Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

Structural Inclusion or Symbolic Diversity? A Narrative Review of BAME Academic Experiences in UK Alternative Higher Education Providers

Obohwemu Oberhiri Kennedy, PhD

Faculty of Health, Wellbeing & Social Care, Oxford Brookes University, GBS Partnership, Birmingham Campus, United Kingdom; and PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom

Nchindia Atabong Christian, PhD

Faculty of Business Management, University of Suffolk, GBS Partnership, Manchester Campus, United Kingdom

Kachitsa Leyman Charles, PhD

Faculty of Business Management and Enterprise, Leeds Trinity University, GBS Partnership, Manchester Campus, United Kingdom

Tayo Oluwadamilola, MPH

Faculty of Health, Wellbeing & Social Care, Oxford Brookes University, GBS Partnership, Leeds Campus, United Kingdom; and PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom

Sahoo Subhadarsini Supriya, PhD

Study Skills Lecturer, Global Banking School, Canterbury Christ Church University, Manchester Campus, United Kingdom

Osinubi Olusunmola, PhD

Faculty of Health, Wellbeing & Social Care, Oxford Brookes University, GBS Partnership, Birmingham Campus, United Kingdom; and PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, United Kingdom

Corresponding Author:

Obohwemu Oberhiri Kenned, PhD

ABSTRACT

This narrative review critically explores the professional experiences of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) academics within Alternative Higher Education Providers (AHEPs) in the United Kingdom. While the marginalisation of BAME academics in traditional universities is well-documented—manifesting in limited career progression, institutional racism, and mental health stressors—there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding their experiences in non-traditional academic settings. This review draws upon contemporary research, policy documents, and theoretical frameworks to examine whether AHEPs offer genuinely inclusive environments or merely replicate the structural inequalities prevalent in

Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

mainstream academia.

The analysis reveals that although AHEPs may present more flexible and entrepreneurial models of higher education, they are not inherently equitable. The absence of robust institutional safeguards and accountability mechanisms can result in the perpetuation of discriminatory practices, albeit in less visible forms. Furthermore, the review highlights the emotional and psychological toll experienced by BAME academics, often exacerbated by cultural taxation and a lack of culturally competent mental health support.

Importantly, this review identifies a pressing need for empirical studies that document the lived experiences of BAME academics in AHEPs. Such research should investigate key areas including career development, workplace culture, mental health outcomes, and long-term job satisfaction. The findings could inform policy reforms aimed at embedding structural inclusion across all tiers of higher education, ensuring that diversity initiatives move beyond symbolic representation to achieve meaningful equity.

Hence, while AHEPs hold potential as incubators for inclusive practice, their success depends on a sustained institutional commitment to equity, transparency, and accountability.

KEYWORDS

BAME academics, alternative higher education providers, institutional racism, equity in academia, mental health in higher education

INTRODUCTION

The persistent underrepresentation of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) academics in the UK's higher education sector continues to raise urgent questions about equity, inclusion, and institutional culture. Despite repeated governmental and institutional efforts to increase diversity (Advance HE, 2022), systemic barriers such as institutional racism, limited career progression, and cultural exclusion remain entrenched in conventional universities (Arday, 2021; Tamimi et al., 2024). These barriers are particularly evident in recruitment to senior roles, with white academics disproportionately occupying leadership positions (Universities UK, 2021).

According to Advance HE (2022), only 0.7% of UK professors are Black, despite the increasing proportion of BAME students in higher education. Bhopal (2020) attributes this to entrenched structural inequalities that restrict BAME academics' access to mentorship, research opportunities, and leadership roles.

Whiteness continues to dominate academic knowledge production and gatekeeping processes (Bates & Ng, 2021; Hassan, 2023; Jackson-Cole & Chadderton, 2023). These dynamics create an inhospitable environment for BAME staff, who are frequently tasked with unpaid diversity work and subjected to racial microaggressions. Rollock (2019) offers qualitative accounts of Black female professors describing experiences of intellectual erasure, exclusion from informal networks, and psychological strain from constant racial vigilance.

Such working conditions have tangible health consequences. Research shows that prolonged exposure to workplace discrimination significantly increases the risk of depression, anxiety, and burnout among BAME professionals (Seo et al., 2022). The emotional labour of navigating hostile or indifferent environments, often coupled with a lack of support systems, undermines both mental health and professional satisfaction.

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

Amid these challenges, alternative higher education providers (AHEPs) have emerged in response to the demand for vocational and career-focused education, often enrolling students from underrepresented socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds (HESA, 2019). These institutions offer shorter courses, flexible entry routes, and smaller staff-student ratios—conditions that could be conducive to more inclusive staff experiences. AHEPS are often characterized by more diverse student populations and less hierarchical structures, could offer BAME academics a different professional landscape (Fielden, 2015; Klemenčič, 2020). However, the extent to which AHEPs truly differ from mainstream universities in addressing racial inequities remains underexplored in the academic literature.

Moncrieffe et al. (2020) and Stevenson (2014) posit that such providers may be less beholden to traditional academic hierarchies and thus more receptive to diverse leadership and pedagogical innovation. This flexibility may afford BAME academics greater autonomy, faster career progression, and increased visibility within institutional operations.

Moreover, working in racially diverse environments may reduce social isolation and foster a sense of community among BAME staff. According to Akel (2021), cultural and racial affinity within professional contexts enhances job satisfaction and contributes positively to mental well-being and retention. However, this premise remains largely theoretical; few empirical studies have examined whether AHEPs deliver on these inclusive ideals.

Despite their apparent advantages, AHEPs may still replicate exclusionary practices if they fail to dismantle institutionalized racism. Richards et al. (2023) caution that the mere presence of a diverse student body does not guarantee an inclusive workplace for staff. Without explicit anti-racist strategies, equitable promotion pathways, and accountability structures, AHEPs may mirror the same discriminatory tendencies found in mainstream academia.

Indeed, some critics argue that due to their relatively unregulated status and limited institutional transparency, AHEPs may be less likely to adopt robust diversity policies. Performative inclusion—where diversity is celebrated in branding but not embedded in institutional culture—can lead to disillusionment among BAME s (Lumadi, 2021; Hall et al., 2023).

Furthermore, AHEPs often employ staff on temporary or part-time contracts, a practice that disproportionately affects BAME academics and exacerbates precarity (Avis & Orr, 2022). This contractual insecurity undermines long-term career planning and negatively affects mental health, particularly when combined with experiences of marginalization.

Career progression for BAME academics remains uneven across higher education (Ajibade et al., 2025). In mainstream institutions, promotion pathways often lack transparency and are perceived as biased against BAME applicants (Stewart, 2016). Even when BAME academics gain entry into higher education, they are frequently confined to "diversity roles" or given teaching-heavy contracts that restrict research output—crucial for advancement.

In contrast, anecdotal evidence from AHEPs suggests a more dynamic internal structure. Some BAME academics, for example, may report faster promotions and recognition for community-based teaching and innovation. Nevertheless, without longitudinal data or large-scale studies, it is difficult to determine whether these experiences are consistent or exceptional.

Job satisfaction among BAME academics is closely tied to institutional belonging and psychological safety (Rana et

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

al., 2022). Environments that are inclusive, collegial, and respectful of cultural difference can mitigate stress, increase retention, and positively impact teaching quality. Conversely, exclusion, stereotyping, and lack of recognition lead to burnout, dissatisfaction, and high turnover.

The link between professional experience and mental health is well-established. Mental health challenges such as anxiety, imposter syndrome, and depression are frequently reported by BAME academics navigating predominantly white institutions (Rollock, 2019; Arday, 2021). The chronic stress of underrepresentation, coupled with institutional microaggressions, undermines psychological resilience and productivity.

In potentially more inclusive spaces, BAME academics might experience less cultural dissonance, greater representation, and stronger peer support—all of which are protective factors for mental wellbeing. However, without dedicated employee assistance programs, mental health training, and culturally competent support services, the risk of institutional neglect remains.

This narrative review seeks to explore the existing evidence concerning BAME academics' experiences in both traditional and alternative higher education contexts. It also investigates whether alternative institutions offer better career satisfaction, mental health outcomes, and opportunities for progression. Given the scarcity of data specific to AHEPs, this review underscores the urgent need for empirical investigation into the lived experiences of BAME academics in these settings.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

- To explore the experiences of BAME academics in UK alternative higher education provider settings.
- To investigate whether AHEPs offer more inclusive, supportive, and progressive environments than conventional universities.

Research Questions

1. What are the systemic barriers faced by BAME academics in conventional universities, and how do this impact mental health?
2. Do alternative higher education institutions provide a more inclusive and supportive environment for BAME academics?
3. How do career progression opportunities, job satisfaction, and health outcomes differ between conventional and alternative providers?
4. What are the unique opportunities and challenges for BAME academics within AHEPs?

Research Design

This study employs a structured narrative literature review to explore the experiences of BAME academics within UK AHEPs, with a comparative lens on conventional universities. A narrative review was chosen for its flexibility in synthesising diverse sources (Pautasso, 2019), including empirical studies, policy reports, and grey literature, while still allowing for a structured and critical approach to data selection and analysis.

Although narrative reviews do not follow rigid protocols like PRISMA, this review adopted a structured, transparent and replicable process for literature identification, screening, and synthesis. The aim was to capture

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

the breadth and depth of existing knowledge on BAME academic experiences, institutional inclusivity, and the comparative dynamics between traditional and alternative higher education settings.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Literature was sourced from a combination of academic databases and institutional repositories, including:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- JSTOR
- Google Scholar
- Office for Students (OfS) database
- Advance HE
- UK Government and Parliamentary Reports

Search terms included combinations of the following keywords:

- "BAME academics UK"
- "Higher education diversity"
- "Alternative providers"
- "Institutional racism academia"
- "Career progression BAME UK"
- "Mental health BAME academics"

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine searches, and filters were applied to limit results to English-language publications between 2015 and 2025.

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed studies, reports, and grey literature published between 2015 and 2025.
- Focus on BAME academic staff within UK higher education.
- Relevance to institutional culture, mental health, job satisfaction, or professional progression.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies published before 2015 – to maintain relevance and ensure contemporary analysis of institutional practices and BAME academic experiences.
- Non-UK-based studies – research conducted outside the UK or focused on non-UK higher education contexts was excluded to ensure contextual consistency with UK-specific academic and institutional structures.

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

- Studies not focused on BAME academic staff – literature focusing solely on BAME students, non-academic staff, or general diversity without specific reference to BAME academics was excluded.
- Publications not addressing institutional culture, mental health, job satisfaction, or career progression – works that did not explore these core dimensions of professional experience were excluded to maintain thematic focus.
- Non-English language publications – due to limitations in translation capacity and the primarily English-language context of UK higher education.
- Editorials, opinion pieces, or blog posts without empirical or conceptual rigour – to ensure scholarly credibility and relevance, materials lacking research-based analysis or theoretical grounding were excluded.
- Duplicate studies or non-original work – secondary sources that did not add new perspectives or evidence beyond already included primary literature were omitted.

Data Extraction and Analysis

A total of 87 sources were initially identified. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 42 sources were retained for full-text review. Key themes were extracted using a thematic coding framework.

Thematic synthesis was used to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps in the literature. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how institutional structures and cultures shape the experiences of BAME academics.

Ethical Considerations

As a literature-based study, this review did not involve human participants and therefore did not require formal ethical approval. However, ethical principles were upheld by ensuring accurate representation of authors' findings, proper citation, and critical engagement with diverse perspectives.

Limitations

While the structured narrative review offers flexibility and depth, it is inherently limited by the availability and quality of existing literature (Greenhalgh, Thorne & Malterud, 2018; Pautasso, 2019). The exclusion of non-English sources may have omitted relevant international comparisons. Additionally, the lack of empirical studies specifically focused on AHEPs limits the generalisability of findings in that context.

FINDINGS

Systemic Barriers in Traditional Universities

BAME academics in mainstream UK universities continue to face entrenched systemic barriers that significantly hinder their professional development and well-being. These include:

- Exclusion from leadership roles: Despite institutional commitments to diversity, BAME academics remain underrepresented in senior academic and managerial positions. Advance HE (2022) and Arday (2021) highlight persistent disparities in promotion and leadership access, particularly for Black academics. According to HESA (2025), only 1.3% of UK professors identify as Black, and just 8.5% as Asian, compared to 83.5% who identify as White. Garrett (2024) explored how racialised minority PhD students in UK higher education navigate career trajectories and institutional whiteness, highlighting the emotional toll and

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

structural barriers they face (Garrett, 2024). The UK Government's Ethnicity Facts and Figures (2023) also provide critical data on disparities in higher education entry and progression by ethnicity (GOV.UK, 2023). These sources, among others, underscore the persistent underrepresentation of BAME academics in senior roles and the need for structural reform.

- Structural racism and marginalisation: Rollock (2019) documents the heightened isolation and structural barriers experienced by Black female professors, who often find themselves navigating hostile or indifferent institutional cultures. These challenges are compounded by overrepresentation in fixed-term or teaching-intensive contracts (Bhopal, 2020), which limit opportunities for research and advancement.
- Limited access to informal networks: Informal mentoring and networking opportunities—critical for career progression—are often inaccessible to BAME staff, further entrenching inequality (Harris & Ogbonna, 2023).

These systemic issues contribute to elevated levels of stress, burnout, and mental health concerns among BAME academics (Sewell & Themelis, 2023).

Mental Health and Professional Isolation

The emotional toll of navigating racially exclusive academic environments is profound. Chronic exposure to racism, microaggressions, and institutional neglect adversely affects the mental health of BAME academics. Arday et al. (2022) report widespread experiences of depression, imposter syndrome, and disengagement, often stemming from a lack of recognition and support.

The emotional labour required to "survive" in predominantly white institutions—where BAME academics may feel hyper-visible yet simultaneously invisible—leads to reduced job satisfaction and diminished career ambition. This psychological burden is exacerbated by the absence of culturally competent mental health services within many institutions.

Alternative Providers as Spaces of Possibility

Alternative Higher Education Providers (AHEPs) have emerged as potential spaces of inclusion and innovation. Scholars such as Shilliam (2020) and Stevenson (2014) argue that AHEPs may offer more dynamic and supportive environments for BAME academics due to:

- Flexible hiring practices: AHEPs often recruit from more diverse talent pools and may be less constrained by traditional academic hierarchies.
- Pedagogical focus: With a strong emphasis on teaching and student engagement, AHEPs may value practical experience and culturally relevant pedagogy, creating space for BAME academics to thrive.
- Diverse student bodies: The demographic alignment between staff and students can foster a greater sense of belonging and reduce the cultural dissonance experienced in traditional institutions.

Some anecdotal evidence suggests that AHEPs are quicker to recognise merit and more open to innovation, offering BAME staff greater autonomy and visibility.

Persisting Challenges in AHEPs

Despite their promise, AHEPs are not immune to the systemic issues that plague traditional universities. Without

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

explicit equity strategies, these institutions risk replicating the same discriminatory structures they aim to disrupt (Oloyede & Osuji, 2021). Key concerns include:

- Precarious employment: AHEPs often rely heavily on part-time, hourly-paid, or fixed-term contracts. This employment model disproportionately affects BAME staff and undermines job security (Avis & Orr, 2022).
- Surface-level diversity: While AHEPs may appear diverse on paper, meaningful inclusion—such as access to leadership, research opportunities, and professional development—remains limited in many cases (Ajibade et al., 2025).
- Lack of institutional support: Many AHEPs lack the infrastructure to support staff well-being, including mental health services, mentorship programmes, and clear promotion pathways (Moore, 2024).

Career Progression and Role Satisfaction

Career progression remains a critical area of concern. In traditional universities, BAME academics are often funnelled into low-status or pastoral roles, limiting their access to research funding and leadership opportunities (Tate & Bagguley, 2017). These roles, while essential, are frequently undervalued in promotion criteria.

In contrast, some AHEPs may offer faster promotion and greater autonomy due to their flatter hierarchies and smaller staff bodies. However, this trend is largely anecdotal, and robust empirical data is lacking. Akel (2021) emphasises that job satisfaction among BAME staff is closely tied to feelings of inclusion and belonging. Without intentional support structures, even diverse institutions may struggle to retain talented BAME academics.

DISCUSSION

The persistent challenges faced by Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) academics in UK higher education institutions have been well-documented across scholarly and governmental literature. These challenges include institutional racism, limited career progression, and mental health stressors, which collectively contribute to a hostile and inequitable academic environment. While alternative higher education providers (AHEPs) may offer more flexible structures, they are not immune to these systemic issues. To foster genuine inclusion, institutions must move beyond symbolic gestures and embed equity into the core of their operational frameworks.

Institutional Racism and Career Progression Barriers

Institutional racism in UK universities manifests in various forms, including biased recruitment practices, unequal access to promotion opportunities, and exclusion from informal networks of power. Research by Arday et al. (2022) highlights how BAME academics often experience marginalisation through microaggressions, tokenism, and the undervaluing of their research contributions. These experiences are not isolated but are embedded within the structural fabric of traditional universities (Atabong, 2023), where whiteness remains the normative standard for academic excellence and leadership.

The Race Disparity Audit conducted by the UK government revealed significant disparities in the representation of ethnic minorities in senior academic roles (Department for Education, 2019). Despite increasing numbers of BAME students, the academic staff profile remains disproportionately white, particularly at professorial levels. This lack of representation perpetuates a cycle where BAME academics are less likely to be mentored, promoted, or included in decision-making processes.

Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

Mental Health Stressors and the Emotional Tax

The emotional toll of navigating predominantly white academic spaces is profound. BAME academics often report feelings of isolation, hypervisibility, and the pressure to overperform to counteract stereotypes. These stressors contribute to mental health challenges that are exacerbated by the lack of culturally competent support services within universities. A study by the Equality Challenge Unit (2019) found that BAME staff were less likely to access mental health services due to fears of stigma and mistrust in institutional support systems (Nicholson, 2022).

Moreover, the burden of diversity work—often unpaid and unrecognised—falls disproportionately on BAME academics. They are frequently called upon to serve on diversity committees, mentor students from similar backgrounds, and contribute to decolonising curricula, all while managing their own research and teaching responsibilities. This "cultural taxation" not only affects their mental health but also detracts from their career progression.

The Role of Alternative Providers (AHEPs)

Alternative Higher Education Providers (AHEPs) have emerged as potential disruptors to the traditional university model. Their less rigid structures and entrepreneurial ethos may offer opportunities for innovation and inclusivity (HESA, 2019). However, the absence of systemic safeguards in these institutions can lead to the replication of the same harms found in traditional universities. Without robust policies on equity, accountability, and mental health, AHEPs risk becoming spaces where institutionalised discrimination flourishes unchecked.

AHEPs often operate outside the regulatory frameworks that govern mainstream universities, which can result in inconsistent application of inclusive practices (Moore, 2024). For example, while some AHEPs may champion diverse hiring, they may lack mechanisms to support staff retention, professional development, or grievance redressal. The flexibility of these institutions must be matched with a commitment to structural inclusion, otherwise they risk perpetuating the same exclusionary dynamics under a different guise.

Symbolic vs. Structural Inclusion

Symbolic inclusion refers to superficial gestures that signal diversity without addressing underlying power imbalances. Examples include token appointments, diversity statements without action, and performative allyship. Structural inclusion, on the other hand, involves embedding equity into the policies, practices, and culture of an institution. This includes transparent hiring processes, equitable promotion criteria, inclusive curricula, and culturally competent mental health support.

Universities must move beyond student diversity metrics and focus on staff equity (Atabong, 2023). The Office for Students (OfS) has called for institutions to publish data on admissions and attainment broken down by ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic background (Department for Education, 2019). While this is a step in the right direction, data transparency must be accompanied by accountability. Institutions should be required to demonstrate progress in diversifying academic leadership and addressing awarding gaps.

Decolonising the Curriculum and Inclusive Pedagogy

Decolonising the curriculum is a critical component of structural inclusion. It involves challenging Eurocentric epistemologies and recognising the contributions of scholars from diverse backgrounds. Winter, Webb & Turner (2024) and Glowach et al. (2023) argue that decolonisation is not merely about adding diverse content but about transforming pedagogical strategies and power relations within the classroom. Inclusive pedagogy must be

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

reflexive, student-centred, and responsive to the lived experiences of BAME students and staff (Atabong, 2023).

Reflective diary studies conducted at Manchester Metropolitan University revealed that BAME students often feel alienated by curricula that lack representation and fail to acknowledge their identities (Nicholson, 2022). These narratives underscore the importance of creating learning environments where all students feel seen, valued, and safe. Staff development programmes should incorporate these insights to foster empathy and drive meaningful change.

Mental Health Support and Cultural Competency

Mental health support systems in universities must be culturally competent and accessible. This includes hiring diverse counsellors, offering services in multiple languages, and training staff to recognise the unique stressors faced by BAME individuals. Institutions should also create safe spaces for dialogue and peer support, where BAME academics can share experiences without fear of reprisal.

The unequal impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities further highlighted the need for targeted mental health interventions (Robertson, Mulcahy & Baars, 2022). Universities must learn from this crisis and invest in long-term strategies that prioritise wellbeing and resilience. This includes integrating mental health into equity frameworks and ensuring that support services are adequately resourced.

AHEPs as Incubators for Change

Despite their limitations, AHEPs have the potential to serve as incubators for inclusive practices. Their agility and innovation can be harnessed to pilot new models of equity, such as participatory governance, community-based curricula, and holistic staff development. However, this potential can only be realised if AHEPs commit to robust frameworks that prioritise inclusion.

Partnerships with regulatory bodies, community organisations, and traditional universities can help AHEPs build capacity and share best practices. They must also engage in continuous evaluation and be willing to adapt based on feedback from staff and students. Inclusion should not be an afterthought but a guiding principle that informs every aspect of institutional life (Aithal & Maiya, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This review underscores that while alternative providers present promising opportunities to cultivate inclusive academic environments, they are not inherently equitable. Their capacity to support Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) academics hinges on a deliberate and sustained institutional commitment to confronting systemic inequalities. Without such intentionality, the flexibility of these institutions may inadvertently reproduce the same exclusionary practices found in traditional universities.

There is a pressing need for robust empirical research that captures the lived experiences of BAME academics within Alternative Higher Education Providers (AHEPs). Such studies should explore dimensions including career progression, mental health, and long-term professional fulfilment. The insights derived from this research could inform evidence-based policy reforms aimed not only at diversifying the academic workforce but also at embedding sustainable equity across institutional structures.

The challenges confronting BAME academics in UK higher education are deeply rooted and multifaceted.

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

Institutional racism, constrained advancement opportunities, and disproportionate mental health burdens are not isolated phenomena but interlinked manifestations of structural exclusion. While AHEPs may offer innovative models and greater agility, they must be held to the same rigorous standards of equity, transparency, and accountability as their traditional counterparts.

Ultimately, inclusion must be structural rather than symbolic. This necessitates a fundamental reimagining of how institutions conceptualise and operationalise diversity—not as a performative metric, but as a principled commitment to justice, representation, and holistic wellbeing. By embedding equity into recruitment, promotion, curriculum design, and support systems, higher education institutions can foster environments in which all academics—regardless of background—are empowered to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the academic community.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no funding of interest.

FUNDING

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Matthew Carlile, Dean of the Education Department, GBS, and Tracy Maule, Dean of the University of Suffolk, for their valuable feedback. Appreciation is extended to Pete Emelone and Robert Ajani for their support and encouragement. The authors would also like to acknowledge the management and technical staff of PENKUP Research Institute, Birmingham, UK, for their excellent assistance and for providing medical writing and editorial support in accordance with Good Publication Practice (GPP3) guidelines.

REFERENCES

1. Advance HE. (2022). *Equality in higher education: Staff statistical report 2022*. Available at: https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/equality-higher-education-statistical-reports-2022, [Accessed: 16 June 2025].
2. Aithal, P. S. and Maiya, A. K., (2023) Innovations in higher education industry–Shaping the future. International Journal of Case Studies in Business, IT, and Education (IJCSBE). 2023 Nov 18;7(4):283-311.
3. Ajibade, A. T., Gbadamosi, G. and Chang, K. (2025). Unequal Academy: The Struggle and Challenges of Token Black Academics in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Management*. 0, 1–16, (2025). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12902.
4. Akel, S. (2021). *The Broken Pipeline: Barriers to Black PhD Students Accessing Research Council Funding*. Leading Routes. Available at: https://leadingroutes.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/The-Broken-Pipeline-Report-

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

Sept-2019-120919-1.pdf, [Accessed: 16 June 2025].

5. Alexander, C., & Arday, J. (2015). *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy*. Runnymede Trust. Available at: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/617bcf1cd124685da56a014c_Aiming%20Higher.pdf, [Accessed: 14 June 2025].
6. Arday, J., (2021). Fighting the tide: Understanding the difficulties facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Doctoral Students' pursuing a career in Academia. *Educational philosophy and theory*, *53*(10), pp.972-979.
7. Atabong, N. C., (2023). *The Souls of B.A.M.E Academics in the UK and the Shocks of Intercultural communication: An Ethnographic case study*. [Thesis] Available at: https://pure.hud.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/the-souls-of-bame-academics-in-the-uk-and-the-shocks-of-intercult, [Accessed: 30 June 2025].
8. Bates, K.A. and Ng, E.S., (2021). Whiteness in academia, time to listen, and moving beyond White fragility. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *40*(1), pp.1-7.
9. Bhopal, K. (2020). *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-Racial Society*. Policy Press.
10. Bhopal, Kalwant, and YASMIN ALIBHAI-BROWN. "Front Matter." *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-Racial Society*, 1st ed., Bristol University Press, 2018, pp. i–vi. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22h6r81.1.
11. Department for Education (2019). *Universities must do more to tackle ethnic disparity*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/universities-must-do-more-to-tackle-ethnic-disparity, [Accessed: 25 June 2025]
12. Garrett, R. (11 Feb 2024): Racism shapes careers: career trajectories and imagined futures of racialised minority PhDs in UK higher education, Globalisation, Societies and Education, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2024.2307886.
13. Glowach, T., Mitchell, R., Bennett, T., Donaldson, L., Jefferson, J., Panford, L., Saleh, A., Smee, K., Wells-Dion, B. and Hemmings, E., (2023). Making spaces for collaborative action and learning: Reflections on teacher-led decolonising initiatives from a professional learning network in England. *The Curriculum Journal*, *34*(1), pp.100-117.
14. GOV.UK (2023). *Entry Rates into Higher Education*. [online] www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk. Available at: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/higher-education/entry-rates-into-higher-education/latest/, [Accessed: 24 June 2025]
15. Greenhalgh, T., Thorne, S. and Malterud, K., (2018). Time to challenge the spurious hierarchy of systematic over narrative reviews? European journal of clinical investigation, 48(6), p.e12931.
16. Hall, R., Ansley, L., Connolly, P., Loonat, S., Patel, K. and Whitham, B., (2023). Struggling for the anti-racist university: learning from an institution-wide response to curriculum decolonisation. In *Possibilities and Complexities of Decolonising Higher Education* (pp. 16-33). Routledge.
17. Harris, L.C. and Ogbonna, E., (2023). Equal opportunities but unequal mentoring? The perceptions of mentoring by Black and minority ethnic academics in the UK university sector. *Human Resource Management*

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

Journal, *33*(4), pp.940-956.

18. Hassan, A., (2023). Who has the capital on knowledge production? Reflections on the sharp white background of academia and anti-racist scholarship. *Stolen Tools*, *1*(1), pp.25-31.
19. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2019) Higher Education Student Statistics: Alternative Providers, 2017/18 – Notes, Available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/14-02-2019/sb254-higher-education-student-statistics-APs/notes, [Accessed: 17 June 2025]
20. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2025) Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2023/24, Available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/28-01-2025/sb270-higher-education-staff-statistics, [Accessed: 17 June 2025]
21. Jackson-Cole, D. and Chadderton, C., (2023). White supremacy in postgraduate education at elite universities in England: the role of the gatekeepers. *Whiteness and Education*, *8*(1), pp.101-119.
22. Lumadi, M.W., (2021). Decolonising the curriculum to reinvigorate equity in higher education: A linguistic transformation. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *35*(1), pp.37-53.
23. Moncrieffe, M., Race, R., Harris, R., Chetty, D., Riaz, N., Ayling, P., Arphattananon, T., Nasilbullov, K., Kopylova, N. and Steinburg, S., 2020. Decolonising the curriculum. *Research Intelligence*, *142*(9).
24. Moore, J.E., (2024). *Practice research in higher education: An investigation into the potential of practice reviews to support national policy objectives* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter (United Kingdom)).
25. Nicholson, T. (2022). *Lived Experiences of BAME Students Uncovered Through Reflective Diaries - heawardgap.mmu.ac.uk*. [online] heawardgap.mmu.ac.uk. Available at: https://heawardgap.mmu.ac.uk/lived-experiences-of-bame-students/, [Accessed 25 June 2025].
26. Pautasso, M., (2019). The structure and conduct of a narrative literature review. *A guide to the scientific career: Virtues, communication, research and academic writing*, pp.299-310.
27. Rana, K.S., Bashir, A., Begum, F. and Bartlett, H., (2022, May). Bridging the BAME attainment gap: Student and staff perspectives on tackling academic bias. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 7, p. 868349). Frontiers Media SA.
28. Richards, K., Pilcher, N., Galbrun, L., Forster, A. and Richards, J., 2023. Diversity and inclusion in UK Higher Education: staff perspectives on institutional representations and their reality. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *28*(4), pp.647-669.
29. Robertson, A., Mulcahy, E. and Baars, S., (2022). What works to tackle mental health inequalities in higher education. *London: Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Edcation*.
30. Rollock, N. (2019). *Staying Power: The Career Experiences and Strategies of UK Black Female Professors*. University and College Union (UCU).
31. Seo, H., Chung, H., Adewumi, B., Jassal, V. and Emoekabu, D.A., (2022). The BAME Staff Network All Staff Survey 2020: A Report on the Findings.
32. Stevenson, J. (2014). "Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment." *Higher Education Academy*.

eISSN: 2957-3602 pISSN: 2957-3599
VOLUME04 ISSUE07
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55640/gjhss/Volume04Issue07-02
Submission 26-06-2025, Accepted 04-07-2025, Published 23-07-2025 *Page No. 10-23*

33. Stewart, C., (2016). How diverse is your pipeline? Developing the talent pipeline for women and black and ethnic minority employees. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, *48*(2), pp.61-66.

34. Tamimi, N., Khalawi, H., Jallow, M.A. *et al.* (2024) Towards decolonising higher education: a case study from a UK university. *High Educ* 88, 815–837 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01144-3

35. Universities UK. (2021). *Tackling racial harassment in higher education*. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/tackling-racial-harassment-higher, [Accessed: 17 June 2025]

36. Winter, J., Webb, O. and Turner, R., (2024). Decolonising the curriculum: A survey of current practice in a modern UK university. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *61*(1), pp.181-192.