

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies and the underrepresentation of marginalised groups in leadership positions - integrating Industry/HR 4.0 technologies.

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Paper’s Importance

- Ongoing discourse on EDI – Career advancement, marginalised group (Bhopal, 2020; Arday, 2022).
- Underrepresentation of marginalised groups in senior leadership, UK universities, despite EDI legislations nationally and institutionally (Arday, 2022).
- UK Equality Act (2010) – Mandatory equality policies:
- Race Equality Charter, Athena Swan (Campion and Clark, 2021).
- Barriers – systematic racism, workload, white supremacy.
- Emerging Industry 4.0 (subset HR 4.0) – Impact on EDI (Kamasak and Yalcinkaya, 2023).
- RESEARCH GAP**– Limited information on the impact of EDI policies and Industry/HR 4.0 on marginalized groups promotion.

Research Purpose

The purpose of the research is to examine perceptions of equality, diversity, and inclusion policies and their impact on the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in leadership positions in academia, with consideration of HR 4.0 technologies.

Research Questions

- 1) How do you perceive existing EDI policies and their impact on the underrepresentation of marginalised employees?
- 2) What are the challenges marginalised employees encounter in progressing into senior leadership positions?
- 3) To what extent do HR 4.0 Technologies and EDI policies impact marginalised groups in senior leadership positions?

Theoretical base

- A Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens to analyse structural inequalities (Delgado and Stefancic, 2023).
- ✦ Racism embedded in law - white privilege.
 - ✦ Compound characteristics – race/gender.
 - ✦ Making positive changes.

Methods

- ☐Qualitative approach: semi-structured interviews (Tindall et. al. 2009).
- ☐UK ethnic minority academic staff: lecturer/senior lecturer upward.
- ☐UK universities (research-intensive/teaching-focused).
- ☐ Snowballing technique: researcher network. (Manning and Kunkel, 2013).

Ethics

Ethical approval was received, and to ensure integrity (Anderson et. al. 2015), ethical and legal practices were followed in line with the institution’s guidelines and GDPR practices.

Key Findings

Data was analysed using manual thematic analysis.
Key themes: Limited awareness and involvement with EDI policies, need for clear communication and active inclusion, conditional optimism and human limitations of HR 4.0 in bias reduction, and the complex interplay between technology, culture, and human agency.
The findings reveal that HR 4.0 and EDI policies may inadvertently reinforce structural barriers for racialised staff when not grounded in their lived academic experiences.

Key Words: Underrepresentation, marginalised, Senior Leadership, Industry/HR 4.0 technologies, policies, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

Limitations

Manual thematic analysis, while thorough, introduces a degree of subjectivity that may influence theme interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
Small sample size and participants’ limited knowledge on EDI policies and Industry/HR 4.0 may impact the depth of analysis.

Implications for HRD Practice

- The research is useful for HRD practitioners, university leaders, EDI/HR policy makers, tech developers, and academic researchers to mobilise change.
- Theoretical: Contributes to HRD and Industry 4.0 debates by showing how digital HR systems interact with EDI policies to either reinforce or challenge racial inequities in academic promotion.
- Practical: To support the development of inclusive HRD policies and practices by highlighting the need for equity-centred design in digital systems to advance racialised staff.

Conclusion

While EDI policies aim to solve equality challenges, the underrepresentation of marginalised groups still exists in senior leadership within UK Higher Education. This research seeks to bridge the gap between policy objectives and the lived experiences of ethnic minority employees, critically examining the impact of EDI initiatives on career advancement. By integrating insights on HR 4.0 technologies, the study advances the discourse on equity in academia and provides a foundation for innovative strategies and policy interventions that promote genuine inclusivity and representation in leadership.

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