

# **The impact of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies on ethnic minorities' advancement into senior leadership roles in UK universities**

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## **Abstract**

Ethnic minorities in senior leadership positions are uncommon in UK universities, despite their emphasis on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (Arday, 2018). There are initiatives to promote EDI in higher education (HE) institutions. Some of these initiatives aim at advancing gender equality as well as race inequalities in HE (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019). Nevertheless, inequality still exists (Watson et al. 2023; Bhopal, 2021,). There are concerns about whether these initiatives holistically support diversity in senior leadership. The lack of diversity in senior leadership roles in UK universities suggests little is done to address ethnic minorities' progression. It is implied that organisational barriers are hindering the career progression of ethnic minorities, particularly when it comes to addressing issues related to race (Arday, 2018). The research explores the impact of national and institutional EDI policy's obstruction or improvements to ethnic minorities' advancement into senior roles in UK universities. The study is grounded in critical race theories, aiming to understand the complex interplay of institutional practices and individual experiences that shape the career trajectories of ethnic minorities. It draws on the lived experiences of ethnic minorities in UK universities contributing theoretically and empirically to existing knowledge.

Key Words: Equality diversity and inclusion (EDI), ethnic minority, race, policies, higher education, senior leadership

## 1. Introduction

The Advance HE's Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report (2019) highlights that in UK universities, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff are less likely to hold senior positions when compared to their white counterparts. Similarly, the Race Equality Charter (REC) provides insights into the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in senior roles within higher education institutions. Concern has been mounting over the inadequate representation of ethnic minorities at senior levels within UK higher education (HE) institutions. According to The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for 2020/21, out of 22,855 professors, only 2,425 (11%) identified as Black, Asian, or from other minority backgrounds, while 82% were white. Only 160 (1%) of these professors were black (HESA, 2021). Despite legal frameworks such as the UK Equality Act (2010) and institutional commitments to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, the underrepresentation of ethnic minority groups occurs at senior levels (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019; Ishaq and Hussain, 2022).

As part of UK universities' strategy, they stress EDI concerning executing policies. Among the rationale for implementing EDI policies is to address unfairness including making leadership more diverse. Although these policies are in place, ethnic minorities still experience unfair treatment and difficulties (Alexander and Arday, 2015; Watson et al., 2023; Bhopal, 2021). This can also be seen at the level of leadership (ECU, 2016). It is the notion that universities should be held accountable for integrating diversity into their organisational framework and cultures (Adserias et al., 2017). Implementing EDI agendas poses a significant global challenge. As the culture of organizations evolves, EDI agendas must align with these changes to succeed. Leadership styles are therefore considered a contributing factor in determining effective change within the EDI agenda (Adserias et al., 2017). Educational institution leaders should possess the authority to address racial inequality within their organizations (Miller, 2020) and should be responsible for the successful execution of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies.

Research has underscored the persistence of racial inequality within HE, particularly evident in senior leadership positions (William, 2013; ECU, 2015). According to Scheurich and Young (1997), the persistence of racial inequality for marginalized groups in higher education institutions results from both individual and systemic institutional racism in the face of EDI policies. Acknowledging the enduring challenges of race and gender disparities, Bhopal and Henderson (2021) conducted a comprehensive examination of the Athena Swan Charter (ASC), designed to evaluate gender equality in higher education (HE). They also examined the Race Equality Charter (REC), aimed at identifying obstacles faced by Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff and students in HE (Advance HE, n.d). Their analysis revealed a disconnection between institutional policies and the lived experiences of individuals within these institutions. It therefore raises ethical interest in the effectiveness and commitment of EDI policies and charters introduced by universities (Bhopal and Henderson, 2021).

The research purpose is to examine the effects of EDI policies on the ability of ethnic minorities to advance into senior leadership positions within higher education (HE) institutions. In the context of this study, "ethnic minority" encompasses all ethnic groups except for the white British group and white minorities. This categorisation enables the examination of potential advantages or disadvantages among different ethnic groups. The research will employ Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a conceptual framework to contextualize and comprehend the issues under scrutiny together with leadership and power dynamics. A qualitative methodology will be adopted using semi-structured interviews with Higher Education staff across UK universities. The research will investigate questions involving the influence of current EDI policies on the career progression of ethnic minorities within UK universities, identify the key barriers hindering their advancement into senior leadership roles, and examine proposed strategies for enhancing EDI policies to support the progression of ethnic minorities into senior leadership positions. Data collected will be analysed thematically. Additionally, strict adherence to ethical protocols will be observed according to current regulations.

This research will contribute to scholarly discourse both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, it aims to contribute novel insights that augment current understandings of the utility of critical race theory (Delgado, 2023) in comprehending institutional racism and catalysing transformative shifts. Empirically, it seeks to furnish empirical evidence about the lived realities of UK Higher Education (HE) academics from ethnically diverse backgrounds, exploring the resonance of these experiences with extant policies and their implications for advancement into senior leadership roles. The ensuing findings are anticipated to proffer actionable recommendations to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policymakers, fostering conducive environments for meaningful change.

The paper is structured as follows: it begins with a comprehensive examination of the research context, including background information and the rationale for the study. Subsequently, the research aim, conceptual framework, and research questions are elucidated. Following this, a critical literature review is undertaken, delineating prevailing perceptions concerning the influence of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies on the career advancement of ethnic minorities within UK universities, identifying key barriers impeding their progression into senior leadership roles, and proposing strategies for enhancing EDI policies to better support the advancement of ethnic minorities into senior leadership positions. The paper then details the research methodology, including considerations of ethics and research limitations. It concludes with discussions on the research contributions to career development, organizational enhancement, professional advancement, and policy and practice improvement.

## 2. Context

The Equality Act (2010) consolidated equality legislation to protect key characteristics, including gender and race. It established a public sector equality duty in the UK, requiring Higher Education (HE) institutions to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. In line with their commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), universities have instituted internal policies to address systemic inequities and promote diverse leadership (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019). These EDI policies aim to create an environment where everyone has equal opportunities to succeed, regardless of ethnic background (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019). Despite these efforts, inequalities persist, with individuals experiencing institutional racism, unconscious bias, and discrimination (Ahmed, 2007; Bhopal, 2016; Bhopal, Brown and Jackson, 2015; Law et al., 2004; Easterly, 2011). Critics argue that these policies often remain superficial declarations with limited practical impact (Koutsouris et al., 2022; Bhopal, 2020; Marques, 2010), resulting in a glass ceiling for those meant to be protected under the Equality Act.

According to HESA (2024), from 2018/19 to 2022/23, out of 167,190 total white academics, 19,480 were professors and 5,495 were other senior academics. Less than 50% (73,230) fell under Black, Asian, Mixed, other, not known categories. Only 210 Black academics were professors and 90 were other senior academics. Conversely, 1,855 Asians were professors while 360 were other senior academics. Among 239,830 males and females, 7,510 were female professors compared to 16,895 males. Additionally, 2,740 females were other senior academics while men stood at 3,730. This highlights a lack of ethnic diversity in UK university senior leadership (Gasman et al., 2015).

According to Advance HE (2022), the representation of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) professors remained stable at 16.3% in 2021, with a slight increase from 15.5% in 2020. However, Black representation among professors remained low at 0.7% in 2021. The proportion of BAME male and female professors remained consistent at 7.2% and 2.7%, respectively, compared to 6.9% and 2.5% in 2019/20. Black women often face intersecting race and gender challenges (Davidson and Burke, 2000). Significant gender and race inequalities persist in UK Higher Education (Bhopal and Henderson, 2019). While there's potential for improvement in BAME representation, racial equality remains an issue (Williams, 2013; ECU, 2015). Slow recruitment and limited promotion of ethnic minority staff contribute to inequalities, with BAME staff often at lower grades (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; ECU, 2015), suggesting significant gatekeeping in senior leadership.

Higher Education (HE) serves as a crucial platform for knowledge acquisition and workforce preparation. Despite this, gender and ethnic representation at senior levels in UK universities remains lacking (Manfredi, 2017). Leadership plays a pivotal role in organizational success and is tasked with ensuring EDI, yet may also pose challenges to policy implementation (King and Lawley, 2022; Miller, 2020).

Policy analysis and interviews in HE reveal that racism significantly influences the experiences of ethnic minorities in higher education institutions' policy-making processes (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020). Despite discussions on gender in EDI policies, intersectionality, as highlighted in CRT, is often overlooked (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023). Critics argue this may hinder inclusive dialogue (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023). There's a lack of focus on how policies impact ethnic staff progression into senior roles. Understanding race is crucial for increasing ethnic representation in leadership positions (ECU, 2011; Miller, 2016). Racism persists in laws, institutions, and cultural norms (Bell, 2004; Delgado and Stefancic, 2023). This research will use Critical Race Theory (CRT) to address racial inequity in universities (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2017).

## 2.1 Research Aim

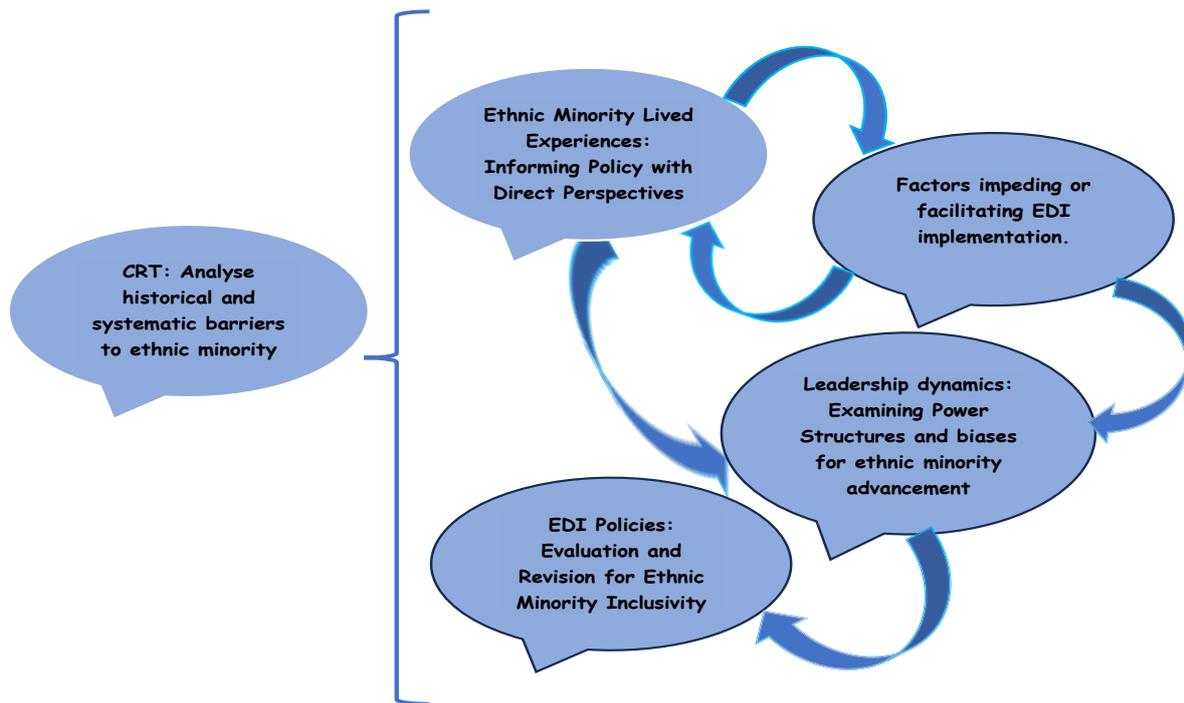
The research aims to critically analyse the impact of EDI policies on the advancement of ethnic minorities into senior leadership roles.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

To address the research questions effectively, theoretical concepts such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), leadership, and power will provide a framework for interpreting the study's findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994). CRT originating from legal studies in the United States emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in response to racial inequality and systemic racism (Banton, 1998). It explores the construction and representation of race and racial power within social structures, policies, and discourses (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023). There are five basic tenets of CRT, it focuses on understanding and addressing racism within societal structures. It posits that racism is deeply embedded in legal systems and institutional frameworks, privileging white individuals and hindering racial diversity in senior leadership (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023). CRT views race as a social construct influenced by historical, political, and cultural forces. It asserts that racism is a normalized aspect of everyday life, often concealed by colour-blindness and meritocracy. Intersectionality highlights how overlapping social identities, like race and gender, result in selective protections. CRT also emphasizes the need for positive, enduring changes to achieve racial equity, providing a comprehensive framework for analysing and dismantling racial inequality (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023).

Figure 1 below reflects the interaction of key theoretical concepts. CRT will be used to explore the lived experiences of ethnic minorities in UK universities. The view of the critical race theorist is that racism is embedded in laws, institutions, one's beliefs, and day-to-day practice (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023). It examines the intersection between race and racism along with other forms, for example, gender. Bell a proponent of CRT found in McDougall (2000), noted that racism is normal in society. Systems are biased against minorities and favor the white population. CRT will be used to analyse current university EDI policies, how well they are represented and implemented and how the university policies and practices shape ethnic minorities' experiences and the effects on their lives.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework



## 2.3 Research Questions

The following research questions will enable the achievement of the aim of this research.

1. To what extent do current EDI policies influence the career progression of ethnic minorities in UK universities?
2. What are the key barriers that ethnic minorities encounter in their pursuit of senior leadership roles?
3. How can EDI policies be enhanced to better support the advancement of ethnic minorities into senior leadership positions?

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 *The impact of EDI policy on ethnic minority career progression*

#### 3.1.1 Perceptions of EDI Policies

The widespread adoption of EDI policies across sectors has often failed to achieve their goals, sometimes leading to tokenism and employee tension (Ahmed, 2007; Pizarro Milian and Wijesingha, 2023). Studies indicate that diversity efforts can appear superficial and insincere, causing backlash (Bhopal, 2023; Pizarro Milian and Wijesingha, 2023). For instance, female professionals in the oil and gas industry felt included in mentoring programs primarily due to their gender

(Williams et al., 2014). Similarly, women in engineering faced conflicts between work demands and family responsibilities (Sharp et al., 2012). In higher education, the impact of EDI policies on ethnic minorities' career progression remains underexplored, with existing research largely focusing on gender (Bhopal, 2019). Challenges include weak enforcement, perceived insincerity, over-regulation, and bureaucratic obstacles, which hinder the effective implementation of EDI policies (Pizarro Milian et al., 2022).

### 3.1.2 Lack of Awareness of EDI Policies

Among the few comparable studies on EDI policies in universities, it is not clearly articulated how EDI policies are perceived and implemented from a critical race theory lens and to what extent policies impact ethnic progression. The impact of EDI policies on ethnic minorities in universities is significantly hindered by the pervasive lack of awareness and understanding among employees (Pizarro Milian and Wijesingha 2023). Studies have shown that although employees support the principles of EDI, their knowledge of these policies is superficial (Pizarro Milian and Wijesingha 2023). This lack of understanding is evident among permanent and non-permanent staff and is attributed to the absence of mechanisms ensuring they remain informed. This is a broader organizational issue where EDI policies are seemingly endorsed but not rigorously enforced or integrated into daily practices. Consequently, the intended benefits of these policies, such as the support and advancement of ethnic minorities, are significantly undermined (Pizarro Milian and Wijesingha 2023). This loose coupling between formal policy structures and individual behaviors underscores the need for stronger accountability measures to ensure meaningful implementation and impact.

### 3.1.3 Policy as a Cover-up and Poor Policy Implementation

The objective of EDI policies' is to address inequalities (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020). However, some scholars argue that organizations adopt equality policies solely due to policy mandates, not genuine commitment (Ahmed, 2007; Jones, 2006). This obligation often leads organisations to fail in effectively using these policies to address inequalities. This calls for a greater need for universities to demonstrate an understanding of equality policies and how legal equality measures are being met by the 2010 Equality Act (Bhopal, 2019). It has been suggested that different equality policies born out of the Equality Act (2010) have disguised aspects of inequalities as they relate to race and ethnicity and there is a persistence in HE (Pilkington 2013). Crofts and Pilkington (2012) concur that there is a shift in HE focuses from paying attention to certain racial and ethnic inequalities (Crofts and Pilkington, 2012).

## 3.2 Ethnic minorities' barriers in pursuit of senior leadership roles

### 3.2.1 Gender/Race Bias

Concerns about women's advancement to senior leadership have led researchers to focus on barriers in Science and Technology (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2014; Bhopal and Henderson, 2019). Gender inequality often takes precedence over racial disparities, which are considered intersecting issues. Kaplan et al. (2018) explored ethnic and racial diversity but focused on gender demographics. Research on the challenges faced by ethnic minority men and women in senior leadership beyond Science and Technology is limited (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2018). In Science and Technology, women face intimidation, harassment, and institutional barriers, including temporary work arrangements (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2014). Knights and Richards (2003) noted that academic career paths favor men, offering greater research flexibility and fewer disruptions.

Kjeldal et al. (2005) identified that men have fewer teaching hours than women, highlighting disparities in workload allocation. Allen et al. (2021) and Santos and Dang Van Phu (2019) confirmed systemic issues in higher education, with women disadvantaged by heavier teaching loads, impeding their research and career progression. This system favors men, reinforcing hierarchical differences (Knights and Richards, 2003) and reflecting cultural norms that hinder women's advancement (Acker, 2006). Acker (2006) also noted that cultural factors contribute to both gender and racial inequities. Despite numerous EDI policies aimed at fostering change (Watson et al., 2023), there is still a need for genuine cultural transformation to achieve equity and inclusion.

Women aspiring to senior leadership roles in academia face numerous impeding factors, including the multifaceted responsibilities of mothers, wives, and employees, which inherently demand a delicate balance (Borjalilou et al., 2012). The disproportionate burden of childcare responsibilities significantly hinders their career progression, as it restricts their ability to participate in essential training and career development opportunities (Gewin, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, further hindering women's academic advancement by increasing their childcare duties and limiting their capacity to focus on research publications (Watson et al., 2023). However, the existing literature does not sufficiently address the pandemic's specific impact on ethnic minorities, leaving a gap in understanding the full extent of these disparities.

In contrast, male career development is not much affected by their multiple roles. Another barrier can be linked to the recruitment and selection processes as they are likely to have a composition of white members (Bhopal, 2018) on the panel. This can lead to halo effects, biases, and subtle or hidden forms of racism. Gabriel and Tate (2017) emphasized the need for diversity in recruitment and selection panels.

### 3.2.2 Recruitment, retainment, and the promotion of ethnic minority in HE

Kaplan et al. (2018) highlighted challenges in recruiting, retaining, and promoting racially and ethnically diverse staff, noting a lack of diversity in senior leadership. Beattie and Johnson (2012) discussed unconscious bias and the scarcity of women and BME professionals at the University of Manchester, with only 8% BME professors and 10% senior lecturers/readers among the 11,000 staff. Despite a slight increase in women lecturers, progress remains slow at higher levels. They noted the static nature of senior positions over five years. Although a small sample size can provide in-depth insights, a larger sample size could offer a more comprehensive representation (Boddy, 2016). Data collection across four universities focused more on students than staff, with 152 white respondents compared to 15 BMEs.

Kaplan et al. (2018) identified a lack of critical mass as a barrier to recruiting ethnic and racial minorities in medical faculties, emphasizing the need for mentors. Despite a critical mass of women in some fields, Heisler et al. (2020) reported high levels of sexual harassment and discrimination among obstetrician-gynaecologists. The gender pay gap was also highlighted as an issue and the difficulties towards career advancement for women. Both studies stress the need for more women leaders to mentor female trainees and suggest aligning policies to support diversity and inclusion for gynaecologist surgeons.

Kelly et al. (2017) focused on the experience of black faculty at a predominantly white university and how not attracting and retaining Black staff can potentially trigger protests. The study attributed low faculty retention to racism and a culture that is hostile which potentially can lead to unrest. The challenges leading to unrest spoken of in Kelly et al. (2017) study is not popular across the literature. It has emerged from the literature that black students are likely to receive lower grades and be less likely to transition into professorship compared to white students (Wong et al. 2021; Mahmud and Gagnon, 2020). It could perhaps be argued that with a low pool of black staff and retention, creating that critical mass could be difficult and adversely affected. There is therefore speculation as to whether the attainment gap between white and BME students has an impact on critical mass.

Bhopal (2019) examined the experiences of women in HE with a focus on the availability of promotion and how they can advance in their careers as well as what is in place for staff retention. The outcome reveals that despite some progress in supporting career progression amongst staff, there is a need for greater change within organisations to embed inclusion as part of their strategic plan and institutional framework. Contrastingly, Watson et al (2023) in pointing out inequalities in UK HE, gesticulated that among possible hurdles for females to get to the top, they are unlikely to go forward and apply for promotion as men do. This the authors associated with their lack of confidence on whether they are qualified and working more in part-time roles.

### 3.3 To what extent do EDI policies better support the advancement of ethnic minorities into senior leadership positions?

Discrepancies exist between how barriers are addressed in the literature (Davies and Gannon, 2006; Arday, 2008) and the lived experiences (Ishaq and Hussain, 2022; Sian, 2019). Similarities emerge thematically in areas such as institutional racism (Sian, 2017; Sian, 2019), exclusion (UCU, 2016), discrimination (Easterly, 2011), unconscious bias, marginalization, and culture (Johns et al., 2019). Lived experiences underscore emotions that should not be overlooked (Ishaq and Hussain, 2022; Sian, 2019) or overshadowed within these broad themes but should be uniquely addressed.

To better support the advancement of ethnic minorities, universities have implemented policies and charters such as the Athena Swan Charter (ASC) which focuses on gender equality in higher education and the Race Equality Charter (REC) aimed at identifying barriers for BAME staff and students in HE (Advance HE, n.d, Bhopal and Henderson, 2021). Studies, however, revealed that lived experiences within institutions are not directly aligned with policies. The REC is new and focuses on both students and staff. However, not much work is available to highlight whether the charter is effectively aligned with people's experiences (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2018). Unlike ASC, it applies only to the institution as a whole and not individual departments or schools. This therefore could see universities targeting institutional inequalities broadly addressing gender with little or no emphasis on race (Bhopal, 2018).

## **4. Design and Methodology**

The research purpose is to critically evaluate EDI policies and their impact on ethnic minorities' ability to progress into senior leadership roles. The study is grounded in the belief that people see the world differently because they occupy a different space in the world (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992) therefore an interpretative phenomenological approach will be adopted for this research. In the face of ongoing discussions on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and the assumption that EDI issues are being addressed, there doesn't appear to be much voice in the literature on the lack of ethnic diversity in senior leadership roles within higher education (HE) in the UK. The researcher's intent in conducting this study is to explore and capture the views of ethnic minority employees in Higher Education from their own lived experiences of progressing into or working in senior leadership. Notably, this type of research cannot be conducted without 'the conscious or unconscious use of underlying theoretical perspectives which inform methodology, guiding theory, questions pursued, and conclusions drawn' (Broido & Manning, 2002, pg.434) during the research process.

To address the research questions as outlined above, a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews will be employed to understand how ethnic minorities construct meaning in their work life (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Davies and Gannon, 2006). Interviews are advantageous due to the adaptability and opportunity to explore people's feelings and thoughts through body language such as facial expression and tone (Bell 2022). It helps to build a rapport with participants and

can be a rich source of data (Tindall et. al. 2009). It gives voice to the disadvantaged or those excluded subpopulations (Pistrang and Barker, 2012).

A sample of 30 academic and professional staff will be selected from different types of universities (for example, a teaching-focused institution and a research-focused institution). The selection will be from diverse ethnic backgrounds (non-white) in roles from senior lecturer positions or equivalent and upwards in the hierarchy (for example, senior lecturer, associate professor, head of a department, professor, associate professor, executive dean, deputy vice-chancellor, and vice chancellor). The staff and level were chosen as they are key stakeholders relevant to the research topic in question with direct experience. A case study research strategy will be followed as it allows multiple sources of evidence to be used (Ying, 1989), so the researcher can explore similarities and nuances concerning EDI.

Interviews will be audio and video-recorded online via MS Teams. Participants will be selected based on a snowballing technique (Bryman 2016) and interpersonal relationships with those from EDI groups and networks, this method is adopted in interviews (Manning and Kunkel, 2013), and is relevant in the UK university setting (Creswell, 2016). While acknowledging the disadvantage of bias in oversampling this network and the fact that participants might not be willing to provide names of peers due to ethical concerns, there is the ability to recruit from the hidden population and the method is cost-effective.

Deeper insights will be gained into whether there are challenges and limitations towards meaningful policy implementation and the lived experiences of ethnic minorities in UK universities. Permission will be requested for the interviews to be recorded and the research will be carried out in line with the ethical requirements of the university (Tindall et al, 2009) and the Data Protection Act. The research will be analysed using thematic analysis (Gbrich, 2007). Data will be double-coded for reliability.

## **5. Ethical Issues and Limitations**

### *5.1 Ethics*

Ethical and legal practice will be observed following the Nottingham Trent University (NTU) guidelines and the Data Protection Act. Approval will be sought from the NTU ethics committee. An important aspect of the research is integrity, to ensure participants are knowledgeable about the process (Anderson et. al. 2015). Participants will be given an information sheet to learn more about the research and a consent form to obtain consent voluntarily (Allmark, 2002) before data collection. Data collected will be treated confidentially and with anonymity observing the NTU Research Privacy Notice (RPN). The Research Privacy Notice outlines what NTU does with personal data and how personal data is protected and the rights of research participants during research activities following UK GDPR/ Data Protection Act 2018. For more information regarding the RPN, please click on the following link: <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/p...research-privacy-notice>

## *5.2 Limitations*

This research has limitations, including its reliance on qualitative data from ethnic minorities at two UK universities. Findings based on individual perceptions and experiences, cannot be generalized to all ethnic minorities or those outside the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). While a larger sample size could yield more accurate results, interviewing ethnic minorities remains valuable for capturing rich, detailed participant voices despite these limitations (Cresswell, 2014).

## **6. Conclusion**

This is a working paper where data has not yet been collected. It highlights the aim which is to critically analyse the impact of EDI policies on ethnic minorities' ability to progress into senior leadership roles. This comes amidst the lack of ethnic diversity representation at senior-level positions in the presence of equality legislation. HE policies will be examined with HE staff from ethnic minorities' experience to understand the impact of the policy on career progression. The research will add to the existing body of knowledge theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, it will provide new insights to add to existing knowledge into how critical race theory (Delgado 2023) can be used to understand institutional racism. Empirically, it will provide evidence of the lived experiences of UK HE academics from ethnic backgrounds and how these experiences align with existing policies and the impact on their progression into senior leadership.

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