and ADSU	Sophia 501-509	“for me I need the extra extension for my assignments, rather [than] being hard on myself, being like oh its because I'm the worst person ... I actually went to talk to them and was like I need this, I saw it, because they give you a list and you tick which one works for you and I was referring back to the paper you gave me, I think I want to add that, and then obviously I had the support of the therapist who again had my back”
		Rita 34-37	“I decided to get in touch with the [ADSU] offices and they were very very nice, awfully nice, I would say. And yes, they gave me access arrangements accordingly and as much as they could”
		Phoebe 40-46	“I was contacted from the access themselves and they were helpful like they set up a call and then like they discuss what like I might be entitled to and I said what my comments are, what I thought I needed, and then I filled in the form, and like I heard back from them so it was more them who reached out than me”
Negative experiences of the application process	Application process was negative	Nina 42-46	“I applied and it was so and so because it was a long process and first my doctor didn't do the stamp and the registration number and she did the lady of the support unit didn't accept it so I had to stay redoing it and then she wanted the paper from the consultant, from the GP”
		Nina 46-49	“it was a tiring process to be honest and I was quarantined at the time so I couldn't keep going back and forth during the deadlines to apply – quite a lengthy process”
		Nina 277-278	“maybe it wouldn't be so difficult to apply. The whole registration number was a bit annoying in my case”
		Marie 395-402	“I didn't know that I had to go to an occupational therapist and actually do a report as proof that I need extra time for example and ehe that was quite confusing, and I didn't know about the interview or the ehe it was just a lot at once, you know you're starting university everything is new and then you have to take care of this before the first exams, and ehe it was quite a lot for me”
		Monica 230-234	“I think the [application] process needs to be approached with more inviting, because I

			remember it was such a fearful experience that I could get rejected despite knowing that I have back up, like proof of why I need them, so I think how the approach is should be better”
		Monica 252-258	“I think the approach of applying for access arrangements like making it more clear as to why you can you can apply, making it clear to everyone, and that it isn't it shouldn't be such a tedious process or a scary process with the fear em as in my experience was the fear that I wouldn't get accepted that's why I never had in school access arrangements but for the main exams I had”
		Miriam 88-97	“[related to wrong ID number and feelings before an O level exam] I was going to have a heart attack one time... I did my ID number wrong or something when I applied and I was not going to have the access arrangements and I freaked out and I was crying in the car when I figured out, I was like mum I'm not going to go to the exam... but luckily with the help of my mother she calmed me down we fixed it, it took a lot of time like sending emails back and forth, so it's quite time consuming to apply for certain access arrangements”
		Miriam 308-312	“but honestly if you're applying for extra time I don't think you need to put a percentage on it, like having a psychology report that tells you that this person has that and whatnot, and you're giving them, I doubt you need to do an assessment – the hassle”
		Sophia 285-290	“[in secondary school - assessment] written in the report that I have a slight dyslexia and when I did the report again the report was me reading a book basically it was like a 20 minute observation and they were like okay you don't need the extra help you're good enough – it's there, but it's not enough for us to build a report on it”
		Sophia 297-299	“I can't pronounce certain words or tell time or directions but those are passable apparently [according to those who assessed her regarding her dyslexia, which was assessed as a slight dyslexia]”

		Sophia 313-315	"she [her mom] did try finding a way [regarding her diagnosis, how she could help] to but if you don't have the right information you're kind of locked outside"
		Phoebe 285-287	"when you like go to ask for help or if you're falling behind and you don't have anything on paper to back you up"
		Rita 116-119	"my documents were a bit old, I had to renew them, so it was a long process for me. I also had a therapist at the time to accompany me through this emotional rollercoaster"
		Rita 308-313	"recently em I was wondering if I should change from 15% to 25% extra time but to be honest, I don't want to go through all that process sort of redoing the entire paperwork and putting a lot of stress all over again, the same stress I had last year, so, yeah, that's literally the only reason"
		Rita 318-320	"it [the application process] was long, I believe there was one step that took 6 months I believe to go through, yeah cause of a long waiting list"
	Not involved in the application process	Marie 70-74	"no they choose for you. I think it's according to the OT report or they do an assessment, it dpeneds on the... gravita, like how bad the case is... so no no I wasn't involved"
		Marie 76-79	"if I had the option, I would like that [to be more involved]"
		Marie 80-83	"in my case the access arrangements they gave me it was enough in my case, I agreed with them, so it didn't bother me as much that I wasn't involved but if they involve us, I think it's it wouldn't do any harm"
		Monica 61-65	"[were you personally involved in the process of deciding which arrangement you get?] not really no I only gave the psychologist's reports"
	Missed lessons due to application process	Miriam 97-99	"they used to take time from our schools and lessons, which honeslty we needed, but there's nothing you can do"
		Miriam 313-316	"I used to lose lessons and I would be like I don't almost afford to lose lessons because I tried to make the most of the lessons, even if I'm not understanding, I try to take something"
		Miriam 322-328	"one time I remember that we didn't even go to school, we had to go personally"

			<p>somewhere and then the second time round they came to our school, and we did the assessment in another room in the school itself, so then when we were done we went back to class, but it used to take an hour or two so I would miss around 2 lessons”</p>
Long process to be diagnosed	Nina 262-266		<p>“Some people have chronic pain and they don't have a diagnosis because it takes very very long to be diagnosed - it took me months I think because they thought it was something else, and to book appointments... it takes too long”</p>
	Nina 268-271		<p>“it [getting a diagnosis] takes months, and in those months the person... they're suffering and you can't get access arrangements if you don't have a diagnosis - it's not fair”</p>
Not everyone has a diagnosis	Nina 262		<p>“Not everyone has a diagnosis”</p>
	Sophia 259-263		<p>“so before secondary and sixth form I didn't have the accessibility to have that extra access arrangements because I was undiagnosed, I wasn't diagnosed with ADHD and they didn't see my dyslexia as enough to be worth of the LSE or the paper the report”</p>
Experiences before being diagnosed	Miriam 14-20		<p>“before I knew I had dyslexia, lesson would be quite... boring in a way that I wouldn't be paying attention because they wouldn't be attracting me so I would just stare off and the lesson would just go on and I almost wouldn't know what was happening in the lesson”</p>
	Sophia 256-263		<p>“before like I had dyslexia but it was not enough to get the extra help. They were like you can live you can pass by so I didn't have the extra, so yeah so before secondary and sixth form I didn't have the accessibility to have that extra access arrangements because I was undiagnosed, I wasn't diagnosed with ADHD and they didn't see my dyslexia as enough to be worth of the LSE or the paper the report”</p>
	Rita 48-51		<p>“as a young child you don't know what these things are. But obviously in class you see the difference between you and the other students”</p>
	Rita 75-81		<p>“when I didn't know that I had dyslexia and ADD um I was basically a cloud really, I was sitting there and um I didn't know how to study, my memory is pretty fried I'd say so</p>

			even if I tried to study it never stuck in my head... I would spend drawing”
		Rita 86-87	“even though I tried studying, it never really stuck in my head”
		Rita 89-93	“[so instead of answering the quesiotns you'd be drawing] most of the time. I try, but then I get frustrated, and I end up drawing”
		John 97-101	“considering my clinical profile... I could only choose an extra time for exams, and I wasn't claiming anything for dyslexia I remember because I wasn't diagnosed with dyslexia yet so I've never had actually arrangements for dyslexia”
	Not everyone can afford a therapist	Sophia 357-358	“if certain people can't afford it [to see a therapist], it [monitoring meetings] would be a very good ideal situation”
		Sophia 525-529	“some people can't afford a therapist I mean it's costs around 40 euros per session so you have to be realistic with certain people especially if you're just a student and on a stipend”
		Sophia 529-533	“they should have an educational psychologist, a learning psychologist or an education psychologist, who specialises within that field where during the meeting or you have a one-to-one session with the educational psychologist”
		Sophia 538-543	“there's a therapist so they can work together to find the actual need... it's free, so it shouldn't be a problem for anyone”

Table 11: Codes and quotes pertaining to the sub-themes within the theme Application process. ‘AAs’ refers to access arrangements.

Theme 5: Providing appropriate access arrangements			
Sub-themes	Codes	Line numbers	Quotes
Positive experiences of access arrangement provision	AAs provided – satisfied	Nina 130-134	“I think its good... The only thing I have is extra time and the classrooms need to be within close distance to a bathroom”
		Nina 167-175	“Yes, the classroom used to be close to a bathroom. I honestly liked that because I didn’t hear people fidgiting and coming late... and it was stress-relieving which helps my condition”
		Jane 136-142	“And I wouldn't have managed to meet the deadlines for the assigments. And to be

			honest, during exams when I know that I have flexibility with deadlines it allows me the time that I need to do because I don't feel like I work at the same pace as other students, I take longer, because of my mental issues, you know. So, I think they were really helpful”
		Jane 227-230	“Oh my god, the extra time was so helpful ... I forgot about that. I don't know how I would have managed without extra time because I used almost every time the extra time”
		Marie 202-203	“ it's the perfect amount of access arrangements”
		Marie 260-261	“with the access arrangements I had it was all well and good”
		Monica 83-84	“[in online exams] I did have access arrangements I had the extra time so that wasn't a problem at all”
		Monica 89-96	“extra time helps me because when I'm in a rush and how to express what I need to say to answer the question I may not structure the sentence properly, so extra time helps me to reread my work and adjust that makes sense cause in my mind it may make sense cause it's my own work, but then I may have to see does this actually make sense for the examiner when coming to correcting”
		Monica 106-107	“I'm pleased with what I have to be fair em I think the time is more than enough”
		Miriam 109-111	“extra time it's just for me to focus more, to not panic about the time that's going by”
		Miriam 133-137	“it helps me obviously cause even if it's just 10 minutes, like I wouldn't be stressing about the time cause like I know I have those 10 minutes where I can read the question carefully, try to understand it, and answer and make sure what I'm writing is clear”
		Miriam 141-144	“I really have to think twice about reading and understanding and answering questions so that extra time even if it's for a minute it really helps”
		Sophia 23-25	“university giving me the liberty to access arrangements really helped so that should have been the number one”
		Sophia 73-76	“so I have the ability that part of my package deal that I can ask for my professors for extra week, depends if they can allow it – so that really helps me regarding assignments”

		Sophia 81-83	"it was a quiet room only like 2 or 3 students were present in the classroom, which is a little bit different and more relaxed"
		Sophia 212-216	"for me access arrangements are like uh [for example, if] I wear glasses [as a metaphor] I [may not] see from afar, and those help me see clearly, the same way access arrangements are... I'm not abusing them I'm not having... better than the rest"
		Phoebe 75-83	"I had that I had to be in a room with 5 students or less, and I have 25 % extra time [and did those help you?] I think the do because like for example the extra time I was like sometimes it does help me like to keep calm or like or take a walking break so I found it does help me"
		Phoebe 83-87	"also being in a small room like... I do feel like it helps me a lot more in the sense... being overwhelmed or disrupted"
		Phoebe 104-105	"when I've needed them, they have been very helpful so I'm thankful for them"
		Phoebe 262-265	"I don't think you need to do things on hard mode... I think it does help"
		Rita 143-145	"[computer with spell check] which is very helpful"
		Rita 198-201	"it makes it easier for me because I feel less stressed, I mean for me personally it takes me longer to write by hand than by computer, so just that alone I'm already winning time"
		John 188-191	"I'm a good student... I wasn't a bad student in no way, um the only for example I can say that without those extra half an hour that I had I wouldn't be able to finish the degree"
		John 194-198	"If you look at my marks they would be [high] and then you would have an essay that I had to write, a D, like barely passing, so without that half an hour I wouldn't be able to finish the degree. I would be failing constantly"
		John 227	"they [access arrangements] helped me finish [study units]"
		Jane 350-354	"one of my major anxieties that if I do an assignment I won't be convinced that it's good enough so I'll keep on perfecting it so probably it could be that they were well deserved marks cause I had 6 weeks to perfect them"
	AAs provided changed	Sophia 149-153	"I found that I couldn't manage with um the deadlines of the assignments, that's

		something very relatable with the ADHD and anxiety - they said okay we can add this to the access arrangements”
	Sophia 159-167	“I asked one of my professors if I could have an extension, and then I sent an email to [the coordinator of the ADSU] and telling her listen this is the issue I'm dealing with um I don't know how to go about it because um my brain knows that I have an assignments but also my brain isn't letting me to, it's a very complicated issue, so yes they were, so first I emailed my professor, hoping that they would be very understanding, but obviously I wanted the back up of [the coordinator of the ADSU] as approval”
	Phoebe 156-160	“it's not like I think I needed anything added, but that there would be better follow through like ensure like when you ask for something and like you prove that you actually need it, that then it would be like ensured”
	John 112-115	“for sure I would ask [for some other arrangements if you were to need to do an exam in person]. It's too overwhelming of an anxiety the exams, knowing that it's somehow out of your hands to a degree, so uh I would not be ashamed to ask”
	Sophia 137-142	“I miscalculated, procrastination with ADHD, and that's when I did the extra extension of the assignments. So they were very helpful regarding oh okay, so this is happening for you and you are finding it very difficult, so we are going to add it, no problem. They were very understanding about it”
AAs given (although not asked for) – useful	Phoebe 73-83	“I didn't apply for exam ones, but they gave me anyway and I had that I had to be in a room with 5 students or less, and I have 25 % extra time [and did those help you?] I think the do because like for example the extra time I was like sometimes it does help me like to keep calm or like or take a walking break so I found it does help me”
AAs offered but not wanted	Monica 45-47	“When I was in like junior and secondary school I was offered extra time but I refused em with the fear that for the O levels I won't have that opportunity”

		Rita 133-135	"[for dyslexia] she suggested that I have the like pen and she reads for you but I don't feel that's necessary"
		Monica 76-78	"did get offered to have a reader with me but I felt that it's too like pressure on me like to understand properly so I would rather have my own time and use that time"
		Monica 108-112	"if I would have a reader I would be too nervous and pressured and feeling that someone is watching me constantly, so I would need my space, so I would prefer just to have that extra time which I think I have a valid amount of time and not have a reader"
	Leniency in AA provision (primary and secondary education) - positive experience	Marie 91-92	"In primary and secondary I didn't have a percentage [of extra time] they just gave me as much time as I needed"
		Marie 118-120	"during primary and secondary they were more lenient like they they didn't have any restrictions on time"
Negative experiences of access arrangement provision	AAs provided – discontent	Jane 109-112	"So I have like extension for deadlines, but it's at the discrepancy [discretion?] of the of the lecturer which I don't really approve of because not everyone like understands mental health"
		John 207-209	"when it comes to length of how extra you have, it should kind of be more... personal in a way"
		John 210-217	"when I had to apply for my access arrangements I had to submit my IQ test, and ADHD test... so the severity of my... processing speed, how severely it was affected, could help those who make those arrangements judge whether I'm able to read and write in this half an hour, or whether I need 45 minutes or you know so I think these arrangements should be a little more on an individual level"
		John 223-226	"on the other side there's the question of how much do you need at the end of the day. Maybe you know it's like what are we going to give you, 5 hours to write it?"
		AAs not provided	Sophia 20-24

			studying so university giving me the liberty to access arrangements really helped”
		Phoebe 149-152	“when it gets to the actual working of stuff like asking for recordings which I understand might be disruptive to the other class, but then like they [lecturers] get very stuck on like fearness”
		Phoebe 165-176	“even though like I asked for permission from like it was given from the access [ADSU] and then I met with the head of department and they also approved them and then he himself had filled in like the consent form for this recording of lectures and also for the assignment it was hand written... but then when it came to actual practice it didn't get anywhere and then like sort of like I wanted to take it up but like at the same time like I didn't want to risk the like the extra hassle of like going and reporting a lecturer and whatnot, so then it kind of fell through there”
	AAs wanted but not provided	Jane 244-256	“maybe requesting more thorough notes from the lecturers, because sometimes they like have slides with some few words in them and you have to sort of remember if you were like like maybe someone with my condition... maybe someone who is struggling mentally might have some absenteeism and maybe like having the notes of what is said during the lecture can help to me not falling behind and even when I'm not physically present and I might wander off or not be in a good state I wouldn't be able to follow so having what like the notes like as good as they can be you know I think that would really help”
		Marie 195-196	“that's a good one, the one of being able to type instead of write”
	Leniency in AA provision (primary and secondary education) - negative experience	Marie 121-125	“it was very chaotic in a sense that I I find it really helpful that if you have extra time they put you in a separate room. That you don't do the exam with others who have the same amount of time [who don't have extra time]”
		Marie 125-136	“in secondary and primary... you're still in the same class as everyone, so you're that person who everyone else is finished and going out the class and going out the room and as everyone is kind of going out the room and trying to settle wherever you're trying to

			concentrate keep like concentrating so that you're not so much... back in time, because you would have exams even in secondary you would have an exam in the morning and then a one hour break and the another exam of another subject so you really have to hurry kind of up cause you would then miss the second exam"
	AAs given not benefited from or used	Jane 211-214	"one of the access arrangements was that I'm in a class with up to 4, and I don't think that that really benefits me, so it's not it's something I use obviously but um not something that has been as helpful as having the extensions for example"
		Sophia 93-95	"but recording I'm not gonna listen to it, there's gonna be a lot of noise, so I'm not going to waste anyone's time regarding that"
		Sophia 488-491	"for me recording doesn't work, because I'm not going to listen to someone who um his voice maybe won't be very clear people are laughing people there's outside noise"
		Rita 183-185	"I can have extensions approved I can potentially as if I can record the lecture, but I don't make any I don't want to be treated differently in that way"
	AAs changed - no difference	Monica 120	"I think it [the percentage of extra time] got reduced, but it didn't affect me"
Suggestions	Extending AAs to other circumstances	Nina 248-252	"I don't think they should be limited to maybe disabilities and conditions, cause maybe Gozitan students, sometimes they need to come to school just for 1 hour in the day, on a Friday when they could have gone home beforehand - I don't think that's fair on them. And even those who live far away, it's not really fair"
		Nina 253-256	"maybe there should be some sort of arrangements that other students with certain cases, not just disabilities and conditions, but I don't think that everyone needs them"
		Rita 273-274	"maybe if we can be given the option of doing an assignment over an exam"
		Jane 244-256	"maybe requesting more thorough notes from the lecturers, because sometimes they like have slides with some few words in them and you have to sort of remember if you were like like maybe someone with my condition... maybe someone who is struggling mentally

			might have some absenteeism. And maybe like having the notes of what is said during the lecture can help to not falling behind and even when I'm not physically present and I might wander off or not be in a good state I wouldn't be able to follow so having what like the notes like as good as they can be you know I think that would really help”
Assignments preferred over exams – option of choosing?	Rita 273-274	“maybe if we can be given the option of doing an assignment over an exam”	
	Rita 287-291	“I don't remember much of what I did last year, however with my assignments I can still recall because I read more I researched more I wrote a lot more so there's a really good contrast”	
	John 53-56	“assignments, uh those I found to be easier for me because I kind of wasn't so limited with time in terms, I didn't have to read and write, immediately pronounce something on the spot”	
Provision of certain AAs could be temporary	Sophia 445-452	“there are people who have for example lost a loved one or something traumatic happened to them... I would say yes you can have like the extra arrangement, but it would be something temporary, I mean temporary could be for that semester or it could be for the whole year”	
	Sophia 453-456	“or if you have a physical injury - broke your arm - you need someone to write for you, and again this is like a temporary fix where you needed the extra help”	
	Phoebe 294-301	“visit their wellbeing team and like even if it's mental or physical... get arrangements from there, without having to have proof of disability... if you have proof of disability they like entitled to go have these extra which normal student wouldn't be... I think it would be helpful to have something like that”	
	Phoebe 311-317	“it could be circumstantial... they can be revisited... you can go visit the wellbeing team and if you need something they can give it to you for however long you would need it but it wouldn't be as fixed as it would be if you were like actually disabled”	
Monitoring process	Monica 122-127	“[did you ever have a meeting to monitor or check they need to change] no, I just always stayed with what I received”	

		Sophia 349-356	“not the monitoring, because that would be very stressful... they do it [monitoring] nahseb every year regarding to see if you need a different modification... I think it would be a good idea”
		Phoebe 199-201	“I think it [a follow-up to see how it's going] would be very helpful”

Table 12: Codes and quotes pertaining to the sub-themes within the theme Providing appropriate access arrangements. ‘AAs’ refers to access arrangements.

Theme 6: Support			
Sub-themes	Codes	Line numbers	Quotes
Peers	Support from peers	Jane 51-55	“I knew about them because my best friend has them - I didn't know it was an option... I got to know from another student and while I had no official paperwork or diagnosis like I knew that I had mental problems”
		Jane 324-326	“everyone [peers who know she has access arrangements] is quite supportive, they never told me it's not fair that you have extra time and I don't and they all know because we're... close”
		Jane 326-330	“one of them is has difficulties as well and I encouraged her to apply as well but she doesn't want to because she she's like not sure about disclosing her difficulties to the University”
		Monica 27-31	“I'll never forget a friend who told me you know your material during the exams but you don't get the same mark as me but I told her it's mostly because how I understand the questin or the paragraph that is in front of me I may not understand”
		John 283-288	“when I shared it with friends... a little compassion was there definitely, so always a positive experience”
		Miriam 232	“friends would be quite understanding”
		Jane 51-55	“I knew about them because my best friend has them - I didn't know it was an option... I got to know from another student and while I had no official paperwork or diagnosis like I knew that I had mental problems”

	Peers convinced them to apply for AAs	Sophia 118-121	"I was talking to one of my friends he actually [went] through the process of doing the access arrangements and he talked me into, and then I had the meeting with [the coordinator of the ADSU]"
		Phoebe 212-216	"there were people who found you like when I told them about it they found out they were also entitled to the access arrangements so if anything like I think I was very helpful to be like open about it because then they could apply and also get like what they needed"
		Phoebe 226-227	"I was like able to tell him like he could also get them and filfatt he did"
	In same class as others who also receive AAs	Monica 139-144	"you will be in a room or a class where everyone has access arrangements so it's always been like that so you wouldn't see your colleagues if you know what I mean, I wouldn't be with my friends I had to go search a different room but it was always the same structure"
		Monica 149-150	"I would be in a classroom full of students who have extra time or any other access arrangements"
		Monica 157-159	"since we have extra time we wouldn't hear them leaving the classroom so we'd be separate"
		Marie 162-165	"we'd be 3 people in a room, you know, at least but it's still like they're in the same boat as you, so, you don't feel that like you know because you relate to them"
	Worries about peers' thoughts	Nina 157-162	"I try to only limit that [whether lecturers/friends know she has access arrangements] to a small circle of my friends who know my condition because I don't want others to think oh because she has extra time what does she have, or she has extra time that's not fair. I think they notice though because some of in-person exams weren't in the same room as them, it was in a room alone"
		Nina 184-189	"I try and limit that, if they ask me hey why weren't you in the room with us, I'll tell them, but I'm not going to publicly say I have access arrangements because even with my conditon does not have to do with the way I look in my case, and people

			always assume things, so I try to keep them private”
		Marie 105-109	“I find myself em comparing myself to what others have arrived to in the exam paper for example if I see them turning the page and I'm still on the first question, that's panics me a lot”
		Marie 269-273	“[if they were to know that you had extra time] it's a matter of me putting this under the carpet... I wouldn't want them to know about it, it's just my opinion ghax I just again I don't know how they would react”
		Marie 275-280	“they would probably be curious of like tipo like why tipo what do you have more... I mean they wouldn't say anything to my face really they would just think to themselves or with each other tipo just them being curious I think about why do I need this or what's wrong with me in a sense”
		Monica 176-178	“[peers know she has access arrangements] I tell them that I have extra time since it's obvious since I don't have written the same classroom to which to attend”
		Monica 182-184	“when I was younger since I couldn't understand why I used to feel ashamed that I'm like I'd be pitied oh that's not fair she has extra time”
		Miriam 254-264	“like she has something so to make it easier like more fair for her... just that extra thing that will help, but I'm pretty sure for them it would be helpful to finish their exam, while for me it would be helpful to understand the question, like my answer correctly, so it would be a total different like if I have the extra 10 minutes and my friends would have the extra 10 minutes”
		Sophia 367-370	“[if your peers, or classmates... were to know that you had access arrangements] I do not care... this is about bettering yourself”
		Rita 336-338	“I don't talk about it because I don't want to be looked differently, I mean I still work hard I just struggle with bits and pieces here and there”
		John 338	“what would others think about it”

	Feelings of shame	Monica 180-184	“now that I've grown, and I'm confident in that I have to work harder I don't feel ashamed anymore - when I was younger since I couldn't understand why I used to feel ashamed that I'm like I'd be pitied oh that's not fair she has extra time”
		John 281-283	“whenever I had to share it I felt a bit of shame you know because I did feel like you know maybe I would be a bit judged about it”
		Sophia 381-382	“I'm very open I have no shame but there really is not shame”
		Monica 190-191	“I wouldn't tell them verbally myself that I have extra time, I would be too criticized, I think”
	Need' to be 'normal'	Marie 141-146	“even the fact that evryone is like ara why is she still doing her exam? What's wrong with her? like yoi know you feel yhy even though they might not think that but but you do feel that you're the odd one out, like why is she has privileges than me why don't I have extra time”
		Rita 131-133	“I was provided 25% extra time which I opted for 15% because I wanted to challenge myself”
		Rita 183-185	“I can have extensions approved I can potentialaly ask if I can record the lecture, but I don't make any I don't want to be treated differently in that way”
		Rita 201-205	“I can easily oranize my essay I can put my thoughts I wouldn't say better but more organized really you know I can start with PowerPoints I can erase, redo, it's those simple things that really help me be normal”
		Rita 336-338	“I don't talk about it because I don't want to be looked differently, I mean I still work hard I just struggle with bits and pieces here and there”
		Rita 349-355	“one friend before I told her she thought I was a bit ignorant toward her because whenever we sit down and there are cars passing by, I would always turn my head, she told me tipo thank you for letitng me know because I was having the wrong impression... the reason I don't talk about it

			is because I don't want to be looked differently”
		Marie 141-146	“even the fact that evryone is like ara like why is she still doing her exam what's wrong with her like you know you feel that even though they might not think that but but you do feel that you're the odd one out, like why is she has priveledges than me why don't I have extra time”
		Marie 147-149	“its not fair that she has time to do it and ... you feel like you're the black swan”
		John 155-158	“I felt it was like I'm doing something wrong, like no one else got the PowerPoint so why should I get it in a way, so it was quite a bit of guilt there”
	Wanted to challenge self	Rita 131-133	“I was provided 25% extra time which I opted for 15% because I wanted to challenge myself”
		Phoebe 103	“I do try to limit my use [of access arrangements]”
	Need to work harder than peers	Monica 22-26	“as I got older I knew that I knew that I had to to work harder thn others so I had to start studying from before I had to start working before so that. Could reach the exams reduce any stress or any anxiety or nervousness and and do good in my exams”
		Monica 180-181	“now, that I have grown, and I'm confident in that I have to work harder I don't feel ashamed anymore”
		Miriam 32-37	“certain teachers, they just go about with their lessons, and they don't care, as long as they finish what they need to finish. And through it obviously almost builds my character, like I have to work harder than all my peers, it sort of builds me up as a person as well, but some things didn't change”
		Monica 19-22	“as for a child I couldn't really understand the real reason behind why I have to work so hard so much harder than others”
Lecturers and teachers	Lecturers/ teachers were understanding regarding AAs/ condition	Monica 194-202	“[do you think them knowing about extra time would change the way they'd look at your exam paper?] In secondary school and post-secondary school I don't think so becuse the teachers were very understanding and and for those years you

			they get to know you, so they know that I'm a hard working student so they wouldn't look at is any different, that's what I believe"
		Miriam 20-22	"a teacher noticed and I went to see and obviously then I found out that I was dyslexic"
		Miriam 28-31	"some of the teachers were very helpful, like I had a teacher who used to give me extra notes a month before the exam to help with the studying and to know what is on the curriculum"
		Sophia 315-323	"for me it's more like teachers realising certain signs because obviously teachers can compare with others... having a lot of information available to you, the internet really helps nowadays... when the teacher realised there's something, uh that's how it starts because [a child] will not be like I have ADHD or anxiety, um so it comes from the teachers and the parents, that's how the access arrangements started"
		Phoebe 187-190	"he [head of department] had scheduled a meet-up with me at the beginning of the second semester to see like how I was finding it, like how the lectures were going, and if I needed anything else"
		Phoebe 244-249	"the majority of them [lecturers] are understanding and if anything like I have had lecturers reach out to me before like the study unit started to make sure to send the notes so I would say like on the majority like they're very helpful and understanding"
		Rita 32-34	"my professor of the faculty told me that I might have a sign of dyslexia and if certain mistakes are repeated I won't be able to continue"
	Lecturers/ teachers were not understanding regarding AAs/ condition	Miriam 32-37	"certain teachers, they just go about with their lessons, and they don't care, as long as they finish what they need to finish. And through it obviously almost builds my character, like I have to work harder than all my peers, it sort of builds me up as a person as well, but some things didn't change"

		Miriam 157-163	“in my primary school it wasn't well known about dyslexia, so you would have some teachers or educators that were reluctant so they would just go on and wouldn't take any notice, but then as like I grew up, there was more awareness being made and like even teachers would change the way they teach to make it friendly to everyone that everyone would understand”
		Miriam 232-236	“lecturers honestly I as in when I was younger the mentality was different so they would like use it make it like it was an excuse so I think they would like maybe label me or something”
		Phoebe 149-152	“when it gets to the actual working of stuff like asking for recordings which I understand might be disruptive to the other class, but then like they [lecturers] get very stuck on like fearness”
		Phoebe 165-176	“even though like I asked for permission from like it was given from the access [ADSU] and then I met with the head of department and they also approved them and then he himself had filled in like the consent form for this recording of lectures and also for the assignment it was hand written... but then when it came to actual practice it didn't get anywhere and then like sort of like I wanted to take it up but like at the same time like I didn't want to risk the like the extra hassle of like going and reporting a lecturer and whatnot, so then it kind of fell through there”
		Phoebe 236-238	“I think it sort of depends on the lecturers themselves, like how understanding, because I'm sure that some would think that it's an excuse”
		Phoebe 239-244	“at the beginning like my head of department informed all the lecturers and there were like some of the first introductory meeting where they keep emphasising the importance like that they don't accept flexibility with deadilnes like... because like they [lecturers] value fairness”
	Worries about lecturers'/	John 166-171	“I felt like I don't know it as you said it was not fair that I ask but I also worried what the professor would think of me just asking

	teachers' thoughts and perceptions		for extra, kind of I felt I don't know I just I didn't feel comfortable with it, let's make the statement I'm not comfortable with asking"
		Marie 322-333	"like what if they [teachers] know I have an extra time and they would be I don't know more lenient or harsher in a way, like uh maybe she's not good not good as the others so let's not give her a good mark, or the other way around tipo she needs extra help so let's be more lenient on her... in my o levels and [sixth form] exams and university they're all em anonymous, so I said okay that's not the eventually I said okay I don't think that's the case cause there weren't any changes in marks"
		Jane 347-350	"I always do quite well, but in that semester I did do quite well, I think the were all 70 80 plus, something like that, like I'm not doubting the quality of my work but maybe some pity marks, like a few, I don't know"
		Jane 350-354	"one of my major anxieties that if I do an assignment I won't be convinced that it's good enough so I'll keep on perfecting it so probably it could be that they were well deserved marks cause I had 6 weeks to perfect them"
		John 308-310	"I would as you say probably think that that this [extra time - teachers' perceptions of it] would affect how they grade my work"
		Sophia 47-58	"with other sixth form and secondary that was just the teachers used to kind of tell my my mom during parents parents day that I'm always distracted, distract other people, get nervous, so there it was more of a uniform behaviour especially in staying in a classroom for 6 hours, like in university 2 hours max and I have the accessibility to go to the bathroom, but we have a 5 minute break so that's really helpful, but I can get up and have a 10 minute break extra, because that's part of my access arrangements, like I said secondary and junior college, they didn't have that, just sitting down"

		Monica 92-99	“extra time helps me to reread my work and adjust that makes sense, cause in my mind it may make sense cause it's my own work, but then I may have to see does this actually make sense for the examiner when coming to correcting sort of, so that's why and even to read certain questions I may be too nervous to understand it so then I do it at the end and then I have enough time to answer it”
Uncomfortable and issues related to asking for AAs which are at the discretion of lecturers to give		Jane 109-112	“So I have like extension for deadlines, but it's at the discrepancy [discretion?] of the of the lecturer which I don't really approve of because not everyone like understands mental health”
		Phoebe 149-152	“when it gets to the actual working of stuff like asking for recordings which I understand might be disruptive to the other class, but then like they [lecturers] get very stuck on like fearness”
		Phoebe 165-176	“even though like I asked for permission from like it was given from the access [ADSU] and then I met with the head of department and they also approved them and then he himself had filled in like the consent form for this recording of lectures and also for the assignment it was hand written... but then when it came to actual practice it didn't get anywhere and then like sort of like I wanted to take it up but like at the same time like I didn't want to risk the like the extra hassle of like going and reporting a lecturer and whatnot, so then it kind of fell through there”
		Phoebe 149-152	“when it gets to the actual working of stuff like asking for recordings which I understand might be disruptive to the other class, but then like they [lecturers] get very stuck on like fearness”
		Phoebe 165-176	“even though like I asked for permission from like it was given from the access [ADSU] and then I met with the head of department and they also approved them and then he himself had filled in like the consent form for this recording of lectures and also for the assignment it was hand written... but then when it came to actual

			practice it didn't get anywhere and then like sort of like I wanted to take it up but like at the same time like I didn't want to risk the like the extra hassle of like going and reporting a lecturer and whatnot, so then it kind of fell through there”
		John 166-171	“I felt like I don't know it as you said it was not fair that I ask but I also worried what the professor would think of me just asking for extra, kind of I felt I don't know I just I didn't feel comfortable with it, let's make the statement I'm not comfortable with asking”
		Jane 109-112	“So I have like extension for deadlines, but it's at the discrepancy [discretion?] of the of the lecturer which I don't really approve of because not everyone like understands mental health”
		Jane 397-399	“also not leaving it up to the lecturers' discretion cause there are some lecturers who just don't understand mental health”
		Sophia 168-174	“when I send email a professor I'm going to send it late I ask them, I never take it into to be a veto thing, I need to ask my professor like is this allowed, like are you going to allow this extension, so I always tell them that email the note where it says this person does have the access arrangements for an extension, it's like a back up”
		Rita 183-185	“I can have extensions approved I can potentially ask if I can record the lecture, but I don't make any I don't want to be treated differently in that way”
		John 128-134	“I could go from the lecture, leave whenever needed and come back, and I had option of asking for extra material if a lecturer is able to uh willing to provide... I wasn't comfortable with [that] because uh you immediately feel that, I remember not asking, although I needed it”
		John 139-151	“I remember having a lecturer where we didn't have PowerPoints, PowerPoints were not given to us, so it was just as useless as whatnot to be there, and I remember... near the end of... the semester, we were preparing for the exam and I asked [the coordinator of the ADSU]... how do I

			approach ghe person if I need the extra material - she told me you can uh ask but it's in their own discretion if they want to... share it with you”
		John 152-158	“I remember feeling terrible about it, I didn't ask though... I remember feeling uite bad about it - wouldn't ask... I felt it was like I'm doing something wrong, like no one else got the PowerPoint so why should I get it in a way, so it was quite a bit of guilt there”
		John 173-177	“[do you feel that it would have been better if PowerPoints were made available to you regardless of whether you needed them or not?] definitely, made available”
	Negative experience with teachers regarding behaviour behind condition	Jane 166-173	“other access arrangements might have been helpful during maybe like me not giving up... because if maybe the teachers were more supportive and hands on on me you know I think that would have made me like it would have resulted in me being more successful... and maybe recognising that I need help rather than not caring”
		Jane 174-182	“I had the access arrangements based on me being diagnosed with a generalized anxiety disorder, and now I've also been diagnosed with ADD, which I think really explains the anxiety, so looking at it from a holistic point of view, if maybe the teachers acknowledged that it was not carelessness, like careless mistakes, or not caring but procrastination and anxiety, I think that would have completely changed the trajectory”
		John 235-237	“just considered a bad student and uh that's how it was all the time”
		John 252-257	“it wasn't being lazy or whatever, it's just I couldn't do it and no one noticed it, no one paid attention to it, that's when it was more to my character ah he doesn't want to study he's lazy. So, I never really got a chance to even consider, I didn't even know it exists, access arrangements”
	Not disclosing difficulties with university	Jane 236-330	“one of them has is has diffulcites as well and I encouraged her to apply as well but she doesn't want to because she she's like

			she's not sure about disclosing her difficulties to the University”
		Jane 394-397	“students being aware that there is such help and... informing them that it would not affect um the way sort of the university views them”
	Lecturers/teachers teaching styles	Sophia 270-279	“I was terrible in maths I used to always get 17 or 20 and then I found a tutor who actually taught in a dyslexic way like with colours and shapes, and that's how I passed my o levels, that's something I'm very proud of because I passed the first time like huh good riddance, and that's me kind of [beating] the system, but like out of my own time, because I started my maths studying my maths from form 1 till my o levels, summer weekend doesn't matter weekends, so yeah access arrangements would have been very helpful”
		Miriam 157-163	“in my primary school it wasn't well known about dyslexia, so you would have some teachers or educators that were reluctant so they would just go on and wouldn't take any notice, but then as like I grew up, there was more awareness being made and like even teachers would change the way they teach to make it friendly to everyone that everyone would understand”
		Miriam 164-168	“if you give me a note let's say because I'm very visual like a map like even the other students may benefit, so it's not going to affect the lecturer or educator to change it a little bit, so by time when there was more awareness about dyslexia it came more easier”
		Miriam 236-239	“nowadays for them to know it would help the because they would know maybe the student has something in order to have such an access arrangements maybe I need to arrange my lectures”
		Miriam 22-26	“thanks to my mother with a lot of dedication we managed to some of the teachers not all of them make them more aware about my being [dyslexic] and about how they can help and alter some of their lessons to make them more attractive to me”

	John 45-48	"I found those academics those professors who would ask questions to keep me engaged that way, so that was an easier way for me to listen to lectures that would not be of interest to me"
	John 48-51	"if that [lecturers asking questions which kept him engaged] wouldn't happen if the lecturer would just be reading slides I'm done, I'm lost... when is this going to end"
	Phoebe 9-18	"it [experience with education] was a positive experience, but like I think like from the situation I've gained like a lot of insight, and at the same time I think that things could be done better in the sense of retaining of knowledge and the way like stuff is taught in that sense"
Teachers and parents need to work together	Sophia 324-325	"it's the parents and the teachers that work together, they realise certain things"
Schools need to be inclusive	Sophia 325-326	"the actual school that actually is inclusive"
	Sophia 328-335	"student with ADHD, and they didn't know where to put him. They couldn't put him in a classroom because he was being disturbing and he wanted somewhere quieter but he couldn't be put in the playground because it wasn't very safe... so the school has to be designed in a way that it can cater a lot of different needs um because access arrangements sometimes are limited by exams and assignments"
	Sophia 339-340	"school being more flexible, and you know the extra time always helps, and being understanding"
Not provided with an LSA in primary/secondary school	Rita 22-23	"I never was provided the LSA [related to her ADD and dyslexia] that I was always promised during my primary and secondary"
	Rita 244-250	"no one phoned my mum to tell her listen someone is available [to give her an LSA, presumably] they're gonna start maybe next week. I think the waiting list was really long back then um and let's say it wasn't as important maybe as having let's say another disability. Now I think it's given more importance, given that there's quite a

			large number of students that have it [dyslexia/ADD]"
		Rita 237-239	"it [a call regarding getting an LSA for her] came [towards the end of secondary education] so I was already terrible in school, there was no use for the last... weeks of school"
Parents	Parental support	Monica 14-22	"A teacher noticed that I was dyslexic and then my mother and father worked hard to get a psychologists diagnosis and so on and from then on I worked hard, I started going to private lesson... since I was [a child], and as for a child I couldn't really understand the real reason behind why I have to work so hard so much harder than others and... it was really frustrating as a child"
		Monica 33-35	"every day I used to read with my mother you know just to improve my understanding and to read correctly, but now now I got used to how to study"
		Monica 240-241	"my mum always worked since I was young my mum always thrived [strived?] for it"
		Monica 276-284	"when I was young [dyslexia] was still kind of very new, you know, I used to attend to a... group, again I never understood what dyslexic is, my mother would use to force us and encourage is, mostly encourage us... about making more awareness about dyslexia... eventually I had more opportunities so that's why how I accept of what I have and I know what I have to do to work on it"
		Miriam 22-26	"thanks to my mother with a lot of dedication, we managed to some of the teaches not all of them make them more aware about me being [dyslexic] and about how they can help and alter some of their lessons to make them more attractive to me"
		Sophia 313-315	"she [her mom] did try finding a way [regarding her diagnosis, how she could help] to but if you don't have the right information you're kind of locked outside"
		Sophia 315-323	"for me it's more like teachers realising certain signs because obviouly teachers can compare with others... having a lot of information available to you, the internet"

			really helps nowadays... when the teacher realised there's something, uh that's how it starts because an 8-year old will not be like I have ADHD or anxiety, um so it comes from the teachers and the parents, that's how the access arrangements started”
		Rita 234-236	“my mum always told me that I am entitled to have someone help me during the classes, but the call [regarding getting an LSA for her] never came in really”
		Miriam 175-178	“it was easier [at one of the education levels] to apply because we knew what to do but you have to apply like no one's going to come on you and tell you like you can apply for this because they're not going to know”
Therapists	Support from therapists	Sophia 501-509	“for me I need the extra extension for my assignments, rather [than] being hard on myself, being like oh its because I'm the worst person ... I actually went to talk to them and was like I need this, I saw it, because they give you a list and you tick which one works for you and I was referring back to the paper you gave me, I think I want to add that, and then obviously I had the support if the therapist who again had my back”
	Negative experience related to therapists	Rita 396-401	“when I was getting retested for my ADD... the therapist was a bit impatient I remember, which was a bit hilarious now that I think of it, but it was very stressing at the time. She thought it was a bit ridiculous that she has to do it herself and not someone else”
		Rita 411-414	“some of the questions [asked by the therapist] that she was asking that weren't on the paper were a bit ridiculous I would say... if she were a bit more understanding towards my case maybe it would have been better”
Awareness	More awareness among lecturers regarding what AAs are (MA) and More awareness about what AAs/	Jane 379-385	“I think they [access arrangements] should be made aware to all students, and I think em everyone should have a session about how to cope with stress at the beginning of the University, healthy ways of coping, telling them about the service, and informing the students, cause yes I think

	are and who is eligible for them		that not everyone who needs them is reached, and that might lead to them not being able to finish university”
		Jane 394-397	“students being aware that there is such help and... informing them that it would not affect um the way sort of the university views them”
		Jane 403-405	“there could also be reaching out to lecturers and if it's not obligatory due to some reasons like the lecturer tries to be understanding of the access arrangements”
		Marie 298-300	“I don't think that all lecturers know [about her access arrangements] because some units we have visiting lecturers they just do one lecture and that's it, so I don't think they know”
		Miriam 236-239	“nowadays for them to know it would help the because they would know maybe the student has something in order to have such an access arrangements maybe I need to arrange my lectures”
		Rita 365-371	“if I never spoke about my struggles last year I don't think I would have made it, and not because I didn't know my stuff but because I was struggling in the very small things... it's pretty much common that people have ADHD so I think it should be part of normality nowadays, speaking for ADHD”

Table 13: Codes and quotes pertaining to the sub-themes within the theme Support. ‘AAs’ refers to access arrangements.

7.2. Appendix 2: Information letter samples

8th June 2022

Information letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Patrick Mamo and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master in Teaching and Learning in Science. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled 'Lived experience of undergraduate students with access arrangements: A qualitative study'; this is being supervised by Dr. Louis John Camilleri. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to gain insight about the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta. Your participation in this study would help contribute to a better understanding of students' experiences of access arrangements at the University of Malta, along with potentially leading to further research into students' access arrangements. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute individual interview, whereby I will ask semi-structured interview questions to elicit discussion regarding your lived experiences with access arrangements.

Data collected (through a voice recording of the interview) will be transcribed, giving codes/pseudonyms to each participant (i.e., the participants will be non-identifiable in the resulting dissertation). The voice recordings, transcriptions, and codes will be stored on a safe, secure, and encrypted hard disk protected by a password, which will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor (Dr. Louis John Camilleri).

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks. Neither I nor my supervisor are members of the Access Disability Support Unit (ADSU), and participation or otherwise in the study shall have no bearing on your access arrangements.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the

data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail patrick.mamo.18@um.edu.mt you can also contact my supervisor over the phone: 23403694 or via email: louis.j.camilleri@um.edu.mt.

Sincerely,

Patrick Mamo
patrick.mamo.18@um.edu.mt

Dr. Louis John Camilleri
louis.j.camilleri@um.edu.mt
Humanities B Building Room 230

8 ta' Ġunju 2022

Ittra ta' Tagħrif

Għażiż/a Sinjur/a,

Jiena Patrick Mamo, student fl-Università ta' Malta, u bħalissa qed insegwi il-kors ta' Masters in Teaching and Learning in Science. Ir-riċerka għad-dissertazzjoni tiegħi jismha: 'Lived Experience of Undergraduate Students with Access Arrangements: A Qualitative Study'; it-tutor tiegħi hu Dr. Louis John Camilleri. B'din l-ittra nixtieq nistiednek tipparteċipa fir-riċerka. Hawn taħt issib aktar informazzjoni fuq l-istudju li qed nagħmel u fuq xi jkun l-involvement tiegħek jekk tiddeċiedi li tiegħu sehem.

L-għan tal-istudju hu li niksbu għarfien dwar l-esperjenza personali ta' studenti universitarji li qed jsegwu kors 'undergraduate' u li qegħdin jirċievu 'access arrangements' fl-Università ta' Malta. Sehemek jgħin biex ikun hawn iżjed għarfien dwar l-esperjenza personali ta' studenti universitarji li qegħdin jirċievu 'access arrangements' fl-Università ta' Malta. L-informazzjoni kollha li tingabar fir-riċerka tintuża biss għall-fini ta' dan l-istudju.

Jekk taqbel li tipparteċipa, tinalab tipparteċipa f'intervista individwali ta madwar 45-60 minuta miegħi fejn nistaqsik xi domandi ppreparati biex jgħinu l-konversazzjoni tagħna dwar dan is-suġġett.

L-informazzjoni miġbura (minn audio recording tal-intervista) jiġu traskritti, kodifikati, u mhux identifikabli. Din l-informazzjoni tiġi maħżuna fuq hard disc sikura u 'encrypted' li hija 'password-protected'. L-investigatur u t-tutor biss ser ikollhom aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni.

Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju tkun għalkollox volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, inti liberu/a li taċċetta jew tirrifjuta li tiegħu sehem, mingħajr ma tagħti raġuni. Inti wkoll liberu/a li twaqqaf il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek fl-istudju meta tixtieq, mingħajr ma jkollok tagħti spjegazzjoni u mingħajr ebda riperkussjoni. Jekk tagħzel li tirtira mir-riċerka, l-informazzjoni li tkun laqget ittiegħdet fl-intervista miegħek tithassar dment li dan ikun teknikament possibbli (ngħidu aħna, qabel ma tiġi anonimizata jew ippubblikata), u sakemm l-għanijiet tar-riċerka jkunu jistgħu jintlaħqu u ma jintlaqtux serjament. F'dak il-każ, l-informazzjoni tiegħek tintuża u tinzamm anonima.

Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, jekk jogħġbok innota li m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalik. Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek ma fiha l-ebda riskju magħruf jew mistenni. Tajjeb li tkun taf ukoll li l-investigatur u t-tutor mhumiex membri tal-'Access Disability Support Unit' u li d-deċiżjoni jekk tipparteċipax f'dan l-istudju mhix ser taffettwa l-access arrangements tiegħek.

Bħala parteċipant/a, għandek id-dritt, skont ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-Data (GDPR) u l-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, li taċċessa, tikkoreġi u fejn hu applikabbli, titlob li l-informazzjoni li tikkonċernak tithassar. L-informazzjoni kollha li tingabar fl-istudju [specifika x'se jiġri bl-informazzjoni miġbura wara li jitlesta l-istudju tinzamm b'mod anonimu meta jintemm l-istudju.

Qed ngħaddilek kopja ta' din l-ittra biex iżzommha bħala referenza.

Grazzi tal-ħin u l-kunsiderazzjoni tiegħek. Jekk ikollok xi mistoqsija, tiddejjaqx tikkuntattjani fuq patrick.mamo,18@um.edu.mt; tista' tikkuntattja wkoll lit-tutor tiegħi fuq: 23403694 jew elettronikament fuq louis.j.camilleri@um.edu.mt.

Tislijiet,

Patrick Mamo
patrick.mamo.18@um.edu.mt

Dr. Louis John Camilleri
louis.j.camilleri@um.edu.mt
Humanities B Building, Room 230

7.3. Appendix 3: Consent form samples

Participant's Consent Form

Lived experience of undergraduate students with access arrangements: A qualitative study

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Patrick Mamo. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in an individual interview in which the researcher will ask me questions regarding my experience with access arrangements to *explore* the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta. I am aware that the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will be completed in one session. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation *does not entail any known or anticipated risks*
5. I understand that *there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study*. I also understand that this research may benefit others by contributing to a better understanding of students' experiences of access arrangements, and this research may identify issues which could be addressed through further research projects to improve students' experiences of access arrangements throughout their education.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be *stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study*.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

I agree to this interview being audio recorded.

I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded.

10. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs, either in anonymous form, or using a pseudonym [a made-up name or code – e.g. respondent A].
11. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.
12. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised; i.e., my identity will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data, in an

encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only the researcher Dr. Louis John Camilleri and myself will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely *for the duration of the study*.

13. I am aware that the researcher and his supervisor are not members of the Access Disability Support Unit (ADSU), and that participation or otherwise in the study shall have no bearing on my access arrangements.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Patrick Mamo
patrick.mamo.18@um.edu.mt

Dr. Louis John Camilleri
louis.j.camilleri@um.edu.mt
Humanities B Building Room 230

Formola tal-Kunsens tal-Parteċipant/a

'Lived Experience of Undergraduate Students with Access Arrangements: A Qualitative Study'

Jiena, hawn taht iffirmit/a, nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi li nieħu sehem fl-istudju ta' Patrick Mamo. Din il-formola tal-kunsens tispjega t-termini tas-sehem tiegħi f'din ir-riċerka.

1. Ingħatajt l-informazzjoni bil-miktub u/jew bil-fomm dwar l-iskop tar-riċerka; kelli l-opportunità nagħmel il-mistoqsijiet, u kull mistoqsija ngħatajt twegħiba għaliha b'mod sħiħ u sodisfaċenti.
2. Nifhem ukoll li jiena liberu/a li naċċetta li nieħu sehem, jew li nirrifjuta, jew li nwaqqaf il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi meta nixtieq mingħajr ma nagħti spjegazzjoni jew mingħajr ma niġi penalizzat/a. Jekk nagħzel li nipparteċipa, jaf niddeċiedi li ma nwegħibx kull mistoqsija li ssirli. F'każ li nagħzel li ma nkomplox nieħu sehem fl-istudju, l-informazzjoni li tkun laħqet ingabret mingħandi tithassar dment li jkun teknikament possibbli (ngħidu aħna, qabel ma tiġi anonimizzata jew ippubblikata), u sakemm l-għanijiet tar-riċerka jkunu jistgħu jintlaħqu u ma jintlaqtux serjament. F'dak il-każ, l-informazzjoni tiegħi tintuża u tinzamm anonima.
3. Nifhem li ġejt mistieden/mistiedna nipparteċipa f'intervista individwali u l-persuna li qed tagħmel ir-riċerka se tistaqsi xi mistoqsijiet dwar l-esperjenza personali tiegħi fejn jidhlu 'access arrangements' biex l-espejenza personali ta' studenti universitarji li qed jsegwu kors 'undergraduate' u li qegħdin jirċievu 'access arrangements' fl-Universita ta' Malta. Jiena konxju/a li ser nipparteċipa f'intervista waħda li se ddum bejn wieħed u ieħor 45-60 minuta. Nifhem li l-intervista se ssir f'post u f'ħin li huma komdi għalija.
4. Nifhem li l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi ma ma fiha l-ebda riskju magħruf jew mistenni.
5. Nifhem li bil-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi f'dan l-istudju, m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċju dirett għalija. Nifhem ukoll li din ir-riċerka jaf tkun ta' benefiċċju għall-oħrajn billi niġbru għarfien aħjar dwar l-esperjenzi tas-studenti fejn jidhlu access arrangements.
6. Nifhem li, skont ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-Data (GDPR) u l-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali, għandi dritt naċċessa, nikkoreġi u, fejn hu applikabbli, nitlob li l-informazzjoni li tikkonċernani tithassar.
7. Nifhem li l-informazzjoni kollha miġbura se tinzamm b'mod anonimu meta jintemm l-istudju.
8. Ingħatajt kopja tal-ittra ta' tagħrif biex inżommha u nifhem li se ningħata wkoll kopja ta' din il-formola tal-kunsens.
9. Konxju/a li, jekk nimmarka l-ewwel kaxxa t'hawn taht, inkun qed nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex l-intervista tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo u maqluba f'kitba fl-istess waqt (traskrizzjoni).

IMMARKA BISS DAK LI JAPPLIKA

- Naqbel li l-intervista tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo.
 - Ma naqbilx li l-intervista] tiġi rrekordjata bl-awdjo.
10. Konxju/a li siltiet mill-intervista tiegħi jistgħu jiġu riprodotti b'mod anonimu jew bl-użu ta' psewdonimu [isem ivvintat jew kodiċi - eż. parteċipant A].
 11. Jiena konxju/a li l-informazzjoni tiegħi se tkun psewdonimizzata, jiġifieri l-identità tiegħi mhix se titniżżel fit-traskrizzjonijiet jew fin-noti tal-intervista, imma minflok, se niġi assenjat/a kodiċi. Il-kodiċijiet li jorbtu l-informazzjoni dwari mal-identità tiegħi se jinżammu b'mod sigur u separat mill-informazzjoni, f'file kodifikat fuq il-kompjuter tar-riċerkatur/riċerkatriċi, protetti b'password, u r-riċerkatur u t-tutor tiegħu biss se jkollhom aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni. Kwalunkwe materjal stampat se jitqiegħed f'armarju msakkar. Kwalunkwe materjal li jidentifikani bħala parteċipant/a f'dan l-istudju se jinżamm b'mod sigur sakemm isir l-istudju.
 12. Konxju/a li l-identità tiegħi u d-dettalji personali tiegħi mhux se jiġu żvelati f'xi pubblikazzjoni, rapport jew preżentazzjoni li tista' toħroġ minn din ir-riċerka.
 13. Konxju/a li la r-riċerkatur u lanqas it-tutor tiegħu mhumiex membri tal-Access Disability Support Unit, u li d-deċiżjoni tiegħi dwar jekk nipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju mhix ser taffettwa l-access arrangements tiegħi.

Qrajt u fhimt l-istqarrijiet t'hawn fuq, u naqbel li nippartecipa f'dan l-istudju.

Isem il-partecipant/a: _____

Firma: _____

Data: _____

Patrick Mamo
patrick.mamo.18@um.edu.mt

Dr Louis John Camilleri
louis.j.camilleri@um.edu.mt
Humanities B Bldg Rm 230

7.4. Appendix 4: Interview questions

Semi-structured interview questions

Research question: *What are the lived experiences of undergraduate students who receive access arrangements at the University of Malta?*

- (1) What schools/educational institutions have you previously attended?
- (2) What has been your experience with education, up to and including tertiary education (including lessons, lectures, and examinations)?
- (3) What was your experience of applying for access arrangements, and were you involved in the process of deciding which access arrangements to apply for?
- (4) What arrangements did you have (i.e., did you receive access arrangements for exams, throughout the year, or both)?
- (5) How do you feel the access arrangements that were given to you helped or hindered your educational experience at tertiary level?
- (6) If you received access arrangements prior to your tertiary education, what was your experience of these (compared with the access arrangements allocated throughout your tertiary education) and how did you feel during the transitions between the different education levels?
- (7) Are there any access arrangements which you received/have received which you feel could be changed, and replaced with more relevant access arrangements?
- (8) If your peers and teachers were to know that you have access arrangements, what do you think they would think about it and how would they react?
- (9) What do you think about the notion that access arrangements can help to 'level the playing field' for all students?
- (10) How do you feel the allocation of access arrangements to university students could be improved to enhance students' experiences with their tertiary education?