

The recruitment and retention of teachers of colour in Wales. An ongoing conundrum?

Susan Davis¹  | Chantelle Haughton¹ | Sammy Chapman¹  |
Rom Okeke² | Aylwin Yafele² | Kin Yu¹ | Martin Smith¹

¹Cardiff School of Education and Social Policy, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff, UK

²School of Business, Management and Law, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff, UK

Correspondence

Susan Davis, School of Education and Social Policy, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff, UK.
Email: sdavis@cardiffmet.ac.uk

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Abstract

There are a disproportionate number of teachers of colour (ToC) in Wales in comparison to pupils of colour. Teachers are less ethnically diverse than the pupils they are teaching with only 1.3% of teachers categorising themselves as being from a non-White background. This paper sets out findings from research investigating recruitment into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the career progression of ToC in Wales. Through a qualitative case study approach, employing participant voice, it gives participants a platform to articulate their experiences. Sixty-eight semi-structured interviews took place and participants were a mixture of 14+ learners and serving teachers/leaders, all from diverse backgrounds. As a multi-ethnic research team ourselves, we were aware of issues that participants faced within the Welsh school system, either as pupils or teachers, and were committed to carrying out the research, employing an empathetic lens. This was especially relevant as participants were relaying incidents of racism and racial trauma suffered, as well as sharing their achievements. This provided us with rich data, detailing lived experience and gave an insight into

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the unique experiences of teachers of colour, within a predominantly White school system in Wales and as a result, suggests what needs to change.

KEYWORDS

education, ethnicity, race, racism

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Practices already apparent within the school system serve to maintain the ‘dominant discourse of whiteness’ and thus reinforce the notion of ‘other’ (Lander, 2014, p. 95). If we look at a UK dynamic, the under-representation of people of colour in teaching was initially highlighted in 1985 in the Swann report, (HMSO, 1985). In 2003, the General Teaching Council for Wales published a strategy for teacher recruitment and retention which included the need to improve recruitment of diverse teachers into the teaching profession. This issue still needs to ‘go back to basics’ and one of the issues that must be explored is the proactive recruitment of a new generation of diverse students onto teacher training programmes (Egan, 2020). Currently, local authorities in Wales with the highest numbers of learners from diverse backgrounds are not those with the highest numbers of teachers of colour (Figure 1). Across Wales, the teacher workforce is less ethnically diverse than the learners. Amongst school leaders, only 15 individuals from non-White backgrounds were identifiable on the register in Wales (EWC, 2020). As an ethnically diverse research team (Black British, Nigerian, Chinese, Mixed-Heritage and White), we were able to empathise with and understand the research participants’ ‘lived experiences’. The concept of gauging lived experience was integral to our research and building a picture of the status quo, utilising participant voice. Interestingly, many participants were already involved in what could be termed ‘social justice work’ alongside their full-time teaching roles: diversity and equity outreach work, mentoring

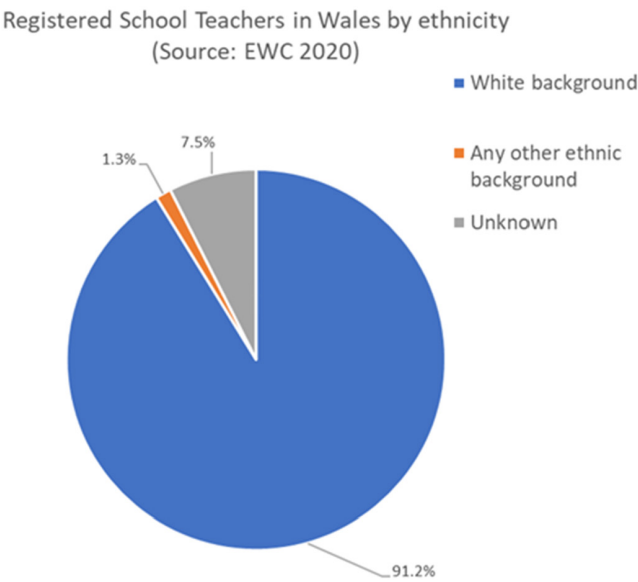


FIGURE 1 Registered school teachers in Wales by ethnicity.

youngsters in local communities or running after school sports clubs. Thus, we are making informal grassroots changes already. (Baez, 2000).

The picture for school leaders gets bleaker as Table 1 above sets out. The number of pupils from ethnically diverse backgrounds (Figure 2) compared to White backgrounds in Wales (Stats Wales, 2020) shows 12% of pupils aged 5 and over being from families other than White British. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2021) reports that on teacher training programmes in Wales at all levels (undergraduate and postgraduate), 7% of students categorised themselves as being from a diverse background, with 85% declaring that they were White (8% unknown).

The Welsh Government (WG) is committed to changing practice regarding issues of diversity in schools, both within the teaching profession itself and in developing the curriculum to reflect this. Professor Charlotte Williams' working group in 2021 made recommendations which focused on areas such as improving teacher resources, training of the workforce and changes to teacher training. The New Curriculum for Wales (2022) will empower students as 'ethical and informed citizens of Wales and the World' and *Cynefin* (a feeling of belonging) will be at the heart of this curriculum. The setting up of the WG DARPL programme (2022) (Diversity, Anti-racist practice and Professional Learning) across Wales is also a positive move. Whilst this is welcomed by ToC, there is still a long way to go. The lack of ToC in Wales is now an increasingly visible issue that needs to be addressed.

Through what we termed 'courageous conversations' with teachers and learners of colour, this paper sets out findings on recruitment into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and recruitment and retention of people from minority ethnic (ME) backgrounds (ME is a term taken from Welsh Government guidance at the time of undertaking the original research project) into the teaching profession in Wales. Participants' testimonies are integral to the research. The participants were from a variety of ME backgrounds. We are not suggesting that participants had a collective experience within the school system because of this. We acknowledge that there are fundamental differences for participants, due to ethnicity/skin colour/religion etc., and therefore, we are not seeking to trivialise an individual's experiences, but merely to record that as a teacher or learner from an ME background they had a collective experience of what could be termed 'shared racialised othering'. Our findings suggest that generally, participants did demonstrate a common solidarity or shared experiences of being 'othered' (Baxley, 2012; Martinez et al., 2017) within the Welsh school system. There are also cultural, societal and political nuances that are unique to this context, but are beyond the scope of this paper. Throughout the course of this research, we found clear evidence that participants employed resilience and secured career gains within a system where the odds were often stacked against them.

TABLE 1 Ethnicity of school leaders in Wales (EWC, 2020a)

Ethnicity	Total	Percentage
Asian or Asian British	5	<1%
Black or Black British	1	<1%
Mixed background	8	<1%
White: any other White background	42	1%
White British	2859	83%
White: Irish	1	<1%
Any other ethnic group	1	<1%
I do not wish ethnic group recorded	44	2%
Unknown	482	14%
	3443	100%

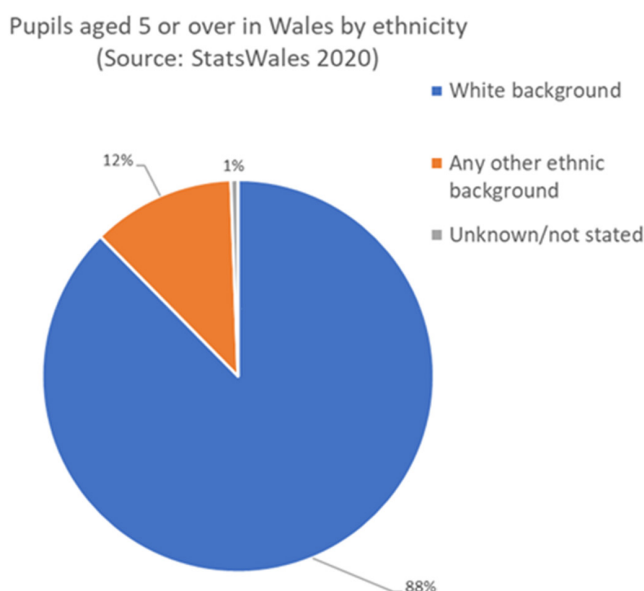


FIGURE 2 Pupils aged 5 or over in Wales by ethnicity.

METHODOLOGY

The study captured participants' responses during in-depth interviews and used the collected data from online semi-structured interview transcripts (semi-structured interview questions are at [Appendix A](#)) to identify perceptions of a range of groups from diverse backgrounds. Interview transcripts were then coded using NVIVO and a range of themes were generated from the data. Exploring cultural issues using interview data has an epistemological resonance, especially in research within a racial paradigm. Also, by generating knowledge, there is an epistemological and ethical responsibility, as we were looking at and unpicking elements of socially constructed layers of live reality for participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Garcia et al., 2015; Guishard et al., 2018; Shah, 2013). Analysis of data was grounded in narrative research (Salkind, 2010). Participant voice was interrogated in order to explore and conceptualise human experience which was then presented in textual form. We ensured an in-depth exploration of the resultant 'courageous conversations' and the rich and free ranging discourse that was generated. The emphasis was on 'storied' experience and sharing. Participant's viewpoints were used to generate new information (Creswell, 2013). Using narrative research, we aimed to 'unravel' participant stories, as told by them in their own words (Ntinda, 2018). Knowledge was also gained through building on past experiences of the participants to create new information (Piaget, 1964).

PARTICIPANTS

The population of the sample was defined during the initial desk-based sift/scoping at the start of the project.

- Students (14+) (on whether they aspired to become teachers)
- Students on Teacher Training programmes

- Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)/Teachers/School leaders (at various stages of their careers and their beliefs in relation to career progression)

The research gathered a sample that is representative of the current Welsh context. Overall, a total of 68 ME participants were recruited during the specified data collection period of nine school weeks, as per [Table 2](#) below: Our own contacts and knowledge of communities were used to recruit participants along with social media adverts through professional and personal platforms. [Table 3](#) outlines a range of ethnicities that were identified via a 'Self-Defined Ethnic Classification Key' (Gov.uk, 2021).

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews formed the basis of investigation. A case study approach was used to reflect upon 'complex social situations' (Van Maanen, 2011) which encapsulated the research dynamic perfectly and especially in relation to the 'courageous conversations' that we had with participants. The research project ran for four months.

RESEARCH CONVERSATIONS

An initial distinct finding was that younger participants had a negative reaction to the term 'interview'. This was something that we had not envisaged. Younger participants suggested that we ditch the term, as for them, it had connotations of failure along with judgement and pressure. Some initially refused 'interviews' and declined to contribute—stressing that they did not want to be 'interviewed' or asked 'challenging' questions; this occurred several times early in the recruitment process and so 'interviews' were renamed 'research-conversations' and the young people then re-engaged in the process. It is unclear whether this finding is specific to the population of the research or whether this is a wider issue across age groups and ethnicities. The research conversations usually lasted up to two hours. The emotive nature of participants' sharing and off-loading their lived experiences of racism did result in a significant emotional toll on the research team.

RESEARCH CHALLENGES

The research took place during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and this impacted recruitment to the study. Most schools which were contacted across Wales did not reply within the short timescale. Whilst we appreciated that this was an unusual and

TABLE 2 Participant involvement grid by self-defined ethnicity

Target group	Male	Female	By ethnicity ^a
Students in school –14–19 age group	2	4	M2, O1, O2
Undergraduate students	4	7	M1, M4, A2 (x2), A3
Postgraduate students	2	1	B1, B2, O2
Teacher education (ITE) students	1	9	M4 (x2), A2 (x2), A3, A4, A5, B2, O1
Unsuccessful Teacher education (ITE) students	–	1	B1
School teachers	13	23	M1 (x2), M2 (x3), M3, M4, A2 (x4), A3, A4, B1 (x5), B2 (x5), B3, O1, O2
School leaders	–	1	A1
Total	22	46	

^aSome participants did not disclose their self-defined ethnicity.

TABLE 3 Ethnicity groups and coding

Ethnicity group	Code
<i>Mixed or multiple ethnic groups</i>	
White and Black Caribbean	M1
White and Black African	M2
White and Asian	M3
Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background	M4
<i>Asian or Asian British</i>	
Indian	A1
Pakistani	A2
Bangladeshi	A3
Chinese	A4
Any other Asian background	A5
<i>Black, African, Caribbean or Black British</i>	
African	B1
Caribbean	B2
Any other Black, African or Caribbean background	B3
<i>Other ethnic group</i>	
Arab	O1
Any other ethnic group	O2

difficult time for schools, the research team found that gatekeeping was employed by some organisations and schools. Gatekeepers withheld or delayed sharing research information that was meant, especially for ToC or students of colour, often citing that they did not want to ‘burden’ them. We appreciate that headteachers did not wish to overload staff, however, we believe that diverse staff should have been given the opportunity to decide for themselves on whether to take part. There was also a lack of empathy and understanding from schools on the importance and relevance of the research. These barriers undoubtedly limited the scope and size of the overall sample. This paradigm of control may have a continued impact on future research projects with similar focus and participants. Teacher participants who were recruited (through our own networks and via social media) expressed how ‘thankful’ they were for the opportunity to discuss these issues (Table 4).

RESEARCH THEMES

A wide selection of themes and sub themes were drawn out of the collected data, which are illustrated in Figure 3. For example, ‘Role Models’ and ‘Representation’ were amongst the most referenced themes with 181 and 182 references, respectively. There were some lesser referenced nodes within the data, such as ‘Recognised Leadership’ (3 references) or ‘Over-Qualified’ (7 references).

The relationship between each theme and sub theme within the data set is demonstrated and outlined in the diagram below and demonstrates the depth and breadth of matters covered (Figure 4).

TABLE 4 Title/acronym or description of research participants

Title	Acronym used or description
Initial teacher education student (Trainee teacher)	ITE
Undergraduate student	UG
Postgraduate student	PG
Teacher/PG student	Trainee teacher on school placement or Masters student
Student	Student in school

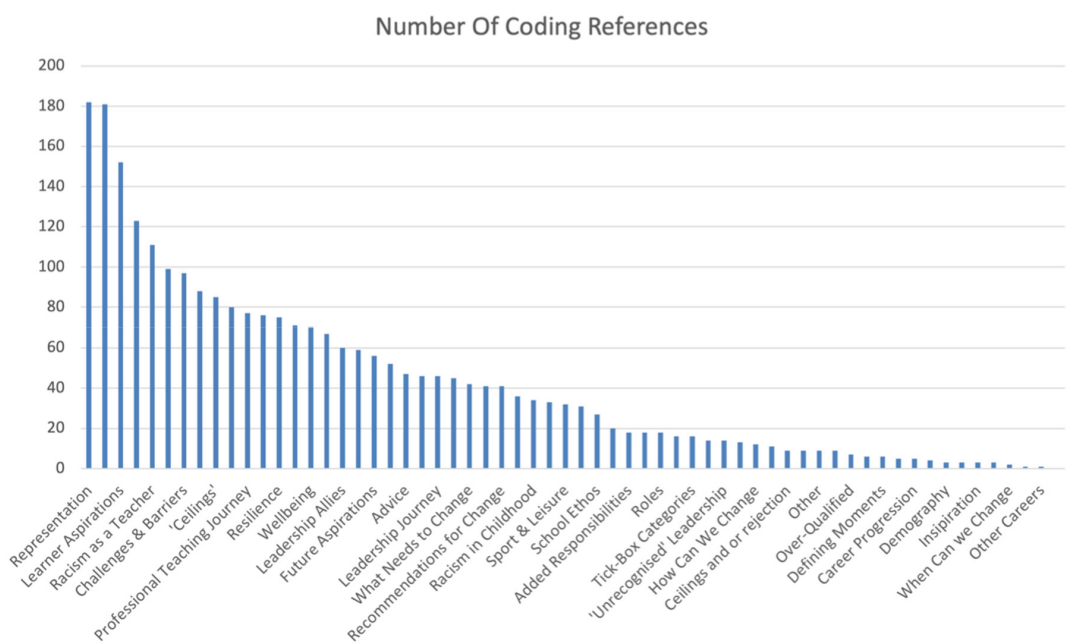


FIGURE 3 Number of coding references.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Whilst 10 key themes were identified within the data, a range of lesser themes and sub-themes were identified. As this was a complex data set and for the purpose of this paper, we will explore five of the main research themes. These were:

- 1. Role models and representation
- 2. Well-being and mental health
- 3. Racism
- 4. Rejection
- 5. Ceilings within the profession/career progression

There is no hierarchy of themes and no theme is deemed more important than any other.

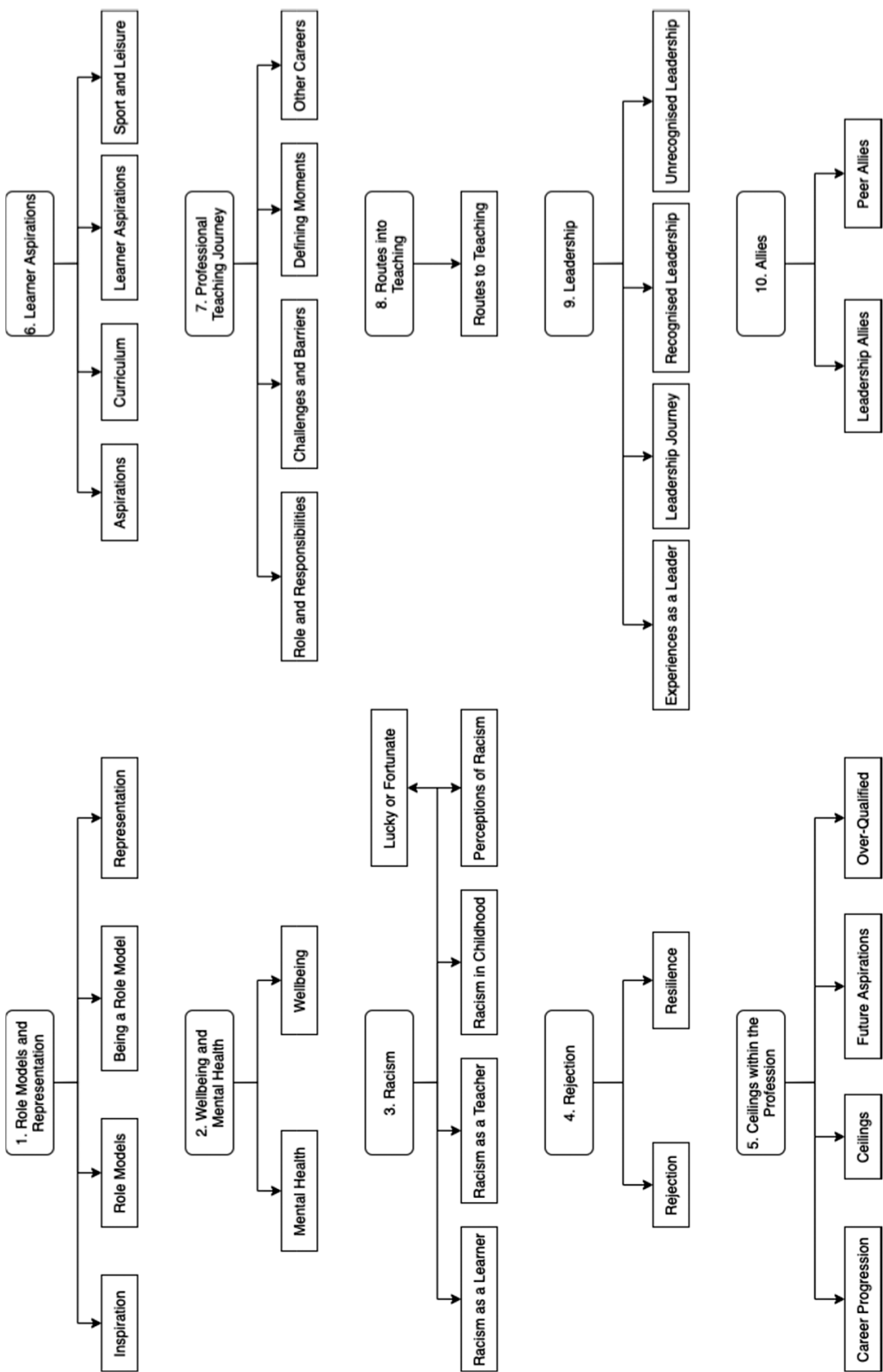


FIGURE 4 Themes and subthemes.

Role models and representation

Findings indicate that most of the participants, especially ToC, viewed themselves as role models for young learners of colour. They believed that it was their responsibility to mentor and support the younger generation, especially if the young people had a similar background to themselves. A number of ToC did not perceive themselves as role models, nor thought they should be seen as such, as they were just 'teachers', students of colour shared similar views in identifying ToC as role models and sources of inspiration.

'Those teachers were from an ethnic minority, they really allowed me to flourish. I could have easily been stunted.' (P60, Student)

Most participants stressed that being viewed as a role model was a chance to 'right the wrong' and afford youngsters an opportunity which they lacked when they were growing up. These findings correspond to previous studies (Johnson, 2017; McNamara et al., 2009) which explored critical life experiences such as professional and social identities, self-concepts, moral stewardship, role models and being community advocates, that influence the path to professional progression of teachers and learners of colour.

'I guess children who have similar background to me they're like, oh, you know, that's a positive role model ... so that's very powerful in the school because for most of the kids, the first Black man they've met is me.' (P23, Teacher)

There was a realisation that schools need more Black teachers, but in the case of Black men, this often equated to them being viewed as disciplinarians (Brockenbrough, 2015; Sandles, 2018). Good discipline should be in the remit of all teachers and not seen as the preserve of Black males.

'I find a lot of it is oh, you're Black so you'll be a good teacher for kids. You will be good at discipline.' (P29, Teacher)

There are far fewer ToC and leaders in Wales than their White colleagues (Stats Wales, 2020). Thus, participants did not express surprise that there was a lack of relatable role models in Welsh schools.

'I've never seen a teacher who looks like me.' (P23, UG Student)

Participants were, however, hopeful that things will change in the future and that a diverse teaching workforce in Wales would become a reality:

'There's nothing more wonderful than children seeing somebody who looks like them.' (P46, Teacher)

Well-being and mental health

Incidents of racism not only affected participants at time of the event, it also impacted confidence and self-esteem into adulthood in some cases. It became clear that participant mental health had been negatively affected by racism and, the cumulative effects of it. (Priest et al., 2019; Wallace et al., 2016). Feeling depressed or suffering depression as a young person was also a common theme:

'The racism and bullying I suffered when I was in school, ended up in me leaving. I missed a year of school because I had mental health issues.' (P4, ITE Student)

'I would say I suffered with depression as a child. Actually, from a really young age. I think that had a lot to do with how I was treated in school by teachers because of my race, probably the main reason.' (P15, ITE Student)

It was evident that participants were not asking for or expressing self-pity. Coping strategies were frequently noted, which often involved sparing the feelings of others:

'I had lots of issues at school, lots of problems that went down, with the other students, which made me doubt myself. I would never get my parents involved or talk to them about it. I didn't want to worry them.' (P1, Teacher)

There were also negating factors which came into play, and it is pertinent to set out that for diverse learners having a supportive headteacher or colleagues cannot be overestimated. As these participants set out:

'My PE teacher at secondary school was fabulous, she was brilliant. Because I went through a lot when I was at secondary, because I was dealing issues such as bullying because of my race and with my mental health but she was supportive. She was the difference.' (P34, ITE Student)

'In order to progress in your career, you need a supportive headteacher and you need that mentorship, don't you? That kind of supportive mentorship? And ultimately that kind of friendship as well, I suppose. I had that, I was lucky.' (P5, Retired Teacher)

Williams (2018, p. 467) suggests there is 'considerable complexity in the association between race and mental health' it is not in the remit of this paper to unpick that assertion, nor do we imply that being from a diverse background means you will suffer from mental health issues. However, an interesting finding sets out:

'I wanted to become a teacher mainly because, I just want to make children feel good, I want them to feel good about themselves. Positive mental health is huge for me, and I want them to feel accepted ... I want them to feel better as a child than I did when I was a child.' (P3, ITE Student)

There was a discernible effect on participant well-being if they had encountered racism in its various forms and micro-aggressions whilst within the Welsh school system. NASUWT (2016) found that diverse teachers often lacked confidence when reporting racist incidents, encountered in their everyday work. A lack of support by school management was suggested and teachers who reported alleged racist incidents being viewed as 'oversensitive', 'paranoid' or 'aggressive'. NASUWT also found that ToC faced 'gaslighting' micro-insults, and other forms of covert racism which affected their well-being often, daily. Our research echoes these findings:

'I experience racism and micro-aggressions in my job role. I just need to know what I can do because I need to protect myself, because it's really affecting my mental health and well-being and actually starting to affect my family life as well.' (P49, Teacher)

Participants would often question their own judgement or downplay their own feelings:

'I'm not sure if it was racism' or 'I thought it was a micro-aggression, but I may have been being oversensitive.' (P9 and P20, Teachers)

Williams et al., (2020) suggest that micro-aggressions are often 'minimised' by the recipient as they are sometimes perceiving them as 'cultural missteps or faux pas'. However, this is a complex dynamic as micro-aggressions are forms of oppression that continue to reinforce notable power differences in a relationship, whether this is a conscious act or not by the perpetrator. One such example here:

'I thought it was a micro-aggression ... it's the internal racism that gets to you ... because it was something she said to everyone, there was 15 of us, but they all looked at me! by the end of it I was in tears.' (P49, Teacher)

'I remember not wanting to go into the staff room because it just felt that you were out of it, that the conversations didn't seem to include you that sort of thing, so I spent more time in my classroom.' (P2, Teacher)

If teachers were the only ToC in the school, they reported feeling isolated and lonely:

'No staff member ever talked to me about it. How I was coping or, had a discussion with me on any level about it. So even when the dinner lady reported that particular racist incident, yeah, that wasn't followed up by anybody.' (P15, ITE student)

Some participants reflected on the need to 'fit in' within a White school space and also that they needed to 'dilute' or 'tone down' their diversity or personality:

'being a minority can be difficult. Yes, looking back on it trying to fit in and trying to make new friends.' (P12, Teacher)

'You put undue pressure on yourself to fit in and that then can have a negative effect.' (P17, Teacher/PG Student)

Miller (2019, p. 989) refers to an 'appeasement of adaptation' as a process where ToC 'prove themselves' and became part of a school clique. He suggests that ToC may have greater chances of promotion or career success if they are willing to 'adopt, adapt and adjust' their behaviours to those of White teachers. During our research, participants spoke poignantly of the mental energy it took to navigate being the only ToC in a school and how a conscious and unconscious process of 'assimilation' or 'blending in', as set out above, does take place, and is the process whereby ToC integrate with their majority White colleagues.

'All of this takes energy, and people have to understand the brutal realities of that energy and hopefully over time less energy will be expended in that way. But for the here and now, it is. That is the mental draining part of it.' (P16, Teacher)

'I try to integrate as much as possible with other teachers and other teaching staff. I try and integrate with other people in the department so in the staff room, for example, at lunchtime, you know people sitting there have some banter and chat and all that kind of thing.' (P12, Teacher)

Racism

It seems that race and racism are rarely discussed in Welsh schools, therefore, any racist incidents that do occur are often ignored or brushed aside. Participants mentioned several examples whereby they received unequal treatment in school, either as a student themselves or as a teacher. P29 (Teacher) was involved in fights as a child at school and whenever the police were called, it was only the Black Caribbean boys that were searched and interrogated. Gregory et al., (2016) and Warikoo et al., (2016) suggest there are subtle implicit biases inherent and held by White staff, which contribute to their perceptions about the behaviour of students of colour. Thus, White staff must avoid stereotyping and labelling, Black boys as troublemakers, or thinking that any misconduct is part of a pattern of misbehaviour.

There were several incidences of mistaken identity 'by virtue of being Black' that were recalled by the participants or incidences of people dismissing their experiences of being Black. P19 (Teacher) when growing up was often told 'you are Black, but you are alright.' P1 (Teacher) remembers an activity at school in which they had to bring their favourite music into school. He brought in a Bob Marley record and the teacher said loudly to the whole class, 'we don't listen to this music here.'

When discussing race (usually only within Black history month), participants often believed they were more educated than their White teachers. P27 (UG student) recalled:

'Our teacher kept talking about "coloured" people' and when she tried to explain this was an outdated term, was met with harshness. P12 (Teacher) remembered an instance in which a classroom window had been smashed and the headteacher called the three Black boys that were in the school to his office, even though it was nothing to do with them. Although these were childhood experiences, participants were still able to recall them vividly and explained that they still had a negative effect on them. Priest et al., (2019, p. 344) imply that experiences of racism have an 'incremental negative effect' on socio-emotional development. P13 (Teacher) mentioned that a lot of the racism they experienced came from teachers and not other children. This was confusing for them as when this occurred, teachers used racial slurs in a seemingly endearing way. A participant who was the only non-White person in their school felt they were:

'A lonely voice in the wilderness.' (P26, Teacher)

Or participants sharing:

'My school is not racist but there are many people there that are racist.' (P47, Teacher)

This highlights an acceptance amongst participants that racism is apparent in Welsh schools and that they lack power to change this dynamic. Some participants received comments from colleagues such as:

'You've got an accent. We don't understand what you're saying.' (P17, Teacher/PG Student)

'They said, I can't stand how some people can eat dog. I just found that really offensive.' (P21, Teacher)

There seemed to be a resignation amongst participants that racism cannot easily be eradicated:

'Obviously you always have racism coming from people on the streets as well. I think that's just a part of growing up and being an Asian. It shouldn't be, but you kind of accept that.' (P65, Undergraduate Student)

However, we did find that participants were resilient and employed various coping mechanisms against racism. It was also apparent that participants were using coping strategies to 'buffer' the effects of racism, (Brondolo et al., 2009):

'My extrovert nature makes it easier for me to "blend in" and interact with others and it helps to demonstrate that I am just a person like everyone else.' (P9, Teacher/Postgraduate Student)

Resilience only worked to an extent as P24 (Teacher) suggests:

'If you're White, you are assertive. If you're Black, you're aggressive.'

Rejection and glass ceilings within the profession

Feelings of rejection and 'settling' in a comfort zone were a lived reality for many participants. Our findings concur with existing studies (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Tsui, 2007; Zembylas, 2003) and consider the complex interrelationships between teachers' sociocultural identities and teaching practices. There was a perception amongst participants that they must constantly prove their worth in terms of skills and professionalism. They also alluded to the lack of racial diversity on teaching interview panels, which was seen as another hurdle in obtaining a position.

'Just proving yourself. Proving your competency in doing what you do, I think I would try little bit harder as well I suppose. I would have to work twice as hard to prove myself.' (P26, Teacher)

'You tend to find is the majority of interview panels, you know they're not as diverse as they potentially could be.' (P17, Teacher/PG Student)

However, participants did find a way to remain motivated in relation to the interview process:

'I don't think there's going to be anything stopping me in terms of getting that position, really, if I wanted to.' (P19, ITE Student)

A common theme apparent was that participants used a variety of words to define their feelings of rejection. Words used included 'undervalued', 'silenced' and 'helpless'. These words demonstrate the effect of rejection on participant aspiration and confidence. Another evident theme was the need for participants to self-evaluate or assess themselves to ensure that they 'fitted in':

'I felt I was out of my comfort zone. I didn't know if my work was valued as much. It was valued in the sense that we used to get good examination results, but ... I felt constantly that I needed to prove myself. I needed to do something to demonstrate that I was worthy of responsibility.' (P25, Teacher)

'It just made me feel really undervalued, but also embarrassed ... My development, my professional development is lacking in some way ... my leadership journey ... It's been up and very down and then slightly up again.' (P3, Teacher)

There was evidence of being treated as a second-class citizen, and this is how P2 (Teacher) describes this:

'It didn't matter about any sort of qualifications that you had. You were seen first as Black and then a woman.'

There were comments regarding feelings of 'not belonging'. P39 (Teacher) shared her experience:

'I didn't get the permanent position and now I'm asked to train the person that you employed ... that was better than me, you know. So, it was things like that really got to me I really thought I was going to quit because of it.'

P2 (Teacher) shared a similar experience:

'I remember not wanting to go into the staff room because it just felt that you were out of it, that the conversations didn't seem to include you that sort of thing, so I spent more time in my classroom.'

Participants indicated that they lacked support from senior staff and thus had no option but to 'live' with it.

'When I was accepted to do higher qualifications at University ... I was basically told why are you going for it? I haven't got that qualification! you don't need it to do your job. They were basically saying no, no, no.' (P8, Teacher)

Some participants acknowledged our research conversations as an opportunity to speak out or to be heard, they believed that any discussion around race had now been 'politicised'. Phillips et al., (2018) discuss the difficulty that diverse staff have with discussing issues to do with race or racism for fear of alienating their White peers or management:

'I volunteered for the research study, because I just felt this is something positive that I can do that doesn't make me feel so helpless and allows me to be part of the conversation.' (P8, Teacher)

Without doubt, participant confidence was impacted by feelings of rejection or self-blame.

'The biggest impact it had on me I would say is that although I see jobs that come up sometimes and think, but I need to develop my [skill], but I've completely lost my confidence, and it makes me quite emotional, but I don't feel that I'm good enough for those roles anymore.' (P3, Teacher)

'I often feel like I set myself up to fail and it actually limits my potential to progress.' (P8, Teacher).

There was a clear belief amongst many of the participants that there is ceiling and barrier for their progression:

'Yes, I've been here now for the last seven years and I don't really know what my next steps are, I've always, thought I'd go up the ladder and you know—the assistant head-teacher and deputy headteacher. But last few years. I don't really see myself, certainly in my own school fitting into that role.' (P12, Teacher)

'I certainly have experienced a lot more glass ceilings than I expected, yeah. It seems like I'm constantly trying to prove my ability or my worth before I'm ever given an opportunity to do something.' (P25, Teacher)

P49 (Teacher) narrated a different rejection experience:

'The roles which I've applied for, where actually not only do I meet the requirements, but some roles I even exceed the requirements, I have three Masters degrees ... but the thing is ... I've not been called for an interview, right? It's starting to feel, bleak—if I didn't meet the requirements, I'd understand.'

Experiences of rejection mean that the participants 'settle' at their 'comfort zone' and lack the will or aspiration to progress onto a higher position. P12 (Teacher) stated:

'I don't think I would want to go any higher.'

P14 (Teacher) agreed:

'If you are a [Black] teacher and there's nobody up there that gives you that chance, then you've had it.'

Analysis of data found that serving ToC in Wales mostly perceived that there was a 'glass' ceiling regarding promotion to higher positions and that this is a lived reality for many. This view is supported by The National Education Union (NEU/Runnymede, 2017). The lack of diverse staff in senior leadership teams in Welsh schools does have a substantial impact in terms of raising aspirations. It was also thought that ToC were subject to 'White sanction' (Miller, 2016), whereby they needed the backing or support of White colleagues to 'sure up' their achievements.

Participants stressed that an emphasis needs to be on support and mentoring of ToC:

'It all depends on the senior leadership team how they value you and whether they put you on courses.' (P10, Teacher)

It is crucial to state that not all participants wanted to aspire to leadership, stressing the importance of sound classroom teaching as a career goal:

'I felt supported in my progression, but I never really had any desire to be anything but classroom teaching.' (P48, Teacher)

The notion that ToC must work hard to fit into a White school runs parallel with the trope that they have to work harder overall. This was a common theme:

'I have to work extra. Forgetting about my own mental health, my family, anything else that I've got going on. Basically, I have to put in twice if not three times as much effort into my learning, then those I've seen within the classroom as me.' (P41, ITE Student)

P45 (Senior Leader) on the other hand mentions that they found their progression to be smooth until they arrived in Wales where it had then been a challenge to find a job as a headteacher. The participant felt that with twenty-five years of experience under their belt, would have the skill set required for headship. They had a negative experience in the recruitment process and believed that skin colour has been a contributing factor, particularly because the feedback received did not indicate any major concerns.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a candid overview on the experiences and reality for ToC in the Welsh school system, whom we found to be inspirational and dedicated professionals. It became clear that securing a leadership role within a school should not be seen as the 'gold standard' and the only way to judge career success for ToC. Several participants intimated that taking on a leadership role would take them away from the jobs they loved, directly and positively influencing their pupils. Where participants did aspire to leadership, they perceived progression as an opportunity to make further impact, as becoming a leader would send a strong message to other ME colleagues and students. If ToC are looking to aspire to leadership, we found that those who had a caring and supportive headteacher or senior management were more likely to achieve. There is a vital need for conversations around race to be a more central discourse across the board in schools, universities and in teacher education. This needs to be a top-down approach with robust engagement taking place amongst senior leaders and in classrooms (Warde et al., 2022). Job descriptions/criteria should reflect the need for ME teaching staff within schools. Teacher training programmes in universities should ensure that application and interview processes support students from ME backgrounds, and targeted careers guidance must be available in schools. In addition, an explicit recruitment approach to find school governors from ME backgrounds should be in place.

Those in policymaking roles in schools and universities should re-think approaches to recruit diverse students onto teacher training programmes. A 'cultural capital' dynamic is currently in place and this needs to be negated. Some applicants into teaching from ME backgrounds lack the tools to navigate within this predominantly White, mostly middle-class system. Wallace (2019) reflects on the significant role of Black middle-class parents who input into the school system and suggests that Black teachers contribute to this category. He reports on the need for schools to consider Black middle-class parents as agents for change, alongside pupils.

It is also imperative to look closely at how to retain trainee teachers of colour and ensure that the institution is a welcoming and supportive place of learning for them. Efforts need to be made to understand lived experiences and create culturally inclusive opportunities for ME students, which celebrate diversity and champion fair representation. This effort will complement the aims of Universities UK (2020, p. 2) who are calling on [predominantly White] university leaders 'to acknowledge where there are issues in their institutions, and [understand] that UK higher education perpetuates institutional racism'. Universities UK recommends training for senior leaders and governing bodies to improve awareness of concepts including 'White privilege' and 'allyship' and makes clear that efforts to address racism will only succeed if the entire university community—including students, staff, alumni and local partners—take shared responsibility for change. There are also wider concerns regarding the role of curriculums and how de-colonisation of curriculums is beginning to be debated in the school system in Wales, but this is not being translated into a higher education (HE) arena. Adefila et al. raise specific concerns that HE needs to embrace this agenda, as it is important for 'both theoretical and practical reasons' (Adefila et al., 2022, p.262).

The creation of safe spaces (Bhopal, 2022) within organisations, for ToC to share experiences and support each other is recommended. Robust mechanisms should be put in place to mentor ToC and support career progression. Awareness of the consequences of 'racial trauma' and emotional toll as the result of racism needs further investigation, along with research into mental health needs for ToC. Within Wales, we propose a call to action is needed and that the Welsh teaching profession and Welsh Universities embrace this change agenda and begin to 'level the playing field' for Teachers and students of colour. This should also be translated in relation to a UK wide dynamic.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There was no conflict of interest in undertaking this research.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared - due to confidentiality aspects.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was conducted within BERA guidelines (2018) and permissions were granted through the Institution's Research Ethics Committee.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

This research paper is the work of the authors above. It is based on our original report for Welsh Government, but we have re-written it to be complementary to the original research.

ORCID

Susan Davis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9341-9964>

Sammy Chapman  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6181-4268>

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APPENDIX A Semi-structured interview questions

(These were used as a guide and actual conversations around these questions were more naturalistic)

School staff	<p>Emotive aspects</p> <p>What is your ethnic background? How would you describe your ethnicity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What have been your experiences of being an EM teacher/leader. Tell us about your professional journey and your own childhood school experience• Who/What has inspired you to choose teaching as a profession, for example, did you have an inspirational role model that inspired you to enter the teaching profession? <p>Teaching as a career</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is it like for you as an EM teacher? What have your experiences been like? Both positive and negative?• What have been your experiences in relation to career progression? What are your aspirations for your future experiences career?• In relation to leadership – how would you describe your leadership journey? Any defining moments? <p>Way forward and expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would be your advice to new EM entrants to the teaching profession?• Do you think things need to change? If so what and why?
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Unsuccessful ITE applicants

Emotive aspects

What is your ethnic background? How would you describe your ethnicity?

- What have been your experiences of being taught in school? What has your learning journey been like?
- Have you had an inspirational teacher – tell us about them?
- What do you think good teaching is? – what does it mean to you?

Teaching as a career

- Why did you want to go into teaching as a career?
- Tell us why you think you were unsuccessful in your ITE application and/or interview?
- How did find out? How did that make you feel – did the feedback from your interview align with your performance at interview? Was the feedback formative/constructive? Did the feedback help you go forward?
- How did this experience affect you – how did you deal with this experience?

Way forward—expectations

- Do you think this process needs to change? If so – how? What needs to change?
- What do you think would have helped you to obtain a place on an ITE programme?
- What are you doing now in relation to your career? would you try again for an ITE place? For example

14+ learners and undergraduate and postgraduate students in HEI Students in FE

Emotive aspects

What is your ethnic background? How would you describe your ethnicity?

- What have been your experiences of being taught in school? What has your learning journey been like?
- Have you had an inspirational teacher – tell us about them?
- What do you think good teaching is?

Teaching as a career

- Have you thought about teaching as a future career?
- If yes, why? If no, why?
- Are you thinking of teaching primary or secondary – why?
- If secondary – what subject would you like to teach?
- Have you received career guidance on a teaching career?/been given advice from another adult/peer. Did you do your own research on teaching
- Do you have any relatives/friends who are teachers?

Way forward—expectations

- What do you think career progression would look like in teaching
- Do you think there is a good career progression for EM teachers?
- How likely is it for EM teachers to become, for example, headteacher?
- How far do you think you could go in teaching? for example, headteacher
- What needs to change in school and why?